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## **SFMOMA COMMEMORATES 75TH ANNIVERSARY WITH EXHIBITION EXPLORING IN-DEPTH CONCENTRATIONS OF WORK BY LEADING ARTISTS**

On the occasion of its 75th anniversary, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) presents *Focus on Artists*, an exhibition celebrating the museum's close ties with modern and contemporary masters and the depth in which SFMOMA has collected their work. The exhibition reflects SFMOMA's dedication to organizing benchmark presentations and its history of fostering long-term relationships with artists. *Focus on Artists* is organized by Gary Garrels, SFMOMA Elise S. Haas Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture, and will be on view from January 16 through May 23, 2010. Throughout the anniversary season, SFMOMA will present a series of exhibitions under the heading *75 Years of Looking Forward*, illustrating the story of the artists, collectors, cultural mavericks, and San Francisco leaders who founded, built, and have animated the museum.

While SFMOMA's holdings reflect a wide range of art movements, time periods, and geographic regions, the collection is distinguished by its rich concentration of works by a number of significant artists. Filling an entire floor of the museum, *Focus on Artists* looks at 18 artists who defined movements from Abstract Expressionism to Postminimalism and beyond, and whose iconic works are hallmarks of the SFMOMA collection.

The first section features eight American artists—Richard Diebenkorn, Philip Guston, Ellsworth Kelly, Brice Marden, Robert Ryman, Richard Serra, Frank Stella, and Clyfford Still—whose practice fundamentally impacted the development of abstract art in the United States. The second section showcases an international selection of artists—Diane Arbus, Matthew Barney, Robert Gober, Dan Graham, Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Doris Salcedo, Kara Walker, Jeff Wall, and Andy Warhol—whose work signaled a shift from the 1960s forward toward more psychological, social, and historical content in art.

Nearly one hundred paintings, sculptures, and photographs dating from 1944 to 2006 trace the evolution of SFMOMA's artist-focused collecting practice, with a single gallery dedicated to each artist's work. In many cases, the selection of works in each gallery spans the featured artist's entire career, and three galleries, those dedicated to Still, Kelly, and Stella, will rotate to chart the fullest range of artistic development and show as much of the collection as possible. In-gallery texts will offer insight into how the



Gerhard Richter, *Lesende (Reading)*, 1994; Collection SFMOMA; © Gerhard Richter

museum came to acquire particular objects, why patrons collect and donate to museums, and how relationships between collectors, artists, and museums form over time.

“This exhibition, like the collection it distills, offers a remarkable view of past 60 years of art,” says Garrels. “Because of the collection’s particular depth in important areas, it’s more than just a repository of history. It also connects us to the genesis of an artwork and the spirit that underlies it, allowing us to be closer to the open-ended investigation intrinsic to the creation of great works of art, as well as the artist’s process over time. This is the experience of SFMOMA’s collection that we hope will further serve the public as both an educational resource and a source of pleasure.”

The exhibition opens with a gallery devoted to Clyfford Still, whose generous gift of paintings to the museum reflects the artist’s affection for the city of San Francisco and his desire to make SFMOMA a chief representative of his work. The museum’s first painting by Still, a gift from Peggy Guggenheim, was acquired in 1947 following the artist’s first solo museum exhibition, which was held at SFMOMA in 1943, several years prior to Still’s appointment to an influential teaching post at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute). Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson gave the museum a second painting by the artist in 1974, a very large work from 1960. In tandem with preparations for a 1976 retrospective at SFMOMA, Still made a gift of 28 paintings to the museum—all selected by the artist himself—ranging from early figurative work completed in 1934 to two monumental abstract canvases from 1974, along with works from the late 1940s and the 1950s. SFMOMA now houses one of the world’s great stores of Still’s paintings and has dedicated a gallery to continuously showing a changing selection of these works. *Focus on Artists* will feature two complete rotations of the artist’s paintings.

The museum’s relationship with painter Philip Guston was another milestone of the 1970s. In a move considered extremely risky at that time, SFMOMA added to its existing Guston holdings (superb abstract drawings and paintings from the 1950s) several examples of the artist’s later figurative paintings, including the triptych *Red Sea; The Swell; Blue Light* (1975), which had been dismissed by many of Guston’s early supporters. Undaunted by the critics, SFMOMA director Henry Hopkins sanctioned a full-scale retrospective of Guston’s work that opened at SFMOMA in 1980 to widespread acclaim, establishing him as a central figure in 20th-century painting. In 1982 four major works selected by Guston to augment the museum’s holdings came to SFMOMA as posthumous gifts. Subsequently, trustees and patrons built upon this legacy by giving the museum other Guston paintings and drawings considered among the best in his oeuvre.

