

**Depictions of the Unusual Showcased in Worcester Art Museum
Exhibition Opening September 2014**

***Perfectly Strange Examines Distortion Techniques, Fantastical Themes, and
Grotesque Subjects Employed by Artists Ranging from Francisco Goya to Diane Arbus***

Worcester, MA – September 3, 2014 – This fall, the Worcester Art Museum (WAM) will explore how artists from the 17th century through present day have represented concepts of the strange, shedding light on how the aesthetic of the unusual has fascinated artists throughout the centuries. Drawn largely from WAM's permanent collection, *Perfectly Strange* brings together over seventy-five prints and photographs that convey a sense of the bizarre and unexpected, including works by Francisco Goya, Pablo Picasso, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, John O'Reilly, and Diane Arbus, among others. On view from September 13 through January 4, 2015, the exhibition investigates the common impulse among the featured artists to distort ordinary scenes with unusual perspectives, engage with fantasy, and depict grotesque subjects.

“This exhibition provides viewers with an opportunity to experience the feelings evoked by strangeness through the lens of the artist, granting insight into a novel perspective on both everyday life and the life of the imagination,” said Nancy Burns, Assistant Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs at WAM. “These unusual subjects and distorted scenes can be jarring, but deserve closer contemplation as important works that challenge the classical ideal of beauty and conjure feelings of discomfort.”

The exhibition is organized around four themes, which provide a framework for navigating the diverse range of artwork on view and reflect aesthetic trends and artistic approaches:

In the first section of *Perfectly Strange*, **The World of the Real** examines how artists distort reality to create images that are both familiar but off kilter. Highlights from this section include:

- **Diane Arbus, *Identical Twins, Roselle, N.J.*, 1967:** This celebrated work from WAM's collection depicts two identical twin girls standing side by side in matching outfits. Through her isolation of the subjects, and her ability to capture their blank expressions, Arbus questions the idea of normalcy and identity.
- **Manuel Álvarez Bravo, *Caballo de Madera (Wooden Horse)*, 1928 –** Considered Mexico's foremost proponent of Latin American Modernist photography, Bravo isolates occurrences from Mexican life to create unexpected images that are both foreboding and serene. This photograph depicts a rocking horse, a popular child's toy that becomes unnerving as it peeks behind two curtains.

The World of the Circus, Masks and Magic explores spaces manufactured in real life for audiences to become immersed in the unusual or magical. The circus has long fascinated the public, underlining a widespread curiosity about the strange and those who exist on the fringes of society. Section highlights include:

- **Alexandr Rodchenko, *Durov with a Cock*, 1940:** Rodchenko did a series of photographs featuring Vladimir Durov, a famed Soviet-era circus performer renowned for his animal training. In this photograph, Rodchenko emphasizes Durov's intense eye contact with the rooster to highlight the absurdity of the situation while elevating Durov's status as a performer.
- **Pablo Picasso, *Head of a Clown*, 1962:** This work conveys both the childlike nature of clowns, and the simultaneously unnerving simplicity of their feigned innocence. Picasso revisited the subject of clowns and street performers throughout his career, beginning with the Saltimbanques and Harlequins during his Rose period.

In **the World of the Frightening and Grotesque** distorted perspectives on the alien and the abnormal serve as a point of departure for artistic creativity. Among the works featured are:

- **Francisco Goya, *Mucho Hay Que Chupar (There is Plenty to Suck)*, 1799:** This etching is from Goya's *Los Caprichos* series, a set of 80 prints that offer hyperbolic social commentary when viewed together in an album. This series reflects Goya's influence on surrealism and symbolists like Odilon Redon, in his representation of mythical creatures and outlandish scenes.
- **Joel-Peter Witkin, *Un Santo Oscuro, Los Angeles* 1987:** Witkin incorporates both art historical references and contemporary imagery into his photographs. Witkin gives this photograph texture by scraping the negative, affecting an aged or weathered appearance.

The World of the Imagination and Dreams explores artists' use of fantastical settings, fairy tales, and surreal motifs. Historically, fantasy has been used in fables to communicate lessons of morality, while more recent endeavors in surrealism explore how to depict our dreams and consciousness. Highlights from this section include:

- **Herbert Bayer, *Lonely Metropolitan*, 1932:** Trained in the renowned Bauhaus school in Germany, Bayer was a graphic designer before he immigrated to New York in 1938. Heavily influenced by Surrealism, he was one of the first artists to explore photomontage.
- **Odilon Redon, *Perversité*, 1891:** Like his predecessor Francisco Goya, Redon is admired for his ability to vividly conjure fantastic, phantasmagoric, and foreboding characters. This etching depicts a sculpture bust that is turning its head to look back at the viewer confrontationally. Its menacing expression paired with the dark backdrop suggests a frightening atmosphere.

Related Event

The Artists of *Perfectly Strange*

Thursday, September 18, 5:30pm

In-gallery introduction by and discussion with *Perfectly Strange* Curator, Nancy Burns. Conversation with exhibition artists Tad Beck, Seth Rubin, and Marguerite White. Free with Museum admission.

ABOUT THE WORCESTER ART MUSEUM:

With its encyclopedic collection of paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, photography, prints, drawings, and new media, the Worcester Art Museum serves Worcester and the broader region. Founded in 1898, the Museum has historically been strongest in European Renaissance paintings, but with recent acquisitions and donations, like Veronese's *Venus Disarming Cupid* and the integration of the collection from the Higgins Armory Museum, it continues to diversify and expand its curatorial and programmatic offerings. Symbolized by the opening of the Salisbury Street doors in 2012, the Museum continues toward its goal of accessibility for all visitors.

The Worcester Art Museum, located at 55 Salisbury Street in Worcester, Mass., is open Wednesday through Friday and Sunday from 11am to 5pm; Saturday from 10am to 5pm; and every third Thursday from 11am to 8pm. Admission is \$14 for adults, \$6 for children 4-17, \$12 for seniors 65+, \$12 for college students with ID. Members and children under 4 are free. Parking is free. For more information, visit worcesterart.org.

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Worcester Art Museum

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