Fig. 2.1  
Fineline painted vessel. Moche style, north coast Peru, 100–800 C.E. Ceramic. H: 16 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert L. Lucas Jr. X86.3934.
The Moche peoples of ancient Peru (100–800 C.E.) portrayed complex scenes on fineline painted ceramic vessels, depicting everything from hunting and fishing to the ritual battles of supernaturals. Studying the painting on these vessels offers excellent opportunities for students to practice their skills of visual literacy as they gain a deeper understanding of the ancient Peruvian world. They will

- “Read” ceramic vessels for the details of Moche dress, environment, and secular and sacred practices.
- Express their understanding of the iconography through artmaking and writing-based lessons.
- Analyze Moche depictions of confrontation and war and probe their own opinions on the nature of conflict.
- Compare these with other depictions of war in art, as a means of understanding how the arts can comment on the crises and concerns of a community.

The Moche lived along fertile river valleys on the north coast of Peru from 100–800 C.E. They built pyramids, temples, and palaces of sun-dried mud bricks and decorated them with colorful murals. Master metalworkers, they created extraordinary jewelry and ornaments of gold, silver, and copper. The Moche are most widely known, however, for their remarkable painted and modeled ceramics that today we can “read” for a vivid artistic record of their culture. From these works we know of their environs, the crops they grew; and the animals of land, sea, and sky that were important in their lives. Even though the Moche did not have a writing system, we can reconstruct many aspects of the civilization by studying the complex scenes depicted in fineline drawings on clay vessels.

The vessels were rendered with such a high degree of realism that researchers have been able to establish correlations between the painted scenes and the actual environment in which Moche artists lived. Even when stylized, the clothing, ornaments, and implements represented in the paintings are remarkably accurate depictions of equivalent objects that have been recovered from archaeological excavations.
Background Information (cont.)

Although Moche artists fashioned many forms of ceramic vessels including boxes, dippers, bowls, goblets, jars, and bottles with other types of spouts, it is the stirrup spout bottle that offers the most information. More than ninety percent of fineline painting occurs on this form. The four bottles displayed in the Painting History segment of the exhibition represent different phases in Moche ceramic history. (These and four additional works not on display in Intersections are illustrated on Handout MOCHE CERAMIC VESSELS). The painted iconography on Moche vessels became increasingly finer and more complex over time. In the earliest phases of Moche pottery painters frequently decorated the chambers of stirrup spout bottles with geometric designs. Human and animal figures then began to be depicted, typically painted with broad brushstrokes. In later phases new characters were introduced, narratives were illustrated, and more and more human activities predominated with greater interaction between the figures.

About the Artist

Because so many objects have been found, archaeologists have been able to discern that there were many Moche artists creating ceramic works. Centuries later it is even possible to identify many of the artists by their signature style. UCLA archaeologists and Andean scholars Christopher B. Donnan and Donna McClelland named them according to their distinctive style (such as the “Short-Leg Painter,” the “Broken Spear Painter,” and the “Snail Painter”), or after cities or museums with Moche collections (the “Munich Painter,” the “Fowler Painter,” the “London Painter,” etc.). The works display a wide range of both artistic and technological expertise.
1. Reading the Stirrup Spout Bottles

Activity
Have students form small groups (about four in a group) to study images of the stirrup spout bottles displayed in the Painting History section of the exhibition along with other selected works, and included here as Handout MOCHE CERAMIC VESSELS. From the brief discussion above, they should locate each bottle in the Moche timeline—early to late. What details do students notice? How do the bottles differ? How does the painting on the vessels change over time?

Activity
Guide students to read the visual “grammar” that informs Moche art. Use the fineline drawing in Handout MOCHE VISUAL GRAMMAR to help them decode Moche iconography, as explained below.

- Moche fineline painting usually contains a number of participants—animal, plant, human, supernatural, nonliving, or composites of several.
- High status is indicated by the most elaborately dressed figure being shown larger than those around him.
- The location of an event may be indicated by the presence of certain animals. The birds in the background of this scene and the sea urchin (far right) suggest a marine setting.
- Supernaturals are distinguished from humans by the fangs in their angular mouths.
- The capture of prisoners is shown by the victor grasping the hair of the opponent.
- Decapitation of the prisoner is indicated by the presence of a tumi knife in the captor’s right hand.
- Particular individuals can be identified by their distinctive characteristics.

