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**VENICE ARTS CELEBRATES 18 YEARS OF SERVING YOUTH IN OUR COMMUNITY
With Anniversary Event at the William Turner Gallery**

Venice, CA (October 11, 2011) – Venice Arts will celebrate its 18th Anniversary with a festive fundraiser at the William Turner Gallery at Bergamot Station in Santa Monica on Sunday, November 6, 2011, from 4–7pm. The theme, 'Coming of Age,' highlights the organization's growth since its inception eighteen years ago. The event will also offer a sneak peak at some of Venice Arts' upcoming plans and highlight the work and achievements of Venice Arts' current students, alumni, and supporters.

Acclaimed singer-songwriter Jill Sobule will headline a live musical program. The celebration will showcase a "best of" auction of photographs from our 18 years; our most recent project, *Shipping & Receiving*, a collaboration between youth photographers in Venice and youth on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota; and a small selection of work featuring Venice Arts' alumni, a number of whom, now adults, are working photographers or filmmakers. One such individual, Mayra Mejia, was involved in the Girls' Project, a national documentary photography project we conducted in 1998–2000, when she was 16 years old. Prior to her involvement at Venice Arts, Mayra said that she imagined a life of poverty and challenge. At Venice Arts, she discovered that she was a talented artist and, through the extremely strong relationship that she developed with her mentor, Josie Zamudio, she started to see other options for her future. She remained in Venice Arts' programs until she graduated from Venice High School. In the summer following her first year of college, she worked as a paid summer Art Intern at Venice Arts through the Getty's Multicultural Internship Program. Presently, Mayra is working on a Master of Arts degree in Photography at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco.

Mayra's work was recently featured in the exhibition *Collector's Favorites: Works from the Collections of Members of LACMA's Photographic Arts Council* at the Stephen Cohen Gallery. New collectors as well as seasoned veterans were invited to submit two works from their collection; collector, producer, and Photographic Arts Council member Michele Morris chose to show Mayra's self-portrait, acquired at a Venice Arts' event several years ago. Of her choice of this photograph for the exhibition, Morris writes, "I've always loved self-portraits and autobiographies. I find this self-portrait by Mayra haunting because her eyes seem to have an urgent desire to tell you something."

Venice Arts is also honoring several people who have been instrumental in ensuring the organization's success over the years, including founding board Vice President Dr. V. Joy Simmons, a physician, art collector and consultant; talented long-time Volunteer Photography Artist-Mentor Wynn Miller, and Supporters Steven Oritt & The Selma Oritt Foundation.

"I can't believe that it's been nearly twenty years; we are so proud of our students and the great work our mentors are doing here," says Dr. Simmons. "Venice Arts has become a vital and essential organization for the city and all of Southern California. Our diverse students have had an impact both in their community and throughout the world."

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Speaking of his involvement with the organization, Art Mentor Miller states, "Few things bring as much satisfaction as watching a student empowered by the realization that they have a voice that matters and that they can share this voice, through the arts, with the outside world."

About Venice Arts

Founded in 1993, Venice Arts is an award-winning, nonprofit organization based in Los Angeles, California. Offering programs in documentary photography, filmmaking and digital media, Venice Arts primarily targets low-income youth in order to expand their sense of possibility through accessible media. For more information, visit www.venicearts.org.

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Images

Mayra Mejia, age 17, *Self-Portrait*, Documentary Programs: Girls' Lives through Girls' Eyes: The National Girls' Project, 1998

Evelyn Alvarez, age 18, *Nene's Quinceañera*, Mentoring & Education Program, Venice, 2010

Hi-Res images available upon request.

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