

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 13, 2010

**Williams College Museum of Art Opens
Major Installation by Pepón Osorio
in North Adams**

Williamstown, Mass.— The Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) is pleased to announce the opening of *Drowned in a Glass of Water: An Installation by Pepón Osorio* at 69 Union Street in North Adams on July 17, 2010 from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. All are invited to attend.

In 2009, the Williams College Museum of Art commissioned artist and MacArthur Fellow Pepón Osorio to create a work of art, using the themes of food, community, and culture as a starting point. Osorio, whose artistic practice involves a process of social engagement, spent the past year sharing conversations, stories, and meals with many people in both Williamstown and North Adams. The resulting artwork represents the stories of two families, transforming personal memory into a collective narrative.

This major installation includes an 18-foot revolving platform divided by a central wall, filled with objects and video elements. As the platform slowly revolves, the artist's interpretation of two lives is revealed to the viewer. One side presents a home's interior, featuring a life-sized mannequin wearing an elaborate dress with red ruffles that have been crocheted by individuals from the region and the artist's home city of Philadelphia. The other side presents an exterior view from a home in the Berkshires. *Drowned in a Glass of Water* explores the dynamics involved in nourishing an individual, a family, or a community. The title comes from a Spanish expression that conveys how sometimes in

life we face challenges that seem so large we feel like we are “drowning in a glass of water.”

Osorio is known for large-scale, multimedia installations that often overpower the area they occupy and create aesthetically challenging spaces in order to advance critical discussion. Osorio has said that his art asks viewers to negotiate their relationship to the artwork, to think about who they are not only in relation to the artwork, but to the world at large. Traditionally, Osorio presents his installations first in an unconventional, community-based setting and then the museum. *Drowned in a Glass of Water* opens first at a former Chevrolet car dealership in North Adams and then moves to the museum in the fall. By shifting context, the project enables WCMA to link audiences in dialogue and reflection and become a crossroad to the community.

“This project has really allowed the Williams College Museum of Art to move beyond its own walls,” says the project’s curator Cynthia Way, Director of Education and Visitor Experience at WCMA. “The artist’s working method has allowed us to connect students on campus and the museum’s staff to a wide variety of people and organizations in our community. We hope that this site, and the related programming, will be an open place for dialogue.”

History of the Project

In celebration of the 10th anniversary of *Gastronomica*, the journal of food and culture, WCMA collaborated with Darra Goldstein, a Williams professor and Editor-in-Chief of *Gastronomica*, to organize a major symposium exploring food, culture, and community and to commission artist Pepón Osorio to create a work of art with these themes as a starting point. Goldstein and Corrin identified Osorio because of the unique, community-based way in which the artist works to generate his art. For the past year, Director of Education and Visitor Experience Cynthia Way has curated this project, connecting the artist to students, staff, and community members and organizing the exhibition and programming.

"When we think of public art, we usually imagine an autonomous sculpture sitting outside on a pedestal or plopped in a concrete plaza," says Lisa Corrin, Class of 1956 Director at WCMA. "Pepón Osorio has reinvigorated the meaning of this kind of art by emphasizing its public dimension. His collaborative practice involves his subjects at every level, encouraging them to participate in a dialogue that begins at their first

encounter and continues when the work of art goes on view. In a sense they are monuments, not heroic bronze men on horseback elevated above us, but monuments to these relationships between the artist, the people he encounters, and the significance of their lives. He literally brings the monument down to earth and memorializes the lives of ordinary people. In this way, Osorio is not the romantic artist painting in a studio removed from the world, but a socially engaged individual for whom the world is his studio and his creative material.”

Rooted in his early experiences in social work in the Bronx, Osorio’s unique way of working involves extended dialogues with various community members that, in turn, inspire his visual art. Throughout WCMA’s project, food has been a critical part of this dialogic process as a form of exchange and often an icebreaker in the conversations that have inspired elements of the artwork. Osorio began by visiting a number of local farms, meeting with museum and college staff, and then working with students and community organizations to understand the fabric of our region – the economics of our towns, the relationship of our communities to each other. Osorio conducted numerous talks and workshops at Williams, including a winter study course, *Art in the Community*, which introduced students to his methodology and issues related to conducting community-based collaborations.

As part of the course this winter, Osorio began working closely with the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition (NBCC). The mission of the Coalition is to improve the quality of life for people in the Northern Berkshires by organizing, supporting, and empowering the community. The Coalition works to achieve its mission by providing a public place for the community, building stronger neighborhoods, and promoting positive youth development. Through Osorio’s talks with members of the NBCC, the artist identified the first family with whom he began to collaborate. He then met with numerous residents of Williamstown to find another family partner. Extensive conversations, meals, and connections with the families form the basis of the inspiration for the artwork. Their identities remain confidential.

Osorio’s installation has grown from the dialogues and time he has spent with two families but ultimately reflects the story of the artist as well. Rather than visually depicting food or using food as medium, the artist chose to elaborate on the theme of nourishment in the context of our lives and to examine how we handle life’s challenges.

