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EXHIBITION: *Fabulous Histories: Indigenous Anomalies in American Art*

Anthony Campuzano, James Castle, Felipe Jesus Consalvos, Jess, Jim Nutt, Christina Ramberg, Martin Ramirez, Luis Romero, P.M. Wentworth

October 21 – November 19, 2004

Reception for the curators Thursday, October 21, 5:30-6:30 pm

The Exhibition

Curated by graduates of the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies Brendan Greaves ('00) and William Pym ('02) with their colleague Jina Valentine, **Fabulous Histories: Indigenous Anomalies in American Art** juxtaposes nine artists in potent trios which illuminate the profoundly enmeshed conceptual and formal concerns of prominent artists both self-taught and trained. In addition to marquee names like Jim Nutt and Martin Ramirez, the exhibition takes into account "dark horse" artists who are infrequently shown such as P.M. Wentworth, whose body of work is extremely limited, as well as the recently rediscovered Felipe Jesus Consalvos and emerging artist Anthony Campuzano. The influence of self-taught work on contemporary mainstream art practice has never been more evident. Authenticity and legitimacy are thorny issues in today's young, style-conscious art world. **Fabulous Histories** offers the opportunity to view masterworks by important artists that are unfamiliar to many, and by establishing and exploring the relationships between self-taught, marginal, and mainstream art practice, the exhibition allows the viewer to more easily discern which contemporary bodies of work will find their place in the art-historical narrative. The exhibition will draw from the collections of the Fleisher-Ollman Gallery Philadelphia, and major private and public collections Fleisher-Ollman has helped build over the last thirty-five years.

<http://www.ves.fas.harvard.edu/events/fabuloushistories.html>

About the Artists***Cutting/Collage***

Felipe Jesus Consalvos (c. 1864/65 – c. 1940; self-taught): This Cuban-American artist lived and worked with his son in Miami, with stints in Philadelphia. Involved in the manufacture and sale of cigars, his work, all dated 1910-1940, is comprised of dense, humorous collages of cigar wraps, cigar-box paper, newspaper clippings, and collected ephemera. Consalvos was self-taught and never shown until quite recently, yet his work parallels and in some cases predates developments in Cubist, Dada, and Surrealist collage.

Jess (1923-2003; trained): A radiochemist-turned-artist, Jess (born Burgess Collins) began his strange career in the arts around 1950. Never one to tie himself to a particular style, Jess distinguished himself as a painter and collage artist (though he preferred the term "paste-ups") in a variety of modes, often working from found images and alluding to dense scientific, mythological, and historical concepts. In the last decade, his work has acquired a reputation as groundbreaking and singular.



Fabulous Histories... (continued)

Anthony Campuzano (b. 1975; trained): A graduate of Tyler School of Art, this emerging artist also studied at Yale University Summer School and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. His most recent exhibitions include the Ukranian Museum of Modern Art in Chicago; the Art Center College of Design at Pasadena, CA; and the Fleisher-Ollman Gallery. Incorporating drawing, painting, sculpture and collage, Campuzano’s compulsive collections and translations of found text and images draw from the work of the self-taught and contemporary pop culture, employing humble materials to lush ends.

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Constructing/Surrogates

James Castle (1900-1977); self-taught): Born profoundly deaf, Castle spent his life making drawings, books and constructions on his parents’ farm in Boise, Idaho. Recently rediscovered, he was the subject of a one-person show at the Drawing Center in New York in 2000. The Museum of Modern Art recently purchased six pieces to complement the five already in their collection, which they intend to show in their 2005 Manhattan reopening exhibition. Castle’s works are in the collections of a number of important contemporary artists including Jasper Johns.

Luis Romero (b. 1965, trained): This Latin-American artist studied philosophy at Boston University and art under Ray Yoshida at the Art Institute of Chicago. His work deals almost exclusively with the relationships between line and paper constructions, and his models, scrolls, and drawings often share linguistic and philosophical underpinnings. His work has been exhibited internationally.

Christina Ramberg (1946-1995; trained): A graduate of the Art Institute of Chicago and a significant figure among the male-dominated Chicago Imagists of the 1960’s, Ramberg interpreted that group’s prevalent interest in cartoons, comics, and bold and bawdy outsider-influenced design through a feminine lens. Her work, particularly her drawings, details the female form in abstracted entanglements with clothing and flesh. Heads, torsos and hands in series refer to costume design and history, assuming an ambiguous, erotic weight.

