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Contemporary Art Galleries  
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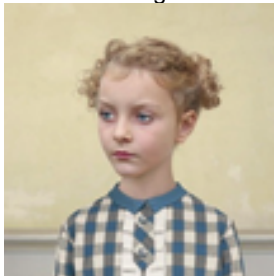
CONTEM  
PORARY  
ART GAL  
LERIES



Erwin Wurm



Gillian Wearing



Loretta Lux



Rebecca Martinez

## Press Release

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# UNCANNY

Contemporary Art Galleries, Storrs Campus

September 16 – October 25, 2013

Symposium 4pm – October 21

*Perspectives on the Uncanny in Art, Literature and Psychoanalysis*

Art Building, CAG

Exhibition Reception 5:30 to 7pm – October 21

### Artists in Exhibition

Lu Cong, Gregory Crewdson, Jonathan Ehrenberg, Loretta Lux, Rebecca Martinez, Tony Matelli, Boo Ritson, Quentin Shih, Angela Strassheim, Gillian Wearing, Rachel Perry Welty, Erwin Wurm.

The word “uncanny” implies that something is strange or unnatural. This would seem to mean that one can only get an uncanny feeling from something that is unfamiliar. In English as well as in other languages, the word is used most often to describe a strange and unexpected similarity—a moment of unwanted recognition that makes sense even though it should not.

“Uncanny” is the English translation of a German word, *unheimlich*. It is a modification of *heimlich*, which refers to something homey and familiar, but also something secret and hidden away. Sigmund Freud’s 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche* explains that “the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.” *Unheimlich*, in other words, is not the opposite of *heimlich*. It is found in places where the characteristics of the homey and familiar are pushed to such an extreme that they become perversions.

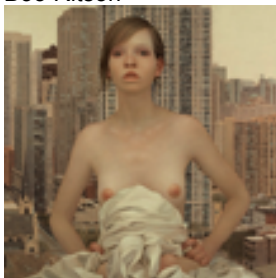
The uncanny draws its sense of unease not through the abnormal or the transgressive, but through the signals of normality that seem as though they should be safe. The uncanny is a tangent from normal, a familiar sight jarringly twisted but still recognizable, a moment of recognition where it doesn’t make sense. It is the moment of primal fear that comes with second-guessing; it is the twist of discomfort when secrets are forced out into the open from behind closed doors.



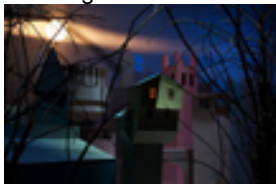
Tony Matelli



Boo Ritson



Lu Cong



Jonathan Ehrenberg

The uncanny does not arise from a simple fear of the unknown. The peculiar kind of fear that comes with the uncanny requires the presence of both the familiar and the unknown. The unknown must become jarringly familiar, in a way that makes sense even though it shouldn't—or the familiar must exist where it does not belong.

The artists featured in this exhibition all tap into the power of the uncanny to fill the viewer with a visceral, eerie uncertainty. Some work by exaggerating or distorting the human figure, evoking what Jacques Lacan described as “the space between two deaths”—the moment of doubt in which we wonder whether the body we see is alive or dead or even just a simulacrum of humanity. Others work by looking closely at the details of what we assume to be normal, so that the viewer ceases to take normalcy for granted.

All of the works in this exhibition create the sensation of something that is almost real, almost alive—but not quite. The uncanny lies in that narrow margin between what is real and what cannot be.

Curated by Barry A. Rosenberg and Micah Sizemore  
Conceptualized by Micah Sizemore

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**Erwin Wurm** (born 1954) is an Austrian artist born in Bruck an der Mur, Styria. He currently lives and works in Vienna and Limburg, Austria. Since the late 1980s, he has developed an ongoing series of *One Minute Sculptures*, in which he poses himself or his models in unexpected relationships with everyday objects close at hand, prompting the viewer to question the very definition of sculpture. He seeks to use the "shortest path" in creating a sculpture — a clear and fast, sometimes humorous, form of expression. As the sculptures are fleeting and meant to be spontaneous and temporary, the images are only captured in photos or on film.

Massachusetts-based **Rachel Perry Welty**, who has been exhibiting for about a decade, is known for thoughtful images made by reconstituting such materials as supermarket labels and flyers, receipts, price tags, twist ties and fruit stickers. An insatiable fascination with issues of privacy, identity and miscommunication led to *Karaoke Wrong Number (2005–09)*, 2009. This quirky video, which is a variation on an earlier work, features Welty lip-synching messages she received on her answering machine from people who dialed the wrong number. In a white T-shirt in front of a white wall, she gives personality and a sense of urgency to the disembodied voices meant for another.

British-born photo, video and performance-based artist **Gillian Wearing** is best known for bringing home the 1997 Turner prize and her series of direct street portraits, *Signs That Say What You Want Them To Say and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You To Say* (1992-3). At London's Whitechapel Gallery, the artist presents a fascinating collection of honest, if not creepy, portraits in an exploration of the public and the private, the concept of everyday performances as well as the psychological complexities of wearing masks. Woven throughout layers of artificiality and deception a thread of reality continually shimmers through. Wearing often elicits the participation of real people, with real confessions, real trauma and real fantasies. Although they hide behind anonymous masks and a handful sound rehearsed, these video performances were made for the sake of revealing personal truths.

