

# MOCRA

Museum of Contemporary Religious Art ♦ Saint Louis University

## Statement of Philosophy and Institutional History

### Mission

Saint Louis University's Museum of Contemporary Religious Art (MOCRA) is the **world's first museum of interfaith contemporary art**. Officially opened in 1993, MOCRA is **dedicated to the ongoing dialogue between contemporary artists and the world's faith traditions, and to serving as a forum for interfaith understanding**. Located in a spacious chapel that was used for over 35 years by Jesuits studying philosophy at Saint Louis University, MOCRA offers a unique, meditative setting for the display of its permanent collection and changing exhibitions. MOCRA's exhibitions demonstrate the range of contemporary religious and spiritual artistic expression, presenting the work of artists of regional, national and international stature. Exhibitions are complemented by lectures, symposia, performances, and other public presentations. In its first fifteen years, MOCRA has earned the respect and admiration of the mainstream art world in America and abroad. It has received critical acclaim in the local and national media, including the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Art News*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Art Journal*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, *Art in America*, *USA Today* and *The New York Times*.

### Exhibition history: 1993–2002

Past exhibitions have included the groundbreaking *Consecrations: The Spiritual in Art in the Time of AIDS; Utopia Body Paint*, featuring the work of the Aborigines of Australia's Central Desert; and *Tobi Kahn: Metamorphoses*, hailed as St. Louis' best traveling exhibition of 1998 by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. The MOCRA-organized exhibition, *Bernard Maisner: Entrance to the Scriptorium*, a 25-year retrospective of that artist's paintings and illuminated manuscripts, received enthusiastic reviews in *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Austin Chronicle* during its three-year, five-city tour. In December 2002, MOCRA was named by *USA Today* as one of America's top 10 religious museums.

Twice during 2001 and 2002, MOCRA hosted the largest ever U.S. installation and first ever St. Louis showing of Andy Warhol's *Silver Clouds*, buoyant helium- and air-filled silver mylar pillows that ride the air currents and respond to the touch of the viewer. The *Silver Clouds* drew record audiences of all ages to MOCRA and generated extensive media coverage. MOCRA continued its commitment to presenting challenging and significant exhibitions in 2002 with *The Greater Good: An Artist's Contemporary View of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment*, an installation by artist Tony Hooker. This artistic reflection on a painful chapter in America's racial history opened MOCRA's doors to a broader cross-section of the Saint Louis community and inspired a talk by noted civil rights leader Fred D. Gray as well as an interdisciplinary panel discussion by University faculty and community members. It was named one of the best exhibitions of 2002 by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

## Exhibition history: 2003–present

In 2003, MOCRA presented Georges Rouault's *Miserere et Guerre: The Complete Series of Etchings*. MOCRA is privileged to have in its collection one of the few complete sets of this landmark body of prints, and was pleased to display them newly rematted and reframed. The latter part of 2003 saw *Avoda: Objects of the Spirit*, an exhibition of contemporary reworkings of traditional Jewish ceremonial objects by artist Tobi Kahn. Visitors were encouraged to consider the sacred objects of their own faith traditions and the role they play in our lives. MOCRA turned its focus in Spring 2004 to the photographic work of three important Latin American artists—Luis González Palma, María Magdalena Campos-Pons, and Pablo Soria—with *Rito, Espejo y Ojo/Ritual, Mirror and Eye*.

MOCRA's first show devoted to contemporary architecture took place during Fall and Winter 2004–05. *Radiant Forms in Contemporary Sacred Architecture* examined recent church commissions by leading architects Richard Meier and Steven Holl. Simultaneously, *Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus: An Homage to Olivier Messiaen* featured a series of twenty etchings by artist Daniel P. Ramirez, work inspired by the music of the great French composer Messiaen. MOCRA's 2005 programming continued with *The Breath of Consciousness*, a thirty-year retrospective of work by Japanese-American artist Junko Chodos, who in her drawings, collages, and scroll paintings embraces the sacred and the profane, uncovers beauty in ugliness, and maintains an openness to hope and peace amidst struggle and hardship. Fall 2005 saw a presentation of photographs by Chinese artist DoDo Jin Ming. *Land and Sea* explored the representation of sublime as discovered in nature. Jin Ming's riveting seascapes and haunting vistas of sunflower fields were warmly received.

