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The Rifles of Geronimo and Chief Joseph on View in "A Song for the Horse Nation" Opening Nov. 14 in New York City

Three rifles belonging to celebrated Native leaders' Geronimo (Chiricahua Apache), Chief Joseph (Nez Perce) and Chief Rain-in-the-Face (Hunkpapa Lakota) will be included in "A Song for the Horse Nation," opening Saturday, Nov. 14, at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in New York, the George Gustav Heye Center. Starting with the return of the horse to the Americas in 15th century, the exhibition traces how once horses were captured they would change the lives of Native peoples throughout the Americas. Paired with the introduction of the gun, the mounted Plains warrior was a formidable fighter, upsetting old alliances among the tribes and frustrating European advances. The exhibition is scheduled to close on July 7, 2011 and, along with museum admission, is free.

"A Song for the Horse Nation" includes a Springfield U.S. Model .55 caliber trapdoor carbine, owned by Chiricahua Apache leader Goyathlay (Geronimo), ca. 1875. The Apache leader evaded capture by the U.S. government for over a decade as he and his followers fought against the encroachment by the U.S. and Mexico onto tribal lands. Later in life, Goyathlay (Geronimo) became a celebrity, appearing at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis as well as riding in the inaugural parade of President Theodore Roosevelt in 1905.

Also included will be a Winchester Model 1866 .44 caliber carbine, owned by Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, ca. 1880. Chief Joseph was a humanitarian and peacemaker. When the U.S. government ordered the Nez Perce to leave their homeland and relocate onto a reservation, Joseph and the other Nez Perce chiefs made the decision to move their people north to Canada. With 2,000 soldiers in pursuit, Joseph and other Nez Perce chiefs led 800 Nez Perce toward freedom at the Canadian border. For over three months, the Nez Perce outmaneuvered and battled their pursuers traveling 1,700 miles across Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Wyoming and Montana, before Chief Joseph formally surrendered to General Nelson Appleton Miles on October 5, 1877.

Also featured is a Sharps .45 caliber rifle, owned by Hunkpapa Lakota chief Rain-in-the-Face, ca. 1880. Rain-in-the-Face was a celebrated war chief among the Lakota. As an adult, Rain-in-the-Face joined with Chief Sitting Bull and was among the leaders responsible for the defeat of General George Armstrong Custer and the U.S. 7th Cavalry Regiment at the 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn.

“A Song for the Horse Nation” narrates the enduring relationship between Native people and the horse through songs, personal accounts, historic and contemporary images as well as 98 historic and contemporary objects. Starting with the return of horses to the Americans by Christopher Columbus on his second voyage in the 15th century, the exhibition traces how once horses were captured they would change the lives of Native peoples throughout the Americas. Horses would affect the way Native peoples traveled, hunted and defended themselves. Horse trade between the southern plains tribe, the Comanche and their northern relatives, the Shoshone would be conduit for horses arriving on the Plains and Plateau regions. Horses would be the inspiration of new artworks, particularly in form of pictograph paintings first illustrated on clothing, buffalo robes and later muslin cloth and ledger books. The exhibition will include many examples of elaborate horse trappings such as a horse crupper adorned with exceptionally fine quillwork (Red River Metis, ca. 1850) and a colorful Lakota baby bonnet (South Dakota or North Dakota, ca. 1900). New works such as a porcupine quilled horse mask trimmed with brass buttons and feathers created by Juanita Growing Thunder (Assiniboine/Sioux) and two beaded flat cases decorated with horse imagery created by Jackie Bread (Blackfeet) will also be featured in the show. The exhibition will feature how Native horse traditions continues today at the annual Crow Fair parade in Montana, the Young Horsemen breeding program of the Nez Perce in Idaho and the Future Generations Youth Ride in South Dakota.

The Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in New York, the George Gustav Heye Center is located at One Bowling Green in New York City, across from Battery Park. The museum is free and open every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Thursdays until 8 p.m. By subway, the museum may be reached by the 1 to South Ferry, the 4 or 5 to Bowling Green or the R or W to Whitehall Street. For information, call (212) 514-3700 or visit the museum’s Web site at www.americanindian.si.edu.

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