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LANGUAGE OF CLAY

New Exhibit Features Catawba Nation Pottery and History

CHARLOTTE, N.C., July 15, 2021 – The Charlotte Museum of History opens a new exhibit featuring Catawba Nation pottery and related traditions on Saturday, July 31.

On loan from the USC Lancaster Native American Studies Center in South Carolina, “The Language of Clay: Catawba Indian Pottery & Oral Traditions” features dozens of clay pottery pieces from the 19th century to the present. The pieces feature motifs from various traditions and legends, including the natural world and human faces. The exhibit also highlights oral histories and stories from the people who preserve these traditions.

“The Language of Clay’ honors the long history of Catawba pottery and artisanship in our region, as well as the persistence of a people in the face of an ever-changing world,” said Adria Focht, president & CEO of The Charlotte Museum of History. “As one of the earliest points of contact with Europeans, Indigenous people in the Carolinas were among the first to suffer the effects of colonialism and genocide. The heritage of many tribes did not survive, but those of the Catawba and some others – including the Cherokee, the Lumbee and the Tuscarora – did so, to a large degree, by maintaining local narratives and material folk traditions like pottery making. Bringing this exhibit to Charlotte allows more people to understand and respect this rich heritage and the people who have fought for centuries to keep it alive.”

“The single most unbroken material tradition throughout all the years of the Catawba Nation is pottery making, done in the way handed down through generations, using the coil method, rubbing stones and pit firing,” said Stephen Criswell, director of the USC Lancaster Native American Studies Center. “The clay is dug from the flood plains of the



Catawba River itself, connecting the people to the land they have inhabited for thousands of years.”

For museum hours and admission information, go to charlottemuseum.org/visit.

“The Language of Clay: Catawba Indian Pottery and Oral Traditions” is a traveling exhibition, organized by the University of South Carolina Lancaster.

About The Charlotte Museum of History

The Charlotte Museum of History exists to save and share the Charlotte region’s history, helping create a better understanding of the past and inspiring dialogue about the future. The museum is the steward of the 1774 Hezekiah Alexander Rock House and homesite, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is the oldest home in Mecklenburg County. Visit charlottemuseum.org and follow the museum on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#). The museum is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

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