

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
October 1986

PROJECTS: JUSTEN LADDA
November 15, 1986 - January 6, 1987

This fall the PROJECTS series continues at The Museum of Modern Art with a major installation by Justen Ladda, opening on November 15, 1986. Ladda, born in Germany in 1953, has been living in New York and executing site-specific pieces for the past eight years. His work for the Museum, entitled art, fashion and religion, is a provocative synthesis of sequential drawings, architectural structures, painted sculpture, and wall painting. Through a complex overlay of abstract patterns, objects of contemporary culture, and imagery from historical masterpieces, Ladda creates a dramatic composition that evolves or dissolves with the viewer's changing vantage points.

Ladda explores the ambiguous regions that hover between perception and reality, and the object and its shadow, by incorporating both the object and its painted representation. Often painting over floors, walls, and objects, he creates a composition of apparent three-dimensional imagery, the cohesiveness of which can only be discerned from one vantage point. The composition disintegrates if viewed from any other angle as the individual elements emerge, often in bizarre distortions. This fragmentation of the image is as essential to his work as the existence of the cohesive image itself.

The installation that Ladda has created specifically for the Garden Hall Gallery highlights contemporary society's changing viewpoints toward historically established values. The artist often uses such images from popular American culture as household utensils, commercial advertisements, and television sets, thereby interpreting contemporary society in terms of its

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"products." With ironic and subtle wit Ladda produces "iconic dimensions out of banal everyday imagery," according to Wendy Weitman, assistant curator in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, who organized the exhibition. She writes, "His interest in artifacts of contemporary culture (or any other culture, for that matter) derives not merely from a particular attraction to television sets or comic-book figures but rather from the beliefs of a specific society that are reflected in them."

All of the three-dimensional and painted stylistic components of the installation suggest and contrast what Ladda refers to as specific cultural "belief systems." The work illuminates the distinction between the ephemeral nature of the artifacts of a culture and the relative permanence of its traditional values. Ms. Weitman continues, "In this elegant and provocative construction Ladda forces viewers to reassess their approach to art and cultural symbols."

Ladda's most well-known piece, The Thing (1981), is painted on the walls and seats of an abandoned auditorium in a South Bronx public school. His style has evolved from predominately painted installations to freestanding sculpture. In the last year, he has become increasingly involved with architecture and the transformation of interior spaces through the use of architectural elements. As part of New York City's Percent for Art Program, Ladda has designed the corridors and classrooms of a public school expansion in the Bronx, exploring the possibilities of his style in a given architectural setting. In the Museum's installation he combines abstract patterns and architectural structures of his own design to create an environment which heightens the viewer's sense of spatial and conceptual orientation.

The PROJECTS series is made possible by generous grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Lannan Foundation, and the Wallace Funds, established by the founders of Reader's Digest. Additional support for this exhibition, which will remain on view through January 6, 1987, has been provided by the New York State Council on the Arts and First Bank System, Inc.--headquarters Minneapolis. PROJECTS is a series of exhibitions of relatively short duration devoted to the work of contemporary artists. JUSTEN LADDA will be followed by JOEL OTTERSON (January 17 - March 3, 1987) and LOUISE LAWLER (March 14 - April 28, 1987).

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most interesting achievements of recent photography," said John Szarkowski, director of the Department of Photography.

Mr. Szarkowski writes about NEW PHOTOGRAPHY 2, "Documentary photography of the classic mode depends on the assumption that appearance is meaningful and that the relationship between the look of a scene and its significance is straightforward, even if not always easily understood....In recent years many younger photographers have used the documentary style in ways that challenge this assumption...."

Both Mary Frey and Philip Larca diCorcia explore the uneasy relationship between documentary photography and narrative. Frey combines ordinary domestic scenes from middle-class life with brief texts similar to the language of popular romance novels. She alters the traditional relationship between caption and photograph by choosing texts that are stylistically dissonant.

Ms. Frey calls her photographs "Real Life Dramas." Currently an assistant

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For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.

from the NEA and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.