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**SFMOMA PRESENTS THE WORK OF CONTEMPORARY ARTIST KIKI SMITH
WALKER ART CENTER'S MAJOR TOURING SURVEY DEBUTS IN SAN FRANCISCO**

The first full-scale American museum survey addressing Kiki Smith's twenty-year career will premiere at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) from November 19, 2005, through January 29, 2006. Organized by Siri Engberg, Curator of Visual Arts at the Walker Art Center, in close collaboration with the artist, *Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980–2005* includes works in the various media in which the artist is fluent—from bronze to beeswax to papier-mâché—dating from 1980 to 2005. SFMOMA's presentation is overseen by Madeleine Grynsztejn, Elise S. Haas Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA, and will offer a focused look at nearly one hundred objects spanning Smith's oeuvre. Following its San Francisco debut, *Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980–2005* will travel to its institution of origin, the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (February 26 to May 14, 2006), where it will expand to include more than two hundred objects.



Blue Girl (detail), 1998;
Private collection, New
York; © Kiki Smith; photo:
courtesy PaceWildenstein,

Over the last twenty-five years, Smith has developed into a major figure in contemporary art, and she is widely considered to be one of the most important artists of her generation. Best known for her depictions of the human form—both in anatomical fragments and in full figure, rendered in a wide variety of materials—she has explored a broad range of subject matter, including religion, folklore, mythology, natural science, art history, and feminism. From room-size installations to miniatures, Smith's meditations on the human condition have resulted in works of extraordinary power and grace.

“Considered as a whole, Smith's work has made a revolutionary contribution to figurative art,” states Grynsztejn. “By turns intimate, universal, visceral, and fragile, her art has provided a poignant exploration of humanity's place in the world while provoking us to think in new ways about the physical, philosophical, and social issues of our time.” Adds Engberg, “Kiki Smith furthers the lineage of artists advancing feminist ideas in their work, such as Eva Hesse and Lee Bontecou; her concern with bodily narratives allies her art with peers including Robert Gober and Ann Hamilton, and her work's frank articulation has been an influential precedent for a younger generation of artists—among them Sarah Lucas and Catherine Opie.”

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Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980–2005 unfolds in chronological order and is divided into three “gatherings” (to use Smith’s term) of works in a wide range of media, including a concentration of sculptures in plaster, bronze, paper, glass, ceramic, and other materials, as well as installations, prints, drawings, and photographs. These thematic clusters will converge around key figurative works that punctuate the presentation. The exhibition opens with a collection of Smith’s very early body-related works from the 1980s, continues with large figural sculptures and floor pieces from the 1990s, and closes with more recent work based on the artist’s interest in folklore and the natural world. In addition, *Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980–2005* will feature an intimate, artist-curated *wunderkammer*, or “cabinet of wonders,” a gallery showcasing both early and recent works, many of which are miniature in scale and have never been seen before. This gallery will be installed largely by Smith herself.

Smith was born in 1954 in Nuremberg, Germany, and grew up in New Jersey, where she was introduced to art at an early age. Her grandfather was an altar carver, her mother an opera singer, and her father, Tony Smith, a sculptor who encouraged her participation in his work and hosted fellow artists and friends such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and the young Richard Tuttle as frequent household guests.

In 1976, after a year at Hartford Art School, Smith settled in New York City, where she turned seriously to art and supported herself by working variously as a cook, an electrician’s assistant, and a surveyor. Within a few years her underground reputation grew steadily alongside her involvement with Collaborative Projects, Inc. (CoLab), a New York–based artist cooperative. In 1980 she contributed to the celebrated *Times Square Show* and received her first solo exhibition at The Kitchen in 1983, followed by shows at P.S. 1, Artists Space, Fawbush Gallery, and eventually PaceWildenstein Gallery.

Her art in these early years, in part a response to her father’s death and later influenced by her training as an emergency medical technician, was largely concerned with themes of mortality and the human body. These works often focus on the individual organs, fluids, and systems that make up the body’s interior, which Smith depicts in frank, nonhierarchical terms. These sculptures in plaster, paper, and metal, along with the artist’s first prints, allude to the literal and metaphorical dissection to which the human body has historically been subjected—from object of the early anatomists’ quest for knowledge to a testing ground for contemporary faith in medicine. In *Digestive System*, 1988, Smith models in cast iron a looping, organic form that represents the accurate length and shape of the human digestive system, from tongue to anus. Another work from the period presents a stomach fashioned in clear, delicate glass. *Ribs*, 1987, one of her most fragile works from this period, is constructed of white terracotta “bones” held together with thread and precariously attached to the wall. This piece, with its concise expression of the body’s dual aspects of vulnerability and strength, is often considered to be a breakthrough in Smith’s work, which would subsequently expand to seek out equivalences between the body and the materials of art—the fragility and imperfections of skin and handmade papers, for example, or the fleshy, organic volume of wax and plaster.

