

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Koffler Gallery presents *Vanitas* – an immersive, architectural beeswax installation from Toronto-based artist Penelope Stewart

Toronto, ON, June 16, 2014 – The **Koffler Gallery** is proud to present a solo exhibition of new work by **Penelope Stewart** at its new downtown home at **Artscape Youngplace**, 180 Shaw Street, Toronto.

Vanitas presents work developed specifically for the Koffler Gallery by the internationally acclaimed Toronto-based installation artist. Curated by Koffler Gallery Director/Curator **Mona Filip**, the exhibition runs from **June 26 to August 31, 2014**, opening with a free public reception on **Thursday, June 26**, from **6 to 9 PM**.

The trans-disciplinary practice of Toronto artist Penelope Stewart encompasses architecture, in situ installation, sculpture, photography, drawing and print. In recent years, Stewart has created a series of installations exploring the beehive metaphor in utopian architecture.

Throughout entire rooms, high-relief beeswax tiles are placed on the walls, floor to ceiling, to create imaginary landscapes or cityscapes. Designs reference the ideas of modernist architects and landscape designers who were fascinated by the social model of the beehive, which began to represent a democratic ideal that could be used as a blueprint in the creation of the utopian city. The large beeswax maps enfold the rooms and transform them into sensory spaces. The smell of honey and the colours of the wax trigger both memory and imagination.

For the Koffler Gallery, Stewart creates a site-specific installation that takes her practice into new directions, exploring her beeswax work three-dimensionally and transforming the gallery space into an immersive environment. Beeswax-cast bee skeps (man-made straw beehives) lead the way to a central architectural-scale hive, covered in large tiles. Prominently featuring the grid as a modernist reference, the structure alludes simultaneously to Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* and to the rational beehive box used in apiaries.

Accessed through a door, the interior of the hive contains an overflow of baroque beeswax surfaces excessively loaded with floral forms layered with household objects forming a mysterious forensic geology. The objects and flora disrupt and expand the interior until it spills outward. Constructed beeswax vines hang from the top of the hive and from the ceiling into the expanded space of the gallery. This dense overgrowth can be seen from the inside and the outside, and further builds up around the exterior with cast domestic materials and household detritus.

The luscious excess coalesces into a grand still life – a *vanitas* – a modern ruin reminding of the life and death cycle, the ephemeral nature of all things, and the fragility of our utopian aspirations of transforming nature through culture. The installation speaks of loss but also about expectations. Nothing stays the same, everything is in a constant state of transformation, and ultimately, that is profoundly hopeful.

For more information and a full list of the Koffler's summer 2014 programs, please visit kofflerarts.org

Regular exhibition hours: Tuesday to Friday, 12 PM to 6 PM; Saturday and Sunday, 11 AM to 5 PM. Admission is free.

The Koffler Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the **Toronto Arts Council**, the **Ontario Arts Council**, and the **Canada Council for the Arts**. Funding to support the outfitting of the new Koffler spaces at Artscape Youngplace has been provided in part through a generous grant from the **Ontario Trillium Foundation**. The Ontario Trillium Foundation is an agency of the Government of Ontario.

PENELOPE STEWART

Born in Montréal, Québec, Penelope Stewart is a site-sensitive installation artist working across the varied media of sculpture, installation, photography, printmaking and architectural intervention. Central to her practice is an engagement with space and place; its architecture, history, politics, ideology and environment. Whether it is her large-scale beeswax architectures or her trompe l'oeil photographs, Stewart brings a sensory intensification, a haptic quality to the encounter.

Stewart received an MFA from the State University of New York and in 2010 was elected to the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts (RCA). Her work has been exhibited at such notable institutions as Ganna Walska Lotusland, California; The Albright-Knox Art Gallery, New York; Musée d'Art de Joliette, Québec; Musée Barthélemy, Boussan, France; Oakville Galleries, Ontario; Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Ontario; ACT Design Museum Canberra, Australia; Poimena Gallery, Launceston, Tasmania, Australia.

KOFFLER CENTRE OF THE ARTS

The Koffler Centre of the Arts is a multidisciplinary arts organization and independent not-for-profit based in Jewish culture. We engage a contemporary dialogue through the arts that has local, national and international resonance. The Koffler Gallery and its administrative offices are located at Artscape Youngplace, in Toronto's vibrant downtown West Queen West art and design district.

Koffler Centre of the Arts acknowledges the support of the Koffler Foundation, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, Cultural Season Sponsor CIBC Wood Gundy, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Ontario Arts Council through the Community and Multidisciplinary Arts Organizations Program, Artscape, our patrons and members.

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**For further information, interview requests
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