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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ACQUIRES IMPORTANT CONTEMPORARY WORKS BY BROODTHAERS, LEWITT, MORRIS, AND SIMPSON



Lorna Simpson

***Untitled (2 Necklines)*, 1989**

2 gelatin silver prints and 11 engraved plastic plaques

101 x 254 cm. (40 x 100 in.)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of the Collectors Committee

Washington, DC – At its annual meeting in March, the Collectors Committee of the National Gallery of Art made possible the acquisition of several important contemporary works, including *Panneau de moules (Mussel Painting)* (1966), an early work by Marcel Broodthaers (1924-1976); *Objectivity* (1962), a painted construction by Sol LeWitt (b.1928); *Hook* (1963) and *Untitled (The Letter)* (1964), two object sculptures,

and *Blind Time I* (1973), a drawing, by Robert Morris (b.1931); and *Untitled (2 Necklines)* (1989), a photography and installation piece by Lorna Simpson (b. 1960).

“We greatly appreciate the ongoing support and enthusiasm of the Collectors Committee, which continues to provide funds that bring a range of exceptional works into the Gallery’s collection of postwar and contemporary art,” said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. “This year’s group comprises four works from the 1960s, including the Gallery’s first work by Marcel Broodthaers and a rare early construction by Sol LeWitt—the earliest work by him to enter our collection.”

All of the works will go on view in the East Building concourse galleries by early August 2005.

***Panneau de moules (Mussel Painting)* by Marcel Broodthaers**

Poet, filmmaker, and artist Marcel Broodthaers lived in Brussels during the 1960s and 1970s and is best known for his pioneering work in conceptual art. Through books, drawings, documents, happenings, and elaborate installations, he explored the biases and vagaries of institutional language, including the language of classification that shapes the nature of the art museum as a repository of culture. Broodthaers died in 1976. In spite of his short career, he had a great impact on conceptual art in Europe and—through posthumous exhibitions and prominent critical attention—in the United States.

Mussel Painting, measuring 45 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 48 x 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, is composed of hundreds of mussel shells arranged on a square support, fixed with glue and drizzled with resin, which has been allowed to pool inside of the shells and, in some cases, is colored with blue and green pigment. It is a remarkable work from Broodthaer’s breakthrough period when his objects were comprised of two primary “media”: egg shells and mussel shells. Both of these materials possess multiple associations relating not only to their obvious place in daily culture, but also to their function as containers or molds. (In French, “moules” means “mussel” and “mold.”) While *Mussel Painting* can be described as a visual pun on the modernist painting tradition of monochrome abstraction, it also belongs to a new class of objects, a hybrid of painting and sculpture which was being

developed by many artists during this period.

***Hook, Untitled (The Letter) and Blind Time I* by Robert Morris**

Robert Morris is a leading artist and important art critic from the generation of the 1960s. As a sculptor, he has worked in the related but separate genres of minimal, process, conceptual, and land art, among others. Morris has also written pioneering critical and philosophical texts about these practices.

Hook and *The Letter* are among some two to three dozen early objects that relate to Morris' experimentation with the modernist tradition of object sculpture. *Hook*, a direct allusion to Marcel Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913-1914), is a lead box containing a heavy metal hook in a sealed compartment; this box sits on top of a vitrine inside of which two shelves hold objects that demonstrate the effects of the hook as it was used to shape plaster and lead according to procedures relating to the laws of chance. *The Letter* is a construction in which the elements of written communication—an envelope and a sheet of paper, both formed from lead and painted white—are blankly suspended in space from a lead plinth.

Made of powdered graphite and plate oil on paper, *Blind Time I* is from a seminal 1973 series of drawings. Without the benefit of sight, each *Blind Time* drawing follows a unique and predetermined strategy. In *Blind Time I*, that strategy is mapped out in the lower left corner of the paper, where Morris has written, "With the eyes closed the ten fingers move outward from the center making counting strokes. Two thousand strokes are made in an estimated two minutes." The *Blind Time* drawings fundamentally challenge much that is basic to the visual arts, including their dependence on vision.

***Objectivity* by Sol LeWitt**

Sol LeWitt is one of the most prominent exponents of minimal and conceptual art. Beginning in the late 1960s, his work has been characterized mainly by a variety of structures and large-scale wall drawings, all representing remarkably diverse aspects of modularity, seriality, and various permutational systems through which the act of making art was intentionally separated from the touch of the artist's hand.

Objectivity is one of only two such works by LeWitt. It is a painted construction consisting of a grid composed of small square panels each containing letters of the word “objectivity” dispersed across a series of five horizontal rows of five panels each. From top to bottom, the rows of panels progress in their physical relationship to the flat surface of the work: the top row is raised and attached, the second row is painted flush, the subsequent three rows are apertures of increasing depth. The work applies the rational principle of the grid to a procedure that is irrational or absurd. In selecting the word “objectivity,” a word that ironically signifies logic or truth, LeWitt has also satirically implicated the entire history of a modernist tension between representational and abstract or “nonobjective” art.

***Untitled (2 Necklines)* by Lorna Simpson**

Lorna Simpson, one of the foremost figures in conceptual photography and installation art, began to exhibit in the early 1980s while in graduate school at the University of California in San Diego. Her early works question the authority of photographs as bearers of factual truth, attacking, in particular, stereotypes attached to African American females.

In the late 1980s, Simpson concentrated increasingly on text-image interventions and serial imagery. *Untitled (2 Necklines)* is exemplary of this period. Two identical black-and-white photographs of a woman, shown from her lower chin and mouth to her breast bone, hang in matching black circular frames on either side of a vertical column of black-and-white plaques. All but one of these plaques bear a single word—ring, surround, lasso, noose, eye, areola, halo, cuffs, collar, loop. These references to encirclement combined with the round shape of the photograph evoke the menace of lynching. The final textual panel, larger than the rest, makes this threat explicit; set against a blood-red background, the white words read, “feel the ground sliding from under you.” Manipulating language and form, Simpson subverts the serene beauty of these photographs and converts aesthetic seduction into a compelling picture of aggression and victimization.

Collectors Committee

The Collectors Committee—inspired by Paul Mellon, founding benefactor and son of Gallery founder Andrew Mellon—was formed in 1975 to acquire works of modern and contemporary art for the Gallery’s collection. To date, the committee has made possible the acquisition of more than 300 works of art, approximately half of which are works by living artists. Ruth Carter Stevenson, chairman of the Gallery’s Board of Trustees from 1993 to 1997, was the first chair of the Collectors Committee. Edwin L. Cox joined Stevenson as co-chair of the committee from 1988 to 1995. Barney A. Ebsworth and Doris Fisher succeeded them in 1995 and served as co-chairs for ten years. At the annual meeting in March 2005, John Pappajohn and Roselyne Swig, both collectors of modern and contemporary art, were appointed as the new co-chairs. Pappajohn, who resides in Des Moines, is president of Equity Dynamics, Inc., a financial consulting firm. Swig, a San Francisco resident, is active in cultural organizations and served as director of the U.S. State Department’s Art in Embassies Program.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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