

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## The Museum of Modern Art

### A SUBTLE PORTRAIT OF SOUTH AFRICA EMERGES IN A NEW PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

#### David Goldblatt: Photographs from South Africa

July 16-October 6, 1998

An unusual series of photographs documenting the social history of apartheid will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art beginning July 16, 1998. *David Goldblatt: Photographs from South Africa*, a selection of 40 works, eschews dramatic events--the conventional markers of social documentary--in favor of straightforward photographs of homes, churches, public buildings, and other structures in moments of quietude. The deceptive simplicity of these works is quickly complicated, however, by Goldblatt's powerful commentary, presented in the Museum's exhibition as extended captions. In restrained and eloquent language, Goldblatt details the complex historical, political, and economic contexts in which these structures are embedded. Together, text and image create a remarkable portrait of a complex social reality, which, though apartheid officially ended in 1990, remains unresolved. The exhibition will be on view through October 6 in the Museum's third-floor Edward Steichen Photography Center.

"This stunning project demonstrates another way to contend with deep-rooted social issues," says Susan Kismaric, Curator, Department of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art, who organized the exhibition. "It is a highly original entrée into the photograph as a means of social criticism."

The photographs, dating from the early 1960s through 1990, describe many aspects of South African culture during the so-called Era of White Domination, a period that began in 1652 and ended with the National Party's notorious policy of apartheid (1948-90). They illuminate the history and meaning of the structures of both the country's indigenous people and those who colonized South Africa--from Dutch Reformed churches to shantytown shacks, from resettlement communities to downtown banks.

Goldblatt was born in 1930 in Randfontein, South Africa, the son of Lithuanian Jewish parents who had fled Europe with their parents in the 1890s. He conceived an interest in photography in high school, but there was little opportunity in his chosen field (magazine photography). Discouraged, he joined the family's menswear business and began work part-time on a university degree. Following his father's death in 1962, he sold the clothing concern and soon after began working full-time as a photographer.

"I was neither an activist nor a missionary," he writes in *South Africa The Structure of Things Then*, the forthcoming book of his work. "Yet I had begun to realize an involvement with this place and the people among whom I lived that would not be stilled and that I needed to grasp and probe. I wanted to explore the specifics of our lives, not in theories but in the grit and taste and touch of things, and to bring those specifics into that particular coherence that the camera both enables and demands."

Goldblatt has fulfilled assignments for magazines, corporations, and institutions in South Africa and worldwide. His photographs are in the collections of the South African National Gallery, Cape Town; the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; the National Gallery, Melbourne, Australia; and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, owns 12 of Goldblatt's works. This is his first solo New York museum show. *South Africa The Structure of Things Then* is due in August 1998 from Oxford University Press and is available through the Museum Book Store. An audio interview with David Goldblatt and a selection of works from the exhibition can be found on the MoMA Web site, at [www.moma.org/exhibitions/goldblatt/](http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/goldblatt/)

*David Goldblatt: Photographs from South Africa* is made possible by a generous grant from the Contemporary Exhibition Fund of The Museum of Modern Art, established with gifts from Lily Auchincloss, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder.

No. 49

[press office](#)

[menu](#)

©1998 The Museum of Modern Art, New York