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Exhibition Remarks

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Curator's Exhibition Opening Remarks

Every exhibition needs a vision, a purpose, a mission, and clarity of message. With such a sweeping title as "Indigenous Peoples of the Americas: roots, resistance, and resurgence" any curator would be challenged. After all, we cover Indigeneity in art, in literature and theater, as well as Indigenous healing—and also Mesoamerican influences on contemporary culture.

Our exhibition includes ancient Mexican and Chumash artifacts that are over a thousand years old, as well as contemporary ceremonial objects and art prints, but ultimately, what is most compelling for me about this exhibition is not so much the objects by themselves, really, but rather it's the narrative that seamlessly threads these objects together through the underlying powerful stories of Indigenous peoples. What is most meaningful is the message of their struggles for self-determination and the building of community, cultural affirmation, and the passing on of ancient cultural practices to the younger generation.

For me it was a process of discovery. It was the Chumash people who reminded us that the UCSB mesa was once the site of one of the densest, thriving, Native American communities in North America and it was the Chumash who came up with the brilliant idea that the tomol crossing of the Channel Islands could be the visual metaphor for the overall exhibit. I had to think it over. What about the Indigenous peoples' movements in Mexico and Central America?

But it made perfect sense. This was an epiphany. The tomol represents a re-birth of a cultural tradition that many thought had disappeared and was now

only a museum artifact. The tomol also represents resistance to notions that vital cultural practices had vanished and can only be read about in the history books. It also represents resistance to the kinds of historicity that excluded Native peoples from expressing their own voices.

There's something else. The tomol also represented a healing process, good medicine that knits communities together in friendship and remembrance, reminding us to protect our oceans, our air, and the land so they can be used by future generations.

In the Mesoamerican segment of the exhibition there is a beautiful little stone jaguar in the first display case. Jaguars are nocturnal hunters. Prof. Aldana describes the jaguar as a powerful Mesoamerican symbol of power and the night. Across the room from the little jaguar I added two art prints by Chicana artists who each appropriate the jaguar motif that Prof. Jenell Navarro alludes to as a symbol of the strength and power and spirituality of Indigenous women everywhere.

I extend special greetings and blessings to the Chumash Leaders that are here with us today. I want to share with you that for us, this project was a labor of love from beginning to end that could never have been pulled off without drawing close to us a team of consultants and contributors, beginning with my co-curator Callie Bowdish and our inspiring visit to the Wishtoyo Chumash Village a year ago.

I credit the Ward family, and Chumash elders, and the broader Chumash Community for their wisdom,

support, interpretive texts, loaned objects, for wrestling ideas with us over the phone, and for their guiding spirit and friendship. Through them we were able to borrow the Little Sister tomol that's on display on the first floor of the library. To this we extend our thanks to Chumash Maritime Association and the Central Coast Aquarium.

Dr. Gerardo Aldana of our Chicana and Chicano studies department curated the Mesoamerican portion and, even while laid out with a bad cold, he managed to write out the interpretive texts to accompany the Mesoamerican artifacts and facsimile codices.

Graduate student Ana Barba, with her passion and in-depth knowledge of the women in the Zapatistas Movement in Chiapas, co-curated by carrying the narrative about women's leadership roles in the struggles for land, housing, food, health care, and environmental justice.

I hope you enjoy today some refreshing Jamaica made by the Del Pueblo Cafe. It's from the Hibiscus flower, one of the medicinal plant specimens populating our display on the curative properties of plants. Local Indigenous Mexica healer Anita Campion provided the ceremonial Copal. Luhui Isha Waiya handpicked for me the Sage bundle that is traditionally used in the cleansing of ritual spaces and objects as well as holistic healing practices.

I'd like to recognize Dr. Lynn Gamble from our Anthropology Dept. for graciously opening up the UCSB Repository to us for a special loan of historical artifacts, to accompany the contemporary pieces loaned to us by members of the local Chumash community.

Dr. Janelle Rae Navarro of Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and her undergraduate student Carolina Mahalat Castro came alongside us with enthusiasm and volunteered to write out the display texts connecting Indigeneity to contemporary Chicano art and theater.

It takes a village to accomplish something like this. It is good medicine to our community. Remembrance. Harmony with nature. Affirmation that we are one community but with multiple voices that need to be equally heard. It is hope for the generations to follow us.

Thank you all for coming, please enjoy the exhibition.

*Salvador Güereña
Santa Barbara, CA
March 3, 2015*