

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston sets the stage for *The Puppet Show*

Opening reception: Friday, January 16, 2009, 9:00-11:00 PM

On view: January 17 – April 12, 2009



Dennis Oppenheim, *Theme for a Major Hit*, 1974. Motor driven marionettes, wood, cloth, felt, soundtrack, tape player, and external speakers. Courtesy of the artist

Houston, TX—The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston's Brown Foundation Gallery becomes a stage for *The Puppet Show*, a group exhibition that looks at the imagery of puppets in contemporary art. *The Puppet Show* concentrates on sculpture, video, and photography and brings together several generations of artists from around the world. Organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, *The Puppet Show* is co-curated by Ingrid Schaffner, senior curator at ICA, and Carin Kuoni, director, The Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School, New York.

Some works in *The Puppet Show* involve puppets as figures: marionettes, shadow puppets, ventriloquist dummies. In others, artists perform as puppeteers. And still other works bring to mind the richly evocative topics associated with puppetry such as manipulation, miniaturization, power, and control. Ventriloquists' dummies of noted art-world luminaries like Hans Ulrich-Obrist and Liam Gillick sit ready to participate in a panel discussion in Philippe Parreno and Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled (ventriloquist performance #1)* (2005); French architect Le Corbusier's struggles with his 1963 Harvard-commissioned building are documented in Pierre Huyghe's puppet opera *This is not a*

time for dreaming (2004); a man and woman alternate roles as aggressors, in an unconventional Punch and Judy show, over a romantic supper that erupts into violence in Bruce Nauman's 1986 video *Violent Incident (Man/Woman Segment)*; and dozens of identical dancing figures perform in Dennis Oppenheim's 1974 installation *Theme for a Major Hit*.

The exhibition opens with a look at backstage—an installation dubbed, “Puppet Storage.” The plywood structure is filled with pictures, props, and other source material collected from artists' studios as well as a historic collection of puppets from the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry at the University of Connecticut selected by the Ballard's director Dr. John Bell, an internationally renowned puppeteer and historian of puppet theater. “Puppet Storage” was conceived as an exhibition within an exhibition and provides insight into the artists' working methods and inspirations.

The Puppet Show takes as a historic point of departure one of the first episodes of avant-garde art history: Alfred Jarry's 1896 play *Ubu Roi* that was conceived as a puppet show. Considered by many to be the first dramatic work of the theater of the absurd, *Ubu Roi* (translated as “King Ubu” or “King Turd”) is an allegory of anarchy that uses farce and scatological humor to comment on art, literature, politics, and the ruling class. Since Jarry's play, puppets have taken hold of pop consciousness by way of films, theater, computer games, and animation. Together with these collective points of reference, the exhibition shows puppets to be a provocative and relevant subject—one that moves deep into social, political, and psychological terrain.

ARTISTS IN THE EXHIBITION

Guy Ben-Ner

Nayland Blake

Louise Bourgeois

Maurizio Cattelan

Anne Chu

Nathalie Djurberg

Terrence Gower

Handspring Puppet Company

Pierre Huyghe

Christian Jankowski

Mike Kelley

William Kentridge

Cindy Loehr

Annette Messenger

Paul McCarthy

Matt Mullican

Bruce Nauman

Dennis Oppenheim

Philippe Parreno and Rirkrit Tiravanija

Laurie Simmons

Doug Skinner and Michael Smith

Kiki Smith

Survival Research Laboratory

Kara Walker

Charlie White

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

All the following events are free and open to the public, and take place at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston unless otherwise noted. Please check www.camh.org for additional programming and information.

Opening reception: *The Puppet Show*

Friday, January 16, 9:00-11:00 PM

Celebrate the opening of *The Puppet Show*, on view through April 12, 2009.

Artists/Scholars Talks: Ingrid Schaffner

Saturday, January 17, 2:00 p.m.

Gallery walkthrough of *The Puppet Show* with **Ingrid Schaffner**, senior curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and co-curator of the exhibition.

Performance: Houston Playback Theatre

Thursday, February 5, 6:30 p.m.

