



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## MUSEUM STARTER KIT: Open With Care

On-view: March 13 - September 6, 2014

### Press Preview

March 12, 2014, 10:00am - 12:00pm

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**NEW YORK, February 21, 2014** - El Museo del Barrio, now celebrating its 45th anniversary, reimagines its beginnings with MUSEUM STARTER KIT: Open With Care, an exhibition that explores the unusual founding of El Museo and solicits community participation to invent new museums—creating unorthodox museums of the moment. The exhibition is designed to grow and change over time.

“Most museums are born of private collections. El Museo was born of necessity,” said Jorge Daniel Veneciano, recently appointed Executive Director of El Museo del Barrio. “Lacking mainstream cultural representation, the Puerto Rican community in New York had to invent its own museum.”

The inventor of El Museo, its founder in 1969, was Raphael Montañez Ortiz (b. 1934, Brooklyn, New York), a pivotal artist in the 1960s Destruction in Art movement. MUSEUM STARTER KIT: Open With Care draws inspiration from Montañez Ortiz in revisiting the idea of a museum, its invention, and reinvention today—especially as El Museo del Barrio embarks on a new chapter in its history. The exhibition underscores the museum’s historic capacity for and reliance on openness, generosity, and care in serving and being served by diverse communities. It also understands the ironic “destruction” of old rules to create new institutions—an understanding of conditions in the 1960s as well as a symbol of the museum’s current renaissance.

The “starter kit” proceeds in four steps. The first prominently features works by Montañez Ortiz, who celebrates his 80th birthday this year. Among works on display will be his Archaeological Find #21: The Aftermath (1961), a destroyed sofa as sculpture—a signature work of the artist. Later works, such as Maya Zemi I and II, illustrate his profound interest in connecting the historic indigenous cultures of the Caribbean and Mesoamerica.

The second step features the New York-based collective BroLab and their modular edifice, Stack and Rack, a multipurpose public sculpture that functions as a socially interactive space. Visitors and tour groups are invited to sit on BroLab’s flatpack benches made from recycled plastic as they contemplate the invention of their own museum—imagining which works of art, architecture, and design they would include—and to register their thoughts in the gallery and through social media. Their suggestions will then be illustrated and added to this growing installation, creating an evolving conceptual museum that changes from week to week.



The third step offers a reflection on past and future artists of El Museo and features renowned artists including performance artist Papo Colo and photographer/filmmaker Perla de Leon. A handful of works by artists who have never been featured at El Museo adds to the reflection of this section; they include drawings by Zilia Sanchez, and found object sculptures by Romy Scheroder. Additional artists include Beverly Acha, Tamara Kostianovsky, LNY and Mata Ruda, Geraldo Mercado, and Luís Stephenberg.

For the fourth step, El Museo has partnered with a group of local artists and neighbors from El Barrio (East Harlem) to invite community members to bring objects from their homes for display in the museum's galleries. These displays will grow and change over time, creating ephemeral museums of the moment. This portion of the exhibition celebrates the human impulse to collect and will be organized in collaboration with an Artists/Neighbors Curatorial Committee. Members include: Jaime Davidovich, Alexis Duque, Christopher Lopez, Lina Puerta, Judith Escalona/medianoche gallery, Debbie Quiñones, and Manny Vega.

The "kit" concludes with having visitors exit through the BroLab space, allowing them to reflect again on the overall process. This unconventional museum exhibition underscores El Museo's commitment to exploring new connections with its audiences and questioning museum orthodoxy.

## FUNDERS

MUSEUM STARTER KIT: Open With Care is supported by the Carmen Ana and Joseph Unanue Foundation.

## ABOUT EL MUSEO

El Museo del Barrio, New York's leading Latino cultural institution, welcomes visitors of all backgrounds to discover the artistic landscape of Latino, Caribbean, and Latin American cultures. Their richness is represented in El Museo's wide-ranging collections and critically acclaimed exhibitions, complemented by film, literary, visual and performing arts series, cultural celebrations, and educational programs. For more information on El Museo del Barrio, please visit [www.elmuseo.org](http://www.elmuseo.org).

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