



City of Arts & Innovation

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Riverside Metropolitan Museum Receives Rare Native American Artifacts

Bow, arrow and basket hat will be part of “Cahuilla Continuum” exhibit opening Sept. 26

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – The Riverside Metropolitan Museum welcomed Cahuilla people from around Riverside County to help unpack and bless artifacts from their ancestors that were shipped from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. for display during the Cahuilla Continuum exhibit that opens Sept. 26 in downtown Riverside.

“This truly is a blessing to have these items come home to us,” said Sean Milanovich, a Cahuilla tribal member and UC Riverside graduate student who is interning as Associate Curator of Anthropology at the Riverside museum. “These items are alive, filled with our hearts and our ancestors’ hearts. That energy lives on.”

Milanovich used an eagle feather and burning sage to bless the artifacts. The húl (bow) and húyal (arrow) were made by Tomas Cisco, a Cahuilla from the Morongo Reservation. A yá’mahval (basket hat) was made by Antonia Apapas Casero from Cahuilla Reservation. The objects were collected nearly 100 years ago and represent material that was created by people living in two worlds: the Cahuilla and that of the American settler.

The event on Tuesday marked the first time any of the attendees had seen the items from the National Museum of the American Indian. The loaned items are part of a three-year exhibit at the Riverside museum entitled Cahuilla Continuum, which tells the story of an indigenous Native American people who have lived in Southern California for thousands of years.

The exhibit will feature more than 160 objects from the Riverside Metropolitan Museum, the National Museum of the American Indian, Cabazon Band of Mission Indians Cultural Museum and private collections. Members of the Cahuilla community have played a pivotal role in developing and producing the exhibit, which opens Sept. 26.

A small number of area Native Americans attended a short unpacking event Tuesday morning in Riverside. Descendants of the items’ creators were allowed to touch the objects once they were carefully removed from a large packing crate. Several described a deeply moving experience.

“This is beautiful, a real honor,” said Mario Castellano, a Riverside resident and member of the Los Coyotes Band of Cahuilla and Cupeno Indians. “I’m very thankful and grateful that this opportunity has come.”

Rose Ann Hamilton, who attended the event with her mother, Cahuilla Elder Ann Hamilton, choked up with emotion as she picked up the basket hat created by her great grandmother. She said the respectful display of such objects locally will help Native Americans in the area stay grounded to their culture even in the face of urbanization.

“I’m sorry, it’s just very special,” Rose Ann Hamilton said through a sprinkling of tears. “I’m so glad this is being done, because it is really needed now.”

The Riverside Metropolitan Museum is a Smithsonian Affiliate and has worked with curators and staff from the National Museum of the American Indian on previous occasions. The Riverside museum began developing the idea for Cahuilla Continuum about five years ago and really accelerated the process within the last year, said Brenda Focht, Senior Curator.

“The support of the City allowed us to do this,” Focht said. “But if it were not for the support of the Cahuilla people, we would not be here today.”