

October 24, 2007

Contact:

Robyn Wise, 415.357.4172, rwise@sfmoma.org

Libby Garrison, 415.357.4177, lgarrison@sfmoma.org

Sandra Farish Sloan, 415.357.4174, ssloan@sfmoma.org

NEW WORK BY PAUL SIETSEMA DEBUTS AT SFMOMA

From March 28 through June 22, 2008, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) presents *New Work: Paul Sietsema*, an exhibition of works by Los Angeles–based artist Paul Sietsema. This focused presentation, part of the museum’s ongoing *New Work* series, will debut the artist’s newest project, and is organized by SFMOMA Assistant Curator Apsara DiQuinzio. The exhibition will feature sculpture, drawings, and a 16 mm film that together shape an evocative, layered environment—one that fluctuates between presence and absence, historical time periods, and different cultures.

Marked by conceptual acuity and material experimentation, Sietsema’s artistic process is deliberate, inventive, and multilayered. Identifying primarily with a sculptural practice, the artist uses film as a way to examine sculptural experience in relation to photographic imagery. Sietsema’s sculptural objects, constructed by hand and with an exquisite attention to detail, derive from preexisting photographic images. After creating the objects, he shoots them in 16 mm film. As the subjects migrate from their initial two-dimensional photographic source to a three-dimensional sculptural object and finally to a cinematic, time-based medium, the artist investigates how different forms of representation affect our understanding of a subject.

Sietsema’s new project, for which he received a Guggenheim Foundation Grant in 2005, is undertaken in an open-ended spirit and uses diverse materials, technical processes, and formal properties to explore certain prehistoric cultures, such as Africa, Indo-Asia, and Oceania. Sietsema began the work by collecting images of early artifacts that typify the way the West perceives and is influenced by so-called “primitive” cultures. Initially springing from these 18th- and 19th-century documents, both written and photographic, the project merges past and present, and points to a slippage between cultures, spaces, and objects. Because many of the indigenous civilizations addressed have mostly been lost through a conflation of colonialism, industrialization, and modernization, their reception has been filtered and reorganized through Western perspectives. Of the project, the artist has stated: “Many of the subjects I chose are to structure a kind of loss. The objects for me epitomize a certain kind of loss, one structured by,



Paul Sietsema, *The Famous Last Words*, 2006; Collection SFMOMA; © 2007 Paul Sietsema; photo: Joshua White, courtesy the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles

and in this case caused by, representation. The attempt to record and represent these cultures to the West has changed them.”

The mostly black-and-white film (a work presently in progress) included in the exhibition features the dozens of objects Sietsema made based on images of rare cultural artifacts he has been compiling since 2001. He envisions these sculptures as utilitarian objects for an imagined person living on a remote island before the onset of Western exploration. The objects include a fishing net, a shield, a carrying bag, wrapping fiber, a fish-skin tunic, coins, and a waist ornament, among others. In the film, they are presented against various backgrounds, and their treatment reflects Sietsema’s consideration of object photography, material experimentation, and museum display methods. The images slip in and out of identification, as Sietsema experiments with abstract and figurative vocabularies.

Additionally, the artist has made a series of related black-and-white drawings in which he experiments with pre-digital, photo-retouching methods such as stencils, sprayed ink, and built-up layers of ink. Though entirely constructed by hand, the drawings were made with processes meant to emulate those of mechanical reproduction. *The Famous Last Words* (2006), an example from this series and part of SFMOMA’s collection, presents an image of a text composed of passages written by the artist as well as sections appropriated from sources ranging from Belgian poet Henri Michaux to Norwegian adventurer Thor Heyerdahl. Seamlessly woven together, the fragments form a single and unique diaristic account belonging to an anonymous individual, partly embodied by the artist himself, living on an imagined island. The drawing encapsulates the dynamic reconstructive thrust of Sietsema’s project, while at the same time conveying our inherent urge to want to know (or visually read) a subject that has in essence become illegible over time. This drawing, along with the other works in the project, exemplifies what the artist describes as “the tension between the yearning for a primary direct view of a lost culture/time, and the impossibility of this view.”

Sietsema (b. 1968) lives and works in Los Angeles, where he received an MFA from UCLA in 1999. Over the past eight years, he has produced a small, sought-after body of work now represented in museum collections worldwide, including the Centre Pompidou, in Paris; the Museum of Contemporary Art, in Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, in New York; the Tate Modern, in London; the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York; among others. He has been included in a number of significant group exhibitions in recent years, including *Uncertain States of America* (Astrup Fernley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, 2005), *Ecstasy: In and About Altered States* (MOCA, Los Angeles, 2006), and *The Americans: New Art* (Barbican Art Galleries, London, 2001). His most notable project to date was *Empire* (2002–3), also consisting of a 16 mm film, sculptural objects, photographs, and drawings.

A free illustrated brochure, with an essay by DiQuinzio, will be produced in conjunction with this presentation.

The *New Work* series is organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and is generously supported by Collectors Forum, the founding patron of the series. Major funding is also provided by the Mimi and Peter Haas Fund, Nancy and Steven H. Oliver, and Robin Wright.

* * *

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.

#