

# OBJECTIVITY: International Objects of Subjectivity

*Contemporary Art Center of Virginia*



Phoebe Adams

Kate Beynon

Louise Bourgeois

Saint Clair Cemin

Colin Chase

Ik-Joong Kang

Kcho

Walter Martin & Paloma Muñoz

Rachel Selekman

Claude Simard

Elizabeth Turk

Not Vital

Facing page:

Ik-Joong Kang

*Throw Everything Together and Add*, 1997

Not Vital

- (*Minus*), 1997

Kate Beynon

*Clothes for Twenty Daughters and One Son*, (detail) 1994

This page:

Phoebe Adams

*In the Balance*, 1996

Kcho

*Para Olvidar*, 1996

Walter Martin & Paloma Muñoz

*Grace and Gravity*, 1995

Elizabeth Turk

*The Fall*, 1996

Colin Chase

*House of Many Stories: After the Benediction of the Rain*, 1992

Claude Simard

*For Rolande*, 1995

Saint Clair Cemin

*Atlas*, 1990

## OBJECTIVITY: Pursuing the Subjective

The twelve artists represented in *OBJECTIVITY* explore the evocative power of materiality and form. Though employing different media, styles and subjects, the artists would seem to ascribe to the Platonic notion of art as mirror: the art object reflects categories of knowledge and values in the real world. Through the individual artist's heightened sense of observation, the mundane object or crafted form is probed and transformed into signifier of cultural and personal content.

At a time in history when we are confronted with the rapid and relentless pace of technological advance and speed of information, the art object is in danger of becoming just another artifact left behind at the crossroads of the information revolution. However, while virtual objects primarily convey information, material objects convey meaning through their real presence. As infants, we come to know our surroundings and find comfort by projecting associations onto the objects of our environment. Therefore, the object is an appropriate metaphor for artists to utilize when exploring a particular place or concept—whether the personal, intimate space of memory or the expansive territory of cultural perspectives.

A variety of perspectives—gender, ethnic and cultural—are explored by the artists. This subjective content is readily understandable in some cases; at other times, the particular meanings remain oblique. However, this ambiguity engages and entices one to consider the artists' intentions. Additionally, one is challenged to move beyond insularity even though it is human nature to absorb what we see and fit it into our own perceptions. The exhibited objects may lead one to consider the following questions: How do objects carry meaning? How is that meaning derived? What implications do the answers to these questions have for understanding who and what we are?

Whether by a coherent grouping of sculptures or an installation, it is the artist's eye, hand and mind that infuses the object with subjective content. Louise Bourgeois, Saint Clair Cemin, Not Vital and Phoebe Adams create "disagreeable objects," materially refined and formally cunning. These objects take their inspiration from natural objects or human inventions. The human qualities of the handmade art object are emphasized in the sculptures of Rachel Selekman, Kate Beynon and Claude Simard. Their handcrafted objects reveal notions of gender categorization and sense of place. The territory of memory and longing is explored in the sculptural objects of Martin and Muñoz, Elizabeth Turk, Kcho and Colin Chase. In the hands of these



artists, metaphysical inquiry is balanced with sensuous materialism.

Like the medieval alchemist transforming base material into the philosopher's stone, Louise Bourgeois mines personal experience and autobiographical content to distill and exorcise a painful past. Born in Paris in 1911, she first learned to draw in order to help in her family's textile restoration business. Her *Spider IV* is a massive cast bronze arachnid that covers a six-foot span of wall. The spider symbolically functions on a number of levels, representing her family's business, the feminine life force and creativity, as well as being a symbol for a protective, fierce mother figure. The myth of Arachne, the mortal weaver who was too good at her art and was consequently transformed into a spider by Athena, is also conjured by this object.

Brazilian artist Saint Clair Cemin infuses his work with humor. His sculptures are decidedly antiheroic as he pokes fun at modernist universals. He often fuses identifiable forms with unusual materials and patterns: a large, vibrantly colored golf tee or a modernist rendition of Atlas. For Cemin, parody is paramount. Cemin's playful inventiveness reforms fragments into wholes so that even the familiar can be seen afresh.

The post-industrialized culture of money and commerce is wryly alluded to in Swiss artist Not Vital's altered garbage cans. These repositories for waste are given sterling lids embossed with symbols: plus, minus and zero. This is perhaps a conceptual commentary on the relentless cycle of acquisition, consumption and disposal. Vital juxtaposes abstract symbols with real fragments so that the original material quality of the object is distorted and changes meaning. For example, *Heart* is a cast bronze ox heart that has no sentimental affiliation with the organ considered home for our emotions and desires.

