

Highlights

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The Voice of the Taíno People®

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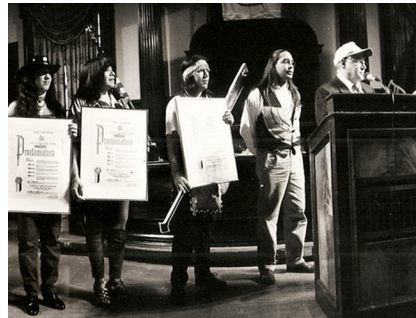
Taíno Leaders Sign Historic Declaration at New York's City Hall

NEW YORK, NY - On March 27th 1998, Taíno Leaders representing Caribbean and North American Indigenous Taíno organizations gathered for an inauguration ceremony and the official signing of the Declaration of the United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP). The historic event took place in the Council Chambers at New York's City Hall. This was made possible through the cooperation of the Honorable City Councilman, Jose Rivera.

At the commencement, UCTP Spokesman and Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Roberto Múcaro Borrero, called for a moment of silence dedicated to the struggles of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

Tabanuco, the sacred Taíno incense filled the City Council Chambers with an ancient mist. In his opening remarks, Mr. Borrero explained that with the establishment of the Confederation, Tainos, the descendants of the first "Native Americans" who greeted Christopher Columbus in 1492, can now present a unified voice to address the many issues which concern contemporary Taíno People.

Some of these issues include the correction of past misconceptions about the Taíno, the repatriation of Taíno ancestral remains, religious intolerance, cultural exploitation, and the promotion of new dialogue between Taíno People and the international, national and local communities.



Mr. Borrero highlighted a few precedent setting events which have occurred within the Taíno Community over the last 10 years such as the inclusion of Taíno People in the decision making process, as consultants in museum exhibits and film documentaries, the reestablishment of communications between inter-island Taíno groups, and Taíno representation at the United Nations and other diplomatic and academic forums.

In a dynamic presentation, the Honorable Councilman Jose Rivera acknowledged the historic significance of this event 500 years after the arrival of Columbus and 100 years after the United States invasion of Puerto Rico. In recognizing the groups and individuals that were responsible for the establishment of the UCTP, Councilman Rivera presented an official Proclamation, designating the 27th of March as the United Confederation of Taíno People Day in New York City. A copy of the Proclamation was given to representatives of each group present.

Following the introductions and statements by representatives of UCTP member organizations, the group proceeded to sign the Declaration of the United Confederation of Taíno People.

The Declaration, in its preamble begins with "We, the Taíno People" and contains eight articles whose provisions seek to protect, defend and preserve Taíno cultural heritage and Spiritual tradition, while establishing basic guidelines for organizational structure, process and accountability.

Taíno Declaration story continues on pg. 2

Taino Declaration cont. from pg 1

The organizations now forming part of the UCTP include; from the United States: Jatibonuco Tribal Council, Presencia Taina, Maisiti Yucayeke Taino, Taino Inter-Tribal Council, Caney Spiritual Circle, Baramaya, Taino Ancestral Legacy Keepers, Cacibajagua; from Borikén: Consejo General de Tainos Boricanos and the Caney Quinto Mundo; and from Quisqueya: Fundacion Social Luz Cosmica Fraternalista Taina.

Acknowledgments of special guest included Ms. Esmeralda V. Brown, Chairperson of the NGO Committee on the United Nations International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples. Also showing support for the UCTP were representatives of local Native American groups like the Northeastern Native American Association and the Native American Correctional Indian Society. Other organizations represented in attendance were the Wittenberg Center for Alternative Resources, the Tribal Link Foundation, and the Rajkumari Cultural Center.

The program closed with the participants singing a Taíno ceremonial song dedicated to Attabeira (Mother Earth) and a reception featuring traditional Taíno foods followed. ●

The Voice of Mother Earth Gathering and Conference

NEW YORK, NY - The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) was host to an historic gathering and conference of Native Peoples on March 28th, 1998. The conference entitled "Voice of Mother Earth," featured Indigenous Elders and Community Leaders from North and South America and the Caribbean to discuss the role of Native Women within their perspective communities.

