

**The Museum of Contemporary Art**  
**Guide Program**  
*The Fluidity of Time*  
**November 25, 2005 – February 25, 2006**

**Introductory Panel**

Borrowing its title from that of the painting in the collection by artist Yves Tanguy, *The Fluidity of Time* surveys works by several generations of artists who have made defining contributions to contemporary art in recent decades. Many of these artists, who have been the subjects of exhibitions held over the past several decades at the MCA, maintain enduring significance in art history. This exhibition both provides a evolutionary view of certain artistic developments and disrupts that chronology, allowing works of art from different decades to address each other and to provoke new interpretations of works and artists' reputations over time.

The exhibition begins with early figurative paintings that are joined by key works from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in a plurality of media, revealing a greater range of ideas, materials, and formal directions that characterized the art of those decades. Among the most recent works presented are those by emerging and established artists, including recent acquisitions for the museum's collection. The exhibition also incorporates some works on loan to amplify the collection's holdings.

On the north side of the building is a major new installation by artist Sarah Sze, made in 2005, positioned adjacent to a work from 1967 by Dan Flavin. Both artists received their first American museum exhibitions at the MCA. The juxtaposition of one of the first and one of the most recent examples of large-scale installation art highlights the genre's increasing importance in contemporary art.

Interweaving art of the recent past with that of the evolving present, this exhibition aims to reveal how the fluidity of time reanimates our responses to the art of our time and to relationships between works by artists of the different generations that comprise the MCA Collection.

**Exhibition Checklist**

**Lobby Galleries**

**John McCracken (American, b. 1934)**

*Untitled, 1967*

Fiberglass, polyester resin, and wood

Gift of Ileana Sonnabend

1984.53

Wall label

One of many plank sculptures that McCracken began creating in 1966, *Untitled* joins a stark, elongated rectangle with a vivid, sensuous green surface. The highly refined nature of the sculpture's green exterior reflects the significance that some minimalist artists of the 1960s and 1970s placed on achieving an industrially manufactured appearance in their work. Recalling a range of forms from architectural structures and memorial stones to surfboards, the work leans informally against a wall rather than standing free or on a pedestal unlike traditional sculpture.

**Damián Ortega (Mexican, b. 1967)**

*Adentro/Afuera (Superficie Modulada) [Inside/Outside (Superficial Modulation)]*,  
**2002**

Acrylic, fiberglass, acrylic hinges, plastic, and tape  
Restricted gift of Carol and Douglas Cohen  
2002.83

Wall label

This work comprises two interrelated elements: a three-dimensional structure created from an interlocking system of acrylic and fiberglass and a white tape diagram that appears to be a template or plan for the structure's reconstruction. Ortega's use of hinges to connect the plastic panels suggests that the entire structure could be folded, unfolded, and reconfigured in another space or situation. *Adentro/Afuera (Superficie Modulada)* echoes current architectural concepts and practices that place a similar emphasis on makeshift or portable structures built for fast-paced contemporary life.

**Jeff Wall (Canadian, b. 1946)**

*Diagonal Composition*, **1995**

Silver dye-bleach transparency and light box  
Partial and promised gift from The Howard and Donna Stone Collection  
2002.66

Additional information

This photograph was taken in the cellar of Wall's studio. The scale of the objects is life-size, but the cropping of the frame seems to magnify them and give them undue significance. It is not the scale which is magnified, then, but the attention that gets paid to an apparently insignificant corner of a sink.

**Jenny Holzer (American, b. 1950)**

*Truisms*, **1983**

Electronic sign  
Partial gift of Dr. Paul and Dorie Sternberg  
1986.66

Wall label

Since 1978, Holzer has composed a series of truisms, or short phrases, derived from a variety of clichés, advertising slogans, and literary sources. These authoritarian, yet often ambiguous phrases, encourage the viewer to reflect on the meaning of the overwhelming amount of messages one sees daily. The LED sign, a format that has become Holzer's

signature, is chosen for its associations with advertising and the dissemination of authoritative information in public places. One full loop of all of the phrases takes twenty-six minutes and shows a variety of the LED sign's rhythmic variations of color, speed, and presentation of the moving text.

#### Additional information

The inspiration for Holzer's *Truisms* came from her experience in the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program. Students were given a list of "great books" to read, giving her the idea of oversimplifying complex concepts. The pithy sayings she composed were first displayed outside museums and galleries—on handbills and posters and later in Times Square.

Her 193 *Truisms* address fundamental issues like money, power, and love and have the tone of clichés. The *Truisms* are organized alphabetically and the type and pace vary, mimicking the human voice. The title, *Truisms*, suggests agreement, but many of the statements contradict each other.

#### **Jim Hodges (American, b. 1957)**

##### ***Just This Side, 1999***

Wood, metal, and light bulbs

Courtesy of the Howard and Donna Stone Collection

EL2002.2.a-f

#### **Thomas Struth (German, b. 1954)**

##### ***Familia Shimada Yamaguchi 1986 (The Shimada Family Yamaguchi), 1989***

Chromogenic development print

Gerald S. Elliott Collection

1995.102

#### Additional information

Struth depicts his sitters in their own homes and has them look into the lens of the camera and present themselves as they wish to be seen rather than as the photographer commands, revealing an authentic truth about their relationship to each other. Struth only chooses subjects he knows personally and the resulting portraits have been noted for their unusual gaze between subject and viewer, virtually erasing the camera's presence.