Help determine the evening's content. **Houston Playback Theatre** is an improvisational troupe whose performance is created through a unique collaboration between performers and audience. See your stories come to life.

Loft Concert: Musiqa

Thursday, February 12, 6:30 p.m.

Dedicated to the performance of contemporary classical music, **Musiqa** continues its *Loft Concert* series with a selection of music inspired by the exhibition *The Puppet Show*.

Performance/Scholars Talks: Joel Orr

Thursday, March 5, 6:30 p.m.

Performance/lecture with **Joel Orr**, artistic director of **Bobbindoctrin Puppet Theatre**, which presents original works of experimental adult puppet performances that incorporate a mix of shadow, rod, hand, string and tabletop puppetry, as well as masks, in any given show.

Family Day

Sunday, March 15, 1:00–4:00 p.m.

Join us for family tours and hands-on art activities, including a puppet workshop with **Joel Orr** of **Bobbindoctrin Puppet Theatre**

PUBLICATION

The Puppet Show is accompanied by a 127-page fully illustrated catalog with essays by the curators and contributing authors: John Thomas Bell, Director, Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry at the University of Connecticut; Terence Gower, artist and exhibition designer; Jena Osman, Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing, Temple University; John Pemberton, Associate Professor, Department of Anthology, Columbia University; Jane Taylor, Skye Chair of Dramatic Art, Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand; Michael Taylor, Muriel and Philip Berman Curator of Modern Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art; and Allen Weiss, Associate Teacher, Performance Studies and Cinema Studies, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Included is an annotated checklist of the works in the exhibition, and a picture record of the contents of "Puppet Storage." Published by the Institute of Contemporary Art. It is available in The Museum Store at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. \$35

EXHIBITION FUNDING AND SUPPORT

This exhibition has been made possible by the patrons, benefactors, and donors to the Museum's Major Exhibition Fund: Major Patron—Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, Fayez Sarofim, and Michael Zilkha; Patrons—Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Ballard, Mr. and Mrs. I. H. Kempner III, Ms. Louisa Stude Sarofim, Leigh and Reggie Smith; Benefactors—Marita and J.B. Fairbanks, George and Mary Josephine Hamman Foundation, Jackson Hicks / Jackson and Company, Elizabeth Howard, King & Spalding L.L.P., Elisa and Cris Pye, Beverly and Howard Robinson, Swift + Company, The Susan Vaughan Foundation, Inc.; Donors—Anonymous, Baker Botts, LLP, Bergner and Johnson Design, Citi Private Bank, Jana and Richard Fant, Julia and Russell Frankel, Jo and Jim Furr, Mr.

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The Puppet Show is organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania. It is co-curated by Ingrid Schaffner, ICA senior curator, and Carin Kuoni, director, The Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School, New York.

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EDUCATION SUPPORT

The Museum receives support for its education programs from M.D. Anderson Foundation, Baker Hughes Foundation, Chevron U.S.A. Inc., Louise D. Jamail, Marian and Speros Martel Foundation Endowment, and Nordstrom, Inc.

GENERAL SUPPORT

The Museum's operations and programs are made possible through the generosity of the Museum's trustees, patrons, members and donors. The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston receives partial operating support from the Houston Endowment, Inc., the City of Houston through the Houston Museum District Association, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

Continental is the official airline of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

CAMH MISSION

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is an idea and a place shaped by the present moment. The Museum exemplifies the dynamic relationship between contemporary art and contemporary society through its exhibitions, public and educational programs, and publications. The CAMH provides the physical and intellectual framework essential to the presentation, interpretation, and advancement of contemporary art; it is a vibrant forum for artists and all audiences, and for critical, scholarly, and public discourse.

ALWAYS FRESH, ALWAYS FREE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is located at 5216 Montrose Boulevard, at the corner of Montrose and Bissonnet, in the heart of Houston's Museum District. Hours are Tuesday to Saturday, 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Thursdays to 9:00 PM, and Sundays noon to 5:00 PM. Admission is always free. For more information, visit www.camh.org or call (713) 284-8250.

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