This event, held in observance of Women's History Month, was

presented by UCTP member organization, Presencia Taina and the Long Island Native American Task Force, in association with the NMAI. Directors Vanessa Inarunikia (PT) and Aurelia Lucia Henriquez (LNATF) organized and co-moderated the presentations and activities. Conference speakers included Harriet and Lance Gumbs (Shinecock), Lorraine Canoe Mohawk), Sunshine Eagle (Quechua), Marguerite Smith (Shinecock), Maria Manati Robles (Taíno), Melvin Betsellie (Navajo), Roberto Múcaro Borrero (Taíno) and Elba Anaca Lugo (Taíno). Ms. Lugo, who is the President of the General Council of Tainos Boricanos was in New York not only to participate in this conference but to represent the Council at the historic UCTP Signatory Ceremony at City Hall.



The program also included powerful musical presentations by the Young Blood Singers and the Drum Circle Singers. Sylvia Guariche-Coa Benitez (Taíno), Lizzy Sarobey Craino) and Barbara Nanche Marengo (Taíno) of Cacibajagua accompanied Roberto Múcaro Borrero in a song dedicated to Attabeira, the sacred Taíno Earth and Water Mother. Sandra Roldan also gave a moving version of her song dedicated to Indigenous Women, "India Nativa."

Presentations covered topics such as the matriarchal organization of Iroquois society, maintaining a balance between traditional and contemporary life, and the feminine energy which permeates every aspect of the Taíno universe. Shinecock Elder, Harriet Gumbs spoke of her youth and the changes that she has seen occur on

the reservation for her people. Melvin Betsellie (Navajo) spoke of need for women and men to work together on a spiritual level to protect not only their heritage but the environment.

The day long event was enthusiastically received by both natives and non-natives, who filled the conference room to capacity.

The positive interaction from the audience reflected the desire for this type of dialogue. It is interesting to note that a majority of questions were directed toward the Taino representatives, displaying a genuine public interest in the Caribbean Indigenous Peoples Movement.

The program which opened with a prayer by Melvin Betsellie and Maria Manati Robles, closed in the same manner. The conference was felt by the participants and the audience alike, to be an overall success and all looked forward to gathering again next year.

Indigenous Gathering of the Americas held in Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO- A conference entitled "Indigenous Encounter of the Americas" was held March 16-20, 1998 in San Juan, Puerto Rico and was organized by the Center for Indigenous Studies of the Americas (CISA) and the University of Puerto Rico. This conference, according to its press releases, sought to bring together Indigenous representatives from throughout the Americas to address cultural issues, topics like intellectual property rights, human rights, natural habitat destruction, diversity and natural medicine. Activities scheduled throughout the event included tours, panel presentations, performances, and spiritual ceremonies.

Story continues on pg.2



Indigenous Gathering of the Americas held in Puerto Rico
(Cont. from pg.2)

Although a few Taíno people were extended last minute invitations to the conference, these invitations unfortunately proved only to be a form of tokenism. In an article which appeared in the San Juan Star three days before the event, Cheile Zarate Vargas, public relations coordinator of the CISA declared, "...in Puerto Rico, there are not indigenous people any longer."

Mr. Ramon Nenadich, CISA Director, supported Ms. Vargas' statement, continuously relating this same position to the visiting Indigenous delegates.

On hand to witness the event, UCTP spokesperson, Mr. Roberto Mucaro Borrero, noted "the fact that Taíno participation throughout this conference was so isolated and obviously manipulated by the organizers, is unfortunately representative of the discrimination, oppression and intolerance still perpetuated against contemporary Taíno descendants in Puerto Rico and throughout the Caribbean."

Local Taíno representatives, like Nanki Reyes Ocasio were especially concerned that native people could come from other lands and perform spiritual ceremonies without consulting with the island's Indigenous residents.



Kalinago Carib Chief Hillary Fredricks, Elba Anaka Lugo of the Consejo General de Tainos Borincanos, and UCTP rep. Roberto Mucaro Borrero in Puerto Rico.

Despite the local concerns, and displaying the commitment of the Taíno community to the solidarity of Indigenous Peoples, positive dialogue and interaction did occur between the visiting Indigenous delegates and the representatives of the General Council of Tainos Borincanos.

As lessons can be learned from every situation, this conference revealed not only the importance of Indigenous Peoples being directly involved in the organization of all activities which concern them but the urgent need for a new dialogue to begin between the native people of Puerto Rico and the present academic establishment. ●

Taíno Activist Gains Return of Ancient Artifacts

ADUJUNTAS, PUERTO RICO - In the mountainous interior of the island of Boriken (Puerto Rico) there stands a beautiful tribute to the hard work of an individual and a community who's vision of repatriation has come to pass. In **Samuel Maracuto Nunez's** 'front yard,' an ancient Taíno Batey or ceremonial plaza has been restored and can now be visited by the general public.



