

NEWS

Press Contact:
 Online Press Room:

Karen Gysin 612.375.7651 karen.gysin@walkerart.org
 press.walkerart.org

THE SPECTACULAR OF VERNACULAR FEATURES ARTWORKS BY 26 ARTISTS WHO UTILIZE CRAFT, INCORPORATE FOLKLORE, AND REVEL IN ROADSIDE KITSCH

EXHIBITION PREMIERES AT WALKER ART CENTER JANUARY 29–MAY 8, 2011



Marc Swanson
Untitled (Looking Back Buck), 2004
 crystals, polyurethane foam, and adhesive
 36 x 18 x 18 inches
 © Marc Swanson
 Image courtesy Richard Gray Gallery

Minneapolis, September 3, 2010—In an era of virtual neighborhoods and fast-paced Internet communication, the Walker Art Center exhibition *The Spectacular of Vernacular* addresses the role of vernacular forms in the work of 26 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*, curated by Walker chief curator Darsie Alexander, premieres in Minneapolis January 29–May 8, 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



Siah Armajani
Closet Under Dormer, 1984–1985
 wood, paint, shellac, mirror
 107.5 x 48 x 27.25 inches
 Collection Walker Art Center
 T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 1986



Jess
An Universe, 1961
 glass, metal, antlers, wood, paper, hair,
 ceramic, bone, feather, starfish, walnut
 18 1/2 x 20 x 20 inches
 Collection Walker Art Center
 T.B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 1993

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 William Eggleston, whose color-saturated images gravitate toward the tawdry palette of faded billboards and road signs. 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.

The Artists

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.

Exhibition Catalogue

A fully illustrated 112-page catalogue will include an essay by exhibition curator Darsie Alexander exploring artists' interest in the vernacular as a means to address aspects of folk ritual, amateur craft, and sense of place in their work; 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 where it is so abundant. Also included will be a reading list, featured as an appendix, that functions as a cross-section of art criticism and cultural studies. A full plate section will highlight the works in the exhibition.

Distributed by D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 155 Sixth Avenue, Second Floor, New York, NY 10013, 800.338.2665 (phone), 800.478.3128 (fax), artbook.com, and available at the Walker Art Center Shop, 612.375.7633 (phone), 612.375.7565 (fax). ISBN 978-0-935640-99-1 \$15 (\$13.50 Walker members).

Exhibition Curator

Darsie Alexander is chief curator at the Walker Art Center. Before her appointment, 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).

Acknowledgments

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Gallery Hours and Admission

\$10 adults; \$8 seniors (65+); \$6 students/teens (with ID)
Free to Walker members and children ages 12 and under.
Free with a paid ticket to a same-day Walker event.
Free to all every Thursday evening (5–9 pm) and on the first Saturday of each month (10 am–5 pm).

Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday 11 am–5 pm
Thursday 11 am–9 pm
Closed Mondays

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The Walker Art Center is located at 1750 Hennepin Avenue—where Hennepin meets Lyndale—one block off Highways I-94 and I-394, in Minneapolis.

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