

# NEWS

from the Worcester Art Museum

55 Salisbury Street, Worcester, MA 01609-3196  
Telephone 508.799.4406, Fax 508.798.5646

Allison Berkeley, x3073  
[allisonberkeley@worchesterart.org](mailto:allisonberkeley@worchesterart.org)

IMMEDIATE



**DIRECT FROM THE CARIBBEAN TO THE WORCESTER ART MUSEUM  
MI PUERTO RICO: MASTER PAINTERS OF THE ISLAND, 1780-1952**

**ON VIEW SUNDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2006 THROUGH SUNDAY, JANUARY 14, 2007**

(WORCESTER, Mass., August 2, 2006) – *Mi Puerto Rico: Master Painters of the Island, 1780-1952*, organized by the Museo de Arte de Ponce, is the first major exhibition in the continental United States devoted to Puerto Rico's three greatest masters: José Campeche, Francisco Oller, and Miguel Pou. The exhibition showcases select masterpieces from the Museo de Arte de Ponce's Permanent Collection and rarely seen paintings from private collections in Puerto Rico. Celebrating the art and artists of this Caribbean paradise, *Mi Puerto Rico* provides an extraordinary glimpse into the rich artistic heritage of this Commonwealth of the United States.

*Mi Puerto Rico* consists of forty two paintings including portraits, still lifes, landscapes, and genre scenes by José Campeche (1751-1809), Francisco Oller (1833-1917), and Miguel Pou (1880-1968). The exhibition explores how these three principal painters perceived and rendered their surroundings over the course of nearly two centuries. These works are particularly illuminating in the context of the Worcester Art Museum's important holdings of European and American paintings from the same periods, from aristocratic and colonial portraiture to impressionist landscapes.

Campeche was the official portrait painter of eighteenth-century Puerto Rico. His elegant, delicate, and refined renderings offer detailed testimony about the life of the ruling classes. Governors and their wives, officers of the garrison, bishops, and colonial officials commissioned him to paint their likenesses. Campeche was the son of a slave who had bought his freedom. Yet, from these inauspicious roots, Campeche became the best portrait painter in the Spanish America of his era and achieved an honored position within San Juan's ruling elite. Campeche did not limit his artistic talents to painting; he was also well known as an urban planner, architectural draftsman, musician, musical instrument craftsman as well as a fireworks maker. Because of his impressively broad range of talents, his mastery allowed him access to the pillars of Puerto Rican society: the Catholic Church, government, and the military.

The legacy of artistic excellence established by Campeche continued with Francisco Oller. Oller's paintings epitomized a new role for the artist, that of critic as well as chronicler of society. Oller studied abroad and brought back to Puerto Rico the new developments in painting heralded by the European avant-garde. He became an

abolitionist, as well. His formal education began with trips to Spain and France, where he resided for a number of years. The influence of the Spanish master painters is evident in the still lifes Oller later created. In contrast to the European flora and fauna depicted by the Spanish masters, Oller's works feature the fruit and vegetation of his homeland. In Paris, he joined the vanguard of Courbet and Manet and became close friends with Pissarro and Cézanne. Along with his peers, he embraced the precepts of Realism and Impressionism, artistic movements that were changing the face of painting in the West. In the landscapes he painted after returning to Puerto Rico, he sought to capture the Caribbean's atmosphere through its tropical light and its intense, variable skies. He did not restrict himself to a single manner of painting, but, in the mode of the times, chose the styles that best served his purposes.

Miguel Pou, on the other hand, liked to portray what the artist called "regional types." Pou studied in the United States at the Art Students League in New York and the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts, but his influences were the same ones that had been so important to his predecessor, Oller. He noted that he was indebted to the Impressionists for his sense of color; though in terms of subject matter, he wished to "reflect the soul of my people" and a way of life he feared was being "blown by the wind" of modernity. To this end, his best work was local, embracing the land, its people, and their customs.

***Mi Puerto Rico*** also includes several works by contemporaries of Oller and Pou. These artists were likewise inspired by the island's majestic landscape, and they portrayed its inhabitants and especially the abundance of the natural world as symbols of pride and authenticity.

The exhibition is organized by the Museo de Arte de Ponce—located in Ponce, Puerto Rico—whose permanent collection of 4,000 objects encompasses both European Old Masters and modern and contemporary Latin American art. Curators of the exhibition are Marimar Benítez, Director of the School of Fine Arts, San Juan, and Cheryl Hartup, Chief Curator of the Museo de Arte de Ponce. Marimar Benítez, a critic and art historian, has written extensively on the contemporary art of Puerto Rico and has previously organized exhibitions on José Campeche and Francisco Oller for the Museo de Arte de Ponce. She was also the curator of the Puerto Rico section of the Bronx Museum of the Arts' exhibition *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States 1920-1970*. Cheryl Hartup was curator at the Miami Art Museum, where she was part of the curatorial team that produced *Miami Currents: Linking Community and Collection* in 2002.

#### **EXHIBITION CREDIT LINE**

This exhibition was organized by The Museo de Arte de Ponce, in Ponce, Puerto Rico, and The Luis A. Ferré Foundation, Inc. The Worcester Art Museum presentation is supported in part by a grant from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

#### **CATALOGUE**

A 104-page soft-bound bilingual catalogue featuring full-color illustrations of all works in the exhibition will be published in conjunction with the exhibition. Geared to both general and scholarly audiences, the catalogue will

include a forward by Agustín Arteaga, Director of Museo de Arte de Ponce, essays by the curators of the exhibition, brief biographical information on the artists, and an exhibition checklist.

