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**ALWAYS FRESH
ALWAYS FREE**

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is pleased to present *It is what it is. Or is it?*, a group exhibition that considers how artists are using and making readymades today.

It is what it is. Or is it?
May 12 – July 29, 2012

Opening Reception
Friday, May 11, 2012
6-7PM: Members' Preview
7-9PM: Public Reception

HOUSTON, TX (April 25, 2012)—As forms go, the readymade is a slippery one. Its originator, Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), spoke of it as “a form of denying the possibility of defining art.”¹ Now, as the art form nears its 100th anniversary, the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston presents *It is what it is. Or is it?*, a group exhibition that explores how the form has changed. Featuring sculpture, painting, photography, video, and interactive works, including new works and commissions by an international group of artists, *It is what it is. Or is it?* is a speculative proposition that considers how artists are using and making readymades today. The exhibition is organized by CAMH Curator Dean Daderko and marks his curatorial debut at the Museum.

Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), art history's first readymade, is a sculpture the artist created in his studio by taking two ordinary manufactured objects—a bicycle wheel and a white wooden stool—and mounting the former upside down onto the latter. The exhibition attempts to recuperate a sense of the radicality of Duchamp's original gesture.



Fayçal Baghriche, *Envelopments*, 2010. Flags from 28 countries, flagpoles, and hardware. Courtesy the artist and Nadour Collection. Photo: Simon Boudvin

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It is what it is. Or is it? is a dialogue with the readymade form, seeing it not as a collection of static objects, but as a practice of displacement that turns thought into form. The 18 artists in the exhibition represent 3 generations and 9 countries: Ellen Altfest, Fayçal Baghriche, Bill Bollinger, Chto Delat?, William Cordova, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Latifa Echakhch, Daphne Fitzpatrick, Claire Fontaine, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Rachel Hecker, Jamie Isenstein, Luis Jacob, Patrick Killoran, Jiri Kovanda, Klara Lidén, Catherine Murphy, and Pratchaya Phinthong. These artists' works offer us unique opportunities to address the contemporary legacy of the readymade.

Artists use the form's simple materiality and economy of means to address a diversity of social, political, aesthetic and temporal concerns. For example, William Cordova's *laberintos (pa' octavio paz y gaspar yanga)*, 2003-09, is composed of "200 appropriated vinyl records from an undisclosed ivy league institution that refused to repatriate 200 Inca artifacts it borrowed from Peru in 1914." The records' gatefold covers interlock to form a maze on the floor. Though its scale makes it physically inaccessible, Cordova's description of the work's materials makes it plainly evident that these records are being held hostage to protest the refusal to repatriate the Peruvian treasures. Patrick Killoran's *An Inconspicuous Addition* (2011) may look like a typical cooler one takes on a picnic or to the beach, but lucky viewers may catch a glimpse of the diamond nestled down in the cooler's melting ice. Latifa Echakhch's *Globus* (2011) is a world map crumpled into a round globe that disregards national borders by reshuffling them arbitrarily. For his sculpture *Envelopments* (2010), Fayçal Baghriche uses the flags of all 28 of the world's nations whose flapping ends are entirely red. By wrapping the flags around their wall-mounted poles, Baghriche produces a row of identical-looking objects that conceal a secret identity. Ellen Altfest's paintings of plant and corporal forms show us how little we see with a casual glance, and how strange these forms become when Altfest reframes and re-presents them. In Rachel Hecker's airbrushed paintings, it's easy to see the models, rock stars, and actors with their shoulder-length hair and scruffy beards as portraits of Jesus Christ. Hecker also demonstrates how easily representational typologies can be established.

The catalogue for this exhibition, designed by Dancing Foxes Press, gathers previously published texts by Duchamp, Claire Fontaine, Joseph Kosuth, and Lucy Lippard to establish a direct relation to the process of re-contextualization that the readymade engages in.

Together, these artists chart our changes in perception, demonstrating that artistic practice has become notably more politicized and engaged with the representation of multiple realities.

The readymade, and its legacies, demand that we be active viewers. *It is what it is. Or is it?* culls together different, even unexpected, approaches to the readymade to insist upon its relevance as a method, practice, and approach for artists today.

¹ Cabanne, Pierre. *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*. Da Capo Press, Inc., 1979, p. 48.

PUBLICATION

It is what it is. Or is it? is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue featuring an essay by Dean Daderko, Curator, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. The publication also includes a selection of essays-as-readymades: previously published texts by Marcel Duchamp, Claire Fontaine, Joseph Kosuth, and Lucy Lippard. To receive an email announcing the availability of this catalogue, due out in mid-July, please click [HERE](#).

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: *It is what it is. Or is it?* **Friday, May 11**

6-7PM: Members' Preview

CAMH Members get a first look at the exhibition with Curator Dean Daderko.

7-9PM: Public Reception

Help us celebrate the opening of this group exhibition. Reception with bar and food truck; cash only please.

Curator's Talk

May 12, 3PM

Join CAMH Curator Dean Daderko for a conversational tour of the exhibition.

Lecture Series: One Artist, One Work

May 26, 2PM

Critic and writer Jennie King shares her paper *Something Old, Something New, Something 'Borrowed': William Cordova's Laberintos and the Machu Picchu Artifacts at Yale*, which addresses a work included in the exhibition, Cordova's *Laberintos (pa' octavio paz y gaspar yanga)*.

Artists/Scholars Talk: Lynn Herbert

June 16, 2PM

Former CAMH Senior Curator Lynn Herbert offers her views on the exhibition.

In Conversation:

Rachel Hecker and Dean Daderko

July 7, 2PM

Artist Rachel Hecker, represented in the exhibition by paintings from her recent *Jesus* series, joins Curator Dean Daderko in a conversation about her practice, and offers audience members an opportunity to get up close and personal with her work.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

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, Faye 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, Marley Lott, Poppi Massey, Beverly and Howard Robinson, Andrew Schirrmeister, Susan Vaughan Foundation, Inc., and Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Wilson. Donors - A Fare Extraordinaire, Anonymous, Anonymous, Bank of Texas, Bergner and Johnson Design, The Brown Foundation, Inc., Jereann Chaney, Susie and Sanford Criner, Elizabeth Howard Crowell, Sara Dodd-Spickelmier and Keith Spickelmier, Ruth Dreessen and Thomas Van Laan, Marita and J.B. Fairbanks, Jo and Jim Furr, Barbara and Michael Gamson, Brenda and William Goldberg / Bernstein Global Wealth Management, King & Spalding L.L.P., KPMG, LLP, Judy and Scott Nyquist, David I. Saperstein, Scurlock Foundation, and Karen and Harry Susman.

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.

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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 Faye 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 a leading destination to experience innovative art. CAMH actively encourages public engagement with its exhibitions through its educational programs, publications, and online presence.

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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.