

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
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WORD 2 MY MOTHER

November 18, 1991 - January 19, 1992

A new video installation by the African-American artist Tony Cokes opens at The Museum of Modern Art on November 18, 1991. Employing visual and textual materials, Cokes examines his mother's life and experiences. **WORD 2 MY MOTHER** is on view in the Museum's third floor Garden Hall Gallery through January 19, 1992.

WORD 2 MY MOTHER consists of three primary elements: a documentary portrait of Cokes's mother, computer-animated texts that reinvestigate the documentary material in personal and theoretical terms, and audio-taped excerpts of popular songs from the 1940s and 1950s, sung *a capella* by his mother. The documentary footage constitutes an interview with his mother. At regular intervals the screen fades to black and phrases appear: a selective list of book and music titles shown in alphabetical order, a budget line from the project, or a line of credits. Text is not only an integral element to the videotape but also exists as a separate component shown on adjacent computer terminals.

WORD 2 MY MOTHER explores what it was like growing up as the youngest child in a southern family with many siblings, an absent father, and a strong mother who worked for fifty years in a school, a hospital, and the houses of the rich. Cokes first conducted lengthy interviews with his mother on audio tape and videotape about love, family, work, and money. On camera she sings and tells stories seated at her kitchen table. Cokes took this material and

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spent months analyzing his mother's experiences, interpreting and combining them with his own. In the resulting work, issues of language and control are carefully scrutinized, as is the artist's relationship to the dominant culture surrounding him.

In conjunction with **WORD 2 MY MOTHER**, the VIDEO VIEWPOINTS program on November 18 at 6:30 p.m. will feature two videotapes by Cokes: *Fade to Black* (1990), made with Don Trammel, and *Black Celebration* (1988). Cokes will be present to discuss his work.

Born in 1956 in Richmond, Virginia, Tony Cokes received his B.A. in photography and creative writing from Goddard College (1979) and his M.F.A. in sculpture from Virginia Commonwealth University (1985). His videotapes and installations have been exhibited at numerous museums and alternative spaces, including The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Washington Project for the Arts, Washington, D.C.; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; the Long Beach Museum of Art, California; and The Kitchen and Artists Space in New York. Cokes currently lives in New York.

WORD 2 MY MOTHER has been organized by Barbara London, assistant curator, video, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art.

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For further information or film stills, contact Barbara Marshall, Film Press Representative, Department of Public Information, 212/708-9752.