



ETHEREAL and material

DELAWARE CENTER FOR THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS

Acknowledgements

Ethereal & Material is certainly an appropriate theme for the inaugural exhibition in Carole Bieber and Marc Ham Gallery, the largest of the new galleries at the new Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts. For many years, the dream of a new DCCA seemed just that, a dream. Now, thanks to the hard work and generosity of many, that dream has come true—and the new DCCA stands as a tribute to a very special kind of alchemy—the power of art to transform lives and communities.

Like the alchemists, the DCCA seeks to transform the prosaic into the spiritual. Exhibitions and programs at the DCCA present thought-provoking contemporary art in the belief that art reveals something of our lives and the complex world in which we live. It is our hope that, through the exploration and discussion of the issues and ideas underlying contemporary artists' work, we can re-forge connections between individuals and groups in our increasingly specialized and isolated society. And, like the Greek agora or the Roman forum, the new DCCA facility and its programs both literally and figuratively seek to draw the community into dialogue about our common experiences, hopes and aspirations.

Ethereal & Material draws together a diverse group of internationally known and regional artists to explore compelling questions about the human experience. The Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts is indebted to the many artists, galleries, and private collectors who have so generously lent their work to this exhibition. We are especially thankful to the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts for its extraordinary grant which enabled the long term planning for this exhibition, as well as all those in the DCCA's inaugural season in its new facility. We also thank the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation for its generous grant enabling the publication of this catalogue documenting the exhibition, and Christine Celano for her handsome design. The DCCA also wants to acknowledge Douglas Maxwell for his introduction that so thoughtfully sets the tone for the exhibition. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the hard work of all the DCCA staff in support of this exhibition. I want to particularly thank preparator John Shipman for his many labors to assure the careful installation of the work and, most especially, curator Dede Young for her insightful conceptualization and tireless implementation of this effort to make the ethereal, material.

Stephen L. Lanier
Executive Director
Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts

Introduction

THE TIMING OF *Ethereal & Material* could not be better, not only as we enter a new millennium, but also as we reflect on the artistic contributions of the Twentieth Century. From a formal point of view I believe the last century will be noted for the enormously expanded range of materials and space that encompass almost anything not traditionally associated with the making or presentation of art.

In *Ethereal & Material* many of the artists demonstrate not only their comfort with but also their preference for non-traditional materials such as polyresin, hummingbird, satin pillow (Celaya), wool and thread (Trager), glass and intestines (Neff), silver and liver of sulfur (Bradshaw) and tissue paper, breath, thread, magnets (Bierniller), to name a few.

Although the materials and spaces utilized by artists to exhibit their work are different than in previous centuries, artists have always been concerned with space and materials especially as each has led to a heightening of symbolic meaning. The early Renaissance, both in the north and south of Europe, provides an excellent example. In Flanders, Jan Van Eyck, in works like his *Crucifixion* and *Last Judgment* diptych utilized his invention of oil-based paint to begin a tradition of precise detail which gave a new vibrancy to his religious landscapes. In Italy, around the same time, Domenico Veneziano implemented the *Sacred Conversation* in his *Madonna and Child with John the Baptist* where John looks out at the viewer and with a hand gesture introduces us to the Madonna and child. With this,

the artist ushers in a new sense of realism in painting. In each development the effect was to direct the viewer to entertain a new religious meaning that signaled a new dimension of heightened spirituality.

Like Van Eyck and Veneziano, the contemporary artists in *Ethereal & Material* are using space and materials to create new meaning, albeit that meaning is not necessarily religious, but rather is transformative. So the choice of materials becomes a means to an end, the end becoming an elevated and expansive sense of meaning. Thus, when several of the artists—Kahn, Janowich and Stickney-Gibson—choose to make abstract paintings using traditional materials, each, in his or her own way, expresses their own spirituality through abstract techniques that act as a vehicle for communicating a relationship between the personal and the universal. Thus, we as viewers can share some meaning in common with the artists and are also given license to look into ourselves and reflect personally about the meaning of the work.

For me, it is this relationship of the personal and the universal that provides the thread that runs through *Ethereal & Material*. Specifically the overall theme of the exhibition seems to be about how we fend our way through this thing we call life, which encompasses, as well, the contemplation of death and dying. It seems to me that this requires continual contemplation of our spiritual selves, and *Ethereal & Material* provides the creative and symbolic means for furthering this journey for all of us.

Douglas Maxwell
New York
August 2000

Ron Janowich

Untitled

1999

oil on photograph,
14 x 11 in.



(Cover)

Sarah Biemiller

Breath

2000

Tissue paper, breath,
thread, magnets
dimensions variable

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