

# Serpentine Gallery

Rebecca Warren

10 March – 19 April 2009

## Teachers' Notes



Rebecca Warren  
*Their Famous Auteur* 2007  
(detail)  
Mixed media on MDF  
43.5 x 25.5 x 3.7 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin  
© 2009 Rebecca Warren

This exhibition is made possible by the  
generosity of the

**Council of  
the Serpentine Gallery**

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Maureen Paley, London  
Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin  
Matthew Marks, New York

These notes are designed to support your visit to the Serpentine Gallery, including planning prior to your visit and suggestions for discussion and activities back at school when you return. They are aimed primarily at Key Stage 3 but include activities that can relate to all key stages, enabling you to develop them to suit your needs and inspire discussion and practical work.

The *Rebecca Warren* Teachers' Notes are also available to download free at [www.serpentinegallery.org](http://www.serpentinegallery.org) along with Teachers' Notes for the previous exhibitions:

**Indian Highway**, 10 December 2008 – 22 February 2009  
**Gerhard Richter**, 23 September – 23 November 2008  
**Richard Prince**, 26 June – 7 September 2008  
**Maria Lassnig**, 25 April – 8 June 2008  
**Derek Jarman**, 23 February – 13 April 2008  
**Anthony McCall**, 30 November 2007 – 3 February 2008  
**Matthew Barney**, 20 September – 11 November 2007  
**Hreinn Fridfinnsson**, 17 July – 2 September 2007  
**Paul Chan**, 15 May – 1 July 2007  
**Allora & Calzadilla**, 17 – 29 April 2007  
**Karen Kilimnik**, 20 February – 9 April 2007  
**In the darkest hour there may be light, works from Damien Hirst's murderme collection**, 25 November 2006 – 28 January 2007  
**Runa Islam**, 25 October – 5 November 2006  
**China Power Station: Part 1**, 8 October – 5 November 2006  
**Uncertain States of America**, 9 September – 15 October 2006  
**Thomas Demand**, 6 June – 20 August 2006  
**Ellsworth Kelly**, 18 March – 21 May 2006  
**Elmgreen & Dragset**, 26 January – 26 February 2006  
**Ilya and Emilia Kabakov**, 19 October 2005 – 8 January 2006  
**Oliver Payne & Nick Relph**, 6 September – 2 October 2005  
**Rirkrit Tiravanija**, 5 July – 21 August 2005  
**Andreas Slominski**, 26 April – 12 June 2005  
**Tomoko Takahashi**, 22 February – 10 April 2005  
**Monika Sosnowska**, 5 December 2004 – 16 January 2005  
**Glenn Brown**, 14 September – 7 November 2004  
**Gabriel Orozco**, 1 July – 30 August 2004  
**Cy Twombly**, 17 April – 13 June 2004  
**State of Play**, 3 February – 28 March 2004  
**Hiroshi Sugimoto**, 18 November 2003 – 18 January 2004  
**John Currin**, 9 September – 2 November 2003  
**Cindy Sherman**, 3 June – 25 August 2003  
**Takahashi Murakami**, 12 November 2002 – 26 January 2003  
**Kutlug Ataman**, 11 February – 9 March 2003

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## Background information

The Serpentine Gallery presents the first major solo show in a UK public gallery of the work of British artist Rebecca Warren (born 1965). Warren is known internationally for her exuberant, roughly-worked clay sculptures, bronzes and vitrines containing carefully assembled objects that the artist has collected.

Described as ‘an original and formidable talent’, Warren’s oeuvre combines rich art historical and contemporary references. The artist challenges sculptural conventions while also engaging with the history of figurative sculpture and her position within this predominantly male tradition. Alongside such art historical figures as Edgar Degas and Auguste Rodin, Warren’s work also refers to contemporary artists such as Swiss duo Fischli/Weiss and sculptor Charles Ray.

This Serpentine Gallery exhibition displays pieces from throughout Warren’s career, and features a selection of her best known works including the iconic *Helmut Crumb* (1998), alongside new work made specifically for this exhibition.

