

For Immediate Release  
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**Pelotas Oaxaqueñas/Oaxacan Ball Games: Photographs by Leopoldo Peña**  
January 28 – July 15, 2018



Los Angeles, CA—*Pelotas Oaxaqueñas/Oaxacan Ball Games: Photographs by Leopoldo Peña* features thirty-eight black-and-white images of traditional team sports played by Oaxacan ex-patriates in California taken from 2011–2016. In these images, Peña has captured discrete moments that frame the event—sudden movements of arms arcing to reach the ball; pauses in action as players gather their strength; and families and friends watching the game from the sidelines—a testament to how the game creates and reinforces communal ties.

Nearly 150,000 people of Oaxacan ancestry currently reside in California. Since the 1980s, one way they have maintained cultural ties to their homeland is by playing traditional games, including the more popular (and centuries-old) *pelota mixteca* (“Mixtec-style ball”), and a variant game known as *pelota de esponja* (“sponge ball”).

In these games, players use two different types of devices to protect their hands from a ball—two pounds of solid rubber—as it bounces with high velocity along the narrow playing alley, about the length of a football field. In *pelota mixteca*, participants use heavy leather mitts that wrap around the hand, often embellished with Mesoamerican motifs, logos from modern sports and bright colors, while *pelota de esponja* players use a large, lightweight, square, hand paddle. Both are often decorated with metal studs. The installation will include a *pelota mixteca* mitt from the Fowler’s permanent collection. Noted for rapid action and dynamic movements, both games are played and scored in a

manner similar to tennis. The game has a history and network in central and southern California going back to the 1980s. Based in Fresno, the Asociación de la Pelota Mixteca de California Central organizes teams and tournaments in San José, Monterey, Oxnard, Santa Barbara, San Diego, and San Fernando.

“*Pelotas Oaxaqueñas* offers a look at the often invisible and humane side of immigration,” says Leopoldo Peña, “people playing, improvising and sharing a cultural space.”

Leopoldo Peña was born in Michoacán, México and has lived in Los Angeles since 1992. A Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at University of California, Irvine, his photography has been featured in journals and newspapers in California and Mexico, including *Boom California*, *Streetnotes*, *La Jornada*, *La Opinión*, and *El Tequio*. Peña’s photographic work centers on themes of immigration and the environment, and his long-term documentary projects often emphasize cultural performance.

### **Credit**

*Pelotas Oaxaqueñas/Oaxacan Ball Games: Photographs by Leopoldo Peña* is curated by Matthew H. Robb, Chief Curator, and Patrick A. Polk, Curator of Latin American and Caribbean Popular Arts, and will be on view from January 28–July 15, 2018 in the Goldenberg Galleria.

### **About the Fowler Museum**

The Fowler Museum at UCLA explores global arts and cultures with an emphasis on works from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the Americas—past and present. The Fowler enhances understanding of world cultures through dynamic exhibitions, publications, and public programs, informed by interdisciplinary approaches and the perspectives of the cultures represented. Also featured is the work of international contemporary artists presented within the complex frameworks of politics, culture, and social action.

### **Fowler Museum at UCLA**

308 Charles E Young Dr N | Los Angeles, CA 90024 | [fowler.ucla.edu](http://fowler.ucla.edu)

Admission to the Fowler is free.

Hours: Wednesday 12–8pm and Thursday–Sunday 12–5pm

Parking: UCLA Lot 4, 398 Westwood Plaza directly off Sunset Blvd, \$12/day

Ride Share Drop-Off: 305 Royce Drive

### **Press Contact**

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### **Images, left to right:**

Leopoldo Peña

[San Fernando, CA], 2013

A *pelota mixteca* player wears a mitt adorned with Mesoamerican motifs.

Leopoldo Peña

[Santa María, CA], 2011

*Pelota de esponja* players during at early morning match in Santa María.