

# The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release  
April 1990

## FACT SHEET

**EXHIBITION** HIGH AND LOW: MODERN ART AND POPULAR CULTURE

**DATES** October 7, 1990 - January 15, 1991

**ORGANIZATION** Kirk Varnedoe, Director, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art; and Adam Gopnik, Art Critic, The New Yorker

**SPONSOR** AT&T

**FOCUS** This exhibition addresses the relationship between modern art and popular and commercial culture. From Paris prior to World War I to New York today, this dialogue has been central to the modern visual experience. Although many historians have attempted to analyze this subject--especially since the advent of Pop art--this is the first exhibition to examine in depth this pervasive phenomenon.

**CONTENT** Concentrating on painting and sculpture, the exhibition is divided into four basic themes: Graffiti, Caricature, Comics, and Advertising. Over 250 works by approximately fifty artists show the varieties of appropriation on the one hand, and transformation on the other, through which "high" art has borrowed from "low," and vice-versa, throughout the twentieth century.

HIGH AND LOW begins with the Cubists--who first directly incorporated into art elements of advertising, popular press, and everyday objects--and continues through the past decade, in which the imagery of consumer society and the modes of mass communication have been of central importance to younger artists.

The exhibition establishes the lineage from Picasso's collages to the work of Kurt Schwitters and Joseph Cornell to early Pop art and eventually to such recent work as that of Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer. Similarly, the lineage of Marcel Duchamp's readymade objects is traced through Surrealist works such as Meret Oppenheim's fur-lined teacup to Claes Oldenburg's object-monuments to the recent appropriation works of Jeff Koons.

In relation to modern artists' attention to graffiti, the exhibition examines in depth those instances--as in work by Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly--in which the formation of new artistic languages has had a fundamental connection to sources in popular culture. In treating a theme such as

caricature, the exhibition deals with the expressionist tradition of exaggerated facial deformation and with obvious caricatural elements in the work of such painters as Jean Dubuffet.

Concurrent developments in advertising strategies or in cartoon illustrations are revealed by numerous examples of ephemera having to do with these aspects of popular culture. In examining the exchange between painting and comic art, it deals with evident instances such as Roy Lichtenstein's work, as well as the more covert affinities between Joan Miró's nocturnes and George Herriman's Krazy Kat cartoons or Philip Guston's and Elizabeth Murray's paintings and R. Crumb's underground comic style.

#### PERFORMANCE SERIES

In conjunction with the exhibition, SIX EVENINGS: HIGH AND LOW PERFORMANCE features artists whose work in the medium of performance explores the relationship between art and popular culture. Organized by RoseLee Goldberg, author of Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present (1988), the Tuesday-evening series includes performances by Laurie Anderson, Eric Bogosian, David Cale, Brian Eno, and Spalding Gray. All performances take place at 8:00 p.m. in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1. Tickets are \$15.00. Dates and ticket sales to be announced.

#### PUBLICATIONS

High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture by Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik. 464 pages. 220 color and 405 black-and-white illustrations, with three foldouts. Extensive bibliography by Matthew Armstrong. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. Hardbound, \$65.00; paperbound, \$29.95; available in The MoMA Book Store.

Readings in Modern Art and Popular Culture. Foreword by Kirk Varnedoe. Essays by John Bowlt, Lynne Cooke, Lorenz Eitner, Peter Plagens, Robert Rosenblum, Roger Shattuck, and Rob Storr, among others. Details will follow.

#### TRAVEL

Following its New York opening, the exhibition travels to The Art Institute of Chicago (February 20 - May 12, 1991) and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (June 21 - September 15, 1991).

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For further information, contact the Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 212/708-9750.