

## *The Figure: Contemporary Works from the Collection*, March 12, 2010-March 3, 2011

Representing the human figure has been fundamental to art throughout time. Over the course of the 20th century, however, profound social, political, and artistic developments greatly expanded how the human form is rendered in art, liberating it from illusionistic demands for physical likeness. Comprising a range of mediums and approaches, including painting, printmaking, sculpture, video, and needlework, this exhibition explores various themes and issues that guide contemporary artists' approaches to the figure.

Acting as the literal interface between an individual's physical and psychological worlds, the figure has become a powerful vehicle for artists to make their internal realities visible. Some artists use themselves as subject matter while others work with live models, photographs, or personal memory as a starting point. They then employ processes of stylization and embellishment, enlist the universal language of symbols to make their interior worlds tangible to others, and/or reinterpret art history while reflecting the world in which they live. The selection of objects in this exhibition includes a number of recent acquisitions that are being exhibited at the Museum for the first time.

### CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Alice Neel, American, 1900-1984  
*Nancy Selvage*, 1967  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of Richard and Hartley Neel 1994.086

In the 1960s, when abstraction was the dominant style in art, Alice Neel continued to work in a figurative mode, creating portraits of her friend and fellow artist Nancy Selvage. Using expressionistic line and vivid color, Neel captures the particular idiosyncrasies of her subject. Characteristically, she left sections of the canvas unpainted, thereby giving the portrait a sense of immediacy. After years of neglect, Neel gained recognition in her later years, as the women's movement generated interest in the personal subject matter of her paintings.



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Ann Agee, American, b.1959  
*Man in Plaid Jacket with Paper Bag*, 1998  
Porcelain  
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.41.1

Merging craft, decorative art, and fine art, Ann Agee's work infuses the traditional genre of porcelain figurines with contemporary preoccupations. These colorful handmade miniatures employ the stylistic language of European rococo figurines, offering a new perspective on those important 18th-century collectibles. Designed to amuse the aristocracy, traditional figurines were most often allegorical representations that decorated table tops and other furniture. In contrast, Agee's works represent contemporary men and women in New York City. Through their gestures and dramatic poses, they recall characters from the commedia dell'arte made by the famous European porcelain factories. Agee juxtaposes this theatricality with mundane subject matter so that her figures are immediately recognizable as familiar neighborhood characters.



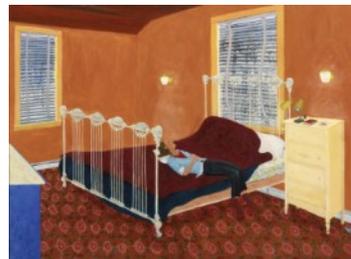
Ann Agee, American, b.1959  
*Woman with Camera and Pink Skirt*, 1998  
Porcelain  
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.41.2

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Sarah McEneaney, American, b.1955  
*Bedroom*, 1995  
Egg tempera on gessoed wood  
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2004.24.1

Sarah McEneaney paints autobiographical narratives based on her immediate surroundings, such as this interior of the bedroom she lived in during her 1995 artist's residency at Yaddo, in Saratoga Springs, New York. Working from observation, memory, and



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imagination, McEneaney captures the emotional as well as the physical character of a particular situation or event, whether mundane or dramatic, with remarkably vivid detail, colors, and patterns. McEneaney's use of egg tempera recalls early Renaissance panel painting, but she significantly rejects the use of one-point perspective typical of Western art since that era. In viewing the details of her experiences we observe the artist's life, while we are asked to contemplate our own.

Judy Glantzman, American, b. 1956, (RISD BFA 1978; part-time RISD Faculty)

*Untitled*, 2001

Oil on canvas

Gift of Hansen, Jacobson, Teller, Hoberman, Newman, Warren & Richman, LLP 2005.128

In this feverishly rendered self-portrait, Judy Glantzman offers the viewer a glimpse of her internal world. The artist describes her paintings as "the inside of my head made visible." Densely layered and vigorously reworked, her figure emerges from a prolonged process of compulsive repetition and repainting, particularly evident in the multiple contour lines that define the body. In this painting, the human figure acts as a receptacle for intimate moments of self-reflection, brooding, and anxiety.



Raquel Paiewonsky, Dominican, b. 1969

*Parida (Birthed)*, from the "Vestial" series 2001

Plastic and rubber dolls hand sewn onto fabric

Mary B. Jackson Fund 2005.13

Using commercially manufactured baby dolls considered at once precious yet expendable, Dominican artist Raquel Paiewonsky explores ingrained cultural stereotypes about femininity and race. In this dress/sculpture from a series of ten, the simple shape of the garment signifies the idea of a woman. Countless dolls covering the surface of the dress have skin tones that range from white to dark brown, representing the transracial origins of the Dominican and wider Caribbean population and fertility in general. The artist had difficulty finding brown-skinned dolls to balance the number of white ones, underscoring persistent racial hierarchies.

