

تحت الرعاية السامية لصاحب الجلالة الملك محمد السادس  
Sous le Haut Patronage de Sa Majesté le Roi Mohammed VI

# Oiseaux du Mexique

طيور  
المكسيك

musée  
YVES SAINT LAURENT  
marrakech

Birds  
of Mexico

22.02-  
27.07.2025

Press Kit



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# PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION PRESENTED AT  
THE MUSÉE YVES SAINT LAURENT MARRAKECH



Under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI

# Birds of Mexico

EXHIBITION AT  
THE MUSÉE YVES SAINT LAURENT MARRAKECH

FROM SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22,  
THROUGH SUNDAY, JULY 27, 2025

Following the 2023 exhibition *Serpent*, at which Australian Aboriginal art was exhibited in Morocco for the first time, the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech (mYSLm) continues its mission of sharing with the Moroccan public works by collectors from around the world, with the exhibition *Birds of Mexico*.

With its innovative focus on birds as a lens through which to view a culture, *Birds of Mexico*, a new exhibition placed under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, explores the presence and meaning of avian fauna in artistic and artisanal representations of Mexican society from the classical Mayan age up to modern, artistic avant-garde movements.

*Birds of Mexico* introduces us to an aviary of impressive variety and an extraordinarily rich aesthetic production through more than 90 original works: jewelry, paintings, vases and other decorative objects from around 20 private and public Mexican collections.



# SUMMARY

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# THE BIRDS OF MEXICO, OF "THE NAVEL OF THE MOON"



In addition to its aesthetic and poetic scope, the exhibition offers an overview of the construction of Mexican culture and identity through the sole prism of birds, covering a large part of the history of artistic creation in this Latin American country.

Pre-Hispanic societies were captivated by birds and their plumage; they made them central figures in their belief systems through which they interpreted the world. Sustained throughout the colonial period of New Spain, these bird-figures have persisted in the modern era through multicultural and spiritual manifestations and symbols, and above all through the creation of objects: birds remain omnipresent in Mexican aesthetics, from pre-Hispanic decorative arts through contemporary artisanal production. We discover them in a vast range of ornamentation, through handicrafts such as the silverware of Taxco (State of Guerrero), the ceramics of Tlaquepaque (Jalisco) or Guanajuato; we also find their motifs in pottery, cabinetmaking, or even embroidery on sheets or clothing as well as in jewelry.

We have seen birds emerge as a symbol in the founding myths of the Aztec empire or cited as a reference in the *Abya Yala*, a term used by the original inhabitants of Mexico to symbolize respect for the land they inhabit and to designate the "Americas" before colonization.

Among the Mayan peoples of the Classical age, sounds from nature such as croaking, whistling, squeaking or chirping inspired the manufacture of sound instruments such as whistles and flutes capable of communicating the dimensions of the living and supernatural worlds. A few centuries later, on the central high plateau, birds' importance gave rise to the construction of the Totocalli, a house for birds and wild animals, an exclusive complex located in the city of México Tenochtitlán which housed the vivarium of the emperor "Moctezuma Xocoyotzin."



# BREEDING PRACTICES, PRECIOUS JEWELRY AND DIVINATION



Early on in Mesoamerica, the raising of certain species of birds by following their reproductive cycles, in semi-captivity or in captivity, made it possible to integrate birds into culinary, medicinal, economic, religious and ornamental practices. At the same time, the behavior of these species in their natural habitat had given them a role as spiritual interlocutors ferrying good and bad omens. Birds became beings carrying allusions to life, war, the sun and the underworld.

Historically, the fascination with birds and their feathers—as well as with turquoise, jadeite, cocoa, vanilla and gold—has been a valuable resource that has strongly encouraged their collective use. The shape and texture of feathers, which vary according to their origin and biological function, as well as in various colors and shadings, which can be opaque, metallic or iridescent, have led societies to incorporate feathers into their spiritual symbols and into ornamental and utilitarian objects, among which those dedicated to war, religion and government stand out in particular.



