

PRESS RELEASE

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*WCMA announces opening events for  
Asco: Elite of the Obscure*



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Williamstown, Mass. – The Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) invites the public to celebrate the opening of the exhibition *Asco: Elite of the Obscure, A Retrospective, 1972–1987* on March 2 and March 3. This two-day celebration features an opening party and a half-day symposium. Both events are free and open to the public, however reservations are strongly recommended for the symposium as space is limited.

The festivities begin at WCMA on **Friday, March 2** at 4:30 p.m. Guests will have the opportunity to join the exhibition curators, C. Ondine Chavoya, Associate Professor of Art and Latina/o Studies at Williams College, and Rita Gonzalez, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art at Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), in the galleries for a tour of the exhibition. A wine and hors d'oeuvres reception with artists Sean Carrillo, Harry Gamboa, Jr., Willie F. Herrón III, Louis Jacinto, and Patssi Valdez—all artists featured in the exhibition—will be held from 5:30 to 7:00 pm.

The celebration continues on **Saturday, March 3** with a symposium at Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall on the Williams campus from 1 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. This half-day event will feature lively conversations with the exhibition curators, Asco artists, and scholars Colin Gunckel, Amelia Jones, Amalia Mesa-Bains, and Mario Ontiveros. These key figures from the fields of art, art history, and Latina/o studies will discuss how Asco developed as a group during a period of tremendous youthful activism in the United States and across the Americas, and Asco's role in challenging and expanding the parameters of art, cinema, performance, and muralism alongside a social nexus that involved feminism, the Chicano civil rights movement, and queer politics.

To reserve a space for this event, please email [wcmareervations@gmail.com](mailto:wcmareervations@gmail.com) or call (413) 597-4545. A detailed schedule is available at [wcma.williams.edu](http://wcma.williams.edu).

"Collaboration and experimentation are central themes running through the course of Asco's history and creative output," said Chavoya, a specialist in contemporary art with expertise in Chicano art and intermedia practices, such as performance and conceptual art. "There is much to be learned from and explored through this dynamic history and I hope that the greater Williams and regional community will see how forms of collaboration can strengthen the art community."

Chavoya has just completed teaching a Winter Study Course at Williams that exposes students to the inner workings of mounting an exhibition of this scale. He adds that, like Asco's work, "there is an important group dynamic to exhibiting art—from the museum team that works together to launch the show, to major institutions like LACMA and WCMA working together, to a symposium that brings together the artists and scholars, collaboration is at the center of it all."

### **About the Exhibition**

*Asco: Elite of the Obscure* is the first retrospective of the Chicano performance and conceptual art group Asco (1972–1987). The exhibition was co-organized by WCMA and

the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). It is on view at WCMA from February 4 through July 29, 2012.

Geographically and culturally segregated from the still-nascent Los Angeles contemporary art scene and aesthetically at odds with the emerging Chicano art movement, Asco artists united to explore and exploit the unlimited media of the conceptual. Creating art by any means necessary—often using their bodies and guerilla tactics—Asco merged activism and performance and, in doing so, pushed the boundaries of what Chicano art might encompass. *Asco: Elite of the Obscure* includes nearly 150 artworks, featuring video, sculpture, painting, performance ephemera and documentation, collage, correspondence art, photography (including their signature No Movies, or invented film stills), and a series of works commissioned on occasion of the exhibition.

### **About the scholars**

Colin Guncel is an Assistant Professor in American Culture, Screen Arts, and Cultures and Latina/o Studies at the University of Michigan. He was co-curator of the exhibition *Vexing: Female Voices from East L.A. Punk* for the Claremont Museum of Art, California (2008) and is currently Associate Editor of the *A Ver: Revisioning Art History* monograph series published by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Amelia Jones is Professor and Grierson Chair in Visual Culture in the Department of Art History and Communications Studies at McGill University, Montreal. She specializes in many different aspects of modern and contemporary art, including feminism and art; performance, body, and video art; and Dada, and has published extensively in each of these areas, including *Self/Image: Technology, Representations, and the Contemporary Subject* (2006).

Amalia Mesa-Bains is Professor Emerita of Visual and Public Art at California State University, Monterey Bay. An artist and cultural critic, Mesa-Bains has worked throughout her career to define a Chicano and Latino aesthetic in the United States and Latin America. Her artwork, primarily interpretations of traditional Chicano altars, has been exhibited nationally and internationally, including at the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C.; the Whitney Museum of American Art at Phillip Morris, El Museo del Barrio, and the Queens Museum of Art, all in New York; the Mexican Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, both in San Francisco; the Williams College Museum of Art in Williamstown, Massachusetts; the Musée Art Contemporain in Lyon, France; the Kulturhuset in Stockholm; and the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. She received the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1992. Her artwork is part of WCMA's permanent collection.

Mario Ontiveros is an Assistant Professor in Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His research and writings focus on critical art practices since 1970, examining issues of social belonging, political obligation, and ethical responsibility.

*Asco: Elite of the Obscure* is organized by the Williams College Museum of Art and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. It is made possible in part by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Support for these programs has been provided by the Williams College Art Department, Latina/o Studies Program, and Lecture Committee.

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