

Celebrating the Continuance of the Indigenous Caribbean Cultures

On March 22 and 23, 2003 over 900 people attended an historic two-day event held at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in New York City. Taino and Carib community members from the Caribbean were invited to participate in the museum's Expressive Culture Series program. Participants included: Dr. Jose Barreiro (*Taino*) representing Cuba, Prosper Paris (*Carib*) representing the island of Waitikubuli (Dominica), Nina M. R. Aponte (*Taino*) representing Boriken (Puerto Rico), Ricardo Bharath (*Carib*) representing Cairi (Trinidad) and Candida Peralta (*Taino*) representing Quisqueya (Dominican Republic).

The program was inspired by an exhibit titled "The New Old World, Living beyond the Myth" by photographer Marisol Villanueva, <http://www.americanindian.si.edu/exhibits/index.html>. **(Click on New Old world on line)**. This exhibit focused on surviving Taino and Carib communities in the Caribbean. Most of the participants were featured in the exhibit themselves. The program commenced with a curatorial lecture by Marisol Villanueva and Dr. Jose Barreiro who represented the community of Caridad de los Indios in Cuba (community chief, Don Panchito Ramirez, was unable to attend due to an illness). Later that afternoon community representatives sat in five different tables set up in the museum's rotunda area. Each table had objects from the communities being represented.

Museum visitors and staff were able to have informal dialogue and interaction with our guests. Our staff learned many new things about contemporary Carib and Taino life ways. For some visitors it was the first time they had ever heard of Taino or Carib survival in the Caribbean. For many others it was a get-together with their island relatives. There are many people of both Taino and Carib descent in the New York area. Community members of the Taino Nation were present as were representatives of the Garifuna people, also known as the Black Carib. There were also Taino family group members such as Maisti Yucayeque Taino, Taino del Norte, T.A.L.K, Tanama and Guajataca, etc.

Dr. Jose Barreiro's table had literature on the Cuban Indian experience. Working along with Jose were his Jimaguas (twin boys), who enjoyed themselves immensely selling books authored by their father. When I asked them what they would do with their earnings, they jokingly replied: "This is for dads retirement fund"!

On the next table sat Nina M.R. Aponte, who despite feeling ill, shared with the public her beautiful necklaces, made from Indigenous seeds found in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Nina was delightful and very helpful with other participants who did not speak English. Nina has done workshops in Puerto Rico on casabe bread making and Taino identity.

Prosper Paris's table had all kinds Carib Indian woven baskets, woven fans, toy canoes and Carib music CDs from the Island of Dominica. Prosper was very friendly with museum guests and the museum staff were very impressed with him. Prosper is very active in his community and works as an eco-tour guide.

