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**RARELY VIEWED PAINTINGS BY HAITIAN ARTIST ODILON PIERRE
AT RAMAPO COLLEGE**

(Mahwah) – An exhibition of paintings by Haitian artist Odilon Pierre, from the private collection of film director Jonathan Demme, will open at the Selden Rodman Gallery of Popular Arts 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.

The exhibition, in recognition of African Ancestry Month, spotlights the rarely exhibited works of this self-taught artist. Demme first discovered the artist's work in the mid-eighties during a visit to the Iron Market, located in the heart of downtown Port-au-Prince. Through a boarded-up, screened-in stall, Demme and several friends glimpsed stacks and walls filled with dust-coated canvases and wood carvings. After many visits, and still with no vendor at the stall, Demme persuaded a guide to track down the keys to the padlocks securing the structure.

The Iron Market population referred to Odilon Pierre as “crazy,” not so much for not manning his stall, as for demanding higher than Iron Market standard prices for his work. Demme, when he finally met the artist, recalls that Pierre explained that he could not “sell his paintings for less than he thought they were worth, when each one was a part of him, the product of his own flesh and blood, a chunk of his soul.”

A proud, perhaps stubborn man, Pierre, in a conversation with writer Edwidge Danticat said, “I don't want to make a lot of noise with my painting. I keep my work

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hidden. When a foreigner comes, if they want to buy my work, I let them have it. I don't really paint to sell. I sell out of necessity."

Pierre created small canvases and his subjects included the countryside, landscapes and peasant women. Danticat points out that Pierre's style of painting was different from other Haitian painters. "I was not looking for a style," he commented. "I didn't have a vision or a handle on any subject in particular."

On subsequent visits to Haiti, Demme had the opportunity to get to know Pierre and became an ardent admirer of his work. The artist died in 1998 following a long illness. Demme has made it his goal to not let Odilon Pierre's work remain hidden.

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 Selden Rodman Gallery of Popular Arts is located in the B Wing of Ramapo College. Gallery hours are Tuesday, 1 to 4:30 p.m. and Wednesday, 1 to 7 p.m. For more information, call 201.684.7147.

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