### **IMPORTANT DATES**

**Press Preview:** Friday, October 6, 2006/11:30 a.m./Worcester Art Museum/RSVP to Allison Berkeley, x3073 or [allisonberkeley@worcesterart.org](mailto:allisonberkeley@worcesterart.org). Tour the exhibition with WAM Director James Welu, Museo de Arte de Ponce Director Agustín Arteaga, and exhibition curators Mirimar Benitez and Cheryl Hartup.

**Opening Reception:** Saturday, October 7, 2006/7-10 p.m./RSVP to Special Events, x3105, 508.799.4406. Featuring music by Manolo Mairena and Curubande, as well as Annette and Ray of Salsa Storm. Food from the island, cash bar.

**Exhibition on view to the public:** Sunday, October 8, 2006 through Sunday, January 14, 2007

### **About the Worcester Art Museum**

The Worcester Art Museum, which opened to the public in 1898, is world-renowned for its 35,000-piece collection of paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, photography, prints, drawings and new media. The works span 5,000 years of art and culture, ranging from ancient Roman mosaics to Colonial silver, Impressionist paintings and contemporary art. Dedicated to the promotion of art and art education, the Museum offers a year-round studio art and art appreciation program that enrolls over 6,000 adult and youth students each year. Public tours are offered Saturdays at 11 a.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m., September through May. Audio tours are also available in English and Spanish.

Museum hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Third Thursday's of every month, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. (evening hours sponsored by Commerce Bank), and Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors and full-time college students with current ID, and FREE for Members and all youth 17 and under. Admission is also FREE for everyone on Saturday mornings, 10 a.m.-noon (sponsored by The TJX Companies, Inc. and National Grid). The Museum is located at 55 Salisbury St., Worcester, Mass., easily accessible from the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90), Route 290 and Route 9. Free parking is available near entrances on Salisbury, Lancaster and Tuckerman streets. For more information, call (508) 799-4406 or visit the Museum web site at [www.worcesterart.org](http://www.worcesterart.org).

# Mi Puerto Rico

Master Painters of the Island, 1780-1952

October 8, 2006 through January 14, 2007

## RELATED EVENTS & CLASSES

### EVENTS

#### **Preview Party**

Saturday, October 7, 2006/7-10 p.m./RSVP to Special Events, x3105, 508.799.4406. Featuring music by **Manolo Mairena** and **Curubande**, as well as **Annette and Ray of Salsa Storm**. Food from the island, cash bar. \$10 Museum members, \$20 nonmembers. RSVP by calling 508.799.4406, x3105. Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury St., Worcester [www.worcesterart.org](http://www.worcesterart.org)

#### **Curator Talk: Marimar Benitez, Guest Curator**

Sunday, October 8, 2 p.m.

Join *Mi Puerto Rico* Curator Marimar Benitez for an informative talk about three of Puerto Rico's leading master painters: José Campeche, Francisco Oller, and Miguel Pou, as well as the history of Puerto Rico from Spanish colonial times through World War II. In addition to co-curating this exhibition, Benitez is the Director of the Escuela de Artes Plásticas in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Free with Museum admission. **LOCATION: United Congregational Church, Institute Road.** [www.worcesterart.org](http://www.worcesterart.org)

#### **Family Day**

Sunday, November 19, 1-4:30 p.m.

Discover the art and culture of Puerto Rico at the Museum! Held in conjunction with the exhibition *Mi Puerto Rico: Master Painters of the Island, 1780-1952*, take part in this adventure for all ages through art-making activities, performances, and much more! Family Day is sponsored by Bank of America. Free with Museum admission. Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury St., Worcester [www.worcesterart.org](http://www.worcesterart.org)

#### **Gallery Talk: Community Perspectives: Puerto Rico**

Sunday, December 3, 2pm

Join members of the Worcester Puerto Rican community, Isa Bayon and José Masso, in exploring the exhibition *Mi Puerto Rico: Master Painters of the Island, 1780-1952*. This informal gallery talk will take place in the galleries, and will be a time for community to gather and reflect on memories of the island. Free with Museum admission. Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury St., Worcester [www.worcesterart.org](http://www.worcesterart.org)

#### **Audio Tour**

Delve into *Mi Puerto Rico: Master Painters of the Island, 1780-1952*, with a self-guided audio tour in Spanish or English. Available for rental at the Salisbury Street entrance in a choice of formats: CD (\$1) or iPod mini (\$3). Approximate time: 30 minutes. Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury St., Worcester [www.worcesterart.org](http://www.worcesterart.org)

### CLASSES

The Art of Salsa and More with Ray & Annette Gonzalez: 9/26-10/25 and 11/1-12/6, W 5:30-6:30 pm \$

Caribbean Medley with Maru Fuste, mixed media class, 9/26-10/24, T 6-8:30 pm \$

An Emerald in a Sea of Blue: The Art of Puerto Rico with Maru Fuste, 10/31-11/28, T 6-8:30 pm \$

Courting Esmeralda with poet and writer Adelle Leiblein, reading and writing class, 10/23-11/27, M 4-6 pm \$

Teachers Workshop: The Art & Culture of Puerto Rico, 10/8, 1-5pm \$

Space is limited; registration required. Call 508.799.4406, x3007 or 3129 for more information or to register; or visit us online. Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury St., Worcester [www.worcesterart.org](http://www.worcesterart.org).

Electronic images available.

**Editors:** Why typeset when you can copy and paste from the web? Find this release online at: <http://www.worcesterart.org/Information>