Mr. Nunez, a member of the General Council of Tainos Borincanos, along with other concerned community residents, led the successful struggle to gain the return of the ancient monolithic stones that had once lined this plaza

which was used by his ancestors so long ago.

The Batey was first discovered in 1978 and because of mining activities in the area, the stones were taken to the Catholic University of Puerto Rico. Twenty years after their removal, the return of the stones was made possible by a collaborative effort of the Department of Natural Resources and Casa Pueblo, a community based environmental group which has been struggling the last 15 years against mining activities in the area.

Under the guidance of the archeologist, Pedro Alvarado, the stones have actually been replaced in the same location where they stood so proudly in ancient times.

In a private ceremony, members of the General Council of Tainos Borincanos gathered on the sacred grounds to honor the return of the stones and the restoration of the plaza.

In an emotional presentation, Council Member, **Pablo Haguey Rosario**, stated to the children present that this was their Batey and it was up to them to care for and protect it from now on. Future plans for the area, include a proposed initiative by the University of Puerto Rico which is to include an environmental center, reforestation, and a publication about the archeological site. ●



IMPORTANT UCTP NOTICE: Are you being counted among your Nation? If you are a Taíno, Carib or Arawak and would like information on the **UCTP Taíno Population Census and Tribal Registration Program**, please visit our award winning web portal www.uctp.org or write to our postal address in New York.

Taino Poetry

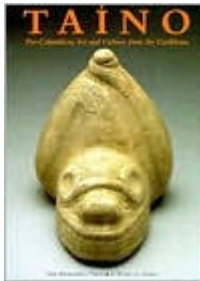
Two Roads

by: Edward Lebron (Taíno)

"As I Traveled Distant Lands,
I Saw Many Forms Before Me,
The Mark of the Sun Was
Always There,
I Slowly Hid My Fears,
Shall I Lead Them Into
Righteousness,
Will It Be Another Life That
They Seek,
Onward I Will Struggle,
To See If I am Worthy"



BOOK REVIEW



TAÍNO: Pre-Colombian Art and Culture from the Caribbean

El Museo del Barrio/The Monacelli Press
ISBN # 1-88525~82-2 \ \$35.00

Review by Melanio Gonzalez: This lavishly illustrated book is comprised of a series of essays written by some of the most highly respected scholars working in the field of Taíno studies.

The book concentrates on personal artistic expression to illustrate various aspects of our ancestral life ways. Beginning with an overview of the general aspects of Pre-Columbian

Caribbean history, it proceeds smoothly into a detailed study, through art, of our People.

Each essay focuses intently on its particular subject matter and expands greatly on previously known material. While reading the book, I sensed what seemed to me to be an increased sensitivity towards our People and the Spirituality which permeated every aspect of our life ways.

To me, every essay seems to be written with respect, not only towards the medicine objects which are depicted throughout the book, but also to our ancestors and to us, their living descendents.

Throughout the book, newly recognized truths about the way our ancestors conceptualized our universe, through their art, is included and detailed. For the artist, sharp, clear photographs and detailed line drawings are an excellent resource to further their own work. Historically, the text provides a thorough, in depth study that should be considered one of the most accurate to date.

In my opinion, those who seek some insight into the Spirituality of the works created by our Grandmothers and Grandfathers, this volume can be considered a revelation because it would appear that the scholars actually took the time to ask some of us the right questions and they listened! Of course there are some flaws. The jacket liner of the book speaks of our [Taíno] disappearance, the use of the word Zemi instead of Cemi, and statements concerning our sacred Cohoba Ceremony using phrases like "hallucinogenic drug trances" - make it clear that there is still some educating to be accomplished in regards to the academic world.

This book has something for everyone; historians, artists, the casual readers, and the self-professed know-it-alls alike. It is concise and easy to read, that it is not an archeological or anthropological treatise in any sense

of the word. Taken as a whole, the Taíno community should be proud that at last a more accurate portrayal of our ancestors and their life way finally made it to print. Throwing away the comment in the jacket liner, the authors of the essays do not mention even once the words extermination or extinction. Indeed Professor Jose Juan Arrom states:

"Elsewhere I have shown that the Tainos were not exterminated. There were survivors of the great decimation.. and after contact these survivors transmitted not only their genes, but also the principal achievements of their culture."