Following a different model, SFMOMA has gradually amassed works by Richard Diebenkorn, who maintained close connections to the Bay Area throughout his life. The museum organized a solo exhibition of Diebenkorn’s work in 1954 and the following year acquired its first Diebenkorn painting and works on paper as gifts. In 1958, the museum purchased a major abstract painting from 1955, and in 1964 acquired a key landscape painting and a figurative drawing. In 1972 the museum organized an exhibition of the artist’s *Ocean Park* abstractions and purchased a prime painting from the series, finished that year, to honor retiring director Gerald Nordland. This collecting pattern has continued to the present, with works

acquired intermittently by both gift and purchase, so that SFMOMA now hosts one of the outstanding museum collections of Diebenkorn's work.

From its inception in 1987, SFMOMA's *New Work* exhibition series, which typically presents works by up-and-coming artists, has been critical in establishing the museum's long-range collaborations with living artists. SFMOMA organized Matthew Barney's first solo museum exhibition in 1991. It also became the first museum to collect his work with the purchase of the artist's groundbreaking installation *Transexualis* (1991). A second installation, *CREMASTER 2: The Drones' Exposition* (1999), was jointly acquired in 2000 with the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and had its West Coast premiere in San Francisco. Building on a 15-year commitment to Barney, SFMOMA mounted the only U.S. presentation of a large-scale survey of the artist's complete *DRAWING RESTRAINT* series in 2006, for which the artist executed a performance work that involved climbing under the museum's Haas Atrium bridge dressed as General Douglas MacArthur and drawing on the wall of the turret. Besides showing early work by Barney, *Focus on Artists* will reactivate this site-specific installation—now a symbiotic feature of SFMOMA's interior architecture—by screening the video of the action.

Celebrated contemporary artist Kara Walker also had her first museum exhibition at SFMOMA in 1997 as part of the *New Work* program. Three years later the museum acquired her room-sized installation *No Mere Words Can Adequately Reflect the Remorse This Negress Feels...* (1999), a stunning example of her signature cut-paper silhouette tableaux depicting haunting historical narratives set in the American South before the Civil War.

Important sculptures by Colombian-born artist Doris Salcedo, also the focus of a *New Work* exhibition in 1999, have systematically been brought into the collection over the past ten years, giving the museum one of the best representations of the artist's work. Prime examples from her *Unland* series (1995–98) and her untitled “cabinet” series (1989 to the present) will be juxtaposed.

Other highlights of *Focus on Artists* include selections from SFMOMA's considerable body of work by painter Robert Ryman, which were chosen by the artist and Garrels specifically for SFMOMA's galleries and then brought into the collection through gifts of Mimi and Peter Haas. The exhibition will also present key paintings and sculptures spanning Frank Stella's entire career, many of which were acquired by purchase and gift from Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson, as well as selections from SFMOMA's sizeable collection of postwar German art, including monumental paintings by Sigmar Polke and masterworks by Gerhard Richter. Stellar groupings by Robert Gober, Diane Arbus, and Jeff Wall—the subjects of retrospectives at SFMOMA in 2000, 2003, and 2007, respectively—will be featured, along with major works by Dan Graham, Brice Marden, and Andy Warhol. Also on view will be SFMOMA's permanently installed lead “splash” piece by Bay Area native Richard Serra, which was executed on site in 1995 as a gift from Jasper Johns in honor of the museum's new building.

Through its emphasis on important retrospectives and innovative conservation efforts, SFMOMA remains true to the institution's founding vision of adventurous artistic programming, with a growing

collection that reflects not only the rich traditions of modern and contemporary art but also lifelong commitments to individual artists.

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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: \$15; seniors and students: \$9; SFMOMA members and children 12 and under: free. Admission is free the first Tuesday of each month and half-price on Thursdays after 6 p.m.

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 website at [sfmoma.org](http://sfmoma.org) or call 415.357.4000 for more information.**

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