



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTEMPORARY ARTS MUSEUM HOUSTON PRESENTS  
NEW ART EXPLORING FOLK THEMES IN  
*THE OLD, WEIRD AMERICA***

***The Old, Weird America***

On View May 10 – July 20, 2008

Opening reception Friday, May 9, 9:00 – 11:00 p.m.

Houston, TX—April 11, 2008—This spring the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston will present *The Old, Weird America*, the first museum exhibition to explore the widespread resurgence of folk imagery and mythic history in recent art from the United States. Organized by Contemporary Arts Museum Houston senior curator Toby Kamps, the exhibition illustrates the relevance and appeal of folklore to contemporary artists, as well as the genre's power to illuminate ingrained cultural forces and overlooked histories. The exhibition borrows its inspiration and title—with the author's blessing—from music and cultural critic Greil Marcus' 1997 book of the same title examining the influence of folk music on Bob Dylan and The Band's seminal album, *The Basement Tapes*.

*The Old, Weird America* will feature eighteen artists who explore native, idiomatic, and communal subjects from America's past: **Eric Beltz, Jeremy Blake, Sam Durant, Barnaby Furnas, Deborah Grant, Matthew Day Jackson, Brad Kahlhamer, Margaret Kilgallen, David McDermott and Peter McGough, Aaron Morse, Cynthia Norton (a.k.a. Nanny), Greta Pratt, David Rathman, Dario Robleto, Allison Smith, Kara Walker, and Charlie White.** Covering the period from the first Thanksgiving in 1621 to the beginning of the Space Age in 1957, their representational paintings, sculptures, drawings, photographs, installations, and videos reconsider important legends and figures in United States history. Indians, Pilgrims, Founding Fathers, cowboys, Civil War widows, bobby soxers, and Depression-style drifters are among the Ur-American characters populating storytelling works that —like all good folklore —recklessly combine myth and fact to suggest an alternative national history.

During times of change and social stress, cultures look to their master narratives. For example, in the United States, Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and other artists in the Regionalist movement of the 1930s and 40s rejected abstract, European Modernism and turned their attention to depicting rural and domestic life in realist styles, in part as a reaction against the horrors of that continent's First World War. Similarly, says exhibition curator Kamps, "in this post-9/11 America of high-emotion and sweeping change, artists naturally look for inspiration in the forgotten and unresolved relics of our nation, the volatile and mercurial old, weird America of folk history."

To be included in the exhibition are renowned works, such as: **Kara Walker's** animated, Balinese-style shadow-puppet video, *8 Possible Beginnings or: The Creation of African-America, a Moving Picture by Kara E. Walker* (2005), a fearless satire of black origin myths and white racism in outrageous vignettes featuring slave ships, gay master-and-slave sex, and dancing cotton-boll babies; **Sam Durant's** sculptural installation *Pilgrims and Indians, Planting and Reaping, Learning and Teaching* (2006) restages two amateurish dioramas from the defunct Plymouth National Wax Museum in Massachusetts juxtaposing two radically different versions of how the Jamestown Colony came to celebrate the first Thanksgiving in 1621; **Margaret Kilgallen's** installation *Main Drag* (2001) depicts, in a playful, cartoon-like style, a low-rent town of the imagination inhabited by surfers, hobos, juvenile delinquents, and dames in beehive hairdos; **Barnaby Furnas's** paintings and watercolors express the chaos and confusion of battle, and works on view such as *John Brown* (2005) feature glowing blood, explosions, and tracer bullets as well as representations of time-lapse movement reminiscent of film and videogame special effects; **Jeremy Blake's** digitally composed video *Winchester* (2002), inspired by the labyrinth-like house of rifle heiress Sarah Winchester, morphs vintage photographs of the house, mysterious cowboy shadows, and Blake's own abstract "digital paintings" to create a lush, engulfing image of a uniquely American form of madness.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a 162-page, full-illustration catalog published by the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston that will provide the cultural and historical context for the artworks. The publication will include essays by Kamps, the show's curator; Colleen Sheehy, Director of Education at the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum and art historian at University of Minnesota in Minneapolis; and Michael Duncan, a critic and curator based in Los Angeles. It will also contain reproductions of the exhibited work, as well as biographical and bibliographical information on each artist.

## **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

Please visit [www.camh.org](http://www.camh.org) for up-to-the-minute information on public programs, including preview receptions prior to the scheduled opening date, Artists/Scholars Talks, Confirmed public programs to date:

Saturday, May 10, 2 p.m.

