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Smithsonian Latino Center Celebrates 10th Anniversary with the “Mexican Treasures of the Smithsonian” Exhibition and the *¡Smithsonian Con Sabor!* Gala

“Mexican Treasures of the Smithsonian,” on view Sept. 5 through Nov. 11 at the S. Dillon Ripley Center’s International Gallery, showcases the full range of the Mexican presence in the Smithsonian’s collections, highlighting the shared histories and cultural exchanges between the United States and Mexico. The exhibition presents a select sample of the Smithsonian’s Mexican treasures—precious objects that tell the stories of Mexico’s land and peoples and range from Olmec statuettes and an Aztec obsidian mirror to a portrait of Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata by David Alfaro Siqueiros and costumes worn by popular Mexican American singer Selena.

“Mexican Treasures” reflects the Smithsonian’s long history of collecting in Mexico, as well as ongoing research in the northernmost border regions of the country to the southern reaches of the Maya. For more than 150 years, Smithsonian researchers have found fertile ground for study in Mexico, collaborating with Mexican scientists, historians, anthropologists, artists and linguists.

“‘Mexican Treasures of the Smithsonian’ continues our initiative of showcasing a different Latin American country each year,” said Pilar O’Leary, executive director of the Smithsonian Latino Center. “On the 10th anniversary of the center, which is dedicated to highlighting Latino culture, achievement and heritage in America, we believe it is a fitting tribute to celebrate the culture, history and contributions of the largest Latino population in the United States—that of Mexicans and Mexican Americans.”

The Smithsonian Latino Center worked with curators and specialists from across the Institution to select emblematic objects from their collections, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the National Museum of American History, the National Museum of the American Indian, the National Museum of Natural History, the National Portrait Gallery and the National Postal Museum.

Exhibition Highlights

- **New World Foods**—Corn, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, chocolate and chilies—staples of the Mexican diet—were unknown outside the Americas before the 1500s. A traditional chocolate stirrer, or

“molinillo,” will be on display along with a statuette of Chicomecóatl, the Aztec Corn Goddess (AD 1400–1521).

- **Languages**—Smithsonian anthropologist Robert Laughlin collects words, tales, myths, dreams and sayings. His publications, some of which will be on display, include dictionaries of contemporary and Colonial-era Tzotzil, one of 30 living Maya languages; a collection of Tzotzil dreams and folktales; and ethnographic essays.
- **Labor**—The United Farm Workers labor union was formed in the 1960s by Mexican American and Filipino farm workers fighting for better working conditions and higher wages. UFW posters will be on display in this section along with “Farm Worker’s Altar” (1967) by Emanuel Martinez and a portrait of Cesar Chavez by Richard Avedon.
- **New Borders**—Mexico’s borders once included Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah and Colorado. A “vara” chain (1840–1850), used to measure property lines, will be one of the objects on display in this section.
- **Popular Culture, Popular Expressions**—*Tejano* music was born in South Texas, a child of American and Mexican popular music. A costume worn by *Tejano* star Selena (circa 1990–1995) will be featured.

A bilingual online component to “Mexican Treasures of the Smithsonian,” with an interactive gallery, music samples, a family guide and collection highlights, will be available at <http://www.latino.si.edu/exhibitions/>. The exhibition was made possible by Banamex and received federal support from the Latino Initiatives Pool.

“Mexican Treasures of the Smithsonian” is part of the Mexico at the Smithsonian program series, organized by the Smithsonian Latino Center in partnership with the Mexican Cultural Institute and other organizations in Washington, D.C., to highlight different aspects of Mexican and Mexican American culture. The series includes more than 20 programs—exhibitions, concerts, film screenings and lectures—running through December. The program series will reach its high point with the Smithsonian Latino Center’s 10th anniversary *¡Smithsonian Con Sabor!* 2007 Mexican-themed gala Wednesday, Sept. 5 at the National Museum of the American Indian.

The Smithsonian Latino Center is a division of the Smithsonian Institution that ensures Latino contributions to art, science and the humanities are highlighted, understood and advanced through the development and support of public programs, scholarly research, museum collections and educational opportunities at the Smithsonian Institution and its affiliated organizations across the United States and internationally.

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