

## EXHIBIT CATALOG

### Jay I. Kislak Foundation Conquest of Mexico Paintings I – 8

The events of the Conquest of Mexico were not an unusual subject for works of art produced in colonial Mexico in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Drawing on published histories, such as Antonio de Solís' 1684 *Historia de la conquista de Mexico*, workshops produced individual representations, series of paintings, and folding screens depicting events from the Conquest. The Kislak Conquest of Mexico paintings are, nonetheless, outstanding examples in this genre of history painting because of their early date, fine condition, and the skill of the artists involved.

Painted in the second half of the seventeenth century, the Kislak series is considered the earliest of the three complete cycles of paintings of the Conquest that still exist. Beginning with *The Entrance of Hernán Cortés into Tabasco*, these images highlight

the battles between the Spanish and the Mexica of the Aztec empire. The series ends with the dramatic *Conquest of Tenochtitlan* and *The Capture of Cuauhtémoc*, the last Aztec king.

The rich colors, dramatic compositions, and crowded atmosphere of the Kislak paintings owe much to the baroque vocabulary found in contemporary works of art created in Italy and Spain. Paintings of successful battles were common in European art in the early modern period. In particular, they formed an essential part of princely self-fashioning, with military victories proclaiming the authority of the ruler. The Kislak Conquest of Mexico paintings follow the traditional formula for seventeenth-century Spanish battle paintings in which large figures, often on horseback, are highlighted in the foreground, with the actual conflict occurring in the middle and backgrounds. A well-known example of this type of image is Diego Velázquez's *Surrender of Breda* (1635), which decorated the Hall of Realms in the Buen Retiro Palace of King Philip IV (1605-1665). As is typical of such works, this painting is not limited to one moment

from the narrative. Rather, a series of events are compressed onto a single canvas.

Scholars have suggested that the Kislak Conquest series was likely painted with a Spanish destination in mind, perhaps even the royal collection of King Charles II (1661-1700). Although the Kislak paintings never made it to Spain, inventories following the king's death in 1700 demonstrate his interest in paintings of this subject. Images of the Conquest were also in the collections of high-ranking Spanish officials during this period. Unlike the Buen Retiro battle paintings created for Philip IV, for these later audiences the Conquest was not a contemporary event, and images of it could not portray the brilliance of Charles II and his armies. Perhaps these later aristocratic patrons simply wanted to claim a piece of the glory for themselves. Had the Kislak series joined the royal collection, as was perhaps originally intended, then the paintings could have functioned as part of the mythology surrounding the Spanish triumph in the New World. Future scholarship may illuminate contemporary fascination with this subject in Spain, which can be due only in part to the publication of Solís's *Historia de la conquista de Mexico*.

During the seventeenth century, the subject of the Conquest held relatively little interest for writers and the wider public in Spain until the 1684 publication of Solís' history. Solís was the official chronicler of the king, and the elegance of his work stim-

ulated a new interest in the Conquest throughout Europe. This history, which draws upon the letters of Cortés as well as the books by Francisco López de Gómara, Antonio de Herrera, and Bernal Díaz del Castillo, was published in multiple editions. Translators throughout western Europe were eager to make the great actions of Cortés, and elegant pen of Solís available to the widest possible audience. While the Kislak paintings probably draw on a variety of written sources, in their theatricality and drama they are closest to the refined language of Solís.

The Creole population of New Spain did not, however, need to read history to be reminded of the centrality of the Conquest to their existence. Scholars believe it is most likely a member of this group, which included people of "pure" Spanish ancestry as well as those of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent, who commissioned this series of paintings, perhaps intending them as a present for the king in Spain. Although we may never know for whom these works were intended, for Creoles in Mexico at the end of the seventeenth century, both the Spanish and the Mexica of the Aztec empire had already become part of their ancestral mythology, so it was imperative to portray both groups with dignity. Through their glorification of the history of Mexico, the Conquest of Mexico paintings may have served as symbols of Creole nationalism.

R.B.

