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**Public Art Fund presents...**

***Semiprecious***

**Sculptures by Carolyn Castaño, Jennifer Cohen,  
Luis Gispert, Kirsten Hassenfeld, and Marc Swanson**

*At MetroTech Center in Brooklyn*

**September 29, 2004 – August 31, 2005**

Public Art Fund is proud to present a new exhibition of contemporary art at MetroTech Center. *Semiprecious* features works by Carolyn Castaño, Jennifer Cohen, Luis Gispert, Kirsten Hassenfeld, and Marc Swanson, each of whom use visually dazzling materials to explore themes of artifice, seduction, desire, exoticism, and fantasy. With a critical eye toward the precious object, these artists explore the elements of melancholy, romance, and sensuality that lie beneath the sparkling surface.

**Carolyn Castaño's** glittering depictions of women, animals, birds, and flowers examine beauty, femininity, gender roles, and the relationship between nature and artifice. Castaño is best known for her mixed-media works on paper, in which she renders her seductive and flamboyantly colorful imagery against a white background. She embellishes her subjects with swirling calligraphic filigree, feathers, collaged fashion magazine cut-outs, brooches, fake gems, and other ornamentation. Elegant but bordering on garish, Castaño's mixed-media works portray natural beauty overwhelmed by over-the-top decoration.

For the lobby of One MetroTech Center, Castaño will create *Nightbird (A Memory of Things Lost and Found Again)*, her first sculptural work. Bringing the outside indoors, *Nightbird* is a bejeweled peacock, painted in rich, metallic shades of blue, silver, and black. The peacock's closed tail, which drapes over the edge of the pedestal, will be covered in gems, crystal brooches, and cameos found at flea markets and elsewhere. This exotic bird has made frequent appearances throughout the course of art history—most famously in the work of Art Nouveau illustrator Aubrey Beardsley—often as a symbol of beauty, vanity, and femininity, despite the fact that it is the male who has colorful plumage.

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**Jennifer Cohen**'s work captures a sense of experimentation and love of materials. She isolates small moments of dramatic reactions and transformations in material objects. Inspired by special effects and props, Cohen uses low-tech materials to investigate the theatrical possibilities of organic and chemical processes—the ways that static objects can be, as she puts it, “filled with the stuff of life.” She has made several recent sculptures whose exteriors change over the course of time or when various materials are applied, often drawing in viewers as active participants in her visual experiments

At MetroTech Center, Cohen will install *Diamond*, a cast bronze sculpture of a cobra, whose design and decoration are linked to the jewelry style of the art deco period. Covered in scales, the length of *Diamond*'s six-foot-long body will be unpolished and slightly chemically treated to accelerate the oxidation process from bronze to green. The cobra's diamond-shaped head is rendered in highly polished bronze. For Cohen, the work refers to the desired transformative properties of jewels, and the way that precious objects change over time. Even the snake's body is positioned in the shape of a diamond, with the end of its tail near its mouth. Decades of advertising have made familiar the expression “a diamond is forever.” In a similar vein, the cyclical gesture of a snake eating itself is a mythological symbol of eternity and regeneration.

**Luis Gispert** has formulated a seductive urban aesthetic, creating sculptures that incorporate objects identified with hip-hop culture—turntables, chrome tire rims, gold jewelry, rhinestones, fake fur, and boom boxes—into semi-usable furniture designs. Gispert also makes photography and video works, in which he combines the dazzling iconography of hip-hop culture with art historical tropes and visual references to movies, music videos, and television. His best-known photographic series depicts cheerleaders—sporting flashy gold chains and painted fingernails—frozen in graceful poses borrowed in part from Renaissance art.

Gispert's work for MetroTech Center is a sculpture of a three boom boxes that doubles as a bench. Made in chrome-plated bronze and buffed to a gleaming silver sheen, like ostentatious tire rims, *Laid Back in the Cut* is a quasi-functional monument to nearby Fulton Street Mall, downtown Brooklyn's busy shopping district. An urban center for decades, Fulton Street Mall is mentioned in the lyrics of several hip-hop songs. The boom box, or ghetto blaster, played an integral part in the history of hip hop and rap, transforming the musical forms into mainstream genres with mass appeal. The portable sound system was, as Gispert puts it, “a contemporary campfire for urbanites to gather around and express themselves through their versions of storytelling (rap) and dancing (breaking).”

