

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **House of the Americas Turns 100: Paul Philippe Cret and the Architecture of Dialogue**

### **An exhibition on the Organization of American States (OAS) Headquarters Building**

On view April 29-July 3, 2010

Art Museum of the Americas

201 18th Street, NW

Washington, DC 20006

One hundred years ago, on April 26, 1910, President William H. Taft, along with hemispheric leaders, dedicated the House of the Americas, a building which represents the regional cooperative work improving the lives of the peoples in the Americas. This magnificent building, which houses the headquarters of the Organization of American States (OAS), was built with generous funding from Andrew Carnegie and has become one of his most notable public gifts. The building's architecture represents the Organization's objective of promoting peace, democracy, human rights, security, and development.

To commemorate the Centennial of the building, the OAS Art Museum of the Americas announces the opening of House of the Americas Turns 100: Paul Philippe Cret and the Architecture of Dialogue an exhibition with a collection of original plans and drawings by its architect, Paul Philippe Cret. Blue-prints and sketches that have never before been displayed in Washington, DC will show how the building was conceived in the spirit of promoting hemispheric cooperation.

Curated by architectural historian and writer Tom Mellins and designed by Pure+Applied, the exhibition— which begins in the main OAS building and continues in the Museum—provides an introduction to Cret and his travels to South America, where he derived inspiration for his use of interior detail and color within the building. It features a number of original artifacts, including one of the American Competitions T-Square portfolios that documented all of the entries for the competition for the design of the main OAS building (formerly the Pan-American Union Building and also known as the 'House of the Americas').

The exhibition will display numerous large-scale images of Cret's submission, a large model constructed specifically for the exhibition by Catholic University students, as well as a time-lapse sequence of the building being completed. The exhibition also includes archival photographs of the building, historic images of the architect, original travel sketchbooks, drawings (including elevations and plans), and

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original furniture.

The House of the Americas presents a series of dialogues- between function and aesthetic, artifice and nature, and between the Classical architecture that can be found in much of Washington and traditions of Latin America, both ancient and colonial. For Cret, there was elasticity in Classicism, one that was malleable to more contemporary and global styles. The seeds of this notion were planted during his time studying at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, the prestigious and influential art institution that endorsed the fusion of Modern French and Classical forms of architecture.

According to Mellins, “Cret’s winning design rejected the imposing colonnades and domes that were hallmarks of many of the other entries, in favor of a design that emphasized the social and diplomatic activities to be housed by making the building resemble a *salon de fête*, or grand private residence. The program encouraged the incorporation of ‘the Spanish or Latin feature of a patio.’ Cret’s interpretation of this element, lushly landscaped with tropical plants and protected by a retractable roof, ultimately included...Aztec motifs and a fountain designed by the sculptor Gertrude Whitney.”

A French-American architect and industrial designer, Paul Philippe Cret was born in Lyon. He began to practice in the U.S. in 1907, his first major project being the House of the Americas. Considered an architectural wonder of its time, Cret designed the building with Albert Kelsey as an architectural symbol of the unity of the hemisphere by combining the major cultural influences from Organization’s Member States, including Spanish-Colonial, Native American, French, Portuguese and English.

Cret went on to build war memorials, civic buildings, court houses and other official structures. Known for his Beaux-Arts style, infused with monumental classical traditions, Cret’s most famous projects include the Rodin Museum and the Benjamin Franklin Bridge in Philadelphia and the Federal Reserve in Washington, D.C.

This exhibit will also set the platform for the launching of a Master Plan for the renovation and improvement of the OAS Historic Building Complex.

A press preview and gallery talk is scheduled for Wednesday, April 28 at 12 noon at the Museum. Additional public programs will be announced on the Museum’s webpage.

The museum is located at 201 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20006 and it is open to the public Tuesdays to Sundays from 10 am until 5 pm. The museum is closed on Federal holidays. For more information about the museum, visit the website [www.museum.oas.org](http://www.museum.oas.org).