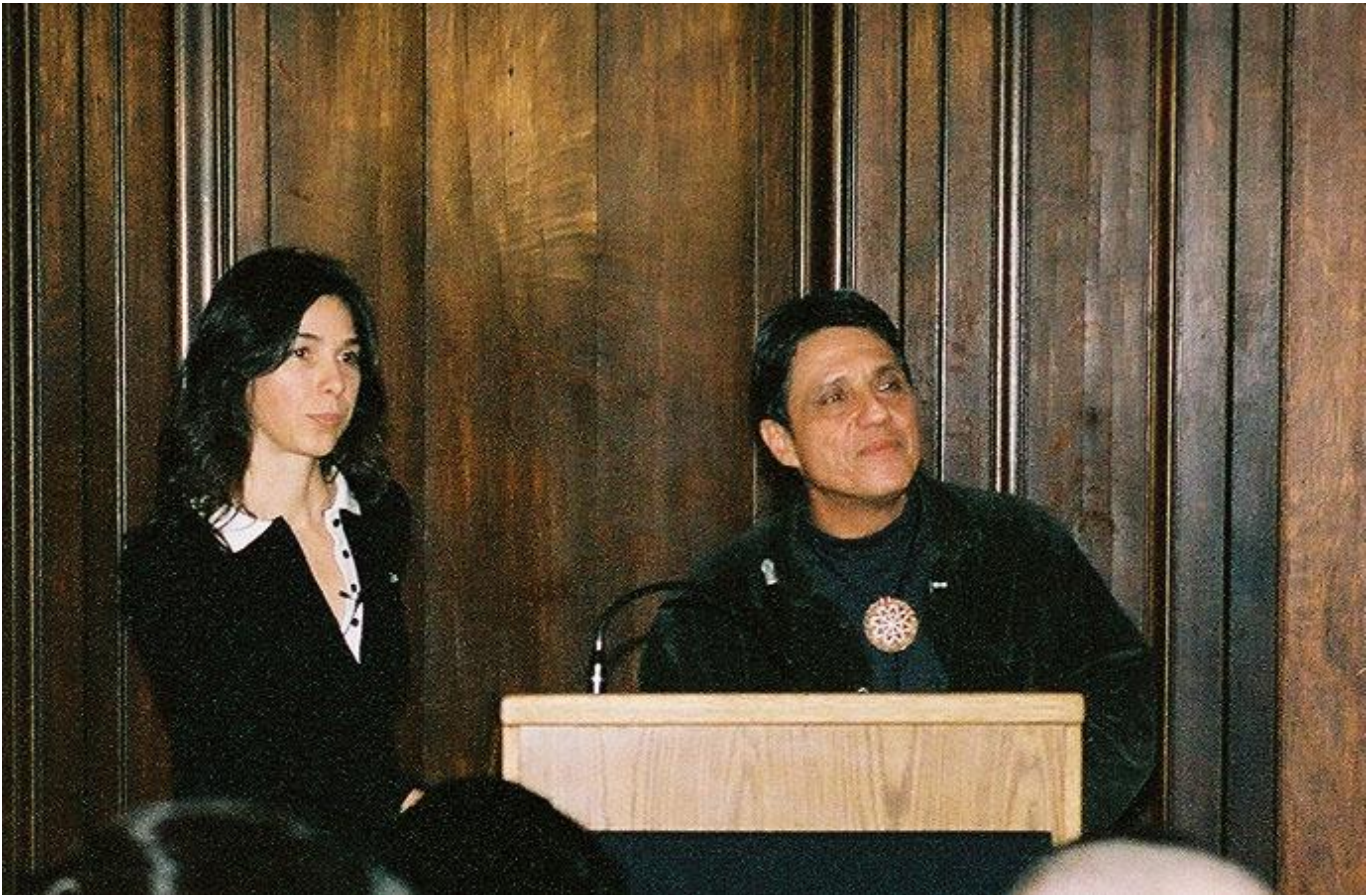
Ricardo Bharath Chief of the Santa Rosa Carib community in Trinidad had the most intricate, woven baskets on display. Ricardo also brought casabe bread from his community to share with the public.

Candida Castillo de Peralta who hails from the Cibao region of the Dominican Republic brought casabe making utensils as well as different kinds of casabe bread products made from the yuca (manioc). Ricardo Bharath was very impressed with her casabe as was she, of his and Prosper Paris's baskets. Candida also received seed necklaces from Nina Aponte. The spirit of sharing and giving was particularly contagious this day. It was indeed a very good thing to see. Afterward, Marisol Villanueva, who worked meticulously on her "New Old World" exhibit, gave a tour that concluded the event.

For me this was the culmination of 3 years work. Although I have been doing Public Programs at the Smithsonian for 8 years now, I had no idea how hard it was to get an exhibit off the ground and could not have accomplished this without the support of my supervisor Shawn Termin (Lakota) and Education Manager,

Johanna Gorelick, who were both phenomenal. To have Taino and Carib people together in one space, sharing stories and comparing the cultures of our peoples and homelands was a dream come true for me.

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Marisol Villanueva photographer of the New Old World exhibit, and Dr. Jose Barreiro during lecture at the NMAI.



Jimaguas (twins) Thomas and Phillip Barreiro with customer



Nina Aponte (1st from left) showing her arts & crafts.



Prosper Paris (right) showing staff member Juanita Velasco (Ixil Maya) his crafts.



Ricardo Bharath (right) and David Kahian Campos (Taino) .



Candida Peralta (center), with Wakonax (left), of the Taino Nation & Guraguaorix (right) f the Maisiti.