

The Meeting of Cortés and Montezuma

Painted in the latter half of the seventeenth century in Mexico by unknown artists, the eight paintings in the *Conquest of Mexico* series depict the encounter of Spanish and Aztec cultures and the ultimate victory of the Spanish over the native peoples.

The painting displayed, the third in the series, depicts Hernando Cortés (1485-1547) meeting the Mexica emperor Montezuma (1480?-1520). The landscape and treatment of indigenous dress serve to romanticize the meeting of these two powerful leaders. Cortés approaches Montezuma with his arms opened in a gesture of embrace, which the Mexica leader respectfully rejects by raising his left hand. Montezuma's idealized body, dignified stance, full beard, and the golden sword in his right hand owe more to European ideas about the appropriate bearing of a king than to ethnographic accuracy. Furthermore, while the feather skirts shown on Montezuma and his court were part of the standard European iconography for depicting "Indians," skirts like this are not known to have been worn anywhere in the Americas.



Unknown artists

"The Meeting of Cortés and Montezuma,"

from the *Conquest of Mexico* series

Mexico, second half of seventeenth century

Oil on canvas

Jay I. Kislak Collection

Rare Book and Special Collections Division (26.1)