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**NEW WORK BY DEVENDRA BANHART PAIRED WITH SELECTIONS FROM
PAUL KLEE COLLECTION AT SFMOMA**

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) is pleased to present *Abstract Rhythms: Paul Klee and Devendra Banhart*, on view through April 13, 2008. The exhibition explores the relationship between music and visual art, pairing Klee's works on paper with those by the young contemporary artist Banhart.

Organized by Apsara DiQuinzio, assistant curator of painting and sculpture at SFMOMA, *Abstract Rhythms* includes 27 works, and is part of an ongoing presentation within *Matisse and Beyond*, an exhibition that highlights the museum's painting and sculpture collection, and draws from Dr. Carl Djerassi's gifts and extended loans to SFMOMA of more than 150 pieces by Klee.

Music was a consistent source of inspiration for Klee (1879–1940), spanning the arc of his career and informing much of his practice. He came from a family of musicians and, prior to turning his attention to painting, drawing, and printmaking, was an accomplished violinist who often performed in concerts. His varied experience with music influenced much of his work. *Hoffmanneske Märchenscene* (Hoffmannesque Fairy Tale Scene) (1921), for example, was inspired by Jacques Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann*, an opera Klee saw on several occasions. Additionally, Klee wrote extensively on the relationship between graphic arts and music, and he devised elaborate techniques to marry the two forms in his practice. Some excerpts from his writings are paired with selected works in the exhibition.

A foundational aspect of Klee's life, music is explicitly referenced in many of his artwork titles, in the linear movement and rhythmic structure of his compositions, and as overt pictorial themes. The title of Klee's *Andante* (Moderately Slow) (1931), refers to the tempo used to designate a "walking pace" in musical nomenclature. In this simple watercolor, Klee represents the tempo as a fantastical figure, seemingly part fish, part man, holding a walking stick. In Klee's surrealistic lithograph *Der Verliebte* (Man in Love) (1923), a woman floats inside the



Devendra Banhart, *Banded King Snake and Thunder Maiden*, 2007; watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper; Courtesy of the artist; © 2007 Devendra Banhart

enlarged head of a male, sticklike figure who emerges at the base of the composition from a symbol that resembles the treble clef in musical notation.

Also featured in the exhibition are 13 new works on paper by Banhart (b. 1981), who is also a popular musician, known for his surrealistic lyrics. Like many artists working today, Banhart considers Klee an important creative touchstone. The drawings were made in conjunction with his fifth and most recent album, *Smokey Rolls Down Thunder Canyon* (released September 2007 on XL Recordings). Both the drawings and the album spring from a personal narrative developed around a fictional protagonist named Smokey—an archetype of a person Banhart frequently encounters while on tour. In these drawings, he depicts the invented persona assuming character traits culled from a diverse array of mythological and ethnic references.

In *Kadmon Smokey* (2007), Banhart thematically draws from the kabbalah, presenting Smokey as the primordial Kadmon Adam (the first being created by the cosmos), pictorially represented as an abstract, mountainous form around which colorful planets revolve. In *Banded King Snake and Thunder Maiden* (2007), Banhart blends myriad cultural myths, including a reference to Quetzalcoatl, the ancient Aztec god who is half-bird and half-snake. In the drawing the snake's vibrant colors signify the plumes of the quetzal bird. Similarly, lightening bolts radiate from the hybrid figure's hat—an allusion to Indra, the god of thunder in Hindu mythology. Just as Banhart's drawings reflect divergent sources of inspiration, so does his album, which features him singing in several different languages and employing diverse musical genres that range from samba to gospel to reggae to doo-wop, among others.

Banhart's otherworldly drawings are populated by whimsical characters that seem suspended in an undefined pictorial space, recalling some of Klee's surrealist works. Furthermore, his relationship to music, like Klee's, is interdependent on his visual art practice: "I sing what I can't draw and draw what I can't sing," he explains. Though Klee and Banhart were born a century apart, both oscillate between abstraction and figuration—a tendency enlivened by each artist's invisible rhythmic pulse.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Banhart will present a musical performance at SFMOMA on January 15, 2008, at 8 p.m., in the Phyllis Wattis Theater. Tickets are \$20 general; \$15 SFMOMA members, students, and seniors. The album *Smokey Rolls Down Thunder Canyon* and an accompanying booklet that features reproductions of his drawings are available at the SFMOMA MuseumStore (www.sfmoma.org/museumstore).

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Museum hours: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): Open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas. The museum is open the Wednesday between Christmas and New Year's Day.

Koret Visitor Education Center: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

Admission prices: Adults \$12.50; seniors \$8; students \$7. SFMOMA members and children 12 and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings after 6 p.m. admission is half-price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

Visit our Web site at www.sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is supported by a broad array of contributors who are committed to helping advance its mission as a dynamic center for modern and contemporary art. Major annual support is provided by Koret Foundation Funds, Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, and Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. KidstART free admission for children 12 and under is made possible by Charles Schwab & Co. Inc. Thursday evening half-price admission is sponsored by Banana Republic.

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