



CHELSEA ART MUSEUM
HOME OF THE MIOTTE FOUNDATION

For Immediate Release

Streetwise

Thursday, June 23, 2011

Press Preview: Thursday, June 23, 2011, 4p – 6p; **R.S.V.P. at:** press@chelseaartmuseum.org

Opening Reception: Thursday, June 23, 6p – 8p

Performance: Thursday, June 23, 7:30p

(Featuring artist Susana Barbará and Darman Lopez dancing the Tango)

Exhibition: Thursday, June 23 - Saturday, August 6, 2011

Chelsea Art Museum is pleased to present *Streetwise*, curated by **Elga Wimmer**.

The streets, serving as the pulsing veins of our cities, bring the public and private realm together and are a reflection of our social and political reality. Streets are a modern arena for the unexpected, an area of contradictions. As a result, they represent uncensored opportunities for freedom of expression. Every day, people get out of their “boxes” - also known as homes - and mix in the streets, where all social groups collide like molecules that eventually cohere and form a society.

The video artists in *Streetwise* use the streets to examine diverse emotions — such as hope, love, happiness as well as fear and anxiety — that make up our personal and collective experience. All over the world, the streets of big cities look similar: all have both a dark and a light side. The artists use different tactics to communicate complex social issues to audiences that are often unaware of the fact that they are a part of an artistic project.

Oleg Kulik's *Reservoir Dog* was filmed during the opening of the exhibition *Signs and Wonder: Niko Pirosmanni and Contemporary Art* in Kunsthau, Zurich on March 30, 1995. Here, Kulik takes on the persona of a wild animal as an exploration of one's regression into the “original animal.” Assuming the role of these untamed beasts, Kulik is shown naked, howling at the entrance of what he referred to as the “Swiss Bank of Arts.” It was his protest of the transformation of an artist's life into that based on material value, and against art as commodity. Kulik was subsequently arrested and spent a night in prison for this work.

In another work that critiques the ramifications of modernity, Japanese video and installation artist **Momoyo Torimitsu** created a part sculpture, part performance piece called the *Miyata Jiro* project. The work consists of a life-sized robot that takes the form of a stereotypical, corporate-enslaved Japanese businessman. Dressed as a nurse, the artist would follow the robot and periodically change its batteries as it crawled through the streets of Rio de Janeiro's business district. Torimitsu has performed the work in various cities throughout the world, including Rockefeller Center and Wall Street in New York, Tokyo, Amsterdam, Graz, London, Paris, and Sydney. Inherently provocative, the work solicited a wide range of reactions from onlookers – horror, disgust, bewilderment, pleasure, amusement - thus revealing the distinctive and varied preconceptions found across individual as well as cultural boundaries.

In *B.A.Ches (Potholes)* (2008), **Marta Ares and Susana Barbará** feature a couple performing the Tango around the heavily potholed and damaged streets of Buenos Aires. Wittily and ironically, this video references mundane situations that bother us in our daily lives — from dog excrement carelessly left on the sidewalks to neighbors and politics — and suggests that we resort to the absurd in order to “dance around the difficulties.” **Halil Altindere's** *Miss Turkey* (2005) also injects humor into random moments of daily life. The artist fills the main pedestrian street in Istanbul, Istiklal Caddesi, from one end to the other, with imaginary moments that fleetingly disrupt the mundane and the routine. For example, a beauty queen bikes up and down the street, and two businessmen break into a rap dance in a theatre of the absurd.

Hank Willis Thomas and Kambui Olujimi's *Winter in America* (2006) work consists of a stop-motion animation video and still photographs that work together to depict the 2002 robbery and murder of Thomas's cousin Songha Thomas Willis. This tragic event is enacted by G.I. Joe action figures, ironically used by the artists to play out the violent narratives. The work directly critiques our culture's relationship with violence, especially its prevalence in simulated forms in mass culture, media and toys.

All over the world, the streets are also home for people living on the edges of society, as are the homeless adolescents in **Bradley McCallum and Jacqueline Tarry's** *Endurance* (2003) or the prostitutes and transvestites featured in **Alexander Apóstol's** *Avenida de Libertador* (2006). In both videos, the protagonists communicate their stories, from the tragic to the humorous, but viewers are often left in a state of unease with a sense that anything could happen. In these obscure worlds, the streets have no borders and no rules. However, the title of Apóstol's work is particularly meaningful and perhaps hopeful, as it can be translated as “Avenue of Freedom.” The title itself references the principal thoroughfare in Buenos Aires that has become a site of commercial, artistic and cultural richness in Argentina.

