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“Posters from the Division of Community Education (DIVEDCO) of Puerto Rico, 1949-1989” Opens at the Smithsonian’s S. Dillon Ripley Center Sept. 17

“Posters from the Division of Community Education (DIVEDCO) of Puerto Rico, 1949-1989,” on view Sept. 17 through Jan. 18, 2009, at the S. Dillon Ripley Center’s Concourse, highlights Puerto Rican poster art from the 1940s through 1980s. This exhibition was organized by Marvette Perez, curator at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, and the Smithsonian Latino Center as part of the 2008 program series “Puerto Rico at the Smithsonian.”

The posters in the exhibition were produced by artists enlisted by a government agency known as DIVEDCO, as part of a broader effort to stimulate artistic production in Puerto Rico while transforming its rural population into a model of modern, democratic citizenry. The posters featured in the exhibition illustrate the connection between art and social policy during one of Puerto Rico’s most culturally defining decades—the 1950s—and into the 1980s. Representing the work of some of Puerto Rico’s best graphic artists, the exhibition will include rich educational programming and a film series of short and feature length films.

“DIVEDCO was a unique and powerfully Puerto Rican adaptation of New Deal-era programs, placing art at the service of solving the everyday problems of people on the island,” said Daniel Sheehy, acting director of the Smithsonian Latino Center. “As an incubator, DIVEDCO yielded an entire generation of graphic artists, filmmakers and writers, many of whom, like Rafael Tufiño, Amílcar Tirado and René Marqués, would bring Puerto Rican art to the attention of the world.”

DIVEDCO was signed into law by the first elected governor of Puerto Rico, Luis Muñoz Marín, in 1949. Under Gov. Muñoz Marín’s leadership, the island underwent dramatic changes with increases in urbanization and industrialization projects. The main concerns of the newly minted government were issues of democracy, health, education and the economy. More than a government agency, DIVEDCO was a social and cultural experiment that aimed to reach the masses, especially in remote areas of the island.

These structural and social changes began during the 1930s with President Roosevelt's New Deal projects, such as the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, aimed at developing the agricultural sector and improving the living conditions of the urban poor and rural populations. DIVEDCO became a pedagogical enterprise that followed in the steps of the Farm Security Administration and the Works Projects Administration, the largest New Deal agency.

DIVEDCO included film, editorial and graphic arts sections that worked together to create didactic films, booklets and posters. These were vehicles for educating Puerto Ricans about democracy, values, civic duty, hygiene and nutrition. They also became aesthetic and social documents about a rural way of life, which was rapidly disappearing. The Film Division was a training ground for Puerto Rican filmmakers, such as Tirado and Luis Maisonet. The Print Workshop also became important for many established and aspiring artists. Isabel Bernal, José Meléndez Contreras, Eduardo Vera Cortés, Lorenzo Homar, Julio Rosado del Valle and Tufiño, among many others, created great art working cooperatively. They worked closely with the filmmakers and the writers of the DIVEDCO Writer's Workshop in order to create a strong and deep connection among their graphics, films and storylines. The Writer's Workshop included many important writers such as Marqués, Pedro Juan Soto and Emilio Díaz Valcárcel. Their short stories, texts for the *Libros para el Pueblo* (Books for the People) and scripts became the basis for the films and the posters advertising them. The camaraderie among these artists reflected their vision for the future of Puerto Rico.

This exhibition is part of the "Puerto Rico at the Smithsonian" programming series, which includes, among other activities and events, a poetry workshop and reading with Puerto Rican scholars, poets and students; a Puerto Rican concert and music workshop; and a traveling exhibition of famed baseball sports legend Roberto Clemente. "Puerto Rico at the Smithsonian," produced in collaboration with the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, a Smithsonian affiliate, continues the Center's tradition of highlighting a different Latin culture each year, with this year's focus on the cultural richness of Puerto Rico.

The Smithsonian's S. Dillon Ripley Center, located on the National Mall at 1100 Jefferson Drive S.W., presents temporary exhibitions in art, history, science and technology that complement the Institution's existing educational programs and collections. It is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., except Dec. 25, and admission is free.

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