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For Immediate Release

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BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS EXPLORES THE STREET AS MUSE

*Street Art, Street Life: From the 1950s to Now to Take Viewers from
Boulevards of Paris and Sidewalks of New York to New Vertical Canyons of Beijing*

Bronx, NY — Vanguard artists have long looked to the street for inspiration, subject matter, a stage, and even the raw materials of their art making.

From September 14, 2008 to January 25, 2009, the Bronx Museum of the Arts examines this fascination in *Street Art, Street Life: From the 1950s to Now*. The far ranging exhibition, one of the largest to consider the subject, has been organized by guest curator Lydia Yee, curator at the Barbican Art Gallery, London. Yee identifies the street as a pervasive and cohesive thread binding today's vanguard artists and photographers to those of preceding generations.

Robert Frank, William Klein, Jacques de la Villeglé, Yoko Ono, Vito Acconci, Martha Rosler, Sophie Calle, Nikki S. Lee and Francis Alÿs are among those represented by street photography, documentation of performances and ephemeral actions, videos, and art objects fashioned from found materials. New works by Xaviera Simmons and Fatimah Tuggar, co-commissioned by the Bronx Museum of the Arts and the Public Art Fund, will spill out onto the Bronx's widely featured boulevard, the Grand Concourse, and with a special commission, Blank Noise Project from India will make its U.S. debut.

“One of my key aims is to situate compelling new art by a diverse group of younger artists in a rich historical context. The exhibition presents many intersecting paths—documentary photography, performance, conceptualism, activism, and street culture,” says Yee, who conceived of the exhibition while a senior curator at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, where she organized several other exhibitions on urban topics including *Urban Mythologies* (1999) and *One Planet under a Groove* (2001).

“The vitality of the Bronx flows from its street culture, the connections people make on the corner, front stoop, or public park,” says Holly Block, director, Bronx Museum of the Arts. “During the period of this exhibition, the museum will draw both from these roots and the global conversation to present a series of concerts, talks, and panel discussions.”

A giant street fair in front of the Museum will happen on the Grand Concourse on the afternoon of Sunday, September 14, to celebrate the opening of the exhibition.

Street Art, Street Life begins in the late 1950s and early 1960s, at the end of the classic age of photojournalism. Brash, motion-filled black and white photographs by William Klein and the sly photojournalism of Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander reflect a new, de-skilled and post-aesthetic approach to photography. Grainy offset posters publicizing Free Flux-Tours, photographs of the Fluxus performances on Canal Street, and other Fluxus ephemera, show how George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Dick Higgins, Ben Vautier, Alison Knowles, and fellow Fluxus artists began to devise ways to spontaneously encounter the public.

Other artists will be seen to have transformed cast-offs found in the streets into art materials, whether it be the torn poster on view by the affichiste Jacques de la Villeglé or the newspaper/ink/watercolor collage that a young Claes Oldenburg fashioned for a solo show at the Reuben Gallery in New York in 1960.

By the end of that decade, works of art were beginning to straddle the line between street photography, photojournalism, and conceptualism, as artists began to employ photography to document actions. Gritty photographs from Vito Acconci's *Following Piece* (1969) show the artist randomly following a person on the street as part of a month-long action in which he followed a different person until he or she entered a private space. VALIE EXPORT's *Aus der Mappeder Hundigkeit (From the Portfolio of Doggedness)* (1968) documents another performance that required the unscripted stage of the street for realization and the medium of photography for immortalization: in the photographs, she is seen walking Peter Weibel on a leash, on all fours, through the streets of Vienna.

The exhibition continues through the 1970s and 1980s with Martha Rosler's groundbreaking text/image panels of derelict storefronts along the Bowery from 1974/75 and performance artist Tehching Hsieh's photographs of the year he spent in New York City (1981/82) without ever entering an enclosed space, except for a night he spent in jail. Martin Wong's painting of a fenced and chained Pentecostal church on the Lower East Side (1986), and photographs of street fashion and culture by Jamel Shabazz demonstrate other ways in which artists and photographers responded to anomie, homelessness, urban decay, and gentrification during these decades.

