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**Blanton Museum of Art to present first major museum
retrospective of internationally renowned artist Michael Smith**

Mike's World: Michael Smith and Joshua White (and other collaborators)
on view from September 11 to December 30, 2007

Austin, Texas—This fall, the Blanton Museum of Art will be home to *Mike's World*, the first major retrospective of internationally renowned performance/video/installation artist Michael Smith and his New York-based collaborator, director/artist Joshua White. This extraordinary exhibition features some 30 years of videos, installation environments, and other performance-related materials detailing the adventures of “Mike,” a sweet but hapless Everyman character created by Smith, and his hilariously awkward and ineffectual search for a piece of the American Dream.

The exhibition is organized by the Blanton and funding is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Melissa Jones, and Marlene Nathan Meyerson. The project also is supported by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts. Following its debut in Austin, *Mike's World* will travel to the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia (April 24-August 3, 2008).

“The Blanton is pleased to organize and present this first survey exhibition of Michael Smith’s impressive body of work,” said Blanton Director Jessie Otto Hite. “Not only does this show allow us to showcase the work of one of the university’s finest artists, it also affirms one of the new Blanton’s strengths as a major presenter of contemporary art. Smith’s work speaks to issues that touch all our lives—depersonalization, isolation, failure, fear of failure, and the rapid pace of change. Michael Smith, Joshua White, and the other collaborators of *Mike's World* illuminate timely challenges with poignancy and humor.”

About the Exhibition

Mike's World will take a tightly focused view of a single Michael Smith performance persona as it has developed over the course of many years and through innumerable presentation formats. The character “Mike” functions metaphorically as a kind of ever-

hopeful *Candide*, adrift in a world of rapid technological advancement that he seems incapable of fully comprehending. Annette DiMeo Carlozzi, curator of American and contemporary art and organizer of the exhibition, explained, “Direct and accessible, Smith’s exquisite use of humor as a strategy for empathy and identification is rooted in the artist/audience relationships of performance. Yet the work’s amplification and variation owes much to its visual, conceptualist sources. Underscoring the hybrid nature of Smith’s accomplishment, the works selected for the exhibition also will highlight the unusual collaborative creative process in which Smith has engaged over the years, including his most recent series of videos and installation collaborations with artist-director Joshua White.”

The exhibition has been designed by Michael Smith and Joshua White as a self-contained theatrical set. Two new commissions by the Blanton will serve as the introduction to the exhibition: a five-minute video by Smith and White reprising the story of “Mike,” and a three-dimensional timeline that introduces “Mike’s world” to museum audiences and contextualizes it within recent “real world” historical and cultural events. Resembling the orientation center of a presidential library, the space will provide a sharp break from the rest of the museum and a challenging, quasi-theatrical experience for museum visitors.

Subsequent sections of the installation will be sequenced along a thematic and chronological route. Short video performances will be shown on monitors and flat screens within installation environments, while longer videos will be projected in a screening room. The videos surveyed include *Down in the Rec Room*, 1979/81; *Secret Horror*, 1980; *It Starts at Home*, 1982; *Go For It, Mike*, 1984; *Mike Builds a Shelter*, 1985; *The World of Photography* (a collaboration with William Wegman), 1986; *Mike*, 1987; *Outstanding Young Men of America*, 1996; *Interstitial*, 1999; *Famous Quotes of Art History*, 2001-03; and *Portal Excursion*, 2007.

The exhibition includes a number of fragments from early installations, and three key recent projects will be reconstructed in their entirety. *MUSCO: 1969-97*, 1997, the office, storage area and showroom of a theatrical lighting company forced into bankruptcy by “its astounding failure” to keep up with post-disco-ball times. *The Quinquag Arts and Wellness Centre*, 2001, documentation of an invented art retirement colony being devoured by corporate patronage. *Take Off Your Pants!*, 2005, a revolving six-sided kiosk that offers carnivalesque elaborations of a Mike-designed board game. The show will also feature numerous drawings, notebooks, storyboards, and performance ephemera.

Mike's World: Michael Smith & Joshua White (and other collaborators) is organized by the Blanton Museum of Art. Funding for the exhibition is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Melissa Jones, and Marlene Nathan Meyerson and by a grant from Houston Endowment Inc. in honor of Melissa Jones for the presentation of contemporary art at the Blanton. This project also is supported by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts.

