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# MARTIAN MUSEUM OF TERRESTRIAL ART

**6 March – 18 May 2008**

**Barbican Art Gallery, London**

**Media View: Tuesday 5 March 2008, 11am – 2pm**

*The exhibition is made possible in part by the American Center Foundation and The Henry Moore Foundation*

**Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art** presents contemporary art as if shown in a fictional museum conceived by and designed for extraterrestrials. This ambitious, playful and irreverent exhibition transforms the Barbican Art Gallery into an imaginary museum, with a mission to interpret and understand contemporary art. It features around 200 works — primarily sculpture as well as mixed media, video, photography and works on paper — by over 100 established and emerging artists, from the 1960s until now. They include **Joseph Beuys, John Bock, Marcel Broodthaers, James Lee Byars, Maurizio Cattelan, Richard Hamilton, Isa Genzken, Barbara Hepworth, Susan Hiller, Thomas Hirschhorn, Damien Hirst, Mike Kelley, Yves Klein, Sherrie Levine, Piero Manzoni, John McCracken, Annette Messager, Bruce Nauman, Sigmar Polke, Simon Starling, Haim Steinbach, Francis Upritchard, Andy Warhol and Cerith Wyn Evans.** The exhibition opens to the public on 6 March 2008.

The project is in part inspired by the first chapter of *Kant after Duchamp* by Belgian art historian Thierry de Duve, in which an imaginary anthropologist from outer space sets out to inventory 'all that is called art by humans'. Since Martians do not have art as a defined category in their culture, they classify and interpret their chosen objects without the 'knowledge' we know as art history. Instead, they treat works of art as artefacts: objects which serve a function, whether real or symbolic.

The Martian perspective opens up contemporary art to fresh interpretations. It allows for its reassessment from an alien standpoint, thus mimicking the way that Western anthropologists historically interpreted non-Western cultures through foreign eyes. Looking at contemporary art as though from outer space offers the potential to make the familiar strange and to turn the dominant Euro-American art tradition into the 'other'. It also raises pertinent questions about the use and value of contemporary art in human culture.

Adopting a pseudo-anthropological approach, **Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art** employs eccentric taxonomies and surprising juxtapositions. Arranged according to how they function or are used by humans, objects are classified within a framework of four broad categories: **Kinship and Descent; Magic and Belief; Ritual;** and **Communication.** Within these larger themes, objects are grouped in subcategories such as **Ancestor Worship, Relics and Spirits, Ceremonial Objects,** and **Cultural Contact** and arranged on plinths, in vitrines and on the wall. While interpretive labels and an audio guide enhance accessibility, and serve further to explicate the Martian's understanding of the role and purpose of contemporary art, they also reveal humorous misunderstandings about the objects on view.

The Martian Museum opens with a spectacular gallery conceived as the *Great Hall of Ancestors*. Presented within the category **Kinship and Descent**, works include totems, kinship diagrams and various forms of ancestor worship. Thomas Hirschhorn's *Musée Précaire Albinet (Lighter)*, 2004, is a four foot tall sculpture, in the shape of a cigarette lighter, featuring some of his artistic heroes such as Andy Warhol and Piet Mondrian. In Jay Heikes', *Family Tree*, 2003, brightly coloured sport jackets hang from a suspended tree trunk, suggesting connections between social groups. Sherrie Levine pays homage to Marcel Duchamp by casting a urinal in bronze, a precious metal and traditional material for sculpture, and thereby amplifying the gesture of transforming a common object into a work of art.

**Magic and Belief** includes works that involve the literal or metaphorical transformation of materials from one form to another. Joseph Beuys' *Capri Battery*, 1985, suggests that energy captured by the lemon from the Capri sun is magically transferred to a yellow bulb. Icons, relics and shrines are also featured in this section. Andy Warhol's appropriation of the endlessly reproduced photograph of Mao Zedong reinforces the Chinese political leader's iconic status. Dr Lakra's decorative box contains a small wax hand covered in tattoos, conjuring up the preciousness of holy power. Haim Steinbach's work consists of seven small black alarm clocks and a gold bust of C-3PO from Star Wars carefully arranged on shelves, and is reminiscent of a shrine.

**Ritual** features masks, costumes, props or other objects used in the observance of rites and ceremonial functions. Damien Hirst's wall sculpture of fish in glass containers, all aligned in the same direction, can be likened to a cave painting as an auspicious ritual designed to produce a successful hunt. Rituals and ceremonies are also presented through photographic and video documentation. In the video *The Colleague In a Kitchen Garden* by Rosemarie Trockel and Thea Djordjadze we see the sculpture they had made together being burnt to a cinder, with the ashes then placed in an urn.