2006 began with *Gorky: The Early Years, 1927–1937*, a special presentation of early drawings and paintings by pivotal modern artist Arshile Gorky (1904–48). This exhibition inaugurated *MOCRA: Sources*, an occasional series of exhibitions presenting those seminal artists who have influenced the development of modern and contemporary art, and whose impact is seen in the artists of our time who engage the religious and spiritual dimensions in their work. Andy Warhol's *Silver Clouds* returned to MOCRA in Fall 2006, again drawing record crowds. This final engagement of the *Clouds* at MOCRA received significant media attention, including a segment on *Living St. Louis*, a local-interest series on St. Louis Public Television affiliate KETC (Channel 9). MOCRA also participated in Day With(out) Art on December 1, 2006, juxtaposing images from Carolyn Jones' moving *Living Proof* photographic suite with the *Clouds* as a meditation on all those whose lives have been affected by HIV/AIDS.

MOCRA presented another installment of *MOCRA: Sources* in Spring 2007 with *Oskar Fischinger: Movement and Spirit*, a presentation of paintings and drawings by pioneering German abstract painter and filmmaker Oskar Fischinger (1900–67). He worked in the realm of “visual music,” seeking to expand dimensions in both visual and auditory experience. In Fall 2007, MOCRA debuted *The Celluloid Bible: Marketing Films Inspired by Scripture*. This presentation of vintage motion picture posters and other promotional materials (dating from 1898 to the present and hailing from across the globe) explored the ways in which the Bible has been adapted to film, as well as how those movies have been advertised. In conjunction with the exhibition, MOCRA presented the classic Bible epics *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Ben-Hur* (1959) in St. Louis's handsomely restored Tivoli Theatre. *The Celluloid Bible* was featured in a segment on *Living St. Louis*.

MOCRA begins 2008 with *Miao Xiaochun: The Last Judgment in Cyberspace*. Chinese artist Miao Xiaochun used three-dimensional modeling software to create a digital avatar of his own body. Then he mapped

this model onto all 400-plus figures in Michelangelo's famous Sistine Chapel painting, thus becoming all of the characters—the divine, the demonic, the saved, and the damned. He has created large-scale digital prints from five vantage points in the virtual environment, as well as a video that enables the viewer to “fly through” the painting. The images and the video blend qualities of cutting-edge technology with sublime and apocalyptic imagery. For Fall 2008, MOCRA is developing a retrospective exhibition that will survey its first 15 years.

### **Looking ahead**

Now into its second decade, MOCRA remains committed to displaying work of the highest artistic quality but also broadly representing the currents of spiritual and religious artistic expression.

# M O C R A

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## Exhibition History (through Spring 2008)

### 1993

Sanctuaries: Recovering the Holy in Contemporary Art  
Body and Soul: The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

### 1994

Georges Rouault: Miserere et Guerre, the complete series of etchings  
Post-Minimalism and the Spiritual: Four Chicago Artists  
Consecrations: The Spiritual in Art in the Time of AIDS

### 1995

Keith Haring: The Life of Christ Altarpiece  
Ian Friend: The Edge of Belief  
Eleanor Dickinson: A Retrospective

### 1996

Frederick J. Brown: The Life of Christ Altarpiece  
Edward Boccia: Eye of the Painter

### 1997

Steven Heilmer: Pietre Sante  
Utopia Body Paint  
Manfred Stumpf: Enter Jerusalem

### 1998

Tobi Kahn: Metamorphoses  
MOCRA: The First Five Years

### 1999

Bernard Maisner: Entrance to the Scriptorium

### 2000

Georges Rouault: Miserere et Guerre, the complete series of etchings  
Lewis DeSoto: Paranirvana  
Robert Farber: A Retrospective, 1985–1995

### 2001

Andy Warhol: Silver Clouds

### 2002

The Greater Good: An Artist's Contemporary View of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment  
Andy Warhol's "Silver Clouds": An Encore Presentation

### 2003

Georges Rouault: Miserere et Guerre, the complete series of etchings  
Avoda: Objects of the Spirit

### 2004

Rito, Espejo y Ojo / Ritual, Mirror and Eye  
Radiant Forms in Contemporary Sacred Architecture:  
Richard Meier & the Jubilee Church, Rome – Steven Holl & the Chapel of St. Ignatius, Seattle  
Daniel Ramirez – Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus:  
An Homage to Olivier Messiaen

### 2005

Junko Chodos: The Breath of Consciousness  
DoDo Jin Ming: Land and Sea

### 2006

Gorky: The Early Years – Drawings and Paintings, 1927–1937  
Andy Warhol: Silver Clouds

### 2007

Oskar Fischinger: Movement and Spirit  
The Celluloid Bible: Marketing Films Inspired by Scripture

### 2008

Miao Xiaochun: The Last Judgment in Cyberspace  
MOCRA at Fifteen: Pursuit of the Spirit

### note:

*selected works from the MOCRA collection or on extended loan are often on display in the interim periods between exhibitions*