

NEWS

from the Worcester Art Museum

55 Salisbury Street, Worcester, MA 01609-3196
Telephone 508.799.4406, Fax 508.798.5646

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Martin Richman, x3022
martinrichman@worchesterart.org

WORCESTER ART MUSEUM ANNOUNCES CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITION *FRONTIERS: COLLECTING THE ART OF OUR TIME*

(WORCESTER, Mass., October 21, 2005) - All art is contemporary art at the time it is made, and the Worcester Art Museum has a history of collecting art of our time. Worcester Art Museum's first Director, Philip Gentner, purchased two paintings by the Impressionist master, Claude Monet, *Water Lilies* (1908) and *Waterloo Bridge* (1903), only a few years after they were painted. Works by John Singer Sargent, Mary Cassatt, Charles Sheeler, and Marsden Hartley were also collected by the Museum during the lifetime of the artists. In 1998, the Worcester Art Museum made a renewed commitment to the art of our time, by collecting "art from the last decade in all media by young artists around the world." An endowed program for contemporary art was established, and a new permanent contemporary gallery was opened.

Frontiers: Collecting the Art of Our Time, on view at the Worcester Art Museum from November 13, 2005 – February 12, 2006, marks the first occasion to see many of the acquisitions tied to this mission. In this exhibition, Curator of Contemporary Art, Susan Stoops, illuminates the major trends in contemporary art. Characterized by a youthful and multi-cultural personality as well as a diversity of materials, processes, and concepts, *Frontiers* is a mirror of the formal and cultural hybrids typical of art making today. Stoops notes, "artists are experimenting with new forms of narrative and revitalizing the potentials of abstraction. They are sampling from the grab bag of the latest scientific and technological data while also looking for meaning through a thrift-store vernacular." The exhibition, which includes works by 40 artists, is divided into four thematic "frontiers," reflecting a wide range of contemporary practices: *Uncommon Terrains*, *Human Nature(s)*, *Material Revelations*, and *Telling Tales*.

Uncommon Terrains

The dialogue between the exterior world and the interior self that these images inspire connects the sometime disparate languages of photography, painting, and etching. Ideas of place include those that look to the lessons of the past as well as the uncertainties of the future. Whether they revisit familiar subjects or existent sites, or they are the result of pure imagination, these works map concepts of place that exist foremost in the minds of

the artists—worlds where, in the place of natural laws, the rules are those particular to an artist’s medium. Paul Noble’s etchings, *A* and *Paul’s Place*, depict an imaginary cityscape that gives concrete form to our anxieties about urban development. Alexander Ross’ enigmatic painting, *Untitled* (2001), exists somewhere in the gap between the tangible and the imaginary, between modernist tradition and science fiction. Ross’ hybrid image of two alien creatures against a pixilated blue sky—born of myriad data but realized in paint— emulates both the anxiety and promise we feel about the external world at the beginning of the 21st century. Other artists in *Uncommon Terrains* include Jennifer Reeves, Uta Barth, David Maisel, Rachel Whiteread, Robert Ferrandini, and Shellburne Thurber.

Human Natures

Human Nature(s) explores contemporary images of the human body and all of its surrogate forms—from empty garment to body fragment and genetic information—and searches for answers to the timeworn question, “Who am I?” While these artists may not engage in likeness in a traditional sense, they nonetheless wrestle with social issues underlying representations of the figure, such as gender roles, domestic relations, cultural stereotypes, public and private personas. With varying degrees of compassion and detachment (and occasional humor), contemporary artists ask us to rethink what constitutes our “human nature.”

Kiki Smith is widely recognized for her role in bringing the human figure, in all its mortal urgency, back to the center of contemporary art making. While much of her work in the ‘80s examined the body and its functions from the inside, during the ‘90s she began paying attention to the figure’s exterior. Around 1999, Smith began to focus on themes of childhood, addressing not only the tenderness and vulnerability, but also the loss of innocence as seen in *Girl with a Blue Dress*. Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle worked with a genetics laboratory to digitally convert DNA samples of his subjects (like those typically used to determine paternity, predisposition to genetic diseases, or criminal culpability) into three corresponding color photographs. Abstract by conventional standards, this family portrait, *Byron, Lisa, and Emmett*, is nonetheless exacting in terms of genetic “likeness” and challenges traditional identification. Other artists in *Human Nature(s)* include Charles LeDray, Salomon Huerta, Byron Kim, Gary Schneider, Bill Viola, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Sharon Lockhart, Nam June Paik, Catherine Opie, Milton Montenegro, Richard Billingham, and Do-Ho Suh.

Material Revelations

The translation of an idea into a physical object entails a delicate and complex balance between representation and invention, between what already exists in the world and what an artist brings into the world. Today, that world is being reconfigured digitally, and our lives are increasingly structured by daily encounters with virtual reality. By subtly putting pressure on what we think we know about the things around us, some artists invite us to consider how even the most obvious “facts” of the physical things we encounter—wax-print fabric, plastic

bottles, silver chains, a wooden door, even paint—are never only what they first seem to be; rather, art regularly depends on the possibility of one thing revealing another.