**Kirsten Hassenfeld** describes her sculptures and installations as “escapes into the world of fantasy and daydreaming.” Using clear vellum, paper, and other non-precious materials, she fashions ornate and elegant objects that she installs on pedestals or hangs from the ceiling like strands of gems. Hassenfeld begins her works on AutoCAD, molding materials into the precise, angular geometry of gems and crystals, and then adds painstaking hand-made details onto the larger structures. The finished sculptures often resemble Fabergé eggs or Tiffany stained glass, in part the result of the artist’s stint working at Sotheby’s. According to Hassenfeld, her installations function as “small acts of hope and celebration, ways of making your own beauty.”

Rising out of the central lawn of MetroTech Commons, *Obelisk* will playfully address issues of luxury, ownership, sexuality, and public displays of wealth. The obelisk is a familiar form, symbolizing masculine power and conquest throughout history. In this case, Hassenfeld will give the obelisk a make-over, incorporating traditionally feminine elements of filigree and ornamentation. Replacing the heavy stone typically used in such monumental objects with translucent milk-glass acrylic Plexiglas, Hassenfeld creates an object that is both a monument and a bauble, blurring the boundary between public and domestic treasures. The sculpture will sit on a white wooden plinth embellished with both laser cutwork and festooned in chains, cameos, and other jewel-inspired decorations. Cutaway arches on each of the plinth’s four sides will reveal a single Plexiglas rhinestone, tucked away underneath the sculpture.

**Marc Swanson** uses a variety of materials—from crystals and glitter to lumber and deerskin—to make sculptures that examine renewal, personal history, mortality, and rites of passage. His last solo exhibition, “Live Free or Die,” presented a loosely autobiographical narrative about the artist’s home state and childhood upbringing. Through a series of sculptures and installations, Swanson explored male bonding rituals, often through traditional masculine pastimes of hunting and fishing. Swanson has developed an artistic language that seeks to merge his New Hampshire upbringing (his father was an Eagle Scout and marine) with his present day identity.

For MetroTech Center, Swanson will install a sculpture of a life-size deer, entirely encrusted in rhinestone crystals. Called *Fits and Starts*, the deer is portrayed mid-leap, its hind legs in the air and its head turned, as if glancing back at a person or another animal in pursuit. Swanson, who views the sculpture in terms of fantasy and desire, notes that the deer is an alluring and elusive creature that is simultaneously darting away and frozen in time. The graceful sculpture suggests an unattainable object of adoration, trying to flee those who wish to approach. Swanson has made several related deer-head sculptures, which he calls his “surrogates,” encrusting the conventional hunter’s trophy with dazzling rhinestones and hanging it on the wall.

**MetroTech Center** is located in Downtown Brooklyn between Jay Street and Flatbush Avenue at Myrtle Avenue. Viewing hours are dawn to dusk daily for outdoor works, Monday through Friday 8am to 6pm for Carolyn Castaño's *Nightbird* in One MetroTech. Subway: A, C, F to Jay Street/Borough Hall, exit at Myrtle Promenade; R to Lawrence Street.

**Public Art Fund** is New York's leading presenter of artists' projects, new commissions, installations, and exhibitions in public spaces. With twenty-five years of experience and an international reputation, the Public Art Fund identifies, coordinates, and realizes a diversity of major projects by both established and emerging artists throughout New York City. By bringing artworks outside the traditional context of museums and galleries, the Public Art Fund provides a unique platform for an unparalleled public encounter with the art of our time.

Public Art Fund is a non-profit arts organization supported in part with public funds from The New York State Council on the Arts, a State Agency, and the City of New York Department of Cultural Affairs and through generous contributions from corporations, foundations, and individuals.

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