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## Newark Forges Family Bonds Through The Community Art of Pepon Osorio

NEWARK, N.J. - Artist Pepon Osorio's installation, "Project 5: Pepon Osorio - Badge of Honor," sponsored by The Newark Museum in collaboration with Aljira, a center for Contemporary Art, will be on display at a store on 33 Broadway until August 12, Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 7 pm and Saturdays from noon to 5 pm. After this community showing, the exhibition will be reinstalled in the Contemporary Galleries

of The Newark Museum from September 13 to December 31.

According to painting and sculpture curator Joseph Jacobs, "One trend in contemporary art over the last 15 years has been to move from "art about art" to art about social issues. A generation of artists has been making public art that focuses on concerns central to the public's well-being. Osorio is among the most innovative and effective of these artists. Not only

does he make his work about the community and for the community, but he makes it in the community with the community even collaborating in the work. The community acts as Osorio's co-artist and is an integral part of the artwork itself."

This philosophy leads to a unique process in creating the artwork. The exhibit actually began in March and April when the artist met with several community groups and social service organizations to identify issues for the largely Latino and African-American North Newark neighborhood. Among the groups consulted were La Casa de Don Pedro, Aspira and Offenders Aid and Restoration.

Based on these meetings, Mr Osorio decided to focus on the issue of family separation, especially on parents and children who do not know each other because a parent is incarcerated. The artwork is designed to function as a vehicle to confront the disintegration of the contemporary family, whether from separation by prison or a parent holding down two of three jobs, and to provide tools to help hold families together.

The installation consists of two sleeping quarters: a prison cell and boy's bedroom. Video monitors will play interviews with an incarcerated father and his real-life son to emphasize how important strong family bonds are to the happiness and success of the individual.

Mr Osorio directed the installation with interested local residents who had an opportunity to assist with the construction and talk to the artist about community values, motifs and themes, which could later surface in the artwork. Once the artwork was installed, it became the site for informal community programs, primarily sessions where neighborhood people come together to discuss the broad issues raised by the show.

Says Mr Osorio, "This father and son are really just a metaphor for all the different types of jail people may have - places they can't get out of. It could be a disease, working multiple jobs or some other condition in their lives. I hope "Badge of Honor" will lay the positive groundwork to make it easier for the community to talk about some of these things and will provide help for people who are dealing with these challenges every day."

In conjunction with the September reinstallation at The Newark Museum, Aljira will also present a related exhibition, "Modern Life," at its Two Washington Place location. Curated by Aljira co-founder Carl E. Hazlewood, the show will focus on socially conscious art by emerging and established contemporary artists. Like Mr Osorio's art, these works are directly related to the community and its concerns. Artists include Grace Graupe-Pillard, James Andrew Brown, Anthony Murrell and Donald Odita. The exhibition will be on view from September 13 through November 17.