#### **Thomas Ruff (German, b. 1958)**

##### ***Portrait (Carolyn Kewer), 1988***

Chromogenic development print

Gerald S. Elliott Collection

1995.90

#### Wall label

The subject of this portrait is an acquaintance of Ruff, who photographed her in a frontal pose, with even, harsh light, recalling a passport photo or mug shot. Each freckle, line, and hair is exposed on a grand scale, yet the image does not convey the essence of the subject's personality. Ruff's methods result in unsettling, ambiguous portraits. He has remarked that his work reflects upon memories of growing up in postwar East Germany

in an environment of political uncertainty and government surveillance.

#### Additional information

This portrait is one of a series of approximately 100 of Ruff's acquaintances and fellow students. In this series, familiar artifacts of contemporary life—small id photos—are presented on a monumental scale. Ruff was among the first to make portraits in that scale and to create studio photographs that were not functional in nature.

#### **Dawoud Bey (American, b. 1953)**

##### ***Carrie II, 1997***

Internal dye diffusion-transfer print

Restricted gift of Jane and Gary Wilner, Anita Blanchard and Martin Nesbitt, Lynn and Allen Turner, James Reynolds, Sandra P. and Jack Guthman, and members of the New Group

2002.80.a-f

#### Wall label

In *Carrie II*, a young woman wearing jeans, sneakers, and a T-shirt sits protectively in a chair with her arms holding her ankles. Her averted gaze avoids direct contact with the viewer in a gesture of self-consciousness. In his photographic portraits of urban youth that encompass both single figures and groupings, Bey seeks to create a relationship between the artist, subject, and viewer. He photographs fragmented parts of the sitter, then reassembles the total image to convey a vivid sense of energy and an almost cubist sense of movement.

#### **Cindy Sherman (American, b. 1954)**

##### ***Untitled, #147, 1985***

Chromogenic development print

Gerald S. Elliott Collection

1995.99

#### Wall label

In this work from Sherman's *Fairy Tale* series of the mid-1980s, the artist uses dramatic prosthetics and wigs to create a strange and artificial-looking figure. The dark background and closely cropped view of the figure's face enhances the sinister mood of the scene. As in all of her works, Sherman plays every role—actress, photographer, make-up artist, prop person, and director—transforming herself into an enigmatic and grotesque character, undermining the conventions of fairy tales by highlighting the horrific and frightening aspects of the otherwise benign genre of children's stories.

#### Additional information

Although Sherman is both the subject and the model in her photographs, they are not self-portraits; she says she uses herself because it's easier. All of Sherman's photographs are untitled, to avoid guiding the viewer's interpretation. Sherman is interested in how identity is constructed by the mass media and other sources (magazines, movies, television, art history, and fairy tales).

*Untitled #147* is from Sherman's *Fairy Tale* series of 1985, which began as a commission for *Vanity Fair*. About the series, Sherman said that the world is drawn toward beauty;

however her interest is in the grotesque, ugly, and dark side of human nature. Historically fairy tales were often graphic, frightening, and violent (the Brothers Grimm, for example). One cliché Sherman explored in the series is that of a woman in distress waiting for a handsome prince.

**Cindy Sherman (American, b.1954)**

***Untitled, #167, 1985***

Chromogenic development print  
Gerald S. Elliott Collection  
1995.100

Additional information

Growing out of her examination of the grotesque and macabre in her *Fairy Tale* series, Sherman's *Disasters* present wastelands of garbage and decay, disfigured body parts and other scenes of horror and despair. She uses dramatic lighting and appealing colors to create a lush visual appearance—with a composition similar to an “all over” painting—for otherwise revolting and repulsive imagery. The series demonstrates Sherman's fascination with portraying scenes of abjection—a state of utter despair, disgust, or hopelessness.

In this series, Sherman disappears from the images and in her place she uses objects she collects. She says she is fascinated with the morbid and unthinkable and that it's important to show artificiality because the real is too horrible.

**Cindy Sherman (American, b. 1954)**

***Untitled Film Still #14, 1978***

Gelatin silver print  
Gift of Lannan Foundation  
1997.56

***Untitled Film Still #8, 1978***

Gelatin silver print  
Gift of Lannan Foundation  
1997.52

***Untitled Film Still #9, 1978***

Gelatin silver print  
Gift of Lannan Foundation  
1997.55

***Untitled Film Still #29, 1979***

Gelatin silver print  
Gift of Lannan Foundation  
1997.53

***Untitled Film Still #24, 1979***

Gelatin silver print  
Gift of Lannan Foundation  
1997.54

### Wall label

Sixty-nine photographs comprise Sherman's black-and-white *Untitled Film Stills* series made between 1977 and 1980 that recall promotional photographs from Hollywood studios. The photos depict female characters played by Sherman in various costumes and scenarios typical of popular films from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. *Untitled Film Still #8* is one of the three that were her first location shots, for which the setting dictated the particular image. In addition to examining portrayals of women in popular culture, Sherman investigates how interpretation of an image is tied to location and character types.

### Additional information

In her *Film Stills* series, Sherman doesn't recreate specific movies, yet we can guess at the plot and character from just one shot. The images are black and white and deliberately grainy to create a feeling of nostalgia.

At the time movies were primarily made by men, thus influencing how women were portrayed and therefore perceived. The films reflected the post-war era's ambivalence about women's roles, thus Sherman's images often present stereotypical women, either passive or seductive femme fatales. She says, "Even though I've never thought of my work as feminist or as a political statement, certainly everything in it was drawn from my observations as a woman in this culture."

### **Catherine Opie (American, b. 1961)**

#### ***Untitled #1 from Mini-mall series, 1997***

Ink-jet print on paper

Restricted gift of the Women's Board

2000.3

### **Catherine Opie (American, b. 1961)**

#### ***Untitled #14 from Mini-mall series, 1997***

Ink-jet print on paper

Restricted gift of Dr. Raffy and Vicki Hovanessian in honor of Francesco Bonami and Elizabeth Smith

2000.6

### Additional information

Opie's photographs of Los Angeles mini-malls were shot in the early morning hours to avoid any signs of cars and people. Opie used a special camera (a 7 by 17 inch banquet camera) to maximize the horizontal field, creating a panoramic format of the contemporary American West, low and wide with landscape on either side.

