

## **New Seattle Art Museum Downtown Features Artist-Created Spaces**

### *New Art Ladder and Programming Spaces Enlivened by Artist Installations*

SEATTLE, April 26, 2007—Visitors to the expanded downtown Seattle Art Museum, which opens May 5, 2007, can interact with and engage in the artistic experience in several newly conceived areas of the museum. The education and public programs division has created a series of new spaces and programming where the artist and visitors come into contact. In the south building along the Grand Staircase SAM will inaugurate the **Art Ladder**, a space conceived where visitors of all ages can interact and create art. The Art Ladder consists of three major components, the Artist Created Experience Project, the Open Studio and the Think Tank.

“The new SAM is all about connecting art to the city and providing artistic experiences as soon as visitors step through the door,” says Mimi Gates, director of the Seattle Art Museum.

The **Artist Created Experience Project** (ACE Project) was conceived as a way to enliven the free zone in the south building and create a visual experience for visitors beyond the gallery walls. Every 18 months SAM will commission new artist to create an installation throughout the Art Ladder. Seattle-based artist Jason Puccinelli was selected to design the first installation of the ACE Project.

Sandra Jackson-Dumont, SAM’s Kayla Skinner Deputy Director of Education and Public Program says, “SAM’s educational programming reflects the museum’s goal to facilitate a dialogue about art in all of its myriad forms. We are activating the spaces and letting artists shape the visitors experience.”

Along the South Building’s second floor, mezzanine and Grand Staircase are Puccinelli’s three installations, which all present perceptual shifts to the viewer. The first, which is in the wheelchair ramp on the second floor, is titled *The Illusion of Destination* and depicts an eye

floating in the clouds painted onto three planes, creating a distorted image that rights itself only when the viewer is in a particular position within the space. Puccinelli was inspired by the anamorphism practiced by historical artists such as Hans Holbein the Younger.

On the mezzanine landing, the second mural, *Establishing the Rules of Matter*, is also painted on three different planes. One perspective is of a child in the height of play, while the second perspective reveals the interior landscape of the child's head. Puccinelli's third work, *Finding the Hidden Cracks in Our World*, is interspersed along the Grand Staircase and presents abstract forms painted on 14 free standing panels along with two suspended projection screens.

Two digital video cameras embedded in the panels project an image of a forest onto the screens above, and the visitor realizes that the designs on the panels include tree-like forms. The cameras are positioned to "slice across" the panels and catch only the trees so that the projection resembles an unbroken forest landscape that the visitor can virtually navigate while walking through the space. Onscreen, the three-dimensional forms of the visitors pass through the seemingly flat forest landscape, as in a painting by René Magritte that inspired the artist. Puccinelli attended the Academy of Art in San Francisco and later worked in the motion picture industry as a scenic artist and set builder, picking up many of the skills that would later form the foundation of his work.

The **Open Studio**, located on the mezzanine adjacent to Puccinelli's virtual forest, will be a destination for hands-on-art making, demonstrations, workshops and much more. The goal for the art studio is to offer new opportunities to engage visitors in a wide variety of programming with open access to SAM's free space. Coming in the summer, one feature of the Open Studio will be an interactive project inspired by Li Jin's scroll, *A Feast* which is on view in the galleries. The interactive project recreates Li Jin's scroll on a rectangular acrylic topped table, which can be written on. Visitors can explore the work and add their own art to the scroll.

## **THINK TANK**

*Think Tank* artist residencies are meant to encourage artists and communities to connect and collaborate. This is a space for artists to engage the public in transforming the museum into a site for dynamic exchanges. A new aspect of the Education + Public Program Division at SAM, *Think Tank* programming fosters dialogue about contemporary topics and critical issues in the world as they relate to works on view at SAM. *Custodian* is the inaugural artist project of the SAM Think Tank.

## **CUSTODIAN (2007)**

**Marie K. Watt**

### **Installation**

*"What does custodian mean to you?" "Who is a 'custodian'?" "How do we take care of shared objects and spaces?"*

For her installation *Custodian* (2007), artist Marie Watt printed 3,000 manila tags stating she "will trade a silkscreen print for a [wool] blanket." Viewers who take Watt up on her offer can share how an everyday object gathered deeper significance for them. Watt opens a public conversation about *what* a 'custodian' can do and *who* a 'custodian' might be. This dialogue becomes intimate and hands-on as Marie leads Sewing Circles to re-construct blankets at the Museum's *Think Tank* and other Seattle

locations. The Sewing Circles reflect the artist's interest in working with communities collectively to think through broader understandings of the word 'custodian'.

A balance between give and take shapes *Custodian's* exchange with the public. Along with those who donate blankets, Sewing Circles participants receive a silk screen print from Marie Watt. This project celebrates storytelling, breathing new life into old blankets. As *Custodian* unfolds between May and October 2007, viewers can listen to audio-recorded conversations from the Sewing Circles and witness donated blankets fill the Think Tank space.

Audience members are asked to write their personal understandings of the word 'custodian' in a book kept in the *Think Tank* space. Watt leaves us with an evocative question: *How might we all be custodians of culture?*

Marie Watt is the recipient of the 2005 Betty Bowen Memorial Award. Her work (need title) is on view in the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor SAM Textile Gallery. Marie Watt was born in Washington and received her MFA in painting and printmaking from Yale University School of Art in 1996. Her recent work explores the stories and rituals implicit in everyday objects. Using blankets as a medium, she collects stacks and stitches wool together in multi-dimensional ways that evoke memory and markers of life. Watt's artwork combines 2-D and 3-D elements, while giving a sense of her material's history. Watt is noted for thoughtfully combining indigenous design, oral traditions and personal experience. She currently lives in Portland.

On the fourth floor in the **Lockwood Foundation Living Room**, Curtis Steiner's *1,000 Blocks* comprises 1,000 one-and-a-half-inch decorated walnut cubes in a 30- by 75-inch grid on a worktable. Each cube was painted identically in high gloss black enamel, contrasting the natural wood grain of the walnut: a blank side and a solid side, a side with a small half circle in positive and a side with a small half circle in negative, a side with a large quarter circle in positive and a side with a quarter circle in negative. Visitors are encouraged to create their own patterns with the cubes in this interactive piece. Curtis Steiner is the owner of Souvenir, a gallery in Ballard, which offers a selection of cards, calligraphy, fabricated found objects and jewelry.

### **About the Seattle Art Museum**

For more than seven decades, the Seattle Art Museum has been one of the Pacific Northwest's leading visual art institutions. When SAM opened its doors at Volunteer Park in 1933, the museum's collection focused primarily on Asian art. Today, SAM has matured into an institution with a global perspective, representing 140 cultures. SAM's collections currently number approximately 24,000 objects, and the range and depth of these collections are unmatched in the region. SAM comprises three venues: the Olympic Sculpture Park, SAM downtown and the Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park.