

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
November 1996

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PRESENTS MAJOR EXHIBITION EXPLORING THE LATE WORK OF WILLEM DE KOONING

**Last Chance to View Touring Exhibition,
The First to Focus on the Artist's Paintings from the 1980s**

EXHIBITION *Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, The 1980s*

DATES January 26–April 29, 1997

ORGANIZATION Organized by Garry Garrels, Elise S. Haas Chief Curator and Curator of Painting and Sculpture, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, in cooperation with the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. It is coordinated for and installed at The Museum of Modern Art by Robert Storr, Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture. Mr. Storr also contributed an essay to the exhibition catalogue (see below).

CONTENT The paintings made during the 1980s by American artist Willem de Kooning (b.1904), one of the great painters of this century, constitute a major and largely unknown chapter in his 60-year career. With the exception of a relatively small number of works that were shown in galleries and museums during the past fifteen years, few of the paintings of the artist's final period have been seen by the public. *Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, The 1980s*, which finishes its international tour at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, provides the first opportunity to study in depth the artist's last decade of work. "Of these works, a significant number count among the most remarkable paintings by anyone active in the 1980s and among the most distinctive, graceful, and mysterious de Kooning himself ever made," writes Robert Storr in the exhibition catalogue.

The exhibition contains some forty paintings made by the artist between 1981 and 1987 selected from more than 300 canvases from public and private collections. The variously ethereal, animated, and richly hued works demonstrate a striking formal and emotional range. Enlivened by sinuous, flowing strokes in radiant primary reds, yellows, and blues, augmented by subtle whites and strong blacks, and startling greens,

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oranges, and violets, the paintings reverberate with fragmentary references to the sexually charged figuration, landscape spaces, and the biomorphic forms of his great Abstract Expressionist canvases of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s.

One of the founders of that movement, de Kooning, in his art, was widely thought to have personified its anguished aggression and painterly bravado. Throughout his career, however, he refused to be typecast, shifting his ground back and forth from classic draftsmanship to daredevil improvisation and from ferocious attacks on the human form to the most lyrical evocations of light and nature. Firmly believing, as he said, that "I have to change to stay the same," de Kooning radically redirected his work one last time beginning in 1980 at the age of 75. Working at an ever accelerating pace until his powers failed in 1990, the artist turned away from the tumult of his previous paintings to limn canvases of a wholly unexpected and unprecedented ease and luminosity. "As the heavy oleaginous currents and skimming riptides of colors of the late 1970s paintings stilled and receded," writes Mr. Storr, "the sheer hues and spare structure of his new work emerged—light, sharp-focused, and assured."

PUBLICATION

Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, The 1980s, copublished by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, is the first scholarly publication on De Kooning's last decade of work. The fully-illustrated 144-page catalogue contains essays by Gary Garrels and Robert Storr. Clothbound, \$50.00, distributed by D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., New York, and paperbound \$29.95, are both available in The MoMA Book Store.

TRAVEL

The exhibition completes an international tour with its MoMA showing. It opened at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (October 3, 1995–January 7, 1996) and traveled to the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (February 3–May 8, 1996), Städtisches Kunstmuseum, Bonn (June 14–August 11, 1996), and Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (September 9–November 25, 1996).

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