Rebecca Warren lives and works in London. She was nominated for the *Turner Prize* in 2006, and for the *Vincent Award*, 2008, at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Her work was also the subject of a major solo exhibition at Kunsthalle Zurich in 2004.

The exhibition is curated by Julia Peyton-Jones, Director, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Co-Director, and Kathryn Rattee, Curator, Serpentine Gallery. A catalogue has been published to coincide with the exhibition, with essays by Martin Herbert and Barry Schwabsky and an interview with Rebecca Warren by Julia Peyton-Jones and Hans Ulrich Obrist. This exhibition is made possible by the generosity of the Council of the Serpentine Gallery.

## Themes, ideas and questions to explore

### 1. Movement, texture and transformation

#### Keywords

Sculpture – Figurative – Female form – Human body – Unfired – Clay – Bronze – Unfinished – Re-work – Handmade – Hand-painted – Fragile – Texture – Surface – Raw material – Rough – Smooth – Explode – Merge – Process - Self-expression – Change – Transform – Emerge – Melting – Morphing – Wiggling – Bulbous – Messy – Voluptuous – Biomorphic – Mutate – Instability – Movement

#### Cross-curricular links

Art and Design – English Literature – Media Studies – Creative and Media Diploma – Design Technology



Rebecca Warren  
*Cube* 2003  
Bronze on MDF on wheels  
51 x 35 x 37.5 cm  
Courtesy Maureen Paley, London  
© 2009 Rebecca Warren

Rebecca Warren's shape-shifting sculptures in clay and bronze range from amorphous to more recognisable forms, embracing both formal and grotesque, the figurative and the abstract. She describes that body parts suggest themselves in the movement and surface of the clay as it is shaped and marked by her hands.



*We Are Dead IV* 2008  
Painted reinforced clay on painted MDF plinth  
Artwork: 79 x 45.5 x 31 cm  
Plinth: 88 x 48.5 x 34.5 cm  
2008  
Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, New York  
© 2009 Rebecca Warren

Clay has an important history in art and is usually fired in a kiln, in which permanent physical and chemical reactions occur turning the clay into a ceramic material which is strong and durable. Rebecca Warren uses the material differently. She intentionally leaves the material un-fired and this introduces opposite qualities to her artwork. On the one hand the clay is heavy and robust, on the other fragile and delicate as it is un-fired. The weight of the clay makes the sculptures difficult to move but they are also extremely easy to break.

*We Are Dead I-VIII*, 2008 are eight handmade clay forms, presented on individual plinths, two of which are coloured delicately in places with washes of paint. Some look rain-eroded or half completed, despite the idea that by being painted could imply that the forms are finished. Rather than a reminder of traditional statues or busts in this format, multiple figurative elements appear to explode out of and merge back into the clay. The work offers fragments of familiar, yet strange body parts, faces and objects.

Warren also casts clay sculptures in bronze and as with clay; she explores the traditional status and processes of this established art form. When the clay originals are returned from the foundry, misshapen from the casting process, she adapts and adds to them before returning them for recasting. *Cube*, 2003 and *Cube*, 2006 are cast in bronze, from clay, suggesting opposite ideas about the nature of the material: permanent and complete, misshapen, unfinished and changeable. This is emphasised by the low trolley or base with wheels on which they are presented, as a moveable or transitional object.

### Discussions

- What kinds of shapes and textures can you find in Rebecca Warren's clay and bronze sculptures?
- Consider how the two different materials can have different effects and qualities. How might you change or move a material like clay, could you do the same with bronze?
- What tools do you think Rebecca Warren has used to make her sculptures? Think of as many action words as you can to describe how she might work with clay to make her sculptures. Write them in a list.
- What parts of the body can you identify in the artists work?
- Do the shapes remind you of anything other than people?
- Can a sculpture be figurative and abstract at the same time?
- How do the works *We Are Dead I-VIII*, 2008 make you feel?
- The title is inspired by a David Bowie song *We Are The Dead*, 1974, which in turn is a phrase spoken in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. 'We are the dead' are the last words Winston Smith says to Julia before they are caught by the thought police. How could the themes of uncertainty, humanity, or dystopia relate to Warren's sculptures?

