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THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN PRESENTS A MAJOR GROUP EXHIBITION EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF ART AND ANTHROPOLOGY AT ITS JONES CENTER AND LAGUNA GLORIA LOCATIONS

The multi-site exhibition, *The Sorcerer's Burden: Contemporary Art and the Anthropological Turn*, features eleven international artists working in diverse mediums, including sculpture, painting, film, video, and installation.



The Sorcerer's Burden: Contemporary Art and the Anthropological Turn

September 14, 2019 – January 19, 2020

The Contemporary Austin – Jones Center on Congress Avenue

The Contemporary Austin – Laguna Gloria

JUNE 19, 2019, AUSTIN, TEXAS – From September 14, 2019, through January 19, 2020, The Contemporary Austin presents *The Sorcerer's Burden: Contemporary Art and the Anthropological Turn*. On view at the museum's two locations, the Jones Center in downtown Austin (700 Congress Avenue) and the Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria on the shores of Lake Austin (3809 West 35th Street), the exhibition will consist of new commissions, existing works, and site-specific iterations of previous works by eleven international contemporary artists working in a variety of media. The exhibition is made possible, in part, by generous grants from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Sorcerer's Burden: Contemporary Art and the Anthropological Turn is organized by Heather Pesanti, Chief Curator & Director of Curatorial Affairs at The Contemporary Austin, and features artists **Ed Atkins** (born 1982 in

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Oxford, United Kingdom; lives and works in Copenhagen and Berlin), **Nuotama Bodomo** (born 1988 in Accra, Ghana), **Theo Eshetu** (born 1958 in London, United Kingdom; lives and works in Berlin), **Cameron Jamie** (born 1969 in Los Angeles, California; lives and works in Paris), **Kapwani Kiwanga** (born 1978 in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada; lives and works in Paris), **Marie Lorenz** (born 1973 in Twentynine Palms, California; lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, and Austin, Texas), **Nathan Mabry** (born 1978 in Durango, Colorado; lives and works in Los Angeles), **Ruben Ochoa** (born 1974 in Oceanside, California; lives and works in Los Angeles), **Dario Robleto** (born 1972 in San Antonio, Texas; lives and works in Houston), **Shimabuku** (born 1969 in Kobe, Japan; lives and works in Naha, Japan), and **Julia Wachtel** (born 1956 in New York, New York; lives and works in Connecticut and Brooklyn, New York).

Encompassing diverse media including sculpture, photography, painting, installation, video, sound, and performance, the exhibition explores intersections between contemporary art and anthropology, examining the rich, complex, and at times contentious dialogue between the two fields and their social, cultural, and political implications. The exhibition will be accompanied by a full-color catalogue co-published by The Contemporary Austin and Radius Books, as well as a diverse range of related public and education programs.

“From Renaissance ‘cabinets of curiosities’ and early ethnographic museums to modernist artists who drew inspiration from other cultures, art and anthropology have been intertwined for centuries. This is evidenced by our persistent interest in collecting, classifying, and questioning the evidence of culture and our enduring impulse to explore the human condition,” said Heather Pesanti. “*The Sorcerer’s Burden* represents a collection of ideas examining the intersection of art and anthropology from a contemporary art perspective. The artists in the exhibition offer fresh takes on the subject matter, both directly and indirectly, as they borrow fruitfully from anthropological methods and approaches. These powerful, poignant, subversive, and at times playful works blend real and imagined narratives, history with myth, and fact with fiction to raise important questions around identity, ethics, history, power structures, postcolonialism, and material culture. I am excited to present the depth and breadth of these artists’ work in Austin.”

The Sorcerer’s Burden: Contemporary Art and the Anthropological Turn will occupy both museum sites and is loosely organized around four themes: **Things** (works focusing on material culture and appropriation and taking its title from critical theorist’s Bill Brown’s 2001 “Thing” theory); **Ritual, Magic, Myth** (works exploring history and culture through the lens of storytelling, ritual, and fantasy); **The Spyglass of Anthropology** (works that offer critiques of culture through self-exploration and identity, inspired by anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston); and **Farther Afield** (works revolving around fieldwork, community, and performance, and a nod to writer and critic Lucy R. Lippard’s 2010 text of the same name).

