

Foundation for Contemporary Arts

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**EDWARD ALBEE AND MARIAN SELDES TO GIVE READING OF
“OCCUPANT”
A PLAY ABOUT LOUISE NEVELSON
TO BENEFIT THE FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS
WEDNESDAY, MAY 25, 2005**

New York, NY, May 12, 2005 – Edward Albee will give a one-performance only reading of “Occupant,” a play about sculptor Louise Nevelson, with famed stage actress and long-time colleague Marian Seldes. Lawrence Sacharow, who has worked with both Mr. Albee and Ms. Seldes in the past, will direct. The performance will benefit the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, a non-profit arts organization based in New York City whose mission is to support emerging performance and visual artists. “We are thrilled to present such a special evening,” says the Foundation’s Executive Director Stacy Tenenbaum. “This is truly a once-in-a-lifetime performance featuring two of the greatest names in theater.”

The reading will take place at 7:00 P.M. on May 25 at the Diane von Furstenberg Studio, 389 West 12th Street, following a cocktail reception starting at 6:00 P.M. Tickets for this very special evening are \$1,000 (performance only) and \$2,000 (performance followed by a seated dinner with Mr. Albee and Ms. Seldes). All attendees will receive a limited-edition, hard-bound printing of Edward Albee’s “Occupant,” published by the Foundation in celebration of the evening, signed by Mr. Albee and Ms. Seldes.

The benefit host is Diane von Furstenberg. The Benefit Committee is: Anne Bass, Paula Cooper, Douglas S. Cramer, Stephen and Kathy Graham, Agnes Gund, Bill Katz, Dorothy Lichtenstein, Matthew Marks, Allison Sarofim and Alexandra Shiva.

Mr. Albee has long been considered one of the leading American playwrights. He has been awarded three Pulitzer Prizes, three Tony Awards, the Gold Medal in Drama from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the Kennedy Center Honors and the National Medal of Arts. His award winning early play, “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” recently reopened on Broadway to rave reviews and sell-out performances. It was announced this week that Mr. Albee will receive the Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement at this year’s awards ceremony.

Ms. Seldes, one of Mr. Albee’s favorite actresses, has appeared in numerous Broadway and off-Broadway productions. She has won the Tony Award for her performance in “A Delicate Balance” and has been nominated four additional times. She is the winner of several other awards including: the Drama Desk Award, the Obie Award, the Outer Critics Circle Award, the Sustained Achievement Lucille Lortel Award and the Edwin Booth Lifetime Achievement Award. Ms. Seldes has had roles in many of Mr. Albee’s plays, including “The Play About the

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Baby” and “Three Tall Women.” She will appear next in Terence McNally’s new play, “Dedication or the Stuff of Dreams,” at Primary Stages.

“Occupant” was first staged at the Signature Theater in New York in winter 2002 with Anne Bancroft as Louise Nevelson and Neal Huff as The Man, but never opened as Ms. Bancroft fell ill. The playwright and Nevelson met in the 1960s and remained friends until her death in 1988. The two-character play is constructed as a dialogue between Nevelson and an interviewer, and chronicles a woman fighting against the traditions and conventions into which she was forced in order to find her own path in life. The narrative ranges from her childhood, to her unlikely marriage and subsequent abandonment of her husband and child, as well as her creative years.

Louise Nevelson, born Leah Berliawsky, emigrated from Russia to Maine with her family in 1905 and married shipping magnate Charles Nevelson in 1920. She began exhibiting her work in the 1930s and became a major force in the modern art world throughout the mid and late 20th century, widely known for her abstract wood “assemblages,” large sculptures constructed from found objects and usually painted black, white or gold. Her work has appeared in many museums and galleries around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Nevelson’s persona was equally as intriguing and celebrated as her work — she dressed dramatically and was immediately recognizable by a headscarf and multiple pairs of sable eyelashes. “She fascinated me,” said Mr. Albee. “Anybody who saw Nevelson parading down the street in one of her costumes wouldn’t say, ‘that is Nevelson,’ but ‘that is the Nevelson,’— the work. She wasn’t a shrinking violet! She was conscientious about making sure that we saw the two worlds [public and private] were the same thing.”

Mr. Albee added that “Occupant” is about “Leah Berliawsky becoming Louise Nevelson,” but also that “the play is less about Louise than it is about how we invent ourselves. How we invent, reinvent and create ourselves, and the difference between the private person and the public image. How we become that which, with any luck, we wish to become, whether that’s wise or not. Many, many creative people do this. I am fascinated by the great difference between the public persona and the private.”

Founded and guided by artists, the Foundation for Contemporary Arts mission is to encourage, sponsor, and promote innovative work in the arts created and presented by individuals, groups, and organizations. Artists working in dance, music, theater/performance art, poetry, and the visual arts are awarded nonrestrictive grants for projects of their own choosing by a nomination process; arts organizations receive project or general operating support by application. Since the Foundation’s inception in 1963, over five hundred artists have donated work to raise funds for these grants, and just as many grants have been awarded. In 2004, the Foundation awarded a total of \$250,000 in grants to individuals and arts organizations.

The current Directors of the Foundation are: Brooke Alexander, Jasper Johns, Julian Lethbridge, Elizabeth Murray, and Phill Niblock.

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