### Practical Activities

- In pairs have one person be the sculptor and one person be the model. Have the model strike a pose. Using plasticine or clay, or a mixture of found materials the sculptor can try to capture the essence of the shape in front of them. Build up the form by adding lumps of clay or plasticine, or new objects. How is the weight distributed? Explore what the model might be feeling and how this is conveyed in their posture, shape, or form. How will you express this in your sculpture?

## 2. Heroes, references and art history

### Keywords

Identity – Inspiration – Art History – Sculpture – Tradition – History – Popular Culture – Representation – Gender – Stereotypes – Influence – Appropriation – Re-appropriate – Artistic Heroes – Contemporary References – Subversive – Ideas

### Cross-curricular links

Art and Design – English Language and Literature – Media Studies – Creative and Media Diploma – Art History



Rebecca Warren  
*Helmut Crumb* 1998  
Reinforced clay on two stacked MDF plinths  
196.9 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm  
Courtesy of Cranford Collection  
© 2009 Rebecca Warren



Robert Crumb  
*Girls, Girls, Girls*  
© 2009 Robert Crumb

Rebecca Warren finds inspiration from popular culture such as films, television, music and cartoons. She also makes references in her work to some of the great artists from history such as Auguste Rodin, Edgar Degas and Willem de Kooning. She re-works and intentionally misappropriates existing images by some of the famous artists who made figurative sculpture.

Using clay, Warren created *Helmut Crumb*, 1998 transforming a figure in R. Crumb's cartoon strip called *Girls, Girls, Girls* and an image by Helmut Newton into a sculpture. In this work she explores the transition from two dimensions to three and considers what might happen around the side, corner or back of a picture. It was also a way to express new ideas and meanings about gender, representation, and traditional figurative sculpture. In this way Warren is influenced by but also influences the original picture.

Warren also refers to many other things that play a role in how she approaches her artwork. Her artistic heroes include Martin Kippenberger, Fischli and Weiss and Charles Ray. Warren has been drawn to the idea of twins, pairs, or copies asking the question if you made one thing spontaneously, and then if you copied that thing, what would the result be? This theme takes shape through the re-working of her original clay artworks after they have been cast in bronze.