## AN EXHIBITION CONCEIVED IN MOROCCO IN DIALOGUE WITH MEXICO

It is important to emphasize that *Birds of Mexico* is not an exported exhibition, but rather the fruit of a rich dialogue between Morocco and Mexico. Conceived by the exhibition's curator Juan Gerardo Ugalde Salinas, a Mexican restorer who, since 2023, has been in charge of the collections of the Pierre Bergé Museum of Berber Arts and of the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech, the exhibition was planned from Morocco, following many months of preparation, reflection and scientific research in partnership with distinguished professionals—researchers, experts and art historians—working today in Mexico.

Among them, we should mention the exhibition's scientific advisor, Ana Elena Mallet, a Mexican curator specializing in modern and contemporary design (see bio below in the press release), who accompanied Ugalde Salinas throughout the preparation of the exhibition.

This is the first time that Mexican heritage treasures have been exhibited in North Africa on such a scale. This unprecedented feature of *Birds of Mexico* is made possible by important loans from prestigious Mexican public institutions including the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), the National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature (INBAL) and the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI).



# DESCRIPTION

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## BIRDS OF MEXICO / IMPORTANT LOANS

### National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH)

Founded in 1939, the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) is administered by the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Mexico. It is responsible for researching, preserving and protecting as well as teaching and disseminating the paleontological, archaeological, anthropological and historical heritage of the Mexican nation.

### National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature (INBAL)

Established in 1946, the National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature (INBAL) is currently under the administration of the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Mexico. It promotes artistic production, the dissemination of the arts and literature as well as art education.

### National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI)

The National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI) is a decentralized organization not attached to a ministry of state. Incorporated in the Federal Public Administration of Mexico, its mission is to design, execute, coordinate and evaluate policies, programs, strategies and projects for the development of the country's 68 indigenous and Afro- Mexican peoples.



## A CROSSROADS OF DIFFERENT CONTINENTS AND POINTS OF VIEW

While retracing the history of Mexican heritage in depth, *Birds of Mexico* allows us to explore, on a more universal scale, the anchoring of traditions and customs in the contemporary imagination.

Visitors to the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech will have plenty of opportunities to look back and forth between Mexico and Morocco, although the two countries are, geographically speaking, far from each other. Roosters, canaries, pelicans, pigeons, herons, peacocks and eagles birds remain an integral part of the contemporary landscape of both Mexico and Morocco.

Associations can thus be formed, both in terms of the representation of birds and their role in the arts and in the daily life of peoples.

For starters, from the point of view of the richness of their natural environment framed, to the west, by the Pacific Ocean; to the north, by the Gulf of California; to the east by the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, Mexico enjoys a variety of ecosystems in which a little more than a tenth of the world's bird species are found. In parallel, the geographical location of Morocco, at the gateway to Europe and Africa, has also allowed the development of an impressive avian fauna.

From a historical point of view, other similarities are noteworthy, specifically in regard to the Arab influence on Hispanic culture. In 1492, when the Kingdom of Spain reclaimed the territories of the Iberian Peninsula, then mainly occupied by the Muslim community, Christopher Columbus' ships reached the Antilles. Twenty-nine years later, in 1521, the conquistadors declared victory following the capture of the capital of the Mexican empire, México-Tenochtitlán. It is therefore easy to imagine how the coexistence, for eight centuries, of Hispanic peoples with Arab and Amazigh (Berber) communities had a profound influence on the Hispanic culture that set out to conquer the Americas.



## CULTURE, BIODIVERSITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

But these narrative threads should not obscure a central theme of the exhibition, that which connects the museum to its environment through the notion of a “museum-garden.” The intrinsic links between nature and culture, or between humans and the animal and plant kingdoms, have always strongly resonated with the mission of the Fondation Jardin Majorelle in Marrakech and the Fondation Pierre Bergé–Yves Saint Laurent in Paris.

Through the prism of birds, this exhibition highlights the direct impact between biological richness and cultural heritage.

Birds are indeed at the heart of the life of the Jardin Majorelle: recent studies show that more than 10% of Moroccan bird species have found a home there.

Undomesticated and fragile, birds can be seen as representing freedom in our terrestrial world and help bring us closer to an environmental awareness, which is often severely tested in our commercial, anthropocentric societies that tend to ignore their presence or place them in danger.



## EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The *Birds of Mexico* exhibition catalog published in French and English editions by Éditions Jardin Majorelle, is on sale in the book shops of the Yves Saint Laurent museums in Marrakech and Paris.