Opie has stated: "Los Angeles is known for not having a street life, except for in your vehicle... In the case of the *Mini-malls* I wanted people to read the signs. Those mini-malls mark the entrance and exits of various populations. These ones are about the American dream for me. Mini-malls are often forgotten about... They're the ugly side of L.A.—people don't really want to think about them."

**Jeff Wall (Canadian, b. 1946)**

***Pleading, 1988***

Silver dye-bleach transparency and light box

Gerald S. Elliott Collection

1995.106

Wall label

Taken on the streets of London, *Pleading* is an unstaged photograph of a woman communicating urgently with a man. The woman's all black attire and the presence of another woman who is dressed identically, suggest that they are from a religious group such as the Salvation Army. A group of similarly dressed people across the street erect a sign bearing two crosses, also indicating a religious affiliation. Like many of Wall's photographs, this image depicts an ambiguous moment, and the backlit transparency format conveys cinematic qualities that heighten the drama.

Additional information

Wall got the inspiration for his choice of medium while on a bus ride from Barcelona to London when he saw a backlit bus ad. He says, "It was not photography, it was not cinema, it was not painting, it was not propaganda, but it has strong associations with them all."

**Dan Graham (American, b. 1942)**

***Bedroom Dining Room Model House, 1967***

Chromogenic development print

Gerald S. Elliott Collection

1995.42

Additional information

Early in his career, Graham was known primarily as a photojournalist who documented suburban housing developments and other quotidian types of architecture. *Bedroom Dining Room Model House*, part of this early series, depicts a carefully decorated bedroom and dining room of a model home in Staten Island, New Jersey. The décor, wood furniture, and olive green chairs was, at the time, an idealized version of a middle-class interior.

**Louise Lawler (American, b. 1947)**

***Between Reagan and Bush, 1989***

Silver dye-bleach print and transfer letters on painted wall

Edition of 5 aside from 1 artist's proof

Gerald S. Elliott Collection

1995.58.a-b

Additional information

*Between Reagan and Bush* consists of two juxtaposed parts. One is Lawler's framed photograph of works by Jeff Koons in storage before their installation for his 1988 exhibition *Banality* at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York. The other is a painted wall panel of a menu taken from *The Silver Palate Cookbook*, a contemporary guide to entertaining geared toward elite consumers.

The work in the MCA Collection is one of a series of six, each bearing the same title and framed photograph, but distinguished by the color of the wall panel and letters and the particular menu chosen from the same cookbook. The title of the work identifies policies of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush as courses in a meal for upper-class consumption.

Koons made the particular works in Lawler's photograph as a commentary on the relationship of taste to class, exaggerating the properties of kitsch objects for mass consumption in order to produce sculptures for elite consumption. Lawler's appropriation of the Koons sculptures, however, turns them back against themselves. With the giant pig sculpture in the foreground and the menu to the side of the photographs, Lawler uses Koons' work to represent what she sees as the gluttony of both elitist taste and politics, commenting on conspicuous consumption in the art market and culture at large.

### South Galleries

#### **George Segal (American, 1924–2000)**

##### ***Lovers on a Bed I, 1962***

Plaster and bed

Gift of Beatrice Cummings Mayer

2003.19

#### Wall label

*Lovers on a Bed I* captures the ordinariness of the interaction between the two figures and freezes the lovers' intimacy in time and space. It exemplifies Segal's method of making sculpture—casting human bodies in white plaster to create ghostly renditions of the original subject. Leaving the figures white but placing them on an actual bed, Segal poetically conjoins the handmade with commonplace objects from daily life.

#### Additional information

Segal's sculptures are cast from live models, often friends or family, and have a personal significance to the artist. Once displayed, however, the figures in his work become anonymous.

#### **Christo (Christo Javacheff) (American, b. Bulgaria, 1935)**

##### ***Orange Store Front, 1964–65***

Painted wood, Masonite, Plexiglas, galvanized metal, Pegboard, fabric, and electric lights

Gift of Natalie and Irving Forman

1975.50

#### Wall label

Christo's early works defied convention by adopting non-art, often industrial found objects, and by suggesting connections with real-life situations. In this work, which uses a fragment of a storefront found in downtown New York, fabric obscures the windows, evoking mystery and implying life within. The drapery recalls Christo's technique of

packaging and wrapping as a way to make objects mysterious and marvelous, relating this work to other sculptures and installations that he has designed and produced since the early 1960s.

Additional information

This work is part of a series of *Store Fronts* begun in 1964. In these objects he used doors salvaged from lower Manhattan buildings to create storefronts, juxtaposing architectural exteriors with gallery interiors. Like his other *Store Fronts* executed in yellow and green, *Orange Store Front* is in full architectural scale, convincingly simulating an urban commercial store window. However, the viewer's expectations and curiosity about looking into a window display are frustrated by the white cloth drape and closed door, thwarting any impulse to buy what would be on display.

**Bruce Nauman (American, b. 1941)**

***Life, Death, Love, Hate, Pleasure, Pain, 1983***

Neon

Gerald S. Elliott Collection

1995.74

Wall label

In *Life, Death, Love, Hate, Pleasure, Pain*, Nauman has wryly spelled out the fundamentals of human existence, in colorful neon letters flashing alternately in roman and italic type. This endless circular dialogue offers no answers and leaves the viewer with infinite questions. Nauman, who has said that his work stems from his frustration with the human condition, has frequently incorporated text—printed, spoken, or implied—in his art, using language as if it were a sculptural material. In this work, he has chosen to use neon, a material commonly used in commercial signage and advertising, to engage the viewer with a familiar mode of communication.

