

Centuries old, magical Costa Rican stone table for grinding corn, the metate stands with carved monkeys poised on the crossbar below to guard the grain. Powerful central monkey man plants himself in the center of the bar like Atlas, with arms upraised and muscular shoulders as he bears the weight of the gently curved surface above, as he secures its stability for the grinding of corn and other grain. This monkey bares his powerful jaws and teeth. He displays his gigantic ears and nostrils flaring out. His eyes look up through the stone to the sky.

On each side of the great monkey, two smaller monkey figures stand guard, with large teeth and eyes. Their arms reach out with hands gripped into fists. Carved onto each table leg, a wide-eyed parrot pecks jaguar's cheek with his long fierce beak. Jaguar, sitting rigid, displays his sharp teeth.

Teeth and grinding, grinding of grain,  
grinding of grain for food and for power.  
Watchful and guarding, guarding of grain,  
guarding of grain from theft and from harm,  
guarding of grain for growth, for the future.

Hear me, monkeys and parrots, guardians of grain. Centuries later I speak silently to your stone ears. Lend your fierce protection to preserve the wild corn seeds and their nurturing energy. Somehow in this time of science and progress, the grain is in dire need of safe-keeping.

Museum As Muse

A writing workshop presented with funding  
from the Institute of Museum and Library Services  
at the Palace of the Governors, September 2006