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N E W S R E L E A S E

MIT List Visual Arts Center presents
Melanie Smith: Spiral City & Other Vicarious Pleasures
February 6-April 5, 2009
Hayden, Reference, and Bakalar Galleries

Opening Reception: Thursday, February 5, 2009, 6-8PM

Cambridge, MA–January 2009. The MIT List Visual Arts Center (LVAC) presents *Melanie Smith: Spiral City & Other Vicarious Pleasures* an exhibition of works by international mixed-media artist Melanie Smith. The exhibition features paintings, photography, video works, and installations. Also on view are several works created in collaboration with other artists, including Rafael Ortega and Francis Alÿs. The exhibition highlights Smith's aesthetic and social investigation of Mexico City, where she has lived and worked since 1989. Smith's work explores, through a diverse range of media and multiple perspectives on the city, the economic and social patterns of the city and how they translate into artistic forms. The exhibition was organized by curator Cuauhtémoc Medina.

Over the past two decades British-born Melanie Smith has engaged in an exploration of her adopted hometown of Mexico City, one of the world's most densely populated cities. Examining the city from all angles—from the air and the ground; from the crowded grid of city blocks to the commerce on the street—Smith has created a visual vocabulary that draws from the visual impact of the megalopolis while simultaneously relaying an interest in the history of art and the ways in which “abstract” art relates to the urban environment. Using colors, textures, materials, and found objects from the urban environment, Smith examines the complex and chaotic visual elements of the 21st-century city.

A central work in *Spiral City & Other Vicarious Pleasures* is *Spiral City* (2002), created in collaboration with Rafael Ortega. Nearly six minutes in length, this video features a dynamic aerial view of the city; it recalls, both in the work's title and the helicopter cinematography, Robert Smithson's 1970 film of his seminal earthwork *Spiral Jetty*. The video builds on earlier works that depict urban moments in detail, taking a more inclusive look at the mass of the city by depicting a seemingly unending accumulation of buildings, streets, factories, and parking lots, and establishing the visual patterns of urban living.

Aerobics Class (1996), an earlier video work, explores the rhythms and patterns of 20th century life and culture in Mexico City. Several monitors arranged on shelves mimic a department store

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display. The video installation presents the gaudy costumes and unrelenting beats of an aerobics class, extremely popular in the city in the 1990s.

Smith's paintings and photographs reflect her dual interests in urbanism, as reflected by the city grid, and the history of art. *Desolate Landscapes*, a series of large scale paintings, offer haunting views of the city based on black and white photographs. With soft focus receding into a complete loss of detail, these works suggest both straight urban photographic documentation and abstract painting. The photographic series *Tianguis Aerial* suggests a layering of economic realities and patterns of color, as the multicolored, temporary structures housing street markets trace geometric patterns between the gray official architecture of the city grid.

Jam Side Up, Jam Side Down (1992) stems from Smith's interests in commercialism and consumption in contrast with urbanism. The multi-media installation, created in collaboration with Francis Alÿs, is comprised of plastic and latex cushions and rings, along with gloves, baby bottles, and other objects hung from tubing, as in a wardrobe or a butcher's shop. The title itself alludes to sandwich construction and consumption (offered either "jam side up" or "jam side down").

Spiral City & Other Vicarious Pleasures was curated by Cuauhtémoc Medina, researcher at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas at the National University of Mexico and Associate Curator of Latin America Art Collections at the Tate Gallery in London. The exhibition originated at the University Museum of Sciences and Arts (MUCA) at the National University of Mexico, Mexico City and was presented at the Laboratory of Art and Ideas at Belmar, Lakewood CO. (September 26-December 30, 2007). The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue with texts by Cuauhtémoc Medina; Essex University art history professor Dawn Ades; Mexican artist Eduardo Abaroa; and English artist David Batchelor. The Lab and the MIT List Visual Arts Center are the sole U.S. venues for this exhibition.

About the Artist

Born in 1965, in Poole, England, Melanie Smith has lived and worked in Mexico City since 1989. Smith's work has recently been exhibited at the Tate Gallery, London, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego. She has exhibited with Peter Kilchmann in Zurich, Switzerland; OMR Gallery in Mexico City, Mexico; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, Spain; The Tamayo Museum of Contemporary Art in Mexico City; UCLA Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, California; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts.

Support for *Melanie Smith: Spiral City & Other Vicarious Pleasures* has been made possible by Jacques & Natasha Gelman Trust, Consulate General of Mexico in Boston, Oldcastle Foster-Southeastern, the Council for the Arts at MIT, and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Media Sponsor: Phoenix Media/Communications Group



Directions:

The MIT List Visual Arts Center is located in the Wiesner Building, 20 Ames St., at the eastern edge of the MIT campus. It is in close proximity to Kendall Square, Memorial Drive, and the Longfellow Bridge.

By T, take the red line to the Kendall/MIT stop, follow Main St. west to Ames St., turn left, and

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walk one block to the cross walk. The MIT List Visual Arts Center housed in a building identifiable by its white gridded exterior, will be on your left. Signage is on the building.

By car, coming across the Longfellow Bridge or from Memorial Drive, follow signs for Kendall Square. Limited metered parking is available on Ames Street. A parking garage is located at the Cambridge Center complex (entrance on Ames between Main and Broadway) during business hours and on campus after business hours and on weekends.

Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Wednesday: 12-6PM; Friday-Sunday: 12-6PM; Thursday: 12-8PM;
Closed Mondays

Information: 617.253.4680 or <http://listart.mit.edu>

All exhibitions at the MIT List Visual Arts Center are free and open to the public. Wheelchair accessible. Accommodations are provided by request.

