

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## PROJECTS: DENNIS ADAMS

January 12 - February 28, 1991

A site-specific installation combining photography and architecture by American artist Dennis Adams opens at The Museum of Modern Art on January 12, 1991 as part of its continuing PROJECTS series. Titled *Road to Victory*, the installation refers to a wartime exhibition of the same name organized for the Museum by Edward Steichen, then a lieutenant commander in the United States Navy and, from 1947 to 1962, the director of the Museum's Department of Photography.

Organized by Laura Rosenstock, Assistant Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, PROJECTS: DENNIS ADAMS is made possible by generous grants from The Bohen Foundation, the Lannan Foundation, The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art, and the National Endowment for the Arts. It remains on view through February 28.

Steichen's selection of photographs for his 1942 *Road to Victory* exhibition illustrated a unified and patriotic America. Designed by the Bauhaus artist Herbert Bayer, the installation took the shape of a road bordered by enlarged photopanel and was described in the accompanying catalogue as "a procession of photographs of the nation at war." The photographs were also accompanied by text written by the poet Carl Sandburg.

In his installation, Adams has created objects that resemble museum vitrines. Reflected on mirrored surfaces below these vitrines are World War I aerial reconnaissance photographs, taken under Steichen's supervision while

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commanding the Photographic Division of the American Air Service. As in Steichen's exhibition, the installation architecture dictates the meaning of the photographs. In the former, giant photographic murals pulled the viewer along the ramp--the "road" of the title--which presented dramatic scenes culminating with one of American marching troops. In the current installation, the vitrines pave the way toward documentary photographs of the 1942 exhibition.

By referring to the Steichen exhibition, Adams intends to show that museum exhibitions affirm prevailing cultural and social standards in their selection and their display methodology. Although alluding to Steichen's display techniques, Adams's vitrines are empty. Stripped of their normal function, they metaphorically destabilize the museum's position as the archive of established culture.

The fragmentary scenes of aerial surveillance, images the artist believes are not normally found in a museum, "resemble abstract patterns that distance and aestheticize the war-torn frenzy they depict," as Ms. Rosenstock writes in the brochure accompanying the exhibition. In juxtaposing these depersonalized reconnaissance photographs with the vibrant and triumphant images in the 1942 exhibition, Adams intends to emphasize how the emotional force of that exhibition's installation also deflected attention from the suffering that war entails.

Born in 1948 in Des Moines, Dennis Adams received a B.F.A. (1969) from Drake University, Des Moines, and an M.F.A. (1971) from the Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia. He has been exhibiting his work in public sites since 1978 and is best known for his manipulations of bus shelters, where advertisements are substituted with such photographic images as the Rosenbergs following

their arrest in 1950. Adams's work has been included in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including in 1990 *Dennis Adams: Works*, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; *Passages de l'image*, the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; *Images in Transition*, The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto and Tokyo; and in the current *Rhetorical Image*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. The artist lives and works in New York.

Next in the PROJECTS series is STUART KLIPPER (February 1 - March 19, 1991) and MICHAEL CRAIG-MARTIN (March 9 - February 23, 1991).

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