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### **BRAZILIAN EX-VOTO SCULPTURE ON EXHIBIT AT RAMAPO COLLEGE**

(Mahwah) – *Miracles in the Backlands: Aspects of Africa in Brazilian Ex-Voto Sculpture* will open in the Pascal Gallery at Ramapo College of New Jersey on Tuesday, February 8 and continue through March 18. An opening reception will be held from 5 – 7 p.m. on February 8 and a collector's talk is scheduled for 6 p.m.

The exhibition, mounted in recognition of African Ancestry Month, features small sculptures from private collections and related prints by Brazilian artist Liza Papi. The ex-voto, or *milagre* as it is also called in rural Brazil, is a unique form of popular art, a byproduct of the folk Catholicism practiced in the region. According to collector and exhibition co-curator Beate Echols, "Northeastern Brazil is one of the country's least industrialized and most mysterious regions. Its original indigenous population has been blended with both Europeans and descendants of African slaves. Religious beliefs serve to provide a refuge from hardship and to cope with adversity. Religious cults are still of a home-made variety. They combine elements of Catholicism with indigenous and African belief systems."

Ramapo College gallery director Sydney Jenkins aided in selecting the pieces. The sculptures on display—heads, hands, feet, hearts, breasts, entire human figures, farm animals—range from tiny to almost life-sized and are carved from wood or sculptured from clay. They are direct manifestations of the Catholic "miracle" as understood in this region of Brazil. They serve as physical proof that a miracle (*milagre*) has been

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performed by a saint in response to a believer's plight. The objects represent the fulfillment of a vow (hence ex-voto) or promise made in return for a favor granted.

The Brazilian scholar Lelia Coelho Frota observes that ex-votos "retain the vigor of deeply felt art." However, the art form may become a thing of the past, increasingly replaced by factory-made replicas.

This program is made possible in part by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Pascal Gallery is located in the Berrie Center for Performing and Visual Arts at Ramapo College. Gallery hours are Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 1 to 5 p.m. and Wednesday, 1 to 7 p.m. For more information, call 201.684.7147.

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