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MIGUEL COVARRUBIAS EMBODIES THE SPIRIT OF MANY CULTURES IN AN EXHIBITION FEATURED AT THE CALIFORNIA AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM

LOS ANGELES (September 15, 2011) – *The African Diaspora in the Art of Miguel Covarrubias: Driven By Color, Shaped By Cultures* is an exhibition organized by the California African American Museum (CAAM) and on view through February 26, 2012. The exhibition explores the representations of people of African descent in the work of Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias (1904-1957). Covarrubias was a prolific painter, illustrator, caricaturist, writer, curator archeologist and anthropologist. Relocating from Mexico to New York City in 1923, he quickly became a member of the cultural elite whose many friends included Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston and the Rockefellers. Through a renowned mural, colorful paintings, sketches, prints, books and magazines, this extensive CAAM curated exhibit highlights Covarrubias' multi-cultural depictions of the African Diaspora throughout the world.

Covarrubias' work tells the story of peoples, traditions and everyday life. His drawings adorned the covers of *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, and *Fortune*. He also created set designs and costumes for theatre, including Josephine Baker's *La Revue Negre*. Some of his illustrated books on display at this exhibition include *The Weary Blues* (1926), *Blues: An Anthology* (1926), *Born to Be* (1929), *Mules and Men* (1935), *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1938), *Mexico South: The Isthmus of Tehuantepec* (1946) *Adventures of an African Slave* (1928) and *Batouala* (1932). His illustrations in *Negro Drawings* (1927) gave mainstream America a new and more dignified impression of African Americans.

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Covarrubias was known during the Harlem Renaissance period for his representations of African Americans, but his paintings also depicted Afro-Mexicans, Afro-Cubans and West and North Africans. CAAM's executive director, Charmaine Jefferson, said that it became clear to her nearly 7 years ago, that "Covarrubias needed to have his creative voice explored from the perspective of the people portrayed in his art." Ms. Jefferson noted that while the style of his work is often exaggerated, it is a style that he applied to all that he painted. "As I looked at more and more of his work," she said, "I began to realize that Covarrubias was more often than not a respectful and insightful chronicler of a full range of experiences by people of color. I was especially struck by how often he used his art to document Black culture, to lend vision to worlds outside of America, to support abolitionist efforts to end slavery and racism, to reflect family, and dignity, and life and especially the culture that surrounded the African American community of his days in Harlem. The depth of his work is astounding. You can see the clarity of his research and scholarship applied to his depictions, and you see his willingness to give himself over to see the world through the eyes of others. In this way, Covarrubias helped to make his a voice for us all. I am especially proud of our curator Mar Hollingsworth who took a gem of an idea and shaped an exhibition and palette for absorbing Covarrubias that is informative, visually stimulating and powerful from a variety of perspectives. This man of Mexican heritage lived and breathed the cultural diversity of the world long before it was fashionable to do so. We are honored to have this opportunity to share the Covarrubias that we discovered. We hope everyone will come to get to know his talents as we have."

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The exhibit took three years to complete; it includes several pieces that have not been seen in the U.S. and some of his original illustrations including work for Langston Hughes and Rene Maran. It's a representation of many cultures encompassing people of the Pacific with an oversized mural 15 by 25 feet large, the Caribbean (Cuba and Haiti), Mexico (Tehuantepec), and West, North and East Africa. It reflects Covarrubias' belief that "Real art can no more be a monopoly of one country than man can secure himself on an island and expect to picture humanity."

For more information on the California African American Museum visit www.caamuseum.org or call (213) 744-7432. Admission is always free.

OTHER EXHIBITIONS IN THE CAAM GALLERIES:

"A Photographer's View Inside the Apollo" through September 18, 2011

"Women: Game Changers, Less Known, Here Celebrated" through November 6, 2011

"Places of Validation, Art & Progression" opening September 29 through April 1, 2012

"Gallery of Discovery" (multi-use education exploration space) ongoing

About the California African American Museum

The California African American Museum (CAAM) researches, collects, preserves and interprets for public enrichment the history, art and culture of African Americans. Chartered by the California State Legislature in 1977, CAAM is a state supported institution and a partner with the 501(c)(3) non-profit organization Friends, the Foundation of the California African American Museum. In addition to its permanent collection of over 6,000 objects of art, artifacts and historical documents, CAAM also houses a research library containing more than 20,000 volumes, employs and trains high school students through its Young Docents program, and hosts in-house curated exhibitions and traveling shows on a regular basis. The museum also tours CAAM exhibitions throughout California and the nation.

Located at 600 State Drive in Exposition Park, the museum is open to the public Tuesday-Saturday 10am-5pm, and Sundays 11am-5pm. Admission and workshop participation is always free. Parking in the adjacent lot is \$10.00 all day at Figueroa and 39th Streets. For more information on the California African American Museum visit www.caamuseum.org.

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