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Smithsonian Latino Center Presents “Dia de los Muertos Festival”— a 3-D Experience in the Smithsonian Latino Virtual Museum

Following the successful launch of the Latino Virtual Museum in Second Life in March, the Smithsonian Latino Center is hosting its first in-world public program to showcase Latino cultural heritage through an important holiday, Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead). The Smithsonian Latino Center’s “Dia de los Muertos Festival” will take place in Second Life from Friday, Oct. 30, through Monday, Nov. 2. To take part in the festival, participants must have an avatar in Second Life and can join by going to: <http://latino.si.edu/education/LVMDayoftheDeadFestival.htm>.

Dia de los Muertos is celebrated in Latin America, particularly Mexico and Central America, and in Latino communities in the United States to honor deceased family and friends through altars called “ofrendas” and by decorating cemeteries and individual tombstones. Offerings traditionally include sugar skulls, marigolds, “pan de muertos” (a special Day of the Day bread) and the material goods the deceased enjoyed while alive.

“With the growing number of Latinos in the United States, including people of Latin American descent, it is no surprise that this holiday, traditionally celebrated Nov. 1 and 2, has become so popular in the United States,” said Melissa Carrillo, director of New Media and Technology at the Smithsonian Latino Center. “Illustrating this important aspect of Latino culture in a broad platform such as Second Life will allow users from across the world an opportunity to participate in and see firsthand, spiritual customs that have been passed on from ancient Mesoamerica.”

Highlights include a community altar in the virtual museum’s “Placita” (town square) and a companion community altar in Virtual Native Lands, a partner site in Second Life focused on highlighting Native American culture and practices. Virtual museum resources include Smithsonian Latino collections, a user’s guide, glossary, lesson plans and resource links for educators. Teaching tools for teachers about key elements of the observance include the Spanish arrival, customs and beliefs, traditional dancing and the importance of the return of spirits.

The “Dia de los Muertos Festival” in the Smithsonian Latino Virtual Museum will begin with a cemetery procession in the Placita that takes participants through a virtual Spirits Path, lined with marigolds. All-day activities include “building your own altar” and a learning-altar demonstration for school groups. Special programming will include an All Souls Film Festival and 3-D Crystal Skull Dance Party.

The highlight of the festival will take place Sunday, Nov. 1, as the virtual museum presents Mexican award-winning artist Lila Downs in concert from Los Angeles at the 10th annual Dia de los Muertos Memorial Celebration on the grounds of the historic Hollywood Forever cemetery. For additional information on this landmark celebration, go to www.LAdayofthedead.com. The concert will be followed by an exclusive interview with Downs that will be broadcast Monday, Nov. 2, in the virtual museum’s amphitheatre.

The Smithsonian Latino Center ensures Latino contributions to arts, sciences 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. For more information, visit www.latino.si.edu.

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