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HARVARD UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN AND HARVARD ART MUSEUMS ANNOUNCE COLLABORATIVE EXHIBITION

The Divine Comedy consists of major installations by **Olafur Eliasson**, **Tomás Saraceno**, and **Ai Weiwei** that explore intersections of art, design, and the public domain

CAMBRIDGE, MA (March 11, 2011)—The Harvard University Graduate School of Design and the Harvard Art Museums are pleased to announce an unprecedented three-part exhibition that addresses the converging domains of contemporary art and design practice. Entitled *The Divine Comedy*, this exhibition is comprised of major installations by internationally acclaimed artists Olafur Eliasson, Tomás Saraceno, and Ai Weiwei, and is on display March 21 through May 17, 2011, at the Graduate School of Design, the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, and the Northwest Science Building.

“We are extremely excited to host these path-breaking artists and their explorations of how art and design can powerfully engage the public domain, an area of increasing focus at the Graduate School of Design,” said Mohsen Mostafavi, Dean, and Alexander and Victoria Wiley Professor of Design at the Graduate School of Design.

The Divine Comedy borrows its title from Dante Alighieri’s epic medieval poem in which the author presents a vision of earthly existence as an allegorical journey through the realms of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Dante’s masterwork is widely considered to be the first poetic presentation in which scientific and philosophical themes were given central place. This exhibition explores the political dimensions of History (Weiwei), Mind (Eliasson), and Cosmos (Saraceno), and how these aspects of contemporary experience are being engaged by art and design speculation today.

Exhibition curator Sanford Kwinter, Professor of Architectural Theory and Criticism at the Graduate School of Design, notes that “these three artists reflect an important new habit of thought and work that is emerging today in a hybrid realm between activism, art, and design. It is here that aesthetic practice can be seen as inseparable from the production of knowledge in our society. The presentation of their work within a major research university thus operates both as a kind of homecoming and as an inherent challenge to the boundaries on speculation that still persist within the walls of academia.”

Olafur Eliasson

Harvard University Graduate School of Design, Gund Hall, 48 Quincy Street,
Cambridge, MA

Public hours: Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm; Saturday and Sunday, noon–4pm

Olafur Eliasson’s contribution, *Three to now*, engages the tacit forms of experience and understanding that underlie both scientific theorization and our knowledge of the exterior world. This installation at the Graduate School of Design consists of 55 technical instruments, machines, and other objects that challenge or subvert the trusted and familiar routines of perception by which we order our comprehension of the physical world.

Tomás Saraceno

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Terrace, 24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA

Public hours: Monday–Friday, 10am–5pm; Saturday and Sunday, 1–5pm

Tomás Saraceno is widely known for his rethinking of urban geography and its potential migration into the physical and political atmosphere over our heads. His inflatable sculpture, *Cloud City*—part planet, part vehicle, and by definition humanly inhabitable—is embedded with solar technology and sensors that record and interact with aspects of the wider environment. The sculpture has the potential to launch and travel through the atmosphere while harvesting data and communicating back to the installation site.

Ai Weiwei

Northwest Science Building, B1 Level, 52 Oxford Street, Cambridge, MA

Public hours: Monday–Friday, 7am–10pm

Chinese artist and architect Ai Weiwei’s installation, *Untitled* (2011), memorializes the thousands of schoolchildren who died as a result of the major earthquake in China’s Sichuan Province in May 2008. A site-specific work of 5,335 identical school backpacks represents the exact number of children who died during the earthquake and in the subsequent collapses of poorly constructed school buildings. A related sound piece by the dissident artist, a voice recording reciting the names of the victims, titled *Remembrance* (2010), will play in the space. The counting of the student earthquake victims and collection of details about their deaths are the products of a “citizens’ investigation” conducted by Weiwei and his studio, leading to growing government censure.

Event

An opening event will be held on Friday, April 8, 2011, at the Graduate School of Design’s Piper Auditorium, beginning at 5pm. The exhibition and the event are free and open to the public. **Seating is limited: individuals attending the Graduate School of Design’s Open House program and the school’s current students, faculty, and staff will be admitted to the auditorium first.**

Publication and Website

A brochure will accompany this exhibition. The Graduate School of Design will host a website at www.thedivinecomedy.org; a mobile version will be available.

Credits

The Divine Comedy is organized by the Harvard University Graduate School of Design and the Harvard Art Museums. The exhibition is made possible by the Graham Gund Exhibition Fund.

Curated by Sanford Kwinter, Professor of Architectural Theory and Criticism, Harvard University Graduate School of Design. Directed by Dan Borelli, Office of Exhibitions, Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

About the Harvard University Graduate School of Design

The Harvard University Graduate School of Design is dedicated to the education and development of design professionals in architecture, landscape, urban planning, and urban design. With a commitment to design excellence that demands the skillful manipulation of form and technology and draws inspiration from a broad range of social, environmental, and cultural issues, the Graduate School of Design provides leadership for shaping the built environment of the 21st century.

www.gsd.harvard.edu

About the Harvard Art Museums

The Harvard Art Museums, among the world's leading art institutions, comprise three museums (Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler) and four research centers (Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. The collections include approximately 250,000 objects in all media, ranging in date from antiquity to the present and originating in Europe, North America, North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Integral to Harvard University and the wider community, the art museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and other visitors. For more than a century they have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in this country.

www.harvardartmuseums.org