Phoebe Adams creates objects of "sabotaged elegance" with clear reference to biomorphic forms and the figure. *In the Balance* resembles a contemporary fertility fetish: a Venus with sensuous, girlish ponytails. It is at once a symbol of fecundity, yet borders on its opposite—a body rotund and overripe, about to go to seed. Adams models or carves these curious objects rather than casting from nature because working directly with the materials leaves evidence of the artist's skilled hands. *Providing Passage* is a carved, shallow boat that appears to be transporting a precious object—a mottled sphere or pearl, perhaps a symbol of self.

Rachel Selekman  
*Untitled (Grey)*, 1996



Rachel Selekman's fabric sculptures "strive to give visual form to intangible feelings: feelings of desire and loss, fecundity, mortality and sexuality." Selekman covers pocketbook forms and steel structures with soft-textured fabric "skin." The choice of materials, fabrics, and the process of construction, sewing, grounds the object in femininity. Her *Untitled (Grey)* is a pocketbook form that has long appendages, suggesting an octopus or spider. This handcrafted form is at once humorous and vulnerable, like an animal being observed in the zoo.

Kate Beynon, who is Chinese/Australian, also explores notions of feminine modesty and beauty. Her soft muslin sculptures of distorted bound feet are displayed like pathology specimens on a shelf. Their status as a shelved curiosity mimics the objectification of women in patriarchal cultures. Likewise, rows of plain, white baby kimonos, reserved for girl infants, are contrasted with one richly embroidered kimono intended for the boy child.

French Canadian artist Claude Simard's sculptures are evocative of place and culture: they explore the delineated gender roles of rural society—macho men hunt and subservient women sew. He creates objects of high-minded kitsch, which are about a particular place and have the exaggerated quality of memory. For *Rolande* is a hunting trophy crafted from colored socks, ribbons and pom-poms. *Pulpit: Different Degrees of Passion* and *Pistol* are two overscaled objects that are towering signifiers of masculine power and authority.

The collaborative team of Walter Martin and Spanish artist Paloma Muñoz creates nostalgic objects about memory and longing. These curious forms would seem to reside in a surreal, daunting environment between states of dreaming and awakening. In *I Wake To Sleep and Take My Waking Slowly*, a cradle on stilts appears to be a romantic musing of the inaccessible innocence of childhood. The imaginary child is precariously elevated, but in due time, shedding of innocence and awakening to maturity is inevitable. The artists employ materials and found objects to convey ambiguous conclusions.

Elizabeth Turk's installation, *The Fall II*, has the quiet presence of funerary statuary. An exquisitely carved 800-pound marble wing is juxtaposed with hundreds of butterflies mounted on the wall. The wing's weighty finality contrasts with the ephemeral lightness of the butterflies, suggesting the pull

between the life wish and the death wish—Eros and Thanatos. The sculpture is perhaps an allusion to Icarus' ill-fated flight; yet there is hope for transformation and the sublimated release of unencumbered spirit.

Colin Chase utilizes humble, utilitarian objects, such as galvanized tubs, basketball hoops and feathers, to assemble into dreamlike fetishes, icons and altars. This use of the altar investigates and reclaims aspects of his African-American heritage. Chase explores the ceremonial motif as a method for reintegrating the spiritual into life and art.

Kcho creates objects particular to his island culture in Cuba—boats and vessels—to overcome the barrier of the surrounding ocean. Kcho's boats are crafted from unusual objects, including books, beer cans and driftwood. The artist sees boats as personified objects. For *Para Olvidar* (In Order To Forget) an 18-foot kayak sits amidst a wake of hundreds of beer bottles. Like the towering structures of the Russian Constructivist Vladimir Tatlin, Kcho also creates utopian towers from materials native to his culture.

Ik-Joong Kang was born in Korea in 1960 and came to the United States in 1984. His sculptures are highly autobiographical and involve his experience of observing and assimilating into a new culture. For a number of years, Kang's daily ritual was to commute by train for several hours while listening to English language tapes and painting on three-by-three inch canvases that he could slip into his pocket. His installation, *English Garden*, a pagoda created in the tradition of the Buddhist tower shrine, is constructed from portable cassette players broadcasting English language tapes. In Sanskrit "pagoda" means "blessed, good fortune." Kang's monument is a tribute of image, modern-day artifact and sound.

