

EVERHART MUSEUM

NATURAL HISTORY, SCIENCE & ART

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Press Photographs are Available Upon Request

New Exhibit Celebrating Heritage, Art & Culture in the Americas Opens September 25th at the Everhart Museum in Scranton

Scranton – August 19, 2009: The Everhart Museum will open *Day of the Dead: Art & Culture in the Americas* on September 25, 2009. Created by the Everhart Museum, this exhibit illustrates the Day of the Dead (*El Día de los Muertos*) holiday as a personal and community-based celebration focused on the remembrance of family, friends, and other beloved people. The exhibit highlights the rich cultures of Central and South America by showcasing contemporary art from nationally and internationally recognized artists and photographers, along with Latino folk art and selections from the Museum's ethnographic collections. *Day of the Dead: Art & Culture in the Americas* is exclusive to the Everhart and will be on display through December 31, 2009. The exhibition is funded in part by a grant from The Pennsylvania Humanities Council, with additional underwriting from the Foley Law Firm, Gertrude Hawk Chocolates, Inc. and Prudential Retirement.

While Mexico is perhaps best-known for their Day of the Dead celebration, many other Latin American and Caribbean countries honor their ancestors on this holiday, including Brazil, Guatemala, Haiti, Martinique, and Peru. The Day of the Dead occurs on November 1st and 2nd in connection with the Roman Catholic observances of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. It is believed that during this time it is easier for the souls of the departed to contact the living; therefore, the celebration is one of joy, meant to encourage visits by the souls. *Day of the Dead: Art & Culture in the Americas* will feature contemporary art, documentary photography, video installation, and other objects reflecting Mexican and other Latino cultures' celebratory expression of *El Día de los Muertos*.

The observance of the Day of the Dead has its historical roots in Pre-Columbian rituals more than 3,000 years old. Unlike European cultures who viewed death as the end of life, the Aztecs and other Meso-American civilizations believed it to be the continuation of life. Instead of fearing death, they embraced it. To them, life was a dream and only in death did they become truly awake. During this month-long celebration taking place during the ninth month of the Aztec Solar Calendar (comparable to August in the Gregorian calendar), they used skulls to honor the dead whom they believed visited the earth. Festivities were presided over by *Mictecacihuatl*, the goddess known as "Lady of the Dead." It was a time to invite ancestors to return, thereby keeping the agricultural cycle full and prosperous for their descendants and the community. During their colonization of much of Central and South America in the 1500s, the Spanish Conquistadors tried to dissolve these old traditions but eventually Catholic religion syncretized with indigenous celebrations as native populations converted to the Roman Catholic faith. Pre-Columbian objects from the Everhart's permanent collection, including funerary goods representing some of the important figures and deities in Pre-Columbian Aztec and Incan cultures, will be on display in this exhibit as representation of the ancient heritage of this Latino holiday.

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The Day of the Dead celebration became a nationalized Mexican holiday in the early 20th century shortly after the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Beginning in the 1920s, artists increasingly turned to their indigenous Mexican roots, namely Pre-Columbian cultures, for inspiration. As the same time, the Mexican Muralist Movement took shape as the national government commissioned artists such as Diego Rivera to cover the walls of official institutions such as Mexico's schools, ministerial buildings, churches and museums with scenes of the country's heritage. Rivera featured the Day of the Dead in some of his murals, as did other artists who also illustrated other important festivals and facets of Mexican culture.

Although there are regional variations, important elements of contemporary Day of the Dead celebrations include creation of special altars (*ofrendas*) complete with traditional foods and items favored by the deceased; decoration of cemetery tombs and grave sites; and in some communities, performance of special masses, parades, and other commemorative activities. Some key elements of these displays include marigolds, *papel picado* (punched paper), salt, *pulque* (fermented agave juice), *copal* (incense), *pan de muertos* (bread of the dead). All of these items exhibit special symbolism to the meaning of life and the importance of family and ancestors, and are intrinsic to the look and experience of the celebration. Another special addition to the exhibit is a collection of Mexican masks from collector Robert Ibold of Masksoftheworld.com, which highlight the skull masks used for the Day of the Dead, as well as masks used in other Mexican celebrations.

