Los Angeles—Celebrating the bicentennial of Mexican independence and the centennial of the Mexican Revolution, *Obsidian Mirror-Travels: Refracting Ancient Mexican Art and Archaeology* on view at the Getty Research Institute from November 16, 2010 through March 27, 2011, presents highlights from the GRI’s strong collection of visual materials that explore representations of Mexican archaeological objects and sites from the Colonial era to the present. Through objects created over the past 500 years, the exhibition investigates historical dialogues among explorers, archaeologists and artists, and examines how Mexican antiquities have been viewed by the world and by the people of Mexico.

The exhibition of more than 70 objects features images of ancient Maya and Aztec ruins by archaeologist-explorers such as John Lloyd Stephens and Désiré Charnay, and depictions of the Aztec Calendar Stone and other Mexican antiquities. These images date from the Spanish conquest (1521) through the 19th-century French intervention in Mexico, and the lengthy presidency of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1910).
Obsidian Mirror-Travels showcases images of Pre-Columbian objects, ruins, and manuscripts, including maps tracing Hernán Cortés' route to Tenochtitlan and views of the ruins of Palenque, Chichén Itzá, and Mitla. The papers and photographs of Alice and Augustus Le Plongeon document Maya monuments and ruins in Yucatán. A facsimile of the Codex Boturini maps the progress of the Aztecs across space and time by using footprints that connect the episodes of their migration. Illustrated albums with scenes of Mexico, assembled by French officers during the Maximilian Empire, were created as travel souvenirs.

The exhibition also presents contemporary objects, including Einar and Jamex de la Torre's mixed media Eastern Medicine, 2008, and Guillermo Gòmez-Peña and Enrique Chagoya’s Codex Espangliensis: From Columbus to the Border Patrol, 2001.

The exhibition title, Obsidian Mirror-Travels, refers to an influential essay by the artist Robert Smithson (American, 1938–1973), published in Artforum International in September, 1969. Smithson traveled to Mexico to retrace the 1839-1842 expeditions made by Stephens and the artist Frederick Catherwood. Visiting many of the same Maya ruins as Stephens and Catherwood-- Palenque and Uxmal, among others -- Smithson created a series of installations he called "mirror displacements" that he photographed and published in his essay. Smithson's work, Yucatan Mirror Displacements, consisting of nine chromogenic prints, is on loan to the exhibition from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

“Smithson's work explores notions of reflection and refraction, conjuring the ways that Aztec and other Pre-Columbian rulers used semi-opaque obsidian mirrors as objects of power and divination,” said Beth Guynn, senior collections cataloguer for the Getty Research Institute and exhibition co-curator. “Obsidian mirrors were seen as a threshold between the earthly world and the realm of the gods. In much the same way, the objects in this exhibition stand on their own as individual artworks and illuminate their times and their subjects.”

Obsidian mirrors are an apt metaphor for images of Mexican antiquities: they reflect the viewer as well as the object. A fifteenth century Aztec Obsidian mirror, on loan from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, is the starting point for this exhibition, which is divided into seven sections that explore historical periods, conceptual ideas, and case studies of the Aztec Calendar Stone and Mexican codices. The final piece in the exhibition is Objects divers provenant de Ixlan (Various Objects from Ixlán), a photograph of a suitcase full of artifacts documenting the collections of Auguste Génin, a poet and Mexican cultural historian, which is seen as a metaphor for both the literal and figurative transportability of Mexican culture and objects through time and space.
“Some of the works are accurate, while others are completely fanciful; each portrays a distinct vision of Mexico,” says Khristaan D. Villela, exhibition co-curator and Research Fellow, University of New Mexico.

**Obsidian Mirror-Travels** is part of Los Angeles’ citywide celebration of the bicentennial of Mexico’s independence and the centennial of the Mexican Revolution.

**Note to editors:** Images available upon request.

**RELATED EVENTS**

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**Course: Visions of Mexico**

A two-part adult education course explores Mexican art, history and culture through a survey of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art’s collection of ancient, colonial and modern objects, and representations of archaeological objects and sites that are part of the Getty Research Institute’s collections and the **Obsidian Mirror-Travels** exhibition. Session I meets at LACMA. Session II meets at the GRI at the Getty Center. Course fee is $20 per session and is open to the first 30 participants.

- **Session I:** Saturday, December 4, 2010, 10:30 a.m.—12:30 p.m., LACMA
- **Session II:** Saturday, December 11, 2010, 10:30 a.m.—12:30 p.m., Getty Research Institute

**Artists’ Talks: Einar and Jamex de la Torre**

Join artists Einar and Jamex de la Torre, who will discuss their monumental mixed media sculptures and installations, and how their Mexican-American bi-cultural experiences inform their work. The brothers, who live in San Diego and have a home and studio in Mexico, combine blown glass, cast resin, video, and dollar-store treasures to create a style uniquely defined as “Border Baroque.”

- **Saturday, January 22, 2011, 7:00 p.m.**
  - Museum Lecture Hall

**Artists’ Talks: Jesse Lerner**

Los Angeles-based documentary filmmaker and writer Jesse Lerner, whose films have been shown at the Sundance Film Festival, the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum, will discuss the persistence of ancient Mexican visual culture in the modern imagination and as a theme that runs through his work.

- **Sunday, January 23, 2011, 3:00 p.m.**
  - Museum Lecture Hall
RELATED PUBLICATIONS

*The Aztec Calendar Stone*, edited by Khristaan D. Villela and Mary Ellen Miller, The Getty Research Institute, 2010. $49.


*Yucatán through Her Eyes: Alice Dixon Le Plongeon, Writer and Expeditionary Photographer*, Lawrence Gustave Desmond, with a forward by Claire L. Lyons. University of New Mexico Press, 2009. $45.

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