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LANDMARK EXHIBITION

"COURTLY ART OF THE ANCIENT MAYA" OPENS AT
THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, APRIL 4, 2004;
MOST OBJECTS ON VIEW IN U.S. FOR FIRST TIME



Palenque, Mexico

Portrait head of Pakal

AD 650-683

Stucco

Museo Nacional de Antropología - INAH, Mexico

© photo: Michel Zabé

Washington, DC -- **Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya**, the first exhibition ever devoted to this subject in the United States, will be on view April 4 through July 25, 2004, in the East Building of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. The exhibition brings together some 130 masterworks, approximately half of them from museums in Mexico, along with outstanding examples from American, European, and Australian collections. The majority of works from Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras are coming to the United

States for the first time. The exhibition demonstrates the visual magnificence and the complexity of life at court, particularly at Palenque, Mexico, but at other city-states as well. The objects on view will include primary works of stone sculpture such as stelae, lintels and panels, as well as works in other media, including ceramics, precious stone, and shell.

Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya has been organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. It will be on view in San Francisco at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor from September 4, 2004 through January 2, 2005. The exhibition builds upon a history of cooperation with Mexico. The National Gallery of Art presented **Art of Aztec Mexico: Treasures of Tenochtitlan** in 1983 and **Olmec Art of Ancient Mexico** in 1996. The Fine Arts Museums' relations with Mexico, catalyzed by a large bequest of Teotihuacan wall paintings in the late 1970s, have resulted in a series of collaborative projects, among them the exhibition **Teotihuacan: City of the Gods** in 1993 and this exhibition.

"This landmark exhibition has been built upon a foundation of mutual understanding and trust," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are grateful to the cultural leaders, scholars, and government officials, particularly Mexico's Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes and the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, for their invaluable assistance. We also wish to thank the many other nations who are lending their works to this important exhibition."

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

The exhibition at the National Gallery of Art is made possible by a generous grant from the Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation. "We are grateful for the Reynolds Foundation's support and encouragement in bringing these masterpieces to a wider public," said Powell.

Televisa, the largest media group in the Spanish-speaking world, proudly sponsors this exhibition as part of its commitment to promote and share its Mexican heritage.

"The Maya culture, of great advancement and refinement, is part of the cultural legacy that Mexico gladly shares with our North American neighbors and the world. We are

very pleased to support this exhibition and we hope it contributes to the broader understanding and closer relations between our nations," said Emilio Azcárraga Jeán, chief executive officer, Grupo Televisa.

The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

THE EXHIBITION

During the 200 years from AD 600 to 800, artists and scribes under the direction of kings and nobles of the tropical rainforests of southern Mexico and adjacent Central America achieved a peak of dramatic expression and naturalism unmatched in the ancient New World. Supported by a society of astonishing depth and complexity, ancient Maya kings and queens commissioned great works of art and architecture to memorialize themselves and insure their place in history.

Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya presents a new and intimate look at the Maya court, the focus of religious and political life in each Maya city. In recent years, energetic campaigns of archaeology have yielded new and unprecedented works now being brought to an international audience by this exhibition. Particular attention has been devoted to works from Palenque, Mexico, including works long in U.S. collections as well as latest discoveries from the site. Works from the ancient Maya cities of Tonina, Yaxchilan, and Bonampak, among others, are also included. The exhibition is divided into six sections, as follows:

Life at the Maya Court. Typical members of a Maya court are introduced, from the royals to the servants, with special attention to those most sought as kingly companions, such as dwarves, hunchbacks, and musicians. On view are numerous ceramic figurines, such as those from Campeche, Mexico, of a dwarf and a singer, as well as painted vessels and an expressive sculpted throne back.

The Divine Model of Courtly Life. This section traces the connections between the Maya nobility and their gods. Each Maya court believed that it was a place with special access to the gods, and that life at court mirrored the divine world. In particular, Maya nobility emulated two gods, the Maize God and God L. The Maize God was a princely

figure who symbolizes life, death and resurrection; God L was a wealthy god of tribute and trade and a denizen of the underworld. The contest between these two gods was symbolically acted out on the Maya ballcourt. On view in this section are figurines of ballplayers and a magnificent carved limestone disk from Chinkultik bearing the likeness of a Maya ballplayer.

Women at Court. To a degree unprecedented in the ancient New World, Maya women played a prominent role at court. The exhibition includes the extraordinary example of Lady Xok of Yaxchilan, who commissioned three outstanding sculptures for the lintels of doorways. On each carved panel, Lady Xok plays a central role in ritual life, such as conducting blood sacrifice or dressing her husband for battle.

Word and Image in the Maya Court. The Maya system of writing is one of five original writing systems developed in the ancient world; only in recent decades have Maya hieroglyphs begun to yield their secrets, thanks to enormous advances in their interpretation. The Maya supernatural patrons of art and writing, the "monkey scribes," are represented in this section by figurines with both human and monkey faces. Also on view are intricately carved flints, engraved bricks, and individual painted vessels, such as the elegant "Fleur-de-lis" vase.

The Court at War. This section deals with the dark side of the nobility's struggle for power. Some of the most dramatic images in the exhibition illustrate the pathos of prisoners and the power of warriors, in relief carvings and figurines of captives and statues of warriors. The harsh realities of Maya warfare are vividly portrayed in the wall murals of Bonampak, presented here in a life-size reproduction which shows a king and court presiding over mutilated captives on palace steps.

Palenque: An Exemplary Maya Court. Nestled into the hills of Chiapas, Mexico, Palenque was a place of artistic vigor for 150 years. Palenque's extensive ancient and now-deciphered texts, new archaeological discoveries, and the remarkable preservation of its architecture provide one of the single richest examples of an ancient Maya court. The exhibition includes works from the reign of every major Palenque ruler, from King Pakal (ruled 615-683) to King Kuk (acceded to office, 764), and important new archaeological discoveries, such as a panel which portrays the great king Pakal at

the center, framed by his descendants. Works on display include the iconic stucco *Portrait Head of Pakal*.

