

# BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

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## **Startlingly Real Work in *Lifelike* Examines Artists' Enduring Fascination with Realism**

*Lifelike*

June 23 – September 22, 2013



AUSTIN, Texas—April 11, 2013—The exhibition *Lifelike*, on view at the Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin June 23 to September 22, 2013, invites a close examination of artworks based on commonplace objects and situations, which are startlingly realistic, but often made of unusual materials in unexpected sizes. Organized by the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, this international, multigenerational group exhibition features 75 works from the 1960s to the present by leading figures in contemporary art, such as Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, James Casebere, Vija Celmins, Keith Edmier, Robert Gober, Ron Mueck, Mungo Thomson, and Ai Weiwei, and illuminates artists' enduring fascination with realism.

Avoiding the flashiness embraced by 1960s Pop Artists and the slick urban scenes introduced at that time by the Photorealists, the contemporary artists in *Lifelike* investigate often overlooked items and moments as subject matter: a paper bag, an eraser, an apple core, a waiting room, an afternoon nap. Favoring a handmade, labor-intensive practice rather than technological enhancements, the works in the exhibition—including painting, sculpture, photography, drawing, and video—transform the seemingly ordinary into something beguiling, loaded with narrative and metaphor.

The exhibition explores the many ways artists have pursued realism through a range of media. Some artists featured, such as Vija Celmins, Chuck Close, and Peter Rostovsky, paint from photographs, creating works that exhibit an astonishing degree of likeness and detail. Others work in sculpture often fashioning objects from materials that belie the pedestrian nature of the subject—Ai Weiwei’s jar of hundreds of sunflower seeds, hand painted on to cast porcelain, or Tom Friedman’s bee, made out of clay, plastic, and paint. In photography, artists including James Casebere and Isaac Layman play with the hyperreal, through fabricated scenes or clever layering of images. In video, artists including Thomas Demand and Jeon Joonho create moving images that at first seem familiar, but deceive us through sly use of animation.

Conspicuously absent in most of the works in *Lifelike* is a reliance on technological intervention. Instead, in seemingly inverse proportion to the ease of producing goods for the marketplace, many artists are slowing and complicating their own working methods, remaking banal things into objects of fixation and desire: Catherine Murphy’s details of textured fabric on the seat of a chair, or Ron Mueck’s strikingly “real” sculpture—down to the last hair and pore—of human subjects. Frequently these artists work from photographs, but just as often, their inspiration is the observed world, and the notion that a tangible, perhaps ephemeral object or moment can somehow be brought back to life—reinterpreted through the artist’s hand as re-made readymades.

**To address the nuances of this subject, the exhibition presents several key conceptual sections:**

**Common Objects** gathers a group of late 1960s and early 1970s works that borrowed strategies from Pop, but rejected that movement’s brand-name emphasis in favor of conceptual, more process-oriented approaches to subject matter.

Another section presents the notion of **The Uncanny**, which features work by a generation of artists in the 1980s and 1990s who inflected realism with a psychologically-laden, surreal sensibility, such as Robert Gober’s child-sized chair and flower-covered box of tissues, resting mysteriously atop a floor drain; or Charles Ray’s disarming photograph of himself as a mannequin.

A third section entitled **Realism into Abstraction** presents a range of works by artists such as Peter Rostovsky, Catherine Murphy and Tauba Auerbach, in which lushly painted surfaces such as velvet curtains, the seat of a chair, and other ordinary items are cropped in such a way that they resemble abstract paintings, their original sources difficult to discern.

**Handmade Sleight of Hand**, the fourth section, presents work by artists who make objects that are indistinguishable from their real-life counterparts, but made with the traditional techniques of painting, sculpture, or drawing. Highlights include Jud

Nelson's trash bag carved from Carrara marble and Susan Collis's checkered plastic shopping bag painstakingly rendered in ballpoint pen on paper.

A fifth section, **Special Effects: The Real as Spectacle**, presents artists making work that engages an instant response—be it astonishment, fear, confusion, or delight—through their surprising size or unusual installation.

The Blanton serves as *Lifelike's* final venue after it opened at the Walker and toured at the New Orleans Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego.

*Lifelike is organized by the Walker Art Center and made possible by generous support from John L. Thomson and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.*

*Generous funding for this exhibition at the Blanton is provided by Jeanne and Michael Klein.*

Image: Maurizio Cattelan, *Untitled*, 2001, stainless steel, composition wood, electric motor, electric light, electric bell, computer, 23 1/2 x 33 5/8 x 185/8 in., Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

#### **About the Blanton Museum of Art:**

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art is one of the foremost university art museums in the country and holds the largest public collection in Central Texas. Recognized for its modern and contemporary American and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and baroque paintings, and encyclopedic collection of prints and drawings, the Blanton offers thought provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

The museum is located at the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Congress Avenue and is open Tuesday through Friday from 10 AM – 5 PM, Saturday from 11 AM – 5 PM, and Sunday from 1 – 5 PM. Thursdays are free admission days and every third Thursday the museum is open until 9 PM. Admission Prices: Adults \$9, Kids 12 and under FREE, Seniors (65+) \$7, Youth/College Students (13-21) \$5. Admission is free to members, all current UT ID-holders. For additional information call (512) 471-7324 or visit [www.blantonmuseum.org](http://www.blantonmuseum.org).

#### **For more information or high resolution images, contact:**

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