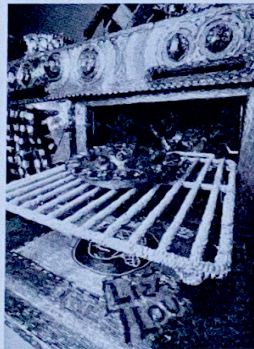


# A LABOR *of* LOVE

January 20–April 14, 1996



Chelo Amezcua  
Imogene Jessie Goodshot  
Arquero  
Alan Belcher  
Robert Brady  
Darren Brown  
Bette Burgoyne  
Larry Calkins  
Rene David Chamizo  
Dale Chihuly  
Pier Consagra  
William Copley (Cply)  
Jacob El Hanani  
Tom Emerson  
Dianna Frid  
Carmen Lomas Garza  
Chuck Genco  
Nöle Giuliani  
Michael Harms  
Bessie Harvey  
Mary Heilmann  
Oliver Herring  
James Hill  
Indira Freitas Johnson  
Jane Kaufman  
Larry Krone  
Paul Laffoley  
Dinh Q. Lê  
Charles LeDray

Liza Lou  
Michael Lucero  
Raymond Materson  
Josiah McElheny  
Sana Musasama  
Richard T. Notkin  
Manuel Pardo  
Elaine Reichek  
Faith Ringgold  
A.G. Rizzoli  
Diego Romero  
Richard Rule  
Alison Saar  
Kevin B. Sampson  
Beverly Semmes  
Judith Shea  
Kazumi Tanaka  
Kukuli Velarde  
Margaret Wharton  
Robin Winters  
Willie Wayne Young  
Daisy Youngblood



**TheNewMuseum**  
OF CONTEMPORARY ART

585 Broadway, New York, NY 10012

## A Labor of Love

For some years now in my public lectures on contemporary art, I've introduced the thorny issue of "quality" by explaining what I think Americans consider important in works of art. Usually the explanation accompanies a slide of a 1972 Richard Tuttle work consisting of a two-inch piece of rope attached to the wall horizontally by a small nail. More recently I've added, by way of comparison, a slide of Jeff Koons's *Puppy*, 1993, a thirty-three-foot-high shaggy dog made of live flowers.

I begin my talks by suggesting that Americans value art according to three standards. The first is "How long did it take to make that?" If the answer is "A very, very long time," that's good. If the answer is four minutes—or worse, four seconds—you're in trouble. The second factor is size—the larger the better, the best being nothing short of monumental. If, alas, it's neither of these, then ideally the artwork should be made of precious materials (gold or jewels will do nicely) to have any validity at all. This view of things usually gets a laugh, because the audience recognizes that it's true, and that it doesn't make much sense as a measure of what constitutes "art."

This picture of American aesthetic sensibility has proven a useful means of introducing audiences to the appreciation of contemporary artworks that are neither labor-intensive nor fashioned from precious material. After a while, however, I began to ask what was on the other side of my setup. Was I unwittingly promoting the idea that if a work of contemporary art does, indeed, take a very long time to make, is large, and/or uses precious materials, then it's not a good work? That if it was created with the aesthetic preferences of a potential audience in mind, it should be dismissed as crassly commercial?

*A Labor of Love* grew out of my interest in confronting the contemporary art world's bias against popular tastes and opinions. While talking to Liza Lou in her San Diego studio, it occurred to me that her project, a twelve-foot by twelve-foot beaded kitchen that's taken her over five years to make, was the answer. Such a work isn't just exemplary, it's a monster paradigm. The creation of her *Kitchen* was hardly market-driven—to the contrary, because it is so large and labor-intensive, it's virtually impossible to sell for a price that would reflect even a modest hourly wage for the artist. As to whether or not the work is "good," that was moot, since I could barely tear my eyes away from it, even after an hour or so of looking.

*A Labor of Love* is for me a new line of investigation in an otherwise long-term exploration of the ways in which art and daily life—from the mundane to the profound—are inextricably woven. The separation and hierarchization of categories of artmaking correspond to divisions found in all aspects of contemporary American life, affecting the way we think about everything from the clothes we wear to the politicians we vote for. *A Labor of Love* is an exhibition of labor-intensive and/or handcrafted work that challenges the definitions and categories that have kept the worlds of craft, folk, "outsider," and decorative arts apart from that of fine arts and have created a stifling polarization between so-called avant-garde and traditional artistic practices. Today, American artists from a variety of backgrounds and cultures are recouping once-denigrated skills and processes in order to examine critically the relationship between the visual arts and everyday life; their work destabilizes artistic boundaries in order to reflect, comment on, and critique other kinds of boundaries in the lived world of social relations.