Additional information

Nauman uses neon in an atypical way. Usually it is used for advertising purposes and seen from the outside. He uses it indoors to create art. In addition, the words spelled out in neon are typically banal, here they are profound. Nauman considers this work a sign which one reads vs. a sculpture to be looked at.

**George Tooker (American, b. 1920)**

***Children and Spastics, 1946***

Egg tempera on gesso panel

Gift of Mary and Earle Ludgin Collection

1981.38

Wall label

Meticulously rendered in egg tempera on panel—a centuries-old technique that involves the use of egg yolk to bind pigments—this painting has a monumental quality that belies its physical size. While its spatial clarity, use of architectural perspective, and figural style resemble that of the old masters, the eerie desolate setting and subject matter of intolerance and persecution are very much of the twentieth century.

**Leon Golub (American, 1922–2004)**

***Reclining Youth*, 1959**

Lacquer on canvas

Susan and Lewis Manilow Collection of Chicago Artists

1979.52

Wall label

The young male nude in Golub's painting is based on the ancient Greek sculpture known as the *Dying Gaul*. In *Reclining Youth* and others that Golub referred to as "burnt-man images," the artist applied a corrosive fluid to mottle and scar the look of the figure's skin. Remaking the classical ideal of the original sculpture into a tortured image with a vigorous painterly technique, this work is a haunting statement on the battered idealism of the modern era. During the 1950s, Golub became an important figure in a group of Chicago artists called the Monster Roster because of their recurring use of grotesque images like this one.

Additional information

Golub lived in Italy from 1956-7 and during that time became interested in Greek and Roman sculpture. About the painting Golub explains: "*Reclining Youth* is based on the great Hellenistic Greek sculpture the *Dying Gaul* [from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE; currently in Rome]. In relation to the pose of the *Dying Gaul*, *Reclining Youth* is potentially rising. He is wounded. His left hand is amputated, cut off. I visualized the actual sculptural fragmentation that takes place over time as symptomatic of both physical and psychic wounds or simply as songs of endurance, the organic beauty of Greek sculpture. These Colossi are stoic, brute and raw looking, eroded, massive in their sense of self. Whether erect or knocked down, they demonstrate a capacity to resist, to rise or fight back. They are both vulnerable and to be watched and perhaps feared. They stand up to time psychically and through erosion. They represent something that I've played with for many years... heroes or anti-heroes, active in the real world."

This painting is coated with 10-12 layers of lacquer paint and then scraped down to a roughly eroded and irregular surface. The erosion was accomplished using sculpture tools and lacquer solvents.

**Dorothea Tanning (American, b. 1910)**

***Sleeping Nude*, 1954**

Oil on canvas

Gift of anonymous donor

1984.23

Wall label

In *Sleeping Nude*, an unconscious woman's face is mysteriously and menacingly covered by an indistinct mass that resembles a storm cloud or folds of billowing cloth. This work is characteristic of both Tanning's interest in depicting women in situations charged with sexuality and psychological anxiety, and her incorporation of abstract forms. Tanning, who attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1930, was strongly inspired by surrealist art—an international movement prominent during the 1930s and 1940s that

dealt with the often strange and unpredictable nature of the unconscious mind.

Additional information

Dorothea Tanning was married to the Surrealist Max Ernst. Male Surrealists often considered women as their muses, and depicted them as such. Women surrealists also painted women, but typically for a different reason—to explore themselves. Tanning included a female nude in a realistic style accompanied by an abstract, dreamlike form, capturing the personal experience and narrative style characteristic of many women Surrealists.

**René Magritte (Belgian, 1896–1967)**

***Les merveilles de la nature (The Wonders of Nature), 1953***

Oil on canvas

Gift of Joseph and Jory Shapiro

1982.48

Wall label

The sculptural part-fish, part-human figures in *Les Merveilles de la Nature* appear to be alive, conveying an uncannily human quality of love. A ghostlike ship made of waves sails in the background, enhancing the fanciful subject of the painting and underscoring its dreamlike aura of fantasy and transformation.

Additional information

Magritte, like many other Surrealists, believed in juxtaposing ordinary objects in unordinary combinations in order to produce a feeling of dissociation or unsettledness in the viewer. In this painting, he has taken fantasy creatures, mermaids, reversed their form and made them petrified. In addition, the boat is composed of waves, another dream-like element. Magritte once said: “The rational is okay for science but only the irrational can make art.”

**Andy Warhol (American, 1928–1987)**

***Jacqueline Kennedy, 1964***

Silk-screen on canvas

Promised gift of Beatrice Cummings Mayer

PG1992.47

Wall label

Andy Warhol instinctively understood America’s obsession with celebrities and tragedy. In this photo–silk-screen portrait of Jacqueline Kennedy, the widow of assassinated American president John F. Kennedy, Warhol used appropriately somber colors. This multipanel work captures a world-famous public figure in a moment of private grief – as in the many images of her on television and in magazines and newspapers from that time.

Warhol often made paintings in series, repeating the same images within a single work, using a commercial silk-screen process to remove any trace of his touch. He said, “The more you look at the exact same thing, the more meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel.”

**Barbara Kruger (American, b. 1945)**

***Untitled (We construct the chorus of missing persons), 1983***

Gelatin silver mural prints with painted artist's frame

Restricted gift of Paul and Camille Oliver-Hoffmann

1984.22.a-c

Wall label

Using colossal enlargements of photographs from popular culture such as advertisements and magazines, Kruger combines these images with captions that employ ambiguous personal pronouns, forming new relationships between image and text. Here a bust-length portrait of a woman whose long hair partially obscures her face is emblazoned with a phrase full of seemingly authoritative referents. The “We” and “missing persons” are left unidentified, opening the work to a range of potential meanings and compelling us to reconsider what we think about our personal and collective assumptions.