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Channeling/Mediums

Martin Ramirez (1895-1963; self-taught): Brought to the attention of the artworld by Jim Nutt, this Mexican-born artist’s drawings were most recently seen in the six-man *Vernacular Visionaries* show at the International Museum of Folk Art in Santa Fe. Nutt rediscovered Ramirez’s work along with P.M. Wentworth’s in a musty bin of artwork made by patients at California’s DeWitt State Hospital, where Ramirez was incarcerated for thirty years, never speaking. His body of work is believed to include no more than 300 drawings, and of these his large-scale pieces are most seldom exhibited.

Fabulous Histories... (continued)

P.M. (Perley) Wentworth (dates unknown – worked in the 1950's; self-taught): Little is known about this enigmatic artist, though researchers have discovered that he worked as a night watchman at a naval station, lived much of his life in California, and spent some time in the DeWitt State Hospital. From inscriptions on his forty extant drawings and paintings, we know that he considered himself a medium between Earth and extraterrestrial worlds, and that his meditative work was a response to visions of the cosmos and of a quasi-Christian heaven.

Jim Nutt (b. 1938; trained): Perhaps the central and most successful member of the Chicago Imagists, Nutt was directly influenced by self-taught artists including Martin Ramirez, Joseph Yoakum, and P.M. Wentworth. Producing only a handful of paintings and drawings each year, Nutt's work is meticulously executed and demonstrates a remarkably refined technique. His paintings and drawings are populated by grotesque, distorted figures engaged in indefinite psychosexual interactions, often inhabiting otherworldly stage-like spaces and accompanied by inset comic-strip style frames and diminutive familiars.

About the Curators

Jina Valentine hails from Philadelphia, where she currently works as co-curator and Assistant Director at the Fleisher-Ollman Gallery. She credits her Carnegie Mellon BFA to the fine tutelage of professors Steve Kurtz, Faith Wilding, and Satoru Takahashi. It was then that she discovered and began to cultivate her interest in social and historical patterns and research-based art. She worked with Leonardo Drew, as a volunteer at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, and was accepted into the Atlantic Center of the Arts Residency program to work with a personal art-hero, sculptor Dennis Oppenheim. Jina has shown at the Atlantic Center of the Arts Gallery, the Perkins Center of the Arts Annual Juried Photo Exhibition, the Fleisher-Ollman Gallery, and Space 1026. She is currently developing an image database of Philadelphian musicians' record collections, as a model for a larger work involving American flea-market top 40 finds. Jina is a founding member of the Philadelphia Girls Fight Club.

Brendan Greaves studied sculpture, photography and writing with Annette Lemieux, Nan Goldin and Peter Schjeldahl at Harvard University's VES department, graduating magna cum laude in 2000. His artwork has been exhibited at the University of the Arts and the Fleisher-Ollman Gallery in Philadelphia. He has also recorded and toured extensively as songwriter, banjoist and vocalist of the Wrist and Pistols, an old-timey Krautrock quartet that has appeared with the likes of '60s psych-folk legends and Woodstock veterans the Incredible String Band. Brendan took a position at the Fleisher-Ollman Gallery in 2002, following a stint as a freelance music, art, and science writer. His second curatorial effort in a year and a half, *Fabulous Histories* affords him an opportunity to work again with Jina and William in a context more specific to his interest in the lineage and legacy of American folk forms.



Fabulous Histories... (continued)

William Pym graduated from the Harvard VES painting program in 2002, producing a thesis that combined a series of 45rpm pop singles with heroically scaled painting. He moved to Philadelphia to follow his allies from college, where he has continued to enjoy a multi-faceted creative lifestyle. As a writer, William juxtaposes contemporary art and fashion to address the major questions facing young people. These articles appear every month in the *Philadelphia Independent* newspaper and in short-run journals and fanzines around the world under various pseudonyms. As a painter he has shown twice at the Rivington Arms Gallery in New York City, at the University of the Arts, Space 1026 and Fleisher-Ollman Galleries in Philadelphia, and the SCOPE art fair in Miami. Through playing and promoting music he has forged professional relationships with every kind of international freak, from Danish Lego prodigy and sound artist 'Goodiepal' to Portland, Oregon's premier pop crooner Bobby Birdman.

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts

The Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts is the home of Harvard's undergraduate study in the visual arts, the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies, and is the architect Le Corbusier's only building in North America. The Carpenter Center lies east of the Harvard University Campus and the Harvard Square Red Line T Stop; next to the Fogg Art Museum; one block north of Massachusetts Avenue between Broadway and Harvard Street, at 24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. Parking in Cambridge is difficult; most of the surrounding streets have restricted parking for Cambridge residents only. Metered parking is limited and free after 6:00 pm. Building hours are M-F, 9 am to 11:30 pm, Saturday, 9 am to 11:30 pm and Sunday, noon to 11:30 pm. Exhibitions and lectures are free and open to the public. Visit our website at www.ves.fas.harvard.edu