## NOTE ON INSCRIPTIONS AND NUMBERS

The paintings in this cycle include inscriptions and a numbering system designed to explain to viewers both who and what they are looking at. Over the last three centuries, these texts and numbers have been worn away and are now very difficult to read. In the following entries on the paintings, we gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Michael Schreffler and Dr. John Beusterien in making transcriptions of the Spanish texts on the paintings. Unlike transcriptions reproduced in earlier catalogs, here we have attempted to preserve as much as possible the spelling and wording of the original captions, which are written in the Spanish of a semi-literate person in Mexico in the second half of the seventeenth century. For example, in the fourth painting, *Moctezuma lapidado por su pueblo/ the death of Moctezuma at the hands of his own people*, the caption includes a possibly unintentional slur on the Spanish. As noted by Dr. Schreffler: “cercados” was originally spelled “cerdos” (pigs).

The quotes from Solís in the catalog descriptions that follow are drawn from Thomas Townsend’s 1724 translation of this work into English.

## Painting 1.

### The Entrance of Cortés into Tabasco / La Entrada de Cortés en Tabasco

Second half of the seventeenth century

Mexico

Oil on canvas, 48" x 78"

Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.0 1.000 1

N<sup>o</sup> 1

Entran en Tabasco las nuestros por la punta de los palmares guiados de geronimo de Aguilar q[ue] hullaron entre los Indios, los quales dieron sobre los españoles. [H]acen pazes y son los primeros cristianos desta Nueva España.

Fernando Cortes – 1

Bautisase D. Marina y otras cinco – 2

Casiques de Tabasco – 3

Ciudad de Tabasco – 4

Gonzalo de Sandoval – 5

Cristobal de Oli[d] – 6

Geronimo de Aguilar – 7

Pedro de Albarado – 8

No. 1

Our entry into Tabasco through the point of the palms [a geographical location marked by palm trees, depicted in the middle ground on the left], led by Gerónimo de Aguilar, whom they found among the Indians that surrendered to the Spanish. They [the people of Tabasco] make peace and are the first Christians of New Spain.

Hernán Cortés – 1  
The Baptism of Doña Marina and five others – 2  
Caciques (leaders) of Tabasco – 3  
City of Tabasco – 4  
Gonzalo de Sandoval – 5  
Cristobal de Olid – 6  
Gerónimo de Aguilar – 7  
Pedro de Alvarado – 8



Hernán Cortés began his expedition to Mexico in February 1519, departing from Cuba with more than five hundred men in eleven ships. They first sailed to the island of Cozumel, located a few miles off the eastern coast of the Yucatán Peninsula, where they had a friendly encounter with a local Maya settlement. The Maya were an important indigenous group of Yucatán and Central America, and remained independent from the Aztec empire of the Mexica. After learning of the existence of Europeans among an inland Maya group, Cortés sent men to find them. As a result, the Spaniard Gerónimo de Aguilar joined Cortés and his men. Having spent years living among the Maya, Aguilar was able to speak their language, a talent that would prove very useful as the Spanish made their way inland.

Cortés' first major conflict with indigenous Mexicans occurred as he and his men made their way toward the city of Tabasco,

located on the mainland of Mexico. Although the Spanish captured the city, the conflict continued. The Spanish were outnumbered, but Cortés used cannons and men on horseback to great effect and eventually won the battle. According to Spanish sources, the *caciques*, or indigenous leaders, of Tabasco then begged Cortés for forgiveness. More importantly, they gave Cortés and his men twenty women, one of whom was Malintzín, also known as Doña Marina or La Malinche. She spoke both Nahuatl, the primary language of the Aztec empire, and Maya. Along with Aguilar, she became an official translator to the Spanish, greatly aiding their ability to make allies throughout Mexico.