**Artists/Scholars Talk** and exhibition walk-through with *The Old, Weird America* artists **Eric Beltz, Matthew Day Jackson, Brad Kahlhamer, Aaron Morse, Cynthia Norton, Greta Pratt** and **Allison Smith**.

Saturday, May 17, 1:00 p.m.

**The Young, Weird America:** The Museum's **Teen Council** hosts an afternoon of poetry and performance.

Thursday, May 29, 6:30 p.m.

**Old, Weird American Ghost Stories!** Bring your ghost stories, mysteries, and folk tales and join us around a virtual campfire.

Sunday, June 1, 1:00 p.m.

**Family Day!** Join us for family tours, historical performances and hands-on activities.

Saturday, June 7, 2:00 p.m.

**Artists/Scholars Talk** with **J. Pittman McGehee**, diplomate Jungian analyst and Director of the Institute for the Advancement of Psychology and Spirituality.

Saturday, June 12, 11:00 a.m.

**Artists/Scholars Talk** with *The Old, Weird America* artist **Dario Robleto**. The talk will be followed by lunch in the Contemporary Arts Museum and reconvene at 1:30 p.m. at The Menil Collection for a discussion of Robleto's work in the exhibition *NeoHoo-Doo: Art for a Forgotten Faith*.

Saturday, June 28, 2:00 p.m.

**Artist/Scholars Talk** with **Greil Marcus**, music journalist, cultural critic, and author of *The Old, Weird America: The World of Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes*.

#### **EXHIBITION FUNDING AND SUPPORT**

*The Old, Weird America* has been made possible by generous support from the Union Pacific Foundation and Nina and Michael Zilkha. This exhibition has been supported by the patrons, benefactors, and donors to the Museum's Major Exhibition Fund: Major Patron-- Faye Sarofim. Patrons-- Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen; Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Ballard; Mr. and Mrs. I. H. Kempner III; Ms. Louisa Stude Sarofim; Leigh and Reggie Smith; and Michael Zilkha. 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 J. Stude; and The Susan Vaughan Foundation, Inc. Donors-- Baker Botts, LLP; Bergner and Johnson Design; Jana and Richard Fant; Julia and Russell Frankel; Mr. and Mrs. William Goldberg / Bernstein Global Wealth Management; Karol Kreymer and Robert J. Card, M.D.; Judy and Scott Nyquist; David I. Saperstein; Karen and Harry Susman; Mark Wawro and Melanie Gray; and Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Wilson.

The catalogue accompanying the exhibition is made possible by a grant from The Brown Foundation, 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.

The audio guide features commentary by exhibiting artists and is supported in part by Will Golden.

## **ABOUT THE CAMH**

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is a non-collecting institution dedicated to presenting the best and most exciting international, national, and regional art of today, and to providing a forum for the discussion and understanding of the art of our time. Through dynamic exhibitions accompanied by scholarly publications and accessible educational programs, the Museum reaches out to local, regional, national, and international audiences of all ages. Recent exhibitions include *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space*, the first comprehensive solo exhibition of Zittel's work in North America, named "Best Architecture or Design Show of 2006" by the International Association of Art Critics; *Sam Gilliam: a retrospective*, the first full-career survey for the important abstract artist; and *Black Light/White Noise: Sound and Light in Contemporary Art*, the first comprehensive review of black artists working with sound and light.

Upcoming major exhibitions at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston include *Sam Taylor-Wood* (August 2-October 5, 2008), comprised of some 40 works by the British artist known for her elaborately staged photos and room-size video installations of psychologically charged narrative, and *Cinema Remixed / Reloaded* (October 18, 2008 – January 4, 2009), which traces the evolution of video presentation over three decades, chronicling the critical contributions of black women artists such as María Magdalena Campos-Pons, Julie Dash, Carroll Parrott Blue, Senga Nengudi, Berni Searle, Lorna Simpson and Kara Walker to the field of contemporary art, and introduces works by emerging artists including Elizabeth Axtman, Zoë Charlton, Lauren Kelley and Xaviera Simmons.

## **GENERAL INFO**

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 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Thursdays to 9 p.m.), and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. Admission is always free. For more information visit [www.camh.org](http://www.camh.org) or call (713) 284-8250.

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## **FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:**

Office of Communications and Marketing

(713) 284-8250

[communications@camh.org](mailto:communications@camh.org)

Access CAMH online at [www.camh.org](http://www.camh.org)