

## Featherhat Variations

Artists Institute, New York

curator Anthony Huberman

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- a text read by Julien Bismuth
- a tirolean featherhat
- a projection with sound

Tenochtitla was the capital of the Aztec Empire. In 1519, the ruler Moctezuma greeted the Spanish colonizer Hernán Cortés as a guest and gave him many gifts. A few days later, Cortés took him hostage. Tenochtitlan is now known as Mexico City. The stories that make up history are always in conflict. Misinterpretation is sometimes deliberate and sometimes not, and it's usually impossible to distinguish one from the other.

Take, for example, the case of El penacho de Moctezuma. It might have been one of the gifts Cortés received from Moctezuma—his feather crown. Somehow, it ended up in Vienna, in the collection of the Museum of Ethnology. Today, it is the source of much debate and conflict between Mexican and Austrian politicians and historians. Aztec headdresses were made with the feathers of Quetzal, Cotinga, Cuckoo, Spoonbills and Gold spangles. The feathers were tied together, stiffened with rods, and the golden head of a bird was often placed at its center. After the Spanish conquest, these exotic objects made their way into the curiosity cabinets of European princes and collectors. The crown in Vienna's museum, for example, was part of Count Ulrich von Montfort's *kunstkammer*, in Tettwang (Upper Swabia). It was then purchased in 1590 by the Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol and then given in 1880 to the Natural History Museum by the Habsburg family. Mexico wants it back and Austria doesn't want to give it back—go figure. What's not clear, however, is whether Moctezuma ever wore a feather crown.

Mahony have brought a hat and a feather to New York, a place that is impartial to the Austrian-Mexican dispute. On January 12th, 2012, they present Featherhat variations a sculpture, a video, and a story about Moctezuma's feather crown.

*Text by Anthony Huberman*