

## *PRESS RELEASE*

### **National Museum of the American Indian Opens at the Smithsonian, September 21, 2004**

The Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) celebrates its Grand Opening on the National Mall in Washington D.C., on Tuesday, September 21, 2004.

Set against the dramatic backdrop of the U.S. Capitol building, the museum is the first national museum in the country to be dedicated exclusively to Native Americans, and the first to present all exhibitions from a Native viewpoint. The NMAI has the largest collection of Native American art and artifacts in the world, representing over 10,000 years of history, from more than 1,000 indigenous cultures through the Western Hemisphere. The NMAI is an institution of living cultures dedicated to the preservation, study and exhibition of the life, languages, literature, history and arts of the Native Peoples of the Western Hemisphere.

Approximately 8,000 objects from the museum's permanent collection will be on view when the museum opens to the public. Three major exhibitions will be complemented by a contemporary art exhibit and landmark works of art – historic and contemporary – placed throughout the building.

The three permanent exhibitions are:

“Our Universes: Traditional Knowledge Shapes Our World” features a star-filled canopy to evoke the night sky and objects including beadwork, baskets and pottery from tribes or Native communities of North and South America.

“Our Peoples: Giving Voice to Our Histories” focuses on historical events told from Native point of view. It includes a “wall of gold” featuring 408 gold figurines, dating back to 1490, along with European swords, coins and crosses made from melted gold.

“Our Lives: Contemporary Life and Identities” is divided into two main sections, one created by museum curators and the other by individuals in tribes and Native communities in North and South America.

Throughout the museum, the works of Native artists will be on display as “landmark objects” in the public areas. The “Window on the Collections” exhibition offers a view into the vast National Museum of the American Indian collections by showcasing 3,500 objects arranged in seven categories. Objects include works with animal decorations, dolls, peace medals and beaded objects.

The demonstration program will feature Native boats, which will be under construction in the center of the Potomac over the course of the next twelve months. At the inauguration, the two boats under construction will be a Native Hawaiian canoe and an Inuit kayak.

The five-story curvilinear building, located between the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum and the U.S. Botanic Gardens, is made of rough limestone that evokes natural rock formations. American Indians played a key role in the design of the building.

More information about the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian may be found on [www.AmericanIndian.si.edu](http://www.AmericanIndian.si.edu).