

Welcome! Let's begin by stepping [*or, if a small-enough group: 'sitting'*] over here, and introducing ourselves ...

Let me mention up-front that "Brave New Worlds" – though a fascinating exploration – is a cutting-edge exhibition unlike other art-shows you've seen here or even perhaps elsewhere. For example, if you visited this museum within the past few years, you might recall our groundbreaking show of 'Women of Abstract Expressionism' ... the very lively art (often motorized), of 'Kinesthesia' ...our retrospective of Andy Warhol's unapologetically-accessible prints ...and more recently, our 'Unsettled' exhibition, which presented almost two hundred works by dozens of artists working throughout the enormous area ranging from Alaska down to Patagonia and across the Pacific. Although some of the art in 'Unsettled' was relatively new (while some, on the other hand, was centuries old), otherwise it – like each of the other shows I mentioned – showcased art created a generation or two ago ...presented that art within fairly traditional museum installations, piece-by-piece...and, while also rewarding extended consideration, was quite welcoming in a more customary, visitor-friendly way.

This show is, at least for me, quite a bit more challenging: Very different from each of those that I just mentioned, "Brave New Worlds" is devoted to just five artists, generally less-well-known ...it features art that's been created only with the past couple years ...and the various works are presented not as isolated pieces, but within larger 'immersive' environments. Over the next half-hour or so, our tour offers a comprehensive overview of what's here ...but, just as any art yields us more to the extent that we personally engage with it, here especially personal engagement, even unhurried personal reflection, is vital to determining how each of us might connect with this show ...and what we might individually take away from its various elements – both visually and philosophically.

For starters, in fact, even the show's title calls for a few minutes' attentive unpacking: "Brave New Worlds" – a phrase that (like so many others) originated with Shakespeare ... at a time when 'brave' described not someone 'courageous,' but rather something excellent, perhaps remarkably out-of-the-ordinary ...indeed, what we have here. And yet, 'courage' is relevant, as we might need it in exploring this show: We'll no doubt encounter some new things that confuse, disturb or perhaps even frighten us, but let me encourage us all to be brave and persevere.

What makes something 'new' to anyone, of course, is just such a fresh, even unexpected, encounter with it. For Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the voyages of the so-called 'Age of Discovery' were then well underway ...and producing a steady stream of things that were 'new,' at least from a European perspective – new terrain, exotic plants and wildlife, even unfamiliar people. None of those discoveries would have been possible, however, in the absence of something still more fundamentally new from a philosophical standpoint: In what one author calls the Discovery of Ignorance, 15<sup>th</sup>-century mapmakers began leaving empty spaces, rather than drawing imaginary monsters and wonders, where their world was as yet 'unknown.' In other words, a modern scientific mindset – a willingness to admit ignorance – was born, ...and with it came healthy curiosity in search of, well, the utterly new. What we know as The 'Age of Discovery' might better be called the 'Age of Curiosity,' and of course, even today – with the earth pretty well mapped – it isn't over: Quite apart from outer-space exploration and scientific work, we increasingly also realize, as Marcel Proust put it, that 'the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes' ... and, as we'll presently see, our most significant voyages may take us deeply into ourselves – into Inner Space. In varied ways, artists (here, as elsewhere) are especially driven by such curiosity.

And yes, 'worlds': In the singular, just one 'brave new world' was referenced by Shakespeare (in The Tempest) and likewise by Aldous Huxley, who borrowed the phrase for his dystopian novel's antiseptic and highly controlled world – where, ironically, curiosity was vigorously suppressed. Here, however, ...

Not one, but five, eye-opening new worlds invite our adventurous exploration here: Around the corner – proceeding from a space-age launch-pad – unfold what may seem a cavern, a 'she-shed,' a miniature museum and a jungle. Each of these represents an independent collaboration between this museum and an active artist to showcase her fresh and distinctive take on life and on art – 'her' take, because each of our artists is a southern California woman – and, so far as freshness is concerned, their average age isn't much over forty!

Our five artists are interested (each in her own way) in fluidity and motion, and their five worlds variously pulsate. Beyond, however, that interest in vibrant change – ironically our only constant –, this show is rife with contrasts: 'feminine'/masculine'; earthy/abstract; sensual/cerebral; complex/simple (even minimal); primitive/avant-garde – it's all here, but typically focused not upon any either/or opposition, but rather upon the rich interplay of both and of conceptual space in-between. In fact, the show utterly defies 'binary' thinking ...or even any analytical 'thinking'

at all ...yet of course evokes unexpected thoughts and feelings, typically in very personal ways. By the same token, we'll see that each artist's 'world' here is intensely personal, indeed intimate, such that our presence might seem intrusive ...but of course, it's each artist's choice (really not so much a choice, as a need) to express herself, and hopefully connect with us in our own various circumstances, as vulnerably she does here.