Collectively, this international sampling explores how objects convey particular cultural meanings regarding place, class, gender and economics as well as how the object can function as a vehicle to explore the intimate space of personal and psychological musings. In the hands of these artists, form and material are altered to reflect concepts, to make tangible thought.

Carla Hanzal  
*Co-Curator*

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December 12, 1997 – March 2, 1998



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2200 Parks Avenue, Virginia Beach, VA 23451  
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This exhibition is sponsored in part by Norfolk Southern Foundation and the Business Consortium for Arts Support.

The Contemporary Art Center of Virginia gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the artists and lenders who contributed to this exhibition.

Publication Design: D. Betz Design, Seattle

Photography Credits: Bourgeois Courtesy of Cheim and Read, New York, Cemin Courtesy of Baumgartner Galleries, Inc., Chase Courtesy of June Kelly Gallery, Kcho Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles, Martin & Muñoz Courtesy of P.P.O.W., New York, Selekman Courtesy of D. James Dee, Simard Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, Turk Courtesy of Baumgartner Galleries, Inc., Vital Courtesy of Sperone Westwater

Printed on recycled paper ♻️

## Checklist of the Exhibition

All dimensions are in inches where height precedes width precedes depth unless otherwise noted

### PHOEBE ADAMS

*In the Balance*, 1996  
wood, hair  
31 x 41 x 11  
Courtesy: the Artist, Philadelphia

*No Shaving*, 1996  
wood, hair  
14 x 40 x 10  
Courtesy: the Artist, Philadelphia

*Providing Passage*, 1996  
carved wood  
34 x 86 x 12  
Courtesy: the Artist, Philadelphia

*View*, 1996  
wood, mirror  
11 x 33 x 11  
Courtesy: the Artist, Philadelphia

*One to Another*, 1995  
cast copper, felt  
12 x 72 x 48  
Courtesy: the Artist, Philadelphia

### KATE BEYNON

*Old Poem with Unbound Feet*, 1995  
chenille, fabric, stuffing, thread  
96 x 90  
Courtesy: Sutton Gallery, Melbourne  
& Bellas Gallery, Brisbane

*Clothes for Twenty Daughters and One Son*, 1994  
fabric, pins, thread  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy: Sutton Gallery, Melbourne  
& Bellas Gallery, Brisbane

*Shoes for Bound Feet with Unbound Feet*, 1994  
fabric, pins, stuffing  
24½ x 54 x 12  
Courtesy: Sutton Gallery, Melbourne  
& Bellas Gallery, Brisbane

### LOUISE BOURGEOIS

*Spider IV*, 1997  
bronze, black and polished patina  
21 x 71 x 80  
Courtesy: Cheim and Read, New York

*Ode A Ma Mere*, 1995  
suite of nine drypoint etchings on dié  
donne paper  
12 x 12 (each print)  
Courtesy: Cheim and Read, New York

*Spider*, 1994  
gouache, ink, paper collage on blue  
paper  
20 x 19¼  
Courtesy: Cheim and Read, New York

*Untitled*, 1994  
Recto: crayon on cardboard; Verso:  
gouache and colored pencil on card-  
board  
11¾ x 11¾  
Courtesy: Cheim and Read, New York

*Give or Take II*, 1991  
bronze  
3¼ x 9 x 9½  
Courtesy: Anthony T. Podesta,  
Washington, D.C.

### SAINT CLAIR CEMIN

*Tea Club*, 1995  
polychrome bronze  
30¼ x 19½ x 30½  
Courtesy: Anthony T. Podesta,  
Washington, D.C.

*Untitled (Turning Point)*, 1992  
bronze, vinyl paint  
26 x 15 x 15  
Courtesy: Anthony T. Podesta,  
Washington, D.C.

*Atlas*, 1990  
bronze, painted aluminum  
98 x 20 x 20  
Courtesy: Anthony T. Podesta,  
Washington, D.C.

