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ALWAYS FREE**

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is pleased to present the group exhibition *The Spectacular of Vernacular*.

*The Spectacular
of Vernacular*
July 30 – September 18, 2011

Opening Reception
Friday, July 29, 2011
6-7PM: Member Preview
7-9PM: Public Reception

Houston, TX (July 18, 2011)—In an era of virtual neighborhoods and fast-paced Internet communication, *The Spectacular of Vernacular* addresses the role of vernacular forms in the work of 27 artists who utilize craft, incorporate folklore, and revel in roadside kitsch to explore the role of culturally specific iconography in the increasingly global world of art. Originally employed as a linguistics term, vernacular is now broadly applied to categories of culture, standing in for “regional,” “folkloric,” or “homemade”—concepts that contemporary artists have investigated since the late 1950s as part of a deeper consideration of the relationship between art and everyday life. For the artists included in the exhibition, aspects of the vernacular—and often specifically American vernacular—provide a platform for narratives of home life, social ritual, and sense of place. Drawing inspiration from such sources as local architecture, amateur photographs, and state fair banners, their work runs the aesthetic spectrum from sleek to handcrafted, underscoring the diverse manifestations of the vernacular within our lived environment and its impact on artists working today. *The Spectacular of Vernacular* is organized by the Walker Art Center and is curated by Darsie Alexander, Walker Chief Curator. The exhibition is on view at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston July 30-September 18, 2011.

Inspired by Mike Kelley’s observation that “the mass



Dario Robleto, *Demonstrations of Sailors' Valentines*, 2009. Cut paper, various seashells, colored wax, cartes de visites, silk, ribbon, foam core, glue. 59 x 52 x 6 in. Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections. Purchased with funds from the Ellen Pray Maytag Madsen Sculpture Acquisition Fund, 2009.75



William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1960-1965. Vintage silver gelatin print. © Eggleston Artistic Trust. Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York

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art of today is the folk art of tomorrow,” *The Spectacular of Vernacular* reflects an expanded view of the vernacular posited in Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, and Robert Venturi’s *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), one that embraces the spectacle of the street and the stylistic cacophony of the strip—the totems, billboards, and neon signs of roadside America. Thus amidst the visibly handcrafted works of Matthew Day Jackson and Dario Robleto are the dense and day-glow paintings of Lari Pittman, the glittering trophy heads of Marc Swanson, and the urban relics of Rachel Harrison. These works, and others in the exhibition, suggest a long road trip through the emblems and eyesores of street vernacular, replete with its tourist destinations and outmoded hotels. A strong showing of photographs informs the exhibition, including work by WPA-era photographer Walker Evans, as well as more recent work by William Eggleston, whose color-saturated images gravitate toward the tawdry palette of faded billboards and road signs. New to CAMH’s presentation of the exhibition is an additional work by Houston-based artist Robleto, *The Minor Chords Are Ours* (2010), and a 2001 sculpture by Louise Bourgeois, *Regression*.

Through strategic selections that capture varied practices, the exhibition reflects artists’ equal fascination with rustic as well as urban vernacular, lending the installation a visually diverse and dynamic character. In a culture in which art is increasingly globalized in its look and dissemination, *The Spectacular of Vernacular* considers work that can be heavily narrated, highly personal, and laboriously produced.

FEATURED ARTISTS

Marina Abramović, Siah Armajani, Louise Bourgeois, William Christenberry, Shannon Ebner, William Eggleston, Walker Evans, Rachel Harrison, Matthew Day Jackson, Jess, Butt Johnson, William E. Jones, Mike Kelley, Chris Larson, Kerry James Marshall, Ree Morton, Laura Owens, Jack Pierson, Lari Pittman, Faith Ringgold, Dario Robleto, Jim Shaw, Lorna Simpson, Aaron Spangler, Marc Swanson, Jeffery Vallance, and Kara Walker.

PUBLICATION

A fully illustrated 112-page catalogue accompanies the exhibition and includes an essay by exhibition curator Darsie Alexander; a reprint of John Brinckerhoff Jackson’s “Vernacular” from his seminal 1984 reader on vernacular landscapes; and a reflection by artist and curator Andy Sturdevant on the evolution of roadside vernacular, and attendant histories of heartland America. This publication is distributed by

D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, Inc. and is available in CAMH’s Museum Shop.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

All events are free and open to the public, and take place at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston unless otherwise noted. For complete listings and current information, please check www.camh.org.

Opening Reception:

The Spectacular of Vernacular

Friday, July 29

6-7PM: Member Preview

Join exhibition curator Darsie Alexander, Chief Curator at the Walker Art Center, for a first look at *The Spectacular of Vernacular*.

