McCLAIN
GALLERY

MATERIAL BEAUTY:
MATTER & SPIRIT

NOVEMBER 7, 2026 – JANUARY 9, 2027

CHRISTIAN ECKART
TRACEY EMIN
SAM GILLIAM
DOROTHY HOOD
JUN KANEKO
ROBERT KUSHNER
JULIAN SCHNABEL
SALLE WERNER VAUGHN

McClain Gallery is pleased to present ***Material Beauty: Matter & Spirit***, a group exhibition of works exploring how material and space can gesture toward the ineffable. Featuring **Christian Eckart, Tracey Emin, Sam Gilliam, Dorothy Hood, Jun Kaneko, Robert Kushner, Julian Schnabel**, and **Salle Werner Vaughn,** artists with long histories of innovation and extensive museum representation, the exhibition gathers practices in which matter is not only the means to create an object, but a passage to somewhere beyond our plane. Utilizing pigment, fabric, clay, and light, these works suggest beauty is more than an aesthetic experience; instead, they posit that its perception could alter consciousness should the viewer allow material to resonate with spirit. Many of these works, realized at near-monumental scale, seek to be encountered rather than simply viewed. The exhibition is a meditation on art's capacity to lift us beyond ordinary life into a state of transcendence and inner stillness.

Through pigmentation and staining, draping and bending, firing and electrifying, each work points to its maker's action: an ambitious and often physically demanding push against the limits of traditional mediums. The grouping draws new parallels between disparate ways of working and highlights the tension between control and chance, evidence of the post-war moment when the act of making became the artist's focus and material became something to be experienced, melded, and even yielded to. The artists here take up that ambition using their own methods: Hood's expansive fields of cosmic color, Gilliam's canvases bound, suspended and unfurling, Eckart's abstracted devotional images, Kushner's patient ornament, the slow transformation of Kaneko's ceramics in the kiln. Before these works, the viewer stands and feels the scale in the body before the mind can catch up.

Included in the exhibition is a major painting by **Dorothy Hood**, *Untitled* (1970s). Working outside New York's art scene, Hood developed her own language of psychologically charged abstraction, paintings that reveal the fevered visions of her psyche using often surrealist vernacular. Her work serves as a space for perceptual experience rather than just a means of depicting the world. At colossal scale, Hood's *Untitled* is exactly that kind of space: a heroic gesture that draws us into a saturated dreamscape, engulfing the viewer whole. **Salle Werner Vaughn**, of a younger generation of Houston surrealists than Hood, describes her work as being about a world we know exists but cannot really see. Vaughn nods, wryly, to Euclidean space, and in the next stroke completely leaves it behind, as in *Mist* (1995) where a perfect three-dimensional pearl floats in moody pigment that was poured and left to pool

across the canvas. Whether through veils of thin pigment, patinated bronze or found object sculptures, Vaughn allows that unseen world to materialize in the round
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Sam Gilliam's *After Micro W.* (1982-1998) is exemplary of the artist's genre defying work. Made of stained, unprimed fabric, these works liberate painting from the stretcher. Paint poured directly onto the canvas bleeds into new, married hues, which are then speckled with opaque strokes of color. Retooling Color Field painting with keen experimentation and more than some improvisation, Gilliam draped these paintings into cascading forms that hang like banners in a sanctuary. The body of work was celebrated in the artist's 2007 retrospective at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Where Gilliam yields to gravity, **Jun Kaneko** yields to fire. In the artist's first documented Houston exhibition in over 40 years, Kaneko's *Untitled* (2018) stands at near human scale, asking the viewer to circle it as one would a figure. Part of the *Dango* series, the rounded, friendly shape invites whimsy and, through its shifting, dark glazed surface, a certain amount of self-reflection. With its two-tone color, a navy-black bleeding down into a soft white, the sculpture evokes a wabi-sabi sensibility, blending starkness and simplicity. With his work, the artist tunes and amplifies the perceived beauty of his forms using a volatile process – low-heat raku firing – that Kaneko has spent a lifetime learning to read.

Robert Kushner, a leading figure in New York's Pattern and Decoration movement since the 1970s, participates in traditions where ornament serves the sacred, such as Islamic tilework, Byzantine mosaics, and Medieval illuminated manuscripts from Europe and the Orient. In Kushner's *Keukenhof* (2022), the artist's repeated botanical forms draw from the artwork's title, named after one of the world's largest flower gardens in the Netherlands. Kushner paints with the patience and flow of ritual, successfully holding a passing moment of beauty in place. British artist **Tracey Emin**'s neon work, *The Memory of Your Touch* (2017), brings the exhibition's devotional undercurrent into a personal register. Emin's private confession is illuminated via a medium developed for showy announcements and branding. Through her invocation of physical touch and the soft, purple glow of the neon in the gallery space Emin places the experience of her work in a decidedly intimate and interior space, far from the grounded nature of materiality.

Christian Eckart's *Andachtsbild #702* (1987) takes its title from the German word for "devotional image," a type of Northern European icon painting, such as a *Pietà* or *Man of Sorrows*. However, here, the *Andachtsbild* is stripped of narrative and figures to provoke intense, solitary contemplation, as Eckart replaces sanctity and mythology with saturated formica, testing how the structures of sacred art might carry over into post-minimalist abstraction. **Julian Schnabel**'s *Untitled (Amor Misericordioso IV)* (2004) belongs to a series whose title, Spanish for "Merciful Love," has deep roots in Catholic practices, and whose imagery draws in part from devotional statuary of Christ. Worked in oil, gesso, and resin over an inkjet print on canvas, the painting is brazenly theatrical, uniting scale and melodrama to explore humanity, beauty, and loss. McClain Gallery first presented the series in 2006, in Schnabel's first Texas exhibition since his 1988 retrospective at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Material Beauty: Matter & Spirit opens on November 7, with an open house from 1–3 PM.