Following their study of the previous handout, distribute Handout MOCHE VISUAL GRAMMAR, FURTHER STUDY for practice with the rules of Moche visual grammar. Can they interpret the narratives using the coding explained above? (Teachers may refer to Moche Fineline Painting by Christopher B. Donnan and Donna McClelland for further information.)
2. The Many Animals of the Moche World

**Activity**

Animals are portrayed realistically on many Moche ceramics. Why is their portrayal significant to scholars? (Their presence gives clues to the environment in which the Moche lived, to the climate, and possibly to animals’ interaction with and importance to people.) Many animals known to the Moche were included in the painted scenes on Moche ceramic vessels. **Handout THE WORLD OF MOCHE ANIMALS** reproduces some of these painted animals. Have students research and identify the animals of present day northern coastal Peru that might have served as inspiration for these drawings. The names of the animals included are listed at the bottom of the page. Students should write the letter of each animal on the grid next to its name at the bottom of the page. Are students certain the animals living in this region today would have existed in Moche times? What factors have contributed to their ongoing survival and/or extinction?

**Activity**

The Moche of Peru were the subject of the September 1993 edition of *Faces: A Magazine about People.* In that issue Moche scholar Donna McClelland wrote an article entitled “A Wonderful World of Animals” in which she introduced creatures depicted in Moche art. An adaptation of her story is given as part of **Handout GROWING UP AS A MOCHE CHILD.** Students will read the story in the handout, writing the correct animal name from the list on the left side of the page in each blank in the story. On the **Handout THE WORLD OF MOCHE ANIMALS** four blocks on the grid are left blank for students to draw in their own interpretation of the animal or place. (The same animals are illustrated in the handouts. The teacher’s key applies to both handouts.)

To enhance this exercise, students can draw or locate drawings or photographs of the same animals in order to compare them to Moche depictions.
Activity

Using the rollout drawings provided, have students look at the many people surrounded by or depicted as anthropomorphic animals. In many other illustrations their clothing and headgear have animals incorporated into the design. Have students hypothesize why, for instance, one would wear a belt with a serpent’s head at its end, why a warrior’s headdress would feature a vicious feline as a component, and why people going off to hunt or to fight might have had an affinity toward specific animals.

Divide the class into groups of about twelve students each. These groups will compose collaborative poems after discussing the following introduction to the activity:

“With no written record, there are no known examples of Moche poetry. Each of you will contribute to a group poem. Consider yourself to be a Moche warrior or hunter. Compose a line that includes the name of an animal who will join you or become a part of your clothing, or who would become part of you. Include, also, the significance of your choice.”

A combination of the contributed lines will form a collaborative poem under a heading or first line such as

“I am a Moche warrior going off to battle.”

And the poem might continue:

“I will wear a headdress of swallow feathers and like the swallow, I will dart so swiftly that no one will catch me.

When I creep as silently as the sleek jaguar my enemy will not know that I am approaching.

The hard shell of a crab will serve as protection from the darts that will be thrown at me.

On my banner a fox will lead our way as I will use its cunning to lead me.

As a spider ensnares victims with his web, so I will envelop my enemy with my rope and lead him to his fate.”
For an extension of this activity individual students can put the subject into contemporary terms and write about him- or herself and animals of influence.

**3. Confrontation and Conflict among the Moche**

A significant body of Moche art (more than sixty percent) deals with the ceremony and ritual of combat and the capture of prisoners. One-on-one contests were typical, with the apparent purpose being the taking of prisoners and their eventual sacrifice. Although the iconography includes seemingly mythical portrayals, we know that Moche artists were actually painting their history. As archaeologists investigate burial sites they find there is correlation between the burials and painted scenes on ceramics. Often people had been buried with masks, ornaments, and face and body paint just as figures were depicted on ceramics. As archaeologist and Moche scholar Christopher B. Donnan says in the video accompanying the exhibition, “...what we see in Moche art is real. The people actually dressed like that, they participated in those ceremonies exactly the way they are portrayed in the art.”

**Activity**

To aid in understanding the actions depicted in the following drawings, teachers should read their short descriptions before presenting them to the students. You can duplicate Handout MOCHE WARFARE (eliminating the letters A, B, C, or D), and separate the drawings as indicated on the cut lines. Ask groups of students (each group having its own set), to label and sequence the drawings.
Activity (cont.)

- **Drawing A** What is depicted in this drawing? How would you describe the warriors?
  (Warriors are fighting one-on-one with their enemy. They are recognized by their face paint, jewelry, headdress, helmet, combat weapons, etc.)

- **Drawing B** What are the two figures on the far right doing? How did the artist depict the defeated enemies? What do all these actions mean?
  (Only rarely is it clear that one or more of the combatants were actually killed. Normally only the vanquishing of the enemy is shown. Defeating an enemy involved hitting the opponent on the head or upper body with the war club. Defeat is indicated by the enemy receiving such a blow, bleeding profusely from his nose, losing his headdress and possibly other parts of his attire, or by the victor grasping his hair, removing his nose ornament or weapon bundle, or slapping his face.)

