

June 15, 2008

Contact:

Robyn Wise, 415.357.4172, rwise@sfmoma.org
Libby Garrison, 415.357.4177, lgarrison@sfmoma.org
Sandra Farish Sloan, 415.357.4174, ssloan@sfmoma.org

SFMOMA PRESENTS MAJOR OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPATION-BASED ART

On view at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) from November 8, 2008, through February 8, 2009, *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now* presents an overview of the rich and varied history of participatory art practice during the past six decades, exploring strategies and situations in which the public has taken a collaborative role in the art-making process.

Organized by SFMOMA Curator of Media Arts Rudolf Frieling, this large thematic presentation gathers more than 70 works by some 50 individual artists and collectives, and will feature projects both on-site and online, as well as several new pieces commissioned specifically for the exhibition. From early performance-based and conceptual art to online works rooted in the multiuser dynamics of Web 2.0 platforms, *The Art of Participation* reflects on the confluence of audience interaction, utopian politics, and mass media, and reclaims the museum as a space for two-way exchange between artists and viewers.

The exhibition proposes that participatory art is generally based on a notion of indeterminacy—an openness to chance or change, as introduced by John Cage in the early 1950s—and refers to projects that, while initiated by individual artists, can be realized only through the contribution of others. This artistic approach entices the public to join in; questions the conventional divide between artists and their audience; and challenges assumptions about the symbolic value of art, as well as the traditional role of the museum as a container for objects rather than a site for social engagement or art production. Participatory art typically synthesizes a variety of artistic media, emphasizes process over object, and champions the idea of collective authorship.

The Art of Participation traces the influence and transformation of this concept across various genres, identifying its signal moments and charting a lineage of participatory art across a wide spectrum of media, including drawing, painting, sculpture, performance, film, video, photography, online projects, and interactive media installations. Seminal works by major historical figures such as Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Lygia Clark, Hans Haacke, Dan Graham, and Nam June Paik, will contextualize more recent projects by Francis Alÿs, Maria Eichhorn, Jochen Gerz, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Lynn Hershman Leeson, and Erwin Wurm, among others, linking key aspects of contemporary participatory practice to their historical precedents.

“For decades, artists have played a major part in anticipating the social implications of the ongoing revolution in communications media, critically studying forms of interactivity, exchange, and participation that are



Erwin Wurm, *One Minute Sculptures* (detail), 1997; photo: Kuzuyuki Matsumoto; © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VBK, Vienna

increasingly commonplace,” states Frieling. “As emblems of the Internet mindset—browsing, sharing, collecting, producing—begin to infuse all areas of society, this timely project establishes a big-picture narrative that connects significant points in art history to widespread conditions of contemporary life, and considers the important role that new-media art, in particular, has played in shaping contemporary art as a whole.”

The Art of Participation will be presented thematically, highlighting significant groupings around common threads: indeterminacy, conceptualism, performance, location, authority, public dialogue, utopian ideals, and social sculpture, among others. In assessing participation’s impact on contemporary art, the exhibition will also touch upon its limits and pitfalls, such as the implications that arise when viewers are puzzled or simply refuse to participate.

Representing a pivotal moment in the historical beginnings of participatory art, John Cage’s score entitled *4’33”* (1952) offers notation for a musical composition of complete silence, to be played for the duration of four minutes and 33 seconds. Without instrumentation, the score—performed daily in the gallery—highlights ambient sounds in the physical environment and those made by the audience. Another early work, Hans Haacke’s *News* (1969/2008), features a printer connected to a live newsfeed that, in light of today’s ubiquitous news access, somewhat anachronistically spews heaps of paper onto the floor as the stories pour in; visitors are welcome to pick up portions to read. Growing as a sculpture over time, the work brings the news and by extension the larger world into the gallery, a space normally reserved for the “reading” of art. Other key historical works include Allan Kaprow’s *Hello*, an excerpt from *The Medium Is the Medium* (1969); Nam June Paik’s *Participation TV* (1963/1998); and several important Fluxus works, including George Brecht’s *Water Yam* (1963), a boxed collection of various cards, documents, and instructions.