Osorio's newly commissioned artwork considers the intersection of food, community, history, class, and culture in the daily lives of the people of Western Massachusetts.

“One of the museum's goals is to be a crossroad to the community – all communities, not just those here on campus,” says WCMA director Lisa Corrin. “Many people don't realize that the Williams College Museum of Art is open to the public six days a week. We hope that this installation, by moving from North Adams to the museum, will help bring people to WCMA who have never been before, and will encourage more people from Williamstown to engage in the vibrant arts community in North Adams. We are especially thrilled to be collaborating with DownStreet Art, an organization that connects artists and our community and reminds us of the wealth of creative talent here in the Berkshires.”

The installation will be on view at the North Adams location through September 7, 2010. Gallery hours are Wednesday to Friday 12-6 pm, Saturday 10:00 am–6:00 pm, and Sunday 10:00 am–2:00 pm. *Drowned in a Glass of Water* opens at the Williams College Museum of Art on September 25, 2010 and will be on view through February 6, 2011.

The Williams College Museum of Art is a teaching museum with a mission to advance learning “through lively and innovative approaches to art for the students of Williams College and communities beyond the campus.” This project furthers the museum's mission by connecting the museum, its staff, and the college campus to the community.

DownStreet Art

WCMA is a proud partner on this project with DownStreet Art, a public art project designed to revitalize downtown North Adams. By harnessing existing arts organizations and events and transforming vacant and open spaces into arts destinations, DownStreet Art defines North Adams as a cultural haven, driving tourists and community members downtown. Visit www.downstreetart.org for more information.

Related Programming

Opening Celebration

Saturday, July 17

11:00 am – 2:00 pm

Celebrate the opening of Pepón Osorio's large-scale, multimedia installation.

Open House: Part of Downstreet Art

Thursday, July 29

6:00-9:00 pm

Open House: Part of Downstreet Art

Thursday, August 26

6:00-9:00 pm

The Place of Taste: An Exploration of Food, Culture, and Community

Saturday, October 2, 2010

10:00 am–5:30 pm

'62 Center for Theatre and Dance, Williams College

This delectable daylong symposium features chefs, writers, scholars, and artists and features a dialogue with Pepón Osorio and artist and Williams professor Ed Epping. The event celebrates *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*'s 10th anniversary and Williams' commitment to community.

About the Artist

Born in 1955 in Santurce, Puerto Rico, Pepón Osorio is one of the most significant artists working in the United States today. Best known for his large-scale installations, Osorio merges conceptual art and community dynamics. Osorio's work emphasizes the exhibition space as an intermediary between the social architecture of communities and the mainstream art world. He has worked with well over 25 communities across the U.S. and internationally, creating installations based on real life experiences. For almost two decades Pepón Osorio has been presenting work in unconventional places prior to exhibiting in a museum setting, thus exploring the subjectivity of meaning in art and the multiple meanings that these installations achieve depending on their location.

In *Badge of Honor*, 1995, first presented at a Newark storefront, Osorio reveals the relationship between a jailed father and his son through the recreation of the spaces they inhabit. The artist's use of mass-produced objects coupled with his socio-anthropological savvy presents the spectator with the opportunity to engage in multiple readings of his work. Ultimately, they speak not only to the Latino community but to society in general.

Since 1990, Pepón Osorio has participated in international venues such as the 1993 Biennial Exhibition of the Whitney Museum of American Art, InSite, San Diego/Tijuana, 1994, and the Second Johannesburg and the Sixth Havana Biennials, both in 1997. His numerous solo exhibitions include the Museo Nacional Centro de Arts Reina Sofía in Madrid, Spain, 1999, the Escuela de Artes Plásticas, Puerto Rico, 2000, and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA, 2004; as well as group exhibitions including *NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith*, The Menil Collection, Houston, TX, which traveled to P.S.1 Contemporary Arts Center, Long Island City, NY, 2009, and *Voces y Visiones*, El Museo del Barrio, New York, 2010. Osorio's works are in public collections such as The Menil Collection, P.S.1, The Walker Center for American Art, The Wadsworth Atheneum, The Whitney Museum of American Art, Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, and The National Museum of American Art, among others.

Osorio was awarded the CalArts/Alpert Award in the Arts: Visual Arts and the prestigious John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship in 1999, Skowhegan Medal for Sculpture, 2001, The Smithsonian Legacy Award for the Visual Arts, 2008, and the Fleisher Art Memorial Founder's Award, 2009. Since 2006 he has been a Professor of Art at the Tyler School of Art, Department of Art and Art Education, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. He is represented by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York.

Williams College Museum of Art

The Williams College Museum of Art is open Tuesday through Saturday, from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, and on Sunday from 1:00 to 5:00 pm. Admission is free and the museum is wheelchair accessible. Contact: Suzanne Silitch, Director of Communications and Strategy, 413.597.3178; wcma@williams.edu; www.wcma.org.