## A TWO-VENUE FILM PROGRAM

THE FONDATION JARDIN MAJORELLE IN PARTNERSHIP  
WITH THE CINÉMATÈQUE DE TANGER

From February 22 through July 27, 2025, in conjunction with the exhibition *Birds of Mexico*, a program of concerts and events has been scheduled, including a conference by the resident ornithologist at the Jardin Majorelle as well as the screening of ten Mexican films from Saturday, March 1 to Saturday, July 26, 2025 in the Pierre Bergé Auditorium of the mYSLm and at the Cinémathèque de Tangier, which has been supported for many years by the Fondation Jardin Majorelle. The film projections are free to the public; the program can be accessed on the website of the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech.



# BIOGRAPHIES

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## Juan Gerardo Ugalde Salinas, Exhibition curator

The Mexican curator Juan Gerardo Ugalde Salinas (b. 1995, Mexico) is a graduate of the Escuela Nacional de Conservación, Restauración y Museografía “Manuel del Castillo Negrete,” (ENCRyM) in league with the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) in Mexico City. His research is oriented towards contemporary Mexican art and intercultural studies. He has worked on exhibitions and on the conservation of collections at numerous Mexican institutions, including the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples, the National Museum of Anthropology, the Centro Nacional de Conservación y Registro del Patrimonio Artístico Mueble, and the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo. He is in charge of the conservation and restoration of the collections of the Pierre Bergé Museum of Berber Arts and of the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech. In 2024, he was awarded the Paul Coremans Prize by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia in the Best Graduate Thesis in Mexican Conservancy category.

## Ana Elena Mallet, Scientific advisor

Ana Elena Mallet (b. 1971, Mexico) is a Mexican curator specializing in modern and contemporary design. She is currently a professor emeritus at the School of Architecture, Art and Design at Tecnológico de Monterrey. She was a member of the advisory board at the Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Artes at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (MUCA Roma/UNAM) and at Casa del Lago, and was curator of the design collection at the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC/UNAM) and a member of its acquisitions committee. She also advises the university cultural center at the University of Guadalajara in matters related to contemporary art. In 2012, she was awarded the Premio Montblanc [Culture Arts Patronage Award] in the “Rising Women” category. In 2024, she curated the exhibition *Crafting Modernity: Design in Latin America, 1940–1980* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

## Alexis Sornin, Director of the mYSLm

Alexis Sornin has been Director of the Pierre Bergé Museum of Berber Arts and of the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech since September 2020. He was previously head of publications and education at the Palazzo Grassi Punta della Dogana/Collection Pinault in Venice; head of exhibitions and publications at the Villa Medici/Académie de France in Rome; and head of the study center at the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal.



# PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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## MUSÉE YVES SAINT LAURENT MARRAKECH

A stone's throw from the Jardin Majorelle, the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech (mYSLm), is a vibrant cultural center that opened its doors in the fall of 2017. Its main exhibition hall features more than just iconic creations by the renowned couturier: it offers a journey to the heart of his inspirations. Fifty models, structured around themes dear to Yves Saint Laurent, offer an original reading of the designer's work through pieces rarely seen by the public. Garments are displayed in ten-month rotations, to ensure their best possible conservation, and to allow repeat visitors to always discover something new.

The mYSLm also houses a temporary exhibition hall a photography gallery, an auditorium, a reference library, a book shop and a café-restaurant. A basement-level conservation and archival center ensures that works are kept under state-of-the-art preventive conservation conditions. At the museum's temporary exhibition hall, designed as a cultural and artistic showcase, the mYSLm pursues a program that places a special emphasis on modern and contemporary Moroccan creations.



## FONDATION JARDIN MAJORELLE

The Fondation Jardin Majorelle is a unique cultural institution in Morocco, situated on three hectares in the heart of downtown Marrakech. It is dedicated to botany, Berber (Amazigh) culture, fashion, the decorative arts and contemporary artistic creations. It includes the Jardin Majorelle, the Pierre Bergé Museum of Berber Arts and the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech. The Fondation Jardin Majorelle is a Moroccan nonprofit institution, which self-finances its projects and supports cultural, educational and social programs and initiatives throughout the Kingdom.





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