

PRESS RELEASE

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The Williams College Museum of Art Presents  
*Teaching with Art: The Art and Archaeology of  
Maya Civilization*

September 24, 2011 –February 5, 2012

Photos available upon request.

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Williamstown, Mass. – The Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) is pleased to present *Teaching with Art: The Art of Archaeology of Maya Civilization*. *Teaching with Art* is an ongoing exhibition series dedicated to supporting Williams courses, installed in the museum's McNicol Gallery. Elizabeth Gallerani, Coordinator of Mellon Academic Programs, approached Professor Antonia Foias to participate in the series. Professor Foias, an authority in Maya ceramics, organized this exhibition to support her two fall courses: Anthropology 103, "Pyramids, Bones, and Sherds: What is Archaeology?" and Art History 209 (cross listed as Anthropology 219), "The Art and Archaeology of Maya Civilization: A Marriage Made in Xibalba." WCMA has a significant ancient artifacts collection. Among these are a number of Maya objects. Professor Foias selected eight of these objects as exemplars for study. She grouped the objects thematically based on their original use—architectural decoration, incense burners, pots, and musical instruments.

When asked about her selections for the exhibition Professor Foias responded, "My goal for the exhibit was to show the rich ritual life of the ancient Maya from the Classic period (A.D. 250-950) through the Postclassic (950-1542) and up to the modern Maya

descendants. Richly painted polychrome and/or highly polished incised black-brown vessels were used to hold fancy foods and drinks, like chocolate, during political and ritual celebrations of mythological events, calendrical cycles, rites of passage in the lives of their divine rulers, victories in war, etc. Small figurines, often musical instruments also, were carried and played by participants in these pageants that involved not only feasts, food and drink, but also music, dance, and mythological-themed plays. Incense-burners, decorated with spikes reminiscent of hallucinogenic plants or bloodletting instruments or with images of gods, were also part of these ceremonies; placed in front of temple-pyramids, these enveloped the whole audience with sacred smoke through which the divine kings and priests could see their visions of the supernatural world. Limestone corbels carved in the images of distinct deities, like the Maize God, jutted out of the facades of these temple-pyramids, some of which rose 70 m above the jungle floor.” She goes on to explain, “The goal of the exhibit is to allow students to come in close contact with the material evidence of Maya civilization, the most celebrated of the prehispanic cultures of Central America. Not only do we visit and tour the exhibit, but several students will be using these pieces for their research paper.”

### **The Williams College Museum of Art**

WCMA houses over 13,000 works that span the history of art. The museum’s principle mission is to encourage multidisciplinary teaching through encounters with art objects that traverse time periods and cultures. An active, collecting museum, its strengths are in modern and contemporary art, photography, prints, and Indian painting. The museum is also noted for its stellar collection of American art from the late 18th century to the present. With the largest collection in the world of works by the brothers Charles and Maurice Prendergast, the museum is a primary center for study of these American artists in a transatlantic context of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Williams College Museum of Art is located on Route 2 in Williamstown, Massachusetts, in the heart of the picturesque Williams College campus. It is open Tuesday through Saturday, from 10 am to 5 pm, and on Sunday from 1 to 5 pm. Admission is free and the museum is wheelchair accessible; [wcma.williams.edu](http://wcma.williams.edu).

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