

# Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas

*For immediate release*

Jan. 30, 2004

## ***Conflicting Memories* considers art's role in constructing history**

**Feb. 7–April 4, 2004**

**Spencer Museum of Art, Kress Gallery, The University of Kansas**

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JPEG publicity images available

**Lawrence, KS**—*Conflicting Memories*, a collaborative effort of the Spencer Museum of Art and the Salina Art Center, offers an opportunity to examine how works of art participate in recording our cultural past—a process that often involves conflicts between the histories established by those in power and the alternative histories of those subjected to that power. In *The book of laughter and forgetting*, author Milan Kundera summed this up elegantly, "The struggle of man against power," he wrote, "is the struggle of memory against forgetting. "

The exhibition, which opened in Salina Oct. 25 and closed there Jan. 22, opens in the Spencer's Kress Gallery Feb. 7 and will remain on view through April 4. The Spencer Museum of Art venue is generously supported in part by the Kansas Arts Commission, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

*Conflicting Memories* includes work from the past five centuries, but is primarily dedicated to contemporary art and to the recent notion of cultural memory, a term that describes the essential cultural record that is passed on to succeeding generations through such avenues as ritual, celebration, advertising, consumer items, literature and the arts.

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**01/30/04 Spencer Museum of Art Media Release, Page 2**

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Anachronism, historicism, nostalgia, evolution, re-enactment, ancestry, hindsight, amnesia, repression—these are some of the terms that recur in discussions of cultural memory, and most of them, like the works exhibited in *Conflicting Memories*, suggest a fluid dialogue between past and present.

For example, Enrique Chagoya's long, printed scroll, *El Regreso del Canibal Macrobiotica*, shows Mayan gods, Our Lady of Guadalupe, border guards, and superheroes from the United States colliding in a vivid confusion of images that characterize the complex heritage of contemporary Latino culture. Like other recent works in *Conflicting Memories*, Chagoya's scroll describes a tension between the prevailing, mainstream perspective of history and culture, and the vast sea of under-recognized, misunderstood or marginalized records and memories that could propose alternative views.

Other works in the exhibition try to knit back together the fabric of culture that has been torn by war or erased by subjugation—such as Martha Rosler's *Makeup, Hands Up* that superimposes an image of a G.I. who holds a Viet Cong woman at gunpoint onto the face of a model applying her makeup; Dinh Q. Lê's *Persistence of Memory* series that literally weaves together incompatible images of the Vietnam war culled from photojournalism and Hollywood movies; Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's American Indian folk figure *Rabbit* atop a floor plan of Saint Peter's Cathedral in Rome, or Willie Cole's photographic self-portrait triptych in which his identity as an African-American elides with an image of an African mask and a strangely talismanic image of a laundry iron that suggests both servitude and ritual scarification.

Roger Shimomura's series of simple declarative statements and images in his *Memories of Childhood* strikes chords of familiarity through our own associations with birthday cake, mom, and the U.S. flag—only to clash violently and ironically with our assumptions when we notice that these scenes are set within a U.S. internment camp secured with barbed wire. Deborah Muirhead's skin-like layers, which she sometimes refers to as "windows," offer muted glimpses into African-American history. William Kentridge distills the remnants of two cultures in post-apartheid South Africa that attempt to recover their history and memories from a war-torn

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### **01/30/04 Spencer Museum of Art Media Release, Page 3**

landscape. Tanya Hartman's pictorial strings of text, meted out day by day, suggest the tenuous connections that link us to previous generations and their aspirations. Wilchar awakens us from cultural amnesia to glimpse horrors so unthinkable that most holocaust survivors are utterly incapable of communicating them. These are important subjects, and the artists who treat them invoke us to change the reading of our common history—Michael Krueger's *Book of Rage (an angry history book)* tells us so. The exhibition also includes work by Tony Fitzpatrick, Jasper Johns, Komar and Melamid, and Robert Rauschenberg.

A dialogue between Saralyn Reece Hardy, Director and Curator at the Salina Art Center and Steve Goddard, Print and Drawing Curator at the Spencer, sowed the seeds for *Conflicting Memories*. As Goddard recalls, they discovered a shared interest in the role of memory in the arts.

"When we found that we were both thinking about memory in art, especially as recent global issues sift into competing historical records, we were motivated to collaborate and realize the exhibition as quickly as possible," Goddard says.

Throughout the exhibition William Kentridge's hand-drawn animated film, "Felix in Exile," will be projected in the gallery. On March 4 artist Willie Cole, whose work is included in the exhibition, will lecture in the Spencer Auditorium at 7 p.m. And at 5 p.m. March 11 the Spencer also plans a guided visit to the exhibition led by KU faculty members and contributing artists Tanya Hartman and Michael Krueger.

#### **EXHIBITION PROGRAMMING: *Conflicting Memories***

- Lecture: Artist Willie Cole on his work, March 4, 7 p.m. SMA Auditorium
- Film: "Rabbit in the Moon," February 19, 7 p.m., SMA Auditorium.
- Tour du Jour: Curator Steve Goddard, February 26, 12:15 p.m., Kress Gallery.
- Children's Art Appreciation Class: "Remember When..." February 28, 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. \$. Pre-registration required.
- Tour du Jour: Intern Emily Stamey on "William Kentridge's hand-drawn animated film 'Felix in Exile'," March 4, 12:15 p.m., South Balcony Gallery.
- Gallery Tour: KU faculty members and contributing artists Tanya Hartman and Michael Krueger, March 11, 5 p.m., Kress Gallery.

\*For more information on these Spencer events, contact Kristina Mitchell, acting curator of education, 785.864.0137 or [educate@ku.edu](mailto:educate@ku.edu)

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Also find the Spencer...

- On the Web: [www.spencerart.ku.edu](http://www.spencerart.ku.edu)
- E-mail: [spencerart@ku.edu](mailto:spencerart@ku.edu)

Gallery hours

Tues., Wed., Fri., & Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Thurs. 10 a.m.–9 p.m.

Sun. Noon–5 p.m.

Closed Monday

- Free parking in Lot 91 after 5 p.m. on weekdays and all day weekends, excepting home football games.
- Parking garage adjacent to Kansas Union is \$1 per hour weekdays, free on Saturdays and Sundays (but unavailable on home football games).