

**MoMA PRESENTS THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE RETROSPECTIVE TO DATE OF
CONTEMPORARY PAINTER ELIZABETH MURRAY**

Exhibition Highlights Four Decades of Artistic Innovation

Elizabeth Murray

The Joan and Preston Robert Tisch Gallery
October 23, 2005—January 9, 2006

NEW YORK, October 18, 2005—The Museum of Modern Art presents ***Elizabeth Murray***, a major retrospective comprising more than 70 paintings and works on paper dating from 1963 to 2005 by New York-based artist Elizabeth Murray (American, b. 1940), in the broadest survey to date of her 42-year career. The exhibition showcases her complete body of work, focusing on her large-scale, multipaneled, shaped canvases, including her most recent work, *The Sun and the Moon* (2005). Organized in a loosely chronological fashion, the retrospective incorporates a selection of the artist's notebooks and drawings to further illuminate her prolific and consistently innovative career. On view from October 23, 2005, through January 9, 2006, in The Joan and Preston Robert Tisch Gallery on the sixth floor, *Elizabeth Murray* is organized by Robert Storr, who is the Rosalie Solow Professor of Modern Art at the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University, and was formerly Senior Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art.

This retrospective indicates the Museum's longstanding commitment to Elizabeth Murray's art, which began in 1983 when two works entered the collection: the 1981 painting *Painter's Progress*, and an untitled print from 1982. *Painter's Progress* and four other works from the MoMA collection are included in the exhibition. In 1995, Murray was selected to curate an Artist's Choice exhibition at MoMA titled *Elizabeth Murray: Modern Women at the Museum of Modern Art*.

Murray belongs to a generation of artists who emerged in the 1970s and whose exposure to Cubist-derived Minimalism and Surrealist-influenced Pop inspired experimentation with new modes of expression that would bridge the gap between these historical models. Over the course of more than four decades, she has transformed painting's conventions to forge an original artistic idiom through the use of vivid colors, boldly inventive forms, and shaped, constructed, multi-paneled canvases. Murray's paintings are animated by recurring biomorphic shapes and vibrant images of domestic objects—cups, glasses, spoons, chairs, tables, and shoes—by which the artist subverts the viewer's notion of the familiar.

Murray grew up outside Chicago, and graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1962. She then moved to the West Coast to pursue a Master of Fine Arts degree at Mills College outside San Francisco. After Murray finished school and left California for New York,

she lived in Buffalo for two years, before moving to New York City in 1967, where she lives and works today.

Murray's early works reflect her synthesis of images from periods of art history into compositions that also manifest her affinity for cartooning. In *Night Empire* (1967-68), Murray creates an iconic and decoratively framed Pop rendering of the Empire State Building. Demonstrating her interest in the modular aspects of Minimalism, which was the dominant style in New York during this period, Murray painted works such as *Untitled* (1970), based on Paul Cézanne's paintings of card players, and incorporated images and forms that recalled the Cubist works of Pablo Picasso and Juan Gris, such as *Beer Glass at Noon* (1971). Her longstanding interest in Cézanne also inspired *Madame Cézanne in Rocking Chair* (1972), a slapstick comic strip homage to the French master's many portraits of his wife. By spilling Mme Cézanne out of her chair, Murray created the first of many images in which the ideal of domesticity is upended.

Murray soon began an investigation into geometric forms, using curved lines to give movement to small, detailed studies informed by mathematical ideas such as *F Painting* (1973) and *Wave Painting* (1973). Two paintings in the exhibition called *Möbius Band* (both 1974) are emblematic of her interest in Möbius strips—endless loops comprised of a band that is twisted 180 degrees and joined at two ends. *Pink Spiral Leap* (1975) marked a subsequent transformation of scale and form—at nearly six and a half feet square, the painting shows lines released from their mathematical confines to resemble a spring pressing out against the edges of the canvas.

Biomorphic imagery, and another dramatic increase in scale to approximately nine and a half feet square, characterize *Beginner* (1976), a painting whose primary image Murray has described as a "Tweety Bird shape." While Murray's childhood love of Walt Disney and the comics underpins many aspects of her art, the imagery in *Beginner* is attained through the manipulation of abstract elements, demonstrating the impact of both Picasso and Surrealists such as Salvador Dalí on her artistic development.

Tug and *With* (both 1978) are the first works in the exhibition to show Murray's incorporation of geometric and biomorphic forms onto angular, shaped frames. During the early 1980s, Murray embarked on a period of intense experimentation with structures formed by the abutment and overlap of multiple canvases. The flowering of her work at this time can be seen in *Painter's Progress* (1981) in which the fragments of Cubism and the arabesques of Surrealism are locked together in a virtuoso composition depicting a palette and brushes, the essential tools of a painter. With *Yikes* (1982), two separate canvases form a pair as their curved shapes almost line up to fit together, but a space is left between them. Similarly, *Keyhole* (1982) get its name from the blank space left by layered canvases built up around a hole in the center.

