

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 5, 2004

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**SEEING BENEATH THE LANDSCAPE—NEW EXHIBITION OF THE ART OF OUR
ANCIENT PREDECESSORS AT THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO**

THIS FALL AND HOLIDAY SEASON

HERO, HAWK AND OPEN HAND: ANCIENT INDIAN ART OF THE MIDWEST AND SOUTH

At Art Institute November 20, 2004–January 30, 2005

A truly groundbreaking exhibition at The Art Institute of Chicago opens a window onto an unexpected, remote, and relatively unexplored area of American history and art this fall and holiday season. *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South* (here November 20, 2004–January 30, 2005) is a full-scale exploration of the art, architecture, and ritual performance of a large branch of pan-American civilization virtually unknown to the American public—that of the Midwestern and Southern United States. This landmark project takes a fascinating look at “moundbuilder” societies that thrived here between 5000 B.C. and A.D. 1600—thousands of years before the westward trek of European and American explorers and the Indian tribes they encountered.

Entry to the exhibition is included in suggested general admission to the Art Institute—special tickets are not needed.

The exhibition is made possible by major funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, expanding our understanding of the world. The Chicago presentation is generously sponsored by The Boeing Company.

Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand illuminates the visual art and symbolism of our ancient predecessors here with an array of some 300 masterworks of stone, ceramic,

Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand Opens

Page 2

wood, shell, and copper. Highlights include sculptures with a wide range of human, animal, and botanical motifs, as well as imaginary creatures, abstract shapes, embellished vessels, implements, and ritual objects. These fascinating, often stunning, works are shown in a rich environment enhanced by informative large-scale plans and new reconstruction drawings of the major archaeological sites where they were found. While rigorous in its science and scholarship, *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand* differs from what might be found in a natural history museum in the emphasis it places on the beauty and aesthetic quality of these objects, while nonetheless also documenting the succession of distinct archaic populations that produced them.

Americans have long been captivated by the idea of an “untamed wilderness.” Many imagine early settlers of the New World encountering a vast unblemished landscape with untapped potential. The truth is that North America had been explored, populated, and exploited for thousands of years before European settlement. Along the Ohio, Tennessee, Illinois, and Mississippi rivers, the archaeological remains of earthen pyramids, plazas, large communities, and sophisticated works of art and artifacts testify to the fact that complex, diverse Native American societies thrived in Midwestern and southern areas of the United States for millennia.

At sites ranging from Cahokia, in southwestern Illinois; and the Newark Earthworks, in central Ohio; to Moundville, in western Alabama; Etowah, in northwestern Georgia; and Poverty Point, in northeastern Louisiana, evidence has emerged of important unifying patterns of visual imagery and cultural themes running across time and shared by various cultures.

“The Hero,” “the Hawk,” and “the Open Hand,” are among many recurrent forms suggesting a provocative and unexpected continuity of thought in the ancient American world concerning the themes of life, death, and renewal. In this ancient

Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand Opens

Page 3

visionary way of thought, human society was understood to form an integral part of the larger order of nature. Such deep-seated themes continue to shape the traditional worldview among many tribes today whose ancestry stems from the ancient societies. While archaeology has charted the settlement, chronology, and economies of ancient habitation in the Midwest and South, interpretation has seldom focused on art and architecture, their expressive and symbolic domains, and their unifying role in these societies.

Curator Richard Townsend has for the first time brought together Indian tribal leaders with art historians, museum curators, archaeologists, anthropologists, and collectors to bring *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand* to fruition. Their dialogue has produced a profound new model for studying the millennia-long story of Native Americans in the Midwest and South that sees the commonalities in lines of culture all the way to the present. The Art Institute's consultation with and approval from various Native American nations is an essential part of this project and its related educational outreach. Discussions have made possible the incorporation of contemporary Native American views and individual perspectives, especially concerning vital matters of traditional cultural survival and revitalization suggested by the ancient objects and archaeological sites.

This is the third in a series of three groundbreaking exhibitions that have emerged from Mr. Townsend's long study of the art and culture of the Western Hemisphere—beginning in South America and moving northward to Central America and North America. He has found, time and again, certain recurring themes indicating that societies in the Americas participated in a deep-seated, widely shared Pre-Columbian worldview with similar cosmologies, beliefs, and systems of symbols connected to the natural world. *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South* offers an extraordinary insight into a still generally unknown part of the collective American experience.

Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand Opens

Page 4

Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South is organized by The Art Institute of Chicago and curated by Richard Townsend, Curator of the Art Institute's Department of African and Amerindian Art. The exhibition installation was designed by Joseph Cochand, Art Institute Associate Director for Graphic Design and Exhibitions.

Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South is accompanied by a 288-page fully illustrated (440 illustrations; 320 color) catalogue copublished by The Art Institute of Chicago and Yale University Press. The book is available in The Museum Shop of the Art Institute for \$60.00 hardcover and \$34.95 softcover.

A comprehensive audio tour of the exhibition is also available and may be purchased in advance with any pre-paid museum admission. The tour is \$6, \$5 for members, and \$5 for students of the School of the Art Institute. The includes at no extra charge the Art Institute's new Gallery Audio Guide, which guides a visitor through the Art Institute's permanent collection at their own pace, selecting a gallery at a time.

The exhibition travels to The Saint Louis Art Museum for a showing March 4–May 30, 2005, and then to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History early July–late September, 2005.

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This presentation is generously funded by the Clarence Spanjer Endowment and supported by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes a great nation deserves great art. Additional support is provided by the Community Associates of the Art Institute of Chicago, and a generous gift from the Thaw Charitable Trust.

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The Art Institute of Chicago is a museum in Chicago's Grant Park, located across from Millennium Park. Museum Hours: 10:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday; 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m. Thursday; 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Closed Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. Suggested admission: \$12.00 ; children over 5, students, and seniors, \$7.00; members always free. Visitors may pay what they wish, but they must pay something. Ford Free Tuesdays are free to all, except for certain special exhibitions that may require full or extra admission fee. Chicago residents with Chicago Public Library cards can borrow a "Great Kids Museum Passport" card from any branch library for free general admission to the nine members of Museums in the Park—including The Art Institute of Chicago—and other Chicago institutions. To reach the Art Institute on the World Wide Web, contact us at: <www.artic.edu/aic>