Moving into the 1990s, Smith’s practice developed an increasingly elaborate vocabulary of the body and its relationship—both physical and symbolic—with society. *Tale*, 1992, presents a life-size figure of a female nude formed in pale beeswax. Positioned on hands and knees as if crawling, the figure excretes onto

the floor a long tail of what appears to be feces or intestines. Debased and yet somehow assertive, this anonymous figure is representative of the type of visceral sculptural work that many deem Smith's most forceful: bodies in unflinchingly rendered states of abjection that draw power from the tension between their delicate, beautifully wrought materiality and the shockingly primal acts they depict. The wax figure in *Untitled III (Upside Down Body with Beads)*, 1993, bends over double, hiding her face but defiantly showing her posterior and a spill of glass beads pooled around her feet. An earlier work from this period, *Untitled*, 1990, represents a life-size nude man and woman modeled in wax, each hanging limply on its own stand, heads slumped in despair, skin mottled with bruises. Bodily fluids stream freely from them: breast milk from the female and semen from the male. Despite their explicitness, these disconcerting figures seem silently reflective—as if oblivious to their effect on the viewer—evoking a particularly touching sense of humanity. Made at a time when the body seemed to be under attack—the height of the AIDS crisis, escalating genetic research, and increasingly contentious reproductive rights—they nevertheless extend beyond the cultural context of their day to encompass universal psychic and physical pain, becoming symbols of the suffering endured by all humans.

In the 1990s, Smith also earned a considerable reputation as a virtuosic printmaker, an explorer of the startling sculptural possibilities of paper, and a reinventor of figurative bronze sculpture. Additionally, she began to engage with themes of feminine archetypes. In Smith's work, the women who populate our cultural mythology, from the Virgin Mary to Little Red Riding Hood, become inhabitants of physical bodies rather than abstract bearers of social doctrine. *Lilith*, 1994, represents a figure from Hebrew legend, Adam's first wife who rejected him and fled the Garden of Eden. Lilith is widely considered a symbol of feminine strength, and Smith casts her *Lilith* in bronze from a live model squatting on the floor, looking sharply over her shoulder. The bronze figure hangs on the wall upside down, on all fours, clinging to a vertical plane like a supernatural creature and peering up at the viewer through disturbingly life-like glass eyes.

More recently Smith has nurtured a growing menagerie of work concerned with the natural world, including animals and celestial bodies. Already known for her work representing the human body, Smith began to question whether figurative art must be about humans only. The resulting creations convey the artist's devout belief in the intimate connection between humanity and the environment, and they look to animals to tell us new stories about ourselves. The exhibition will feature key works from this period, including *Flock*, 1998, an installation composed of hundreds of bronze bird carcasses. Inspired in equal parts by the Bible, natural history museums, and contemporary environmental disasters, the piece is a meditation on the consequences of imbalance between humans and the natural world.

The most recent works in *Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980–2005* show the artist continuing to expand on her earlier ideas, as in her *Pietà* drawings—self-portraits of the artist with her dead cat in the posture of the grieving Virgin Mary. Other works seek to create new mythologies, as in *Born*, 2002, and *Rapture*, 2001, which merge the human with the animal. In these works, Smith finds inherent in the mortality that has haunted so much of her work the possibility of rebirth.

The Walker Art Center will publish a 320-page, fully illustrated exhibition catalogue offering critical essays by exhibition curator Siri Engberg, art historian Linda Nochlin, and folklorist Marina Warner, as well as an interview with the artist by novelist Lynne Tillman. The publication also will include a complete exhibition history and bibliography, and the first-ever comprehensive illustrated chronology of Smith's life and work.

After opening at SFMOMA, the exhibition will travel to the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (February 26 to May 14, 2006); the Contemporary Art Museum, Houston (July 15 to September 24, 2006); and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (November 16, 2006, to February 11, 2007).

Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980-2005 is organized by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and is made possible by generous support from the Elizabeth A. Sackler Museum Educational Trust. Additional support is provided by Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro and the Barbara Lee Family Foundation.

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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, and Christmas.

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Admission prices (effective July 1, 2005): 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.

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