In the painting, the Spanish troops, most in full armor and on horseback, are engaged in a furious battle with the inhabitants of Tabasco. In contrast to the metal armor and rapiers of the Spanish, the native Mexicans wear feathered costumes and carry spears and *maquilhuítl*, wooden clubs inset with black, razor sharp pieces of obsidian. Although Solís describes Cortés as leading the battle on horseback, the most prominent figure in the foreground is Cristóbal de Olid, one of Cortés' captains. Mounted on a pale horse, he rises above the confusion of the battle with his rapier held high. Other members of Cortés' senior staff depicted here include Pedro de Alvarado and Gonzalo de Sandoval. In the background of the painting we see the baptism of Malintzín (hereafter referred to as Doña Marina) along with five other indigenous women in a small grove of trees. Cortés

appears here as a witness to this event, not as a main figure in the battle. Baptisms were a common subject in colonial painting, because Europeans typically equated conversion to Christianity with the acceptance of colonial rule.

The European-looking fortress in the deep background represents Tabasco, which is described in contemporary accounts as a heavily fortified city.

R.B. and P.G-V.

## Painting 2.

**The Arrival of Cortés at Veracruz and the Reception by Moctezuma's Ambassadors/ La llegada de Cortés a Veracruz y la recepción de los embajadores de Moctezuma**

Second half of the seventeenth century

Mexico

Oil on canvas, 48" x 78"

Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.02.000 1

Veracruz N<sup>o</sup> 2

Llega Cortes a la veracruz da fondo en veracruz [...] ban los caciques con Enbaxuda de parte del enperador Montesuma i lleban presentes de oro y mantas. Cortes los recibe desp[ues] [...] por medio de los interpretes Marina y aguilar. Come con ellos y despues les hizo correr los cavallos y [...].

Cortes – 1

Vernal – 2

Caciques de pre – 3

Mensajeros[?] – 4

Los q[ue] corri[eron] – 5

La artilleria – 6

Marina – 7

La demas gente – 8

Veracruz No. 2

Cortés arrives and anchors in Veracruz [...] the caciques and their entourage go forth on behalf of the emperor, carrying gifts of gold and textiles. Cortés receives them [the gifts] after [...] by means of the interpreters Marina and Aguilar. He [Cortés] eats with them after [...] he made the horses run and [...].

Cortés – 1  
Bernal Díaz – 2  
Caciques – 3  
Messengers – 4  
Those that ran – 5  
The artillery – 6  
Marina – 7  
The rest of the people – 8

Small cartouche to left is of an unknown date and includes most of the same information.



**H**ernán Cortés and his army began their march inland toward the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan at the coastal city of Veracruz, which Cortés founded in July 1519. Upon receiving word of Cortés' arrival on the coast, Moctezuma, the leader of the Aztec empire, sent his ambassadors to meet the Spanish explorers. Moctezuma sent precious stones, fine cloth and featherwork, and beautifully made gold objects. Although Moctezuma may have intended his gifts to encourage the Spanish to leave Mexico, the gold only increased their desire to travel to Tenochtitlan.

Most of this painting depicts the show of military strength and prowess that Cortés ordered to impress the Mexica ambassadors. These activities take place in the middle of the painting, which is filled with galloping horses, cannon fire, and Spanish soldiers

in full armor. The effect of this display of military force is demonstrated by a group of indigenous peoples on the right, who prostrate themselves. The massive ships docked in the harbor are decorated with red and white Spanish imperial flags, demonstrating a powerful European presence. The gift exchange is depicted on the left of the painting, where elaborately dressed Mexica ambassadors bring gifts to Cortés, who is seated with Doña Marina and others around a table. Unfortunately, most of Cortés' figure, which was originally seated at the head of the table on the left, has been cut off of the painting. All that remains are his hands and his armor-clad knee.

This painting is one of only two in the series to list Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1495-1583) among those present. Díaz was a soldier on Cortés' Mexican expedition, an eyewitness to the events depicted in the paintings. His history of the Conquest, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, (The True History of the Conquest of New Spain) was written to counteract what he considered to be the over-valorization of Cortés by other authors, although it was not published until 1632. Díaz was used as a source by Solís, who nonetheless states: "he understood a Sword better than a pen."

R.B. and P.G.-V.

