

MID-CAREER SURVEY OF PAINTER MARLENE DUMAS IS THE FIRST TO BE PRESENTED IN THE UNITED STATES

Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave

December 14, 2008–February 16, 2009

The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art Gallery, sixth floor, and
The Paul J. Sachs Drawings Galleries, third floor

Press Preview: Tuesday, December 9, 2008, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

NEW YORK, December 3, 2008— *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave* is the first North American mid-career survey of paintings and drawings by Marlene Dumas. The exhibition features approximately 70 paintings and 35 drawings ranging in format from small individual drawings and intimate, early sketchbooks, to large-scale ink washes, which are, in some cases, more monumental than the paintings. Several series of drawings are also featured, including *Models*, which consists of 100 single sheets. Dumas's paintings are also diverse in size and scale—ranging from very large, recumbent figures of the dead or newborn, to several paintings just completed by the artist and seen at MoMA for the first time in the United States. The exhibition will be on view from December 14, 2008, through February 16, 2009, in the sixth floor International Council Galleries, and the third floor Paul J. Sachs Drawings Galleries.

Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave is organized by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in association with The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The exhibition is curated by Connie Butler, The Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator of Drawings at MoMA and the MOCA Ahmanson Curatorial Fellow. The exhibition was on view at MOCA from June 22 through September 22, 2008. After MoMA's presentation, the exhibition will travel to The Menil Collection, Houston, where it will be on view from March 26 through June 21, 2009.

The exhibition takes its subtitle, "Measuring Your Own Grave," from a painting made in 2003. In this work, a figure bows toward the viewer, gracefully stretching its arms the width of the canvas. The title suggests that the space of the canvas becomes the figure's coffin or grave—for the artist, this measuring is akin to the process of representation itself. "Marlene Dumas is one of the most intriguing painters working today," Ms. Butler said. "Her exploration of portraiture and engagement with many of the most difficult social issues of our time is truly unique, as is her continuing commitment to painting as a relevant and powerful medium."

Born in 1953 in Cape Town, South Africa, Dumas studied art at the Michaelis School of Fine Arts at the University of Cape Town and moved to Amsterdam in 1976 to pursue further studies at de Ateliers. Dumas has lived and worked in Amsterdam ever since. This exhibition surveys more than 30 years of work and is organized around the theme of portraiture, which

Dumas treats as a psychological phenomenon, like a Rorschach test. Drawing almost exclusively on photographic source material, Dumas explores crucial questions of humanity and representation. Subjects of life, birth, sex, death, grief, and identity are represented through portraits and images drawn from her ongoing archive of Polaroid photographs, personal snapshots, and thousands of media images culled over time. A painting is never a literal rendition of a photographic source, nor is the material source of a painting the same as its psychological subject matter. Rather, Dumas focuses on the inherent differences between photography and painting—what she has described as “the essential immorality or indifference” of a photographic image when it is removed from its original context or stripped of its identifying information. Dumas believes that the process of making art is a struggle to be free of the prescriptions of the culture one comes from, just as the figures in her paintings measure themselves against the edges of the frame.

The exhibition is installed not chronologically but rather associatively, and reflects Dumas’s ongoing investigation of the same topics, as well as the artist’s tendency to work in series, with drawing series and groups of paintings arranged together to create new associations. Key paintings in the exhibition include *The White Disease* (1985), which addresses issues of race by creating a visual relationship between the surface of skin and the surface of painting. In addition to works with single figures, Dumas also produces large-scale group portraits such as *The Teacher (sub a)* (1987).

