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***La Virgen De Guadalupe*: Empress of the Americas**

Exhibition Walk-Through

*La Virgen De Guadalupe*, a limited engagement exhibition, retraces the history of the Empress of the Americas. Its storyline covers more than 13 centuries, divided into five sections. Historical documents, artifacts and contemporary artwork from U.S. and Mexican museums are displayed in period-appropriate immersive environments.

The first section takes you back to the Iberian Peninsula in 711. Muslim forces have invaded, and within a few decades, most of the area south of the Pyrenees is under their control. Small Catholic kingdoms in the far north resist and ultimately succeed in reconquering the entire peninsula. Instrumental in this conflict are the Conquistadores, heavily armored knights. Their successes on the battlefield eventually lead to the surrender of the last Muslim bastion, the city of Granada, in 1492. In this section, visitors will see rare Muslim coins as well as a gold coin representing Ferdinand and Isabella, the Spanish Catholic Kings who brought the reconquest to a successful end.

In the next section, visitors learn more about Aztec culture. As visitors walk into a hall with Aztec-style columns, they are introduced to this central Mexican civilization through scale models, paintings and original Aztec monumental art. The paintings were made by the late Gentling brothers, Scott and Stuart. Extremely talented portrait artists based in Fort Worth, the twin brothers devoted all of their free time to the study of Aztec culture. An aerial view of the Aztec capital as well as a courtyard scene, two paintings that are part of a larger series by the brothers, convey the majesty of the capital. This section covers about two centuries, beginning in 1325, when the Aztec capital was founded, and ending in 1519 when the Spanish landed on the Gulf Coast of what is now modern Mexico.

The third section acts as a bridge between the first two sections and the fourth section, which deals with colonial Mexico. In 1492, when Granada surrendered to the Catholic Kings of Spain,

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Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas. This encounter set the stage for the conquest of

indigenous civilizations, including that of the Aztecs. The *Conquistadores*, looking for new enterprises after the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula, played a major role in establishing Spanish rule. The visitor follows the footsteps of the Spanish conquerors from 1519, the year of first contact, through 1521, when the Aztec capital had been reduced to a smoldering ruin. A reconstruction of an impressive 17th-century screen displays the merciless struggle for the Aztec capital on one side and the metamorphosis from Aztec city to colonial capital on the other.

This fourth section takes the visitor through the next 300 years, up to 1820, when the Spanish colonial empire broke up and modern Latin American nations achieved independence. By 1521, the Spanish had completed their siege, and the Colonial period began. In 1531, barely a decade after the fall of the Aztec capital, the Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego, a humble indigenous peasant. This event took place in Tepeyac, located a few miles north of the emerging new capital, Mexico City. On display will be a very rare manuscript, known as the *Nican Mopohua* (“Here it is told”). Dating back to the middle of the 16th century, and written in the native Aztec language, Nahuatl, it is the oldest known account of the apparition. This manuscript is one of the treasures of the New York Public Library. Also on display will be one of the earliest books printed in Mexico: the *Doctrina Cristiana en lengua Mexicana.* Written by Pedro de Gante and published in 1553, this document was also written in Nahuatl. It is a complete statement of Christian doctrine for use in missionary work. The *Doctrina Cristiana* is part of the holdings of the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at The University of Texas at Austin.

A painting from the Franz Mayer Museum in Mexico City depicts the Virgin and the miracles associated with her. What makes this image stand out is that it once touched the original Image in the Basilica. This practice elevates the importance of the later, man-made image in the eyes of the faithful.

The fourth section culminates in a quiet space, in which the Image of the Virgin is the only item one will see. This is a copy of the well-known Image on display in the Basilica of the Virgin of

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Guadalupe in Mexico City.

Modern devotion to the Virgin is on display in the fifth and final section. Some of the items reflect personal piety within the private setting of a home. For example, crocheted bedspreads allowed their makers to sleep under the Virgin’s protection every night. Other items were used as expressions of personal faith in the public arena. An example of this is a banner used in Oaxaca, Mexico. There are also very public expressions of what the Virgin represents to various people. Among these is the “Project for the flag of a Mexican Colony.” Made by Adolfo Patiño, this artwork celebrates the bi-national heritage of the artist: Mexican and American. The image is woven wool, depicting stripes and blue field of the American flag, but instead of the stars representing each of the 50 states, three images of the Virgin of Guadalupe have been inserted. Her image is also altered, with her cloak appearing in three different colors, red, green and yellow, each representing the colors of the Mexican flag.

*La Virgin De Guadalupe*: *Empress of the Americas* opens Dec. 11, 2015 (the day before the Feast Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe), and runs through Sept. 5, 2016. For tickets or more information, visit [**www.hmns.org**](file://C:\Users\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Documents%20and%20Settings\mwade\Local%20Settings\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\Content.Outlook\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\Content.IE5\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Documents%20and%20Settings\mwade\Local%20Settings\lthomas\Local%20Settings\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\Local%20Settings\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\pr\Private\2008%20Press%20Releases\Working%20Press%20Releases\www.hmns.org) or call (713) 639-4629.

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