7-9PM: Public Reception

Help us celebrate the opening of this group exhibition that addresses the role of vernacular forms in the work of 27 artists who utilize craft, incorporate folklore, and revel in roadside kitsch to explore the role of culturally specific iconography in the increasingly global world of art. Reception with cash bar and It’s A Wrap! food truck.

Artists/Scholars Talk: Darsie Alexander

Saturday, July 30, 1PM

Learn more about *The Spectacular of Vernacular* with exhibition curator Darsie Alexander, Chief Curator at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Before her appointment at the Walker, she served as department head and senior curator at the Baltimore Museum of Art, where she worked for seven years. Her recent exhibitions include *Event Horizon* (2009), *Benches & Binoculars* (2009), *Franz West, To Build a House You Start with the Roof: Work, 1972-2008* (MIT Press, 2008), and *SlideShow*, the first major exhibition to explore the history of projected slides in post-1965 art (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

Panel Discussion: *Homespun: Houston Stories*

Thursday, August 4, 6:30PM

What is that single event/thing/place/food that represents the quintessential Houston to you? Join us for a story-telling panel discussion on the vernacular of Houston. Guest speakers **Nancy Ford**, activist/humorist/musician and Senior Editor of *OutSmart* magazine; **Stephen Fox**, architectural historian and Fellow of the Anchorage Foundation of Texas; Alex “PRIMO” Luster, documentary filmmaker and director of the upcoming film, *Stick ‘Em Up!*, about Houston wheat paste artists; **Robb Walsh**, former restaurant critic for the *Houston Press* and author of numerous books on Texas cooking; and **Dan Workman**, charter member of the seminal

art/noise/rock band, Culturcide, and President of Houston's SugarHill Recording Studios, will tell their "only in Houston" stories followed by a discussion and Q&A from the audience.

Artists/Scholars Talk: Dario Robleto

Thursday, August 25, 6:30PM

Join us for a gallery walk-through of *The Spectacular of Vernacular* with **Dario Robleto**, a Houston-based artist who makes intricate sculptures and wall works that explore the belief systems and spiritual aspirations of the past. His works have been exhibited internationally at institutions such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the San Diego Museum of Art, CA; and CALe Center d'Art Contemporain, Montpellier, France. In 2008, his career was the subject of a ten-year survey at the Frye Art Museum in Seattle, traveling to The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY. Robleto's work was also included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial. Two of his sculptures, *Demonstrations of Sailor's Valentines* (2009) and *The Minor Chords Are Ours* (2010), are featured in *The Spectacular of Vernacular*.

15th Annual Museum District Day

Saturday, September 17, 10AM-5PM

Enjoy a free day in the Houston Museum District! Board a free shuttle bus at any of the 16 participating museums and spend the day exploring favorite museums and discovering new destinations. At CAMH, enjoy special presentations and hands-on art activities for the whole family inspired by *The Spectacular of Vernacular*. For more information on Museum District Day, go to www.houstonmuseumdistrict.org.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

The Spectacular of Vernacular is organized by the Walker Art Center and is made possible by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Helen and Peter Warwick, and Margaret and Angus Wurtele. Additional support is provided by Accenture and Briggs and Morgan.

Exhibitions in the Brown Foundation Gallery at CAMH have been made possible by the patrons, benefactors and donors to the Museum's Major Exhibition Fund: Major Patron - Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, Fayeze Sarofim, and Michael Zilkha. Patrons - Louise D. Jamail, Mr. and Mrs. I. H. Kempner III, Ms. Louisa Stude Sarofim, and Leigh and Reggie Smith. Benefactors - Baker Botts L.L.P. / Anne and David Kirkland, George and Mary Josephine Hamman Foundation, Jackson Hicks / Jackson and Company,

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EDUCATION SUPPORT

The Museum receives support for its education programs from: Anonymous, Baker Hughes Foundation, Ruth Dreessen and Thomas Van Laan, Louise D. Jamail, John P. McGovern Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. I.H. Kempner III, Kinder Morgan Foundation, Leticia Loya, Andrew R. McFarland, M.D. Anderson Foundation, Marian and Speros Martel Foundation Endowment, Mrs. Louisa Stude Sarofim, Martha Claire Tompkins and 20K Group, LLC.

Teen Council is supported by Mrs. Louisa Stude Sarofim with additional support from Baker Hughes Foundation.

GENERAL SUPPORT

Funding for the Museum's operations through the Fund for the Future is made possible by generous grants from Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, Anonymous, Elizabeth Howard Crowell, Barbara and Michael Gamson, Brenda and William Goldberg, Mr. and Mrs. I.H. Kempner III, Leticia Loya and Fayeze Sarofim.

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

United 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.

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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 Wednesday 11AM-7PM, Thursday 11AM-9PM, Friday 11AM-7PM, Saturday and Sunday 11AM-6PM. Admission is always free. For more information, visit www.camh.org or call 713 284 8250.