### COLIN CHASE

*Praise Poem #9*, 1997  
wood, steel, glass, water, salt  
14 x 22 x 87  
Courtesy: the Artist and June Kelly  
Gallery, New York

*Anvil of Dreams*, 1995  
wood, steel, nylon, sneakers  
84 x 84 x 27  
Courtesy: the Artist and June Kelly  
Gallery, New York

*For Navigation in the Bush of Ghosts*, 1995  
gourd, Manila rope, jute, wood, kudu-  
horn, hemp, steel  
60 x 52 x 13  
Courtesy: the Artist and June Kelly  
Gallery, New York

*Come Sunday*, 1993  
copper, brass, steel, velvet, wood, salt,  
griot horn  
132 x 36 x 36  
Courtesy: the Artist and June Kelly  
Gallery, New York

*House of Many Stories: After the  
Benediction of the Rain*, 1992  
wood, steel, earth, feathers, sage,  
glass, wax  
99 x 36 x 39  
Courtesy: the Artist and June Kelly  
Gallery, New York

### IK-JOONG KANG

*English Garden*, 1997  
stone, portable cassette players,  
wood, sand, flags  
60 x 168 x 168  
Courtesy: the Artist, New York

### KCHO

*La Columna Infinita*, 1996  
18 rubber innertubes, oars  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy: the Artist and Barbara  
Gladstone Gallery, New York

*Para Olvidar*, 1996  
antlers, socks, ribbon, wood  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy: Regen Projects, Los Angeles

### WALTER MARTIN & PALOMA MUÑOZ

*Eden's Shoes*, 1997  
ultracal paint, French clay, gold leaf  
2½ x 6 x 3  
Courtesy: the Artists and P.P.O.W.,  
New York

*My Dreams Are Keyholes*, 1997  
ultracal, paint, brass  
24 x 15 x 8  
Courtesy: the Artists and P.P.O.W.,  
New York

*Untitled*, 1995-96  
hydrostone, brass, oil paint  
35 x 8 x 7  
Courtesy: the Artists and P.P.O.W.,  
New York

*Grace and Gravity*, 1995  
wood, oil paint, gold leaf, plastic, metal  
75½ x 29 x 18  
Courtesy: the Artists and P.P.O.W.,  
New York

*I Wake to Sleep and Take My Waking  
Slowly*, 1994  
poplar, oil paint, felt  
88 x 31 x 22  
Courtesy: the Artists and P.P.O.W.,  
New York

### RACHEL SELEKMAN

*Untitled (Bear)*, 1996  
pocketbook frame, fabric, thread, chain  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy: the Artist, New York

*Untitled (Grey)*, 1996  
pocketbook, fabric, thread, ribbon wire  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy: Dr. Yael Danieli, New York

*Untitled (Pink Elephant)*, 1996  
fabric, thread, fabric-covered wire  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy: the Artist, New York

### CLAUDE SIMARD

*For Rolande*, 1995  
antlers, socks, ribbon, wood  
78½ x ½ x 39½  
Courtesy: Jack Shainman Gallery,  
New York

*Pistol*, 1993  
wood, paint  
93 x 64 x 18  
Courtesy: Jack Shainman Gallery,  
New York

*Pulpit: Different Degrees of Passion*, 1993  
mahogany  
103 x 48 x 48  
Courtesy: Jack Shainman Gallery,  
New York

*Anomaly*, 1991  
wood, felt, lamb, cotton  
108 x 72 x 24  
Courtesy: Jack Shainman Gallery,  
New York

### ELIZABETH TURK

*The Fall II*, 1997  
marble, butterflies  
dimensions variable  
Collection of Anthony T. Podesta;  
Courtesy: Baumgartner Galleries, Inc.

*Untitled*, 1996  
alabaster, rubber  
13 x 13 x 10  
Collection of Anthony T. Podesta;  
Courtesy: Baumgartner Galleries, Inc.

*Untitled*, 1996  
alabaster, rubber, steel  
19 x 12 x 19  
Collection of Anthony T. Podesta;  
Courtesy: Baumgartner Galleries, Inc.

**NOT VITAL**  
*(Minus)*, 1997  
sterling silver, plastic trash container  
32 x 25 x 25  
Courtesy: Sperone Westwater,  
New York

*+ (Plus)*, 1997  
sterling silver, plastic trash container  
31½ x 25 x 25  
Courtesy: Sperone Westwater,  
New York

*0 (Zero)*, 1997  
sterling silver, plastic trash container  
32½ x 25 x 25  
Courtesy: Sperone Westwater,  
New York

*Heart*, 1987  
bronze  
4½ x 14½ x 6  
Collection of Brian Albert and Maria  
Stenz; Courtesy: Baron/Boisnaté,  
New York