



For Immediate Release:

El Museo del Barrio Launches First Galleries Exclusively Dedicated to its Permanent Collection as Part of its Reopening

The Carmen Ana Unanue Galleries Unveiled October 17, 2009 with

*Voces y Visiones: Four Decades Through
El Museo del Barrio's Permanent Collection*

New York, NY, September 14, 2009 – As part of its reopening on Saturday, October 17, 2009, El Museo del Barrio will unveil the **Carmen Ana Unanue Galleries**, the first space dedicated to the museum's Permanent Collection, fulfilling one of the main objectives of its renovation campaign. The galleries will showcase, on a rotating basis, highlights from one of the oldest and most important collections of twentieth-century Caribbean, Latino, and Latin American art in the United States, along with related events and educational programs. The inaugural exhibition, *Voces y Visiones: Four Decades Through El Museo's Permanent Collection*, made possible thanks to the generous support of American Express and the National Endowment of the Arts, will take viewers through a timeline of El Museo's history in relation to the history of Latin American and Caribbean art in New York, the United States, and internationally. Coinciding with the launch of El Museo's 40th Anniversary festivities, it will be presented alongside *Nexus New York: Latin/American Artists in the Modern Metropolis*.

El Museo del Barrio's Permanent Collection both serves and defines its institutional mission by tracing the paths of its growth and shaping its programs' themes. "We are immensely proud to inaugurate an exclusive space for our rich collection. Representing the DNA of our institution, it spans from its Puerto Rican roots to a wide variety of Latin cultures, reflecting the museum's continuous expansion over the last forty years," says Julián Zugazagoitia, El Museo's Director and CEO.

The galleries will be named after Carmen Ana Unanue, a longtime supporter of El Museo. "It is with great pride that we are naming them after Mrs. Unanue," continues Zugazagoitia. "Her involvement in the philanthropic, educational, and humanitarian world has greatly influenced our institution, as well as Latinos' lives throughout the continent."

The inaugural *Voces y Visiones* exhibition will include a rich and varied range of

artworks and historical objects from the permanent collection ranging from Pre-Columbian Taíno works, to Santos and other devotional objects, prints and posters, and modern and contemporary art. Presented in three sections that will focus on milestones in the history of El Museo, *Voces y Visiones* encompasses more than 200 pieces of artwork documentation and memorabilia from a variety of mediums and cultures.

Starting with the **Foundation of El Museo** and works acquired from its inception in **1969 through approximately 1977**, the first section will highlight the cultural significance of El Museo's beginnings, a period coinciding with the later part of the Civil Rights Movement, which saw a heightened interest and awareness in the traditions of Caribbean, Latino and Latin American art, culture, and tradition. Anchored in the predominantly Puerto Rican community of Spanish Harlem, El Museo del Barrio - "The Museum of the Neighborhood" - emerged during this period as a center for the preservation and promotion of its cultural expressions amidst the struggle of minority groups for a better representation within U.S. culture. Highlights in this section include *Bodega and East 110 Street, NYC* by Roger Cabán; *Lolita Lebron* and *Freedom Fighter* by Marcos Dimas; and *Children of Treblinka* by Raphael Montañez Ortiz.

The middle section will focus on **El Museo's expansion from 1977 to 1991**, when it moved to its current location, the Heckscher Building at 104th Street and Fifth Avenue, situated at the crossroads of its founding community and Fifth Avenue's Museum Mile. During this period, El Museo not only grew in size, but it also began to broaden its focus, expanding its permanent holdings to include art from other Latin American and Caribbean countries such as the Dominican Republic and Mexico, as communities from these regions expanded in New York. The exhibition will highlight El Museo's increasingly active engagement in the aesthetic and cultural debates of the time, significant to both New York and Latin American art. Artworks represented in this section include *Red on Red* by Carmen Herrera, and *The Bed* by Pepón Osorio.

The final section will include works acquired from **1992 to the present**, yet another period of tremendous expansion enriched by the acquisition funds which were intended to further El Museo's involvement in **contemporary art, photography**, and works from **local movements of Latino artists**. Consolidating its position as a leading institution on the cultural map of New York City, this period has seen El Museo renew its professional capacities, continue its growth of the permanent collection, and create a platform for Puerto Rican, Latino, and Latin American contemporary artists, while at the same time critically revisiting and celebrating these rich cultural and artistic heritages. Selections in this section include *Black is Black* by Claudio Bravo, *I'm Loved* by Iliana Emilia García, *Out of Balance* by Alfredo Jaar, *Fox in the Mirror* by Liliana Porter, and the exhibition's signature piece, Gabriel de la Mora's <http://www.google.com.mx/search?q=Juan+Perez=ISO-8859-1&l=es&btnG=B%FA+Asqueda+en+Google+meta>.

