



Media only: Laura Baptiste (202) 633-8494

Jan. 22, 2008

Media Web site: americanart.si.edu/press

Smithsonian American Art Museum Exhibition Honors Six Winners of Its Prestigious Contemporary Art Prize—the Lucelia Artist Award

Since 2001, some of the most innovative artists working in the United States today have received the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s Lucelia Artist Award. “Celebrating the Lucelia Artist Award, 2001–2006,” on view from Sept. 21, 2007 through June 22, features work by each previous winner—Matthew Coolidge, director of the Center for Land Use Interpretation (2006); Andrea Zittel (2005); Kara Walker (2004); Rirkrit Tiravanija (2003); Liz Larner (2002); and Jorge Pardo (2001).

The Lucelia Artist Award annually recognizes an American artist younger than 50 who has consistently demonstrated exceptional creativity. An independent panel of five jurors nominates artists who will be recognized as one of the most important and influential artists of our time. The \$25,000 award is intended to encourage the artist’s future development and experimentation.

The Lucelia Artist Award is part of the museum’s ongoing commitment to contemporary art and artists through annual exhibitions, acquisitions and public programs. The award is named for the New York-based Lucelia Foundation, which supports the visual arts.

“It is energizing to see strong, representative work from each of the Lucelia Artist Award winners transforming the museum’s gallery space,” said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Sidra Stich, who served as the Lucelia Artist Award executive director from 2000 to 2006, is the guest curator of the exhibition. She is the director of “art-SITES,” a series of contemporary art, architecture and design handbooks and currently is in residence as the Coca-Cola Fellow, one of 10 Berlin Prize honorees at The American Academy in Berlin.

“These six artists are engaged in challenging pursuits that expand thinking about the character and function of art and the creative process,” said Stich. “Each has produced a significant body of work that curators, critics and artists who served as jurors consider emblematic of this period in contemporary art.”

The 2007 winner, Jessica Stockholder, was announced Sept. 17, 2007, in conjunction with the opening of the exhibition.

The Center for Land Use Interpretation is a research and educational organization founded by Matthew Coolidge in 1994 to focus attention on the state of land use in contemporary America. The Center is represented in the installation by 15 posters, which were originally exhibition announcements. The Center documents and disseminates information about human interventions that have altered the physical, aesthetic and functional character of the American landscape. Coolidge and the Center for Land Use Interpretation raise awareness about land use and its consequences in a variety of ways including exhibitions, public tours, publications, lectures, an online “Land Use Database” and a national network of on-site interpretative facilities known as the American Land Museum.

Andrea Zittel’s work is rooted in early-modernist ideals about the social function of art, its concern with real-life, utilitarian needs and the transformation of everyday environments. She has been developing her designs for living since the early 1990s, using her own experiences to investigate how the structures one encounters in daily life take on personal significance. Her modular habitats, such as the custom-made “A-Z Homestead Office for Lisa Ivorian Gray” (2003), which is on display in the exhibition, is reminiscent of the utopian creations of the Bauhaus, de Stijl and Le Corbusier, and the homestead shacks built by pioneers on the American frontier.

Kara Walker is best known for her provocative large-scale silhouettes that she uses to explore challenging contemporary social issues. In her hands, the staid paper cut-out—a popular art form in the 18th and 19th centuries—is transformed into a powerful tool for addressing ideas about American racial identity. Using a theatrical sense of narrative and melodrama, as she does in her cut-out paper mural “Virginia’s Lynch Mob” (1998) featured in the exhibition, Walker examines and questions representations of slavery, desire, blackness and the myth of the old South.

Rirkrit Tiravanija’s art focuses on the interactions created by visitors in the spaces he constructs and the social community that is created by these interactions. As is the case with several artists in the exhibition, Tiravanija considers his role as an artist is as a developer of a dialogue, not necessarily as the creator of an object. His “Untitled (Tropical House)” (2006) is a version of the prefabricated housing for French colonial officials working in the Congo designed in the 1950s by the architect Jean Prouvé. Tiravanija’s facsimile of the French Tropical House embodies his interest in exploring the separation of public and private.

Liz Larner's sculptures are based on the formal roots of modernism but question traditional notions of space and volume. Her "RWBs" (2005), made with aluminum tubes, steel and nylon aircraft cable, brass and chrome plated steel padlocks and fabrics, is an open and dynamic form which has a linear quality. The materials and color call attention to the physical and structural nature of the work without asserting such common sculptural qualities as solidity, stability and decoration. The use of red, white and blue, which is alluded to in the title, evokes patriotic expression as well as associations with festive parades, political banners and corporate logos. In 2002, the museum acquired a large artwork by Larner called "Bird in Space" (1989).

Jorge Pardo's work, which combines form and function, blurs the distinction between art, architecture and design. His work—which he calls sculptures—varies from hanging lamps and furniture to architectural projects, such as the house that he designed, built and lived in, as an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 1998. His "Untitled" (1999) illuminates the exhibition galleries with 70 blown glass lamps. In this installation, Pardo uses color to establish a poetic, experiential space conceived as a shaped environment rather than presenting the lamps as autonomous objects.

About the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans with approximately 41,000 artworks in all media spanning more than three centuries. Its National Historic Landmark building is located at Eighth and F streets N.W. in the heart of a revitalized downtown arts district. Museum hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Metrorail station: Gallery Place/Chinatown. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Recorded museum information: (202) 633-7970. Web sites: americanart.si.edu and reynoldscenter.org.

###

Note to editors: Selected high-resolution images for publicity only may be downloaded from <ftp://saam-press@ftp.si.edu>. Call (202) 633-8530 for the password. Additional information about the exhibition and each award recipient is available in the museum's online press room at americanart.si.edu/press.