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Contact:

Sandra Farish Sloan, 415.357.4174, ssloan@sfmoma.org
Libby Garrison, 415.357.4177, lgarrison@sfmoma.org
Robyn Wise, 415.357.4172, rwise@sfmoma.org

SFMOMA PRESENTS JOSEPH CORNELL RETROSPECTIVE
First Major Exhibition of Works by the American Master in 25 Years

From October 6, 2007, through January 6, 2008, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present the exhibition *Joseph Cornell: Navigating the Imagination*, the first major retrospective of Cornell's work in more than 25 years. Underscoring the artist's critical and public reputation as a modern American master, the exhibition features some 170 works that illuminate the richness of themes he explored across all media and presents new insights into his career.

The exhibition is jointly organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum, in Washington, D.C., and the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. The San Francisco presentation is organized by Janet Bishop, SFMOMA curator of painting and sculpture, in close association with exhibition curator Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, chief curator at Peabody Essex.

"We are delighted to have the opportunity to present *Joseph Cornell: Navigating the Imagination*, an exhibition that presents the work of one of America's most innovative and enchanting modern artists," Bishop remarks. "The exhibition assembles an incredibly rich selection of Cornell's work. It is the result of rigorous scholarship and fresh thinking, and offers a number of new lenses through which to see and understand the contributions of this insatiably curious and imaginative artist."

The presentation features Cornell's finest box constructions, collages, dossiers, films, and graphic designs, as well as an array of source materials from the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Joseph Cornell Study Center.



Joseph Cornell, *Untitled (Cockatoo with Watch Faces)*, ca. 1949; The Lindy and Edwin Bergman Collection; © The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York; photo: Michael Tropea

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This is the first time his films, many of his collages, and the open-ended projects he called “explorations” will be shown. In fact, more than 30 objects will be on view for the first time, including the box construction *Bel Echo Gruyère* and the collages *Untitled (Tamara Toumanova)*, *Untitled (Flying Machines)*, *Untitled (Mary Tayler by Lee Miller)*, and *Goop Joe’s Poultry Pages*.

Cornell (1903–1972) viewed art as a means of discovering connections by melding disparate visual elements and ideas. A self-taught artist interested in experimentation, he drew inspiration from a variety of sources, including Victorian educational pastimes, cabinets of curiosities, optical devices, literature, and the performing arts. His work often is associated with Surrealism’s emphasis on dreams and poetic dislocation.

According to Hartigan, “Cornell’s transformation of far-flung ideas and transitory materials goes hand in hand with his elegant integration of woodworking, painting, drawing, and piecing. The result is a remarkable synthesis of the sophisticated and the vernacular that positions him as a modern American artist with a singular way of seeing.”

Cornell was born in Nyack, New York, and attended Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, from 1917 to 1921. In 1929 he moved to Flushing, New York, where he lived with his mother and his brother Robert. Cornell often visited New York City’s galleries, theaters, museums, libraries, and secondhand shops, collecting the ideas and materials that would make their way into his artworks.

The first major presentation of Cornell’s work since the Museum of Modern Art’s retrospective in 1980, this exhibition is organized in thematic sections. “Navigating a Career,” an introductory section, features a selection of collages, box constructions, dossiers, and graphic designs from 1931 to 1972 that provides an overview of Cornell’s evolution as an artist. Also in this section is a selection of Cornell’s source materials from the Joseph Cornell Study Center at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Dozens of objects are presented for the first time as a survey of Cornell’s encyclopedic interests, providing the public with a rare glimpse into his working methods.

The following sections—“Cabinets of Curiosity,” “Dream Machines,” “Geographies of the Heavens,” “Nature’s Theater,” “Bouquets of Homage,” “Crystal Cages,” and “Chambers of Time”—each represent a particular recurring idea or theme explored by the artist.

The Museum will offer several public programs in conjunction with the exhibition. On Thursday, October 4, at 6:30 p.m. in the Phyllis Wattis Theater, SFMOMA presents *The A to Z of Joseph Cornell*, a panel discussion about the rich and complex art of Cornell, featuring curator Hartigan alongside Jeanne Liotta, artist, filmmaker, and curator, and Dickran Tashjian, author and professor emeritus, University of California, Irvine. The evening includes an advance viewing of the exhibition beginning at 5:00 p.m..

From October 12 through December 14, SFMOMA and San Francisco Cinematheque copresent three programs of Cornell’s experimental films and those he influenced. The programs include celluloid screenings of a selection of Cornell films that will be available on video in SFMOMA’s Koret Visitor Education Center, as well as

a number of rarities. The first and second programs feature films by Cornell, including his celebrated *Rose Hobart* (1936), an assemblage of edited footage from the 1931 B movie *East of Borneo*. The third program consists of works influenced by Cornell as well as films produced toward the end of his life in collaboration with avant-garde luminaries such as Stan Brakhage, Rudy Burckhardt, and Larry Jordan. Details about the film series and additional information are available at www.sfmoma.org.

As a companion to the exhibition, Yale University Press has published a fully illustrated catalogue, *Joseph Cornell: Navigating the Imagination*, by Hartigan, a nationally recognized Cornell scholar. The hardcover book will be available at the SFMOMA MuseumStore on October 6, 2007.

Joseph Cornell: Navigating the Imagination is co-organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., and the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, with support from the Henry Luce Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts as part of American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius, The Mnuchin Foundation, the Ridgestone Foundation, and James Corcoran, Los Angeles, and with the cooperation of The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation. The San Francisco presentation of this exhibition is made possible by the Phyllis C. Wattis Fund for Traveling Exhibitions.

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Museum hours: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): Open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas. The Museum is open the Wednesday between Christmas and New Year's Day.

Koret Visitor Education Center: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

Admission prices: Adults \$12.50; seniors \$8; students \$7. SFMOMA members and children 12 and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings after 6 p.m. admission is half-price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free. SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

Visit our Web site at www.sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is supported by a broad array of contributors who are committed to helping advance its mission as a dynamic center for modern and contemporary art. Major annual support is provided by Koret Foundation Funds, the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, and Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. KidstART free admission for children 12 and under is made possible by Charles Schwab & Co. Inc. Thursday evening half-price admission is sponsored by Banana Republic.

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