

Multi-Part Art: Contemporary Works in the Collection, July 11, 2008-March 29, 2009

The history of art has a rich tradition of multi-part compositions. Renaissance altarpieces and narrative cycles composed of a number of separate but related elements, for example, come to mind. Today, contemporary artists working in a variety of materials, styles, and formats are extending the tradition in radically new directions.

This installation presents painting, sculpture, and video by 19 artists. Some of these artworks eliminate any obvious representational content, although several are based on historical events or refer to particular phenomena. A number of recent acquisitions are being exhibited at the Museum for the first time, including a group of works that have been purchased through The Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art, established in 2003. Earlier pieces date back to the 1960s, among them several important examples from the Museum's Nancy Sayles Day Collection of Modern Latin American Art.

The selection of sculpture is especially broad, ranging from works that feature sewn textiles, glass plates, wood furniture, or ceramics to others made with painted steel or elastic cord. Some consist of a pair of objects, whereas others are composed of many more parts. In some cases, the elements are joined together and shown in a particular configuration, in contrast to those where individual parts are rearranged, displayed separately, or located at a distance from each other. Sequence, juxtaposition, and repetition are key underlying principles. Despite dissimilarities of form and content, all the works gain richness because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Josiah McElheny, American, b. 1966, (RISD BFA 1988)

Studies in the Search for Infinity, 1997-1998

Blown glass (eight plates), fabric covered wooden shelf, framed text;
ten parts

Museum Acquisition Fund 2001.71



After studying at RISD, McElheny apprenticed to master glassblowers in both Sweden and Italy. His work of the past decade unites extraordinary skill rooted in the history and craft of glassblowing with a conceptual framework or mode of presentation that belongs to the post-modern art world. In *Studies in the Search for Infinity*, McElheny re-created Venetian Renaissance latticino glass-ware, characterized by a combination of milky white threads or canes with clear, transparent crystal. The delicate geometric patterns vary, but they have in common a central vanishing point so that the decorative lines seem to converge or disappear as the perspectival illusion of endless space. The glassware display is accompanied by a framed text written

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by the artist in which he provides basic information about Renaissance painting and the relationship of perspective drawing to optics, mathematics, and spiritual perfection. In the second paragraph, McElheny speculates about how Venetian glassblowers contributed to Renaissance thought in their search for infinity and thus created a parallel history.

Irene Lawrence, American, b. 1940
Motives for Writing XIX, 2002
oil stick on canvas; two parts
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. William G. Tsiras 2002.55

This diptych belongs to an extended series of paintings and prints with the same title, *Motives for Writing*. The phrase was taken from a piece of music by Wim Mertens (b. 1953), an experimental Belgian composer. Lawrence is interested in rhythm and how words on a page or musical notation may be read as abstract marks rather than for specific meaning. Her lushly colored horizontal gestures may also evoke expanses of water.

Allan McCollum, American, b. 1944
Four Plaster Surrogates, 1984
enamel on cast hydrocal; four parts
Mary B. Jackson Fund 2004.87

McCollum's *Four Plaster Surrogates* is a group of related rectangular objects that differ somewhat in size and frame color. They resemble conventional paintings on canvas, but they are actually cast-plaster simulations whose blank surfaces have no visible content. The painting surrogates are so similar and impersonal that they seem to be mechanically mass-produced. By subverting traditional categories and aesthetic values such as style, subject matter, craftsmanship, personal expression, and originality, McCollum questions the role of artworks today and the artists who produce them. He underscores the social and economic function of art as a commodity and how it may serve as decoration or as an empty sign of class, power, and prestige.



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Yinka Shonibare, MBE, British, b.1962

Un Ballo in Maschera (Courtiers V), 2004

Three mannequins on glass bases, Dutch wax-printed cotton fabric, leather shoes

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2005.52



Yinka Shonibare combines elements from both of his home cultures, Britain and Nigeria, to reflect complex historical relationships and his own dual identity. In *Un Ballo in Maschera (Courtiers V)*, the style of the costumes is 18th-century European, but they are fabricated from cloth now associated with African culture, while the cloth itself incorporates contemporary European commercial images (a Chanel logo, for example). This brightly patterned "Dutch-wax fabric" was originally produced in Holland to imitate Indonesian batik imported from the Dutch colonies. Later manufactured by English textile companies for the West African market, it was adopted as a symbol of "authentic" African culture and identity both in Africa and for the African diaspora.

