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**Return of the Corn Mothers Touring Exhibit**

Students of the Journey Through Our Heritage (JTOH) program at Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU) will celebrate the San Luis Valley leg of a yearlong tour of the nationally acclaimed, award-winning photo-journalistic exhibition, Return of the Corn Mothers, with two special events this spring in Alamosa Colorado. Seven new women from the Valley will be added to this traveling exhibition, which includes women from Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

**Opening Reception: Adams State University Hatfield Gallery - Thurs. Feb 18 (5 p.m.-7 p.m.) Opening Reception: San Luis Valley Museum - Sat. March 19 (5 p.m. - 7 p.m.)**

The Return of the Corn Mothers is a traveling photographic / oral history exhibition of women from the Southwest who embody the spirit of community. The exhibition, which received a Rocky Mountain Women's Institute award in 2007, and a Colorado Endowment for the Humanities grant in 2009, has traveled in the past eight years to Arizona State University in Phoenix; New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico; the University of Colorado at Boulder Museum of Natural History; and Pima Community College in Tucson. In 2012, it was featured at the MSU Denver Center For Visual Arts.

The show is based on the Pueblo myth of the Corn Mother, a legendary entity synonymous with Mother Earth, who represents growth, life, creativity, and the feminine aspects of the world. Master photographer Todd Pierson has traveled throughout Southwest for the past decade, capturing the images of 41 contemporary Corn Mothers. The women in the exhibition, who include midwifes, healers, watershed preservationists, storytellers, musicians, farmers, ranchers, and more, were chosen for their contributions to community and their creative endeavors. Their life stories, and those of female ancestors they have chosen to honor, are also documented in film and story as part of the exhibition.

**Feb. 15 - March 17, 2016** - The Hatfield Art Gallery at Adams State University will showcase 20 of the 41 portraits of the Corn Mother women. The opening reception on Feb. 18 begins at 5:00 p.m. and coincides with the opening of mixed media and social justice artist Jason Watson's show in the Cloyde Snook Gallery at the ASU Department of Art. The Corn Mother show will run through March 17, 2016 at the Hatfield Gallery before moving to the San Luis Valley Museum.

**March 19 - April 16, 2016**- The San Luis Valley Museum in Alamosa will induct seven new women from the Valley into the Corn Mothers traveling exhibition at the opening reception on March 19 from 5-7 p.m. The new inductees include Oneyda Maestas (Adams State University C.A.S.A. Director), Dr. Carol Guerrero Murphy (ASU Department of English), Tori Vigil Martinez (sociologist and community activist), Claudia Ebel (food and justice advocate), Dr. Kristy Duran (ASU Department of Biology), Bertha Velarde (wilderness advocate), and Peggy Godfrey (rancher). The exhibition at the museum will feature portraits and video clips of all 41 women, along with the unveiling of the 2016 Return of the Corn Mothers book, which contains biographies, life philosophies, dichos (sayings), and a story by each of the women, and which was edited by Ed Winograd. The show runs through April 16, with the closing reception starting at 6:00 p.m.

**April 22, 2016** - Metropolitan State University of Denver’s Journey Through Our Heritage program will present Return of the Corn Mothers master Mexican Folk Artist Rita Wallace and Africana storyteller Lois Burrell as featured guest speakers at the JTOH Ttlatchli Games dinner at St. Cajetans at 7:30 p.m. The Corn Mothers exhibition of the San Luis inductees, along with video clips, and the latest edition of the Return of the Corn Mothers book, will be on display.

This exhibition is on loan from Colorado Folk Arts Council and the Journey Through Our Heritage program of the MSU Denver Department of Chicana/o Studies.

For more information, contact Dr. Renee Fajardo of MSU at**720-329-0869** or **jtoh2016@gmail.com****.**

MORE INFORMATION ON THE RETURN OF THE CORN MOTHERS PROJECT

The Return of the Corn Mothers project is a multi-generational and multi-cultural exhibit of stories and portraits of 41 women from the Southwest. The show's focus is a photo exhibition of women who have earned accolades for community activism and creative endeavors. Each featured woman also recounts in story form her memories of the women who influenced her in her life journey. A documentary clip by C'Rodrigo gives a behind-the-scene account of this decade-old project.