Additional information

Kruger's layouts are informed by her years of work as a graphic designer beginning in the late 1960s, including her position as chief designer at Conde Nast. In her artwork, Kruger deliberately chooses attention-grabbing images, and then composes phrases that work with the images in a provocative and multi-faceted way. Once she arrives at combinations, she makes Photostats of the pictures, altering the size, cropping, and contrast to provide an image to be photographed again. She sends the final layouts to a photo studio and has them enlarged to her specifications in black-and-white or color.

**Fred Sandback (American, 1943–2003)**

***Untitled (Sculptural Study, Rindge Studio wall and floor construction), 1980/2004***

Red acrylic yarn

Restricted gift of Helyn Goldenberg, Barbara Ruben, and Dorie Sternberg; Joseph and Jory Shapiro Fund by exchange

2004.27

Wall label

Sandback's work is sculpture with implied volume and mass. Composed entirely of yarn, the sculpture carves out space similar to a line drawing. Like many minimalist approaches to sculpture, the piece is simultaneously determined by and calls awareness to the physical space it inhabits, influencing the viewer's movement and making the viewer aware of the tenuous edge it creates.

**Bernd and Hilla Becher (German, b. 1931 and b. 1934)**

***Cooling Towers, 1983***

Gelatin silver prints

Gerald S. Elliott Collection

1995.31.a-l

Additional information

The Bechers have traveled throughout Europe and North America documenting unused Industrial Revolution-era structures such as blast furnaces, water towers, grain silos, winding towers, oil refineries, and cooling towers. The photographs are grouped in sets

according to the purpose of the structure, and each image is enlarged or reduced to create uniformity of size and framed in grid structures that draw attention to the sculptural rather than the architectural monumentality of the forms. The Bechers, in fact, call their work “anonymous sculptures” and conceived of their project as an analysis of the aesthetic formal elements of the structures. They take all of their black and white pictures, which have low horizons and frontal views of buildings filling the image, on overcast days when there are few shadows.

Serial documentation can be traced back to the systematic, objective records of botanical and human life in the fields of botany, biology, and ethnology. Cooling towers were built for heavy industrial plants as heat transfer systems. The heat from industrial machinery is transferred to water, which is piped into the cooling tower and cooled by forced air through the top. The cold water is then piped back into the plant.

**John Baldessari (American, b. 1931)**

***Fish and Ram*, 1988**

Tempera on gelatin silver and chromogenic development prints

Restricted gift of Gerald S. Elliott; Anne and William J. Hokin by exchange; and National Endowment for the Arts Purchase Grant

1989.2.a–e

Wall label

Like Baldessari’s other photographic groupings from the 1980s, *Fish and Ram* is a composition of unrelated photographs linked together with thinly colored lines. The red line, as a guide for deciphering the possible relationships between the images, is described by the artist as representing danger or abuse of power. The black-and-white images of a woman, stockbrokers, a man being assaulted, and the soldiers in formation are starkly juxtaposed with warm color photographs of wild animals. In this combination, the organic freedom and instinctive nature of the animal kingdom is contrasted with the regimented and destructive aspects of human existence.

Additional information

Baldessari is best known for his photoworks, begun in the 1980s and continuing to the present day, in which apparently unrelated film or photo stills are juxtaposed. The juxtapositions he selects are typically driven by social or formal concerns. Linking the images in these works are colored lines that have symbolic or metaphorical associations; flat colored dots block out the faces of those represented, denying the individuality of the subjects.

*Fish and Ram* consists of two color and four black-and-white photographs joined together to form an irregular geometric shape. The initial inspiration for *Fish and Ram* was a collection of wildlife trophies from Baldessari’s photo archive: “People displaying the things they’ve killed or captured...seemed to be something endemic in our culture that I wanted to portray. Just being over in Catalina, in this fish restaurant, and seeing all these great 8 x 10 photographs of this giant marlin and this fisherman...they’re always flanked on either side by three women in bikinis, similar trophies, I suppose.”

He continued the “trophy” theme from the animals to “woman as sex object” and focused on a formal element—the rhythmic curves of the fish’s body and the ram’s horns. “So I think that set it up and then I began to look at other photographs where similar rhythms were set up. That determined the selection of this one [the image of the woman] with the fur draped over the shoulder and I cropped into that because I loved the movement of the fur,” he said.

Baldessari’s photographic archive also consisted of images of crowds and he was particularly interested in the rhythms that crowds would create. Baldessari saw that this particular photo of a group of stockbrokers at various levels set up a rhythm. He put discs in front of the people’s faces and ran a line through them to continue the formal element of the rhythmic, curved line.

He also had a collection of images of fights in movies. About the image of a duel with whips he selected for *Fish and Ram*, he said, “all of sudden that was the glue that brought all these things together, and in contrast I had these rows of people in formation [the photo of the soldiers], just horizontal lines.”

Juxtaposed above these images suggestive of a violent and constrictive society are the two color photographs. According to Baldessari, although they are hunted, the fish and the ram have an instinctual wisdom in contrast to human beings in our rational bureaucratic society run amok.

**Yves Tanguy (American, b. France, 1900–1955)**

***Untitled (The Fluidity of Time), 1930***

Oil on canvas

Gift of Joseph and Jory Shapiro

1998.41

Wall label

This work by self-taught artist Yves Tanguy is one of the earliest pieces in the MCA Collection. Characteristic of his style of ambiguous forms in a landscape-like setting, the painting may have been inspired by the complex rock formations and the clarity of sunlight that Tanguy encountered during a 1930 trip to Africa. His subtitle has been borrowed for the title of this exhibition.

