



Metropolitan Museum Board

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: METROPOLITAN MUSEUM BOARD DATE: NOVEMBER 30, 2017

FROM: MUSEUM DEPARTMENT

**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON RIVERSIDE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM 2018 EXHIBITION
“UNCOVERING ANCIENT MEXICO: THE MYSTERY OF TLATILCO” IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH RIVERSIDE ART MUSEUM**

ISSUE:

Receive an update on the Riverside Metropolitan Museum 2018 exhibition “**Uncovering Ancient Mexico: The Mystery of Tlatilco**” in partnership with Riverside Art Museum.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board receive and file this update on Riverside Metropolitan Museum 2018 exhibition “**Uncovering Ancient Mexico: The Mystery of Tlatilco**” in partnership with Riverside Art Museum.

BACKGROUND:

In 2015 a RMM intern, who was working in the Museum’s Anthropology collection, noticed some unusual ceramic sculptures. Upon research, these objects were identified as belonging to a people, who had lived 3000 years ago along the bank of a lake in the Valley of Mexico. These people were known as Tlatilco, which translates to “where things are hidden”. Objects from these people had been sold in Mexico City markets for many years. However, where they had been found was not initially known until the 1920s-1930s. During this period Mexico City urbanization spread into the area where the archaeological site of Tlatilco is located.

The RMM’s Tlatilco collection came from the bequest of Christopher L. Moser, Ph. D. a former RMM Curator of Anthropology. Moser had conducted his doctoral fieldwork in Oaxaca, Mexico in the 1960s. During this time he had visited the markets in Mexico City and purchased objects from vendors during his visits. Some of these objects had come from “Tlatilco”.



"Pretty Lady"
RMM Collection A1108-259

The Museum's Tlatilco collection, which includes figures, masks, bowls, musical instruments, earplugs and seals, has never been exhibited. There are female figurines, which are called "Pretty Ladies" and "Ball Player" figurines, which are associated with the renowned Olmec ball game.

This collection inspired the development of the exhibition "**Uncovering Ancient Mexico: The Mystery of Tlatilco**" in 2015. In addition to the RMM Tlatilco collection, the exhibition will also feature Tlatilco objects on loan from the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution (nine objects) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (eleven objects). These objects will enhance the visitor's understanding of the Tlatilco people.

DISCUSSION:

"**Uncovering Ancient Mexico: The Mystery of Tlatilco**" will open at the Riverside Art Museum Friday, February 3, 2018 and will close on Sunday, December 30, 2018.

This exhibition is a significant opportunity for the Riverside Metropolitan Museum.

1. This exhibition gives the Museum a presence in the community while the RMM is shuttered.
2. This exhibition brings a partnership with the Riverside Art Museum (RAM) enhancing the concept of a “Museum Corridor” on Mission Inn Avenue.
3. This exhibition features a Museum collection that never has been exhibited.
4. This exhibition enhances regional and national connections with loans from the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution and Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
5. This exhibition shares the RMM’s Mexican archaeology collection with the community and honors the City of Riverside’s Mexican-American residents who claim this ancient heritage.

PARTNERSHIP WITH RIVERSIDE ART MUSEUM

In 2017 as the Tlatilco exhibition planning progressed so did the Riverside Metropolitan Museum (RMM) plans to focus on museum management issues. This direction meant that the RMM would not be available for new exhibitions until 2020. With exhibition planning underway and loan approvals from the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution and Los Angeles County Museum of Art it was decided to investigate alternative Riverside museum sites for the exhibition.

Upon discussions with the Riverside Art Museum a new venue became possible and a partnership was formed. The partnership offered exciting possibilities especially in exhibition planning and development. RAM brought a new perspective, diverse experiences and a staff with different strengths. RMM brought its collections, history of creating culturally diverse exhibitions and regional and national museum connections through past loans and Smithsonian Affiliates.