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Joyce J. Scott, American, b. 1948  
*Spirit Siamese Twins*, 2000-2002  
Beads, wire, glass, wood, and thread  
Mary B. Jackson Fund 2005.30

Made from a found bottle, beads, and wooden elements, this sculpture considers cultural perceptions of twins. Baltimore based artist Joyce Scott hails from a diverse background that includes African, Native American, and Scottish ancestry. The artist's complex roots are reflected in this work, which is imbued with aesthetic and symbolic conventions of African, Native American, Mexican, and Korean cultures. In Africa twins represent good luck, whereas in Korea they are considered a bad omen. The twins in this work are skeletons, echoing Mexican Day of the Dead figures, which represent the inevitability of death. They emerge from a larger, green-beaded figure that symbolizes a life-giving maternal force. While distinct, the twins are linked together and originate from the same place. Thus the piece addresses cultural differences, while underscoring cultural interconnections.



Allison Newsome, American, b. 1958, (RISD MFA 1983, Ceramics)  
*Foxglove Pants*, 2005  
Ceramic  
Anonymous gift 2006.78

The fragments of rocks, shards, and flora that compose Allison Newsome's ceramic torso, *Foxglove Pants*, make it seem as though the figure has emerged directly from the earth. Indeed, the artist's creative process is closely linked to the natural world. In the spirit of a plein air painter, she begins her process by working outside with clay slip, creating quick three-dimensional sketches that draw directly on elements of the natural environment. She then brings the clay sketch back to her studio and uses it to develop her larger work. The seemingly rough elements that characterize *Foxglove Pants* have actually been worked and reworked by the artist to appear just that way. Bright, glossy blossoms in pink glaze adorning the figure harmonize with the rustic earthy tones of the torso.



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Nick Cave, American, b.1959

*Soundsuit*, 2006

Found knit sweaters, socks, driftwood, dryer lint, and paint

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2007.11

Nick Cave's elaborate, wearable sculpture is crafted from an assortment of found materials ranging from driftwood to dryer lint. It belongs to his series of "Soundsuits," which are all made from recycled materials and resonate with sounds produced by these materials when the suits are worn. Evoking African ceremonial costumes as well as haute couture, the suit can be seen as a physical manifestation of the artist's inner spirit. When worn, it acts as a disguise that enables the wearer to escape notions of race, gender, class, and sexuality.



Daniel Heyman, American, b. 1963

*Untitled*, from the series *Amman Project*, 2006

Drypoint on Rives BFK paper

Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2007.3.2.1

Invited to attend interviews in Amman, Jordan, with former Abu Ghraib detainees, Daniel Heyman scratched fragments of each man's testimony backwards onto a copper plate so that their accounts would become legible when reversed in the printing press. This process of scribbled immediacy captures the degree to which the psychic toll of the war, etched into public consciousness only rarely, continues to engulf Iraqi citizens. Here, the dignity of the faces of the torture victims contrasts with their horrific stories.



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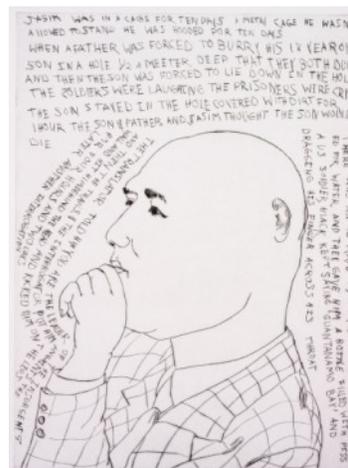
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Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2007.3.2.6

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Ryan Trecartin, American, b. 1981, (RISD BFA 2004, Film)  
Lizzie Fitch, American, b. 1981  
*Take a Stand*, 2006  
Mixed media  
Phil Seibert Alumni Acquisition Fund and Helen M. Danforth  
Acquisition Fund 2008.3

Close examination of the sculpture *Take a Stand* reveals a human figure: a head-like ball of wire is suspended from an armature backbone, mounted atop branching limbs clad in track gear. Assembled from a variety of curious everyday materials, the piece was created collaboratively shortly before Ryan Trecartin made his acclaimed full-length 2007 video *I-Be Area*. Approaching their sculptural process as a director approaches filmmaking, Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch enlist friends, family members, and other artists in the creative process, assigning them tasks but also allowing them to contribute in their own way to the formation of the work. The figure



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can thus be viewed as a collective self-portrait of a community, reflecting group dynamics and shared creative effort.

Tracey Emin, English, b. 1963

*Tracey Emin by Tracey Emin*, 2001 - 2005

Appliqué and embroidery on fabric

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2008.4

Tracey Emin, a central figure in the YBAs (Young British Artists), a London-based group that came to prominence in the late 1980s and '90s, is famous for her intensely cathartic artwork that draws its subject matter from the most intimate details of her personal life. In addition to producing prolific drawings and monoprints, Tracey Emin works in a variety of mediums including neon, assemblage sculpture, and embroidery. In *Tracey Emin by Tracey Emin*, she has spelled her name in the bold blue cutout letters that occupy the center of the fabric. In contrast, a small self-portrait rendered as a simple line drawing of embroidered thread is subtly placed in the lower right corner, adding a sense of loneliness and vulnerability to the composition.