The exhibition’s title was inspired by American cultural anthropologist (and 1978 PhD graduate from The University of Texas at Austin) Paul Stoller’s 2016 ethnographic book, *The Sorcerer’s Burden: The Ethnographic Saga of a Global Family*, which merges history, fictional and poetic elements, and the author’s research among the Songhay people of Africa. The allusion to magic and sorcery in the title also recalls an early exhibition that explored the intersection of Western and non-Western art, Jean-Hubert Martin’s 1989 *Magiciens de la terre* in Paris, while the exhibition’s subtitle references a term coined by Hal Foster in his 1995 essay “The Artist as Ethnographer?” in which he wrote of the problematic “ethnographic turn” in “quasi-anthropological” practices.

ON VIEW AT THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN – JONES CENTER:

THINGS, RITUAL, MAGIC, MYTH, AND THE SPYGLASS OF ANTHROPOLOGY

At the downtown Jones Center on Congress Avenue, viewers will encounter an immersive experience on both floors. On the first floor, works by **Nathan Mabry** and **Julia Wachtel**—part of the exhibition’s thematic category *Things*—examine the power and ambiguity of images and objects and consider the ethics of appropriating such cultural iconography.

In Nathan Mabry’s *T/O/T/E/M* series (five of which are on view), freestanding sculptures merge the imagery of ethnographic display with that of Minimalist art. For example, in *T/O/T/E/M (. . . dog eat dog . . .)*, 2014, what

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appears to be a dog-shaped pre-Columbian terra-cotta vessel sits atop a plywood and Plexiglas box that recalls the style of Minimalist artist Donald Judd. Also on view is a selection of works from Mabry's *u.n.t.i.t.l.e.d.* series. These wall-mounted sculptures include bronze figures—again suggestive of ancient works in an anthropological museum—posed atop painted aluminum and steel boxes.

Things also includes five paintings by Julia Wachtel (two early works from 1997 and three more recent paintings), which combine screen printing and painting, overlaying repeated elements in humorous visual assemblages that draw imagery from politics and pop culture. For instance, in Wachtel's painting *Bad*, 2015, the high school teacher-turned-meth-making antihero Walter White from the AMC TV show *Breaking Bad* is depicted next to a cartoonish figure peeping through a keyhole at him. Like Mabry, Wachtel takes these images out of their original contexts, suggesting the fluidity of cultural meaning and playing with ideas of authorship and appropriation.

Also on the first floor of the Jones Center, the exhibition's *Ritual, Magic, Myth* section examines culture and history via storytelling through works by artists **Kapwani Kiwanga** and **Dario Robleto**. Addressing the experiences of African people and those of African descent affected by colonialism and slavery, Kapwani Kiwanga uses storytelling and symbolism to reveal forgotten historical moments. Kiwanga's conceptual sculpture *Flowers for Africa: Ivory Coast*, 2015, is part of a project in which the artist re-creates floral arrangements from archival photographs and footage of defining moments of independence in African countries. For this work, Kiwanga will provide a local florist with a "protocol" to interpret, and then create, a cut-flower arrangement suggestive of a particular political moment in Ivory Coast history. Affectingly, the living arrangement is left to wilt and decay over time. Also on view is Kiwanga's *Glow*, 2019, an installation of four abstract sculptures, each about the height of a standing person. Installed in a dimly lit space, these spare geometric forms, with inset illuminated elements, suggest human figures seen in the darkness and reference "lantern laws" of 18th-century America, a discriminatory surveillance technique that served to regulate enslaved people of color by requiring them to carry a lantern or candle after dark.

Dario Robleto's work also mines history, giving voice to under-recognized stories in powerfully emotive works that often incorporate science, engineering, technology, and pop culture. On view are new and existing works from the artist's ongoing series related to the human heartbeat. *The First Time, the Heart (A Portrait of Life 1854–1913)*, 2017–2018, is a selection of photolithographs based on the artist's collaboration with sound historian Patrick Feaster. Newly commissioned by The Contemporary Austin and also extending from Robleto's research with Feaster, *The Boundary of Life Is Quietly Crossed*, 2019, is a sound and film installation of various heartbeat narratives transformed into an immersive audio and visual experience.