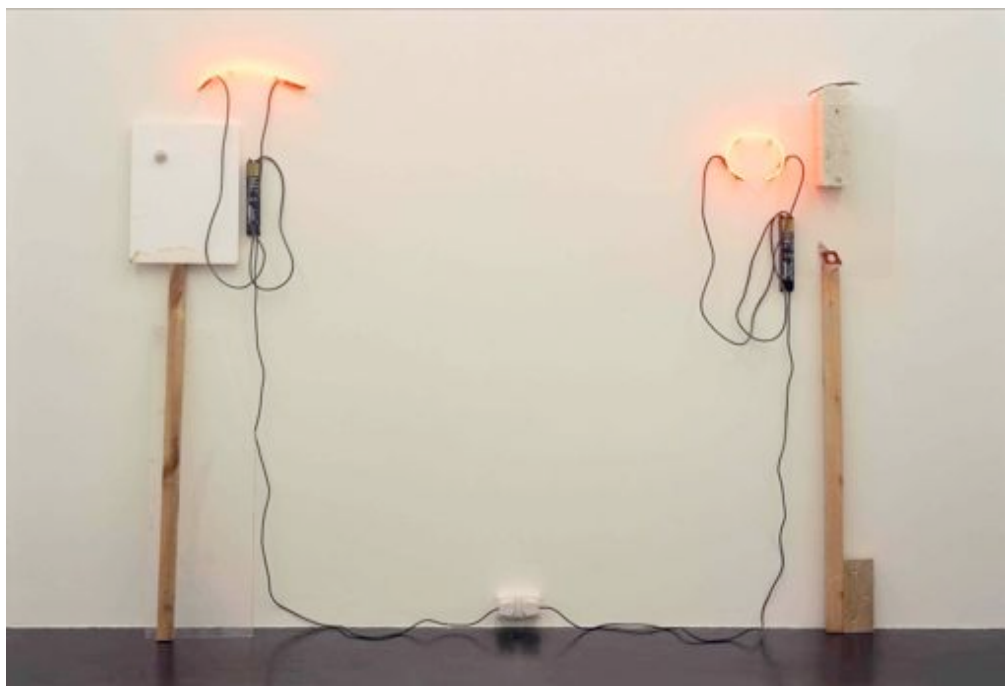
### Discussions

- In her artwork, does Rebecca Warren appear to pay homage to her heroes or question their authority?
- Who are your artistic heroes and in what ways do they influence or inspire you?
- What are the stereotypes attached to gender in art history and how does Rebecca Warren explore these ideas?
- How has she represented male and female form differently and why?
- How does the artist's work relate to popular culture, desires and stereotypes?
- How does the appearance of the work change as you view it from different angles and positions in the gallery space?
- Rebecca Warren considers the plinths to also be part of the artwork. How do the plinths and vitrines change how you view her work? Do you consider them to be part of the work?

### Activities

- Collect comics and book covers from different genres such as biographies/ autobiographies, thrillers, romance, crime and hide the titles and text using white paper or tape. Consider the meanings and messages in imagery from popular culture by looking carefully at what they might represent. Choose an image that most interests you and represent this using sculpture. What materials have you chosen to use? What new meanings and ideas are represented in your sculpture? How do they differ from the original 2D image?

## 3. Assemblage, meaning and mystery



Rebecca Warren  
*Husband Three and Husband Four* 2005  
Mixed media  
Dimensions variable

### Keywords

Change – Adapt – Viewpoint – Collect - Found objects – Meaning - Everyday objects – Composition – Mythology – Presentation – Play – Symbolism – Permanence – Materials – Display – Assembled – Assemblage – Arrangement – Perception – Ritual – Value – Vitrine – Relationships – Allegory – Poetry – Emotion – Humour

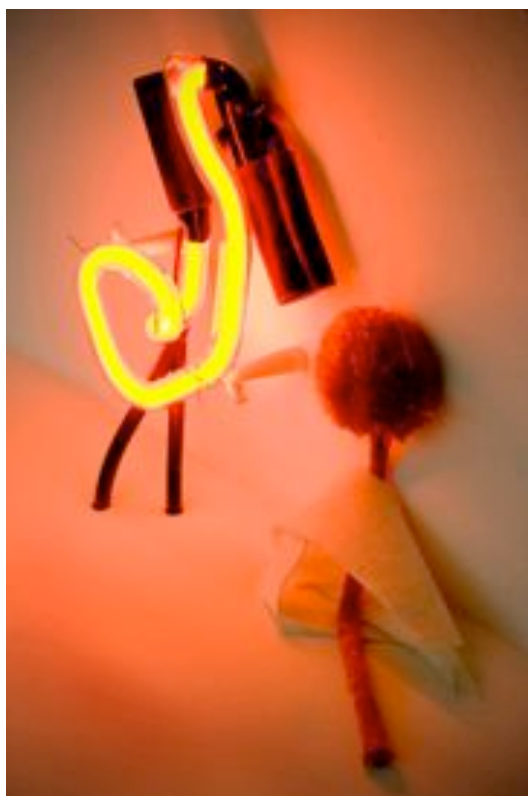
### Cross-curricular links

Art and Design – English Language and literature – Media Studies – Creative and Media Diploma – Design Technology

An important aspect of Rebecca Warren's work is the titling, which can often be to do with popular references, some familiar and some obscure. She deliberately links her hybrid titles to films, songs and made-up words reflecting the varied forms of her artwork. The wall works called *Husbands* are direct in their meaning, although the works are more abstract than figurative in appearance. Made from bits of found and everyday materials such as wood, neon and polystyrene *Husbands* began as a contrasting response to her large female, clay sculptures. Warren describes *Husbands* as in a crisis, gently held together and made from materials that could easily fall apart.

The artist also uses display features in her art in the form of her vitrines. In a museum, vitrines are often used for preservation, containing precious items to observe and study. In contrast, Rebecca Warren places objects outside and on top of her vitrines as well as inside. In this way she blurs the boundaries of mechanisms for displaying artwork and plays with presentation. The vitrines appear like mini exhibitions, new spaces within the gallery space.

