

PRESS RELEASE
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Exhibition
Bruce Nauman
at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal
May 26 to September 3, 2007

Montréal, May 3, 2007. Bruce Nauman's whole body of work raises incisive existential questions related to life and death, love and hate, pleasure and pain—the very words he uses in the title of his neon work *Life, Death, Love, Hate, Pleasure, Pain*. In a Québec and Canadian first, the Musée d'art contemporain presents the exhibition **Bruce Nauman** from May 26 to September 3, 2007.

American artist Bruce Nauman is a leading figure in contemporary art. Celebrated as one of the greatest living artists by *ArtNews* magazine, and as one of the world's 100 most significant personalities by *Esquire* and *Time* magazines, Nauman has had a major influence on succeeding generations of artists for more than 40 years.

Notions of body and identity, the role of language, the phenomena of spatial awareness, and artistic process and viewer participation are recurring themes in Nauman's art. Following a rigorous, innovative approach, he explores various means of expression—neon, sculpture, film, video, performance, drawing—and is considered one of the pioneers of installation.

Neon work

To reflect this multidisciplinary aspect, the exhibition at the Musée d'art contemporain consists of two separate but complementary parts. *Elusive Signs: Bruce Nauman Works with Light*, organized by the Milwaukee Art Museum, features a remarkable series of about 15 neon sculptures and light installations produced in the first two decades of the artist's career (from 1965 to 1985). Neon tubing fills the space, proposing word games such as *None Sing*, *Neon Sign* or *Run from Fear, Fun from Rear*. Other neons, like *Mean Clown Welcome*, show clown-like figures. These light-based works apply irony and humour to the contradictions intrinsic to the human condition and its opposites of sex and violence, humour and horror, life and death, pleasure and pain. The 1971 architectural installations *Corridor with Mirror and White Lights (Corridor with Reflected Image)* and *Helman Gallery Parallelogram* deconstruct the space and bathe it in an intense light, inducing a sensory experience in visitors that is disconcerting, to say the least.

Joseph D. Ketner II, chief curator of the Milwaukee Art Museum and curator of this section, warns: "This exhibition is all about the visitor's experience. Visitors will experience a disorientation of light and space, just as Nauman intended."

A section exclusive to Montréal

The second section, assembled exclusively for the Montréal presentation by Musée d'art contemporain curator Sandra Grant Marchand, showcases a selection of films and videos from the 1960s, seminal video installations from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, and the masterly recent work *One Hundred Fish Fountain*, 2005. In his films and videos,

which focus on body language and usually show the artist “performing” in his studio, Nauman expresses the passage of time, repetitiveness, the ritual of everyday gestures and the resulting self-awareness.

Each of the last three decades in Nauman’s output is represented by a major video installation. *Clown Torture*, 1987, is a key work in his artistic career, with the tension between comedy and tragedy that it arouses in visitors. It depicts clowns wrestling with feelings of anxiety and isolation, and tackles such sensitive themes as insanity, surveillance and torture. *Anthro/Socio (Rinde Spinning)*, from 1992, examines the role of language and the spectator’s involvement in the aesthetic experience. In *Office Edit II*, 2001, Nauman films his mouse-infested studio at night. As Sandra Grant Marchand explains, “In a new way of conveying the strange continuity of life, the work becomes what happens in the studio space, and the artist, the witness to the activities going on there.”

This continuity of life may also be observed in the spectacular piece *One Hundred Fish Fountain*, 2005, which recalls the artist’s childhood memories of going fishing on Lake Michigan with his father. The work consists of 97 bronze fish suspended with wires over a large basin. Water is pumped through the fish and spurts out of their bodies. The fountain is programmed so that the viewer perceives the noise and movement of the water, followed by silence when the pumps stop.

Nauman has continually endeavoured to push back the boundaries of art and bring viewers to reflect on the contradictions inherent in the human condition and in our world today.

Bruce Nauman

Bruce Nauman is a prominent figure on the international art scene and has been the subject of a number of major exhibitions, including the retrospective organized by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, in association with the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, and presented at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1995; the exhibition *Bruce Nauman Image/Texte 1966-1996*, organized by the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, in 1997; *Raw Materials: The Unilever Series: Bruce Nauman* at the Tate Modern, London, in 2004; *Bruce Nauman: Make Me Think Me* at the Tate Liverpool, in 2006; and *A Rose Has No Teeth: Bruce Nauman in the 1960’s*, University of California, Berkeley Art Museum, in 2007. Nauman was born in 1941 in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He lives and works in New Mexico.

The Musée d'art contemporain is a provincially owned corporation funded by the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec. It receives additional funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Canada Council for the Arts, as well as from Lichen Communications.

In connection with the exhibition **Bruce Nauman**

Catalogue

A 96-page catalogue, published by the Milwaukee Art Museum, accompanies the exhibition. Three essays, written by Joseph Ketner II, chief curator of the Milwaukee Art Museum, Janet Kraynak, a New York-based art historian, and critic Gregory Volk shed light on Nauman's works. The publication also includes a biobibliography, list of works and 75 colour reproductions. It may be purchased for \$37.95 at the museum's Olivieri Bookstore or from your local bookseller. A feature article by Sandra Grant Marchand, the curator responsible for the exhibition in Montréal, also appears in the upcoming edition of the *Journal du Musée*.

The exhibition on tour

The exhibition *Elusive Signs: Bruce Nauman Works with Light* originated in 2006 at the Milwaukee Art Museum, then went on to the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami. This year, in addition to its stop at the Musée d'art contemporain, which added a video section and the special display of the installation *One Hundred Fish Fountain*, the show was presented at the Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle. *Elusive Signs* will next travel to the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Victoria, and will conclude its tour in 2008 at the Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane.

Art workshops and guided tours

The *Fish Stories* art workshop, intended for children aged four and up, takes its inspiration from Bruce Nauman's audacious installation *One Hundred Fish Fountain*, 2005. Participants will make shiny, stylized, three-dimensional fish out of cardboard. For all, with family or friends, on Sunday, May 27 and June 3 and 10, at 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. Free with Musée admission and for children under 12 (must be accompanied by an adult).

The Musée Day Camp will also offer activities related to the Bruce Nauman exhibition. The camp, for children aged 6 to 16, runs sessions between June 26 and August 17. Information and registration: (514) 847-6266.

Guided tours of the exhibition are given Wednesday evenings at 6, 7 and 7:30 p.m. in French and at 6:30 p.m. in English, and on Saturdays and Sundays at 1 and 3 p.m., in French and English.

Point[s] of View Series

In connection with the exhibition *Bruce Nauman*, curator Sandra Grant Marchand will meet the public on Wednesday, May 30, 2007 at 6 p.m. The tour will be conducted in French.