About the Artists

Michael Smith is on the faculty of The University of Texas at Austin, and his 30-year artistic career includes live performance, video works, commercial and cable television skits, puppet shows, exhibition installations, comic publications, and drawings. Smith has an impressive exhibition and performance history that began in the late 1970s, with venues as varied as Franklin Furnace, The Kitchen, Randolph St. Gallery, DTW, *Saturday Night Live*, the Whitney, the Corcoran, the New Museum, the Pompidou Center, and, in recent years, sites as far-flung as São Paulo, Copenhagen, Milan, London, and Cambridge.

Joshua White is a director and producer based in New York City. He made his mark as the creator and director of the legendary Joshua Light Show at Bill Graham's Fillmore East in the late 1960s. White went on to design psychedelic light shows for Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, among others. Later, he directed episodes of television programs such as *Seinfeld*, *The Max Headroom Show*, and *Inside the Actors' Studio*. White's lighting designs are currently included in the exhibition *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era* at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Exhibition catalogue

The catalogue will provide a serious but conversational assessment of Michael Smith's work. Contents will include edited transcripts of several lively discussions on the topic, including a recent interview of Michael Smith by artist Mike Kelley, expanding upon their 1986 *High Performance* conversation, and a curatorial discussion about Smith and White's work with curators Regine Basha, Jay Sanders, Ingrid Schaffner, and Annette DiMeo Carozzi. A curatorial introduction to the exhibition, narrative biographies of all the

collaborators, and numerous photographs documenting the work over the years round out the engaging publication.

Public programs and events

Numerous programs are planned to supplement the exhibition experience. The following events are some that feature the artists and curator. On Thursday, October 25, Smith and White will discuss the nature of their collaborative work. The following week on Thursday, November 1, Carlozzi will lead a tour of the exhibition. And on Sunday, November 4, Carlozzi will lead a spirited discussion—“Mirror, Mirror: Creative Self-Invention in a Televisual World”—with David Joselit, Chair, Department of History of Art, Yale University, and Maud Lavin, Professor, Art History, Theory, and Criticism and Chair, Visual and Critical Studies, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Fall Season at the Blanton also includes second contemporary project, *Transactions*, September 11-November 18

This exhibition, organized by Kelly Baum, assistant curator of American and contemporary art at the Blanton, will present work by Conrad Bakker, Daniel Bozhkov, Eugenio Dittborn, Christine Hill, Emily Jacir, Ben Kinmont, Cildo Meireles, Seth Price, and Zoë Sheehan Saldaña. The “transactions” explored range from personal Web sites (supported by “art spam”), to artist-run business ventures, to ingenious art-by-air-mail packages, to zero-value “counterfeit” currency, and much more. Humor, irony and a keen awareness of the impact of globalism on the world of art are implicit in these thought provoking projects, some of which exist in the museum, while others reside beyond these walls, waiting for visitors to encounter them in their everyday lives.

The Blanton’s contemporary season extends into 2008 with *Jorge Macchi: The Anatomy of Melancholy*, December 18, 2007-March 16, 2008. This will be the first comprehensive U.S. exhibition of one of Latin America’s principal contemporary artists. Macchi produces work that is characterized by drawing poetic potential from everyday situations and materials. The exhibition will showcase approximately 40 of Macchi’s most important works, spanning 15 years of artistic production in a variety of media including video, installation, drawing, sculpture, and collage.

The Blanton Museum of Art

The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin is one of the foremost university art museums in the country, and has the largest and most comprehensive collection of art in Central Texas. The museum welcomes and engages all visitors by offering personal, extraordinary experiences that connect art and ideas, reaching within and beyond The University of Texas campus to stimulate the thriving, creative community that is Austin, Texas, and beyond. The Blanton's permanent collection of more than 17,000 works is recognized for its European paintings, an encyclopedic collection of prints and drawings, and modern and contemporary American and Latin American art.

Hours and Admission

Located at the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Congress Avenue, the museum is across the street from the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum and is adjacent to downtown Austin. The museum is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 10-5, Thursday 10-8 (free admission day), and Sunday from 1-5. Admission is free to members, all current UT ID-holders, and children under 12, \$7 for adults, \$5 for seniors, \$3 for college student with valid ID, and \$3 for youth (ages 13–21). For information call (512) 471-7324 or visit www.blantonmuseum.org.

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