- **Drawing C** What does this scene depict? Why do you think this? What do you think the jagged design at the base of the drawing represents?
  (The captives were led in a single-file procession to a place where they appear to have been formally arraigned before a high status individual. The jagged design represents the rugged terrain.)

- **Drawing D** What is shown in this drawing? How do you know this? Are the differences in the people’s dress significant?
  (Following arraignment there was a ceremony in which the prisoners were sacrificed by having their throats cut and their blood consumed by priests and their attendants. Differences in the dress of the figures may denote rank and possibly membership in a different group.)
Activity
After students consider confrontation, conflict, and war among the Moche, they should discuss warring among other peoples, both historical and contemporary. The Moche fought one-on-one. How does this compare to warfare in the Middle Ages, for example, and to combat today? Let students discuss the possible feelings and values of those who were or are involved, both directly and indirectly. Face-to-face combat, for example, personalizes warfare as opposed to bombing from above or launching a missile from a great distance. Does this elicit a different set of feelings? Is life more valued in one situation over the other? Can students make any general statements as to the purposes of war? Are wars ever justified?

Activity
Students can investigate how artists in more recent times have portrayed war. Of particular interest and variety are Pablo Picasso’s Guernica painting (1937) on the horrors of the Spanish Civil War, the early nineteenth-century prints of Francisco Goya such as Desatres de la Guerra (The Disasters of War, 1810–1820), the works done by “Special Artists” who sketched during the conflict on the actual battlefields of the Civil War, and the World War II cartoons of Bill Mauldin.
LESSON 5: PAINTING HISTORY
Fineline Painted Vessels of the Moche, Pre-Columbian Peru

Useful Readings
Alva, Walter
1988  “Discovering the New World’s Richest Unlooted Tomb.”

Donnan, Christopher B.
1988  “Iconography of the Moche: Unraveling the Mystery of the Warrior Priest.”
1993  The Royal Tombs of Sipan.
       Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

Donnan, Christopher B., and Donna McClelland
       Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

Quick, Betsy D., and Lyn Avins
1993  Royal Tombs of Sipan: A Curriculum Resource Unit.
       Los Angeles UCLA: Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

Photograph Captions

**Handout MOCHE CERAMIC VESSELS**
A. Moche fineline painted vessel, north coast Peru. 100–800 C.E. Ceramic. H: 14.5 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert L. Lucas Jr. X86.3854

B. Moche fineline painted vessel, north coast Peru. 100–800 C.E. Ceramic. H: 26.6 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert L. Lucas Jr. X88.800

C. Moche fineline painted vessel, north coast Peru. 100–800 C.E. Ceramic. H: 23 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert L. Lucas Jr. X86.3807

D. Moche fineline painted vessel, north coast Peru. 100–800 C.E. Ceramic. H: 26.2 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert L. Lucas Jr. X86.3922

E. Moche fineline painted vessel, north coast Peru. 100–800 C.E. Ceramic. H: 23.1 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert L. Lucas Jr. X86.3748

F. Moche fineline painted vessel, north coast Peru. 100–800 C.E. Ceramic. H: 17.7 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert L. Lucas Jr. X86.3737

**Handout MOCHE VISUAL GRAMMAR**
Moche fineline painted vessel, north coast Peru. 100–800 C.E. Ceramic. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert L. Lucas Jr. X86.3934. Drawing by Donna McClelland
LESSON 5: PAINTING HISTORY
Fineline Painted Vessels of the Moche, Pre-Columbian Peru

Note to Teachers:
This lesson is part of the curricular materials developed to accompany the exhibition *Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives*. Although this and companion lessons are self-contained, each will be enhanced when used in conjunction with others in this resource. Addressing several lessons within each unit will facilitate the incorporation of the study of world arts and cultures into your curriculum.

The lesson is based on works in the second section of the exhibition called Art and Knowledge. In this gallery works are introduced that served to communicate knowledge and a sense of history. See “Unit Two—Art and Knowledge” for an introductory statement on the unit, along with some provocative “Questions for Thought,” and suggestions that will inspire the students to relate the unit to their own lives.

Images of objects to be shown to students may be printed as handouts (from within each lesson), viewed online at the *Intersections* web link http://collections.fowler.ucla.edu, or downloaded from the curriculum page on our website.

