

For Immediate Release

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THE BERRIE CENTER ART GALLERIES AT RAMAPO COLLEGE PRESENT *(THIS IS NOT THE PLACE)*, A GROUP SHOW FEATURING TWELVE ACCLAIMED CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS WHO NEGOTIATE IDEAS OF "PLACE" THROUGH VARIOUS MEDIA

(Mahwah) – Certain to make a name for itself with its first major exhibition, the Berrie Center at Ramapo College of New Jersey presents an ambitious group show, *(This is not the Place)*, outlining personal histories and tracing territories through the works of 12 diverse contemporary artists who negotiate ideas of "place" in the realm of painting, photography, video and sculptural installation.

Co-curated by Virgilio Garza, a Manhattan-based curator and gallery administrator, and Sydney O. Jenkins, art gallery director at the Berrie Center, the show features works by Cuban "artist in exile" **Luis Cruz Azaceta**, known for his paintings of "rafters" adrift at sea; the late **Alighiero e Boetti**, Italian leader in the "arte povera" movement; film artist **Marco Brambilla**, longtime collaborator of Ridley Scott and director of *Demolition Man*; multimedia artist **Shalom Gorewitz**, former dean of the School of Contemporary Arts at Ramapo College; body-obsessed conceptual artist **Mona Hatoum**, included in the controversial *Sensation* exhibition at Brooklyn Museum of Art; **Sally Mann**, who rose to fame for her provocative, highly personal photographs of her children; former cloistered monk **Ernesto Pujol**, featured on the cover of the March issue of *ARTnews*; Mexican artist **Betsabee Romero**, who uses cars as a medium for exploring urban issues; South African artist **Marlaine Tsoni**, represented by an unsettling audio installation; MacArthur Genius Grant recipient **Kara Walker**, whose subversive silhouettes of black Americans have made her the subject of heated discussion and protests; and eccentric, self-taught artist **Joseph Yoakum**.

Explains co-curator Virgilio Garza, himself a Mexican national relocated to New York City, "In its title, *(This is not the Place)* asks us to look elsewhere. The artists

featured in this show contest and open up notions of identity and place as the crux of their life/art continuum."

The public is invited to attend an opening reception on Wednesday, April 12, from 5 to 7 P.M. The exhibition remains on view in the Berrie Center's Kresge Foundation Gallery and Andre Z. Pascal Gallery through May 5, 2000. Gallery hours are Tuesdays through Fridays, 1 to 5 p.m.

About the Artists

Luis Cruz Azaceta, who emigrated from Cuba in 1960 shortly after Castro's revolution, considers himself an "artist in exile." He began his career in New York, and his early work reflects his awareness of urban social issues such as homelessness, disenfranchisement, violence and the AIDS epidemic. Writes Edward J. Sullivan in a 1998 essay, "Since the late 1970s [Azaceta's] paintings and drawings... have been taking the moral and ethical pulse of this country." Azaceta is perhaps best known for his ongoing series of "boat paintings," poetic images of agonized "rafters" adrift at sea, struggling and isolated. *Crossing* (1999), included in the Berrie Center show, is one such work that illustrates the artist's epic, existential quest. Omnipresent in these paintings is an angst-ridden figure, an archetype of alienation. Azaceta, who has been awarded a number of prestigious fellowships, was among those featured in *Latin American Artists of the 20th Century*, a major, international survey that premiered at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1992 before traveling to the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo in Seville, Spain; the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris; and the Ludwig Art Museum in Cologne, Germany.

The work of the late **Alighiero e Boetti** (1940-1994), a proponent of the "arte povera" movement, reflects the artist's concern with issues of identity and duality - the sense of the self and the "other." His seminal work *Twins* (1968) shows a composite image in which the artist holds hands with his double, a "twin brother" that the photographic image delivers as real. He produced this work as an edition of 50 postcards, which he mailed as an announcement of the birth of Alighiero e Boetti (Alighiero and Boetti). Afterwards, he continued to create "mail art" and other types of work that involved third parties and reflected the artist's transnational sensibility. The exhibition

includes six of Boetti's famous embroideries, which he produced throughout his career. In creating the embroideries, Boetti would render a design—including world maps and text works—that would be executed by skilled weavers, collaborators who exercised their liberty in respect to the use of colors. By incorporating provocative statements and phrases, such as "ORDER AND DISORDER", Boetti elevated the works from the decorative to the conceptual. Also in the exhibition is a drawing, similar to one seen in the March issue of *Artforum*, which Garza describes as a "sweetly chaotic image that illustrates at best the journeys of a wandering mind."

Film artist **Marco Brambilla**, longtime collaborator with Ridley Scott and director of *Demolition Man*, creates video installations that address the "in-between" space of travel, a place that is not a place. *Getaway* (1999), presented in the exhibition, "tells a Sisyphean narrative: that of approaching and never arriving," explains Garza. An airplane pulls closer to the runway, and as the wheels are about to touch ground the image fades to black—then, in an endless loop, the process begins again. All the while, a jazzy musical soundtrack adds an element of irony. Postulates Garza, "Is Brambilla commenting on the long-lost glamour of air travel, or is this airy music an upbeat score for a fiction, the unreachable, ideal place at the end of the runway?"

