

Slightly Unbalanced

Traveling Exhibition Project Description



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #351*, 2000

Curated by Susan Haggood
Organized and circulated by iCI (Independent Curators International)
New York

Tour Dates: January 2008 through March 2010

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This exhibition will survey works by artists who have repeatedly focused on neurosis of various kinds in their work, using themselves and the people around them as fodder for their investigations. During the past fifteen years, inspired by the work of several prominent older artists, a younger generation has expanded the contemporary art vocabulary to encompass a subject that is now well known by the general public. Cumulatively, they make use of psychology as a kind of lingua franca—we all know what the symptoms of neurosis are, if not the particular diagnoses.

Beginning with a group of works by Louise Bourgeois, Mike Kelley, Bruce Nauman, Cindy Sherman, and Sophie Calle, then proceeding to work by other artists including Alex Bag, Beth Campbell, Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn, Sarah Hobbs, Sean Landers, Cary Leibowitz, Dave McKenzie, Tony Oursler, Danica Phelps, William Pope.L, Aïda Ruilova, Ward Shelley and Douglas Paulson, and David Shrigley, this exhibition encompasses the range of media prevalent today: video art, installations, photographs, paintings and drawings. In these works, the artists question what constitutes normalcy, and what qualifies as neurosis, a slippery and suggestive area of exploration. These artists invite viewers to reconsider their own experiences and opinions, and think further about cultural assumptions pertaining to mental health and human behavior.



Mike Kelley, *Ah... Youth!*
(detail), 1990



Beth Campbell, *Simultaneous Temporal Sequence*, 2005

In the field of psychology, the term “neurotic” is used to describe patients who are extremely capable of functioning, despite some emotional suffering. Psychoanalytic diagnoses divide disorders into three levels: the healthy to neurotic level, the borderline level, and the psychotic level. Among the myriad disorders explored in the most commonly used psychiatrists’ diagnostic guide in the U.S., there are a handful, including narcissism and obsessive-compulsive disorder, which seem to interest contemporary artists the most.

In this group, there is often a sense of violated privacy that may leave viewers feeling like intruder or voyeurs.

A final group of works in the presentation focuses on artists' use of the house as a metaphor for the mind, the domestic interior as a symbol for the psyche. This section includes sculptural installations by Beth Campbell; Ward Shelley and Douglas Paulson; and photographs by Sarah Hobbs.

Although previous group exhibitions of contemporary art have focused on such topics as the paranormal, the abject, altered states of consciousness, and art of the mentally ill, there have been no recent exhibitions that tap into contemporary artists' attraction to the subject of neurosis. Yet interest in the broader field of psychological abnormality has a rich legacy in the history of twentieth-century art. A little over two decades after Sigmund Freud first published his concepts of psychoanalysis in 1900, the Surrealists picked up on the notion of the subconscious, using it as a wellspring for their dream imagery and automatism. In the 1940s and 50s, the CoBrA artists (including Pierre Alechinsky, Karel Appel, and Asger Jorn, among others) found inspiration in the art of children and the insane. For the past several decades, Freudian and Jungian theories have permeated the methodologies of many academic disciplines. These forays, joined by widespread familiarity with psychological concepts in contemporary culture, have fed into the recent fluorescence of work dealing with neurosis.



Sophie Calle, *The Bad Breath*, 2000
(detail)

The artists in *Slightly Unbalanced* look at conditions and behaviors that are familiar to audiences today. The field of psychology is well over a century old, and many of its basic concepts and terminology are embedded in our presuppositions about how human beings think and act, what drives and motivates us. The fact that there are various branches of psychiatry, corresponding with different theories and therapeutic methods, makes the subject more fascinating, less definite—it is a field of study that continues to change and develop. In choosing to focus on neurosis, these artists are tapping into a charged and rewarding subject that provokes curiosity, discomfort, recognition, and even identification in the viewer. These artists allude to all individuals' vulnerability and fragility, inviting compassion for fellow humans.



Louise Bourgeois, *Femme (Woman)*, 2005

About the guest curator, Susan Hapgood:

Slightly Unbalanced is curated by Susan Hapgood, Director of Exhibitions at iCI. She has written numerous catalogue essays and magazine articles, and co-authored *Extension*, an online project for the Guggenheim Museum's Web site. Among her most significant exhibition projects are *FluxAttitudes*, *Neo-Dada: Redefining Art 1958-62*, *Video Divertimento*, and *Aspects of Collage, Assemblage and the Found Object in 20th Century Art*.

Artists in the exhibition:

Alex Bag
Louise Bourgeois
Sophie Calle
Beth Campbell
Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn
Sarah Hobbs
Mike Kelley
Sean Landers
Cary Leibowitz
Dave McKenzie
Bruce Nauman
Tony Oursler
Danica Phelps
William Pope.L
Aïda Ruilova
Ward Shelley and Douglas Paulson
Cindy Sherman
David Shrigley

Basic facts:

Participation fee: \$12,000 for 10 weeks, plus incoming shipping (Institutions outside the continental United States must also pay customs fees as well as outgoing shipping charges to the U.S. border.)

Number of artists or artist groups: 18

Number of works: 36

Space required: Approximately 4,000-4,500 square feet

Tour dates: January 2008 through March 2010

Wall texts, press, and education materials will be provided. A 72-page illustrated catalogue, with essays by Hapgood and Susan M. Andersen, Professor of Psychology at New York University, as well as statements by all of the artists, accompanies the exhibition.

iCI is a dynamic non-profit organization committed to enhancing the understanding and appreciation of contemporary art through its innovative traveling exhibitions and publications. iCI brings challenging artworks to a wide range of museums, giving diverse audiences in the United States and abroad the opportunity to experience new art.