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Hung Liu, *A Third World* 1993. Oil on canvas with gold leaf on wood. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum Purchase, with funds provided by the Twentieth-Century Art Acquisition Fund, Jill and John C. Bishop, Jr., and Lillian and Jon B. Lovelace.



Larry Sultan, *Woman in Curls* 2002. Chromogenic print. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum Purchase, with funds provided by the Wallis Foundation.

***Know Thyself***  
***SBMA Uses Permanent Collection to Explore Identities in Fall Exhibition***

***November 3, 2007 – August 31, 2008***

**March 18, 2008**—The Santa Barbara Museum of Art highlights its collection of contemporary art from Asia, Europe, and the Americas and explores the theme of identity as both a collective consciousness and individual reflection. The aptly-named ***Identities*** exhibition includes approximately 25 works, some very large in scale, dating from 1981 to 2003, and represents a broad range of media, including paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, and photography.

The artists featured in this presentation use the visual arts to express personal feelings and broader perceptions about racial, sexual, and cultural identity. A compelling example of the exploration of cultural association is the painting ***A Third World*** 1993, by Chinese émigré artist Hung Liu. In this self-portrait, Liu addresses the conflict between two radically different ideologies—capitalism and communism. Clashing worldviews dramatize the profound ramifications of relocation on personal

and cultural identity. The gold-leaf third eye, which symbolizes the inner world in Eastern thought, is in the shape of San Francisco as it was first mapped. “San Francisco” has been translated in Chinese as “old gold mountain,” and it is used in this case to suggest San Francisco’s status as a main destination for Chinese immigrants. By contrast, the subject dons a red scarf and Mao button representing Communist China.



Nelson Leirner, Untitled, 2003, From the series, *Right You Are If You Think You Are* 2003. Digital print of an electronically manipulated photograph of an original collage. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum Purchase, with funds provided by Larry and Astrid Hammett.

A more macro view of national identity is represented by the work of Nelson Leirner which is based on an original collage of stickers of Minnie and Mickey Mouse and Day of the Dead skeletons shaped to mimic the continental outline of the Americas. From a series entitled *Right You Are If You Think You Are* Leirner’s fusion of mass culture icons with elements of high modernism, primary colors, for example, communicates the complexity and diversity of the Americas. His painting reminds us of the simple but profound idea that the one’s interpretation of the Americas depends on one’s context.



Alison Saar, *Tara Finna* 1991. Wood, tin, tar, and found objects. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of the SBMA Friends of Contemporary Art and partial purchase with the Twentieth-Century Art Acquisition Fund in celebration of the Museum's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The exhibition also turns an eye inward for a more personal view of racial identity with sculpture by Alison Saar. Often larger-than-life size, her rough-hewn figures, carved with a chainsaw, blend the monumentality and strength of Michelangelo's stone-bound slaves with the expressive power of African sculpture. Her work tends to simultaneously acknowledge the example of American assemblage and the rich tradition of African and African-American sculpture first learned from her mother, the artist Bettye Saar.

Saar's *Tara Finna* represented in the *Identities* exhibition, presents a prone figure depicting urban poverty and homelessness. At the margins of society, this mute and faceless person lies below our sight line. The earthen colors and distinct patterns of the pants resemble African textiles while the use of nails may allude to Kongo power figures, which release energy each time a nail is driven into them. The metal sheathing on the body is made up of the tin roofs collected from urban demolition sites. From the nails to the tin, each of Saar's strategic artistic elements come together to address African-American experience in the contemporary United States, proving how the human body is a powerful site for the exploration of personal and collective identity.

Other highlights of the exhibition include Carrie Mae Weems' works from the *Aint Jokin'* series, *Black Woman with Childen* 1986, and *Black Man with Waterson* 1987, addressing common historical racial stereotypes, while Catherine Opie's photograph of a transgendered individual calls into question conventional perceptions about sexual identity.

This exhibition is made possible through the generous support of Jill and John C. Bishop, Jr. and SBMA Friends of Contemporary Art.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that provides internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

***Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA. Open Tuesday - Sunday  
11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday. Free every Sunday. 805.963.4364 [www.sbma.net](http://www.sbma.net)***