I recommend this book to all. ●

Melanio Gonzalez Xeti Aon Coyabey, is an artist and historian, and the Co-Director of UCTP member organization CACIBAJAGUA. He currently resides in Meridan, CT. with his wife and children.

Rethinking Taíno

elMUSEOdelbarrio

The Cultural Politics of the Use of Their Legacy and Imagery

NEW YORK - On February 28th 1998, a symposium entitled "Rethinking Taíno: The Cultural Politics of the Use of their Legacy and Imagery" took place at El Museo del Barrio. In conjunction with the exhibition: *Taíno Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, this panel sought to explore the historical role of the Taíno as a symbol of national identity and its continued use as an important political and cultural symbol for the contemporary Caribbean.

Story continues on pg. 5



Rethinking Taíno

(Cont. from pg. 4)

Panelists included Dr. Arlene Davila, Syracuse University, Dr. Jorge Duany, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Dr. Miriam Jimenez, Independent Scholar and Dr. Peter Roberts, University of the West Indies at Cave Hill. Dr. Davila who was the session chair, opened the presentations with her paper entitled 'Local/Diasporic Tainos: Towards a Cultural Politics of Memory, Reality, and Imagery'.

Dr. Davila's paper, which was by far the best researched, gave an overview of the use of Taíno imagery and symbolism among Puerto Ricans within and out of the Island. She also noted that historically, this symbolism has only been promoted in the context of a "lost heritage" - intent on creating the myth of the harmonious merging of three races in Puerto Rico.

Dr. Davila was also acknowledged by a Taíno in the audience for being the only panel speaker to actually contact and interview Taíno People for her paper.

While the academic credentials of the other presenters were impressive, the subject matter explored in their papers seemed to follow the same tired theories and stereotypes that contemporary Taíno activist have been working so hard to change.

These papers included catchy titles like: "Making Indians Out of Blacks - The revitalization of Taíno Identity in Contemporary Puerto Rico," "The Indians are Coming," and "What's in a name, an Indian Name?". These presentations seemed to transmit a hostile, anti-Taíno sentiment which was sensed by quite a number of people in the audience.

Although this symposium was probably one of the more emotionally charged that had been presented at El Museo del Barrio, the panel did succeed in highlighting the gap between the perspectives of reality of

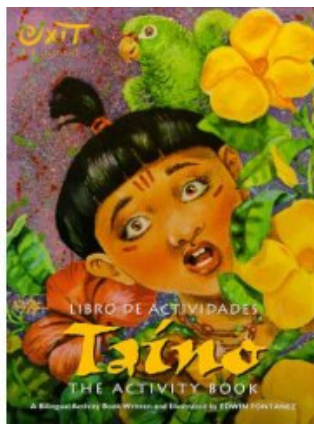
the so-called 'Taino' scholars, Taíno descendants and the general public.

Taíno organizations with representatives in attendance included: Consejo General de Tainos Borincanos, Presencia Taina, Maisiti Yucayeke Taíno, and Cacibajagua. The event was recorded on video by War Party Productions. •

Taino Guanin's Story

Video Review

by: *Pedro Guanikeyu Torres*



A Video: Story and Illustrations

by: *Edwin Fontanez*

Music by Jose Gonzalez, Color VHS, 20 minutes available as a companion to the video - TAINO: THE ACTIVITY BOOK.

I begin this video review with a quote by the author Mr. Edwin Fontanez:

"A beautiful, heartfelt tale of a boy who witnessed an event that would change his world forever! Take a fascinating glimpse into the lives of the native people of Puerto Rico, the Tainos. Through the adventures of Guanin and his parrot Tabite, you'll discover the magic of this tropical paradise as it was before the Encounter."

While viewing this enjoyable, elementary school level video on our Taíno cultural heritage, one first gets the impression that, she or he is dealing with a new and refreshing

view of Taíno people. Yet one finds at the end of this video the same foolish and unfounded nonsense of a Spanish colonial Taíno extinction story.

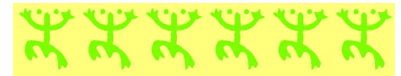
This "book on video" fails to deal with the truth and common reality that the Taíno People of the Antilles have never been extinct as an ethnic group or a race. The video's ending statement simply leaves the viewing audience, teachers and students alike, in a state of shock and total dismay.

