The Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum organizes its most important exhibition to date: "The African Presence in México: From Yanga to the Present". The exhibition, curated by Sagrario Cruz of the University of Veracruz and the MFACM's Visual Arts Director Cesáreo Moreno, will focus on the overlooked history of African contributions to Mexican culture from 1519 to the present day. For nearly 500 years, the existence and contributions of the African descendants in Mexico have been overlooked. Soon Africans arrived in Mexico in 1519 Yanga, an African leader, founded the first free African township in the Americas (January 6, 1609). Since then Africans have continued to contribute their artistic, culinary, musical, and cultural traditions to Mexican culture through the present day.

"At so many levels, The African Presence in Mexico project is a landmark undertaking and the most important cultural presentation ever organized by the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum. The exhibitions and public programming associated with The African Presence in Mexico demonstrate a dynamic cultural connection between Mexicans and African-Americans, the two largest cultural groups in Chicago", commented Carlos Tortolero, President of the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum.

The African Presence in Mexico: From Yanga to the Present
This exhibition, curated by Sagrario Cruz of the University of Veracruz and the MFACM's Visual Arts Director Cesáreo Moreno, will focus on the overlooked history of African contributions to Mexican culture from 1519 to the present day. For nearly 500 years, the existence and contributions of the African descendants in Mexico have been overlooked. Soon Africans arrived in Mexico in 1519 Yanga, an African leader, founded the first free African township in the Americas (January 6, 1609). Since then Africans have continued to contribute their artistic, culinary, musical, and cultural traditions to Mexican culture through the present day. No exhibition has showcased the history, artistic expressions, and practices of Afro-Mexicans in such a broad scope as this one, which includes a comprehensive range of artwork from 18th Century Colonial Caste Paintings to contemporary artistic expressions.

The exhibition features artists such as Rufino Tamayo, Elizabeth Catlett, Francisco Toledo, Francisco Mora, Maria Yampolski, and Afro-Mexican artist Ignacio Canela, Mario Guzmán, Guillermo Vargas, and Hermengildo González.

Who Are We Now? Roots, Resistance, and Recognition
Curated by Elena Gonzales, this exhibition investigates the complex relationship between African-Americans and Mexicans in the U.S. as well as the relationship that African-Americans have with the Mexico. Who Are We Now? charts a path of
collaboration between Mexicans and African-Americans in the U.S. from the domestic slave trade to the present including such milestones as the Underground Railroad to Mexico, the artistic influence of the Mexican School, and the landmark political campaigns of former Mayor Harold Washington of Chicago and Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa of Los Angeles.

Common Goals, Common Struggles, Common Ground
This interactive exhibition was curated by the Museum’s Chicago Gallery committee, Common Goals, Common Struggles, Common Ground, presents a balanced account of historical issues that are common to both the Mexican and African American communities in Chicago. It will identify struggles shared by both communities such as the ones found within the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the current gentrification of the Maxwell, Bronzeville and Pilsen neighborhoods. There will also be an interactive component that will allow visitors to respond to the three exhibitions, the discussions of current events, and the overall issue of race in Chicago.

The Civic Dialogue: Discussions, Performances, Public Events
Public events held throughout Chicago will amplify the themes addressed in the MFACM visual arts exhibitions. The Civic Dialogue will include panel discussions, lectures, and round tables - that will gather scholars and community leaders from the U.S. and Mexico. Sagrario Cruz Carretero, the exhibition’s curator from the University of Veracruz is Mexico’s leading expert in the investigation of African history in Mexico. Tracie Mathews of the University of Chicago Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture will lead an African-American and Mexican-American Studies Symposium. Editors of the book "Neither Enemies, Nor Friends" will participate in a panel discussion.

The MFACM and the DuSable Museum will also collaborate on a Cesar Chavez / Martin Luther King Luncheon to be held in downtown Chicago on April 7, 2006. This event, sponsored by Chase Bank, will include performances, and facilitated discussions.

The performance centerpiece of the exhibition will be the World Premiere of a new dance work choreographed and performed by the Muntu Dance Theater appearing in concert with Mexican singer La Negra Graciana at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance on May 18, 2006. Other performances will include a poetry open mike, a theatrical reading of "The Letters of Yanga," and a cross-cultural cooking demonstration.