Works that address conceptualism and co-authorship include a selection of performative sculptures, among them Erwin Wurm’s *One Minute Sculptures* (2007/2008), which present a number of ordinary items—a refrigerator, plastic bottles, tennis balls—arranged in the gallery. While the display might suggest the idea of traditional sculpture, the objects are only virtual sculptures embodied in corresponding instructional drawings, provided so that the viewer may use them to enact a series of short poses and scenarios. Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s *“Untitled”* (1992/1993), comprises mass-produced prints for viewers to pick up and take home. By offering these giveaways without dictating what is to be done with them, the artist has enabled a future life for his artwork beyond the gallery, questioning the uniqueness of the art object and rethinking the museum as a place of production and distribution. Additional works related to this theme include Tom Marioni’s *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends Is the Highest Form of Art* (1970–2008), a site-specific installation with a functioning bar; Dan Graham’s *Schema of a Set of Pages* (1966), a schematic poem meant to generate further texts; and Stephen Willats’s *A Moment of Action* (1974), which asks viewers to complete a questionnaire about a series of photographs.

Joseph Beuys’s concept of social sculpture—one of his chief theories regarding the cultural and political functions of art—is based on a belief in the artistic potential of every member of society and art’s ability to bring about revolutionary change. In a compelling nine-minute speech that was part of a live international satellite telecast from *Documenta 6* in 1977, the artist expounds on his utopian theory that art “would no longer refer exclusively to the specialists within the modern art world, but extend to the whole work of humanity.” A more recent take on political conditions that frame participation is Francis Alÿs’s street action in Mexico City entitled *Re-enactments*

(2001), which records on video the artist's self-imposed directive to "walk as far as you can while holding a 9mm Beretta in your right hand" until the inevitable dramatic conclusion—his arrest—fifteen minutes later. After the initial filming, Alÿs convinced police officers to allow him to repeat the action, including the arrest and interactions of passersby, as a staged performance for the camera. The resulting work projects both the original documentation and the reenactment. Other performance documents of encounters between artist and public include Abramović/Ulay's *Imponderabilia* (1977), staged in a museum setting, and VALIE EXPORT's *TAPP- und TASTKINO* (TAP and TOUCH CINEMA) (1968), staged outside the institution. Gallery visitors can also physically experience a number of sensorial works by Lygia Clark, including *Diálogo: Óculos* (Dialogue: Goggles) (1968/2008).

The idea of participation in art today, however, is perhaps most radically conceived as an invitation to the viewer to not only contribute to but actually create the work, emphasizing artmaking as public dialogue. Marking its U.S. debut, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's interactive sound installation *Microphones* (2008), records visitors' speech into standing microphones and plays back previous recordings, building an archive of utterances over the course of the exhibition. Another highlight, Jochen Gerz's *The Gift* (2000/2008), creates a fully functioning photo lab in the gallery, inviting Bay Area denizens to have a portrait taken in the museum. In exchange, each participant is given a framed portrait of someone else at the end of the exhibition, and then asked to submit documentation of the work on display in his or her own home. *1st Public White Cube* (2001/2008), by Blank & Jeron and Gerrit Gohlke, takes place both online and on-site in a series of eBay auctions. Participants will bid not for ownership of the works on display (created by guest artists selected by Blank & Jeron), but for the right to alter and reinstall them according to their own proposal.

The exhibition also includes a selection of pieces that redefine notions of location and site-specificity, among them *Ant Farm Media Van v.08 (Time Capsule)* (2008), an SFMOMA commission for the exhibition that reimagines a landmark project by members of the groundbreaking San Francisco-based collective known as Ant Farm. *Hole-in-Space* (1980/2008), a large-scale video installation by Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz, presents here for the first time complete original footage from the artists' live telecommunication event in 1980, which used satellite technology to connect street pedestrians in Los Angeles with their counterparts in New York, allowing them to suddenly see and speak to each other in real time. Another highlight is Lynn Hershman Leeson's *Life²* (2008), which revisits the artist's public installation *The Dante Hotel* (1973–74). Originally presented in a real hotel room in San Francisco, it is now reconfigured as an experiential archive in the virtual world of Second Life, where visitors will be able to convene and interact in real time.