Photographs by Nikki S. Lee suggest that street personas are as constructed and questionable as is the reading of a photograph, and Allan Sekula's slide projection documenting a demonstration during the meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle (1999) are among the works on view from the decade that followed, the '90s.

The impulse of the artist to capture the life of the street as 'archivist' is evident in *Street Art, Street Life: From the 1950s to Now*. As part of Francis Alÿs' *Instantáneas* (1994-present), some 140 snapshots taken from the 1940s to the '60s will be featured, all purchased by the artist in flea markets and vendors in Mexico City.

Daniel Guzmán, Kimsooja, Sze Tsung Leong, and Robin Rhode are among the other contemporary artists represented in the exhibition, all of whom have emerged in the 1990s against the backdrop of the rapid development and growth of mega cities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

“*Street Art, Street Life* illustrates how from the ‘50s onward artists have used the street to critique the institution of art. But as the visitor will see, their different approaches suggest that ground—the street—was itself unstable and shifting,” says Frazer Ward, assistant professor, Department of Art, Smith College, and a contributor to the catalogue. He continues, “Perhaps that’s what explains the continuing lure of the street.”

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive 114-page catalogue published in collaboration with Aperture and distributed by DAP. *Street Art, Street Life: From the 1950s to Now* includes essays by Lydia Yee; Katherine A. Bussard; and Frazer Ward.

FUNDING

Street Art, Street Life is made possible by the Emily Hall Tremaine Exhibition Award, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, a MetLife Foundation *Museum and Community Connections* grant and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Additional support has been provided by the Peter Jay Sharp Foundation, the New York Council for the Humanities and Etant donnés: The French-American Fund for Contemporary Art.

The Bronx Museum of the Arts receives ongoing general operating support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs with the cooperation of Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion Jr. and the Bronx Delegation of the New York City Council, New York State Council on the Arts, Bronx Delegation of the New York State Assembly, and private sources.

PUBLIC EVENTS

Panel Discussion: Unreal Streets

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 7:00 pm

New York University, Einstein Auditorium

Admission: Free

T.S. Eliot summed up the general mood of urban life between the wars in two words: “Unreal cities.” Over the years, however, his phrase has become identified with a certain concept of modernism that proposes to dissolve the boundaries between the private and the social, the material and the spiritual. Curator Lydia Yee and guest speakers examine the enduring fascination of cities and street life on contemporary artists.

Panelists: Lydia Yee, Katherine Bussard, Fatimah Tuggar and Frazer Ward. Introduced by Sergio Bessa

B-Girl City in NYC

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2:00 to 8:00 pm

South Building—Lower Gallery

Admission: Free

The national *b-girl* dance marathon initiated in Texas by Ereina "Honeyrockwell" Valencia comes to the Bronx! Featuring one-on-one *b-girl* battle, one-on-one *b-boy* battle, "three's company" battle (two girls and one guy), kids' crew battle, word of mouth battle, *b-girl* fashion show, and much more. DJ's will be spinning the entire afternoon and into the evening.

Outdoor Fair

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 12 to 5pm

Sidewalk outside the Bronx Museum of the Arts

Admission: Free

For the opening day of *Street Art Street Life*, the Bronx Museum will sponsor a grand street fair on the sidewalk immediately in front of the Museum. Highlights include live D.J. and performances, arts activities for families, street food, and local artisans.

First Fridays! - High Water in the Bronx

A Squeeze Radio Show *Case*.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3, 6:00 to 10:00 pm

South Wing – Lower Gallery

Admission: Free

This special First Fridays! program will feature the entire roster of talent plus special guests from High Water – an independent Hip Hop record label run by Sucio Smash. Be there as they record a live radio show for later broadcast.

