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Classified Materials: Accumulations, Archives, Artists

October 15, 2005 to January 2, 2006



Image: Muntadas, *The File Room*, 1994-2004, File cabinet desk, light, computers, website, Photo: Tara Nicholson, Courtesy of the Walter Phillips Gallery, ©Muntadas

Vancouver, BC – In a world of information overload, the process of organizing, assembling and ordering materials plays an increasingly vital role in all aspects of society. *Classified Materials: Accumulations, Archives, Artists* examines how artists find creative ways to produce meaning through the process of collection and classification. The exhibition opens at the Vancouver Art Gallery on Saturday, October 15, 2005 and will remain on view through January 2, 2006.

How do artists classify materials that resist classification? How do they determine what is significant or relevant? Spanning two Gallery floors, *Classified Materials* explores how forty-four internationally-renowned contemporary artists from Canada, the United States, Asia, Europe and the Middle East are assembling, questioning, challenging and creating new ways of ordering things, images and thoughts. The results take on a variety of forms, from electronic data, words and images, to ready-made objects and layer upon layer of paint. The exhibition, which includes works from the Vancouver Art Gallery's permanent collection, unveils unseen elements of the art making process, demonstrating the works of artists who employ, transform or challenge the process of ordering as the basis for artistic activity.

One notable example is *The Great Survey of Papercuttings in Yanchuan County*, a portion of *The Long March Project*. In 2002, artist/curator Lu Jie led an international group of artists on an expedition retracing the 6,000-mile route on Mao's epic "Long March" of 1934-35. Residents of China's Yanchuan County, situated in the northeastern part of the Yan'an Municipality, were asked to create original paper-cuttings, take photographs and complete detailed surveys collecting personal information. The resulting art works, photographs and biographical information in *The Great Survey of Papercuttings in Yanchuan County* from Lu Jie's *The Long March Project* reveal a great deal about China's cultural revolution, art criticism and what remains of traditional and ancient symbolism, despite many political and religious changes over the past decades.

The thorough survey of the county's 180,000 residents uses the ancient Chinese art form of paper-cutting as a gauge of modern society to gain deeper insight into the relationship between contemporary art and public space.

The File Room is an electronic archive of censored materials by artist Muntadas, whose work examines the history of censorship while proposing and providing tools for the discussion of cultural suppression. Comprised of works compiled over a ten-year period, *The File Room* now serves as an evolving archive recognizing acts of censorship in relation to their social settings, political movements, religious beliefs, economic conditions, cultural expressions and personal identities. *The File Room* is an open system and social sculpture that engages through public interaction, inviting viewers to participate in a conscious political performance as they search the computer terminals for examples of censorship or enter their own “case” into the archive. Muntadas has tackled a variety of controversial social and political issues in his work and was recently chosen to represent Spain at the 51st Venice Biennale.

In a very different vein, *The Hunchback Kit* by Vancouver artist Geoffrey Farmer is a site-specific installation featured in the Gallery's second and third floor rotunda. Farmer, whose interest lies in collecting objects to present social narratives based on popular culture, creates research-based projects that result in multi-media installations combining video, film, performance, drawing, sculpture, found objects and text. *The Hunchback Kit, 2000*, is a presentation of more than 60 objects that relate either directly or through allusion to Victor Hugo's classic novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Farmer encourages visitors to view the evolving accumulation not only to discover pieces reflecting an interpretation of the fictional character, but to also encounter fears and desires of their own.

The creation of imagined or alternate personas through décor, costumes or fetish objects has been explored in various forms by generations of artists. Works involving photography, video and sculptural elements by such artists as Eric Metcalfe, Kate Craig and Hadley + Maxwell exemplify the strategic use of “virtual truth” in accumulative portraiture. Inspired in part by cult novelist William S. Burroughs' concept of the image bank in his post-modern work *Nova Express*, the *Image Bank* artists' archive was founded in 1969 by Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov (in early partnership with Gary Lee Nova) as a base for networking that parallels and parodies publicity-gaining methods in the information age.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, both visually and conceptually, are several accumulative sculptural works that assume an abstract appearance, including Gary Neill Kennedy's *American History Painting*, Irene Whittome's *White Museum#1* and Robyn Laba's *White Squares I-III*, among others.

Alongside the materially based accumulations, the exhibition also presents several serial photographic and book projects that portray abstraction by, in part, rendering categories of knowledge absurd. Collectively, the artists share an interest in conceptual strategies, specifically testing the limits of narrative content and of our ability to make meaning in an image-saturated world.

Artists included in *Classified Materials* are: Roy Arden, Kim Kennedy Austin, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Hai Bo, Christian Boltanski, Eric Cameron, Sarah Charlesworth, Kate Craig, Paul de Guzman, Eugenio Dittborn, Geoffrey Farmer, Hans-Peter Feldmann, Gerald Ferguson, Ellen Gallagher, Hadley + Maxwell, Douglas Huebler, Carole Itter, Emily Jacir, Garry Neill Kennedy, Roy Kiyooka, Robyn Laba, Micah Lexier, The Long March Project, Kyla Mallett, Eric Metcalfe, Morris/Trasov Archive (Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov), Muntadas, Al Neil, N.E. Thing Co., Michael Euyung Oh, Denise Oleksijczuk, Heather Passmore, Ed Ruscha, Jayce Salloum, Mary Scott, Steven Shearer, Jeffrey Spalding, Irene Whittome, Kelly Wood and Jin-me Yoon.

In conjunction with Lu Jie, exhibition artist, curator and director of the Long March Foundation, Vancouver artist/curator Shengtian Zheng and Hsingyuan Tsao, professor of contemporary and historical Chinese art at UBC, will present a dialogue on the continuing evolution of the Long March Project. This special presentation will be held in the Gallery on Wednesday, October 12 at 7pm.

In addition, each Thursday evening in November, Vancouver Art Gallery curators and artists will present discussions on the works in *Classified Materials*. The programs are free with Gallery admission.

Classified Materials: Accumulations, Archives, Artists is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Grant Arnold, Audain Curator of British Columbia Art; Daina Augaitis, Chief Curator/Associate Director; Bruce Grenville, Senior Curator; and Monika Szewczyk, Assistant Curator.

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