CURATORS AND CATALOGUE

Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya is curated by Kathleen Berrin, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco curator of art of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, and professor Mary Ellen Miller, Vincent J. Scully Professor of the History of Art, Yale University.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a comprehensive, fully illustrated 300-page exhibition catalogue by Miller and noted British epigrapher Simon Martin, with a foreword by Kathleen Berrin. This groundbreaking book gathers together both the latest research in Maya civilization and hundreds of illustrations to illuminate the achievements of this ancient culture. Published by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and Thames and Hudson, New York and London, the catalogue includes contributions by Michael D. Coe, Yale University; Héctor L. Escobedo, Universidad del Valle de Guatemala; Martha Cuevas García, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico; Beatriz de la Fuente, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (U.N.A.M.); Roberto Garcia Moll, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia; Arnoldo González Cruz and Guillermo Bernal Romero, Proyecto Arqueológico Palenque, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico; Stephen D. Houston, Brigham Young University; Roberto López Bravo, Palenque, Museo de Sitio "Alberto Ruz L'Huillier"; Diana Magaloni, U.N.A.M.; Alfonso Morales and Julia C. Miller, Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute (PCARI); Merle Greene Robertson, Pre-Columbian Research Institute; David Stuart, Peabody Museum, Harvard University; and Maria Teresa Uriarte, U.N.A.M.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Lecture Programs. Curator Mary Ellen Miller, Vincent J. Scully Professor of the History of Art, Yale University; will present "An Introduction to the Exhibition: Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya," on Sunday, April 4, 2004 at 2:00 p.m. in the East Building Auditorium. Other events include a public symposium, "New Discoveries in the Art of the Ancient Maya," featuring Maya experts discussing the latest discoveries in Maya art and culture

on April 17 from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m., and a special lecture program, "The National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City: New Visions of Mexico's Pre-Columbian Past", on May 30 from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., in which Dr. Felipe Solís Olguín, director, Museo Nacional de Antropología--INAH, Mexico City, will present an illustrated lecture followed by a conversation with Selma Holo, professor of art history, University of Southern California, and director of the USC Fisher Gallery.

Exhibition Film. A 30-minute film, "*Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*," has been produced by the National Gallery of Art. With new footage shot in southern Mexico, it focuses on the courts of the Maya kingdoms of Palenque, Toniná and Bonampak. A short version of the film screens continuously in the exhibition. The film is made possible by the HRH Foundation.

Audio Guide. Narrated by National Gallery of Art director Earl A. Powell III, this tour includes commentary by professor Mary Ellen Miller; epigrapher Simon Martin, research specialist, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; and David S. Stuart, senior lecturer, Department of Anthropology and Bartlett Curator of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions, Peabody Museum, Harvard University. The audio tour is available for rental at the exhibition entrance for \$5.

Film Series. "Milestones in Mexican Cinema: 1898-2003," a retrospective of classic and contemporary Mexican cinema, opens April 18 and continues each weekend through July 10. The series, organized in association with the Mexican Film Institute, Instituto de México, Secretariat for External Affairs, and Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, presents some 30 historically significant feature works in newly struck and subtitled theatrical prints. For details, visit www.nga.gov/programs/film.htm (<http://www.nga.gov/programs/film.htm>) .

Gallery Concerts. Two Gallery concerts will be presented in honor of the exhibition, one featuring Mexico's outstanding string quartet, Cuarteto de Cuerdas de Bellas Artes, on April 4, and the other presenting Maestro Jorge Mester, former artistic director of the Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor of the Pasadena Symphony, conducting the National Gallery Orchestra on June 13. For details, visit www.nga.gov/programs/music/index.shtm

(<http://www.nga.gov/programs/music/index.shtm>) .

Family Weekend. As part of a citywide celebration of Mexican culture, "¡Viva Mexico!: Washington, Celebrates," the National Gallery of Art is hosting a weekend of free family drop-in programs on May 22-23 in honor of both the Maya exhibition and The Cubist Paintings of Diego Rivera: Memory, Politics, Place. For more information, call (202) 842-6880 or visit www.nga.gov/kids (<http://www.nga.gov/kids>) .

Children's Film Program. Tales from the Popol Vuh, the epic creation story of the Maya of Guatemala, unfold in this beautifully animated film by Patricia Amlin, being presented May 22 at 10:30 a.m. and 12:00 noon., and May 23 at 11:30 a.m. For information, call (202) 789-4995 or visit www.nga.gov/kids (<http://www.nga.gov/kids>) . The Children's Films Program is made possible by the generous support of [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

Latin Jazz Brunch. The Terrace Café offers a jazz brunch with a Latin beat on Saturdays and Sundays from 11:30 am-3:00 p.m., April 4 through July 25. The menu features the flavors of Central America, accompanied by live Latin jazz. The cost is \$18.95 for adults and \$8.95 for children 10 and under. See www.nga.gov/ginfo/terrmenu.htm (<http://www.nga.gov/ginfo/terrmenu.htm>) for performer information.

Website--Visit www.nga.gov/exhibitions/mayainfo.htm (<http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/mayainfo.htm>) for a special web feature on the exhibition.

¡VIVA MEXICO! WASHINGTON, DC CELEBRATES--Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya is part of "¡VIVA MEXICO! Washington, DC Celebrates," a citywide celebration of Mexican art and culture in exhibitions and programs across the greater Washington, DC area. For details, visit www.vivamexicodc.org.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/ngadc) at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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