Hosted by **Timm See** (Squeeze Radio Show) with music by **DJ Sucio Smash** (Squeeze Radio Show). And featuring High Water artists: **Sadat X, Fresh Daily, P. Casso, Sputnik Brown** and much more.

Read This Word

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18, 3:00 pm

North Wing—2nd Floor

Admission: \$5.00, free for Bronx Museum members

In an interview with writer and poet Craig Dworkin, editor of *Language to Cover a Page—The Early Writings of Vito Acconci* (MIT, 2006), Vito Acconci will discuss his early poetry and how it influenced the future phases in his rich career.

First Fridays! – Africa2K: The Griots Invazion

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 6:00 to 10:00pm

South Building—Lower Gallery

Admission: Free

Emerging from the concept of Y2K, this Bronx Museum First Fridays! program is a metaphorical expression of modern African culture in the new millennium.

Featuring the screening of “**African Underground: Democracy on Dakar**”, directed by Ben Herson, the film will be followed by a panel discussion with filmmakers and African artists. There will also be a live music performance by **African Underground All Stars** - the world's premier African GLOBAL HIP-HOP group featuring MCs from Africa and the Diaspora.

Panel Discussion: Street / Language

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 3:00 pm

North Building—2nd Floor

Admission: \$5.00, free for Bronx Museum members

For centuries, the sounds, vernaculars and visuals that populate our cities' streets have been sources of undying fascination to artists and writers who see in this plurality not merely a picture of social stratification but a true testament to the wealth of language. STREET/LANGUAGE will feature poet Kenneth Goldsmith, sound artist Kabir Carter, and Vancouver-based writer and performer, Christian Bök in a lively discussion on the role street culture play in their work. The event will culminate in a series of performances by the three participants.

Panelists: Christian Bök, Kabir Carter, Kenneth Goldsmith. Moderated by Sergio Bessa.

Panel Discussion: Street as Site of Globalization

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 7:00 pm

The New School, Tishman Auditorium

Admission Free

Organized in conjunction with Aperture's *Confounding Expectations: Photography in Context Lecture Series*; Parsons The New School for Design and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School.

First Fridays! – Cabiosile pa' Shango!

A Musical Tribute to the Forces of Fire and Healing

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 6:00 to 10:00pm

South Wing – Lower Gallery

Admission: Free

Join the Bronx Museum's First Fridays! musical tribute to the forces of fire and healing. Hosted by Marinieves Alba/ The Zol Lab and featuring live music by Afro-Caribbean group **Illu Aye** with **DJ Laylo**, this event will have you on your feet and inspired.

Illu Aye's dedication to promoting the rich cultural legacy of Africa in the Americas and the Caribbean through performance since 2004 celebrates the connections between the peoples and cultures of the African diaspora. Trained by master musicians and versed in sacred and popular rhythms such as bata, guiro, rumba (Cuba); bomba and plena (Puerto Rico); and palos, salves, and kongos (Dominican Republic), Illu Aye will be bursting with all of your favorite music.

THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS

The flagship cultural institution of The Bronx, founded in 1971, The Bronx Museum of the Arts focuses on 20th-century and contemporary art, while serving the culturally diverse populations of The Bronx and the greater New York metropolitan area. The museum's home on the Grand Concourse is a distinctive contemporary landmark designed by the internationally-renowned firm Arquitectonica.

The Bronx Museum of the Arts maintains a permanent collection of 20th and 21st-century works by artists of African, Asian, and Latin American ancestry. Additionally, the Museum collects works by artists for whom The Bronx has been critical to their artistic practice and development. The Museum's educational offerings spring from these central programs with outreach to children and families as well as adult audiences.

The Bronx Museum of the Arts receives ongoing general operating support from The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs with the cooperation of Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrión, Jr., and the Bronx Delegation of the New York City Council; New York State Council on the Arts; Bronx Delegation of the New York State Assembly; and private supporters.

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