*I love the sound of breaking glass*, 2004 is made of three long MDF cases including found and handmade objects, and fragments or leftovers from Warren's studio. She uses bits of wood, glass shards, twigs, clay, string and pom-poms which appear cryptic and mysterious when assembled together. They invite emotional associations, suggesting a continuous flux of things, mysticism and alchemy.



Rebecca Warren  
*Host* 2008 (detail)  
Mixed media  
Left vitrine: 41 × 30 × 180 cm  
Right vitrine: 41 × 30 × 160 cm

## Discussions

- What are your first reactions to Rebecca Warren's vitrines?
- What objects can you see and what are their associations?
- How do the materials relate to one another?
- How do the shapes relate to one another?
- Have they been arranged in a particular way or composition?
- Where have the objects come from? What kind of places do they belong to?
- What does this work remind you of?
- What meanings do you think the objects have?
- What do you think the titles mean?

## Activities

- Think of an idea or subject that interests you. In the classroom and at home find a collection of images objects and text that represent your meaning/theme.
- At school, lay all of the objects, images and text out in front of you and consider what individual item might communicate to the viewer. How will your theme or meaning be understood when the objects are arranged all together?
- Arrange the selected objects in a way that you think represents your meaning/theme. Give your collection a title, but don't tell anyone the title yet. Now look at other people's collections and write down what you think the meanings/themes are for each collection.
- In groups, discuss what you think the meanings and themes are for each person's collection. Then have the person explain their ideas behind the collection and reveal the title they have given it. Does this change your perceptions of the work? Did you prefer to look at the collection with more information or with less information about the theme and meaning? Why? Is a title important when making a piece of artwork?

## Further information and related links

### Artists to research:

#### Historical:

##### **Auguste Rodin** (1840 –1917)

The French sculptor, draughtsman and engraver, considered to be one of the greatest and most prolific sculptors of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. His best known works include *The Thinker*, 1902 and *The Kiss*, 1901- 4.

##### **Pablo Picasso** (1881 – 1973)

Spanish painter, sculptor, lithographer and designer, Picasso is one of the most recognised artists in 20<sup>th</sup> century art and worked in an unprecedented variety of styles and hugely influential the art movement Cubism.

##### **Edgar Degas** (1834 –1917)

French impressionist painter and sculptor, Rebecca Warren references Degas' sculpture *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* 1880-1 in *Pony*, 2003.

##### **Marcel Duchamp** (1887 – 1968)

The French artist who's work is most often associated with Dadaist, Surrealist and Cubist movements and 'ready-mades'. These were found, everyday objects, sometimes slightly altered and designated artworks by the artist including *Fountain*, 1917.

#### Modern:

##### **Henry Moore** (b. 1898)

British Sculptor in stone, wood and later bronze, Moore is best known for his abstract human forms depicting mother and child or reclining figures.

**Barbara Hepworth** (1903 – 1975)

A major British Sculptor of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially active in the modernist artist community in St. Ives.

**Helmut Newton** (1920 – 2004)

A German-Australian fashion photographer noted for his nude studies of women.

**Joseph Beuys** (1921 – 1986)

German artist known for sculpture, vitrines, performance and politics, Beuys' relationship with the legacy of Marcel Duchamp and the 'ready-made' is a central aspect of his practice.

**Max Ernst** (1891 – 1976)

German painter, sculptor and printmaker, Ernst was a leading figure in the Surrealist movement.

**Willem de Kooning** (1904-1997)

American Abstract Expressionist, painter and sculptor best known for the *Woman* paintings II through VI, 1952-53.

**Martin Kippenberger** (1953 – 1997)

A German artist with a rich and varied body of work, Kippenberger is referenced by Rebecca Warren as one of her artistic heroes.

### **Contemporary:**

**Fischli & Weiss** (b.1952 and b.1946)

Swiss artists Fischli & Weiss collaborate to adapt objects and situations from everyday life and place them in an artistic context making use of a variety of forms of expression including film, photography, art books, sculpture and multimedia installations.