Dumas’s portrayal of the female figure, often nude or provocatively clothed, contrasts with traditional art historical representations of women. In iconic works such as *Waiting (For Meaning)* and *Losing (Her Meaning)* (both 1988), the artist questions the power of this classic image—the female nude—to convey meaning. Other works, such as *Miss Pompadour* (1999) and *Cracking the Whip* (2000), show women in provocative poses, both humorous and assaulting in their acrobatic sexuality, while *Male Beauty* (2002) features an erotic image of a male nude. Connected to her exploration of female identity, Dumas’s work often includes portraits of infants and children, focusing on pregnancy and motherhood and the physical and psychological trauma and mystery of both. Works like *Die Baba (The Baby)* (1985) challenge the traditional portrayal of children by suggesting their mysterious and even threatening aspects. Notions of beauty and ugliness underlie *Models* (1994), a group of 100 related drawings in serial format that capture the diverse facial expressions of women in various professional and psychological roles.

Examples from Dumas’s recent body of work, the Man Kind series (2002-06), highlight the artist’s ongoing commitment to questioning received ideas about identity and politics by presenting portraits of men, seemingly of Middle Eastern descent, drawn from images of terrorists, martyrs, Dutch Moroccans, Palestinians, friends, actors, and ordinary citizens. In *Duct Tape* (2002–05), the subject’s face is obscured by a hood, recalling recent photographs of Abu Ghraib or images of Palestinian prisoners. These paintings force the viewer to recognize the

complexity of current political conflicts and our evolving understanding of race, identity, and human confrontation.

Among the more recent works in the exhibition is *Dead Marilyn* (2008), based on an autopsy photograph of Marilyn Monroe, which Dumas painted for the exhibition's premiere showing at MOCA. Several paintings Dumas completed recently are appearing at MoMA, and in the United States, for the first time. While searching for images of crying women in twentieth century art, Dumas came across a text describing Man Ray's iconic photograph *Tears* (1930-32) as the prototypical modernist representation of tears. That inspired her own version titled *Glass Tears (for Man Ray)* (2008). Dumas's mother passed away in 2007 at noon, two months before the artist's first solo exhibition in South Africa. Her *Self Portrait at Noon* is a touching memorial to this moment of loss.

As Ms. Butler writes in the accompanying catalogue, "Dumas's career-long investigation of the portrait cannot be understood outside her relationship to issues of identity... Dumas has said that South Africa gave her content and Europe gave her form and, indeed, her relationship to her subjects is deeply imprinted by her experiences of constituency, citizenship, and viewership, as well as how these subjectivities shift as we inhabit different cultural positions."

SPONSORSHIP:

Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave is organized by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in association with The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The presentation of the exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art is made possible by Joan Tisch.

Generous support is provided by Jerry I. Speyer and Katherine G. Farley and the Mondriaan Foundation, Amsterdam.

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TRAVEL:

Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave opened at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (June 22–September 22, 2008). After the MoMA presentation, it will be on view at The Menil Collection, Houston (March 26–June 21, 2009).

PUBLICATION:

Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave is accompanied by a 280-page, fully illustrated book. Co-published by Distributed Art Publishers (D.A.P.) and MOCA, the publication constitutes a comprehensive and scholarly examination of the artist's career, featuring newly commissioned texts by exhibition curator Connie Butler, MOCA Director of Publications Lisa Gabrielle Mark, art historian Richard Shiff, and artist Matthew Monahan, as well as new writings by the artist. Butler takes a broad view of Dumas's practice as artist-witness, examining the relationship of her paintings to real personal and socio-political events and reflecting on her reception in America vis-à-vis 1990s identity politics, while Shiff considers Dumas's transformative process of painting from photographic sources through the notion of touch, considering the act of representation from a moral and ethical standpoint. Mark looks specifically at Dumas's images of pregnant women and children to contemplate the interplay of empathy and ambivalence in her work, and Monahan offers a personal reflection on his relationship with Dumas, as both a fellow artist and a one-time denizen of Amsterdam. The catalogue includes an extensive exhibition history and bibliography. Price: \$45.00.

PROGRAMS:**Marlene Dumas: A Lecture with the Artist**

Monday, December 8, 6:30 p.m.

The Celeste Bartos Theater, 4 West 54 Street

In this lecture, the artist presents her work and the exhibition.