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MIT List Visual Arts Center
Public Programs
February-April, 2009

EXHIBITIONS:

Melanie Smith: Spiral City & Other Vicarious Pleasures
(February 6-April 5, 2009)
Reference, Hayden, and Bakalar Galleries

Melanie Smith: Spiral City & Other Vicarious Pleasures, an exhibition organized by curator Cuauhtémoc Medina, includes paintings, photography, and video works, that artist Melanie Smith has made by herself and in collaboration with other artists. These works constitute an aesthetic and social investigation of Mexico City, where she has lived and worked since 1989.

Davis, Cherubini, in Contention
(February 6-April 5, 2009)
Hayden Gallery

The MIT List Visual Arts Center presents a selection of recent collaborative works by artists Taylor Davis and Nicole Cherubini. The artists share an interest in open, distressed forms, and for over a year, they have engaged in a game of three-dimensional collaboration, in which each starts sculptures in her own material languages that the other then completes.

OPENING RECEPTION:
Thursday, February 5, 2009
6-8 PM

Conversation with artists Taylor Davis and Nicole Cherubini
5:30 PM, Bartos Theatre

Preceding the opening reception, List Center curator Bill Arning will moderate a discussion with artists Taylor Davis and Nicole Cherubini.

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**Saturday, February 7, 2009
4-6 PM**

**In and Out of the Context of Contemporary Mexico City:
A Symposium on the Work of Melanie Smith**

**Harvard University
David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies
CGIS Building, Room: S-050/Concourse level
1730 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02138**

This joint presentation of the MIT List Visual Arts Center and Harvard's Latin American and Latino Art Forum at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies focuses on the work of Mexico City—based artist Melanie Smith. The Art Forum Speaker Series seeks to foster critical thinking and academic debate about the topics and issues relevant to the contemporary production and history of Latin American and Latino Art. Programmed by the Art Forum's Curator and divided into two thematic sub-series, *Art Lab* and *Artists on Their Art*, the talks last one and a half hours, are conducted in English (unless noted otherwise) and follow the same format: an invited main speaker and a panel of commentators—usually composed by members of the Harvard or the Greater Boston community—engage in dialogue.

Panelists:

Melanie Smith

Born in 1965, in Poole, England, Smith has lived and worked in Mexico City since 1989. Smith's work has recently been exhibited at the Tate Gallery, London, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego. She has exhibited with Peter Kilchmann in Zurich, Switzerland; OMR Gallery in Mexico City, Mexico; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, Spain; The Tamayo Museum of Contemporary Art in Mexico City; UCLA Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, California; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts. Her work is featured in the exhibition *Melanie Smith: Spiral City & Other Vicarious Pleasures*, organized by Cuauhtémoc Medina, which is on view at MIT List Visual Arts Center (February 6-April 5, 2009).

Cuauhtémoc Medina

Medina is an art critic, curator and historian, who lives and works in Mexico City. He holds a PhD in Art History and Theory from the University of Essex, UK, and is a researcher at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas at the National University of Mexico. Between 2002 and 2008, Medina was the first Associate Curator of Latin American Art Collections at the Tate Modern in London. He recently organized a historical show the *Age of Discrepancy: Art and Culture in Mexico 1968-1997*, in collaboration with Olivier Debroise, Pilar García and Alvaro Vázquez (shown at MUCA in Mexico City, MALBA in Buenos Aires, and Pinacoteca Do Estado in Sao Paulo). Among his recent publications are: *Francis Alÿs* (Phaidon, 2007), *Melanie Smith: Spiral City & Other Vicarious Pleasures* (México, A&R, 2006) and “‘The 21st century has just begun’... beyond the poetic and political divide”, published in: *Out of the studio!* (Hasselt, Z33 Art Centre, 2008).

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Diane E. Davis

Davis is a Professor of Political Sociology at MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning. She is the author of *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

Moderator:

James Oles

Oles is Assistant Professor of Art History at Wellesley College, who teaches the history of Latin American art, focusing on Mexico, and Adjunct Curator of Latin American Art, Davis Museum and Cultural Center at Wellesley College.

Respondents:

José Falconi

Falconi is Fellow/Curator of the Rockefeller Center's Art Forum exhibitions and speaker series at Harvard University.

Bill Arning

Arning is curator for the MIT List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, MA.

Gallery Talks:

Saturday, February 14, 2PM

Mark Linga, LVAC Educator

Thursday, February 19, 6PM

Bill Arning, LVAC Curator

Saturday, February 21, 2PM

Bill Arning, LVAC Curator

Wednesday, February 25, 12:30PM

Jane Farver, LVAC Director

Wednesday, March 11, 12:30PM

Mark Linga, LVAC Educator

Saturday, March 21, 2PM

Mark Linga, LVAC Educator

Wednesday, April 1, 12:30PM

Bill Arning, LVAC Curator

MIT Public Art Tour

Saturday, March 28, 1PM

Tour departs from LVAC galleries.

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LVAC FILM NIGHTS, organized by John Gianvito

Thursday, February 19, 7:30PM, Bartos Theatre

Life in Loops (A Megacities RMX), directed by Tim Novotny
(Austria, 2006, 80 min.)

Thursday, March 5, 7:30PM, Bartos Theatre

Fake Fruit, directed by Chick Strand
(USA, 1986, 22 min.)

La fórmula secreta/ The Secret Formula, directed by Rubén Gámez
(Mexico, 1965, 45 min.)

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All public programs at the MIT List Visual Arts Center are free and open to the public. Wheelchair accessible. Accommodations are provided by request.

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