Murray's "emphatically unstill lifes," as Mr. Storr calls them, such as *Fly By*, *Beam*, and *Long Arm* (all from 1982), distort the perception of such common objects as wine glasses and tables by putting them in precarious situations. Liquids are splashed about as if the objects are being dropped or smashed, alluding to domestic chaos. Murray's splashes suggest physical

trauma, human sexuality, and release of bodily fluids. In the painting *More Than You Know* (1983), a table is flattened, and another table is physically stretched and twisted in *Don't Be Cruel* (1985-86).

In the mid-1980s, Murray conceived and fabricated elaborate supports for the curved paintings she created, making uniquely voluminous stretchers over which she placed her canvases. Works such as *Wonderful World* (1988), *True Air* (1988), and *Euclid* (1989) are examples of these inventive sculptural constructions with their bulging bodies and three-dimensional extremities. Symbolism is also present in these works, with round shapes, long cords, and dark openings suggesting elements of birth.

Shoes are another domestic subject explored in depth by Murray. Shown in numerous paintings depicting oversized footwear, as with *Trembling Foot* (1988), Murray draws on multiple inspirations to make shoes her subject—ranging from those rendered by Philip Guston, Vincent van Gogh, and even the outsized vaudevillian shoes typical of Disney animation and the comics. In *Dis Pair* (1989-90), a clownish and overbearing pair of shoes evokes the black clouds that threaten characters in cartoons.

In the early 1990s, Murray departed from her involvement with heavily built-out paintings. The rest of the decade is characterized by flatter paintings, though still three-dimensional, that are both multi- and single-paneled. Murray's color brightens from 1992-3 onward, and her subjects become more antic, as with *Bounding Dog* (1993-94), as well as shaped canvases such as *What Is Love* (1995) and *Button Painting* (1996).

By 2000, Murray's work acquired a new complexity involving many cut out shapes that resemble the symbols in a comic book thought balloon. This technique is exemplified by *Do the Dance* (2005), about which Mr. Storr writes, "Within its jumbled framework one encounters not only faces, bodies, bottles, and clattering floorboards but also direct allusions to Miró, Picasso, and all of the artists whose idioms Murray has incorporated into her own transformational grammar of shapes and colors."

Coinciding with *Elizabeth Murray* are two complementary exhibitions in The Paul J. Sachs Prints and Illustrated Books Galleries on the second floor: **Focus: Elizabeth Murray** features a selection of Murray's prints from 1980 to the present and provides an in-depth look at the important role printmaking plays in Murray's creative process; **Between Representation and Abstraction** comprises approximately 80 prints that relate to Murray's signature depictions of everyday objects in an abstract style and includes works by Jean Arp, Jasper Johns, Willem de Kooning, and Picasso. Both exhibitions are on view from October 19 through January 9, 2006. See separate press release for more information.

PUBLICATIONS:

With a chaptered essay by Robert Storr, full-color plate section, and an in-depth interview with Murray by the author, the exhibition publication explores Murray's relation to artists such as Paul Cézanne, Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, Claes Oldenburg, and Frank Stella, as well as to the

New Image paintings, Neo-Expressionism, and graffiti art of the 1970s and 1980s.
Hardcover: \$55.00.

The Museum is also producing an artist's book, *Popped Art*. Because Murray's works often operate in three dimensions, this book contains four full-color pop-ups based on existing works of art, designed by accomplished paper engineer Bruce Foster in collaboration with the artist. The book also shows a selection of the preparatory sketches and other drawings that Murray made to create these works. Mr. Storr contributes an introduction. Hardcover: \$19.95

Both books are published by The Museum of Modern Art, and are available in a box set for \$70.00. They will be sold in the MoMA Stores, including momastore.org, beginning in October. The books will also be available to the trade through Distributed Art Publishers (D.A.P.) in the United States and through Thames & Hudson internationally. See separate press release for more information.

PROGRAMS:

Accompanying programs include a **Gallery Talk** by Robert Storr on October 24 at 6:00 p.m., meeting in the film and media lobby, located to the east of the main Museum entrance on fifty-third Street; an **Artists Panel** on November 21 at 6:00 p.m. in Titus Theater 2 that features contemporary artists Jennifer Bartlett, Carroll Dunham, Robert Gober and Jessica Stockholder, in a discussion led by Robert Storr; and a **Critics Panel** on November 28 at 6:00 p.m. in Titus Theater 2 including critics and scholars Carter Ratcliff, Katy Siegel, Joan Simon, and Alexi Worth who will give presentations and engage in a discussion moderated by Robert Storr. See separate press release for more information.

TRAVEL:

The exhibition will travel to L'Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM), in Valencia, Spain, in summer 2006, and other venues to be announced.

SPONSORSHIP:

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