Keith Coventry, English, b. 1958

*White Abstract: Wedding Kiss, Charles and Diana*, 2001

Oil on canvas, gesso, glass, and wood

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2008.41

Keith Coventry's *White Abstract: Wedding Kiss, Charles and Diana* transforms an iconic wedding photograph of Prince Charles and Princess Diana into a white monochrome abstraction. The photograph, the only one ever taken of the Prince and Princess kissing in public, created a scandal in the face of aristocratic decorum. Coventry explores the tension between traditional values and contemporary society by employing the language of abstraction, referring in particular to Russian Suprematist paintings by Kazimir Malevich or the more recent white paintings of Robert Ryman. The work depicts iconic aristocratic imagery, but by limiting his palette to white, Coventry drains the represented subjects of any blood or life, and suggests the waning political and symbolic strength of royalty.



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Tracey Emin, English, b. 1963

*Bath White III*, 2005

Monoprint on paper

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2008.7.1

Tracey Emin, a central figure in the YBAs (Young British Artists), a London-based group that came to prominence in the late 1980s and '90s, is famous for her intensely cathartic artwork that draws its subject matter from the most intimate details of her personal life. The artist's raw, expressionistic approach to figuration often takes its cues from the work of Edvard Munch and Egon Schiele. In these two monoprints, which consist of simple, monochromatic lines drawn on the stationery of Los Angeles's Mondrian Hotel, the artist portrays herself alone in the hotel bathtub. Turning the series of self-representations into a visual diary, the works communicate feelings of isolation and loneliness in a foreign city.



Tracey Emin, English, b. 1963

*Bath White II*, 2005

Monoprint on paper

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2008.7.2

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Grayson Perry, English, b. 1960

*Map of Nowhere*, 2008

Etching on Rives Vellin

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2009.31

Grayson Perry draws on conventions such as medieval cartography and Renaissance printmaking to create a map of a mythical world in which he prominently incorporates his own self-portrait. Perry's body is transformed into a set of mystical signs and symbols that are meant to reveal the topographies of his inner psyche. By embedding his figure into a larger world, he addresses issues not only personal but universal, invoking large questions about sexuality, religion,

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capitalism, and post-colonialism. Humorously critiquing contemporary society, he includes churches devoted to Starbucks and Microsoft as well as a rundown old town called "Free Market Economy."

Cheryl Laemmle, American, b. 1947  
*Self-Portrait with Bottle and Cage*, 1988  
Oil on canvas

The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection: Fifty Works for Fifty States, a joint initiative of the Trustees of the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection and the National Gallery of Art, with generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Institute for Museum and Library Services 2009.59.15



This painting blurs the line between still-life and portraiture. Rather than portraying an accurate physical likeness, Cheryl Laemmle offers the viewer a personal vision of herself. The objects represented function symbolically to evoke childhood memories and important aspects of her past that she sees as integral to her adult persona. The faceless wooden figure, a common motif in Laemmle's work, references the wooden figures that her grandfather would carve for her from birch trees that grew in the forest near the family home in Ishpeming, Michigan. The figure's face is left blank except for random eye-like knotholes, perhaps symbolizing inner sight.

Tom Friedman, American, b. 1965  
*Untitled*, 2005  
Pillow Stuffing  
Gift of Hudson 2009.60.1

Central to Tom Friedman's work is the transformation of mundane everyday materials found in drug stores, supermarkets, or around the house into beguiling, highly crafted works of art. In this piece, the artist employs pillow stuffing to construct a male silhouette. The fragile and delicate quality of the material works metaphorically to convey the ephemeral nature of a shadow-like figure that seems to be stuck in limbo between standing and free fall, rising and sleeping.



Lucky DeBellevue, American, b. 1957  
*Untitled*, 2004  
Chenille stems  
Gift of Hudson 2009.60.2

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In Lucky DeBellevue's sculpture a pair of disembodied legs and feet seem to be walking through the gallery space. Assembled from variously colored pipe cleaners, the piece was painstakingly woven by the artist, transforming a humble everyday material into a diaphanous form that resembles a network of cells. Suspended from the ceiling, the sculpture is monumental in scale, but also lightweight and ephemeral in nature.

Peter Campus, American, b. 1937, video artist

*Third Tape*, 1976

Single-channel video, color, sound

Gift of the artist 2010.22.1

In *Third Tape*, Peter Campus employed various effects of video technology, then in its infancy, to create an intensely psychological portrait. While exploiting new techniques, Campus simultaneously referred to earlier art movements and the styles of artists who worked in more traditional modes before him. According to Campus, "This man tries to abstract himself using age-old methods reminiscent of German Expressionism, Cubism and Surrealism. Art issues of line and plane are dredged up. Perhaps to be subtitled: the war between man and man-made objects." Evoking metaphors of distortion and transformation, Campus emphasizes the camera's role as an intermediary and not simply a mirror, as it inherently alters what is perceived to be fact.