**Jim Hodges (American, b. 1957)**

***The end from where you are, 1998***

Silk, cotton, polyester, and thread

Restricted gift in memory of John S. Baran with additional restricted support from the Meta S. and Ronald Berger Family Foundation

1999.4

Wall label

*The end from where you are* is the last flower curtain in a series that Jim Hodges has been creating since 1995. The large field of black silk flowers sewn together evokes a sense of nostalgia, longing, and memory. While Hodges used a vibrant array of colors in previous flower curtains, this work is composed almost entirely of black flowers. Its delicacy,

fragility, and somber color suggest a mournful quality and allude to the passage of time and ebb and flow of life. According to Hodges, “The darkness of the work, like the darkening sky at the end of the day as the earth turns away from the sun, brings the viewer to a place of quiet reflection.”

Additional information

Hodges intended this work to be a fragile, poetic monument to friends who died from AIDS. The curtains are hand-sewn and evoke the flowers and drapery used in religious rituals. Unlike real flowers, artificial ones live forever, and in this piece Hodges uses them to capture and memorialize the ephemeral beauty of those who have passed away.

**Glenn Ligon (American, b. 1960)**

***Runaways, 1993***

Lithographs on paper

Gift of Sandra P. and Jack Guthman

2000.12.a-j

Wall label

Exploring language and images in relation to racial identity, Ligon’s *Runaways* series refers to early nineteenth-century posters announcing the disappearance of slaves. He combines the visual style and melodramatic language of historical slave narratives, newspaper ads, and anti-slavery pamphlets, with contemporary texts written by ten friends who were asked to describe him as if they were reporting a runaway to the police. These prints function as self-portraits, while simultaneously questioning the position of the individual—and more specifically Ligon, an African American artist—within a larger scope of history and contemporary American identity.

**Alfredo Jaar (Chilean, b. 1956)**

***Cries and Whispers, 1988***

Duratrans and light boxes

Gift of Howard and Donna Stone

1996.7.a-b

Wall label

Combining elements of photography, architecture, and theater, this work explores the complex relationships between industrialized nations and third-world countries, probing the power struggles that often exist between them. *Cries and Whispers* presents two images of the same weathered elderly man on large lightboxes. By positioning the man’s face above and below the viewer, Jaar suggests that we examine our position of relative privilege in a wealthy nation in relation to the circumstances of this individual.

**Lee Bontecou (American, b. 1931)**

***Untitled, 1990–2000***

Welded steel, porcelain, wire mesh, silk and wire

Gift of the Samuel Zell Revocable Trust

2005.26

Additional information

Bontecou's airy assemblage, is a hybrid of organic and mechanical forms, featuring sleek-winged and finned shapes cut from varying densities of fabric and wire mesh combined with porcelain orbs and spheres. The work evokes star charts, galaxies, constellations, and undersea worlds and appears to be both micro- and telescopic.

Nature and flight are recurring themes in Bontecou's work. Later pieces, like this one, are about mankind searching, dreaming, without degradation. Her process is an additive one; this work took a decade to complete.

**Chuck Close (American, b. 1940)**

***Cindy*, 1988**

Oil on canvas

Gift of Camille Oliver-Hoffmann in memory of Paul W. Oliver-Hoffmann

1998.24

Wall label

Using the predetermined structure of a grid system, Close transposes photographs of friends, often artists, onto enormous canvases. Working from a photograph allows Close to accurately represent a likeness through a highly technical process. Each individual square of the grid is filled with concentric circles of color that when viewed closely dissolve into an overall pattern of contrasting colors, and only crystallize into recognizable shapes and forms when viewed from a distance. The grid in this painting is on a diagonal to emphasize the slanted gesture of the subject. Its larger-than-life scale and abstracted details create an impressionistic and somewhat disorienting rendition of artist Cindy Sherman's true appearance.

**Ellen Gallagher (American, b. 1967)**

***Pomp-Bang*, 2003**

Plasticine, ink, and paper mounted on canvas

Joseph and Jory Shapiro Fund by exchange and restricted gift of Sara Szold

2004.19

Wall label

*Pomp-Bang*, the largest of the works from Gallagher's *Preserve* series, is a grid of images culled from wig and beauty product advertisements from the 1960s in *Ebony* magazine, over which the artist has molded playful and fantastic sculptural reinterpretations of various hairstyles that render the images almost abstract. Gallagher utilizes African American hairstyles because of their importance in representing and constructing cultural identities. Her title is taken from the names of different wig styles: "Medalo all-over pompadour glamour" and "Medalo all-over page boy glamour with part or with bangs." Gallagher has commented, "There is this desire from some that black artists should tell the truth, be authentic, but there is actually a lack of authenticity that is crucial to my work."

Additional information

*Pomp-Bang* is the third work in a series featuring recurring characters centered on

archival material and advertisements Gallagher has culled from magazines. While some of the characters repeat, each painting has a different sequence and the wigs vary. The Flying Nun character is specific to *Pomp-Bang*, as are wigs that double as helmets. “The wigs themselves have information embedded within them. They start from the ‘30s and go until about 1978, but here they are neither really chronological nor wholly arbitrary. The wigs admit an anxiety about identity and loss; they map integration, the civil rights movement right through to Vietnam and women’s rights,” Gallagher explains. The wig ads have been revised, extracted from their sources and mutated in scale. “The wig ladies are fugitives, conscripts from another time and place, liberated from the ‘race’ magazines of the past.”

