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NEWS FROM THE GETTY

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Frontispiece of vol. 1 from *Mexico a traves de los siglos* (Barcelona, 1888-1889), lithograph.
Research Library, The Getty Research Institute,
Los Angeles, California (84-B8083).

**THE GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE PRESENTS IMAGES OF
PRE-COLUMBIAN OBJECTS, RUINS, AND MANUSCRIPTS**

***Obsidian Mirror-Travels: Refracting Ancient Mexican Art
and Archaeology***

The Getty Research Institute at the Getty Center

November 16, 2010–March 27, 2011

LOS ANGELES—Celebrating the bicentennial of Mexican independence and the centennial of the Revolution, ***Obsidian Mirror-Travels: Refracting Ancient Mexican Art and Archaeology*** on view at the Getty Research Institute from November 16, 2010 through March 27, 2011, explores representations of Mexican archaeological objects and sites from the Colonial era to the present. Featuring images of ancient Maya and Aztec ruins by archaeologist explorers such as John Lloyd Stephens, Desiré Charnay, and Augustus and Alice Le Plongeon, the exhibition showcases depictions of the Aztec Calendar Stone and other Mexican antiquities, as well as panoramic visions of Mexico—in the context of the Spanish conquest, the 19th-century French intervention in Mexico, and the lengthy presidency of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1910).

Obsidian Mirror-Travels gathers images of Pre-Columbian objects, ruins, and manuscripts, including the Hernán Cortés map of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec Calendar Stone, and

the ruins of Palenque, Chichén Itzá, and Mitla. The Lienzo de Tlaxcala manuscript, a late-16th century Mexican codex, was produced to memorialize the Tlaxcalan version of the Conquest of Mexico. The papers and photographs of Alice and Augustus LePlongeon document Maya monuments and ruins in Yucatán. Illustrated journals with scenes of Mexico, originally penned by French officers during the Maximilian Empire, later became travel souvenirs. "Some of the works are accurate, while others are completely fanciful; each portrays a distinct vision of Mexico," says Khristaan Villela, exhibition co-curator and professor at the University of New Mexico.

The exhibition title, *Obsidian Mirror-Travels*, refers to an influential essay by the artist Robert Smithson (American, 1938–1973), published in *Artforum International* in 1969. Smithson traveled to Mexico to retrace the 1839-1842 expeditions made by Stephens and the artist Frederick Catherwood. Visiting many of the same Maya ruins as Stephens and Catherwood-- Palenque and Uxmal -- among others, Smithson created a series of installations he called "mirror displacements" that he photographed and published in his essay. Smithson aimed to create a visual commentary quite different from that produced by Catherwood.

Beth Guynn, senior collections cataloguer for the Getty Research Institute and exhibition co-curator adds, "Smithson's work explored reflection and refraction, conjuring the ways that Aztec and other Pre-Columbian rulers used semi-opaque obsidian mirrors as objects of power and divination. Obsidian mirrors were seen as a threshold between the earthly world and the realm of the gods. In much the same way, the Getty Research Institute objects stand on their own as individual artworks and illuminate their times and their subjects."

Obsidian Mirror-Travels is co-curated by Khristaan Villela, University of New Mexico, and Beth Guynn, senior collections cataloguer for the Getty Research Institute. Accompanying the installation is an illustrated GRI publication, *The Aztec Calendar Stone*, edited by Khristaan Villela and Mary Ellen Miller. Related events include film screenings, point-of-view talks, and curatorial lectures.

Obsidian Mirror-Travels is part of Los Angeles' citywide celebration of the bicentennial of Mexico's independence and the centennial of the Mexican Revolution.

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The J. Paul Getty Trust is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that features the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Malibu.

The Getty Research Institute is an operating program of the J. Paul Getty Trust. It serves education in the broadest sense by increasing knowledge and understanding about art and its history through advanced research. The Research Institute provides intellectual leadership through its research, exhibition, and publication programs and provides service to a wide range of scholars worldwide through residencies, fellowships, online resources, and a Research Library. The Research Library - housed in the 201,000-square-foot Research Institute building designed by Richard Meier - is one of the largest art and architecture libraries in the world. The general library collections (secondary sources) include almost 900,000 volumes of books, periodicals, and auction catalogues encompassing the history of Western art and related fields in the humanities. The Research Library's special collections include rare books, artists' journals, sketchbooks, architectural drawings and models, photographs, and archival materials.

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