# Painting 3.

## The Meeting of Cortés and Moctezuma / El Encuentro de Cortés y Moctezuma

Second half of the seventeenth century

Mexico

Oil on canvas, 48" x 78"

Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.03.000 1

Bolcan de Mexico N° 3

Sale Cortes para [syle?] de iztapalapa donde descubre villas y ciudades en el agua y la calzada [derecha?] sale de Mexico Moctezuma arrecirle y le present[a] una cadena que traia al cuello. Cortes le ba a echar los brazos y le detiene por no usarse entre ellos [...hacer?] las andas 4 Reyes q[ue] lo trae[n] en [h]ombros.

Cortes – 1

Moctezuma – 2

Marina – 3

Pedro de alvarado – 4

Xpal de Olid – 5

Andas de Moct.[ezuma] – 6

Volcano of Mexico No. 3

Cortés leaves for [...] of Iztapalapa, where he encounters towns and cities on the water and a paved roadway [to the right]. Moctezuma leaves Mexico [Tenochtitlan] to receive him and he presents him [Cortés] with a chain that he was wearing around his neck. Cortés goes to embrace him but he is held back because this is not the custom among them. Four kings [use?] the throne platform, which they carry on their shoulders.

Cortés – 1

Moctezuma – 2

Marina – 3

Pedro de Alvarado – 4

Cristóbal de Olid – 5

The throne of Moctezuma – 6



From Veracruz, Cortés and his men continued their journey westward toward Tenochtitlan, along the way making important allies of the Tlaxcalans, who were bitter enemies of the Mexica. The Spanish expedition traveled with their new allies through the high and rugged terrain surrounding the volcano Popocatepetl (the mountain that smokes) to reach the Valley of Mexico. After spending the night in the city of Iztapalapa, Cortés and his men marched across one of three broad causeways that connected the island city of Tenochtitlan to the mainland.

Moctezuma, leader of the Aztec empire, and Spanish *conquistador* Hernán Cortés met for the first time outside the city on the shores of Lake Texcoco. Contemporary accounts state that Moctezuma wore rich clothing and sandals. His lords or *caciques* carried a canopy for him to stand under; it was decorated with green feathers, gold and silver embroidery, and precious stones. Chieftains swept the ground before him, while other dignitaries held

out royal mats so that Moctezuma's golden sandals would not touch the earth. Keeping their heads lowered in reverence, the members of his court did not dare look Moctezuma in the face.

The painting depicts Cortés' arrival at this scene of refined theatrical spectacle. Cortés has dismounted from his horse, and he approaches Moctezuma with his arms opened in a gesture of embrace, which the Mexica leader respectfully rejects by raising his left hand. Describing Moctezuma, Solís states "his nose was aquiline...his look majestic[sic] and thoughtful." Moctezuma's idealized body, dignified stance, full beard, aristocratic nose, and even the golden sword he holds in his right hand, owe more to European ideas about the appropriate appearance of a king than to ethnographic accuracy. For example, the feather skirts worn by Moctezuma and his court were part of the standard iconography for depicting Indians, although this article of clothing was not worn in Mexico or anywhere else in the Americas.

Comparison with a contemporary illustration of the same event from the 1724 English translation of Solís highlights the great attention paid in the Kislak paintings to other details of dress and ornamentation, many of which are highly convincing (fig. 2.). Great attention has also been paid to the clothing of Doña Marina, who stands besides Cortés as one of the primary figures in this composition.

A small yellow dot in the sky to the left of the volcano may represent a comet that appeared in the sky over Tenochtitlan at this time. According some sources, its appearance contributed to Moctezuma's inability to address the Spanish threat effectively, because it was interpreted as an omen of disaster.

R.B. and P.G-V.



## Painting 4.

The death of Moctezuma at the hands of his own people /

Moctezuma lapidado por su pueblo

Second half of the seventeenth century

Mexico

Oil on canvas, 48" x 78"

Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.04.000 1

Nº 4

Viendose cercados los españoles def[n]tro de las casas de Mexico, [h]acen asomar a Moctezuma a un terrado y desde alli los apasiguaba, pero un indio le tiro una pedrada y los demas indios lan[z]an unes flechasos de q[ue] m[urió?]. pones fuego a los apesentos.