The companion book "Taíno: The Activity Book," that is provided with the video has a word list or glossary of Taíno terms that needs a more serious research effort. I have found some incorrect vocabulary words and spelling errors within the "Taíno Glossary."

Overall, this is good video but it is lacking in the insight relevant to an indigenous reality of the Taíno people of today. My candid suggestion would be to have the author correct the errors or have this video removed from all school shelves and all libraries as it perpetuates a very biased perspective. Can our Taíno children or the general public, afford yet another misguided teaching regarding our past and contemporary Taíno heritage and history? I have personally contacted the author, Mr. Edwin Fontanez via telephone and have humbly requested that he make a retraction to the ending statement concerning the extinction of our People. To this date and to my knowledge, he has not contacted any Taíno organization with regard to this matter. •

Pedro Guanikeyu Torres is an historian and elder of the Jatibonico Tribal Council.

This Review appears courtesy of the Taíno National Library & Museum Project of the Taíno Inter-Tribal Council (ITTC). ITTC is a UCTP member organization.



Taino Survival on Video?

elMUSEOdelbarrio

NEW YORK, NY - On Saturday, April 7th 1998, a panel discussion entitled "Taíno Survival? On Video" was held at El Museo del Barrio in New York City. Presenters included; Mr. Taino Almestica and Mr. Gypsie Running Cloud, Mr. Jorge Estevez and Dr. Jose Barreiro. Ms. Fatima Bercht, El Museo's Curator, was the panel moderator. The panelist presented fifteen minute portions of their videos. They also discussed how they felt their choice of visual medium contributes toward the understanding of Taíno survival.

After introductions, the first presenter was Dr. Jose Barreiro, who co-produced *Taino Indigenous Survival in Cuba*. Dr. Barreiro's video highlighted Taino cultural survival in *Guajiro* (rural) folk of the Oriente (eastern) Province of Cuba. The main focus was the existence of an extended family of contemporary Taíno people who are working to revitalize their ancestral culture in the region. The family head, Franciso "Panchito" Ramirez was interviewed and his clan displayed dances and songs.

When asked why he made the video, Barreiro responded, "video is a way to record reality because despite the extinction story, the people of this region have been well documented over the last hundred years.

Mr. Jorge Estevez, producer of *De Donde Soy Yo*, expressed a similar concern about recording reality and the tradition of the campo (rural life). The video, dedicated to and featuring his mother and grandmother, gave a perspective of Taíno cultural survival from the Dominican Republic. Ms. Luz Patria Estevez displayed the traditional way to prepare *yuca*, and she gave an overview of Taíno oral traditions, and vocabulary words still

used from pre-Columbian times. Mr. Estevez, encouraged all to record their family traditions.

Mr. Taino Aimestica and Mr. Gypsie Running Cloud, the co-producers of *An Indigenous Bootleg Network*, presented excerpts from three programs focusing on different aspects of contemporary Taíno expression in the United States and Puerto Rico. Their video featured an interview with Taíno artisan, Melanio Gonzalez, and his choice of adapting the Navajo medium of sand painting to express Taíno art. The second clip focused on Taíno Poets like Ms. Magda Martas who gave a moving version of her work. The final clip featured a sojourn to the island of Borikén which ended highlighting the Taíno inspired art work of Miguel Guzinan. The producers noted the importance of keeping tradition and they reminded the audience that in Puerto Rico the term "Indian" is still generally seen as derogatory.

Although the presentations were informative, public attendance was extremely poor in comparison to past Taíno related events held at El Museo. This was most likely due to the lack of advertisement of this program - unfortunate as this was apparently the last component of the Taíno Exhibition.

Taíno organizations with representatives in attendance included: UCTP member organizations; Consejo General de Tainos Borincanos, Cacibajagua, Presencia Taina, and Baramaya. Representatives of the Nacion Taina de las Antillas organization were also present.

The exhibition *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, which has run since September 1997, has now closed. ●



ART REVIEW

Honoring the Memory of Itiba Cahubaba

Kenkeleba Gallery
214 East 2nd St., NY, NY
(212) 674-3939



Yamaye Artist Michael Auld

NEW YORK, NEW YORK - April 18th 1998, saw the closing of a major New York sculpture exhibit, by Jamaican Artist, Michael Auld. This exhibit which Mr. Auld dedicated to his Yamaye Taíno (Jamaican) Grandmother, Verena Squire Campell, sought to set the record straight in its use of Indigenous American imagery, legends, philosophy and aesthetics, in the portrayal of history from the Taíno and Carib point of view.

