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CONTACT:

Lynn Collins, public information at 781.283-2034

lcollins@wellesley.edu or

Anne Collins Smith, Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow at 781.283-2175

asmith2@wellelsey.edu

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The Space Between: Artists Engaging Race and Syncretism at the Davis Museum

March 18 – June 8

Wellesley, MA—The exhibition *The Space Between: Artists Engaging Race and Syncretism* opens on Tuesday, March 18 at the Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, 106 Central Street, Wellesley, Mass. The exhibition is on view through June 8, 2003. An opening reception will be held Tuesday, March 25 at 6:00pm beginning with a lecture by South African artist Bernadette Searle, in the Collins Cinema, adjacent to the Museum.

The forced dispersal of millions of Africans into foreign lands during the African slave trade created the African Diaspora, a global community of Africans and their descendants living outside the African continent. *The Space Between* explores how artists across the African Diaspora have negotiated and reconciled a variety of cultural and racial heritages and identities.

Bernadette Searle, one of the featured artists, uses a variety of media to confront the conditions of apartheid in South Africa and to address themes of identity, gender, and body image. Before the abolition of apartheid Searle was classified as “coloured,” a median racial category created for people of mixed racial descent. Searle dynamically confronts and engages color and racial politics by using substances such as henna, spices and pea flour in her work to color herself as she pleases. In the exhibition’s video installation *Snow White*, the artist is showered alternately with pea flour and water, rendering her white, and makes and kneads dough with these materials.

Paul Vanouse, the other featured artist in the exhibition, questions the use of science to determine race and racial hierarchies. He uses information technology to create interactive cinema and biotech installations to address the impact of contemporary culture on aspects of race, gender, and class. His multimedia installation *The Relative Velocity Inscription Device*, merges contemporary DNA separation technologies with early 20th century research in human genetics, particularly Eugenics. This piece is included in this year’s Boston Cyberarts Festival.

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“*The Space Between*” refers to W. E. B. Du Bois’s notion of double-consciousness, first introduced in 1903 in his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk* (which incidentally is celebrating its hundredth anniversary this year). In it he proposes that the black is perpetually aware of the inner self as it is seen by the white viewer, producing a divided self that must be constantly negotiated and reconciled. According to curator Anne Collins Smith, this struggle becomes particularly complex when a mixed racial makeup puts the individual outside or between the categories of black and white. The exhibition’s title refers to postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of the “third or *in-between* space” as one negotiation of double-consciousness in this syncretic racial landscape.

Art from the museum’s permanent collection, including works by Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Ellen Gallagher, Glenn Ligon, Lorraine O’Grady, and Adrian Piper, enrich this dialogue of artists across the Diaspora.

The Space Between: Artists Engaging Race and Syncretism is the fruition of Anne Collins Smith’s appointment as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Curatorial Fellow at the Davis Museum and Cultural Center. The Boston Cyberarts Festival is a biennial celebration of art and technology held at various locations from April 26 to May 11, 2003. For more information visit www.bostoncyberarts.org.

Related Public Programs

Wednesday February 26, 7pm Jewett Auditorium. Films: *Coffee Coloured Children* and *Coffee Cup* by Ngozi Onwurah and artist Robin Rhode respectively. Followed by a discussion with Robin Rhode. Presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Co-Existence: Contemporary Cultural Production in South Africa* at the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University through June 29.

Coffee Coloured Children

Ngozi Onwurah

This unsettling film conveys the experience of children of mixed racial heritage. Suffering racial harassment, a young girl and her brother attempt to wash their skin white with scouring powder. Starkly emotional and visually compelling, this semi-autobiographical film is a powerful testimony to the internalized effects of racism.

Tuesday, March 25, 6 to 8pm Collins Cinema and Museum Lobby Opening Reception and Lecture. South African artist Bernadette Searle lectures on her art confronting conditions of apartheid and reconciling racial heritage and identity.

Tuesday March 26th, 7pm Collins Cinema- Film Series

To Walk Naked

Jacqueline Maingard, Sheila Meintjes, Heather Thompson

In 1990, a group of South African women protested the unlawful destruction of their homes by the then Afrikaner National government. In 1995, the women filmmakers revisited the protesters and they reflect on their experiences of liberation politics and of the social stigma by having protested by literally stripping themselves naked.

