

**NEW PHOTOGRAPHY 2008 FEATURES WORK BY ARTISTS
JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER AND MIKHAEL SUBOTZKY**

Twenty-Third Annual *New Photography* Exhibition Highlights Significant Recent Work in Contemporary Photography

New Photography 2008: Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky

September 10, 2008–January 12, 2009

The Robert and Joyce Menschel Gallery, third floor

NEW YORK, August 26, 2008—The Museum of Modern Art presents ***New Photography 2008: Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky***, the latest installment of its annual fall showcase of significant recent work in contemporary photography. This year's exhibition features the work of two artists, Josephine Meckseper (German, b. 1964) and Mikhael Subotzky (South African, b. 1981). Three works from Meckseper's *Quelle International* series were created specifically for the exhibition, and the photographs from her *Blow-Up* series are making their North American premiere. Meckseper makes photographs and mixed-medium installations that cunningly expose the links between politics and the consumer worlds of fashion and advertising. Her signature installations involve various displays—sleek mirrored shelves, chromed glass vitrines—filled with eclectic scraps from consumer society and political culture. Subotzky's recent body of photographic work, *Beaufort West* (2006–2008), shown here for the first time in North America, portrays a small desert town in South Africa's Western Cape blighted by unemployment, rampant crime, domestic violence, poverty, and segregation.

New Photography 2008: Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky is organized by Roxana Marcoci, Curator, Department of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art, and will be on view from September 10, 2008, through January 12, 2009, in The Robert and Joyce Menschel Gallery, third floor. The *New Photography* series is made possible by JGS, Inc.

Twenty-three years after the first *New Photography* exhibition, the series continues to highlight the Museum's commitment to the work of less familiar artists and seeks to represent the most interesting accomplishments in contemporary photography. Since its inception in 1985, work by 65 artists from 14 countries has been featured in this forum. *New Photography* has featured such influential artists as Rineke Dijkstra (1997), Olafur Eliasson (1998), JoAnn Verburg (1990), and Philip-Lorca diCorcia (1986), among many others.

Explains Ms. Marcoci, "While the objectives of Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky are surely diverse, the work of each artist exemplifies recent developments: the reinvention of documentary practice in contemporary photography in Subotzky's case, and the expanding of the medium of photography into a series of artistic operations to expose the gray area between

advertising, politics, and fashion in Meckseper's case. Both artists' endeavors attest to photography's potential for constructing, documenting, enacting, and engaging with meaning in the world today."

Josephine Meckseper

In her photographs and signature vitrine displays, Meckseper explores the media's strategy of mixing political news and advertising content. The eleven Meckseper works in the exhibition are from the artist's *Blow-Up* and *Quelle International* series, as well as one mixed-medium work, *Kriegsstrasse* (2008), created specifically for the show. Also included are five photographs from the *Blow-Up* series, shown here for the first time in North America; two mixed-medium works that are also part of the *Blow-Up* series; two *Quelle International* photographs; and one *Quelle International* wallpaper. The works from the *Quelle International* series were created specifically for this exhibition, and the installation of *Blow-Up* photographs hanging on top of the *Quelle International* wallpaper represents a never-before-seen configuration of the work.

Meckseper's works use the conventions and imagery of advertising—posing models, flashy backdrops, and end-of-season sales—to address the industry's persuasive impact and to investigate the ways in which political power is articulated in advertising in a world consumed by appearances. The five *Blow-Up* photographs included in the exhibition are life-size and depict models dressed in sturdy elastic stockings and the 1950s lingerie that is still sold in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Two mixed-medium works display some of the accessories used in the photographs. One wall of the gallery is covered from floor to ceiling with reflective wallpaper printed with pages from the 1976 German mail-order catalogue *Quelle International*, after which Meckseper's series is titled. The home products and clothing offered for sale in that publication are those that Meckseper grew up with in divided Germany, and they summon the contrasts between the tastes of Western European middle classes and the Eastern Bloc's mass-produced, functional, and uniform fashion, which, the artist says, was "part of a planned economy and not a status symbol."

After growing up in an artistic family with ties to the revolutionary left, Meckseper moved from Berlin to the United States and studied at California Institute of the Arts in Valencia. It was there that she produced her first photographic and film works, during the 1992 riots following the verdict in the Rodney King police-brutality trial in Los Angeles. On television news shows, continuous media coverage of the escalating tension between local African Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department was punctuated with advertisements, prompting Meckseper to question the way protest culture is aligned with fashion in our media-saturated age.

Mikhael Subotzky

Subotzky's most recent project, the *Beaufort West* series (2006–08)—which makes its North American premiere in this exhibition with 21 photographs on view—is named after a small town in the Karoo Desert along the busy route between Cape Town and Johannesburg. The artist was drawn to this subject by the local jail, which is strangely situated in the center of the town, in a traffic circle at the intersection of the main highway. His photographs of Beaufort West's various populations—inmates, outcasts, families, residents, and passersby—formulate a stirring vision of South Africa's strained post-apartheid condition.

Subotzky's images of the Beaufort West Prison, which was established in 1873, portray life inside and outside the institution, focusing on the disparity between the city's affluent neighborhoods and its fringes that are plagued by endemic poverty. The town's social problems include petty theft, youth prostitution, and a high rate of unemployment. Taken with a medium-format camera in existing light, Subotzky's pictures articulate multiple narratives: a preacher leads a prayer session in the prison; a well-dressed man attends the Agricultural Show, an annual social event for the wealthy; the residents of Vaalkoppies, Beaufort West's garbage dump, scavenge for food; members of the Ai 26s gang abuse drugs; a police officer interrogates a suspect who has just been arrested. Subotzky records white domination and black dispossession without relying on politicized reportage. His scenes are at once introspective and direct, reflecting both the individual and the systemic aspects of South Africa's colonialist legacy in the post-apartheid age.

The history of documentary photography plays a decisive role in Subotzky's work. At an early age, the artist was exposed to the activist work of his uncle, Gideon Mendel, one of South Africa's notable "struggle photographers," and he grew up in a milieu of commitment to social democracy. During his student years at the University of Cape Town, he was influenced by the artist David Goldblatt's vast photographic corpus, which captures the country's landscape and social fabric during colonialist and post-apartheid eras, and the oeuvres of photographers Walker Evans and Joseph Koudelka. At age 26 he became one of the youngest members of the Magnum Photos collective.

For his student thesis project, completed in 2004, Subotzky created a series of panoramic photographs of prisoners in the notorious Pollsmoor Maximum Security Prison, in which former South African president Nelson Mandela spent several years of his political imprisonment. The project, titled *The Four Corners (Die Vier Hoeke)*—in Afrikaans slang, "the four corners" refers to the inside of a prison—was inspired by a 1999 constitutional decree that allowed prisoners to vote in South Africa's elections.

Sponsorship: The *New Photography* series is made possible by JGS, Inc.

Press Contact: Meg Blackburn, 212/708-9757 or meg_blackburn@moma.org

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Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019

Hours: Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m. Closed Tuesday

Museum Admission: \$20 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs)

Target Free Friday Nights 4:00-8:00 p.m.

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