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The Museum of Modern Art

FINAL INSTALLMENT OF BANNERS PROJECT ADDRESSES ISSUES OF GENDER, RACE, AND CULTURE

For Immediate Release
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Projects 70: Janine Antoni, Shahzia Sikander, Kara Walker
Through March 13, 2001

Projects 70: Janine Antoni, Shahzia Sikander, Kara Walker is the concluding exhibition in a tripartite project featuring artworks commissioned for MoMA's Fifty-third Street facade. Organized by Fereshteh Daftari, Assistant Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, *Projects 70* brings together three artists who use their work to address issues of gender, race, and culture. They engage the Museum directly on its facade: Antoni invokes the institution as a mother; Sikander seductively but obliquely teases its attention toward cultural diversity; and Walker implicates the building itself as the site of an impending tragedy. The banners are on view through March 13, 2001.

Ms. Daftari says, "Antoni, Sikander, and Walker are young artists but seasoned infiltrators who have carved their ways into set traditions. In their hands, the banners that customarily announce the Museum's presence brandish subversive messages and promote provocative agendas."

For her banner *Manifesto* (2000), Antoni, adept in recycling, unstitched the letters from an old MoMA banner until only the letters "MoM" remained. With the visibility she gives to absence, her action, not unlike Robert Rauschenberg's 1953 erasure of a drawing by Willem de Kooning, echoes a kind of victory over an adversary, a symbolic father/authority figure. "MoM," Antoni's manifesto, advertises a new identity, a maternal kind of a museum and, in the process, offers a tribute to Antoni's mother. With her humorous action, simple yet time consuming, Antoni unravels a matrilineal lineage for a museum whose founders were three women, or "The Ladies," as Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Lillie P. Bliss, and Mary Quinn Sullivan came to be known.

While Antoni rewrites history with gender on her mind, Shahzia Sikander reviews it from a postcolonial viewpoint. Her banner, *Maligned Monsters* (2000), brings together images plucked from art history: the central protagonist in Agnolo Bronzino's High Mannerist painting *Allegory of Venus* serves as a pedestal for a twelfth-century Indian sculpture of a celestial dancing figure. The light-skinned Venus and the darker Devata flirtatiously twist and turn and sinuously intertwine in an intimate configuration. In their Mannerist posture they deviate from the simplicity of the classical norm. Emphatically, the words "maligned monsters" appear on the banner. While this inscription winks at MoMA in its red letters, it specifically refers to the title of a book by Partha Mitter, who discusses the ethnocentric judgments of Western scholars about Indian art. Sikander's entire body of work is founded on the notion

of difference and sensitivity to cultural diversity. Drawn from two mediums - painting and sculpture - and two mythologies - Greco-Roman and Indian - her figures meet to celebrate diversity and cultural difference.

In her banner, *Miss Obedience* (2000), Kara Walker also chooses a woman to deliver her message. Based on a nineteenth-century engraving of a black female slave who attempted suicide by leaping from the second-story window of a tavern, Walker's scenario is as bleak as history, and her colors are filtered through a racial vision of the world. As Walker explains, the woman did not succeed in killing herself. The original image was captioned: " - but I did not want to go ..." and was intended to rally concern for the plight of slaves in America. Walker remarks, "There is no expression in either the gesture or tone which hints to the drama of the scene. Without the facts," she says, "it is very hard to tell just what is supposed to be happening. ... I have riffed off this image several times, and this time it's less about that formal ambiguity and more about an accident of freedom." Unshackled at last, the slave woman on the banner seeks release in her self-destruction.

The **Projects** series is sponsored by Peter Norton.

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