Montesuma – 1

El indio q[ue] rivo – 2

Frar Bartolome de olmedo – 3

Bernal dias del Castillo – 4

Cristoual de Oli[d] – 5

gonçalo de Sandoual – 6

Casas de Montesuma – 7

No. 4

The Spanish, finding themselves trapped in the palace in Mexico [Tenochtitlan], make Moctezuma appear on a roof terrace, and from there he quieted them, but an Indian threw a stone and the rest launched arrows from which he died. They burn the rooms [perhaps of the temple in the background].

Moctezuma – 1

The Indian that wounded [him] – 2

Friar Bartolome de Olmedo – 3

Bernal Diaz de Castillo – 4

Cristobal de Olid – 5

Gonzalo de Sandoval – 6

House of Moctezuma – 7



Upon the entrance of the Spanish and their allies into Tenochtitlan, Moctezuma put the palace of Axayácatl at their disposal. The new arrivals were entertained and given tours of the city, which by all accounts was a beautiful, well-ordered place. According to Cortés' *Second Letter (Carta de Relación)*, published in 1522, soon thereafter Moctezuma offered himself and his people as vassals to the King of Spain; whether Moctezuma actually made such a statement is still a hotly contested issue for historians of Mexico. There is no doubt, however, that the Spanish and Tlaxacan presence in Tenochtitlan fostered a deep sense of disquiet in the Mexica population, especially when Cortés began to preach Christianity. After learning of an attack on his men left behind in Veracruz, Cortés took Moctezuma hostage. In their palace, the Spanish discovered a treasure room of gold and precious objects, which were supplemented by additional "gifts" from Moctezuma, and it seems clear

that tension also began to build among the Spanish about how they could retain this hoard of gold in light of an environment that seemed increasingly unfriendly.

The city erupted into violent struggles between the Spaniards and their allies and the Mexica after the Spanish destroyed major cult figures in the Templo Mayor, the largest and most important building in the center of Tenochtitlan's ceremonial complex. The Spanish massacre of many Mexica nobles who were participating in a festival also did much to create a hostile environment. Although the exact date of his death is unclear, at some point during this time Moctezuma appeared in public on the upper level of the palace Axayácatl in an attempt to ease the hostility of his people. What followed is a matter of some uncertainty; rocks were thrown and Moctezuma was hit, but the severity of the wound is unknown. Spanish accounts put the blame for his death firmly on a rock-throwing Mexica warrior, while Nahautl accounts suggest that the injury was minor and that the Spanish instead killed Moctezuma in secret.

In the painting, Moctezuma appears above the palace, here depicted as a large, fortress-like structure. The Mexica leader has not yet received his fatal blow, and his facial expression suggests empathy for the Spanish as well as concern for his people. As described by Solís, his face showed “severity mix'd with lenity,

which at once express'd both his anger and fear.” On the street below, the Mexica warriors swarm angrily in front of the palace. Great attention has been paid to the costumes of these figures, especially those of the jaguar and eagle warriors, the highest-ranking soldiers in the Mexica military. A Mexica man holding the fatal stone is depicted in the foreground, standing almost on the bottom edge of the canvas. The stone he clutches is about to be launched, adding tension to the scene. The billowing clouds of smoke in the background also create drama and may represent Spaniards setting fire to the idols from the Templo Mayor.

The prominence of the priest standing next to Moctezuma is both a foreshadowing of the death of Moctezuma and a reminder of the importance of Christianity and conversion in New Spain. One recent scholar has pointed out the formal similarities between this composition and images of Jesus as “Ecco Homo” (Behold the Man). Based on the Gospel of John, images of this subject show Jesus standing on a balcony, looking sorrowfully down at a jeering crowd below. As in the biblical story, in this painting Moctezuma is denied and even struck down by his own people. Moctezuma, with his compassionate expression and inevitable death, becomes a Christ-like figure.

