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
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 exhibition reflects artists’ equal 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 Spectacular of Vernacular considers work that can be heavily narrated, highly personal, and laboriously produced.

FEATURED ARTISTS

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, Culturicide, 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, Montpelier, 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](http://www.houstonmuseumdistrict.org).

**EXHIBITION SUPPORT**

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**EDUCATION SUPPORT**


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**GENERAL SUPPORT**

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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.

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.