

For Immediate Release
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20 x 24: Recent Portraits by Lyle Ashton Harris
June 6 - July 11, 1999

Ridgefield, CT – The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art is pleased to announce an exhibition of work by Lyle Ashton Harris. The exhibition, titled *20 x 24*, will be on view from June 6 to July 11, 1999. *20 x 24* is the first public presentation of a major new series of portraits produced over the last year by Mr. Harris, who has received widespread recognition not only for his work with portraiture, but also his complex narrative-based work that deals with identity and issues of the African Diaspora.

In this new series of photographs, each of the portraits is composed in the same way. Using a large-format 20" x 24" Polaroid camera, Harris has the sitter close his or her eyes and settle into a state of relaxation, then at the precise moment the sitter's eyes open, Harris snaps his shutter. His technique allows the sitters to clear their minds, enabling Harris to capture his subjects at moments of extraordinary vulnerability. During the sitting, the artist also photographs the back of each subject's head, further revealing personality through the particularities of skull, neck and hairstyle. These composite portraits, front and back, create vivid readings that are at once intensely personal and archetypal.

The sitters in his portraits include a broad range of people drawn from the artist's everyday social encounters, including his Yoga teacher, a patron, and a friend's three-year-old child. These unadorned faces seem to stand in stark contrast to some of Harris's other portraits in which there is a staged theatricality. But, as Harris remarks, "the nudity of the face is in some senses another kind of mask."

Mr. Harris, currently a resident of New York City, has exhibited his work both nationally and internationally, including the Guggenheim Museum, NY; the Kunsthalle, Basel, Switzerland; the Institute of Contemporary Art, London; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY. His most recent project, *Alchemy*, a collaboration with his brother, Thomas Allen Harris, was presented at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, in 1998.

A brochure featuring several of the works in color with a transcribed discussion between Mr. Harris and artist Chuck Close will accompany the exhibition. Close, known for his lifelong dedication to the portrait in his own work, is one of the subjects of the Harris portraits. Close and Harris, who represent distinct generations of artists, approach the portrait from different directions. However, their recent work shares much in common and their discussion should reveal their fascination with the genre and its endurance as an aesthetic pursuit for artists throughout history.

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20 x 24 opens concurrently at The Aldrich with *The Nude in Contemporary Art* on Sunday, June 6, from 4 to 6 pm.

The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art is located in Ridgefield, CT, on Route 35, approximately one hour and ten minutes north of Manhattan. Museum hours are Tuesday through Sunday 12 noon to 5 pm; Friday 12 noon to 8 pm. Admission: \$5 adults; \$2 seniors and students; members and children under twelve, free; Tuesday, free all day.

Exhibition Program

Aspects of Contemporary Art: Lyle Ashton Harris

Thursday, July 8, 6:30 to 8 pm

Artist Lyle Ashton Harris will present a slide discussion about his work and its evolution. The talk will take place directly in the gallery where Harris's latest body of work is featured.