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## EXHIBITION

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Obituary Opens at the Davis Museum and Cultural Center**

***An ongoing work featuring front-page obituaries from the New York Times***

*"Paper dies at a different rate than the information inscribed on it..."  
Arthur C. Danto, from the **Obituary** catalogue.*

**Wellesley, MA—***Obituary*, an ongoing work by **Joseph Bartscherer**, opens September 4 at **The Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College** and continues through December 30, 2001. An opening reception with the artist will be held on Thursday, September 13 at 6:30pm on the Museum Plaza. The Davis Museum is at 106 Central Street, Wellesley, MA on the campus of Wellesley College.

A conversation with Joseph Bartscherer and Arthur C. Danto, philosopher and art critic for *The Nation*, will be held from 5:30 t 6:30pm, preceding the reception. The artist and Mr. Danto will discuss the form and content of the work. The reception includes music

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by those memorialized in Obituary by Wellesley College radio station WZLY and a performance by Wellesley College improvisational group Dead Serious.

*Obituary* is a single large-scale sculptural piece that displays in chronological order every issue of *The New York Times* since January 1, 1990 that carries a front-page obituary. The newspapers are unfolded and laid flat on Plexiglas panels resting a few inches from the floor. These panels comprise a grid that creates a modular expanse of ankle-high images and text. Presented side-by-side, the newspapers form an expanding field of words and images, an unexpected cast of portraits and life stories caught in the daily stream of pictures and words.

Approximately 300 newspapers are included in the exhibition with additional space left open to accommodate future entries. The sculpture continues to evolve, even as the impermanent newsprint deteriorates. Reading the texts stimulates the recollection of history as the narrative of the present unfolds.

Street rappers and statesmen, heroes and villains, entertainers and artists, and those whose fame was thrust upon them by misfortune are encountered. The years of archived pages disclose the deaths of Armand Hammer, Jerzy Kosinski, Lee Atwater, Mickey Mantle, Burl Ives, Marion Anderson, Menachim Begin, Francis Bacon, Lana Turner, Ryan White, Kurt Cobain, Selena, Tupac Shakur, Audrey Meadows, and recently, those of Jack Lemmon and Katharine Graham.

Lucy Flint-Gohlke, DMCC curator of the exhibition, explains that when the newspapers are placed on display, revealing their varying states of age and health, the whole imparts a mood of profound seriousness.

“Like the minimalists, Bartscherer’s artistic eloquence is conveyed through the selection he makes, and, in this case, the system he maintains. In *Obituary* he presents the emotionally charged subject of mortality in a cool elegant aesthetic that prompts the viewer to consider philosophical as well as personal issues. The piece calmly marks

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time, embodying the continuum, or tedium, of vitality beyond the course of individual lives.”

In his essay for the exhibition catalog, Arthur C. Danto relates that the format of *Obituary* resembles that of a cemetery. Copies of *The New York Times* are laid out in orderly ranks, like headstones, and each of the front pages carries the death notice of some notable person, he asserts. “Part of what *Obituary* brings to our awareness is aesthetic—the beauty of the front page of *The New York Times* and in particular the beauty of the photographs selected to memorialize the life and person of the deceased.”

“The newspaper is almost a metaphor of ephemerality. Once read, it is discarded, or put to secondary uses—to light fires, or wrap china, or fill crack, or line the puppy pen or, today, to get recycled as egg cartons or paper towels. Even the libraries no longer keep bound volumes of old newspapers, and have been freeing up space by destroying the ones it had been storing on shelves. Where outside this remarkable work, would one see 300 integral copies of *The New York Times*, covering more than a decade of noteworthy demises? Try buying a copy of the Sunday *Times* from 1991!”

“Mr. Danto describes the artist’s intent this way: “Bartscherer counts precisely on the synthesizing mechanisms of the visual process to bring to consciousness the reality he wants us to know.... The whole begins to take form in consciousness. The images all link up, and by time we have integrated them we know the reality they collectively document. But we have also learned something about how we put perceptions together.”

### **Artist’s Background**

Joseph Bartscherer is primarily a photographer whose work explores man’s re-engineering of the environment. Bartscherer is the recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and The Guggenheim Foundation. He has been a visiting faculty

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member at Bard College and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the department of architecture. His work has been exhibited recently at the Yale University Art Gallery, Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The artist is represented by the Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

The exhibition catalogue includes essays by Lucy Flint-Gohlke, DMCC curator, and Arthur C. Danto, philosopher and art critic for *The Nation*.

### **Related Programming**

Tuesday, October 30, 2001 at 7pm in Collins Cinema, (adjacent to the Museum): "Fame, Death and the Media," a panel discussion including Tom Sokolowski, art historian and director of The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburg; Brooke Gladstone, co-host and managing editor of *National Public Radio's* "On the Media"; and Cintra Wilson, pop culture critic and author of "A Massive Swelling: Celebrity Re-examined as a Grotesque, Crippling Disease and Other Cultural Revelations."

Open Class sessions related to the exhibition are planned. Please consult our web site ([www.wellesley.edu/DavisMuseum/davismenu.html](http://www.wellesley.edu/DavisMuseum/davismenu.html)) for scheduling. All programs are free and open to the public. The Museum is accessible to visitors with disabilities.

### **Museum Hours**

The DMCC is open Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday from 11-5, Wednesday and Thursday from 11-8, and Sunday 1-5. Admission and parking is free. Recorded information about Davis Museum exhibitions, events, and driving directions is available at 781-283-2051 or on our web site at: <http://www.wellesley.edu/DavisMuseum/davismenu.html>. For tout information, please call 781-283-3382. The Collins Café is open to the public for lunch Monday through Friday; with a new menu prepared daily.

Museum programs are funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Significant funding for this exhibition has been provided by Wellesley College Friends of Art.