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“Lola Alvarez Bravo” Opens at the Smithsonian’s International Gallery Sept. 5

The photo exhibition “Lola Alvarez Bravo” opens at the S. Dillon Ripley Center, International Gallery Wednesday, Sept. 5. It is presented by the Smithsonian Latino Center and the Smithsonian Photography Initiative, coinciding with Hispanic Heritage Month 2007 (Sept. 15-Oct. 15). In addition, the Latino Center will host the symposium “Camera Culture out of Mexico” Friday and Saturday, Oct. 5-6 at the S. Dillon Ripley Center to further increase awareness of and appreciation for Mexican photography. “Lola Alvarez Bravo” closes Sunday, Nov. 11.

Lola Alvarez Bravo (1903–1993) is widely recognized as Mexico’s first woman photographer and a pioneering figure in the rise of modernist photography in Mexico. The 56 vintage photographic prints on display span six decades and range in subject matter and technique, including street photographs, images documenting indigenous people and traditional culture in Mexico, portraits and Surrealist-inspired photomontages.

The photographer’s work can best be understood in the context of Mexico’s great post-Revolution cultural renaissance, which attracted such international artistic figures as Paul Strand, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Tina Modotti and Edward Weston. She was a central figure in the Mexican modern art movement, which included Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Maria Izquierdo and David Alfaro Siqueiros –all of whom she photographed. Her best-known portraits, and ultimately the work for which she gained international recognition, are that of her colleague and friend Frida Kahlo. Primarily taken between 1944 and 1945, these portraits reveal a profound knowledge of Kahlo’s physical and emotional state of pain and conflict.

Alvarez Bravo was a photojournalist, portraitist and street photographer, as well as a teacher and curator. She moved to Mexico City from her hometown in Jalisco at age 3, and Mexico City remained her home base for the rest of her long life—except for two years in Oaxaca with her then husband, the great Mexican photographer Manuel Alvarez Bravo. She started taking photographs under his tutelage in 1926. Although some of her earlier work reflects Manuel’s influence—they shared the same cameras and often the same roll of film—she achieved her own aesthetic during the

1940s and 1950s, concentrating on two particularly vivid bodies of work: portraiture and street photography.

“Lola Alvarez Bravo” is part of Mexico at the Smithsonian, a program series organized by the Smithsonian Latino Center in partnership with the Mexican Cultural Institute and other organizations to highlight different aspects of Mexican and Mexican-American culture and heritage through more than 20 programs—exhibitions, concerts, film screenings and lectures—running through December 2007.

The Aperture Foundation, a nonprofit organization devoted to photography and the visual arts, organized this traveling exhibition and produced the accompanying publication, which also were made possible, in part, through the generosity of Fundacion Televisa. Additional support was provided by The Reed Foundation and Spencer Throckmorton. Elizabeth Ferrer, independent curator and writer specializing in Mexican and Latino art, is the exhibition curator.

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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