ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO MOUNTS MAJOR EXHIBITION OF SCULPTOR CHARLES RAY IN TRANSFORMED GALLERIES IN MUSEUM’S MODERN WING


CHICAGO—The Art Institute of Chicago opens the first major exhibition of Charles Ray’s work in more than 15 years, *Charles Ray: Sculpture, 1997–2014*, on May 15, 2015. This exhibition devoted to the recent production of the Chicago-born Los Angeles–based sculptor features 17 works on the second floor of the Modern Wing, which has been completely cleared to showcase the range of Ray’s recent achievements. An 18th sculpture, *Horse and Rider*, will be on view in the south Stanley McCormick Court. Four of the works—*Horse and Rider, Huck and Jim, Dog (Silver)*, and *Girl on Pony*—have never before been exhibited. Presenting Ray’s most recent work that explores and experiments with the human figure, this exhibition, co-organized with the Kunstmuseum Basel, will run until October 4, 2015, and can only be seen in the United States at the Art Institute.

James Rondeau, the Dittmer Chair and Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Institute, and the co-curator of the exhibition, said: “Charles Ray is already being recognized as one of the most important sculptors of our era. When we opened the Modern Wing, we were able to acquire his *Hinoki* (2007), and it has been an anchor of our presentation of contemporary art ever since. We now have the opportunity to contextualize *Hinoki* within Ray’s work from the same period and offer a definitive statement of a chapter in his career marked by new levels of formal, technical, and conceptual achievements. We are privileged to have been able to work closely with Ray on all aspects of this project to present a defining exhibition of the possibilities of contemporary sculpture.”
Charles Ray (b. 1953) has been redefining sculptural practice since the early 1980s. His recent pioneering use of solid, machined aluminum and stainless steel is entirely new to the history of art, and its reflective quality and fluid effect mask the tremendous gravity of many of Ray’s life-size and over-life-size works, some of which weigh thousands of pounds. To prepare for the bold installation of the works featured in the exhibition, the Art Institute temporarily placed the contemporary art usually on view on the second floor of the Modern Wing in storage to devote the galleries’ 18,000 square feet solely to Ray’s works.

This reimagination of the gallery space creates an entirely new experience within the Modern Wing and allows Ray’s works—at once intimate and monumental—to form new relationships to their surroundings and with one another.

As the exhibition reveals, Ray’s latest sculptures primarily explore the human form and human experience. The works, materially and conceptually dense, often emerge from a long process of study, experimentation, refinement, and meticulous execution. Ray himself has described his objects as the manifestation of “discipline and persistence,” with works sometimes ten years in the making. In this sense, Ray’s process can be likened to a river eroding or reshaping stones over time.

This intensive working method, along with the sculptures’ highly technical creation and carefully executed display, yields sculpture that is both timeless and utterly contemporary. Ray’s works in this exhibition exemplify the artist’s ability to push sculptural principles in search of a new approach to the most classic sculptural form, the three-dimensional human figure. Each object is the result of a series of complex considerations of proportion, dimension, space, weight, detail, focus, and the relationship of the interior and the exterior—considerations that converge in works that reflect a duality of naturalism and classicized form.

Throughout the exhibition, viewers can trace themes of boyhood, sleep, ghosts, self-portraiture, and myths of American popular culture, as well as recognize references to Classical statues and the revival of ancient techniques such as bas relief. There are also conceptual aspects to Ray’s work—space and time, physical and psychological presence—that compel visitors to consider open-ended allusions and allegorical meaning. Ray, over the past 15 years, has fluently drawn on thousands of years of the history of sculptural form to create works fully embedded in a present moment.
Some of the works in this exhibition may not be suitable for younger visitors.

**Catalogue**
A substantial catalogue accompanies the exhibition, with new critical texts by four authors who bring a diverse and multidisciplinary approach to the examination of the artist's work. Contributors include co-curator James Rondeau, Dittmer Chair and Curator, Department of Contemporary Art at the Art Institute; Richard Neer, William B. Ogden Distinguished Service Professor of Art History and Cinema and Media Studies, University of Chicago; Anne Wagner, Class of 1936 Professor Emerita, University of California, Berkeley; and Michael Fried, Professor and J. R. Herbert Boone Chair in the Humanities, Johns Hopkins University.

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**Images:**

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