On the second floor of the Jones Center, works by artists **Theo Eshetu**, **Nuotama Bodomo**, **Ed Atkins**, and **Ruben Ochoa** reflect the exhibition's theme of *The Spyglass of Anthropology*, drawing from both the past and modernity in reflective works that comment on identity, place, and lived experience.

Theo Eshetu's *Adieu Les Demoiselles*, 2019, a new video and sound installation commissioned by The Contemporary Austin, takes as its starting point Pablo Picasso's iconic painting *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)*, 1911–1914—in which Picasso appropriated African and Iberian imagery to create a composition of masklike faces and fractured female forms that heralded the arrival of Cubism. For this immersive work, Eshetu staged live portraits in front of a projected reproduction of Picasso's painting, using performers that alternately pose as its figures or create new forms, silhouettes, and gestures in front of the famous iconography. The artist then fragmented the filmed imagery, combining it with images from other modernist painters, such as Henri Matisse and Yves Klein. In this way, Eshetu collages and layers visual space, time, and art history to yield an original, spectacular, and startling composition.

Nuotama Bodomo uses her unique transnational perspective of the African diaspora to create exploratory narratives of the imagination through film. Two video works by the artist will play back-to-back: *Afronauts*, 2014, a short fictional film based on the Zambia National Academy of Science, Space Research and Philosophy's real attempts to enter the space race during the Cold War, and *Boneshaker*, 2013, a ritualistic story of a young girl whose mother brings her to a Louisiana church hoping to banish the spirits who may be possessing her.

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Ed Atkins uses technology, digital animation, and language to create dark, arresting works that critique contemporary culture, often rendering unassuming and witty anthropological portraits of the Western male condition and its emotions of melancholy, loneliness, and shame. In *The Sorcerer's Burden*, the video *Material Witness OR A Liquid Cop*, 2012, projected onto an architectural screen, features a pastiche of figuration and abstraction narrated by a CGI avatar—voiced by the artist—who ruminates on topics including ritual, death, and disparity amid a stream-of-consciousness flow of imagery and language.

Finally, *The Spyglass of Anthropology* presents works by Ruben Ochoa that explore the intersections of humanity, nature, and urban environments. For example, one of several works on view from the artist's ficus tree photograph series, *Still Tripping, 90033*, 2007, appears to be a gnarled tangle of pale abstract forms, but is actually a close-up photograph of the roots of a ficus tree that have broken through the sidewalk in Los Angeles's 90033 zip code. Hung low on the wall (near where the roots themselves would be), the work suggests the socioeconomic inequalities revealed by the maintenance—or lack thereof—of a city's sidewalks. Visitors will also see examples from a recent series of rust paintings and abstract steel sculptures by Ochoa (a sculptural work by the artist is also on view at Laguna Gloria).

ON VIEW AT THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN – LAGUNA GLORIA:

FARTHER AFIELD

At the 14-acre Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria, outdoor and indoor works by artists **Ruben Ochoa**, **Cameron Jamie**, **Marie Lorenz**, and **Shimabuku** reflect the exhibition's *Farther Afield* theme, with projects revolving around fieldwork, community, and performance.

In addition to his works at the Jones Center, Ruben Ochoa's sculpture *A bit of detritus*, 2011—a stacked tower of concrete, metal, and dirt standing 80 inches high—is installed in the lower, wooded grounds of the park, raising the question, is it a pile of leftover materials from a construction project, or an urban totem?

Also sited in the lower grounds at Laguna Gloria is Cameron Jamie's new, large-scale, colorful sculpture *Mon Singe*, 2019, commissioned by The Contemporary Austin for this exhibition, which was sculpted in clay, then cast in bronze. Showing the rough marks of the artist's hand, this humorous, oversized work (the title translates to My Monkey) is mischievous and unexpected, part of the artist's recent interventions in landscape and exploration of ceramics that play with mythology and surprising, totemic forms.