This sculpture is related to a larger project, Shonibare's sumptuous film *Un Ballo in Maschera*, 2004, in which these and other of his costumes were worn by a group of 30 dancers. The film's title, which translates as "A Masked Ball," is borrowed from Giuseppe Verdi's 1859 opera, which deals with masking and mistaken identities both in private life and politics. Verdi based his opera on the events surrounding the 1792 assassination of King Gustav III of Sweden at a masquerade ball. King Gustav was a controversial figure who gave generously to the arts while his country endured extreme poverty.

Patty Chang, American, b. 1972

In Love, 2001

Two-channel video, color, silent

Mary B. Jackson Fund 2005.81

Chang's performance videos are the result of great physical and emotional endurance. Her works can be simultaneously subversive, disturbing, and humorous. In the two-channel video installation *In Love*, the artist takes on the psychologically fraught familial ties that are singularly important factors in the formation of self-identity. Each screen shows a close-up recording of the artist (from the neck up) directly facing her mother or her father, as they simultaneously eat an onion with her until it is gone. Because the original video footage runs backward, the opening sequence appears to show the couples kissing and crying, before the onions start to emerge from their mouths. The work speaks to the closeness of parent/child

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relationships, even through the most difficult experiences, for which eating an onion serves as a metaphor.

Louise Lawler, American, b. 1947
Allan McCollum, American, b. 1944
Fixed Intervals, 1988-1992
steel, brass-plated; five parts
Gift of Hudson 2005.87.1

Fixed Intervals was jointly conceived and produced by Allan McCollum and Louise Lawler, who are well known for their individual bodies of work. It consists of a series of stylized signs or symbols made of polished brass. When put on the wall, the separate components act as stand-ins for artworks that have been removed from the exhibition set-up either because they are on loan, in storage, taken to restoration, etc. Both artists are interested in how the immediate surrounding of each work influences its reception, and how the reading of an exhibition changes through the relocation of particular works. *Fixed Intervals* emphasizes the physical properties of gallery space and of display. It also reveals common operations that occur within an art institution and around every exhibition on a daily basis.

Roy McMakin, American, b. 1956
Chair Set with Mirror, 2002
Mapel, enamel paint, mirror; two parts
Gift of Hudson 2005.87.2

Roy McMakin blurs the line between functional furniture and sculpture. All of his work demonstrates exacting attention to detail and finish (including expert joinery and flawless paint surfaces) along with a witty approach to vernacular forms. Here, two simple maple slat-back chairs, immaculately painted in white enamel, are identical except for the mirrored panels on the back of one chair. This reflective element removes the chairs from their strictly utilitarian role and takes them into the perceptual realm. In 1986, McMakin founded Domestic Furniture Co., originally located in San Diego and Los Angeles, but now based in Seattle. It produces furnishings and architectural projects that are known for high standards of craftsmanship and take off from a wide range of periods and styles.



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Betty Woodman, American, 1930 - 2018
Balustrade Relief Vase 97-14, 1997
glazed earthenware; twelve parts
Anonymous gift 2005.98

This multi-part ceramic wall relief belongs to an extended series of works that Woodman began in the early 1990s. Each *Balustrade Relief Vase* consists of a central vessel that rests on a shelf and is surrounded by a number of additional cutout elements that imply the edge of a rectangle or define the space of a painting. The open space between and around the clay parts is as important to the composition as the physical components themselves. The vase combines both flat and volumetric sections, so that its functionality is simultaneously revealed and camouflaged, a phenomenon that is furthered by the application of vibrant colors and forms to its surfaces. If one looks closely, it is possible to see spiral markings on all of the ceramic parts. They are evidence of the process of throwing on a potter's wheel, the method by which all of Woodman's works are made.



Tacita Dean, English, b. 1965
Kronos, 2004
Incised alabaster (triptych)
Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2006.4

Tacita Dean started to draw into alabaster during a stay in Italy in 2002. She was intrigued with the particular qualities of this stone. Its translucent surface is extremely soft and fragile, so it can easily be scratched and scored to leave white lines on the surface. In *Kronos*, which refers to the personification of time in Greek mythology, Dean "maps" the particular characteristics of the stone by tracing the veins, stains, and imperfections with the delicate etching and adding notations of her own signs and directions along the route. Through this process of weaving her own personal journey together with the physical nature of the material, the artist contemplates the subject of time itself and makes her subtle interventions part of a larger geological, geographical, and social history.



