

9/10/09 - **WORD**

Story by Bruce Hartman, executive director, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art

Two exhibitions open at the Nerman Museum

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. — The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art at Johnson County Community College will have two exhibitions **WORD** • Archie Scott Gobber, Christopher Leitch, Jim Sajovic and **Light Text** • Hank Willis Thomas from Sept. 11 through Nov. 20 in three of the Museum's second-floor galleries.

The use of text is integral to the current work of Kansas City-based artists Archie Scott Gobber, Christopher Leitch and Jim Sajovic. **WORD** juxtaposes these three artists, highlighting their varying conceptual and visual approaches to the use of written language.

Concurrently, **Light Text** presents a new group of neon works by New York based artist Hank Willis Thomas. Widely known for his photo-based pieces, Thomas uses neon (and language) to continue to investigate the complexity of race in America in the 21st century.

In the digital age, with the complexity of multi-culturism in a global society, what is the future of the visual/verbal in our present-day Tower of Babel? The three Kansas City artists in **WORD** – Archie Scott Gobber, Christopher Leitch and Jim Sajovic — offer very different and idiosyncratic answers, as **WORD** demonstrates. But they also share some important commonalities. Like the best word/art being created today, their work consciously acknowledges aspects of art historical precedents, while exemplifying new kinds of word/artforms that are deeply personal, subtly disturbing and truly unexpected. Gobber, Leitch and Sajovic have all rejected (hands down) the didacticism and anti-aesthetic stance of a previous generation of conceptualists. Each has insisted that aesthetics have a powerful and unforgettable presence in their work, even as the text holds center court. In their art, the overtly political and remorseless verbal language of the last several decades has given way to paintings and works on paper in which ambiguity and open-endedness rule, and where the viewer is encouraged to not just look but participate. If that proves somewhat destabilizing, so much the better. The “protocols of print” in our new network culture are disintegrating and reassembling in a manner yet to be fully determined, a fact that this exhibit poetically underscores.

The Nerman Museum is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday; 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday; and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. The museum is closed Monday and all JCCC holidays.

For more information, call 913-469-3000 or visit www.nermanmuseum.org.

Admission and parking are free.

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