Perhaps most importantly, *The Art of Participation*, as a reflection of our contemporary media society, will change form and content as more and more visitors contribute—on-site and online—and in so doing, it will explore the role of active engagement between artists, the public, and the museum. In recent years SFMOMA has built a reputation as a pioneer in exploring how new technologies transform contemporary culture with exhibitions such as *Public Information* (1995) and *010101: Art in Technological Times* (2001). *The Art of Participation* furthers this field of study, in part by addressing the impact of technological culture on how a museum defines its notion of public engagement.

According to Frieling, “San Francisco is perhaps one of the most fitting places in the world to present an up-to-the-minute genealogy of participation-based art because of its legacy of experimental art forms of the 1960s and, more recently, its proximity to Silicon Valley. Technological innovation has always changed art—not only by providing artists with new tools, but also by provoking critical analysis or resistance to technology’s utopian promise.”

SFMOMA, in association with Thames & Hudson, will publish a 224-page, fully illustrated exhibition catalogue featuring original essays by Robert Atkins, Rudolf Frieling, Boris Groys, and Lev Manovich. Available at the SFMOMA MuseumStore and bookstores worldwide in November 2008, the publication introduces work by all of the artists in the exhibition, with reproductions of significant projects by other major figures—from Hélio Oiticica, Joan Jonas, and Gordon Matta-Clark to Komar & Melamid and Gabriel Orozco—rounding out the overview. SFMOMA will also produce a companion volume—a small print-on-demand paperback, to be released after the exhibition closes—reflecting the participatory aspects of the show by collecting texts, visuals, and other content contributed by artists and visitors.

In conjunction with *The Art of Participation*, SFMOMA’s Education Department will present a full range of public programs, including lectures, symposia, screenings, live performances, and docent tours. The museum has commissioned the architectural group Freecell to design a special venue in the museum’s Koret Visitor Education Center to house events as well as computer kiosks dedicated to online projects in the exhibition. A cell phone audio tour will allow visitors to record their own feedback to the exhibition, becoming yet another opportunity for interaction and a valuable channel through which SFMOMA will document audience participation.

Complete List of Featured Artists

Abramović/Ulay; Vito Acconci; Francis Alÿs; Chip Lord, Curtis Schreier and Bruce Tomb (former members of Ant Farm); John Baldessari; Joseph Beuys; Blank & Jeron and Gerrit Gohlke; George Brecht; Jonah Brucker-Cohen and Mike Bennett; John Cage; c a l c and Johannes Gees; Janet Cardiff; Lygia Clark; Minerva Cuevas; Maria Eichhorn; VALIE EXPORT; Harrell Fletcher and Jon Rubin; Fluxus Collective; Jochen Gerz; Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz; Matthias Gommel; Felix Gonzalez-Torres; Dan Graham; Hans Haacke; Lynn Hershman Leeson; Nam June Paik; Allan Kaprow; Henning Lohner and Van Carlson; Rafael Lozano-Hemmer; Tom Marioni; MTAA (M.River and T.Whid Art Associates); Antoni Muntadas; Yoko Ono; Dan Phiffer and Mushon Zer-Aviv; Raqs Media Collective; Robert Rauschenberg; Warren Sack; Mieko Shiomi; Torolab; Wolf Vostell; Andy Warhol; Stephen Willats; and Erwin Wurm.

The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now is organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition is generously funded by the James Irvine Foundation.

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Museum hours: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): Open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year’s Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas. The museum is open the Wednesday between Christmas and New Year’s Day.

Koret Visitor Education Center: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

Admission prices: Adults \$12.50; seniors \$8; students \$7. SFMOMA members and children 12 and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings after 6 p.m. admission is half-price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

Visit our website at www.sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is supported by a broad array of contributors who are committed to helping advance its mission as a dynamic center for modern and contemporary art. Major annual support is provided by Koret Foundation Funds, the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, and Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. KidstART free admission for children 12 and under is made possible by Charles Schwab & Co. Inc. Thursday evening half-price admission is sponsored by Banana Republic.

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