



Contact: Martha Donelan 805.884.6430  
[mdonelan@sbmuseart.org](mailto:mdonelan@sbmuseart.org)

## Santa Barbara Museum of Art Presents Dramatic New Way of Looking at Art

May 7, 2004 - *Art of the Americas: Latin America and the United States, 1800 to Now!*, on view March 13 through November 21, 2004, at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA) is not only an exhibition. It is a whole new way of looking at art. Instead of showing art from the United States in one gallery and art from Latin America in another, this dramatic presentation of the SBMA's distinguished permanent collection offers viewers the opportunity to compare works from across centuries and countries of origin and come up with fresh ideas of what it means to be American.

*Art of the Americas* puts the SBMA right on the cutting edge of national and international ideas of how to exhibit art. While some museums have re-organized their curatorial departments to include the arts of the Americas, the SBMA is among the first to dedicate much of its gallery space to such a radical reinterpretation of its permanent collection of United States and Latin American art. The first major project completed during the tenure of the SBMA's new Director, Phillip M. Johnston, *Art of the Americas* also features a complete re-design of the Museum's main gallery spaces by the nationally renowned architect Frederick Fisher.

The nearly 200 paintings, drawings, sculptures, prints, photographs, and installation art are divided into four categories: people; places; things and things abstracted; and art, society, and politics in the Americas. Within each category, the works are grouped by themes, such as "Representing Women," "The Modern Cityscape," and "Form and Spirit." New as well as familiar permanent collection works are arranged in striking juxtapositions that encourage fresh interpretations. These pairings acknowledge similarities but also critical differences in art shaped by related, yet diverse, regional histories. The United States artist James Peale's portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Rouvert of 1803, for example, seen alongside the Mexican artist Federico Cantú's image of himself and of his wife Gloria, of more than a century later, demonstrate radically different treatments of the double portrait, a time-honored convention in western art. William Merritt Chase's *Lady in Pink*, 1886, juxtaposed with Walt Kuhn's *Trude*, 1931, elicits the same exciting opportunity for new perspectives, in this case on the varying representations of women in the Victorian and modern periods. Joaquín Torres-García's Constructivist grid, 1932, and Adolph Gottlieb's pictograph, 1947, form a compelling pair, revealing as many differences as similarities in how these artists interpreted modernist form and ancient indigenous art. Two installation pieces, Carrie Mae Weems' *The Jefferson Suite*, 1999, and Miguel Ángel Ríos' untitled *quipu* (ancient tabulating device from the Andes), 1993, speak to the common theme in contemporary art of history and identity. Works of the last decade by Hung Liu

and Xiaowen Chen expand understanding of the American experience, addressing the theme of ethnic identity and the issues of recent immigration from Asia to the United States.

Major metropolitan museums, such as the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Dallas Museum of Art now include Latin American and United States art within the designation of art of the Americas. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, recently established the International Center for the Arts of the Americas. Mexican and British museums have also begun to combine art from Latin America, the United States, and Europe. But the SBMA is a leader in the integration and display of modern and contemporary Latin American and United States art. "The *Art of the Americas* can be a new and stimulating example of redefining the presentation of American art, and the SBMA hopes that it may serve as a model for the interpretation and display of permanent collections," said SBMA Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Diana C. du Pont.

A whole new approach to exhibiting art at the SBMA required a whole new look for the Museum's main gallery spaces and graphic materials. SBMA Director Phillip M. Johnston and Curator Diana C. du Pont engaged award-winning architect Frederick Fisher to create the Museum's new look. Fisher decided to reveal the original construction of the Museum's primary spaces by removing the temporary walls. Instead, he used freestanding architectural elements called "interventions" to add distinctive, eccentric accents. In place of the stark white walls traditionally used to display modern and contemporary art, Fisher and architectural colorist Scott Flax chose a family of colors evoking the idea of many voices connected by a larger whole. Each gallery is distinguished by color, as are the thematic groupings in each gallery. Print and environmental graphic designers Tim McNeil and Christopher Muñiz completely revamped the Museum's graphics, including signage, banners, and wall labels.

*Art of the Americas* is the centerpiece of a grand celebration of American art at the SBMA during 2004. This year-long event features six exhibitions, launched by the Museum's presentation of *In the American Grain: Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz* from The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. In June, *Heartland: Paintings by Bo Bartlett, 1978-2002* opens, presenting a contemporary reinterpretation of realism, a prominent theme in American art. In September, *Agustín Victor Casasola: Mirada y memoria* (Glance and Memory) features one of the most outstanding and legendary documentary photographers in all Latin America. In October, *Matta On Paper: The John Todd Figi Collection* will highlight one collector's passion for the drawings, watercolors, and related paintings of the 1930s and 1940s by Matta, the world-renowned Chilean-born artist who many consider to be one of the greatest draftsmen of the twentieth century. The *Art of the Americas* celebration culminates in December with the major retrospective *The Art of David Ireland: The Way Things Are*. In contrast to the monumental realism of Bartlett, the vibrant Surrealist works of Matta, and the dramatic photojournalism of Casasola, Ireland's remarkable architectural transformations, installations, objects, and drawings challenge viewers' everyday distinctions between art and non-art.

The *Art of the Americas* Celebration is generously supported, in part, by The Charles and Mildred Bloom Fund, The Challenge Fund, The Cheeryble Foundation, Christine Garvey, Lillian and Jon Lovelace, Larry and Astrid Hammett, Mr. and Mrs. C. William Schlosser, Santa Barbara Museum of Art Visionaries, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art Women's Board, Santa Barbara Bank & Trust, and an anonymous donor.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA. Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday. Free every Sunday. 805.963.4364 [www.sbma.net](http://www.sbma.net)