R.B. and P.G-V.

# Painting 5.

## The Sad Night / La Noche Triste

Second half of the seventeenth century

Mexico

Oil on canvas, 48" x 78"

Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.05.000 1

Nº 5

Sale Cortes de Mexico con los suyos a las 11 de la noche que habia oscuro y llovisnava [...] los indi[os] iban sobre ellos y quitan la puente que llevaban, llenose el foso de Alvarado de hombres, caballos y tlaxcaltecos muertos van a los remedios donde se hazen fuertes en el Cu. Nº – 6

Fernan Cortes – 1

Cristobal de Oli[d] – 2

Gonzalo de Sandoval – 3

Pedro de Alvarado – 4

Indios tlascalcos – 5

No. 5

Cortés and his men leave Mexico at 11 on a dark and rainy night [...] the Indians follow them, and they remove the bridge they [the Spanish] took with them. Alvarado's hole [a hole in the causeway] was filled with dead men, horses and Tlaxcalans. They go to the fortifications on the pyramid, where they regain their strength. No. – 6.

Hernán Cortés – 1

Cristóbal de Olid – 2

Gonzalo de Sandoval – 3

Pedro de Alvarado – 4

Tlaxcalan Indians – 5



Following the death of Moctezuma, and given the increasingly difficult situation of the Spanish, who remained trapped in the palace of Axayácatl in the center of Tenochtitlan, Cortés determined that the time had come to leave the Mexica capital. Midnight on July 1, 1520, was the time chosen for retreat, and it was a rainy, misty, and inhospitable night, according to eyewitness observer Bernal Díaz. Spotted soon after leaving their stronghold, the Spanish and their allies were the victims of fierce attacks by the Mexica. Although Cortés and most of the leaders of the Spanish contingent managed to escape to the mainland on makeshift bridges, hundreds of Spanish soldiers and thousands of Tlaxcalans died, drowned in the lake or pierced by arrows shot by the Mexica from their canoes. According to various accounts, the water was clogged with corpses of both men and horses.

This dramatic nocturnal image highlights the Spanish participants in this battle, who are portrayed as noble men on horseback, imparting a curious sense of heroism to what was in fact a disastrous retreat. In the center of the painting, Cortés is seated on a rearing horse, brandishing his sword triumphantly over the

chaos that surrounds him. In the deep background, Tenochtitlan is represented as an empty, abandoned city, oddly disconnected from the furious battle that rages in front of it. A hierarchy of scale is established in this painting, in which the Spanish are both the largest and most prominent figures. Three Spaniards on horseback dominate the foreground, riding out from the confusion and adding drama to the composition.

In addition to the loss of life on the Spanish side, undoubtedly the loss of their gold treasure also made this a “sad night.” Evidence of the gold lost or left behind can be seen scattered on the ground in the form of small rectangular bars. The treasure was never recovered.

R.B.

## Painting 6.

### **The Battle of Otumba/ La batalla de Otumba**

Second half of the seventeenth century

Mexico

Oil on canvas, 48” x 78”

Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.06.000 1

Nº 6

Gananles el estandarte R[éal] con que tuvieron una [calida?] batalla de que se [vieron?] los espanoles muy apretados, suceden este dia casos memorables en que se mostro al animo de Cortes y sus capitanes.

Fernan Cortes – 1  
Capitan de los mexi[canos] en Otumba –2  
Cristobal de Oli[d] – 3  
Gonzalo de Sandoval – 4  
Pedro de Alvarado – 5  
Otros capp[itanes] – 6

No. 6

The Spanish capture the royal standard from them, with whom they had a [fierce] battle, in which the Spaniards found themselves in dire straits. This day, memorable events occurred in which Cortés and his men showed their bravery.

