



Media Contacts:

Jennifer Westfall, jwestfal@nhm.org, (213) 763-3538

Lauren Clark, lclark@nhm.org, (213) 763-3532

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 2005**

**MEDIA PREVIEW
Friday, February 18, 2005
10 a.m. - noon**

***Conversations* Exhibition Opens February 20th**

Museum Treasures Rediscovered Through Eyes of Artists and Curators

LOS ANGELES, CA, February 18, 2005 – *Conversations*, an exhibition produced by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, explores the Museum’s rich collections through a creative collaboration between its curators and six contemporary visual artists – **Kim Abeles, Lita Albuquerque, Tony Berlant, Paul McCarthy, Ed Moses and John Valadez**. Each artist was invited to explore the wealth of artifacts and specimens at the Museum with curators and select objects to inspire a personal installation for the exhibition. *Conversations* features six installations revealing the different ways in which curators and artists approach similar objects, examining the array of stories these objects can tell and bringing new meaning to them. Located in the Museum’s Dart Gallery, the exhibition opens to the public on Sunday, February 20th.

Dr. Jane Pisano, President and Director of the Natural History Museum, comments, “This exhibition provides an opportunity for the public to view rarely seen objects in our collection. We are grateful to these visual artists who present our treasures guided by their vision and understanding. The result is engaging and exciting.”

Dr. Vanda Vitali, Executive Producer and Vice President of Public Programming for the Natural History Museum, elaborates, “These six renowned contemporary artists will help our visitors rediscover treasures from their own childhood experiences here at the museum. For new visitors and kids of all ages, their work will undoubtedly spark imagination and make new memories.”

Searching the Storerooms

Beginning in November 2004, the artists visited the Museum collections' storerooms to select the objects that would inspire their personal *Conversations* installations. The curatorial team for the exhibit – Margaret Hardin, Curator of Anthropology; Jody Martin, Curator of Crustacea; Jonathan Spaulding, Curator of History; Ángel Valdés, Associate Curator of Malacology; and W.W. Wood, Curator of Anthropology - worked with the artists to shed light on the scholarly value of the Natural History Museum's collections, while exploring its depth and breadth.

“Our collections contain an amazing range of scientific specimens and man-made objects,” explains Margaret Hardin, Curator of Anthropology, who participated in *Conversations* as Installation Curator. “We value the collections in our care as the basis for our research and educational programs. We approach our collections as sources of information that enable us to better understand the history of life and the record of human accomplishment on this planet.”

By contrast, each artist's approach to the Museum's collections are as varied as their artistic visions. “This isn't a typical natural history museum exhibition,” remarks *Conversations* Guest Curator for the exhibition, Patrick Ela. “These works illustrate how artists and curators constantly seek new relationships, new insights and new meaning in their work. *Conversations* is sure to stimulate thought processes and change perceptions.”

The Exhibit

Using pieces from the Museum's collections, *Conversations* features six original installations and original sound created by award-winning sound designer Phyllis Ginter. Showcased next to each artwork are curator and artist statements about their experiences creating *Conversations*.

To complement the exhibit, Self Help Graphics & Art, the highly regarded visual arts center, has published a suite of silkscreen prints by five of the exhibition's visual artists. These special edition prints are on display in the Hallway Gallery at the Museum and are available for purchase exclusively through the Museum for the duration of the exhibit.

The Installations

From the inspiration of a single object to the exploration of its beauty, *Conversations* reveals the array of possible stories that can be told from the Museum's collections. The range of visual stories told in *Conversations* includes:

The Importance of Objects (The Natural History Museum Collection)

Kim Abeles' bird's-eye view of the Museum is a global interpretation of the Museum and its collections that includes specimens suggested by the curatorial staff. The sculpture also incorporates visual montages and video interviews with curators.

OPHIODERMA teres

Lita Albuquerque's exploration of scale as an essential part of creating meaning from the objects seen at the Museum. Her work is inspired by a tiny brittle starfish from the Museum's malacology collection.

Five Artists

Tony Berlant pays tribute to the Museum he loved as a child and the art of collecting. Berlant used First Phase Navajo Chiefs' Blankets and Prehistoric Chumash carvings from the Museum's collections, as well as 20th-century Arthur Sanger soapstone figurines and a Navajo Chief Blanket from his personal collection.

Untitled (Working Title)

Paul McCarthy carefully examines how a specimen – boat dioramas from the California history collection – can illuminate process. McCarthy's discovery became a springboard for exploring his artistic process and the Museum's exhibition process.

Bound and Gagged

Ed Moses explores the spiritual power of African and New Guinea totems and how/if that power changes when these objects are stored behind the scenes of the Museum.

Crustacea Oceana

John Valadez celebrates the delicate beauty of Crustacea, the ocean's architects.

First Fridays

Museum visitors can further experience *Conversations* first-hand through the Museum's public programming. An ongoing performance series held the first Friday of every month, "First Fridays" brings Museum exhibits to life after dark. A series of three evenings featuring dance, music, art, spoken word, poetry and discussion will be devoted to *Conversations*. The first, called "Art and Sol" – took place on Friday, February 4th as a celebration of the Museum's partnership with Self Help Graphics & Art. The second and third events will each feature discussions with three of the six *Conversations* artists and will take place on the following dates.

- Friday, March 4th – partnership with the Otis School of Design
- Friday, April 1st – partnership with MOCA

"First Fridays" are ticketed events that include admission to see *Conversations*. General admission is \$15 and \$14 for Museum members and students with I.D. "First Fridays" tickets are available online at www.nhm.org/FirstFridays or by phone at (866) 468-3399.

Natural Family Fun

Each month during the exhibit, parents and young children can participate in “Natural Family Fun,” *Conversations*-linked art activities, science experiments, storytelling and more, all held in the widely-popular Ralph M. Parsons Discovery Center. Free with Museum admission, these themed activities will take place on the following dates with corresponding themes:

- February 26th and 27th - Native American Discovery Days
- March 26th and 27th - Art Attack!
- April 17th - Beautiful Butterflies

The *Conversations* Continue...

Conversations is the latest innovative presentation to the public of the Museum’s collections. Additional *Conversations* exhibitions are planned, including collaborations among poets, musicians, the Museum, its curators and visitors alike. Each is designed to explore the many perspectives from which to view the Museum’s treasures – and share the array of stories they tell.

About the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

Founded in 1913, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County is the largest museum of natural and cultural history in the western United States. Its mission is to inspire wonder, discovery and responsibility for our natural and cultural worlds. The Museum’s world-class research and collections focus on objects and specimens relating to disciplines of history, anthropology, natural sciences, invertebrate and vertebrate zoology, and invertebrate and vertebrate paleontology.

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County is located at 900 Exposition Boulevard. The Museum is open seven days a week, 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays and 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekends and holidays. Admission is \$9 for adults, \$6.50 for children 5-12. For 24-hour Museum information please call (213) 763-DINO or visit the Museum’s website www.nhm.org.

###