

For over 250 years Mexico, and Latin America in general, was directly linked to Asia. Much work has been done on the visual and material culture from Asia in Mexico City centered on blue and white porcelain china and on Japanese *biombos* (lacquer folding screens) but more work is needed to identify the deep and persistent connections to Asia in Mexico and Mexico City.

This summer in May and June, I spent two weeks in Mexico City funded by a Center for Latin American Studies field research grant. I visited sites, museums, and archives in order to further my research into the ways Asia, through the Philippines, has embedded itself into Mexican visual and material culture, and architecture.

In order to become familiar with relevant information sources I visited the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) at the site of the former notorious prison the Palacio de Lecumberri in the Morelos district of Mexico City. *El Ramo de Filipinas* is a sixty-three-volume archive consisting of over 50,000 pages documenting the system of exchange between Mexico and the Philippines. My initial visit to *El Ramo de Filipinas* archive was to assess the access to the documents and to develop an efficient plan on how to select portions of it in order to sound its depths. Although the site and its history are intimidating, the AGN staff were extremely generous in helping me to learn the tools and techniques necessary to navigate the voluminous holdings of the archive. Through their help I was able to identify four folios of documents from the sixteenth-century identifying Asian people and objects part of the inter-Pacific exchange between Manila and Mexico City. As an historian of art I am always in search of texts and documents that help give life to the visual and material culture held in museum collections so that they can transcend their life as objects and become conduits of their own histories.

I conducted preliminary investigations of Asian materials through visits to several art museums in Mexico City (there are many). At the Museo Nacional de Arte, I examined closely the sixteenth and seventeenth-century paintings for traces of Asia in their compositions. I detected Philippine laces in the dresses of luxuriant portraits of upper class women of Mexican society. The ability to own and display Asian material and patterns was a sign of privilege and wealth for both men and women. Portraits of Viceroy, traders, and priests revealed varieties of lace patterns, paisleys, and Asian iconography that signaled the deep connections to trade in Asia.

At the Museo de la Ciudad de Mexico and at the Museo de Historia Nacional, I was able to see multiple collections of Ming dynasty ceramics brought to Mexico City during the sixteenth and seventeenth-century. Even liturgical paintings of Christ on the Cross included Chinese ceramics holding bouquets of flower offerings on altars. The incredibly beautiful and extensive collection of decorative art at the Museo Franz Mayer allowed me to see Asian objects within the chronological histories of objects in Mexico. The Museo Franz Mayer includes visual and material culture beginning from the sixteenth-century from China, Japan, and the Philippines. The dense and extensive collections are a direct marker of how important Asia was to Mexican economic and social culture from the very beginnings of its Spanish colonization.

I concluded my trip in Mexico City with a visit to the Museo de la Casa del Risco to document the 17th-18th century fountain constructed of over 2,000 pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain. The fountain has only recently been documented and to date there is very little English language academic publication tracing the sources of Asian porcelain in the fountain to the network of trade between Manila and Mexico City. I photographed the fountain with the aim of generating a 3D model using

photogrammetric methods. Over the course of two days I was able to take over four-hundred photographs from various angles and heights. By modeling the fountain, I will be able to create a visual archive and develop a pedagogical tool for my dissertation and for future teaching. With the support of the Center for Latin American Studies Summer Field Research Grant I was able to collect, observe, and document important and diverse materials to develop my dissertation project through the investigation of visual and material connections between Mexico and Asia.