

For Immediate Release: December 1, 2003 (updated February 4, 2004)

Media contacts: Karen Simonian, 614 292-9923 or ksimonian@wexarts.org; or Erik Pepple, 614 688-3261 or epepple@wexarts.org

SPLAT BOOM POW! PACKS A PUNCH

EXHIBITION AT WEXNER CENTER'S DOWNTOWN GALLERIES EXPLORES THE IMPACT OF CARTOONS IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Columbus—The wildly colorful ***Splat Boom Pow! The Influence of Cartoons in Contemporary Art***, an exhibition of nearly 70 works of art using cartoon imagery, hits town **January 31–May 2, 2004**, marking the only Midwestern stop on its national tour. Presented in the Wexner Center's downtown galleries at The Belmont Building, this exhibition is both a survey of the impact of cartoons on contemporary art and a chronicle of the social and political issues of the past 40 years. The show features works in a variety of media—painting, photography, sculpture, and video—by more than 30 emerging and established artists, including Roger Shimomura, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Elizabeth Murray, Roy Lichtenstein, Dara Birnbaum, Trenton Doyle Hancock, Kenny Scharf, Henry Darger, and Andy Warhol. The show reveals how these artists, using cartoon imagery and techniques, have explored such issues as American commercialism, the Vietnam War, sexism, and racism.

The exhibition was organized by the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston.

BUT SERIOUSLY...

Splat Boom Pow! is divided into three sections addressing modes of communication and methodologies borrowed by contemporary artists from the world of comics and cartooning.

Splat! This section reveals how artists across generations incorporated images from pop culture into their work. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, artists living in America and Europe had begun to focus on everyday objects as subject matter, giving birth to Pop art. Many artists incorporated existing cartoon iconography to critique an increasingly consumer-oriented society. In the following decades, this appropriation

continued, presenting divergent views on the Vietnam War and the injustices of racism, sexism, and other social issues. By the 1990s, many artists were reshaping the content and context of cartoons, while others returned to more painterly investigations, dissolving popular icons into abstraction.

Boom!: Pop artists appropriated not only images, but also the symbols and techniques of mass media printing. The use of silkscreen printing technology and its visual characteristics, including the appearance of enlarged Benday dots, were tactics adopted by a number of artists. Over the next three decades, artists would adopt more tools drawn from cartoons, including sequential narratives, the symbolic use of color, and flat and geometric line and form. When computer technology emerged, artists quickly put it into practice, using a variety of digital strategies in their work.

Pow!: In the wake of important cultural changes in American society—such as the rise of multiculturalism—a number of artists abandoned existing iconography in favor of invented icons and narratives that more accurately reflected their own communities and experiences. Some fashioned new imagery based on media stereotypes in order to address the complex politics of identity, while others would reframe street art, punk rock, and hip-hop culture to give voice to a new generation of young people. Still others would use images and narratives drawn from deeply personal experiences to create alter egos and new mythologies.

RELATED EVENTS

A variety of programs and events are planned in conjunction with *Splat!*, including:

Splat Boom Pow! Artist Panel

Artists, Comics, Culture

Saturday, January 31 / 6 pm

The Belmont Building

Free admission

Moderator: Exhibition curator Valerie Cassel Oliver

Panelists: *Splat!* artists Roger Shimomura, whose paintings critique ethnic stereotypes rampant in 1940s animation; Kerry James Marshall, whose newspaper comic-strip format comments on urban housing, creating superheroes out of ancient West African myths; Ethiopian-born Julie Mehretu, who draws on the graphic vocabulary of comics to depict migration, warfare, and displacement; and Mel Ramos, one of the first American artists to adapt comic book imagery, with paintings that feature such action heroes as *Captain Midnight* and *Batman*.

[RELATED EVENTS, CONTINUED]

Splat Boom Pow! BASH

Saturday, January 31 / 7–11 pm

Invitation-only opening party especially for Wexner Center members and special guests.

Lecture

Scott McCloud

The Future of Comics: The Design Challenges of Online Comics

Wednesday, February 11 / 7 pm

Wexner Center Film/Video Theater

Cosponsored by **Ohio State's Cartoon Research Library**

Free admission

Cartoonist and author Scott McCloud explores the collision of art and technology as comics move onto the web. In this presentation, McCloud will show examples of some of the thousands of cartoonists that have been using technology to broaden their audiences and reinvent their art form. McCloud has been writing and drawing independent comic books since 1984. His most recent book, *Reinventing Comics*, explores the potential of comics in digital environments.

Wexner Center for the Arts and 12 ¼ Circle present

Splat Boom Pow! Art after Hours

Friday, February 20 / 5:30–8:30 pm

Wexner Center Galleries at The Belmont Building

\$15 general public; \$12.25 members and OSU students

This art and cocktail party marks the first of an ongoing series presented by the Wexner Center and 12 ¼ Circle, an active group of Wexner Center members. The February Art after Hours, to be held at The Belmont Building, will feature local band X-Rated Cowboys, light hors d'oeuvres courtesy Handke's Cuisine, a cash bar, and the exhibitions *Splat Boom Pow!* and *Tea and Coffee Towers*. Admission includes two complimentary drinks. Proceeds benefit children and family programming at the Wexner Center. In-kind support is provided by Handke's Cuisine. Promotional support is provided by CD101, *The Other Paper*, and *Outlook News*.

Splat! Cartoon Panel
Thursday, April 1 / 4:30 pm
Wexner Center Film/Video Theater
Free

Panelists: Gary Panter, Peter Bagge, and Jessica Abel
Moderator: Brian Rotman.