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The Life and Times of Sara Baartman,
Zola Maseko

Documentary about Saartje Baartman, a young South African Xhosa woman known as the *Hottentot Venus*, who was brought to Europe to be placed on display to showcase her steatopygia (or *abnormally* large buttocks) and large genital labia. Last year, Saartje's remains were returned to Africa 187 years after her death. Presented in conjunction with *Co-Existence: Contemporary Cultural Production in South Africa* at the Rose Art Museum.

Film Series: Wednesdays April 9 - May 7, 7pm Collins Cinema A selection of international films that explore postcolonial society and multiracial identities within the African Diaspora.

Wednesday April 9 *Beyond Black and White* and *Coffee Coloured Children*
Nisma Zaman

Beyond Black and White is a personal exploration of the filmmaker's bicultural heritage in which she relates her experiences to those of five other women from various biracial backgrounds. In interviews and group discussions these women reveal the influences that have shaped their lives including images of women in the American media, racism, their families and environments. They place their experiences within the context of history, including miscegenation laws and governmental racial classifications.

Coffee Coloured Children
Ngozi Onwurah (repeat) See description above.

Wednesday, April 23 *Sugar Cane Alley*
Euzhan Palcy,

Mid-1930s Martinique is the setting for the story of a young boy who lives with his grandmother in a sugar plantation shantytown. *Sugar Cane Alley* gives us insights into the racially divided society of Martinique, the opportunities that schooling provides to a young black boy and the ultimate struggle of giving up one's culture to become alienated but more successful in society.

Wednesday April 30 April *Raya* and *Riches* from the series *Mama Africa*, a series of six short films that intend to challenge the stereotypical perception of women and the people surrounding them in Africa. Each story presents an entirely different perspective and continental reality yet drawn together by a common thread showing the comic, tragic, and passionate side of modern life in Africa Two film from this series *Raya* and *Riches* are presented.

Raya
Zulfah Otto-Sallies (South Africa)

Raya leads the viewer through a young mother's recognition that not only can true change only be realized from within, but that the price for the release of the next generation must be paid by the present.

Riches
Ingrid Sinclair (Zimbabwe)

Riches follows the flight of a mixed race journalist from apartheid South Africa to a small isolated and unfriendly village in Botswana. The gesture of friendship from a member of the community inspires the journalist to write her first story in exile.

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Wednesday, May 7

Mixing Nia (U.S.)

Alison Swan

The daughter of a divorced interracial couple, Nia grew up in Westchester County, New York. An upwardly mobile advertising copywriter, she is irritated by an ad campaign to spur lower income blacks to consume alcohol and quits her job with plans to write a book. Stirring the racial mix, she sets out to find her own identity.

Other events including open class sessions and lectures and planned. Please visit the museum web site at www.davismuseum.wellesley.edu for an updated program listing.

This exhibition is funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Wellesley College Friends of Art, Davis Museum and Cultural Center Endowed Program Fund, and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The exhibition sponsors are the Wellesley College Department of Art, Harambee House, Ethos, Fusion, and WCD (Women for Caribbean Development).

Davis Museum and Cultural Center Hours

The museum is open Tuesday, Friday and Saturday from 11am to 5pm, Wednesday and Thursday from 11am to 8pm and Sunday 1-5. Admission and parking are free. Recorded information about museum exhibitions, events, and driving directions is available at 781-283-2051 or on our web site at: www.davismuseum.wellesley.edu. For tour information, please call 781-283-3382. Tours are generally available Wednesdays from 11am to 12noon and Sundays from 1 to 2pm. The Museum's Collins Café, recognized for its innovative cuisine, offers a fresh menu daily and is open weekdays until 3:30pm.

The Museum, Collins Café and Collins Cinema are wheelchair accessible and wheelchairs are available for use in the Museum without charge. Special needs may be accommodated by contacting the Director of Disability Services, Jim Wice at 781-283-2434 or at jwice@wellesley.edu.

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