



May 19, 2009

**Media only:** Eileen Maxwell (202) 633-6615  
Leonda Levchuk (202) 633-6613

**Media Web site:** <http://newsdesk.si.edu>

## **“Ramp It Up: Skateboard Culture in Native America” Opens at the National Museum of the American Indian**

The Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian will open “Ramp It Up: Skateboard Culture in Native America” Friday, June 12, in the Sealaska Gallery. One of the most popular sports on Indian reservations, skateboarding has inspired and influenced American Indian and Native Hawaiian communities since the 1960s. The exhibition celebrates the vibrancy, creativity and controversy of American Indian skate culture and will be on view through Sept. 13.

The exhibition includes 28 objects and 45 images, including rare archival photographs, film of Native skaters and skate decks from Native companies and contemporary artists. Highlights include a never-before-seen 1969 photograph taken by skateboarding icon, Craig R. Stecyk III, of a skate deck depicting traditional Native imagery and 1973 home-movie footage of Zephyr surf team members Ricky and Jimmy Tavarez (Gabrielino-Tongva).

“The museum is eager to show how Indian Country has embraced and changed skateboard culture in America. The exhibition honors tribal communities’ efforts to connect with their young people through a positive activity like skateboarding,” said Kevin Gover (Pawnee/Comanche) director of the National Museum of the American Indian. “It is a vibrant visual documentation of an emerging culture unique to Native American youth.”

The exhibition features the work of visual artists Bunky Echo-Hawk (Yakama/Pawnee), Joe Yazzie (Navajo), Traci Rabbit (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma) and Dustinn Craig (White Mountain Apache/Navajo) and highlights young Native skaters such as 20-year-old Bryant Chapo (Navajo) and 10-year-old Augustin and 7-year-old Armondo Lerma (Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians).

As skateboarding continues to rise in popularity in Indian Country, Native skaters and entrepreneurs have combined core lessons learned from the sport: strength, balance and tenacity with traditional tribal iconography and contemporary art to engage Native youth in their history and culture. “Ramp It Up” examines the role of indigenous peoples in skateboarding culture, its roots in

ancient Hawaiian surfing techniques and the visionary achievements of contemporary Native skaters. Skateboarding combines demanding physical exertion, design, graphic art, filmmaking and music to produce a unique and dynamic culture. “Ramp It Up” illustrates how indigenous people and tribal communities have used skateboarding to express themselves and educate their youth.

# # #