While viewing this exhibit, one could not help but to be transported back in time, to the most elaborate expressions that were offered by the Indigenous Caribbean Civilizations. Mr. Auld's provocative work, combining hard and soft natural elements and modern technology, presents a tantalizing, truly Caribbean sculptural aesthetic.

Mr. Auld has dedicated over 15 years to the investigation of his roots and culture and it shows. This exhibition, which includes powerful installation with his wife, Native American Artist, Rose Powhatan, is expected to soon arrive in Boston, Massachusetts. Don't miss it. ●

Letters of Support

Readers Write:

It pleases my heart, mind and soul to know that I am now able to learn from great people and it is an honor to correspond with each and everyone of you. I feel that at last I have the chance to give my life depth with the purposes I've always dreamt of. Thanks for being there for our people.

Edward Lebron, Rome, NY

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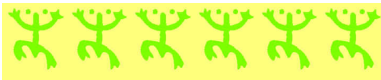
I am fascinated almost fanatically about the emergence of [the Confederation]. I am anxious to know more regarding our movement At last I know who I am. I am not a European or an African But I have a place equal to them.

Jose Antonio Ramos, Jamaica, NY

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Thank you for the newsletters... they were very informative! ...I can hardly wait to receive the next newsletter... may YaYa Bless, Guide, Heal, Protect and Sustain you all, now and always!

Joanna S. Avilez, Reading, Pa



TAÍNO SYMBOLS



frog - coquí



snail - caracol



sun - sol



baby - niño



Ancient Taíno News Journal
— Hayuya, Borikén

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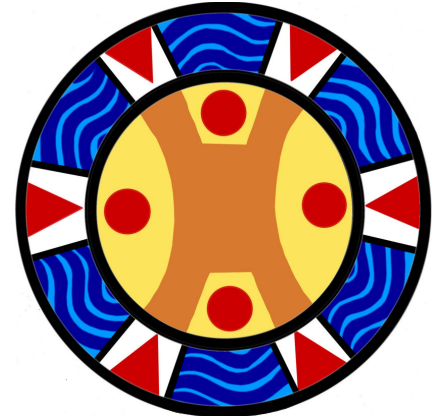
Editor's Note: The staff at 'the Voice' looks forward to hearing from all of you, and we thank you for your comments, suggestions, and inquires. To submit items to the **Community Bulletin Board**, please email your request to la_voz_taino@yahoo.com

Delegation

**American Indian Community House Gallery/Museum
708 Broadway, NY, NY (212)
598-0100**

April 17th through June 28th 1998

This exhibit, featuring the work of Tyler Medicine Horse (Crow) and Susan Stewart-Medicine Horse (Blackfeet/Crow), is a can't miss, creative and dynamic installation that will appeal to your senses. Utilizing natural objects in a comfortable posture, these pieces formulate the existential spiritual language of this delegation. The balance between colors, textures and sizes harmonizes the solemn silence this work commands. The ancestral homage profiling neighboring Indigenous Nations offers a candid perception, stylizing a benefit to the American dream. ●



Created for the UCTP in 1998 by artist Marie Crooke, the UCTP logo represents our people reaching out across the waters to all the other islands or lands where you can find our relatives. ♥

Announcements and Calendar of Events

♦ The First Taíno and Native American Veterans Health Fair

Date: May 16, 1998
Location: Bronx VA Medical Center
Tel: (718) 579-1614

♦ In the Spirit of Unity, Areito/Pow-Wow

Date: August 22-23, 1998
Location: Sec. 4&3 Orchard Beach
Tel: (917) 895-9633
(917) 649-7226
(917) 946-3658

♦ The National Puerto Rican Day Parade

Date: June 14, 1998
Location: 5th Avenue, Manhattan
Tel: (212) 534-6004

♦ Salude de Las Americas Festival

Date: June 13, 1998
Location: 630 Jackson Ave., Bronx
Tel: (718) 402-2800, ext.323

♦ 3rd Annual Long Island Native American Task Force Pow-Wow

Date: August 15-16, 1998
Location: Main St. School, Setauket LI

♦ 18th Annual Paumanauke Pow-Wow

Date: August 8-9, 1998
Location: Tanner Park, Copiague, LI



THE VOICE OF THE TAÍNO PEOPLE

**c/o United Confederation of Taíno People
Office of International Relations and Regional Coordination
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