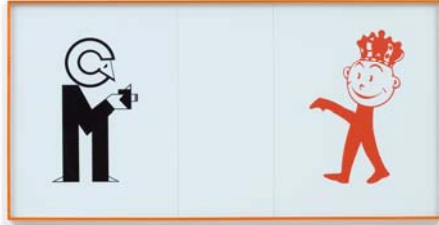


For Immediate Release: May 26, 2009

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Left to right: Larry Johnson. *Untitled (Meters)*, 2007. Color photograph. 49 3/4 x 66 inches framed. Edition of 2.; *Untitled (Morgan Camera and King o'Lawn)*, 1994. Color photograph. Framed: 46 x 91 inches framed. Edition of 3.; *Untitled (Jesus + 1)*, 1988. Color photograph. 45 5/8 x 61 1/2 inches framed. Edition of 3.

Hammer Museum Presents *Larry Johnson*

This is the first U.S. solo museum exhibition for this quintessential Los Angeles artist.

On View June 21 – September 6, 2009

Los Angeles - The Hammer Museum presents the first full-scale survey exhibition of work by the Los Angeles artist, **Larry Johnson**. The exhibition is curated by **Russell Ferguson**, Hammer adjunct curator and Chair of the Department of Art at UCLA. Johnson's work is quintessentially of and about Los Angeles. The exhibition features over 60 color photographs, spanning Johnson's career beginning in 1982 to the present. He combines glossy imagery with witty and at times cutting references to popular culture, animation, gay subcultures, and moderne architectural design. Much of his work explores the themes of Hollywood and celebrity, especially the edges of that world, where aspirations and fantasies bump up against reality.

Johnson emerged from CalArts in the early 1980s and he remains among the most respected artists of his generation. His work is characterized by a postmodern conceptualism that uses appropriation, repetition, and deceptive simplicity. Johnson rarely makes unique objects, instead creating photographic editions that are defined by their humor and rely heavily on stylistic elements such as animation, graphic design, commercial illustration, and advertising.

"There are few artists whose work is as deeply rooted in the social and economic fabric of Southern California as Larry Johnson. He is often described as the quintessential 'artist's artist' and has had tremendous influence among artists working in Los Angeles," says Ann Philbin Director of the Hammer Museum. "Somehow, Johnson has flown relatively low on the radar, so the Hammer is especially pleased to present this survey of his work."

Like his artwork, Larry Johnson is a product of Southern California. He was born in 1959 in Lakewood, California, an emblematic middle-class suburban development built

around a gigantic shopping mall. Joan Didion wrote that Lakewood in the 1950s is where two powerful national interests converged: “that of keeping the economic engine running and that of creating an enlarged middle or consumer class.”¹ The effects of this formative environment coupled with the influences of other Los Angeles-based artists such as Ed Ruscha, Douglas Huebler, and John Baldessari, who all experimented with combing found images and text fragments, are important foundations of his work. These earlier artists developed practices that use conceptual strategies to critique conventional approaches to art making. Johnson took these self-reflexive strategies and turned them outward – exploring and critiquing his surrounding communities.

Similar to work by many of his influences, Johnson uses text as both an object in and subject of his photographs. For example, in two different series – *Untitled (Movie Stars on Clouds)* and *Untitled (Movie Stars on Red)* – Johnson creates pictures of celebrity names floating on a nondescript background. Through this very subtle but powerful maneuver the textual names become as loaded and representational as the celebrity’s physical image. The name is the object and the person named is the subject. It is this kind of decontextualization and recontextualization that makes Johnson’s work at once elegantly efficient and at the same time almost willfully obscure. The viewer is simultaneously titillated and alienated by the works’ stylistic simplicity and conceptual complexity.

“Larry Johnson is without doubt one of the most important artists of his generation,” said Ferguson. “Other artists have always known this, but now is the time to bring this extraordinarily influential body of work to a wider audience.”