She adds, “These women are not just trying to be beautiful; they had to have these prosthetics. It’s about what you needed to go out the door, like you weren’t even reasonable until you put these on. You need to be transformed, constricted by the humiliation of your own hair or these things all over your skin. Nothing’s right! Your skin needs to be whitened, or you have acne or bunions...So overwhelming. Everything needs to be transformed just to be acceptable.”

The material plasticine is frequently used for stop-action animation to suggest motion and also to make models.

**Ed Paschke (American, 1939–2005)**

***Elcina, 1973***

Oil on canvas

Gift of Albert J. Bildner

1974.5

**Kerry James Marshall (American, b. 1955)**

***7 am Sunday Morning, 2003***

Acrylic on canvas banner

Joseph and Jory Shapiro Fund

2003.16

Wall label

Marshall’s *7 am Sunday Morning* depicts a block in Chicago’s South-Side Bronzeville neighborhood. Once known as the Black Metropolis, Bronzeville was a vibrant community of black-owned businesses with a rich cultural life. Marshall includes notations and song lyrics that might be heard coming from buildings or cars on a Sunday morning including both popular secular music and gospel selections. The extraordinary optical phenomenon of a prismatic glare reflected off a building underscores the fictive nature of Marshall’s quasi-realistic, quasi-imaginary portrait of the community in which he lives and works.

Additional information

The Bronzeville neighborhood is where Marshall has his studio (38<sup>th</sup> and Indiana). The prismatic light in this painting represents one end of a spectrum. Together with another work of Marshall’s, *Black Painting*, these two works explore a range of vision and

perception from unconscious blindness to hallucination to awakened consciousness.

**Matta (Roberto Matta Echaurren) (French, b. Chile, 1911)**

***Untitled (Prime Ordeal), 1946***

Oil on canvas

Gift of Joseph and Jory Shapiro

1974.25

**Laura Owens (American, b. 1970)**

***Untitled, 1998***

Acrylic and oil on canvas

Restricted gift of Andrea and James Gordon

2000.4

Wall label

This painting depicts an elusive wooded landscape hidden by thick fog. A tree branch with a red berry peeks out behind the monochromatic white clouds. Recalling 1960s cartoons with their large flat blocks of pastel color and simplified forms, as well as elements of graphic design, this evocative landscape painting appears ethereal and whimsical in spite of its abstraction.

Additional information

*Untitled's* crisp white surface simultaneously stands in as an intensified version of the gallery's pristine white walls and functions as a picture hanging there. The painting's seeming abstraction is undermined by suggestively representational elements that imply the presence of a tree emerging momentarily from a blanket of thick fog. Both tree trunk and angling upper branch, dotted with berries, are created by thick accretions of paint squeezed right out of the tube.

**Lari Pittman (American, b. 1952)**

***Untitled #14, 2003***

Oil, lacquer, and Cel-Vinyl on gessoed canvas over wood panel

Joseph and Jory Shapiro Fund by exchange

2003.25

Wall label

Pittman incorporates an abundance of representational yet ambiguous figures and objects into his large-scale paintings to suggest narratives. Fragmented, overlaid, and elaborately stylized, this work includes a mass of imagery that is both personal and autobiographical. For instance, the number 3061 refers to the street address of his Los Angeles residence and is suggestive of larger social forces, blending abstract and figurative forms.

**Christian Holstad (American, b. 1972)**

***Micro Phonic Cornfields Consumed by the Plague, 2005***

Crocheted wool, vintage vinyl, millinery trimmings, used underwear, quilting cotton, and fiberfill

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward H. Weiss by exchange

### Wall label

In Holstad's "soft sculptures," disparate materials and objects are sewn together to create bizarre and often fantastical reimaginings of otherwise familiar items. This work fuses two completely different yet similarly phallic entities—a cornstalk and a microphone stand—into one compromised and ultimately flaccid new presence. In doing so, Holstad questions the power given to the user of a microphone stand (from politicians to rock stars) while infusing the object with a pathos by presenting it as a cornstalk infested with locusts (represented here by cut pencils and eraser shavings).

### **Jenny Holzer (American, b. 1950)**

#### ***Living Series, 1980–82***

Enamel on metal

Gift of Anne and William J. Hokin

1990.2.1–3

### Wall label

These plaques from Holzer's *Living Series* subvert the official function of signs that convey factual information. Instead, Holzer used mundane texts taken from brochures, advertisements, literary works, how-to manuals, and psychological reports, infusing them with a neutral voice that resembles the anonymous, authoritative tone of panels or signs in public institutions. As part of a large series of plaques, any of which could be displayed together or alone, the texts have no specific relationship to each other beyond the larger concept of the series. By using these tools of communication, Holzer aims to undermine and question the meaning of signs that bombard us everyday.

### **North Galleries**

### **Robert Irwin (American, b.1928)**

#### ***Untitled, 1965–67***

Acrylic lacquer on shaped aluminum

Gift of Lannan Foundation

1997.40

### Wall label

This untitled work from a series called *Disks* appears to be suspended and free from the wall, creating a pure visual experience for the viewer. Irwin has commented that "to be an artist is not a matter of making paintings or objects at all. What we are really dealing with is our state of consciousness and the shape of our perception." Irwin has consistently deemphasized the making of objects, focusing instead on an awareness of perceptual phenomena. Originally a painter, Irwin abandoned the use of canvas and its finite edges, striving instead to fuse his art with the space around it.

### Additional information

This work is part of a series of 18 aluminum disks Irwin made from 1965-67. Convex disks 4 or 5 feet in diameter are sprayed with matte acrylic paint outward in concentric rings of subtly changing spectral hues. "At the edges I made a very slight color and value

change, to lose the edge in the values of the shadow space surrounding each disk,” he says.