**Communication** gathers works together that reveal attempts to communicate with extraterrestrials by transmission of messages, information or ideas. Július Koller's *Universal Futurological Question Mark*, 1978, is a black and white photograph of a large group of people sitting in formation on a hillside; if viewed from a distance or above their positions appear as a question mark. Other works involve interplanetary journeys and missions. Like the Apollo astronauts, Bruce Nauman seeks to leave his trace on the moon with his neon sculpture, *My Name As Though It Were Written on the Surface of the Moon*, 1968 and suggests that the moon can be a readymade work of art.

The Martian Museum also includes a room devoted to **Unclassified Objects**. These are recent acquisitions which have not yet been understood, interpreted and categorised.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

**Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art** is curated by **Francesco Manacorda** and **Lydia Yee**. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated publication with contributions by the curators and celebrated novelist **Tom McCarthy**. Priced £24.99, it is available from Barbican Art Gallery Shop or online [www.barbican.org.uk/eticketing/shop.asp](http://www.barbican.org.uk/eticketing/shop.asp)

A full, diverse and stimulating programme of talks, discussions, performances and late night events complements the exhibition. For full details go to [www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery](http://www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery)

## Artists in the exhibition are:

Marina Abramovic	Ryan Gander	Piero Manzoni
Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla	Mario Garcia Torres	Paul McCarthy
Eleanor Antin	Isa Genzken	John McCracken
Ibon Aranberri	John Giorno	Cildo Meireles
Art & Language	Douglas Gordon	Annette Messager
Ay-O	Loris Gréaud	Matthew Monahan
Joseph Beuys	Victor Grippo	Bruce Nauman
Alexandra Bircken	Nancy Grossman	Mike Nelson
John Bock	Aneta Grzeszykowska	Cornelia Parker
Martin Boyce	Subodh Gupta	Ben Patterson
George Brecht	David Hammons	Manfred Pernice
Marcel Broodthaers	Anthea Hamilton	Sigmar Polke
Angela Bulloch	Richard Hamilton	Richard Prince
Chris Burden	Anne Hardy	Arturas Raila
James Lee Byars	Mona Hatoum	Jason Rhoads
André Cadere	Jay Heikes	David Robbins
Cai Guo-Qiang	Lothar Hempel	Dario Robleto
Maurizio Cattelan	Geoffrey Hendricks	Ugo Rondinone
Spartacus Chetwynd	Barbara Hepworth	Dieter Roth
Adam Chodzko	Susan Hiller	Jim Shaw
Christo and Jeanne-Claude	Thomas Hirschhorn	Andreas Slominski
Marcus Coates	Damien Hirst	Daniel Spoerri
Peter Coffin	Jenny Holzer	Simon Starling
Michael Craig-Martin	Matthew Day Jackson	Haim Steinbach
Björn Dahlem	Luis Jacob	John Stezaker
Walter Dahn	Gareth Jones	Rosemarie Trockel and Thea Djordjadze
Tacita Dean	Brian Jungen	Keith Tyson
Jeremy Deller	Mike Kelley	Francis Upritchard
Wim Delvoye	Scott King	Jeffrey Vallance
Jimmie Durham	Yves Klein	Erika Verzutti
Eric Duyckaerts	Milan Knížák	Francesco Vezzoli
Simon Dybbroe Møller	Július Koller	Andy Warhol
Tatiana Echeverri Fernandez	Dr. Lakra	Rebecca Warren
Brian Eno	Jim Lambie	Gillian Wearing
Robert Filliou	Louise Lawler	Richard Wentworth
Ian Hamilton Finlay	Guillaume Leblon	Pae White
Anya Gallaccio	Sherrie Levine	Cerith Wyn Evans
	Mark Lombardi	
	Goshka Macuga	

## PUBLIC INFORMATION

Barbican Art Gallery opening times: Daily 11am – 8pm,  
Tuesday & Wednesday 11am – 6pm,  
Time Out First Thursdays until 10pm

Admission: £8/ £6 concessions

[www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery](http://www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery) Public information: 0845 120 7550

## PRESS INFORMATION

For further information or images or to arrange interviews contact:

Ann Berni, Media Relations Manager on 020 7382 7169 or [aberni@barbican.org.uk](mailto:aberni@barbican.org.uk)

or Alex Cattell, Media Relations Officer on 020 7382 6162 or

[acattell@barbican.org.uk](mailto:acattell@barbican.org.uk)