

JANUARY 10, 2011
PRESS

MEDIA CONTACT
Connie McAllister
Communications and Marketing Manager
Tel 713 284 8255
cmcallister@camh.org

**ALWAYS FRESH
ALWAYS FREE**

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is pleased to present the first United States museum survey of work in video by British artistic team John Wood and Paul Harrison.

Answers to Questions:
John Wood and Paul Harrison
February 12 – April 24, 2011

Opening Reception
Friday, February 11, 2011
7–10PM

Artists/Scholars Talk: *Lads vs. Guys* with the artists and The Art Guys
Saturday, February 12, 2011
2PM

Musiqa Loft Concert
Thursday, February 17, 2011
6:30PM

HOUSTON, TX (January 10, 2011)—John Wood and Paul Harrison, a British collaborative duo, make single-channel videos, multipart video installations, sculptural objects, and works on paper that elegantly fuse advanced aesthetic research with existential comedy. The artists' spare, to-the-point works feature the actions of their own bodies, a wide range of static and moving props, or combinations of both to illustrate the triumphs and tribulations of making art and having a life. In their not-always-successful experiments with movement and materials, Wood and



Both images: John Wood and Paul Harrison, *Shelf* (video still), 2007. DVD: color, sound, 27 minutes. Courtesy the artists

CAMH



Contemporary Arts Museum Houston
5216 Montrose Boulevard
Houston, Texas 77006-6547

Tel 713 284 8250
Fax 713 284 8275
www.camh.org

Harrison employ exuberant invention, subtle slapstick, and a touch of lighthearted melancholy to reveal the inspiration and perspiration—as well as the occasional hint of desperation—behind all creative acts. *Answers to Questions: John Wood and Paul Harrison* is the first United States museum survey of work in video by this British artistic team and is curated by Toby Kamps, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, The Menil Collection, Houston.

Wood and Harrison describe themselves as performance artists and sculptors whose audience is the video camera. Meeting at the Bath College of Higher Education in 1989, the artists have worked together since 1993 and share a studio in Wood's city of Bristol, two hours away from London. They have forged a creative partnership based on physical trust and equal ownership of ideas and roles—although they both agree that Wood, the shorter, stockier of the two, is the better straight man and often cast him as such. Each of their works begins with a simple drawing in which they work out the engineering and timing of their ideas. Their staging and filming, they say, always aims to be “straightforward” and “undramatic.” They eschew the dynamic camerawork and elaborate editing common in artists' films today, employing a basic, do-it-yourself approach that highlights their physical activities and constructions, many of which include kinetic elements.

Usually made with a fixed camera, their low-tech works contain no special effects or gimmicks other than occasional tracking shots and cuts that give the appearance of seamless movement. The early work *Board* (1993), a dancelike performance involving Wood and Harrison making dozens of collaborative, acrobatic moves centered around a large sheet of MDF chipboard, which they take turns holding and dropping, highlights the artists' physical virtuosity and genius for unlocking unexpected permutations in materials and gestures.

The visual and physical language Wood and Harrison have developed harkens back to the 1960s and works by video art pioneers like Bruce Nauman, Joan Jonas, and William Wegman that were casual and bare-bones, focusing on artists performing simple, oftentimes repetitive tasks in nondescript spaces. Like these predecessors, Wood and Harrison also are influenced by new theories of performance developed in the 1960s by dancers like Yvonne Rainer, who cultivated the idea that inspired amateurs, performing to the best of their abilities, were as valid as trained professionals. In *3-Legged* (1997) a harrowing attempt to move in unison with legs tied together as in a three-

legged race while a high-speed serving machine fires tennis balls at them, Wood and Harrison display the ways they learn, fail, and succeed together. Just before the machine runs out of balls, the exhausted artists discover that all they need to do to avoid getting beamed is duck.

In many of the works in which Wood and Harrison figure as protagonists, there is an element of archness—a tiny pregnant pause or twinkle in the eye—that signals self-awareness. In this sense, Wood and Harrison are heirs to intensely physical American silent film comics Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd. They also acknowledge a debt to a legacy of uniquely British television humor built on the cultural embrace of the silly and the uptight found in comedy troupes like the hysterical Monty Python and the understated double act Morecambe and Wise.

Wood and Harrison are experts at marshaling materials and masters of the physics of everyday life. Whether in complex works like *66.86m* (2004), a depiction of an elaborate grid of white-and-black rope and pulleys that, after much pulling, eventually traces the outline of a chair; or simpler works like *Photocopier* (2007), a simple stop-action animation made by shooting the tray of a Xerox machine as it fills with sequential images of a sailboat moving across a horizon; and *Fan/paper/fan* (2007), in which a piece of paper is balanced on edge between two fans and dances suspended, Wood and Harrison reveal a masterful understanding of the foundational principles of Minimal and Conceptual Art. They consistently use the bare minimum of materials and effort to shape their ideas. The studied neutrality of their performance spaces, the spare geometries of their props, and the recurring interests in grids, sequences, and a clear, illustrational quality in their work indicate that they are steeped in the culture of reductive and idea-based art.

