

NEWS RELEASE



Montclair Art Museum

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Digital Images and Related Information Available for
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For Immediate Release

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William Eggleston, *Untitled (Steak Billboard) Memphis, TN, 1973*. Dye transfer print. © Eggleston Artistic Trust. Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York.

**THE MONTCLAIR ART MUSEUM PRESENTS
*THE SPECTACULAR OF VERNACULAR***

**The Exhibition Examines Colloquial and Local Inspirations in the Work of
25 Contemporary Artists**

On View October 7, 2011–January 1, 2012

MONTCLAIR, NJ, September 21, 2011— The Montclair Art Museum proudly presents *The Spectacular of Vernacular*, opening Friday, October 7, an exhibition that focuses on the role of vernacular forms in the work of 25 contemporary artists who utilize craft, folklore, and roadside kitsch to explore culturally specific iconography in the context of an increasingly global world of art. The exhibition, on view through January 1, 2012, will look closely at this particular brand of culture known as the vernacular, a term used to describe amateur or regional forms of expression that tend to be more homegrown than high-end. From dime-store plaques and snapshot photography to the objects attending folk rituals, these items often possess a warm familiarity. Yet for the artists who take them on as subjects, these humble forms can become nuanced and loaded symbols, offering clues about who we are and where we live.

Inspired by artist Mike Kelley’s observation that “the mass art of today is the folk art of tomorrow,” the exhibition examines the role of vernacular forms in more than two dozen works that run the aesthetic gamut: the hand-crafted work of Aaron Spangler juxtaposes with Lari Pittman’s carnivalesque day-glo paintings; Marc Swanson’s glittering trophy heads with Rachel Harrison’s urban relics. Also on view are photographs from Walker Evans, William Eggleston, and Shannon Ebner, who revel in the signage and other elements of roadside culture.

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Focusing on pieces made since the 1970s, the exhibition shows how the vernacular, in its very ubiquity—its integration into home life, social rituals, and sense of place—is an ongoing fascination for artists. With artworks that draw from such diverse sources as billboards and handmade domestic items, it's suggestive of a long, meandering road trip through the emblems and eyesores of everyday culture, replete with tourist destinations and outmoded hotels.

Every locale has its own singular brand of vernacular—discernible in the ways people dress, decorate their homes (especially around the holidays), and self-identify with behaviors seen as typical of the area. A number of artists here consider those aspects of local culture, probing the markers of place and region. Some hint at the sprawl of the Western strip, filled with commercial billboards, signs, and shopping malls. Several come from the Midwest and respond to its conditions in their work—its landscape, structures, and weather; others look to the South for inspiration, while still others examine the Northeast's industrial landscape.

The culture of today provides a vast source material of readily accessible and mass-produced goods, which is in direct contrast with the tangible, locatable reality addressed by the artists in *The Spectacular of Vernacular*. In a world that is increasingly networked, with influences flowing in from an endless stream of sites and sources, the issue of what remains particularized, even regionalized, is an open question—and one among many that artists engaging the vernacular seek to address.

The exhibition is accompanied by a concise, illustrated catalogue. The show premiered at the Walker Art Center, where it ran from January 29 through May 8, 2011. It is organized at MAM by Alexandra Schwartz, curator of contemporary art.

The Artists

Marina Abramovic, Siah Armajani, Louise Borgeois, William Christenberry, Shannon Ebner, William Eggleston, Walker Evans, Rachel Harrison, Matthew Day Jackson, 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, Jeffrey Vallance, and Kara Walker.

Travel Schedule

Walker Art Center
January 29-May 8, 2011

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston
July 23–September 18, 2011

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Montclair Art Museum
October 7, 2011–January 1, 2012

Ackland Art Museum at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
January 14–March 18, 2012

Public Programs

25th Annual Julia Norton Babson Memorial Lecture
Thursday, October 20, 7 p.m.
\$12 Members, \$15 nonmembers
FREE for MSU staff and students

Alexandra Schwartz, curator of contemporary art at the Montclair Art Museum, will moderate a discussion on MAM's current exhibition *The Spectacular of Vernacular*. The exhibition's curator, Darsie Alexander of the Walker Art Center, and two artists whose works are featured in the exhibition, Marc Swanson and Butt Johnson, are panel participants. Curators and artists will be available for a Q&A following the discussion.

Please arrive early. The galleries will have extended hours from 5 to 7 p.m. Tickets to the discussion include admission to *The Spectacular of Vernacular* on the day of the program.

MAM and the Adult School of Montclair
Tuesday, October 25, 7 – 8:30 p.m.
Registration through the Adult School of Montclair
Call 973-746-6636 to register; enroll EARLY!
Limited to 25 participants
\$20 MAM Members, \$25 nonmembers

Join MAM's first curator of contemporary art, Alexandra Schwartz, for a rare afterhours tour and informal discussion of the current exhibition *The Spectacular of Vernacular*. The exhibition brings together artists whose work fosters a dialogue between contemporary art and the creative manifestations of lay culture. Learn about current trends in contemporary art and MAM's vision for the future.

Group Tours

Group tours may be booked by calling 973-259-5136 or by emailing tours@montclairartmuseum.org.

Online Press Site

The Museum will maintain a site dedicated to the exhibition for journalists seeking further information, including a checklist and images. Please visit montclairartmuseum.org and click on For the Media.

Visit Montclair

For more Montclair experiences, visit websites for the Montclair Center Business Improvement District (www.montclaircenter.com/) and Destination Montclair (www.destinationmontclair.com).

Sponsorship

The Spectacular of Vernacular is made possible by generous support from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Helen and Peter Warwick, and the Margaret and Angus Wurtele Family Foundation.

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This exhibition is presented at the Montclair Art Museum with generous Exhibition Angel support from the Vance Wall Foundation, Bob and Bobbie Constable, Tracy Higgins and James Leitner, Karen and Larry Mandelbaum, and Margo and Frank Walter.

About the Museum

The Montclair Art Museum, a notable, community-based institution with an international reputation, boasts a renowned collection of American and Native American art that uniquely highlights art making in the United States over the last three hundred years. The collection includes more than 15,000 objects: paintings, prints, original works on paper, photographs, and sculpture by American artists from the 18th century to the present, as well as traditional and contemporary Native American art and artifacts representing the cultural developments of peoples from all of the major American Indian regions. The Museum's education programs serve a wide public and bring artists, performers, and scholars to the Museum on a regular basis. MAM's Yard School of Art is the leading regional art school, offering a multitude of comprehensive courses for children, teens, adults, seniors, and professional artists.

The Montclair Art Museum is located at 3 South Mountain Avenue in Montclair, N.J. Information and directions are available on the Museum website, montclairartmuseum.org, or by calling 973-746-5555. MAM is open Wednesdays through Sundays, Noon – 5 p.m., and closed on Mondays, Tuesdays, and major holidays. Museum admission is \$12 for nonmember adults, \$10 for senior citizens and students with I.D., and free for members and children under 12.

All Museum programs are made possible, in part, by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, and by funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Vance Wall Foundation, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and Museum Members.

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