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## The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release  
November 2000

### EXHIBITION EXPLORES THE USE OF CONSTRUCTED FICCTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

*Sets and Situations*  
October 19, 2000-March 4, 2001  
Fourth Floor

New York, November 2000 - Over the past two decades many artists have moved away from using photography as a standard of mechanical, "automatic" objectivity, favoring instead studio-based inventions that conjure fantasies or mime the stereotypes of movies and advertising. ***Sets and Situations*** features contemporary photographs that openly declare themselves as fictions through the use of fabricated sets and artificially staged situations. Organized by Kirk Varnedoe, Chief Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, the exhibition features some 30 works by James Casebere, William Christenberry, Gregory Crewdson, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, David Levinthal, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, and Carrie Mae Weems, among others. ***Sets and Situations*** is on view through March 4, 2001 as part of ***Open Ends***.

"The new showcasing of patently constructed realities has become so widespread, and so rich in its range of purposes, as to constitute a kind of generational sea change within photography," notes Mr. Varnedoe.

Cindy Sherman has played a fundamental role in the development of this new sensibility. As with her *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-80), a series of black and white vignettes that show the artist cast as movie star stereotypes (on view in an adjacent gallery), many photographers in the past two decades have specifically referred to the world of cinema. With her more recent, large-scale photographs, Sherman continues to interweave questions of malleable personal identities with enactments of constructs proposed by the images of popular culture.

Many artists of the period use miniature sets, dolls, and figurines to portray fictitious scenes or settings. David Levinthal, for instance, recalls scenes from Western movies with soft-focus images of toy cowboys in his series *Cowboys*. Likewise, James Casebere's *Covered Wagons* (1985) recalls a still from a film in which a bow-and-arrow attack has riddled a group of covered wagons.

In a parallel vein are Laurie Simmons's photographs of figurines in dollhouses, evoking seemingly rosy fantasies of the happy homemaker from the 1940s or 1950s. In this series, *Interiors*, the use of dolls suggests the ways in which toys shape girls' fantasies about their future lives as mothers, wives, and consumers. In *Blonde/Red Dress/Kitchen* (1978), a Lilliputian figurine prepares a family meal in a colorful and spotless kitchen filled with a miniature array of domestic objects. More recently, Thomas Demand has been using subtle clues of documentary photography to

present miniature models of mythic sites of American lore, including *Room* (1996), a recreation of the hotel room where L. Ron Hubbard, founder of Scientology, wrote *Dianetics*.

Other artists use theatrically staged situations, where stories are implied by figures obviously posed and cinematically lit. In the early 1990s, Philip-Lorca diCorcia hired actual hustlers and homeless people to pose as subjects in urban locales. As in *Marilyn; 28 years old; Las Vegas, Nevada; \$30* (1990-92) - in which the title records the name, birthplace, the age of the model, and the price diCorcia paid for the modeling - the results of these photographs meld documentary and fantasy, street photography and still-lives. Similarly, in an Untitled photograph of 1990, Carrie Mae Weems presents a highly staged scene emphasized by theatrical lighting. Here, a couple playing cards in a room clouded with cigarette smoke appears to enact one part of a larger story.

#### SPONSORSHIP

**Open Ends** is part of **MoMA2000**, which is made possible by The Starr Foundation. Generous support is provided by Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro in memory of Louise Reinhardt Smith. The Museum gratefully acknowledges the assistance of 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. Additional funding is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, Mrs. Melville Wakeman Hall, Sarah-Ann and Werner H. Kramarsky, Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro, Jerry I. Speyer and Katherine G. Farley, Mrs. Jan Cowles, Joann and Gifford Phillips, NEC Technologies, Inc., and by The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art. Education programs accompanying **MoMA2000** are made possible by BNP Paribas. The publication *Modern Contemporary: Art at MoMA Since 1980* is made possible by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. The interactive environment of **Open Ends** is supported by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Film and video programs during **Open Ends** are supported by The New York Times Company Foundation. Web/kiosk content management software is provided by SohoNet.

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