Through this partnership a different method of exhibition planning and development was implemented. McKenna-Cress and Kamien in **“Creating Exhibitions: Collaboration in the Planning, Development, and Design of Innovative Experiences”** (2013) described this new direction for exhibition development. The McKenna-Cress/Kamien exhibition team included the following advocates: institution, subject matter, visitor experiences, design and project & team. The RMM/RAM team with its multiple sources is shaping an enriching exhibition with innovative experiences, which is the goal of **“Uncovering Ancient Mexico: The Mystery of Tlatilco”**.

Visitor Outcomes:

1. Visitors will appreciate the rich culture of these ancient Mexican people.
2. Visitors will understand through the archaeological process how these people and their objects were uncovered.
3. Members of Riverside’s Hispanic community will be introduced to this rich heritage.
4. Visitors will be inspired to search for answers to the questions they have about Tlatilco.
5. Visitors will compare how they live today with how ancient Tlatilco peoples

lived.

6. Visitors will recognize that the foods they eat today were eaten by Tlatilco peoples thousands of years ago.

Exhibit Features:

1. Museum's Tlatilco artifacts to tell a story supported with loans from the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
2. Documents, maps and photographs to represent the location, site and material culture of the Tlatilco people.
3. Interactives to highlight section themes.
4. Archaeology tools and equipment to explain the process for uncovering the story.
5. Activity guide for young visitors to guide them in exploring the exhibition and learning about the people.
6. Archaeological dig in the Taylor Learning Center for Children will provide an opportunity for students to investigate an archaeological mystery.
7. Feedback Station to allow visitors an opportunity to comment on this exhibition.

EXHIBITION STORY LINE

“Uncovering Ancient Mexico: The Mystery of Tlatilco” explores the role of archaeology in understanding an ancient culture. Visitors investigate how the ceramics from Tlatilco provide clues for archaeologists to solve mysteries of an unknown people.

THE MYSTERY

Buried deep beneath the bustling freeways and factories of Mexico City laid the relics of a civilization for thousands of years. Until recently, the secrets of this community remained undiscovered, hidden away and lost beneath history's layers. The ancient people of Tlatilco may be gone, but they left many clues under the surface; clues that archaeologists use in their quest to decode the past and reveal the details of this lost community.

THE SEARCH: How Archaeology helps solve the mystery

Starting in the 1940s with Miguel Covarrubias' work, Tlatilco figurines have captivated the imagination of archaeologists and other scholars. Through fieldwork and careful visual study of the artifacts, much can be discovered, but the technology used by archaeologists today gives us a more accurate picture of life.



Tlatilco Archaeological Site, 1940s

Archive of Miguel Covarrubias, Libraries Division, University of the Americas, Puebla, Mexico

THE FINDINGS: Mystery Solved?

The archaeological evidence tells us that the people of Tlatilco lived busy lives. Farming and hunting provided necessities while artisans created jewelry and sculptures. Musicians, athletes, dancers, and acrobats entertained the living while the dead were prepared for an afterlife.

While much is known and much can be assumed based on the practices of other similar cultures, many of the answers to the mystery of Tlatilco remain unsolved.



"Two-faced Head Mask"
RMM Collection A1108-384
Photograph by Catharina E. Santasilia

Community outreach/audience studies/RAM

1. Tlatilco School outreach (curriculum guide) ART TO GO; RAM partnership
2. School outreach (curriculum guide) Walk and Wonder; RAM partnership
3. Feedback station
4. Gallery special tours [tba]

FISCAL IMPACT:

The total project cost for the "**Uncovering Ancient Mexico: The Mystery of Tlatilco**" exhibition is \$86,741. The exhibit runs from February to December 2018, over two fiscal years. The impact on the General Fund for FY17-18 is \$48,496 and \$8,715 for FY 18-19. Funding sources and amounts are listed in the table below.

FUNDING SOURCE	AMOUNT
Riverside Metropolitan Museum FY17-18 = \$48,496; FY18-19=\$8,715	\$57,211
Riverside Museum Associates	\$9,130
Riverside Art Museum	\$8,400
Private Donor	\$12,000
	Exhibit Total: \$86,741

Prepared by: Dr. Brenda Focht, Museum Curator
Approved by: Alexander T. Nguyen, Assistant City Manager/Acting Museum & Cultural Affairs Director

Attachments: Exhibit Budget