Education
The educational programming for students grades K-12 will consist of curriculum development, professional development for teachers, assemblies, panel discussions, and lectures for students, loan kits for schools, and interactive CD packets. The MFACM is developing the educational programming in collaboration with the Chicago Public Schools and in accordance with CPS standards. Kraft Foods will sponsor free Family Days throughout the exhibition.

Project Overview
Mexico’s rich culture has been long recognized in art, archaeology, and many other fields. However, a very important, but largely unknown contribution to Mexico’s history has been that of the Africans whose forced immigration to Mexico began in the 1500s. Neither the presence nor accomplishments of Mexicans of African descent have been recognized by the mainstream, and President Fox’s recent
comments on U.S. immigration are thought to reflect how far the Mexican populace is out of touch with its African population.

Likewise in the U.S., it is of great significance that African Americans and Mexicans are the two largest groups of color in the United States, and, in most cities, represent the two largest ethnic groups. Yet, there is very little dialogue between African Americans and Mexicans. It is widely held that the two groups speak to the White community more than they speak to each other. The exhibition The African Presence in Mexico: From Yanga to the Present will provide a tremendous opportunity for these two groups to embrace a common cultural past. It also allows the rest of American society to better understand the complexity of race issues that face both the U.S. and Mexico today.

With its long history of collaborations with African American and other culturally grounded organizations, the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum is an ideal "convener" for this discussion at this turning point in American history. The untold story of African contributions to Mexican culture will be the foundation of the discussion. The MFACM has collaborated with African American organizations in Chicago on numerous projects, and the Museum has ongoing relationships with both Latino and African American institutions around the country that will be invaluable in planning this historic exhibition and sending it on tour. As an institution that is dedicated to first voice representation on all levels, it is the responsibility of the MFACM to present this important element of Mexico's cultural history to the public.

To assist the MFACM with the planning and execution of this landmark exhibition, a Steering Committee comprised of key members of the African American community have been meeting for more than two years. The Steering Committee includes Amina Dickerson, Kraft Foods; Joan Gray, Muntu Dance Theater; Jacqueline Atkins, Museums in the Park; Ricardo Millett and Phillip Thomas, Woods Funds of Chicago; Tracye Matthews, University of Chicago Center for Race, Politics & Culture; and Maria-Rosario Jackson, Urban Institute, Washington D.C.

Chase, the Chicago-based consumer and commercial banking business of JP Morgan Chase & Co., is the National Sponsor of the exhibition.

"This exhibit highlights the cultural connections between two groups of people that are important to U.S. communities," said William M. Daley, Chairman of the Midwest for JP Morgan Chase. "Chase is proud to support the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum in presenting the exhibition in Chicago and other cities."

Chicago Sponsors for the exhibition are the Sara Lee Foundation and the Boeing Company. The Youth Education sponsor is Kraft Foods, and the Polk Bros. Foundation is supporting Education Curriculum development. Additional support for the exhibition is provided by: the Woods Fund of Chicago, Wallace Foundation, Joyce Foundation, Albert Pick, Jr. Fund, National Endowment for the Arts, Ford Foundation, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Park District, Illinois Arts Council, and the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. Media sponsors include Univision/Telefutura, and Radio Arte 90.5 FM; travel is provided by American Airlines.

About the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum
The MFACM is the largest Latino Arts organization in the U.S. and the only Latino museum accredited by the American Association of Museums. The MFACM presents
Visual Arts Exhibitions, Performance Festivals, Education Programs to more than 150,000 annually including 50,000 K-12 students. The Museum’s public radio station, Radio Arte 90.5, is an award winning two-year training program and 24 hour/7 day station run entirely by youth 13-21. The Museum’s hours are Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Admission is free. For information call 312.738.1503 or go to the MFACM’s website: www.mfacmchicago.org

About Chase
Chase, the U.S. consumer and commercial banking brand of JPMorgan Chase & Co., has more than 100 million credit cards issued and serves consumers and small businesses through more than 2,500 bank branches, 7,100 ATMs and 225 mortgage offices as well as through relationships with over 15,000 auto dealerships, 2,500 schools and universities, and 2,100 insurance agencies. It also serves more than 25,000 commercial banking clients, including corporations, municipalities, financial institutions and not-for-profit entities with annual revenues generally ranging from $10 million to $2 billion.

Public Exhibition Opening
Saturday, February 11
3 – 7 pm @ the MFACM
Admission: Free

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