**Angela Strassheim**, born in Bloomfield, Iowa, first pursued a career in forensic photography. Instead, she now directs the camera toward the subject of family and the domestic environment. Her images “vacillate between what is immediately revealed on the

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surface, and the unsettling nature of what is discovered upon further inspection.” In her first series, *Left Behind*, she took an introspective look at her own upbringing in a born-again Christian home. In her second series, *Pause*, she explores what it means to be a daughter and examines the complex dramas that reveal themselves in relationships with fathers and other male figures of significance. In her most recent body of work, *Evidence*, she photographs in black and white with long exposures. She has sought out homes where domestic homicides have happened in the past and provides a peek into the world of forensics with her technique to demonstrate the remains of DNA left behind. This is still ongoing and has expanded to a new body of work about domestic violence. Currently she is researching a long-term project in Israel that relates to women of the Bible.

**Quentin Shih**, born in Tianjin, China in 1975, began to shoot photos in college for local underground musicians and artists. During the last few years, his interests have moved into commercial and fashion photography, producing work for top commercial clients such as Adidas, Microsoft, Sony, Siemens, Vogue, Harper's Bazaar and Esquire. In 2007 Shih was named “Photographer of the Year” by Esquire Magazine (China). Shih has recently returned to his roots in fine art photography. Shih incorporates fine art photography’s techniques and concepts into his commercial and fashion photography in order to achieve a unique symbiosis.

**Boo Ritson** is a London based artist who depicts characters and still lifes drawn from her own imagined narratives merged with borrowed Americana. For each piece she paints her subject in a thick emulsion and then has the scene photographed while the paint is still wet. The resulting image sits somewhere between painting, sculpture, performance and photography. Ritson has always located her work in an American cultural context and has been fascinated by the process and the history of painting.

**Tony Matelli** has always been interested in the underdog. He has become well known for his hyper-realistic sculptures often depicting characters and things just barely getting by; things nearly dead, hopelessly lost or otherwise totally unwanted. These sculptures serve as metaphors for our own social malaise and our general struggle for survival. They mimic inner states of desolation, panic, ambivalence and despair; frequent conditions associated with trying to locate ones self within our social world. Tony Matelli has exhibited extensively in the US and in Europe.

**Jonathan Ehrenberg** is an American artist who exhibits and works mainly in New York City. He works overseas as well, serving as the 2013 artist in residence at Glenfiddich in Dufftown, Scotland. Ehrenberg teaches the tools of his trade to art students on the east coast. He currently lectures at Brown University, but he has instructed artists at Pace University and the Parsons School of Design. His ideas are circulated in popular publications including *Art in America*, *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*.

Something is wrong with **Loretta Lux’s** images. While her bodies are evidently those of children, the adolescents do not perfectly fit into their environments. They are displaced from reality. Lux creates this awkwardness on purpose. The backgrounds are added after-the-fact. Lux first deals with the photos of the children and then places them into a seemingly uncomfortable setting. The end result is an overbearing sense of the uncanny. The artist trained as a painter prior to working in photography. She treats digital imaging techniques like the various paints in an artist’s palette. The artist is German born and currently works in Ireland.

**Lu Cong** was born in Shanghai, in February 1978. He immigrated to the United States in 1989 at the age of 11. After graduating from the University of Iowa with degrees in Biology and Art in 2000, Lu chose to pursue portraiture over medicine. His early works were large and

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sensational, though they were painted with exaggerated melodrama and pathos, his keen insight and sensitivity towards his subjects were nonetheless evident. Between 2003 and 2007, Lu was recognized by a number of art publications as a notable emerging artist. Since then, Lu has developed a distinctive look that many regard as an original approach to figurative realism. His portraits do not simply capture the physical or emotional likeness of the subject, rather they beckon to establish an authentic engagement and interaction that ensues when one comes face to face with the sensual, the inexplicable, and the unsettling.

**Rebecca Martinez** was born and raised in Los Angeles. She owned a graphic design firm in San Francisco that specialized in corporate ID and branding for most of her career and now devotes herself to photography. Although she photographs many subjects, the majority of her work explores and documents artificial worlds and entities that represent us.

**Gregory Crewdson** is an American photographer who is best known for elaborately staged, surreal scenes of American homes and neighborhoods. Crewdson was born in Park Slope, a neighborhood in Brooklyn. As a teenager her was part of a punk rock group called The Speedies that hit the New York scene and immediately began selling out shows all over town. Their hit song "Let Me Take Your Foto" proved to be prophetic to what Crewdson would become later in life. In 2005, Hewlett Packard used the song in advertisements to promote its digital cameras. In the mid 1980s Crewdson studied photography at SUNY Purchase. He received his Master of Fine Arts from Yale University.

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