

wexner center
for the arts

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ACCLAIMED EXHIBITION EXAMINES THE “WORK” IN ARTWORK

**WORK ETHIC FEATURES NEARLY 80 PLAYFUL, PROVOCATIVE OBJECTS & EXPERIENCES
ON VIEW FALL 2004 AT WEXNER CENTER GALLERIES AT THE BELMONT BUILDING**

“The funniest, not to mention the smartest thing I’ve seen all year.”— Michael O’Sullivan of the *Washington Post*, which named *Work Ethic* #1 art exhibition of 2003

Columbus—Since the 1960s, artists have been hard at work—pushing the limits of what can be considered art. *Work Ethic*, on view **September 17, 2004–January 2, 2005** in the **Wexner Center Galleries at The Belmont Building**, brings together an international group of contemporary artists who challenge the rules of both the workplace and the art world. The nationally touring exhibition encompasses nearly 80 objects and experiences, from iconic works of post-WWII art by Yoko Ono, Frank Stella, Bruce Nauman, and Robert Rauschenberg to contemporary pieces by David Hammons, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Hope Ginsburg, and Gabriel Orozco. Combined, these objects and experiences are often humorous, ironic, and challenging.

Curated by Helen Molesworth, the Wexner Center’s chief curator of exhibitions, *Work Ethic* includes interactive installations, film and video, performance art and documentation, language works, site-specific art, and photographs. The pieces have their roots in movements such as Fluxus, conceptual art, process art, feminist art, and performance art.

“Since the 1960s, contemporary art has grappled with the problem of artistic labor,” Molesworth says. “Who does it? The artist, the studio assistant, the factory worker, the viewer? What happens to the meaning of art once traditional artistic skills are not necessary to produce it?”

The exhibition was organized by The Baltimore Museum of Art (where Molesworth was curator of contemporary art prior to joining the Wexner Center), and toured to the Des Moines Art Center in spring of 2004. Wrote the *Baltimore Sun*, “*Work Ethic* is by turns quirky, moving, mystifying, and playful,” while *Artforum* called it “a rare show of conceptual rigor and historical depth.”

The exhibition is accompanied by a full-color, 248-page **catalogue** co-published by The Baltimore Museum of Art and Penn State University Press. **A full slate of public programs**, featuring talks by several of the artists in the show, is planned.

DIVISION OF ARTISTIC LABOR

Work Ethic is organized into four sections, each exploring a different aspect of artistic labor in contemporary art. The artwork is placed in the context of the division of labor found in the workplace to show how the act of making art engages the same issues of management, production, and skill that have accompanied the emergence of the Information Age. Following is a list of those sections, along with examples from each.

The artist as worker

This section traces how artists have become less interested in art objects as a finished product and more interested in the activity of making art. These artists create a task for themselves, however mundane or obsessive, and complete it as their artwork.

- *Hand Catching Lead* (1968), a three-minute film, features sculptor Richard Serra's hand grasping at falling pieces of lead. While his hand is fully engaged in its work, it does not carve or mold the material.
- A photograph captures a moment in David Hammons's *Blizzard Ball Sale* (1983), his production and sale of snowballs on a street corner in Manhattan.
- Hope Ginsburg's performance, *Bearded Lady* (1998–2000), culminates in her ability to wear a beard of bees and market her own brand of honey.

The artist as manager

Following Conceptual art's credo that the idea is more important than the object, these artists commission others to bring their ideas to fruition. The artists set a task for others to complete, relinquishing the act of creating the actual artwork to assistants or fabricators.

- Robert Rauschenberg's *White Painting* (1951)—a canvas painted with a roller and white housepaint—is one of a series of paintings regularly recreated by studio assistants according to the artist's specifications.
- Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Can (Turkey Noodle)* (1962) is part of a series of mass-produced silkscreened works turned out by the artist's studio, The Factory.
- Sol LeWitt's *Wall Drawing #280* (1976) will be created in The Belmont Building galleries by his studio assistants, who will transfer the artist's instructions for a web of colorful lines directly onto the wall.

The artist as experience maker

In these works, the viewer is no longer just an observer but a necessary agent for the completion of the work. The viewer has to participate in order for the event to become art.

- In a video of Yoko Ono's performance *Cut Piece* (1964), audience members cut and remove pieces of the artist's clothing.
- Viewers are encouraged to take souvenirs from Felix Gonzalez-Torres's pile of green cellophane-wrapped candies in "*Untitled*" (*Rossmore II*) (1991).
- Erwin Wurm's instructions in the galleries direct visitors to pose with props and hold their position for a minute, allowing themselves to be on view for others in *One Minute Sculptures* (2000).

Quitting Time

Other artists try to remove themselves from the artistic process entirely. This often results in a meditation on not working.

- Gilbert & George declare that their drinking in bars is art in *Smashed* (1972), represented by beautiful black-and-white photographs of the artists intoxicated in pubs.
- Gabriel Orozco's photograph *La Oficina* (1992) shows a desk in an office overgrown with vines.
- Roxy Paine created a machine, *Paint Dipper* (1997), which fabricates paintings while the artist is doing other things, elsewhere. It will be making paintings throughout the run of the exhibition.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

Work Ethic is organized and circulated by **The Baltimore Museum of Art**.

It is presented by the Wexner Center with support from the **Corporate Annual Fund of the Wexner Center Foundation**.

THE CURATOR

Helen Molesworth joined the Wexner Center as chief curator of exhibitions in November 2002. She curated the video art exhibition *Image Stream* (fall of 2003), and the forthcoming exhibitions *Landscape Confection* and *Zoe Leonard: ANALOG* (winter of 2005) for the Wexner Center Galleries at The Belmont Building. Prior to joining the Wexner Center, she served as curator of contemporary art at The Baltimore Museum of Art, where she organized the exhibitions *BodySpace*, exploring minimalism in

contemporary art, and *Work Ethic*. She has also worked as a curator in the education department of the Whitney Museum of Art, and is a widely published writer and scholar. Her writings have appeared in *Art Journal*, *Frieze*, and *October*, and in numerous books and exhibition catalogues, and she is the founding editor of *Documents*, a magazine of contemporary visual culture.

WEXNER CENTER GALLERIES AT THE BELMONT BUILDING

Wexner Center exhibitions are being held at the Wexner Center Galleries at The Belmont Building while the galleries at the Wexner Center's Ohio State location undergo renovation. 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.

VISITOR INFORMATION: The Wexner Center Galleries at The Belmont Building are located at Spring Street and Neil Avenue in the Arena District in downtown Columbus. Hours are 11 am–6 pm Tuesday–Wednesday; 11 am–9 pm Thursday–Friday; noon–6 pm Saturday–Sunday. Closed Mondays and holidays. Admission and parking are free.

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.

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