**Charles Ray** (b. 1953)

An American sculptor who in his work, takes conventions, whether they are from art history or everyday life, and uses them to question the viewer, representing identity and perception in unexpected ways.

**Susan Hiller** (b.1940)

Hiller explores social, anthropological and feminist themes and questions traditional artistic ideas about authorship, collection, display and process.

**Damien Hirst** (b.1965)

British artist Hirst often uses containers such as aquariums and vitrines to as display devices to explore preservation, fragility and death in his work.

**Sarah Lucas** (b.1962)

In her early work British artist Sarah Lucas began using furniture as a substitute for the human body, investigating contemporary cultural references and the 'Ready-made' to confront sexual stereotypes.

**Eva Rothschild** (b.1971)

Born in Ireland, Rothschild's work references art movements of the 1960's and 1970's such as minimalism. She uses materials such as leather and paper in her sculptural work and also makes wall-based work and video.

**Louise Bourgeois** (b.1911)

American sculptor creates symbolic objects and drawing expressing themes of conflict, vulnerability and gender.

### **Reading and web-links:**

Herbert, Martin and Schwabsky, Barry, *Rebecca Warren*, exhibition catalogue, Serpentine Gallery, London; Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne 2009  
Ruf, Beatrix, *Rebecca Warren: Dark Passage*, exhibition catalogue, Kunsthalle Zürich, JRP Editions, 2005

Stern, Steven, *Unmonumental*, Frieze, April 2008, pp.169-170

Lack, Jessica, *In the Studio: Rebecca Warren, Rad Girl*, Art World, April 2008, pp.44-49

Hilty, Greg, *Rebecca Warren: SHE*, Parkett, No.70, 2004.

King, Phil and Renton, Andrew, *Fergal Stapleton and Rebecca Warren*, The Showroom, 1997

[www.frieze.com/issue/article/rebecca\\_warren](http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/rebecca_warren)

[www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/2006/rebeccawarren.htm](http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/2006/rebeccawarren.htm)

[www.kunsthallezurich.ch](http://www.kunsthallezurich.ch)

[www.Maureenpaley.com](http://www.Maureenpaley.com)

## Planning a Visit to the Serpentine Gallery

### Contact Details

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### Transport

The nearest tube stations are South Kensington (1.25 km walk), Knightsbridge (1.25 km walk) or Lancaster Gate (1 km walk)

Bus routes 9, 10, 52, 452, 94 and 148 stop near the Gallery

### Group Visit Guidelines

To make your visit as enjoyable as possible, please read the following:

#### Before your Visit:

- Adult supervision of students under 16 is required at all times, including in the shop. An adult student ratio of 1:5 for under 5's, 1:10 for 5 - 11 year olds, 1:15 for 11 - 16 year olds and 1:20 for 16 - 18 year olds is required.
- We recommend a preliminary planning visit, as for some exhibitions there may be works that you consider unsuitable for your group.

#### During your Visit:

- Teachers/group leaders and accompanying adults are responsible for their group's behaviour whilst at the Serpentine Gallery.
- Please make sure your group is aware of the following Gallery guidelines:
  - No running
  - No touching
  - No leaning against walls or plinths
  - No shouting
  - No photography
- Many contemporary artworks are fragile and damage easily. Please make sure that your group understands that this is why they are not allowed to touch the art.
- Lecturing: If your group is larger than 30 please split them into smaller groups in the exhibition space and do not lecture in rooms where talks are already in progress.
- Drawing: If you would like to do some drawing please check with the gallery what materials you will be able to use in the exhibition

### Education and Family Events

Education is at the core of the Serpentine Gallery's activities. Through practical, artist led workshops and discussion, talks, events and projects the Education Programme

offers a diverse range of innovative ways to engage with modern and contemporary art and architecture for all ages.

Please refer to the Serpentine Gallery Bulletin or [www.serpentinegallery.org](http://www.serpentinegallery.org) for information on events and activities taking place as part of the Education Programme during the *Rebecca Warren* exhibition.