Anna Von Mertens, American, b. 1973
Black and White, 2004
cotton, hand-stitched, quilted; two parts
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2006.41

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Von Mertens makes hand-stitched quilts that comment on events from American history and current politics. She describes *Black and White* as a diptych that examines the warped perspective of seeing things only in black and white terms. Politicians and the media use this simplified way of presenting information, where the only alternatives are good or evil, for or against, right or wrong. It is a seductive way of thinking because it offers easy answers, but losing sight of the true complexity of a situation has quite dangerous consequences... The black sculpture depicts the physical energy dispersion pattern of a nuclear explosion stitched in white thread. The white sculpture depicts the same drawing in black thread, but the drawing has been rotated in AutoCAD and is seen from an aerial view so that it becomes abstracted... By placing the work on the bed and through the intimacy of the hand-stitching, I hope we can see these larger issues differently through the lens of the familiar. (Undated artist's statement in Museum curatorial files.)

Martin Boyce, Scottish, b. 1967

Ventilation Grills (Punching through the Clouds), 2004

brass, acid-etched, laser-cut; four parts

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2006.5.1

Boyce's objects and installations take off from common building features and other details of the urban landscape. The sequence of fake *Ventilation Grills*, mounted here on two gallery walls, are parenthetically entitled *Punching through the Clouds* after the optimistically poetic description of skyscrapers by the pioneering modern architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969). Whereas Mies propagated the virtues of simplicity, clarity, and new materials, Boyce faces the overall collapse of utopian, Modernist ideals that encompassed a belief in progress and social equality.



Martin Boyce, Scottish, b. 1967

We Are Still Here (Think About Why We Are Still Here), 2005

Powder-coated steel

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2006.5.2

The legacy of design and architecture from the first half of the 20th century is a primary interest for Martin Boyce. His sculptures are influenced by modernist forms and serial production. They appropriate common building and street accessories, transferring and altering them from the urban landscape to the gallery environment. *We Are Still Here...* is a series of identically sized steel gates, inspired by public garden gateways. However, there are variations in color, grid patterns, and rectangular plates added to the doors' planes. The



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trapezoid shape of the gates creates a perspective illusion; seemingly open, they entice us to enter an imaginary place beyond.

Kiki Smith, American, b. Germany, b. 1954

Girl with Squirrel, 1999

Graphite and colored pencil on handmade paper; porcelain figure; wood-and-paper shelf; three parts

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2006.51

Girl with Squirrel consists of both a drawing and a sculpture, two modes that are frequently intertwined in Smith's artwork. The influence of folk arts and crafts is often apparent in the simplicity and directness of her style and treatment of subject matter. Here, the representation of a young girl with a squirrel, rendered in both two and three dimensions, reveals Smith's fascination with the historical genre of portraiture (female portraiture in particular) and the primal connection between humans and nature. The child and animal figures seem to share a modesty of scale, paleness of color, and physical fragility that convey vulnerability and innocence.

Louise Hopkins, English, b. 1965

2/7, 1997

Oil on reverse of patterned fabric

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2007.18



This diptych was made by reversing a floral printed commercial fabric, stretching it, and applying numerous layers of a translucent medium. Some of the printed pattern is then carefully painted over in brown so that the result looks quite different from the original fabric, and the prepared but unpainted areas take on a ghostly aura. Hopkins fuses fine-art technique with a decorative every-day material that might be considered in bad taste, as opposed to one in a more purified Modernist style. It recalls carpets, upholstered furniture, wallpaper, and draperies typical of British bed-and-breakfast establishments characterized by multiple floral patterns seemingly in conflict with one another.

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Joanne Tatham, English, b. 1971

Tom O'Sullivan, English, b. 1967

This Teapot Has Reached the Limit Conditions of Its Own Rhetoric,
2006

Ceramic and wood

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2007.29.1



Joanne Tatham, English, b. 1971

Tom O'Sullivan, English, b. 1967

Simon Manfield, British, b. 1955

Now This Has Reached the Limit Conditions of Its Own Rhetoric, 2005

Plywood, gloss paint, glass, and drawing

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2007.29.2



Andrew Lord, English, b. 1950

Tasting, 1996 - 1998

Glazed ceramic, epoxy, gold leaf, and India ink

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2008.37

Tasting consists of three typical still-life objects: a vase, dish, and cup. The larger-than-life scale, manipulation of forms, and grey creviced surfaces embellished with gold leaf address issues about contemporary painting and sculpture, as well as the history of



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functional ceramics. The irregular gold lines suggest repairs made on traditional Japanese tea bowls as well as gilt decoration on European china. Adding an element of performance, Lord used his tongue to pierce through or “taste” the clay in numerous places.