Three cartoon artists come together for a lively discussion of their work and current directions in the world of cartoon art. Panelists include Gary Panter, “King of Punk Art” and Emmy Award-winning head set designer for the television show, *Pee Wee’s Playhouse*; Fantagraphics artist Peter Bagge, author of the popular comic *Hate* and former editor of R. Crumb’s legendary magazine *Weirdo*; and another Fantagraphics artist Jessica Abel, author of the award-winning *Artbabe* comics series and talented cartoon journalist. These three, among the most outstanding cartoonists working today, will share their work and discuss the central themes in *Splat Boom Bow!* Moderator Brian Rotman is a professor in Ohio State University’s Department of Comparative Studies.

RELATED FILM/VIDEO PROGRAMS

Visiting Filmmaker Lewis Klahr
Saturday, March 13 / 7 pm
Wexner Center Film/Video Theater
\$6 general public; \$4 members, students, senior citizens

One of today’s premier American avant-garde filmmakers presents a hand-picked collection of his short films, including several world or U.S. premieres. Highlights include *Two Minutes to Zero* (2004), a feature-length crime story condensed into one minute using imagery taken from a comic book adaptation of the TV show *77 Sunset Strip*, and *Pony Glass* (1997), one of Klahr’s most acclaimed films, which explores the secret sex life of Superman’s pal Jimmy Olsen.

How to Draw a Bunny (John W. Walter, 2002)
Friday–Saturday, April 16–17 / 7 pm
Wexner Center Film/Video Theater
\$6 general public; \$4 members, students, senior citizens

Artist Ray Johnson receives a fittingly open-ended biographical treatment in this film. Although not included in *Splat Boom Pow!*, Johnson’s artworks relate to the exhibition’s themes of popular culture’s transformations in art.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

Splat Boom Pow! The Influence of Cartoons in Contemporary Art was organized by Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and made possible by a grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Union Pacific, and contributors to the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston's Major Exhibition Fund: Faye Sarofim & Co., Eddie and Chinhui Allen, Mr. and Mrs. A.L. Ballard, Mr. and Mrs. I.H. Kempner III, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Zilkha, Robert J. Card, M.D./Karol Kreymer, George and Mary Josephine Hamman Foundation, Max and Isabell Smith Herzstein, Rob and Louise Jamail, Susan Vaughan Foundation, Stephen and Ellen Susman, Baker Botts, L.L.P., James A. Elkins, Jr., KPMG LLP, Ransom and Isabel Lummis, Lester Marks, Karen and Eric Pulaski, David and Suzanne Saperstein, Jeff Shankman, Shell Oil Company Foundation, Leigh and Reggie Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Wallace S. Wilson.

The exhibition catalogue is supported by The Brown Foundation, Inc.

It is presented by the Wexner Center with support from the Greater Columbus Arts Council and the Corporate Annual Fund of the Wexner Center Foundation.

Promotional support is provided by WBNS 10TV.

WEXNER CENTER GALLERIES AT THE BELMONT BUILDING

Wexner Center exhibitions will be held at the Wexner Center Galleries at The Belmont Building all season while the galleries at the Wexner Center's Ohio State location are undergoing renovation.

Located next to the Arena District in downtown Columbus, The Belmont Building is the former home of Belmont Casket, considered "the Cadillac of Caskets," which moved to Columbus in 1916. The building, constructed in 1885, sits near the intersection of Spring Street and Neil Avenue, with an entrance located off Cozzins Street. The four-story building, which currently houses offices in addition to the Wexner Center Galleries, is positioned in a high-growth area, just between the booming Arena District and the historically industrial River District. Caroline's Deli on the ground floor of The Belmont Building is open to the public Monday–Friday, 7:30 am–4 pm.

CALENDAR INFORMATION

SPLAT BOOM POW!

The exhibition: The Wexner Center for the Arts presents the exhibition *Splat Boom Pow! The Influence of Cartoons on Contemporary Art*, featuring nearly 70 works by more than 30 artists. Organized by the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; presented by the Wexner Center at The Belmont Building. (On view concurrently: *Tea and Coffee Towers*.)

Dates: January 31–May 2, 2004.

Location: Wexner Center Galleries at The Belmont Building, at Spring St. and Neil Ave. in the Arena District in downtown Columbus (330 W. Spring St.). One block west of Neil Avenue; entrance off Cozzins Street.

Belmont gallery hours: 11 am–6 pm Tuesday–Wednesday; 11 am–9 pm Thursday–Friday; noon–6 pm Saturday–Sunday. Closed Mondays and holidays.

Belmont gallery admission: Free.

Parking: Free lots just across Cozzins Street.

Public information: 614 292-3535 or www.wexarts.org.

Opening party: Saturday, January 31, 7–11 pm. Invitation-only.

Media tour: Friday, January 30 at 4 pm (call 614 688-3261).

Walk-In Tours: Thursdays at 6 pm & Sundays at 1 pm beginning February 5. No tours on February 29 and April 11.

Media contacts: Karen Simonian, 614-292-9923 or ksimonian@wexarts.org; Erik Pepple, 614 688-3261 or epepple@wexarts.org.

Digital images available upon request.

WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

The Wexner Center for the Arts is The Ohio State University's multidisciplinary, international laboratory for the exploration and advancement of contemporary art. Through exhibitions, screenings, performances, artist residencies, and educational programs, the Wexner Center acts as a forum where established and emerging artists can test ideas and where diverse audiences can participate in cultural experiences that enhance understanding of the art of our time. In its programs, the Wexner Center balances a commitment to experimentation with a commitment to traditions of innovation and affirms the university's mission of education, research, and community service.

Exhibitions are on view at the Wexner Center Galleries at The Belmont Building while the Wexner Center's galleries are undergoing renovation.

###30###