In this unit the topics and lessons are

**Lesson 5: Painting History:** Fineline Painted Vessels of the Moche, Pre-Columbian Peru

**Lesson 6: Memory and Cosmology:** Mother of the Band: The Natan Drum, Ghana

**Lesson 7: Memory and Cosmology:** Creator/ Ancestors: The Wawilak Sisters Bark Painting, Australia

**Lesson 8: Memory and Cosmology:** Cacao and a Ballplayer: Maya Ceramic Vessel, Mexico

**Lesson 9: Proclaiming Heritage:** Canoes, Carvings, and the Austronesian World

**Lesson 10: Proclaiming Knowledge:** Teaching about the Spirit World: Katsina Traditions, Southwest U.S.

**Lesson 11: Proclaiming Knowledge:** Education as Entertainment: Asian Puppetry, Burma
Handout: MOCHE CERAMIC VESSELS

Unit 2

Fowler Museum at UCLA. Intersections Curriculum
Unit 2

Handout: MOCHE VISUAL GRAMMAR

Fowler Museum at UCLA. Intersections Curriculum
Unit 2
Handout: MOCHE VISUAL GRAMMAR, FURTHER STUDY

Fowler Museum at UCLA. Intersections Curriculum
Handout: THE WORLD OF MOCHE ANIMALS
FOR THE STUDENT

Word Bank:
centipedes
dragonflies
Muscovy duck
bonitos
pelican
crayfish
lizards
llamas
crabs
sea lions
wildcat
condor
owl
rays
deer
fox

1._______________ 2._______________ 3. dragonfly 4._______________
5._______________ 6. condor 7._______________ 8._______________
9._______________ 10.______________ 11.______________ 12. owl
13. centipede 14.______________ 15.______________ 16.______________
Word Bank:
- centipedes
- dragonflies
- Muscovy duck
- bonitos
- pelican
- crayfish
- lizards
- llamas
- crabs
- sea lions
- wildcat
- condor
- owl
- rays
- deer
- fox

1. bonito 2. wildcat 3. dragonfly 4. ray
5. llama 6. condor 7. Muscovy duck 8. pelican
9. lizard 10. crayfish 11. sea lion 12. owl
13. centipede 14. crab 15. fox 16. deer
The Moche occupied the dry coastal plains of northern Peru. They lived in lush river valleys with the barren desert on either side. The rivers flowed from the towering Andes in the east to the Pacific Ocean in the west. Because some of these areas are drier than others or higher above sea level, a wide variety of animals lived in the region.

Imagine that you are a Moche girl or boy living a long time ago. If you lived on the coast near the sea you were able to eat a lot of fish and other marine life. That is because a cold ocean current that wells up in Antarctica flows north along the Peruvian coast. The current is rich in nutrients for the fish. You may have paddled a reed boat out into the ocean to catch ______, _____, or ______. As you walked along the beach to a rocky cove, some of the sounds you heard were from a group of barking ___________ and the call of noisy sea birds as they were swooping and diving. A ___________ is nesting on the sea rocks.

If you lived in the river valleys you saw corn, beans, squash, and peanuts growing. As ______ came out in the evening they helped protect the crops by searching for mice in the fields. There was more food to be found in the irrigation ditches where you caught tasty ________ for the next meal. The cool water felt good in the hot sun. __________ hovered near the water, and frogs hid to get out of the sun. The __________ __________ that your family raised as a food source paddled around in the water eating many insect pests.

High in the sky a giant __________ soared above you in the warm updrafts of air from the desert. __________ darted away to hide from the condor and a circling hawk. As you went out to hunt for a _____ or a ____, you might spy a __________ watching you from behind bushes. You must be extra careful of _________, for their bite can be very painful. You often saw _______, valued not only for food but also for their wool and for their ability to carry heavy loads.
The Moche occupied the dry coastal plains of northern Peru. They lived in lush river valleys with the barren desert on either side. The rivers flowed from the towering Andes in the east to the Pacific Ocean in the west. Because some of these areas are drier than others or higher above sea level, a wide variety of animals lived in the region.

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If you lived in the river valleys you saw corn, beans, squash, and peanuts growing. As owls came out in the evening they helped protect the crops by searching for mice in the fields. There was more food to be found in the irrigation ditches where you caught tasty crayfish for the next meal. The cool water felt good in the hot sun. Dragonflies hovered near the water, and frogs hid to get out of the sun. The Muscovy ducks that your family raised as a food source paddled around in the water eating many insect pests.

High in the sky a giant condor soared above you in the warm updrafts of air from the desert. Lizards darted away to hide from the condor and a circling hawk. As you went out to hunt for a deer or a fox, you might spy a wildcat watching you from behind bushes. You must be extra careful of centipedes, for their bite can be very painful. You often saw llamas, valued not only for food but also for their wool and for their ability to carry heavy loads.
Handout: MOCHE WARFARE

Unit 2

A

B

C

D