The artists in *Material Revelations* force us to see the every day object as art, in turn challenging our accepted view of the world. Yinka Shonibare's *Deep Blue* questions authentic origins by using "African" fabric, which was actually manufactured in Holland and Britain for export to West African countries. Tony Feher's use of "forgettable" materials, which surround us constantly and have little aesthetic value to most of us, is indebted to the radical practice of Marcel Duchamp, whose simple yet extraordinary act in 1914 of selecting a common bottle rack and signing it, wrenched that object out of the "useful" context and placed it in the context of a "work of art." In *Linear B*, Feher employs the ubiquitous plastic soda bottle and materials purchased at the hardware store with little, if any, alteration, so that their physical natures function in terms of traditional sculptural tasks: density, color, light, mass, texture, scale. Other artists in *Material Revelations* include Polly Apfelbaum, Beatriz Milhazes, Jim Isermann, Sigmar Polke, Claire Barclay, Willie Cole, Doris Salcedo, Jim Lambie, and Melvin Edwards.

Telling Tales

Storytelling has been at the heart of image making throughout history. Artists' tales can reveal how we relate to the world or free our imaginations and lead to new ways of interpreting contemporary circumstances. Because they are born of both experience and fantasy, speaking truths and fictions, artists' narratives challenge the knowable limits of the world. Contemporary myths, alternatives to the grand narratives of religion, science, or aesthetics, do not aspire to speak in a commonly understood voice; more often they are formally bound by an individual artist's rules of depiction, but open to question and interpretation. Various degrees of "realism," oftentimes integrating text, open the door to human tales of humor, anxiety, enchantment, danger, vulnerability, and courage.

In *Telling Tales* we see how artists like Amy Sillman and Jenny Scobel use personal and imaginary narratives to expose social and psychological conditioning on the part of the viewer. Amy Sillman constructs her intimate narratives like scattered fragments of conversation or paragraphs in a long letter. She favors a palette of pastels for her dreamlike juxtapositions of images and events, which result in an unusual fusion of figuration and abstraction. Jenny Scobel's virtuoso graphite and gesso drawing, *March*, begs us to ask who this serious, freckled-face young woman might be. We might wonder how that innocent face could belong to such a glamorously dressed body—her strapless gown and long white gloves looking straight out of a Jackie Kennedy fashion shot. Is she trapped by the expectations of womanhood? Other artists in *Telling Tales* include Faith Ringgold, Laylah Ali, Ambreen Butt, Fiona Banner, Lily van der Stokker, Howard Johnson, and John O'Reilly.

Generous support for ***Frontiers: Collecting the Art of Our Time*** provided by the Don and Mary Melville Contemporary Art Fund, Worcester Telegram and Gazette, and WICN Public Radio 90.5 FM New England's Jazz & Folk Station.

RELATED EVENTS

Exhibition Opening Reception

Saturday, November 12, 2005, 7-10pm

Celebrate the openings of two exhibitions of contemporary art, *Frontiers* and *AFTERBURN: Willie Cole* with the sounds of Solomon Murungu, cocktails, and eclectic sweets and savories. \$10 members, \$20 nonmembers. RSVP by November 8 to 508.799.4406, x3105.

Family Day: Contemporary Connections

Sunday, November 20, 2005, 1-4:30pm

Discover the exciting world of contemporary art in this fresh and fun adventure for all ages. Art-making activities, performances, scavenger hunts, and much more. Free with Museum admission, and always free for ages 17 & under. Family Day is sponsored by Bank of America.

The Conservator's Perspective: Jim Coddington

Thursday, January 5, 2006, 6:30PM

It has been asked of museums and conservators: what are we saving and who are we saving it for? Contemporary art places these questions in especially stark relief by constantly expanding the definition of art and the materials eligible to create a work of art. The fugitive and temporal nature of some art even raises the question of how to preserve the intangible in any work that will ultimately disappear. This talk, led by Jim Coddington, Chief Conservator at MoMA, will attempt to illuminate this abstract discussion with concrete examples as well as theoretical approaches to preservation of the art of our time. Event includes a wine and cheese reception. Free with museum admission, but seating is limited. *Support for this event has been provided by The Amelia & Robert Hutchinson Haley Memorial Lectures Fund.*

Artist Talk: Jenny Scobel

Saturday, January 14, 2006 2PM

Join New York artist Jenny Scobel at the Museum for a discussion of her art and her artistic process. Following the talk, come see her graphite and gesso drawing, *March* (2003), in the exhibition ***Frontiers: Collecting the Art of Our Time***. Free with museum admission, but seating is limited.

About the Worcester Art Museum

The Worcester Art Museum, which opened to the public in 1898, is world-renowned for its 35,000-piece collection of paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, photography, prints, drawings and new media. The works span 5,000 years of art and culture, ranging from ancient Roman mosaics to Colonial silver, Impressionist paintings and contemporary art. Dedicated to the promotion of art and art education, the Museum offers a year-round studio art and art appreciation program that enrolls over 6,000 adult and youth students each year. Public tours are offered Saturdays at 11 a.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m., September through May. Audio tours are also available in English and Spanish.

Museum hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Thursday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. (evening hours sponsored by Commerce Bank), and Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors and full-time college students with current ID, and FREE for Members and all youth 17 and under. Admission is also FREE for everyone on Saturday mornings, 10 a.m.-noon (sponsored by The TJX Companies, Inc. and Massachusetts Electric, a National Grid Company). The Museum is located at 55 Salisbury St., Worcester, Mass., easily accessible from the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90), Route 290 and Route 9. Free parking is available near entrances on Salisbury, Lancaster and Tuckerman streets. For more information, call (508) 799-4406 or visit the Museum web site at www.worcesterart.org.

#