

## Montclair Art Museum presents **Come As You Are: Art of the 1990s**

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As you walk into the Marion Mann Roberts Gallery, there's a sound of humming that makes a constant background.

It's not the heat. Nor is it feedback from someone's headphones.

It's the spinning of a deskchair in a plexiglass case: Glenn Kaino's "The Siege Perilous."

"The Siege Perilous" is part the Montclair Art Museum's "Come As You Are: Art of the 1990s" exhibit.

"It's kind of a joke on Glenn's part," Curator Alexandra Schwartz said at a press walk-through of the show this past Friday. "He has always worked in tech while he developed his practice as an artist. The Aeron chair was a symbol of tech culture. Every tech firm has this trendy supermodern chair. He set it spinning on its axis. It becomes surreal, a disorienting object, a reflection of the burgeoning culture with the dot-com boom and then bust in the late '90s."

Mam's exhibit will be in at the museum, 5 South Mountain Ave., through May 17, then tour to the Telfair Museum of Art in Georgia from June to September, the University of Michigan Museum of Art from October through January 2016, and the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin from February through mid-May 2016. For more information visit [montclairartmuseum.org](http://montclairartmuseum.org).

The '90s clearly had more going on than Nirvana and flannel shirts.

Schwartz divided the '90s, and the show, into three periods: the early '90s, which Schwartz described as a time when artists were looking at identity politics, including race, gender, class; the mid '90s, which was a time when digital media became commonplace; and the late 90s through 2001, when globalization solidified. Schwartz bookended the show with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and Sept. 11.

She was in college and graduate school in the 1990s, said she began researching the project about four years ago when she first arrived in Montclair.

A trip to the 1993 Whitney Biennial had a big impact on her, she said. "It was a moment when artists were so engaged with social and political issues. That moment seems quite far away."

A decade that began with the L.A. riots, Rodney King, Anita Hill, has parallels with the last few months with Ferguson, and Eric Garner, she said. "We're still trying to figure out how the internet affects our lives, how we communicate with people we know."

Many of the pieces are beautiful, like Beverly Semmes' 1992 "Famous Twins," two enormous garments of crushed velvet and cotton, or Pepon Osorio's 1990 mixed media work (a purple velvet couch with embroidered words), "A Mis Adorables Hijas."

Then there's a framed print of an ebay page. Made in 2001 by Mendi + Keith Obadike, it's an ad to sell Obadike's blackness.

"It was a very smart provocative piece. What does it mean to sell someone's blackness? How can it be quantified, objectified?" Schwartz said. Ebay took it down early; it had been supposed to run for 12 days but was pulled after six. Then 9/11 happened and the conversation stopped.

Then there is a work that feels like you've walked into an old office: "Department of Marine Animal Identification of the City of San Francisco (Chinatown Division)," 1998, Dion Schwartz explained, had been asked by the Yerba Buena Center in San Francisco to do a work about San Francisco, and he decided to go to Chinatown and research the background of the fish there. The installation is his actual office, though with its rotary phone and card catalogue it feels more like the 1970s than the 1990s.

"There's an element of theater to it," Schwartz told The Montclair Times. It's one of her favorite pieces in the show. "I'm proud to be showing it. It hasn't been shown since 1998. It's fun and engaging. People want to learn what it is, and can't get a handle on it."

That's the thing about this show: it's fun. Surprising. For some it will feel familiar. For others? The same, perhaps, but different. It should spark an interesting conversation, she said. Young people must find it hard to even imagine a time before cell phones in the internet, when you had to send a memo or fax, Schwartz said with a chuckle.