

HUDSON VALLEY CENTER for CONTEMPORARY ART

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Press Release
Image attached (hirst-butterfly.jpg)
Caption below

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Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art Announces New Exhibit

'reverence'

Peekskill, NY ... The Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art (HVCCA) announces a new exhibit, entitled 'reverence', opening on Saturday May 20, 2006. A reception with the artists will be held on Sunday May 21 at 4:00 – 6:00 pm.

'reverence' features work by 30 internationally-renowned artists from 13 countries including Damien Hirst, Anselm Kiefer, Hermann Nitsch, Matthew Ritchie, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Shirin Neshat. The art conveys the sense of awe and devotion without religious iconography. "These works open the dialogue to shared beliefs and aspirations across cultures," said Dr. Livia Straus, a theologian and President of the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art.

The Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art is located at 1701 Main Street in Peekskill, New York. The Center is open Saturdays and Sundays, from 11am - 6pm. Group tours are available by appointment throughout the year. Admission: \$5.00 adult; \$1.00 student; Members free. For more information on the HVCCA's exhibits and programs, e-mail info@hvcca.com or call 914-788-7166.

About the exhibit:

'reverence'

Syn. awe, devotion, admiration, esteem, honor, respect ...

Devotion and awe as well as synonyms such as adoration and veneration lend themselves to a religious or spiritual implication though a work of art might be created from a deeply felt sense of devotion that has no religious basis. In 'reverence', we are interested in the transcendent, the elegiac, perhaps even the divine without ritual or doctrine. Can an artist achieve a deeply felt sense of awe without the trappings of iconography?

No doubt Damien Hirst achieves this in "Exaltation," a butterfly painting set into a ten foot high, highly finished white oblong frame with a pink interior border. Thousands of gorgeous and variegated butterfly wings are applied in a dense and specific pattern giving the sense of a wondrous stained glass cathedral window. Here the use of color, translucence and height, drawing the eyes and the spirit ever upward, are features inherent to reverent worship, echoing the Psalm's: "I lift my eyes up to the heights, from whence I

draw my inspiration". The work is ultimately a powerful metaphor for life and death and transcendence of nature and the spirit.

So too Hermann Nitsch's painting "Schuttbild," the oldest work shown (1962), uniquely uses unconventional materials, blood spattered on burlap in a work that has a sense of the profane and sacred. In Jannis Kounellis's 1986 large steel work, both the left-sided Munch-like drawing and the copper fire jets convey a sense of human annihilation and memory and perhaps reflects on the painful passage from this world to the next, referencing the power of fire to purify and to transition. Yet Kounellis might not agree. He remains silent as to the meaning of this and similar work.

Anselm Kiefer's work related to Lillith includes this monumental painting, "Sefirot," which is the transliterated Hebrew word meaning counting. The work references the Kabala and its billowing dress with six arms and the large stamped lead disk above related to the steps humankind might ascend to achieve oneness in the universe. Doug and Mike Starn's large photo "Large Gothic With Pipe Clamps" is in part a devotion to Renaissance painting – specifically northern German religious works, as well as to the individual connection to the divine. But the manner in which the image is appropriated, a close up of a small portion of a small painting, on x-ray film, framed on visible wooden stretchers, brings a single face and life into focus.

Inexorably connecting to Keifer's and the Starns' concept of "Imago Dei", is Jeff Talman's video, "Endless Columns" in which a sense of ascension is achieved. Shirin Neshat's "Turbulence," as well as her images in "Soliloquy", tracks the essence of reaching to divinity through such modes as purification as well as prayer/liturgy/word and verse. The longing that is expressed in her photos and video works go beyond ritual performance. They speak of a seeking out the divine, of the spiritual heights to which the soul may aspire.

John Walker's work "The Chamber" is an oblique reference to Christianity, to Jesus as "The Door," or the gateway leading to the other worldly, to life everlasting. In Tim Rollins' "The Temptation of St. Anthony," the metaphor of the door, the gateway, the skiff on the journey, the entry, death as the passage, is universally shared. Jan Avotin's painting, "Church," conveys the ethereal quality of devotion in a prayer-like space, but without the title one would not readily locate the space. Mapplethorpe's "Death's Head" came accompanies him and reflects upon him on his way out of this life just as much as the funeral pyres of Eastern and ancient beliefs and traditions. Terence Koh's elegiac memento mori is his "tombstone" made of cake.