Hernán Cortés – 1  
Captain of the Mexicans in Otumba –2  
Cristóbal de Olid – 3  
Gonzalo de Sandoval – 4  
Pedro de Alvarado – 5  
Other captains – 6



After the defeat of the Spaniards during the “la noche triste,” Cortés marched the survivors away from the city in the direction of Tlaxcala. During this flight from Tenochtitlan, Cortés took his men through the valley of Otumba. Here Cuitláhuac, the new Mexica leader of the Aztec empire and a brother of Moctezuma, mounted a major battle against the invaders. The Europeans and their allies were both outnumbered and in a weakened condition, and at the beginning of the battle the outcome did not look promising for them. With a small group of men, however, Cortés attacked the main leaders of the Mexica army. By capturing most of these men, who were easily distinguishable because of their banners and elaborate costumes, the Spanish were able to take control and win the battle. Spanish histories of the Conquest emphasize the significance of this battle as a key turning point in the fortunes of the Spanish in Mexico, who were then able to continue their journey to Tlaxcala, the home of Cortés’ most important allies. In Solís’ version of this battle, Cortés is the great commander who rallies his men with the strong but stern words: “either die or conquer.”

The left foreground of the painting focuses on the capture of the Mexica leaders. Like most of the other indigenous soldiers in this painting, these five men are dressed in elaborate costumes. The leader on the left is clearly recognizable as a jaguar warrior.

Surrounded by Spanish soldiers in armor on the left, the men face Cortés, whose wildly rearing horse threatens to trample them. Cortés holds a rapier to the chest of the man closest to him, who also clutches a rapier in his hand, presumably captured from the Spanish. The background of the painting gives way to furious fighting between the Spanish and the Mexica.

R.B.

# Painting 7.

## The Conquest of Tenochtitlan/ La caída de Tenochtitlan

Second half of the seventeenth century

Mexico

Oil on canvas, 48" x 78"

Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.07.000 1

CONQUISTA DE MEXICO POR CORTES. N° 7.

Ultimo conbate de mexico por Cortes y los suyos por las tres calça[das] que van a mexico, y por la Laguna los vergantines a quien davan cruda g[u]jerra los indios. Gana Pedro de Alvarado el alto cu de guichilobos, y pone las banderas de Su Majestad.

Fernan Cortes – 1  
Calçada de Sn. Anton – 2  
Cristoval de Oli[d] – 3  
Pedro de Alvarado – 4  
Calçada de Tacuba – 5  
Gonsalo de Sandoval – 6  
Calçada de Guadalupe – 7  
Sacerdot[e] del idolo – 8  
Guichilobos q[ue] va rodado – 9

CONQUEST OF MEXICO BY CORTÉS. No. 7.

The final battle for Mexico [Tenochtitlan] by Cortés and his men by way of the three roadways that lead to Mexico, and with the brigantines through the lagoon, which the Indians fought savagely. Pedro de Alvarado wins the pyramid of Guichilobos [Templo Mayor] and raises His Majesty's flag.

Hernán Cortés – 1  
Road of San Antón – 2  
Cristóbal de Olid – 3  
Pedro de Albarado – 4  
Road of Tacuba – 5  
Gonzalo de Sandoval – 6  
Road of Guadalupe – 7  
Priest of the idols – 8  
Guichilobos [Huitzilopochtli] that is surrounded – 9



The battle for Tenochtitlan between the Spanish under Cortés and the Mexica under the last Aztec leader Cuauhtémoc is more properly called a siege. Beginning in May of 1521, it lasted well into August of that year. Cortés took advantage of the city's island location by ordering the construction of a fleet of brigantines. These small, maneuverable ships for up to forty men were outfitted with cannon, and they allowed the Spanish to control the lake and blockade the city. Cortés separated his men, the vast majority of whom were indigenous allies such as the Tlaxacla, into three armed groups led by his most highly trusted officers: Pedro de Alvarado, Cristóbal de Olid, and Gonzalo de Sandoval. During the siege Cortés ordered the complete destruction of Tenochtitlan, which had formerly been praised by many, including Cortés, for its beauty. The Mexica put up a spirited and skilled resistance to the invaders, but

months of diminished food and inadequate water, in addition to an epidemic of smallpox, meant that by August they could no longer defend the city. The surrender of the survivors, the destruction of the main temple, and the capture of Cuauhtémoc, Cuitahauc's successor, depicted in the last painting of this series, marked both the end of the battle for Tenochtitlan and the end of Aztec empire.