Tickets (\$10; members \$8; students, seniors, and staff of other museums \$5) can be purchased at the lobby information desk, the film desk, or online at www.moma.org/thinkmodern.

Mankind/Homeland: Culture and Politics in Postcolonial Europe

Monday, February 2, 6:30 p.m.

The Celeste Bartos Theater, 4 West 54 Street

This panel discussion features artists, art historians, and other thinkers as they address issues inspired by Marlene Dumas's work, particularly her "Mankind" series. In these recent paintings, Dumas's subjects depict images of Muslim or Middle-Eastern men, Muslim immigrants in her homeland of Holland, as well as portraits of terrorists, and hooded figures. Though the situation in the Netherlands is a point of departure for discussion, participants address the condition of a postcolonial world in which anxiety, fear, and immigration, as well as cultural resistance, play a role in the development of relationships between people of distinct backgrounds. They also consider how art and artists can react to these issues and how their work can help us to see things differently. Participants include **Saskia Bos**, Dean, School of Art, The Cooper Union, New York; **Maria Hlavajova**, curator and artistic director of BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht, and program director of tranzit, an initiative in Bratislava, Prague, Vienna, and Budapest, artist **Willem de Rooij**; and others.

Tickets (\$10; members \$8; students, seniors, and staff of other museums \$5) can be purchased at the lobby information desk, the film desk, or online at www.moma.org/thinkmodern.

Brown Bag Lunch Lectures

February 9 and 12, 12:30–1:15 p.m.
Classroom B, 4 West 54 Street

Esther Adler (MA, University of Maryland), curatorial assistant in MoMA's Department of Drawings, will give a lecture about the exhibition *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave* on February 9 and 12. You may bring your own lunch. On February 12, sign-language interpretation is available. An induction loop sound amplification system is available for all sessions.

Tickets (\$5; members, students, seniors, and staff of other museums \$3) can be purchased at the lobby information desk, at the film desk, or in the Education and Research Building lobby.

MoMA AUDIO:

Hear Marlene Dumas speak about many of her works in the exhibition. MoMA Audio is available free of charge at the Museum and on www.moma.org/audio and iTunes. MoMA Audio is a collaboration between The Museum of Modern Art and Acoustiguide, Inc. MoMA Audio is available free of charge courtesy of Bloomberg.

PRESS PREVIEW:

Tuesday, December 9, 2008, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Remarks by curator Connie Butler and Marlene Dumas at 11:00 a.m. Also on view, *Artist's Choice: Vik Muniz, Rebus*, with remarks by curator Eva Respini and Vik Muniz at 12:00 p.m. RSVP: pressooffice@moma.org

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Press Contact: Daniela Stigh, 212-708-9747 or daniela_stigh@moma.org
For downloadable high-resolution images, register at www.moma.org/press.

Holiday Hours:

December 24: 10:30 to 3:00 (Christmas Eve)
December 25: Museum closed (Christmas Day)
December 26: 9:30 to 8:00 (Target Free Friday Night 4-8 p.m.)
December 27-January 1: 9:30 to 6:30
January 2: 9:30 to 8:00 (Target Free Friday Night 4-8 p.m.)
January 3-5: 9:30 to 6:30

MoMA Monday Nights:

MoMA will remain open until 8:45 p.m. on selected Mondays, giving visitors extended hours to view special exhibitions and the museum's collection. The evenings will include entertainment and a cash bar. Regular admission applies.

The museum will stay open from 10:30 to 8:45 on the following Mondays:

December 8
January 12
February 9
March 9
April 6
May 4
June 8

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019

Hours: Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m.
Closed Tuesday

Museum Admission: \$20 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D. Free for children 16 and under. Free for members.
Admission includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs.
Free admission during Target Free Friday Nights 4:00-8:00 p.m.

The public may call 212/708-9400 for detailed Museum information. Visit us on the Web at www.moma.org.