Because what we'll see is so personal to each artist, in some cases a biographical factoid or two may help us better understand what she's drawing upon. Beyond that, however, I'll try to share just a general orientation, with minimal information 'about' the works, the artists and their materials. More meaningful than my talking 'about' what's here – or, still less, my telling you what to think of it – is the opportunity for each of you to make your own discoveries. Since what we have here begs to be experienced – and not just work-by-work, but room-by-room and as a whole – I'll encourage each of you to spend a few minutes retracing our steps ... on your own journey, and if not today, then on further visits, both alone and with different docents. Over time, both increased exposure and your own situation changing from day to day will likely bring thoughts and feelings different from whatever you might experience today – and that's really the point, here as everywhere else in this or any other museum: Whatever arises for you, whether positive, negative or indifferent, isn't right or wrong by any objective standard, but rather is 'all good.' Beginning our journey now, *en route* to the first of our new worlds ...

Situating us from art-historical and social standpoints, Gino Severini's "Man in Space" stands in stark juxtaposition with what we're about to tour. Dating from the dawn of the jet age and even of space exploration, and reflecting more than its share of male arrogance, it uses conventional materials in the best Cubist and Futurist styles to depict a true colossus – a man larger than life, winged and erect, heroically overshadowing an obsolescent propeller plane. While the five women of "Brave New Worlds" strive to connect with Nature and work with it in humbler ways, here the audacious subject aspires – in quite a patriarchal way – to fully dominate his universe, land, sea and sky alike. With madly swirling colors ...fragmented imagery ...and motion (well beyond what we'll presently encounter) that's dynamic, even frantic ...the effect is dizzying. In the heady 1950s, Severini came honestly by such over-excitement (and was being paid, by Alitalia, for it), ...but now, with the five women who'll be our guides – and who were born, on average, almost a hundred years after Severini – warmer and far more human explorations await us.

Our first artist is **Gisela Colon**. The daughter of an artist and a chemistry professor, she uses space-age materials to claim her territory with the wall-mounted 'glo-pods' and the monumental pieces – all altering dramatically our perceptions of light in play with movement – that grab our attention as a grand gateway into Brave New Worlds.

Next, behind a large screen-printed curtain, **Victoria Fu**'s collage-rich videography draws us into a cavernous space where we first interact with shadow-play to become integral parts of the work, then shift our focus to the personally significant scraps and images that she rigorously pares down in defiance of 'upgraded' video-software.

Voyages of discovery usually aren't straight lines! We'll backtrack to this hallway after visiting the room at its end...

Our third 'world' is that of **Adee Roberson**, whose textiles, paintings and prints reflect the African diaspora; here, her videos record a personal ritual on the Gulf of Mexico after an aunt's funeral and a collaborative improvisation ('stolen bodies' on 'stolen land') in the Joshua Tree high desert – all of it grounded in deep familial self-awareness.

Using various media, **Kelly Akashi** mixes ephemeral and permanent, natural and artificial, to alter our perspectives upon smaller objects (especially spiraling shells); her hand (as cast here!) is also found in non-camera photography. Her 'cabinets of curiosities' recall the hands-on 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century collections, products of the Age of Discovery, that were the precursors of today's necessarily-hands-off museums ...

Last (not least), **Karen Lofgren**. The daughter of an 'alternative medicine' practitioner, her interests in nature and medical history took her not only into London libraries but also into the Amazon (pursuing a 'cure,' as it were, for its problematic legacy of colonialism). With a countercultural focus upon healing and ritual, she takes us into a veritable jungle, rife with healing plants and with well-defended sculptures alluding to stylized ritual-postures; and at last, we find (as produced by alchemical processes? – or redeemed from colonial exploitation?) pools of gold.

At our journey's 'end,' we return where we started, but not exactly so, as ever-moving rivers won't let us step again into the same spots (and anyway, having changed a bit ourselves, we mightn't want to). Likewise, and hopefully the better for our journey, we might come to perceive a bit differently, and be inspired to explore with brave new eyes, each of the worlds and situations we encounter ... as well as, more deeply, our own 'inner space.' *¡Vaya con dios!*