Shalom Gorewitz, former dean of the School of Contemporary Arts at Ramapo College, is represented with a new site-specific, multimedia installation entitled *Ivri* (2000), comprised of video and computer images, electric fans, clothing and arcane sounds that together create a continuous chaos in which moments of a story unfold. As the title suggests—the word "Ivri" meaning "Hebrew, nomad, boundary-crosser"—Gorewitz plays upon the idea of the wandering Jew, a quasi-self-portrait of "the prototypical 21st century Hebrew, a restless cosmopolitan." Says Jenkins, Gorewitz "probes the elasticity of belonging and place in his own signature style with this dazzling and entrancing installation."

Through her conceptually driven performances and sculptures, Beirut-born **Mona Hatoum** has succeeded in bridging the gap between art and life by treating the body as both a site and an artistic medium. Recently featured in the controversial *Sensation* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Hatoum's work touches upon issues of gender and identity, and a state of being that is caught up between frontiers. The Berrie Center

exhibition features performance stills from *Roadworks*, a poetically—and politically – charged piece in which she walked barefoot through the streets of Brixton dragging a pair of work boots tied to her ankles, as well as the sculpture *Marrow*, a rubber cast of a child's bed that Garza describes as "an inert 'body' that exudes the pathos of the struggle between life and death."

Sally Mann, who became famous for her controversial and deeply personal photographs of her children, is here represented by a large gelatin silver print from her series *Deep South: Landscapes of Mississippi and Louisiana*. These works are devoid of human figures and yet, knowing that the depicted locations are in the South, each scene is "suddenly permeated with those histories, looming ghosts and bitter legacies of loss," points out Jenkins. "Mann calls up a rich romantic essence in photographs dense with atmosphere... Ethereal roots and branches can be discerned amongst the light-filled rectangles, touched by lazy and sad Southern breezes."

Former cloistered monk **Ernesto Pujol**, whose work was the cover story for the March issue of *ARTnews*, has employed a variety of media - painting, sculptural installations and photography - to comment on the ways in which individuality and culture intertwine. Born in Cuba, raised in Puerto Rico and a resident of New York City for more than a decade, "Pujol embraces his diverse background as a standpoint to address identity and the nuances of difference.," says Garza. "His is a subdued, elegantly packaged world of recollections." Ordinary found objects are made subversive through ironic twists, and the artist recontextualizes histories into open-ended narratives that reflect on masculinity and the social self. In *Pride of Place* (1998), three group portraits of American soldiers, arranged as a patriarchal trinity, are accompanied by a cupboard of sculptures—a juxtaposition that seems to represent a commentary on "manliness", American history and the constructs of domesticity.

Mexican artist **Betsabee Romero** describes herself as obsessed, since the beginning of her career, with Mexico's Anahuac Valley "as a repository of personal histories, where Western tradition and the seeds of popular culture merge." The exhibition includes a series of photos documenting site-specific projects that deal with cars and their relationship to urban culture. Her work *Ayate Car*, she writes, is a "symbol of the unceasing quest of a miracle, a vehicle that arrives at the border filled with a cargo

of hope, but the line is hard. The apparition does not come—only rejection, immobility and decline. What appears instead is the other side of the car, opposite to technology, security and speed: fragility and chance... The automobile as home, refuge, altar..."

Marlaine Tsoni was recently featured in the exhibition *Translation/Seduction/Displacement* at White Box Gallery in Manhattan, an important group show of artists from Southern Africa. She is represented in *(This is not the Place)* by the audio CD installation *STD,S* (2000). Donning headphones, the gallery visitor may hear giggling, odd music or any number of sounds problematizing race guilt, the concept of national insiders and outsiders and the positions of the observed in a non-specific context. Says Jenkins, "Sweet moments on the tape take on a more alarming tone when the title is known, and the raging toll of AIDS on that continent is introduced into the meaning of the piece. The frivolity dissipates, and only the echo of emaciation lingers."

Kara Walker, raised in California and Atlanta, burst upon the scene five years ago with her controversial cut-paper works—stark black silhouettes, peopled by startlingly racist images of African-Americans, adhered to white walls. Writes James Hannaham in the catalogue for the exhibition *New Histories*, "The first barb in [Walker's] blatant craft is the old bait-and-switch—she uses an innocuous form to conceal the disturbing content of her work... Her fractured narratives emphasize the sexual side of war, the violent side of romance, the joy of genocide and the dormant power in shame." Cartoonish adults and children, set within the framework of a stereotypical Civil War, delight in dangerous forms of "play." On view will be several of Walker's small silhouettes, parodies of a history that black Americans are forbidden to romanticize.

The exhibition also includes intense, black and white, and color drawings by **Joseph Yoakum** (1886 or 1888-1972). An eccentric, self-taught artist living on Chicago's South Side, Yoakum claimed to have been born on the Navajo reservation, to have traveled with the Ringling Brothers Circus and to have taken up drawing late in life, inspired by a dream that he called "a spiritual unfoldment." Yoakum's work is characterized by a sense of animism: faces and profiles appear in undulating geological formations. Despite his lack of artistic training and remoteness from the art world, Yoakum unquestionably considered himself an artist responding to a calling.

About the Berrie Center

Both a teaching facility and a community resource, Ramapo College's Angelica and Russ Berrie Center for Performing and Visual Arts offers a diverse schedule of exciting programs—from exhibitions of cutting-edge contemporary art, private collections and student work to concerts, dance performances and plays. Outreach efforts include special programs for families and schooltime performances for elementary students.

Located at 505 Ramapo Valley Road in Mahwah, the Berrie Center is easy to reach via the Garden State Parkway or Route 287. For additional information about (This is not the Place) or other programs in the Center's inaugural season, call (201) 684-7202.

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