Luis Felipe Noé, Argentine, b. 1933

Three Doors, 1964

oil on wood; three parts

Nancy Sayles Day Collection of Modern Latin American Art 66.078

Luis Felipe Noé was a member of the New Figuration group working in Buenos Aires in the 1960s. He used vivid colors and a crude, highly expressive approach to figurative painting that he felt were appropriate for depicting the essentially chaotic nature of contemporary society. *Three Doors* belongs to a series of works in which the artist experimented with multiple surfaces and forms of polyptych, challenging the usual notion of painting as a two-dimensional surface hung on the wall. The work is executed on the surfaces of three joined doors. It reflects the artist's interest in utilizing found materials and popular motifs such as street art and graffiti.

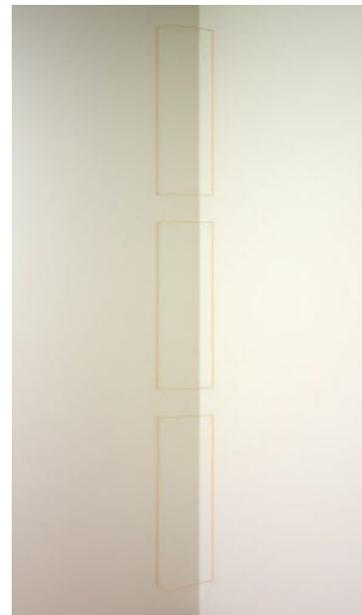
Frederick L. Sandback, American, 1943-2003

Three Unit Corner Piece, LLL of A Series of Eight Sculptures, Closed Series, ca. 1968

Spring steel rod and rayon-covered elastic cord dipped in fluorescent paint

Museum Works of Art Fund 68.100

Minimalist sculptor Fred Sandback made this corner piece and exhibited it at Dwan Gallery in New York when he was still an MFA candidate at Yale University. He subsequently became well known for using simple lines of colored yarn to define architectural space and make its volume almost palpable. Sandback wanted to create sculpture that has no inside so that it can be both totally open and have volume at the same time. This corner sculpture is composed of three geometric units, each of which is made from two vertical lengths of elastic cord, coated with fluorescent orange acrylic paint, and two horizontal right angles of painted steel fittings. It is the only one of a series of eight possible permutations that Sandback executed.



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Fernando de Szyszlo, Peruvian, b. 1925
La Ejecución de Tupac-Amaru XII, 1965
encaustic on wood; three parts
Nancy Sayles Day Collection of Modern Latin American Art 76.040

Fernando de Szyszlo is an important Peruvian painter who advanced the development of abstraction in Latin America starting in the mid-1950s. After traveling and studying both Old Master and Modernist art in Paris, he returned to Peru. There he became known for expressing subject matter specific to Peru's history and culture in a nonrepresentational style. Featuring a vibrant palette and rich gestural brushwork characteristic of much abstract painting of the 1950s and 60s, this triptych was inspired by the tragic death of the Peruvian hero Tupac Amaru (d. 1572), the last indigenous leader of the Inca state.



Robert M. Wilson, American, b. 1941
Stalin Chairs, 1977
Lead over fiberglass
The Albert Pilavin Memorial Collection of 20th Century American Art
83.151.1

Wilson is an acclaimed performer, visual artist, writer, and stage director known for his theatrical innovations and use of different mediums. *Stalin Chairs* consists of fiberglass armatures covered with sheets of lead. The work was inspired by the chair props used in Wilson's 1973 opera *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin*, which lasted for twelve hours and dealt with a transformative moment in Stalin's life—the death of his first wife. The crucial moment of the opera was the scene in which two Stalins, representing his persona both before and after his wife's death, appear seated in the chairs. This expressive work possesses an anthropomorphic character captured in the drapes and creases of the lead surface, which is an extremely soft material to model, and holds a monumental presence through the chairs' size.