Day of the Dead: Art & Culture in the Americas will feature a community *ofrenda* or altar where museum visitors are invited to leave photos and mementos of deceased loved ones; artist Balam Soto's installation about Guatemala's Day of the Dead celebration; Latina artist and illustrator Terry Ybanez photographs of her Day of the Dead *ofrenda* installations; and Mexican artist Hector Tellez's installation of *Catrin*s (fancily-dressed female skeletons), which illustrate the popular personifications of death and the ephemeral nature of life.

Documentary photography is an important component of this exhibit. Rolfe Ross' images of Latino migrants celebrating holidays and cultural rites of passage in Northeastern Pennsylvania provide a regional context to this international holiday. Work by Michael Robinson-Chavez highlights Pisac, Peru, while Les Stone documents the festival of Ghede in Haiti and Eros Hoagland provides work on the Day of the Dead celebration in Oaxaca, Mexico.

As the Latino immigrant population grows in Northeastern Pennsylvania and throughout the United States, their cultural celebrations are becoming a part of American popular culture. Non-Latino artists are increasingly influenced by these events and several in this exhibit created art illustrating the larger cultural expressions of Day of the Dead. These works include Annette Weintraub's video installation of Day of the Dead in New York City, Pittsburgh artist Mike Egan's paintings inspired by traditional Day of the Dead imagery, and contemporary art quilts featuring Day of the Dead symbolism by Sherry Boram, Geraldine Congdon, Deb Lacativa, Janice Paine-Dawes, Meena Schaldenbrand, and Marylouise Smith.

Day of the Dead: Art & Culture in the Americas is a family-oriented exhibit focused on the remembrance of family and friends, a universal theme found in all cultures. According to Everhart Museum Curator, Nezka Pfeifer, "The Everhart Museum decided to curate an exhibit on the celebration of the Day of the Dead to highlight the various and multi-cultural expressions of this unique holiday as there is a growing Latino population in Scranton and throughout Northeastern Pennsylvania. This project has enabled us to reach out to the Latino community and showcase the Everhart Museum's Pre-Columbian collection, as well as the creativity of artists working in the United States to interpret the Day of the Dead."

During the exhibit's installation, the Everhart Museum will present programming for all ages, as well as complementary displays in Gallery One and Isaiah's Corner (the Museum's hands-on activity center) The Gallery One exhibit, ***Celebrating Ancestors: Student Art at the Everhart***, features artwork by area students who were inspired by important people in their lives who have passed away, such as a parent, grandparent, friend, relative or notable public figure. ***Isaiah's Corner: ¡Fiesta Fun with Calaveras!*** provides a place where children can build *ofrendas*, make skeleton masks and dolls, create tissue paper flowers and *papel picado* (punched paper) designs, and calculate in Mayan math as they learn about Day of the Dead.

A public opening exhibit reception will be held on Thursday, October 1, 2009 from 6:00 to 8:00 pm. The cost of this event will be \$25/person and pre-paid reservations are required. In addition, the Day of the Dead Community Day is scheduled for Sunday, November 1, 2009 from Noon to 4:00 pm. Additional information will be forthcoming on these and other public programs associated with this exhibit.

The Everhart Museum is open: Thursday, Friday and Monday, Noon-4:00 pm; Saturday, 10:00 am-5:00 pm; and Sunday, Noon-5:00 pm. Admission is \$5/adults, \$3/students & seniors, \$2/children 6-12, and free to Everhart Museum members. For more information, contact the Museum at 570-346-7186 or email general.information@everhart-museum.org.

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About the Everhart Museum: Founded in 1908, the Everhart Museum of Natural History, Science & Art is the largest general museum in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The Everhart Museum, located in Nay Aug Park in Scranton, is a not-for-profit institution dedicated to the collection, care and display of a diverse array of artifacts, including natural history, science and fine arts. Through our exhibits and programs, the Everhart Museum has become an invaluable regional resource for educational and cultural opportunities. General support for the museum is received from the Lackawanna County Office of Education & Culture, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and the City of Scranton. For more information on the museum visit our website at www.everhart-museum.org or contact us at 570-346-7186.