Like the artisanal and handicraft skills of pre-Industrial America, which became increasingly devalued and rare in the wake of new technologies, most contemporary forms of craft, folk art, and decorative arts are still seen as inferior to work in the high art tradition. In part, this is due to the conventional Western distinction between process and product, whereby the functions of applied arts, craft, hobby, folk art, and popular culture (in which process and product are inextricable from each other) have come to be considered as different from those of fine arts (wherein product is generally privileged). This distinction presents complications when considering artists who draw upon cultural traditions that fall outside the mainstream Western canon and who view artmaking as part of a living cultural heritage.

Increasing numbers of contemporary artists are using traditional craft-oriented skills and/or processes—many of them learned early in life, from older family members—in innovative and content-driven ways. At the same time, artists coded as "outsiders" or "folk" artists have become more vocal about their attitudes and motivations, refusing to have themselves or their work defined by others, thus further breaking down distinctions imposed on their work from outside. *A Labor of Love* is an investigation and an inquiry; it's not intended to be a definitive or prescriptive exhibition, but there are a few parameters worth mentioning. First, I've chosen to focus for the most part on work that is likely to be unfamiliar to The New Museum's usual audience, as well as to folk and craft aficionados. Second, rather than narrowing the selection to a few quintessential examples, I've opted to

show the work of many artists because the terrain is so rich and so varied that it requires an equally diverse selection of work to represent it. And third, the exhibition consists of work made in the United States. The extraordinary political and economic transitions taking place in America at the present time have made the arts a crucial locus of independent, even oppositional, thought and expression, particularly in the light of the harsh and sometimes repressive criticism they've been subject to.

We've installed the pieces in a variety of quasi-domestic settings in order to encourage visitors to spend time looking, listening, talking, and making work of their own. Live and recorded programs of folk music, workshops in dollmaking, and demonstrations of several fascinating forms of "body art" have been integrated into the exhibition to indicate some of the many ways in which the issues in *A Labor of Love* are reflected in popular forms not usually associated with the visual arts.

While raising critical questions about the role and function of art in today's society, the individual works in the exhibition are compelling in a direct and pleasurable way. Some of them, like Raymond Materson's two-inch embroidered narratives, Jacob El Hanani's unbelievably detailed ink drawings, Jane Kaufman's elaborate pictorial quilt, Charles LeDray's tiny, worn suit of clothes, or Liza Lou's "kitchen," are so labor-intensive they belong in a kind of Ripley's *Believe It or Not* of what the human hand can accomplish. Others are marvelously interactive, like the magical "illusion machine" that Chuck Genco spent five years making or the exquisite chest of drawers within drawers within drawers crafted by Kazumi Tanaka. Some pieces are deeply spiritual: Kukuli Velarde's "angels" are meant to protect and nurture visitors, while Sana Musasama's ceramic "totem" is a powerful guardian figure as well as an investigation of contemporary sculptural concerns. There are miniature figures; furniture made from common but unconventional materials; blown-glass pieces created with vastly different intentions and results; paintings, drawings, and weavings that use traditional forms to provocative ends; and garments of uncommon function and variety.

I hope that visitors will find in these works a commonality with their own labors of love, those pleasurable and productive activities in which we can both lose and find ourselves, and that speak to our deepest creative and expressive impulses.

Marcia Tucker, Director



Manuel Pardo *Parlor*, 1995  
oil on linen

## Corporeal Crafts

Body crafts such as razor haircuts, nail design, and body painting are art forms that seldom make their way into museums. The reasons for their exclusion are many, the most common being that artistic endeavors played out on the body are too vulgar or base to be considered fine art. Nonetheless, these forms of body adornment consist of deftly and artfully rendered images and designs done on small and contoured surfaces. Body artisans attend to minute details, carefully tailoring the design to the living landscape, creating a site-specificity of the decorative. The New Museum has invited a series of these artists to perform their respective crafts on willing visitors in the Window on Broadway.

