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## **“The African Presence in México: From Yanga to the Present” Opens at the Anacostia Community Museum Nov. 8**

“The (‘African Presence in Mexico’) exhibition illustrates the depth and reach of African culture (in México)... Through paintings, photos, lithographs and historical texts, the visiting exhibition tries to dispel the myth that blacks had a minimal influence on the culture of our southern neighbor, a myth held by many... either through ignorance or prejudice. If ignorance is the problem and art the solution, then this exhibit should be a required field trip for schools from now until it closes.” – Agustin Gurza, staff writer, LA Times, Feb. 2, 2008.

The Smithsonian’s Anacostia Community Museum will host the critically acclaimed traveling exhibition, “The African Presence in México: From Yanga to the Present,” from Nov. 8 through July 4, 2010. Through paintings, photos, lithographs and historical texts, the visiting exhibition highlights the indelible impact that Africans have on Mexican culture and examines the complexity of race, culture, politics and social stratification. “The African Presence in México” is a bilingual exhibition that includes text panels, tours and various educational and public programming in both Spanish and English. The companion exhibition, “Who Are We Now? Roots, Resistance and Recognition,” examines the relationships between Mexicans and African Americans in the United States and African Americans in the United States and the country of México.

“We are delighted to bring this important exhibition to the Smithsonian through its engagement at the Anacostia Community Museum,” said Camille Giraud Akeju, director of the museum. “The exhibition and the stimulating public programs that accompany it will highlight another significant yet little known aspect of the African diaspora.”

Organized by the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago, this traveling exhibition has been presented in Chicago, New Mexico, California and Philadelphia, as well as Monterrey and Veracruz, México. No exhibition has showcased the history, artistic expressions and practices of Afro-

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Mexicans in such a broad scope, with a comprehensive collection of artwork from historic pieces to contemporary artistic expressions. The Smithsonian presentation at the Anacostia Community Museum includes two rare 18<sup>th</sup>-century colonial “casta” paintings not seen on display since the exhibition originally opened in 2006. The exhibition also features important historical figures, like Yanga, an African leader and founder of the first free African township in the Americas (Jan. 6, 1609).

Curated by Sagrario Cruz-Carretero and Cesáreo Moreno, “The African Presence in México,” illuminates the often overlooked contributions of Africans to the artistic, culinary, musical and cultural traditions of Mexican culture from the past through the present day. Elena Gonzales developed the companion exhibition, “Who Are We Now?” to offer a basis for discussion on contemporary U.S. relationships between people of African and Mexican descent. “At so many levels, ‘The African Presence in México’ project is a landmark undertaking and the most important cultural presentation ever organized by the National Museum of Mexican Art,” said Carlos Tortolero, president and founder of the National Museum of Mexican Art.

The National Museum of Mexican Art notes that “The African Presence in México” serves as a catalyst for a more positive dialogue between African Americans and Mexicans, offering México the opportunity not only to reveal its African legacy, but also actively embrace it as an important element in its national cultural heritage. “Visitors will learn that México is a diverse country, that it has had its own struggle with slavery, race and class and that Africans in México participated in the country’s seminal events as well as made important contributions to the nation,” said Portia James, senior curator at the Anacostia Community Museum.

The museum has worked with several Mexican and Latino civic, cultural leaders and organizations to collaborate on programming and promotional efforts and to generate ongoing dialogue in the Washington metropolitan area. The Smithsonian presentation received Federal support from the Latino Initiative Pool, administered by the Latino Center. Exhibition programs and special events are presented in collaboration with the Smithsonian Latino Center, the National Museum of African Art, the Mexican Cultural Institute and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

The exhibition schedule is subject to change: DuSable Museum of African American History, Chicago, fall of 2010.

### **About the National Museum of Mexican Art**

Formerly, the Mexican Fine Arts Center, the National Museum of Mexican Art is the largest Latino Arts organization in the United States and the only Latino museum accredited by the American  
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Association of Museums. The NMMA presents visual arts exhibitions, performance festivals, and education programs to more than 200,000 annually including 60,000 K-12 students. 90.5 FM Radio Arte is the museum's youth-driven bilingual public radio station committed to advancing the voices of a multilayered society through socially conscious journalism, media literacy, training and programming. For information call (312) 738-1503 or visit the NMMA's Web site: [www.nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org](http://www.nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org).

### **About the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum**

The Anacostia Community Museum opened in southeast Washington in 1967 as the nation's first federally funded neighborhood museum. Adopting its current name in 2006, the museum has expanded its focus from an African American emphasis to examining the impact of contemporary social issues on urban communities. For more information on the museum, the public may call (202) 633- 4820, (202) 633-1000 or (202) 633-5285 (TTY); for tours, call (202) 633-4844. Web site: [anacostia.si.edu](http://anacostia.si.edu).

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