About the Permanent Collection

El Museo's Permanent Collection includes over 6,500 works spanning more than 800 years of Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino art. Among the oldest works in the collection are those of the **Taíno**, the dominant culture in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, and the Bahamas from approximately 1200 to 1500 A.D. Comprising of sculptural objects, ceramics, tools, dance, music, and poetry, these pieces are important elements of the Caribbean's Pre-Columbian past. The exhibition includes archaeological objects from the Taíno culture as well as fine art photographs, and contemporary works that have been influenced by the Taíno legacy.

The Collection also includes later **folk art** pieces from Puerto Rico and across Latin America and the Caribbean. Among these holdings are devotional objects from Catholic customs and Vodun traditions originating in West Africa, including *santos de palo* (wooden saints) mostly from Puerto Rico, ex-votos, or votive offerings of prayer and gratitude, and Vodun *drapeaux*, beaded and sequined flags used in spiritual rituals. Other folk art holdings include festival and ceremony masks, textiles, and other objects.

Among El Museo's holdings from the early part of the 20th century through the late 1960s are works tracing developing modern ideas about **abstraction and representation**. Much of this period is explored in *Nexus New York*, the temporal exhibition on view October 17, 2009 through February 28, 2010, which will feature works from El Museo's Permanent Collection, among other numerous sources. The influence of Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino artists on the evolution of modern art has at times been overlooked in historic analyses of this movement. El Museo's Collection, however, provides insight into this period and important collaborations across the Americas.

El Museo's **print collection also** features important works from the 1960s and 1970s, when Chicano artists in California and the southwest, and Nuyorican artists in the northeast, were engaged in an effort of cultural affirmation. These artists employed techniques that appropriated images and symbols from the histories of their communities, advertising and the media. Both groups reworked Pop Art into a highly politicized critique of U.S. imperialism, consumer culture, the media, and representation itself. The Permanent Collection also includes midcentury works by artists who looked to indigenous and popular traditional cultures as a way to get in touch with the **spiritual world**. These artists explored ancestral cultures and holistic worldviews, and created art that aimed to contemporize the sacred and the ritualistic. In recent years, thanks to the generosity of Mr. Sheehy from Latin American Masters, El Museo has received a large donation of over 100 hundred prints by Matta, Lamb, Tamayo, and a significant number of Toledo's.

Around the time that El Museo began to strengthen its **contemporary art** holdings in the early 1990s, the fifth centennial of the arrival of Europeans in the Americas was giving rise to an aesthetic debate related to colonial heritage and **identity politics**. During this time, indigenous heritages were reevaluated as the history of colonization was rewritten to make audible and visible the tale of the so-called conquered. Another significant theme in El Museo's contemporary art holdings is that of the continued **migration and communication** transformations across Latin America and the U.S., in particular, New York City and other metropolises where vibrant artistic communities emerge. Urban culture, language, pop culture, and the media, among many other themes, inform the work of contemporary artists, which continue to explore, expose, criticize, and celebrate the struggles and triumphs of their communities. With the creation in 1999 of the S-Files, El Museo's Biennale, and thanks to the generosity of the Jacques and Nathalie Gelman Fund, many new works by living artists have expanded the museum's artistic wealth.

About El Museo del Barrio

El Museo del Barrio, New York's leading Latino cultural institution, welcomes visitors of all backgrounds to discover the artistic and cultural landscape of the Caribbean and Latin America. The richness of Latino cultures is represented in El Museo's wide-ranging collections and exhibitions, complemented by performing arts events, cultural celebrations, and educational programs. A dynamic artistic, cultural, and community gathering place, El Museo is a center of cultural pride on New York's Museum Mile.

El Museo was founded 40 years ago by artist and educator Raphael Montañez Ortiz

and a coalition of parents, educators, artists, and activists who were determined to see Puerto Rican culture represented in their children's schools and fought for changes in the public school curriculum, including the classroom museum that became the first El Museo. Since its inception, El Museo has been committed to celebrating and promoting Latino culture, thus becoming a cornerstone of *El Barrio*, and a valuable resource for New York City. El Museo's varied Permanent Collection of over 6,500 objects from the Caribbean and Latin America includes pre-Columbian Taíno artifacts, traditional arts, twentieth-century drawings, paintings, sculptures and installations, as well as prints, photography, documentary films and video. For more information about El Museo, please visit www.elmuseo.org.

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