Each disc is mounted on a concealed arm projecting from the wall 12 to 15 inches and illuminated by two floodlights affixed to the ceiling and two on the floor. He was inspired by watching the perceptual effects of the light on the walls in his Venice Beach studio. His intent was for the edges of the disk to disappear and blend with the wall. Further, he wanted his three-dimensional objects to give the illusion of flatness; the reverse of painting. Like fellow California artist John McCracken, Irwin was interested in polish, surface effect, color, perception (the way light bounces off of, and is absorbed by, surfaces), and finish (cars, surfboards).

**Luisa Lambri (Italian, b.1969)**

***Untitled (Barragan House, #08A), 2005***

***Untitled (Barragan House, #10)), 2005***

Laser chrome prints

Edition of 5 aside from 1 artist's proof

Gift of Verge: The Emerging Artists Advisory Group of the MCA; Bernice and Kenneth Newberger Fund

Wall label

Lambri has consistently photographed modernist architectural landmarks and their distinct geometric forms from an uncommon perspective: the inside. In these two photographs taken inside a house built by noted Mexican architect Luis Barragan (1902–1988), Lambri is intrigued by questions of how we are drawn to these unpopulated, unfurnished spaces and how we interpret them as suggesting ideal, pure forms. Probing the ethereal, abstract qualities of rooms filled with light, the images also frame moments that hint at something taking place just beyond the room's limits.

**Robert Smithson (American, 1938–1973)**

***Mirror Stratum, 1966***

Mirrors

Gift of Ralph I. and Helyn D. Goldenberg

1982.26

Wall label

In 1964, Smithson began a body of work that used only the basic elements and forms, such as geometric shapes and spirals, from which all biological and geological matter derives. *Mirror Stratum* resembles a ziggurat with each plane gradually decreasing in size, a reference also to the multilayered strata of the earth's surface. Smithson used mirrors in a number of sculptures because, as he said, “If one wishes to be ingenious enough to erase time, one requires mirrors,” referring to the infinite reflections of light that they create.

Additional information

Smithson explored processes of fragmentation and often used materials such as glass and mirror for their ability to visually break and displace their surroundings. The work's placement in a corner creates an odd relationship between the viewer and the surrounding space; the mirrors visually “absorb” the space while projecting outward from it.

**Dan Flavin (American, 1933–1996)**

***alternating pink and “gold,” 1967***

Pink and yellow fluorescent lights

Exhibition copy

Courtesy Stephen Flavin

Wall label

First exhibited in December 1967 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, *alternating pink and “gold”* was Dan Flavin’s largest and most ambitious work to date. Its form determined by its architectural context, *alternating pink and “gold”* pairs eight-foot pink and yellow commercially available, standard-sized fluorescent tubes at the center of each wall with alternating pairs of colored lights expanding outward in gradually increasing rhythmic intervals. The installation defines the space by measure while saturating the walls and floor in brilliant washes of color. Flavin claimed he did not create environments as he associated the word with habitation and comfort, but rather “integrated” light images that transcend their physical simplicity and banality with a mesmerizing and otherworldly experience.

Additional information

Initially, Flavin proposed an installation featuring horizontally-mounted tubes, but decided that vertical would fit better with the Barnett Newman exhibition that was scheduled to run concurrently (which ultimately didn’t happen). In addition, Flavin initially thought about using white tubes, but was persuaded by then-MCA director Jan van der Marck to use color since the building was white and in the Miesian tradition. Finally Flavin said, “All right, I’ll do a big, brassy, vulgar installation for you.”

About the work, Flavin says: “I took a rather strict and obvious and almost illusionistic formal approach to a room by using one pattern for each wall and then letting the length of the wall determine the extent of the use of the pattern. Then I used pink and yellow light, which, in general terms of this civilization, has a kind of vulgar sense. Pink and yellow together is rather difficult to take, found more in public lighting in a vulgar way. I had thought to dedicate the entire installation to Mies van der Rohe, a longtime Chicago resident, because here was this rather formal situation colored pink and yellow in a paradoxical way. [He also considered dedicating the work to Claes Oldenburg who had a wall monument on the building next to the MCA] ... It was very consciously taking color usage out of, say, a Brooklyn Chinese restaurant (I think I saw it there once), and putting it in this very formal context and then assigning it to Mies van der Rohe who would never use pink and yellow. But he was then old and arthritic, and I couldn’t do it. Nevertheless, I thought it was a coy and ironic thing to do in Mies’s Chicago, since his architecture dominates the city.”

**Sarah Sze (American, b. 1969)**

***Proportioned to the Groove, 2005***

Mixed media

Courtesy of the artist

### Wall label

Sze creates sculptural installations out of domestic odds and ends—ordinary objects one might find in junk drawers, hall closets, toolboxes, briefcases, or a local drugstore.

Though her sculptures are disorienting in their apparent instability and scale, her meticulous mapping and ordering creates something spectacular and endows her banal building blocks with aesthetic qualities deftly balancing order and chaos. Inspired by her interest in artists' use of perspective in the Renaissance era, *Proportioned to the Groove* presents a vaguely topographic and densely linear configuration which suggests a living organism.

### Additional information

Sze's sculptural inventions are made out of things that for the most part retain their identities. They are made out of commodities, little commodities, things that can and were bought in vast quantities in dime stores and retail outlets. The myriad objects in Sze's constructions do not assert any meaning in and of themselves; they are quirky, but also arbitrary and interchangeable.

In *Proportioned to the Groove*, spills of light blue paint evoke lakes or rivers. Unraveled tape measures and extension cords resemble straight or winding roads. Clusters of pushpins and Styrofoam cups suggest buildings.