The “global village” era has witnessed a multitude of new problems — violence, homelessness, congestion and overpopulation — issues that plague every large city. In particular, traffic is one of the manifestations of everyday life that these artists explore, as In **Solange Fabião's** *Beijing Moscow* (2004) which reflects upon the issue in both of these highly-urbanized cities. Similarly, in **June Bum Park's** *III Crossing* (2002), actual footage of street intersections appear to be manipulated by an enormous hand from above. Large fingers become the barrier between pedestrians and traffic as cars scoot along. In his video *Bandits* (2005), **Tiong Ang** depicts another consequence of modernization — the increasing pollution that many Asian cities are

forced to face. The work is a recording of motorcyclists in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Depicting a seemingly endless string of riders wearing masks on their faces, the continuous stream of images evokes a sense of resistance and illegality, and of anxiety and agitation.

On the streets or underground, one can meet anyone from outsiders to saints. This is shown in **Sonia Khurana's** video *Flower Carrier III* (2006), which was influenced by Milan Kundera's *Immortality*. Much like the novel's protagonist, the artist is featured in the video walking the streets of Barcelona and carrying a flower. Although passerby believe her to be crazy and laugh at her, she instead focuses on the beauty of the flower in the same manner that Kundera's protagonist does to escape the dark and ugly side of life on the streets. Similarly, in *Horror Makeup* (2006), **Jillian McDonald** transforms into a monstrous zombie while riding the L train into Brooklyn. Her work portrays the New York City subway system as a representation of the ugly underbelly of the city, and as a gutter for urban life.

The most fascinating aspect of the streets lies in the fact that life continues despite what occurs around us. On the streets, people try their luck in the lottery, as seen in **Jonathan Calm's** *Scratching Chance* (2005), where humor and irony is used to communicate to their audiences. It is the juxtaposition of the mundane and misfortune, of humor and hope, that binds all of these works together. In particular, hope is a very important theme, especially when the streets become a place of not only innate anxiety but real fear, as was the case of New York City in the aftermath of the World Trade Tower attacks. In *The Day After 9/11*, **Perry Bard** portrays Canal Street on the day following the disaster, where life has to continue as usual despite the tragedy.

Close to 100 years ago in his novel *Amerika*, Kafka portrayed the streets and public places of big cities as sites of corruption, deceit, fatality, intrigue and strange encounters. Yet suddenly on the horizon, as a symbol of hope and freedom, appeared the Statue of Liberty rising high above New York Harbor, giving confidence and strength to Kafka's protagonist. Similarly, the artists in **Streetwise** convey myriad stories that reflect on all aspects of human behavior displayed in the streets and public places of today's cities. Ultimately, the exhibition asks that apart from the progress of modern technology, has so much changed since Kafka's time?

Featured Artists:

Halil Altindere, Tiong Ang, Alexander Apóstol, Marta Ares and Susana Barbará, Perry Bard, Jonathan Calm, Solange Fabião, Sonia Khurana, Oleg Kulik, Bradley McCallum and Jacqueline Tarry, Jillian McDonald, June Bum Park, Hank Willis Thomas and Kambui Olujimi, and Momoyo Torimitsu.

Chelsea Art Museum, home of the Miotte Foundation, presents contemporary thematic exhibitions that foster critical thinking about today's world. CAM strives to cultivate respect for the world at large, exhibiting seminal, but relatively unexplored dimensions of 20th and 21st century art, particularly focusing on international artists that have less exposure in the United States. The museum is founded on the legacy of abstract expressionist painter, Jean Miotte, whose foundation is housed within the museum.

For additional information or to request images, please send an email to:
press@chelseaartmuseum.org

Chelsea Art Museum

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Museum hours: Tuesday – Saturday: 11a – 6p, Thursday: 11am – 8p; closed Sunday and Monday

General admission: \$8 for adults; \$4 Students and Seniors

Directions: C/E to 23rd Street and 8th Avenue