

San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art



**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Tony May: Old Technology  
40-Year Retrospective Exhibition Opens November 2010**



Tony May, *ICA Periscope Lantern/Marquee* (maquette), 2010, Courtesy of the Artist

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**Tony May: Old Technology**

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**SAN JOSE, CA – September 2010** – The first large-scale retrospective exhibition of works by San Jose artist Tony May opens in November 2010 at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA). This comprehensive survey is on view through February 2011 and includes May's conceptually-rooted, site-responsive and often whimsical artwork created over the past 40 years.



Tony May, *T. Tree House*, 1999 – 2009, Installation view, Hawaii, Courtesy of the Artist

By presenting carefully curated pieces from public and private collections, May's own archive, new works and recreations of past temporal or site-specific projects that have been lost over time, the exhibition brings long-overdue recognition to May as a Bay Area art treasure in his own right. An exhibition opening reception will be held at the ICA on Friday, November 12<sup>th</sup> from 6pm – 8pm.

“Since coming to the ICA ten years ago, I have wanted to present Tony’s work,” says ICA Executive Director, Cathy Kimball. “Throughout our 30-year history, the ICA has dedicated resources, time and space to exceptional but under-recognized, mid-career artists in an effort to generate meaningful exposure for their work. And, with that focus, Tony was an appropriately deserving and exciting candidate for this opportunity,” explains Kimball.

May uses a wide range of media in his artmaking. His work often takes the form of site-responsive installations and has a strong leaning toward the conceptual, the quasi-functional and the whimsical. May's dedication to craftsmanship and personal mantra of encouraging hands-on involvement of the artist in all aspects of the creative process has been a trademark approach throughout his long career. Borrowing from his childhood experiences growing up on a farm in rural Wisconsin as a dyed-in-the-wool D-I-Yer and tinkerer, May has spent a lifetime recycling and re-interpreting familiar ideas, concepts and materials including books, and ordinary household objects in his work.

This expansive exhibition will frame and illuminate the artist's longtime personal and professional obsessions and inform and delight visitors at every turn.

## Paintings

May is one of the Bay Area's most notable photo-realist painters. May's paintings are photo-based and documentary in nature. They attempt to capture, in compact form, what May considers to be significant objects, places or moments in time and preserve them for future reflection. The exhibition will include a selection of paintings from the artist's *Home Improvement* series created from the 1970's through the 1980's when May was renovating his home in downtown San Jose. Pieces from the artist's *T.House* series created in the early 1990's which document the construction of May's *T-House* in his San Jose backyard, and several pieces from the *Works Lost in France* series dating from 2000 to 2001 will also be shown.



Tony May, *Minor Home Improvements (Soap Saving Tip)*, 1993, Acrylic on masonite, Collection of Dr. G. Austen Conkey

## Site-Specific Installations

Two site-specific installations will also be on view to showcase May's unique approach to installation art. The first, a large-scale hand-crafted T-shaped structure entitled *ICA Periscope/Lantern/Marquee* is fabricated using bamboo, recycled plastic, mirrors and lighting. The work will be installed above the doorway on the exterior of the gallery. Created by May as the calling card for the show, this MacGyver-esque showpiece invites visitors to view the work and their surroundings both inside and outside the gallery in wonderfully unexpected ways. This piece recalls the elaborate installation piece May created in collaboration with artist Bob Jones during their joint residency at the Capp Street Project in San Francisco in 1985.

The second large-scale installation piece on loan from the San Jose Museum of Art is *Variable Book Construction (Bookmobile)*, 1991-1995. Commissioned by the San Jose Museum of Art for the entrance lobby of the new wing of the museum, this interactive piece is made with books. Its title plays on the earlier function of the museum's historic wing as the city library. It will take on a new character in its adaptation for the space at the ICA.

## Sculpture

A number of May's sculptural works representing key artistic periods in his career will be on view including altered found objects, lanterns and maquettes. May's structure, the *T. Tree House* will take center-stage in the show's sculpture gallery. Originally designed for an exhibition in Hawaii and built in



Tony May, *Book Track Light*, 1973, Mixed Media, Collection of Ralph and Sheila Pickett

collaboration with artist Lonny Tomono, this structure has been carefully deconstructed and reconstructed for this exhibition. The *T. Tree House* refers to an ongoing work, *T. House*, a structure Tony has built in his backyard.

Renny Pritiken notes in his exhibition catalogue essay, "The *T. House* in Tony May's backyard should be considered along with David Ireland's house as a major Bay Area icon of the past 25 years. It is an amalgam of many things: a work shed, a studio, a gigantic lantern, a greenhouse, a Japanese teahouse, a backyard garage."

In conjunction with the exhibition, the ICA will be publishing a limited edition catalogue with an essay by Renny Pritiken, Director of the Richard L. Nelson Gallery and Fine Arts Collection at UC Davis. The catalogue will be for sale at the ICA and presented as a gift to May's many collectors who contributed works to the exhibition.

Tony May, Emeritus Professor of Art, taught at San Jose State University from 1967 until 2005. He has also taught at the University of Wisconsin- Sheboygan, Sheffield City Polytechnic in Sheffield, England and Santa Clara University in Santa Clara, California. Born in Mineral Point, WI in 1942, he received his MFA degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison where he studied with Warrington Colescott, Steven French and Don Reitz.

Tony May's work has been shown widely in California including shows at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco Art Institute, 80 Langton Street, Capp Street Project, San Jose Museum of Art and the deSaisset Museum. He has also exhibited nationally and internationally in England, France, Japan and Thailand.

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The San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) is an energetic art space located in downtown San Jose dedicated to making contemporary art accessible and exciting to audiences of all ages and backgrounds. Exhibitions are presented in three galleries that display the most current, relevant and often challenging art from the region, the nation and the world. The ICA is activated by opening receptions, South First Friday gallery walks, after-dark programming in the front windows, panel discussions, printmaking workshops, brown bag lunches and impromptu conversations in the galleries. Admission to the gallery is always free.

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