

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ISABELLA
STEWART GARDNER
MUSEUM

“CONVERSATIONS: EXPERIENCING CONTEMPORARY ART”
WITH CURATOR DABNEY HAILEY
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4TH, 6:30 PM

New series of evening programs—CONVERSATIONS—at the Gardner engages visitors in new ways of looking at and thinking about art

Curator Dabney Hailey uses revolutionary Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to guide adult visitors in an interactive Conversation about contemporary photographs dealing with issues of love, romance, and marriage



Jessica Todd Harper, *Self Portrait with Christopher and My Future In-Laws*, 2001. (e-print, 32" x 40"). Courtesy Cohen Amador Gallery, NYC.

BOSTON MA ▪ NOVEMBER 26, 2008 ▪ Curious about contemporary photography? Eager to learn more about how to look at and talk about contemporary art? Interested in the latest theories in arts education? On **Thursday, December 4, 2008, at 6:30 pm**, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum will host an interactive *Conversation* about contemporary photography using Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), a revolutionary approach to looking at and thinking about art. ***Conversations: Experiencing Contemporary Art*** will be led by **Dabney Hailey**, *Curator of Painting, Sculpture and Photography* at the Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College.

The evening is part of a new series of programs—called *Conversations*—at the Gardner Museum designed to empower audiences to look and think about art in new ways through a dialogue with artists, curators, art educators, and scholars on a range of topics. *Conversations* are presented on select Thursday evenings at 6:30 pm.

“Learning to look at art is about empowerment and engagement,” says **Margaret Burchenal**, *Curator of Education* at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and director of the museum’s arts education program which centers on the VTS method. “And it’s fun! Once visitors stop thinking about what they *should* know and spend time just *looking*, they really open up and the conversations start to flow.”

In *Conversations: Experiencing Contemporary Art*, Hailey will guide participants in an interactive conversation about a selection of contemporary photographs by some of today’s most provocative artists, including Jessica Todd Harper and Nan Goldin. Using the VTS technique, participants will have the chance to develop their own ideas about the selected art works and, then, to consider the responses of fellow audience members, and engage in a lively conversation about what they see.

“I believe that looking deeply – especially in dialogue with other viewers – is key to finding meaning in contemporary art – or any art for that matter,” says Hailey. “I hope and expect that the Gardner *Conversation* will be a lively and rich exchange of observations and ideas.”

The particular photographs Hailey will discuss are images that play on ideas of love, loss, and relationships – themes central to the museum’s current exhibition, *The Triumph of Marriage: Painted Cassoni of the Renaissance* (on view through January 18, 2009).

On her selection, Hailey adds: “I’ve chosen photographs with complex perspectives on marriage and love, just as the *cassoni* panels comprise very sophisticated visual narratives about marriage during the Renaissance. I hope we’ll mine the ambivalence and beauty of the photographs – which, in turn, can help us understand ourselves and each other a little better. After all, art of our time is art that illuminates our own lives.”

TICKETS • SCHEDULE

\$7 General Public; \$5 Members & Seniors; FREE Students. Available for purchase through the Gardner Box Office at 617-278-5156 or online through TicketWeb via www.gardnermuseum.org/information/tickets.asp. Tickets will also be available at the door subject to availability.

Conversations: Experiencing Contemporary Art with Dabney Hailey begins at 6:30 pm. Participants are encouraged to come early and stay late! Participants can view the current exhibition, *The Triumph of Marriage: Painted Cassoni of the Renaissance*, which explores issues of art, love, and marriage in the Renaissance, beginning at 5:45 pm, and to continue the dialogue over coffee around the courtyard afterwards.

*The latest addition to the Gardner’s commitment to scholarship and education, **Conversations** is presented on select Thursday evenings at 6:30 pm, a full schedule of 2009 Conversations topics and featured speakers will be available in early 2009 on the museum’s online calendar via www.gardnermuseum.org.*

INNOVATION IN ARTS EDUCATION | *School Partnerships • Visual Thinking Strategies • Thinking Through Art*

Education at the Gardner Museum is directed by nationally recognized museum educator and Gardner Museum *Curator of Education* Margaret Burchenal. Burchenal was named “National Museum Educator of the Year” in 2002 by the National Art Education Association (NAEA). The museum’s award-winning *School Partnership Program* pairs Gardner Museum educators with students and teachers at neighboring Boston city schools to enrich classroom learning and the development of critical thinking skills through the arts. Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS; www.visualthinkingstrategies.org) is central to the museum’s philosophy in arts education. Embraced by museums and art educators throughout the country, particularly in recent years, VTS continues to gain recognition nationwide for its value in empowering young people and adults to look and think about art in new ways.

In 2007, the Gardner Museum completed a three-year federally-funded *Thinking Through Art* research study on the relationship between learning to look at art using multiple visits and VTS and the development of critical thinking skills in urban elementary students. The study found statistically significant increases in the development and use of five of seven critical thinking skills used by students when looking at and talking about art. The complete *Thinking Through Art* Research Report, along with video clips of kids engaged in VTS, an online tool kit and sample lesson plans, and additional resources, is available online via: gardnermuseum.org/education/gardner.html.

ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM • 280 The Fenway Boston MA 02115 • Tue.-Sun., 11 am-5 pm • admission: Adults \$12; Seniors \$10; Students \$5; Free for members, children under 18 and all named “Isabella” • “After Hours” admission: Adults \$12; Seniors \$10; Students \$5; Free for members, • \$2 off admission with a same-day Museum of Fine Arts, Boston • Info Line: 617.566.1401 • Box Office: 617 278 5156 • www.gardnermuseum.org • Modeled after a 15th-century Venetian palazzo surrounding a courtyard garden, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum houses one of the most remarkable art collections in the world, featuring works by Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Raphael, Degas and Sargent. Visit us online to learn more about our special exhibitions, concerts, innovative arts education programs, and evening events.

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