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CELESTIAL ASH
Assemblages from Los Angeles
April 11 – September 13, 2009



What remains in the wake of a dying star? The celestial ash of cosmic greatness. Inspired by self-taught artist and filmmaker Joseph Cornell, *Celestial Ash* features artists who continue to create poetry from the commonplace. Curated by journalist and art historian Kristine McKenna, the exhibit features L.A. artists Exene Cervenka, Gail Greenfield Randall, Matjames, and Michael McMillen, whose art reflects the legacy of Cornell. “Joseph Cornell’s intimate, elaborate shadowboxes have had a palpable effect on these contemporary artists who similarly weave commonplace objects into extraordinary and magical landscapes,” says McKenna, “Cornell also has a tangible connection to Los Angeles—his first museum retrospective was organized by the Pasadena Art Museum in 1967.”

While all assemblages use found objects to create three-dimensional artistic compositions, the genre varies greatly in style and execution. *Celestial Ash* looks closely at the work of contemporary artists whose work alludes to Cornell in terms of mood, magic, and intention. Unlike the widely known art of Edward Kienholz and Bruce Conner, west coast artists whose aggressive assemblages of the ‘50s and ‘60s were a vehicle for searing social commentary, the artists of *Celestial Ash* create works that are personal and deeply emotional. Awash in feelings of melancholy and things lost to the past, their works have a wistful loveliness that is worlds away from work by Kienholz and Conner.

Featured artists are: Exene Cervenka, Michael McMillen, Gail Greenfield Randall, and Matjames.

Exene Cervenka is a founding member of the seminal L.A. punk band X. A self-taught artist who works primarily in collage, Cervenka's art-making practice began in the late 1970s with the elaborately collaged journals she maintained while touring with X. The subject of a 2005 solo show at the Santa Monica Museum of Art, Cervenka is represented by Los Angeles gallery Western Projects, and DCKT Contemporary Art in New York.

Michael McMillen has been a greatly loved L.A. artist for decades. Among many other things, McMillen creates what are best described as walk-in assemblages. For this exhibit, he will debut a new work, *The Asylum of Lost Thoughts*, which incorporates sound, found objects, and film. Represented by L.A. Louver Gallery, McMillen will be the subject of a career retrospective that opens later this year at the Oakland Museum.

Gail Greenfield Randall is a self-taught artist whose career as a painter took a sharp turn in 2006 with the death of her grandmother, Tillie Blank. At that point, Randall became increasingly preoccupied with time and the past, and began making haunting assemblages and memory boxes that function as studies in the ephemeral.

Matjames is an artist who was living in New Orleans in 2005 when Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Barely escaping with his life, he made his way to Los Angeles with his two dogs, and after a difficult period of wrestling with post-traumatic stress disorder, he began producing intricately detailed assemblages at a furious pace. *Celestial Ash* will feature a salon of approximately 100 of Matjames' unique works.

Celestial Ash will be on view at CAFAM from April 11 through September 13, 2009 and an opening celebration will take place on Saturday, April 18, 2009 from 6pm to 9pm. A host of events, including artists' talks, children's workshops, and adult classes, will take place during the run of the exhibit.

*** High resolution images available ***

About CAFAM

...because a shrinking world requires an EXPANDED mind.

CAFAM champions cultural understanding by encouraging curiosity about our diverse world. Our exhibits and programs serve as a catalyst for the exploration of art and ideas that reflect our ever-changing community. In a shrinking world, CAFAM believes in building common ground. As the twenty-first century brings global cultures ever closer together, we often find ourselves traveling in unfamiliar lands. This mapless new landscape requires inter-cultural fluency and frequent trips to CAFAM.

About the curator

Kristine McKenna is a noted historian and critic. Her work as a journalist began in the late '70s, when she covered the Los Angeles punk scene for various domestic and international publications. During the '80s and '90s she wrote about art, film, and music for a variety of publications, including *New York Rocker*, *Art forum*, *Rolling Stone*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. In 2005 she co-curated the groundbreaking exhibition *Semina Culture: Wallace Berman & his Circle* for the Santa Monica Museum of Art, and her historical overview of L.A. art, *The Ferus Gallery: A Place to Begin*, will be published this month by Steidl. She lives in Los Angeles and is presently working with writer Jane Brown on *Feral Institutions: Rogue Hybrids and Collectives in Los Angeles*, a survey of unorthodox organizations in L.A.

Craft and Folk Art Museum

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Information

Tel. 323-937-4230
www.cafam.org

Museum Hours

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday 11 am – 5 pm
Thursday 11 am – 7 pm
Saturday and Sunday 12 – 6 pm

Museum Admission

General \$5.00 / Students and Seniors 3.00
Members and Children under 12 Free / Free 1st Wednesday of month