"This show is about women from 29 to 89 who tell stories that help shape and nurture our country. They represent the circle of life and the continuation of a never-ending story about love and perseverance. These women all exhibit extraordinary commitment to their communities but are often taken for granted and not given the recognition they deserve. This is a tribute to those unsung heroines who have made a difference in so many lives," said Ron Gehauf, president of the Colorado Folk Arts Council, a cosponsor of the exhibition.

The exhibition features biographies and philosophies of each woman, with a story that each woman narrates about her "Corn Mother," a woman who influenced and helped mentor and mold her to become the woman she is today.

**History of the Return of the Corn Mothers Project**

The show received a Rocky Mountain Women's Institute Fellowship in 2007 and began in the spring of 2008. Master photographer Todd Pierson has continued to add new women to the show since its inception. From there, the show has been the featured exhibition at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History in the fall of 2008, and in May of 2009 was presented by the Chicano Humanities Arts Council (CHAC) as the featured exhibition in honor of its 30-year anniversary.

The ten-member team behind the Return of the Corn Mothers received the prestigious Colorado Humanities Fellowship in 2009 for the program "A Celebration of Wise Women of the Southwest," which was presented in conjunction with the Colorado Folk Arts Council and Metro State (then called Metropolitan State College). A one-day symposium was held on the Metro State campus, featuring multi-cultural women of all ages who have made significant cultural and social contributions to their Southwestern communities as traditional or folk artists, storytellers, and healers, and in other cultural roles.

The Return of the Corn Mothers photo exhibition’s tour went to the Arizona State University Museum of Anthropology in the fall of 2010. The next stop was at New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico from May through July of 2012. On September 20, 2012 the exhibition came home to Colorado to be housed at the MSU Center for Visual Art. A two-month series of workshops and lectures took place, culminating in a grand fiesta event for the Dia De Los Muertos (Day of the Dead). In April 2013, the exhibition was housed at Pima Community college in Tucson as part of a month-long literacy project. The 2016 Journey of the Corn Mothers exhibition will take place at Alamosa State University’s Hatfield Art Gallery, the San Luis Valley Museum in Alamosa, and at Metropolitan Sate University of Denver.

**What Is a Corn Mother?**

The theme of the show is based on the Pueblo mythology of the Corn Mothers, who were said to have sung in the essence of all creation, including the sacred Kachinas of the Southwest. The show’s content is said to be one of the most unique exhibitions to come to Denver. The focal point of the showcase is a photo-journalistic exhibition of women from Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas who have earned accolades for their community activism and creative endeavors. Todd Pierson, the show’s photographer, is considered one of Colorado's most skilled portrait artists and has spared no expense in putting together a stunning show, according to the show’s curator, Renee Fajardo.

From Taos, New Mexico to the Hopi mesas of Arizona, the oral traditions of story continue to shape the living culture of the Pueblo peoples. Historically, one central figure in these traditions has been the Corn Mother, the giver of life. This legendary entity is important to the Pueblo cultures, as she is synonymous with Mother Earth and represents growth, life, creativity, and the feminine aspects of the world. Although her influence diminished with the coming of the Spanish conquest and the introduction of Christianity, Pueblo communities still preserve their knowledge of the Corn Mother. Some legends say that she will return one day to bring harmony and enlightenment.

This collection of portraits and stories is about today's Corn Mothers. They are women who live, study, and work in the Southwest. They are women who give back to their communities, often without recognition, and for little or no money. Some are native, indigenous to this region. Others have journeyed here, as thousands have done for centuries, from other places. They all share an ability to pull from the past all that is sacred and holy, and to create a future that is filled with promise.

This is a multi-generational and multi-cultural exhibit, which represents the continuation of a story that is always evolving.