The painting attempts to distill all the excitement, bloodshed, and drama of the siege into a series of key moments. Here we see Cortés in the foreground leading his Spanish armies on horseback across one of the causeways and into the city. He is shown in a confident manner, seated on a rearing horse with the baton of command held firmly in his left hand and a rapier held high in his right. The other captains also lead their troops towards the center of the city and the main temple compound. Only five brigantines are visible on the lake, here and there defending the Spaniards from the Mexica in canoes. The success of Cortés and his armies is already assured by the flames that emerge from the main temple and the Spanish flag that has been mounted on the roof of the shrine to Huitzilopochtli.

R.B.

## Painting 8.

### **The Capture of Cuauhtémoc / La prisión de Cuauhtémoc**

Second half of the seventeenth century

Mexico

Oil on canvas, 48" x 78"

Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.08.000 1

Salen huyendo Guatemoc ultimo Rey de mexico, con los suyos en canoas en que llevavan oro y plata y demas joyas. danles alcanse los vergantines. Y prendenlo a [h]ora de visperas de S. Hipolito, con que se concluyo el cerco de Mexico en nombre de Su Majes[tad].

Guatemoc, Rey de Mex[ico] – 1

Bergantín que le alcaço – 2

Canoas de oro y plata – 3

Carrisales – 4

Indios que iban huyendo – 5

Muger de Guatemoc – 6

Guatemoc [Cuauhtémoc], last king of Mexico [Tenochtitlan], flees with his men in canoes, in which they carry their gold and silver and other jewels. The brigantines reach them, and arrest him at the hour of the vespers of S. Hipolitus, after which the siege of Mexico was concluded in the name of his majesty.

Guatemoc [Cuauhtémoc], King of Mexico – 1

Brigantines catching up to them – 2

Canoes with gold and silver – 3

Reeds – 4

Fleeing Indians – 5

Wife of Guatemoc [Cuauhtémoc] – 6



The Mexica noble Cuauhtémoc, whose name roughly translates to swooping or falling eagle, was the eleventh and last *tlatoani* of the Aztec empire. He ruled from December 1520, following the death due to smallpox of Cuitáhuac, to August 1521, when the city fell to the Spanish. Although Cuauhtémoc was apparently quite young, he was already known as a great warrior. In preparation for the battle with Cortés and his allies, Cuauhtémoc had attempted to strengthen and renew alliances with various peoples in the empire. His inability to find reliable allies isolated the Mexica in their final battle with the Spanish. In August, after much of Tenochtitlan had already been destroyed, Cuauhtémoc was captured as he fled the city in a canoe. At this time Cuauhtémoc was delivered to Cortés, who received him with great honor. In 1525 Cuauhtémoc was executed because of reports that he was planning a rebellion against Spanish rule.

According to some histories, Cuauhtémoc fled with fifty canoes, carrying his relatives, other Mexica nobles, and especially his riches with him, and this is the version that we see depicted in this painting. Here Cuauhtémoc, who was recognized because of his feathered and jeweled finery, stands between two Spaniards, one of whom looks like Cortés (on the left), although he was not in fact present for the capture. This Spaniard stretches

out his left arm to embrace the nobleman, although he also holds a rapier in his right hand. Cuauhtémoc maintains his dignified composure. Although the artist of the paintings certainly never saw the individuals depicted in this work, there is a surprising degree of attention paid to the individual features of both Cuauhtémoc and his captors.

R.B.

SOURCES:

Brown (1986)  
Cortés (1971)  
Cuadriello (1999)  
Díaz (1981)  
García Sáiz (1999)  
Honour (1975)  
Keen (1971)  
Schwartz (2000)  
Solís (1724)