



PEABODY MUSEUM  
*of* ARCHAEOLOGY & ETHNOLOGY

## PRESS RELEASE

# ***Storied Walls: Murals of the Americas***

**What:** New Exhibition

**Exhibit Dates:** March 13, 2008 – December 31, 2009

**Opening Reception:** March 13, 2008,

5:30 Lecture: *Painting Performance: The Art of Ceremony, Sacrifice, and History*

William Saturno, Curator, Assistant Professor of Archaeology, Boston University

6:30 –8 Exhibition opening and Reception

Free and Open to the Public

**Where:** Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 11 Divinity Ave. Cambridge. Harvard Square T stop, #1 Bus, handicapped accessible. Information: 617-496-1027

**(Cambridge, January 24, 2008)** The Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology presents a new exhibition exploring ancient murals from North, Central, and South America. The exhibition opens March 13, 2008 and will remain on view through December 2009.

Throughout time and around the world, people have adorned the walls of their homes, palaces, tombs, temples, and government buildings with painted scenes and designs. From cave paintings to the Neolithic shrines of Çatalhöyük, Turkey, to the Sistine Chapel, to the contemporary works of Diego Rivera or graffiti art, artists have transformed blank architectural canvases into engaging, evocative works of art, through the application of color, pattern, and figure. While murals may serve as simple decoration, they are often highly symbolic, making visible a people's religious, political, and cultural beliefs, their histories and values.

***Storied Walls: Murals of the Americas*** explores the spectacular wall paintings from the ancestral Hopi village kivas of Awatovi in Arizona; San Bartolo and Bonampak in Guatemala and Mexico respectively, and the Moche *huacas* of northern Peru. The artists and artisans who adorned these walls left stunning visual accounts of some of the most significant and enduring

stories of their times—stories that insist upon being read, even now, centuries after their creation. The original art works remain for the most part *in situ*. **Storied Walls** uses the photographs and drawings of archaeologists and artists, models, and fragments of original murals to examine the meanings and social uses of murals within the Pueblo, Maya, and Moche cultures; the history of their discoveries and investigations by affiliates of the Peabody Museum and others; and ongoing efforts to preserve, restore, and interpret these fragile painted surfaces.

### **Awatovi: Murals of the Hopi**

The village of Awatovi, located on Antelope Mesa in Arizona, is one of the oldest and most



Awatovi mural painting, Room 788. Collection of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University. PM 39-97-10/23099B.

important ancestral Hopi villages, dating from approximately AD 1250 to 1700 when the village was destroyed. In the 1930s, the Peabody Museum launched a major archaeological expedition to the site. While examining the kivas — windowless subterranean ceremonial structures—archaeologists found that fourteen kivas had painted murals and multiple layers of murals on the walls, some with up to twenty-seven layers of murals. Several of the Awatovi murals are in the collections of the Peabody Museum.

### **Huaca de la Luna and Huaca Cao Viejo: Murals of the Moche**

The Moche (ca. AD 1—700) of northern Peru participated in mural-painting traditions already over a thousand years old by the time they decorated their own temple walls. Most mural art was located in large architectural complexes of adobe brick. The stepped terraces of *huacas* were covered with smooth adobe plaster or modeled in *bas relief* and brightly painted



Polychrome frieze of the decapitator god, Huaca de la Luna, Peru. Photo by Pasquale Sorrentino.

with images of gods and scenes of victorious warriors with prisoners. Such bright decorations contrasted with the brown desert sands and green agricultural fields marking *huacas* as power centers from afar and dazzling pilgrims when they arrived.

### **San Bartolo and Bonampak: Murals of the Ancient Maya**

The oldest known Maya murals are also the most recently discovered. Murals found at the Preclassic site of San Bartolo, Guatemala, date to 100 BC. Already showing a highly developed tradition, they were painted on the upper walls of a room attached to the north side of a pyramidal structure known as “Las Pinturas.” The murals reveal that along with the art of painting, the Maya religious understanding of the creation of the world, and the king’s divine right to rule were well-established centuries earlier than previously thought.

Deep within the jungle of Chiapas, Mexico, the small Maya site of Bonampak is home to one of the most magnificent artistic creations in the Americas. At the end of the eighth century AD, Maya artists painted a masterpiece within the three rooms of a limestone building on the site’s acropolis. The murals of Bonampak are the most complete Maya murals from the Late Classic period to survive into the twenty-first century, and provide us with an unparalleled view of courtly life and military practice.



North Wall, Las Pinturas, San Bartolo Guatemala. Painting by Heather Hurst ©2004.

### **The Curators**

The exhibition was curated by Jeffery Quilter, Deputy Director, Peabody Museum, and director of the Huaca Cao Viejo excavations; Steven LeBlanc, Director of Collections, Peabody Museum and specialist in the American Southwest; William Saturno, Assistant Professor of Archaeology, Boston University, and director of the San Bartolo excavations; Mary Miller, Professor of the History of Art, Yale University; and Barbara Fash, Director, Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic

Inscriptions Project, Peabody Museum, with the assistance of Lisa Trever, graduate student in the History of Art and Architecture.

### **About the Peabody Museum**

The Peabody Museum is among the oldest archaeological and ethnographic museums in the world with one of the finest collections of human cultural history found anywhere. It is home to superb materials from Africa, ancient Europe, North America, Mesoamerica, Oceania, and South America in particular. In addition to its archaeological and ethnographic holdings, the Museum's photographic archives, one of the largest of its kind, holds more than 500,000 historical photographs, dating from the mid-19th century to the present and chronicling anthropology, archaeology, and world culture.

**Location:** *The Peabody Museum is located at 11 Divinity Avenue in Cambridge. The Museum is a short walk from the Harvard Square MBTA station.*

**Hours:** 9 AM to 5 PM, 7 days a week. The Museum is closed on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. Admission is \$9.00 for adults, \$7.00 for students and seniors, \$6.00 for children, 3–18. Free with Harvard ID or Museum membership. The Museum is free to Massachusetts residents Sundays, 9 AM to noon, year round, and Wednesdays from 3 PM to 5 PM (September to May). Admission includes admission to the Harvard Museum of Natural History. The Peabody Museum participates in the City Pass and WGBH programs. For more information call (617) 496-1027 or go online to: [www.peabody.harvard.edu](http://www.peabody.harvard.edu).

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