The performative project *Graybelt Field Trips*, 2019, by Marie Lorenz, is an extension of her project *Tide and Current Taxi*, 2005 – ongoing, which encompasses firsthand explorations of urban waterways by boat. *Graybelt Field Trips* takes advantage of Laguna Gloria's unique location on Lake Austin for open-ended boat excursions on a stretch of the Colorado River, using a boat built by the artist. Bridging the worlds of contemporary art, anthropology, and archaeology, Lorenz also presents a new, site-specific installation, *Trap and Weir*, 2019, commissioned by The Contemporary Austin for this exhibition and sited at an old, concrete boat dock along the edge of Lake Austin. *Trap and Weir* comprises a collection of steel lobster traps and cast ceramic vessels evoking ancient octopus traps (created by Lorenz during a residency at the ceramics studios of The Contemporary Austin – Art School). Curiously encountered in Austin's fresh waters, the installation spurs the viewer's imagination to ponder this unexpected confluence of nature, the manmade, and industry.

Finally, inside Laguna Gloria's historic Driscoll Villa building, artist Shimabuku presents works from his project *The Snow Monkeys of Texas*, 2016. Based on an event that took place in 1972, in which a population of monkeys was relocated from Kyoto, Japan, to Dilley, Texas, south of San Antonio, *The Snow Monkeys of Texas* encompasses a video installation from the artist's visit to see the monkeys in their sanctuary, live cacti installed on the floor, and one of Shimabuku's portrait-like photographs of these now-Texan animals. All playfully out-of-sync with the Italianate architecture and interiors of the 1916 Driscoll Villa, Shimabuku's installation employs a gentle fieldwork approach to address contemporary topics, including immigration, overpopulation, and ecology.

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EXHIBITION CATALOGUE AND SUPPORT

The Sorcerer's Burden: Contemporary Art and the Anthropological Turn will be accompanied by a 272-page, full-color catalogue, co-published by The Contemporary Austin and Radius Books, Santa Fe. The catalogue, sharing its title with the exhibition, will be released in September 2019 and includes a long-form, scholarly essay by exhibition curator **Heather Pesanti**; a think piece by artist, critic, and curator **Robert Storr** on the relationship between art and the social sciences; a conversation on the ethics of art and anthropology between Pesanti and **David Odo**, Director of Student Programs and Research Curator of University Collections Initiatives at the Harvard Art Museums; and a creative text by **Julia V. Hendrickson**, Associate Curator at the museum. The eleven artists featured in the exhibition were also invited to submit images, texts, personal photos, or other inspiration and research related to their work, which is collected in the book's *Farther Afield* section.

This exhibition is funded in part by a grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and an award from the National Endowment for the Arts, with additional support from artnet, Cultural Arts Division of the City of Austin Economic Development Department, Cultural Services of the French Embassy, Horizon Bank, Linda L. Brown, MaddocksBrown Foundation, *Texas Monthly*, and The Contemporary Austin's Exhibition Fund Supporters.

EXHIBITION-RELATED PROGRAMS

The museum will present a full calendar of related public and education programs, including a book release celebration, lectures, conversations with artists, and performances. Visit thecontemporaryaustin.org/events for up-to-date information about upcoming programs.

"This exhibition brings thought-provoking work by significant contemporary artists from around the world to Austin, and provides many opportunities for the museum to fulfill our mission of creating compelling public and educational programming," said Andrea Mellard, Director of Public Programs & Community Engagement. "I look forward to sharing these experiences with the public, and welcome the community to join us to encounter new ideas and narratives through the lens of anthropology and contemporary art."

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As Austin's only museum solely focused on contemporary artists and their work, The Contemporary Austin offers exhibitions, educational opportunities, and events that start conversations and fuel the city's creative spirit. Known for artist-centric projects and collaborations, The Contemporary invites exploration at both its urban and natural settings—downtown at the Jones Center on Congress Avenue, lakeside at the Laguna Gloria campus (including the Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park, the Art School, and the historic Driscoll Villa), and around Austin through the Museum Without Walls program.

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IMAGE CAPTION

Theo Eshetu, *Adieu Les Demoiselles* (still), 2019. Single-channel HD video, color, sound. Running time: 8:45, looped. Commissioned by The Contemporary Austin. Artwork © Theo Eshetu. Image courtesy the artist and Axis Gallery, New York.