The history of film is another inspiration for Wood and Harrison. They admire the elegant staging and pacing of Jacques Tati's 1967 film *Playtime*, a low-key, nearly dialogue-less physical comedy set in lobbies, apartments, and restaurants in high-modernist buildings. And the eight-minute tracking shot of a pileup of cars on a highway in Jean-Luc Godard's film *Weekend* (1967), is the inspiration for the 27-minute *Shelf* (2007), a series of static and moving tableaux made from household hardware and toys arranged on a shelf, filmed and edited so that it appears as though the camera is moving along an endless shelf. As the lens moves serenely past them, these objects perform their own mini-dramas: a tugboat sinks; a toy train hits a car straddling its tracks, pushing it to a waiting ambulance, police car, and tow truck; and

a row of alarm clocks go off in succession, creating a cacophony of electronic chirps. Developing its own logical momentum as it progresses, *Shelf* suggests that everyday objects have lives of their own that need only be seen with fresh eyes to reveal themselves.

Through their efforts, no matter how absurd, Sisyphean, or masochistic, Wood and Harrison reveal the inventive play behind all art, even its most ephemeral strains. The creative sparks Wood and Harrison throw off in their simple, self-effacing video works are the raw material of human culture. They trigger the small epiphanies and perspective changes that make life worth living. Grounded in a reverence for the quotidian, Wood and Harrison's unique blend of the absurd and erudite, high and low, philosophical and funny, captures both a sense of wonder and the necessary thrill of risk and experimentation in art and life alike.

PUBLICATION

Answers to Questions: John Wood and Paul Harrison is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue featuring an essay by Toby Kamps, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, The Menil Collection, Houston, as well as color reproductions of featured work, and the artists' biography and bibliography.

This publication is made possible by a grant from The Brown Foundation, Inc.

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

Answers to Questions: John Wood and Paul Harrison Friday, February 11, 7-10PM

Join us for the first United States museum survey of work in video by British artistic team **John Wood and Paul Harrison**. Reception with bar and food truck; cash only please.

Artists/Scholars Talk: Lads vs. Guys

John Wood and Paul Harrison and The Art Guys Saturday, February 12, 2PM

It's a battle between dynamic duos: British team **John Wood and Paul Harrison** take on Houston collaborative duo **The Art Guys** (Michael Galbreth and Jack Massing). **Toby Kamps**, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, The Menil Collection, Houston, and organizing curator of *Answers to*

Questions: John Wood and Paul Harrison, will referee.

Musiq'a Loft Concert

Thursday, February 17, 6:30PM

Musiq'a's Loft Concert series continues with an evening at CAMH that includes a world premiere by **Bill Ryan** performed by violinist **Todd Reynolds**. A composer, conductor, and arranger, Reynolds is committed to genre-bending and technology-driven innovation in music and has produced innumerable collaborations with artists that regularly cross musical and disciplinary boundaries, regularly placing him in venues from clubs to concert halls around the world.

Presented in collaboration with the University of Houston Mitchell Center for the Arts.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

Answers to Questions: John Wood and Paul Harrison has been made possible by the patrons, benefactors and donors to the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston's Major Exhibition Fund: Major Patron—Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, Faye Sarofim, Michael Zilkha; Patrons—Louise D. Jamail, Mr. and Mrs. I. H. Kempner III, Ms. Louisa Stude Sarofim, Leigh and Reggie Smith; Benefactors—City Kitchen Catering, George and Mary Josephine Hamman Foundation, Jackson Hicks / Jackson and Company, Marley Lott, Poppi Massey, Beverly and Howard Robinson, Andrew Schirmeister, Susan Vaughan Foundation, Inc., Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Wilson; Donors—A Fare Extraordinaire, Anonymous, Baker Botts, L.L.P., Bergner and Johnson Design, The Brown Foundation, Inc., Jereann Chaney, Susie and Sanford Criner, Elizabeth Howard Crowell, Ruth Dreessen and Thomas Van Laan, Marita and J.B. Fairbanks, Jo and Jim Furr, Barbara and Michael Gamson, Mr. and Mrs. 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 Botts L.L.P., 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, M.D. Anderson Foundation, Marian and Speros Martel Foundation Endowment, Mrs. Louisa Stude Sarofim, and 20K Group, LLC.

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

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, 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.

Continental Airlines 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 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.