While the social significance of adornment has been probed by feminists and cultural critics, the focus has been on mostly the "beauty industry" rather than alternative body crafts. Constituting a visual language, adornment signifies membership, status, and locale, as well as a site of pleasure and self-identification. Furthermore, the institutions that have evolved around the practice of body crafts, such as barbershops, nail salons and beauty parlors often serve as community centers where friends and strangers share news and anecdotes or debate politics. Some traditions of body adornment are performed almost exclusively in the domestic sphere, such as Yemeni body painting which adorns the hands and legs of Yemeni women to mark special occasions like weddings.

Through audience participation, *Corporeal Crafts* invites visitors to engage in an expanded lexicon of artistic practice that encompasses the physical and sensual as well as the intellectual.

Isabel Venero, Curatorial Intern

## Public Programs

### Colliding Worlds

A series of discussions organized for *A Labor of Love* by The New Museum of Contemporary Art in collaboration with the American Craft Museum.

### Distinctions and Beyond

Monday, January 29, 1996  
6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.

at the American Craft Museum, 40 West 53rd St.

Artists, critics, and museum professionals explore the complex interrelationships among folk, craft, and fine art discourses with April Kingsley, curator at the American Craft Museum, and others. Free with Museum admission.

### Tied to Tradition

Thursday, February 1, 1996  
6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.

at The New Museum of Contemporary Art

Artists and cultural critics discuss traditions of folk, craft, "outsider," and fine art with Joanne Cubbs, curator of folk art at the High Museum; Michael Cummings, artist and quilt maker; Harryette Mullen, cultural critic and professor of English at UCLA; Joanna Osburn-Bigfeather, curator of fine art and director of the American Indian Community House Gallery/Museum. Tickets \$7 general, \$5 students, seniors, members. Tickets sold in advance at the Admission Desk during Museum hours; no reservation or ticket orders by phone.

## Workshops

### Doll Workshops for Adults

Saturdays, February 10 and 24, 1996  
12:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.

at The New Museum of Contemporary Art

For *A Labor of Love*, multimedia artists Lisa Bradley and Larry Krone conduct workshops using found and personal objects. Workshop participants are requested to bring in small objects for doll making. Free with Museum admission. Reservations only.

### Educators' Workshops

March 9, 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.  
at The New Museum of Contemporary Art

March 31, 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

at the Jewish Museum, 1109 5th Ave.

April 21, 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

at The New Museum of Contemporary Art

Curator of Education Brian Goldfarb and teachers from the Museum's High School Arts Program facilitate workshops with a selection of artists from *A Labor of Love*. Free with Museum admission. For reservations or more information, call the Education Department, (212) 219-1222.

Front cover:

**Liza Lou** *Kitchen*, 1991-95 (detail)  
beads, plaster, wood and other materials

**Nòle Giuliani** *Untitled (Shoes)*, 1990  
Dried banana peels, red thread, myrrh resin  
Photo credit: Paul Boyer

### Corporeal Crafts in the Window on Broadway

A series of body crafts performed for (and on) willing visitors. Free.

### Nail Art

by Nails & Designs by Gee Gee & Co., Inc.

Saturday, January 20, 1996  
12:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m.

### Razor haircuts

by Astor Place Hairstylists

Saturday, February 17, 1996  
1:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m.

### Artist Talk

Artist Liza Lou talks about her beaded *Kitchen*.

Saturday, January 20, 1996

1:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m.

Free with Museum admission

## The New Museum of Contemporary Art

583 Broadway between  
Prince and Houston Streets  
New York, NY 10012  
Information (212) 219-1355  
Offices (212) 219-1222

### Hours

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday:

12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.; Saturday: 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.,  
6:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m. free; Monday and Tuesday: closed.

### Admission

\$4.00 general; \$5.00 artists, students, seniors;  
Members and children under 12, free.

### Directions

Subway: Lexington Ave. line (#6) to Spring St. or  
Bleecker St.; Broadway line (N/R) to Prince St.; 8th Ave.  
line (A/C/E) to Spring St.; 6th Ave. line (B/D/Q/F) to  
Broadway/Lafayette. Bus: #1/5/6/21 to Houston St.  
or Broadway.

### Group Visits

Guided group visits are available for adults and students  
grades 7 through 12.

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