The exhibition will feature a range of Johnson’s work spanning his entire career. Johnson’s photographs are created through a highly complex and exacting process of scanning multiple drawings, paintings, and collages into a single cohesive image that at times resemble animation cels and Pop art. Despite the apparent simplicity and sharp focus of his images, Johnson’s work delves deeply into the fabric of American culture revealing an often sardonic, frequently melancholy or nostalgic underpinning. He takes as his subjects marginalized Hollywood figures including less recognized film stars and street hustlers; other recurrent themes include the Kennedy family, along with Arnold Schwarzenegger and singer Nancy Sinatra. The texts that are such a crucial part of Johnson’s work are sometimes written by him and at other times appropriated from disparate sources such as *People* magazine, pulp fiction, celebrity autobiographies, black box flight recorders, and rock lyrics.

A thorough survey of Johnson’s work is long overdue. Johnson’s work has featured in numerous gallery exhibitions and has been included in many institutional thematic exhibitions including at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Whitney Museum of America Art, and the Hammer’s *Mirror Image* exhibition in 2002. The Hammer Museum has three of Johnson’s works (all from 2007) in its collections: *Untitled (Meters)*, *Untitled (Copier)*, and *Untitled (Projector)*.

¹ Joan Didion, *Where I Was From* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 104.

The three works, featuring three technologies on the edge of obsolescence, form a sequence about light and the production of visual meaning.

Catalogue, Special Edition, and Public Programs

The exhibition is accompanied by a 140-page, fully-illustrated catalogue with essays by exhibition curator Russell Ferguson, professor Lee Edelman, and scholar Esther Leslie, and will reprint an interview from 1990 between David Rimanelli and Larry Johnson from *Flash Art*. The catalogue is published by the Hammer Museum and DelMonico Books, an imprint of Prestel Publishing.

The catalogue is published with the assistance of The Getty Foundation.

Johnson has also created a special edition work for the Hammer Museum, which will soon be available in the Hammer Bookstore. *Untitled (Achievement: SW Corner, Glendale + Silverlake Blvds.)* will be seen for the first time in the exhibition. Proceeds from the sales of this limited edition work will support the Museum's exhibitions and publications.

The exhibition will also be accompanied by a full range of public programs at the Hammer Museum including a curator walkthrough and a film series, *Elective Affinities*, devised by Larry Johnson and artist and filmmaker William E. Jones. Please visit www.hammer.ucla.edu for more information.

ABOUT THE HAMMER MUSEUM

The Hammer Museum, a public arts unit of the University of California, Los Angeles, is dedicated to exploring the diversity of artistic expression through the ages. Its collections, exhibitions, and programs span the classic to the cutting-edge in art, architecture, and design, recognizing that artists play a crucial role in all aspects of culture and society.

Founded by Dr. Armand Hammer in 1990, the museum houses the Armand Hammer Collection of Old Master, Impressionist, and Post-Impressionist paintings and the Armand Hammer Daumier and Contemporaries Collection. Associated UCLA collections include the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, comprising more than 45,000 prints, drawings, photographs, and artists' books from the Renaissance to the present; and the Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden on the UCLA campus. The Hammer's newest collection, the Hammer Contemporary Collection, is led by works on paper, particularly drawings and photographs from 1960 to the present.

The Hammer presents major single-artist and thematic exhibitions of historical and contemporary art. It also presents approximately ten Hammer Projects exhibitions each year, providing international and local artists with a laboratory-like environment to create new work or to present existing work in a new context.

As a cultural center, the Hammer offers a diverse range of free public programs throughout the year, including lectures, readings, symposia, film screenings, and music performances. The Hammer's Billy Wilder Theater houses these widely acclaimed public programs and is the new home of the UCLA Film & Television Archive's renowned cinematheque.

HAMMER MUSEUM INFORMATION

For current program and exhibition information call **310-443-7000** or visit **www.hammer.ucla.edu**.

Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, 11am – 7pm; Thursday, 11am – 9 pm; Sunday, 11am – 5 pm; closed Mondays, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

Admission: \$7 for adults; \$5 for seniors (65+) and UCLA Alumni Association members; free for Museum members, students with identification, UCLA faculty/staff, and visitors 17 and under. The Museum is free for everyone on Thursdays.

Location/Parking: The Hammer is located at 10899 Wilshire Boulevard, at Westwood Boulevard. Parking is available under the Museum. Rate is \$3 for three hours with Museum validation.

Hammer Museum Tours: For group tour reservations and information, call 310-443-7041.