The universal or primal need to believe in and to revere that which gives us spiritual uplifting, which gives us a sense of eternity and of meaning beyond the here and now. Trenton Doyle Hancock's "In the Blesstian Room," which emerges from his strict childhood Christian upbringing, is internalized and metamorphosed to a repetitive internal chant textualized on the wall and painting. Shirazeh Houshiary's painting is a prayer-like mantra, thousands of delicate markings, an analog for meditation of a Sufi artist. Amy Myers's drawing "Hyloz Ring" similarly is ritualistic and non-specific. Devotion and ecstasy implicit in Helen Sadler's tiny paintings, in Francesco Vezzoli's needle points and Folkert de Jong's "Monroe," are to more modern idols: rock musicians and Hollywood stars. In Justen Ladda's gowns made of chandelier crystals, reverence is for the garment which lends splendor to the individual who wears it. For Radcliff Bailey, "Soular Taps," is devotion to ones roots: religion, ethnicity, ancestry and music (Miles Davis) inexorably intertwined.

The most abstract works are installations of Micah Silver and Leonardo Drew. Drew's "Untitled #29" hanging of shroud-like distressed canvases, or alternatively ascending spires, convey a sense of religious architecture and historicity. Silver's piano ensemble, discarded harps lying on their side with music thrumming as though from their past lives, is an exquisite memento mort.

The works in this exhibit have wide range. What makes each one compelling and interesting is the unique voice of each work and the way in which materials and image lends to an emotional reading. The power in the work is realized when the viewer participates in the dialogue.

Art is often at its best when the artist's starting point is a fulcrum from which radiates out dialogue and inspiration. These works open the dialogue to shared beliefs and shared aspirations - across gender, across culture and across racial and cultural divides. When there is not only devotion but also a spirit of generosity and inclusion the artist draws us to a place of humanness.

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ARTISTS IN EXHIBIT:

Dieter Appelt	Germany
Janis Avotins	Latvia
Radcliff Bailey	US
Jules de Balincourt	US
Michael Borremans	US
Skyler Brinkley	US
Folkert de Jong	Netherlands
Leonardo Drew	US
Trenton Doyle Hancock	US
Damien Hirst	Great Britain
Shirazeh Houshiary	Iran
Zhang Huan	China
Anselm Kiefer	Germany
Terence Koh	Canada
Jannis Kounellis	Greece
Rachel Lachowicz	US
Justen Ladda	Germany
Robert Mapplethorpe	US
Amy Myers	US
Shirin Neshat	Iran
Ernesto Neto	Brazil
Hermann Nitsch	Austria
Anne & Patrick Poirier	France
Matthew Ritchie	US
Tim Rollins & KOS	US
Helen Sadler	US
Micah Silver	US
Mike & Doug Starn	US
Jeff Talman	US
Sandra Tomboloni	Italy
Francesco Vezzoli	Italy
John Walker	Great Britain

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The Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art opened to the public in June 2004. Founded by the Marc and Livia Straus family, the not-for-profit center is dedicated to the development and presentation of new art, exhibits and interdisciplinary programs that enrich our understanding of contemporary art, its contexts, and its relationships to societal issues. The Center is committed to the enrichment of Peekskill, a multicultural community that has recreated itself as a major center for art and culture. HVCCA operates a 12,000 square foot exhibition space in Peekskill and is the primary sponsor of the Peekskill Project, an annual, city-wide exhibition of site-specific artwork.

(CAPTION FOR IMAGE ATTACHMENT) (hirst-butterfly.jpg)

"Exaltation," Artist: Damien Hirst. 2004. A butterfly painting set into a ten foot high highly finished white oblong frame with pink interior border. Thousands of gorgeous and variegated butterfly wings are applied in a dense and specific pattern giving the sense of a wondrous stained glass cathedral window.

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Contact to schedule a tour for review, photograph, artist interview or for further information:

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