



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Thursday, March 3, 2016

**THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES (MOCA) PRESENTS  
*DON'T LOOK BACK: THE 1990S AT MOCA***

**FEATURING WORKS FROM MOCA'S PERMANENT COLLECTION MADE DURING THE 1990S**

**March 12–July 11, 2016  
The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA**



**LOS ANGELES**—The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, presents *Don't Look Back: The 1990s at MOCA*, featuring works from MOCA's permanent collection that identify the recent decade's key concerns and transformations. Many of the works have not been on view since they were originally shown and acquired. If the 1980s were shaped by the advent of identity politics, producing significant works that examined the nexus of race, gender, and sexuality, then the 1990s can be seen as having both extended and challenged these ideas. This exhibition includes work by Catherine Opie, Cady Noland, Sarah Sze, and Paul McCarthy, among others, and explores the complexities of the period by dividing the presentation into six thematically grouped sections, titled: *Installation*; *The Outmoded*; *Noir America*; *Place and Identity*; *Touch, Intimacy, and Queerness*; and *Space, Place, and Scale*.

*Don't Look Back: The 1990s at MOCA* derives its title from D. A. Pennebaker's 1967 documentary about Bob Dylan. Pennebaker captures Dylan at the beginning of his stardom, being hounded by the media. The film brilliantly catches Dylan's attempt to control his work in the face of this new spectacle culture. During the 1990s, the art world underwent a similar transformation from being a space for avant-garde culture to an increasingly market-driven one.

“As I started to think about the art of the 1990s, I found myself haunted by this film for it shows an artist struggling to balance his personal creative needs and the new demands of the marketplace. The film also elucidates the perennial artistic struggle between creativity’s ferocious need to move forward and leave the past behind, and the equally strong desire to resist change, to stay the course. Both the world at large and the art world have changed a great deal since the 1990s,” remarks MOCA Chief Curator Helen Molesworth. “Hopefully this exhibition will allow us to think about how we might want to move forward.”

The 1990s witnessed the rise of the Internet, the end of the cold war, the election of Bill Clinton, the rise of the LGBTQ civil rights movement, the videotaped beating of Rodney King, and the rebellion that ensued in the wake of the acquittal of the police officers who attacked him. The art world saw an increased interest in artists from around the globe, the rise of international biennials, the growing consensus that Los Angeles was a center for contemporary art, the rise of installation art as an increasingly dominant mode of art making, and the emergence of MOCA as one of the preeminent museums of post-World War II art in the world. It is interesting to note which of these trends and events are reflected in the work in MOCA’s collection and which are not.

### **Sections of the Exhibition**

#### *Installation*

Installation is a loose, descriptive term for works of art that are not limited to one discrete medium, like painting or photography. Installations create overall environments, and as such they both demand and create their own separate spaces. Sometimes installations are modeled on the diorama as something you look into from a fixed position. Other times, installations imagine a viewer who is mobile or immersed within the space. As loose as the term may be, installation has become one of the dominant modes of artistic expression from the 1990s to the present.

#### *The Outmoded*

Rotary phones, slide projectors, 35-millimeter cameras, VHS tapes, and boxy sedans with banquette seats: images of all of these objects appear in this exhibition and all were still very much in use during the 1990s. One effect (largely unintended) of the inclusion of everyday objects in contemporary art is that, given the extremely rapid technological development of the past two decades, such objects now appear as historical artifacts. The 1990s can be seen, in retrospect, as the decade within which analogue gave way to digital.

#### *Noir America*

While most Americans are taught from a young age that our country is “the land of the free and the home of the brave,” many artists have focused instead on the darker side of the American story. Our country’s love affair with guns, Hollywood tales of good and evil, and television’s superheroes and antiheroes unfolds before us daily in mass media. Artists have critically engaged with these narratives, showing them to be alternately macabre and ludicrous. In almost all of the works in this exhibition that deal with violence, artists have resisted the urge to be accusatory or moralistic in tone. Rather, they have sought to implicate themselves and the viewer in the culture at large, provoking questions about our collective role in this dark underbelly of the American psyche.

#### *Place and Identity*

During the 1980s, the advances of the civil rights and women’s rights movements were felt strongly by artists. Many artists moved away from concepts of universality and instead began to explore the concept of difference through an examination of identity, history, and memory. During the 1990s, many artists continued these lines of inquiry, delving into the ways that geography, history, economics, sexuality, and gender profoundly shape our sense of individuality, even as all of those forces also make us part of multiple, and sometimes competing, communities. Artists working in the 1990s sought to situate and describe their particular positions in a world that was becoming, in large measure due to the Internet, progressively international in scope.

#### *Touch, Intimacy, and Queerness*

In 1990, the activist group Queer Nation was founded in New York and chapters developed quickly across the country. Their chant—“We’re here! We’re queer! Get used to it!”—swiftly entered the lexicon of popular culture. In the wake of the AIDS crisis, which had been particularly devastating to the arts community, Queer Nation’s protests, such as a kiss-in outside the Academy Awards in 1991, marked a new era in the civil rights agenda for the LGBTQ community. By using the term queer instead of homosexual, the activists signaled a societal sea change. As artists began to explore

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themes and issues pertaining to queerness, many integrated touch and intimacy into their works through a subtle insistence on the body and its central role in matters of sexuality and identity.

#### *Space, Place, and Scale*

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, artists began to confront the scale of industrial buildings. New York artists started living and working in downtown Manhattan lofts while Los Angeles artists were able to occupy entire buildings previously used for light industry or storage. This shift in scale led to ambitious works that imagined the museum and other institutional spaces, rather than domestic spaces, as the primary site for contemporary art. This impulse can be seen in land art, minimalist sculpture, and, ultimately, the many installations that came to dominate 1990s art. As artworks began to occupy whole rooms, notions of space, place, and scale became increasingly dominant themes.

*Don't Look Back: The 1990s at MOCA* is organized by MOCA Chief Curator Helen Molesworth.

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Image credit: Mark Dion, *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth (Toys 'R' U.S.)*, 1994, mixed media installation, dimensions variable, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, gift of Per Skarstedt

#### **RELATED PROGRAMS**

##### **MEMBERS' OPENING**

Friday, March 11, 7–9pm

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

INFO 213/621-1794 or [membership@moca.org](mailto:membership@moca.org)

FREE; MOCA members only and RSVP not required

##### **LECTURE: HELEN MOLESWORTH**

Thursday, April 14, 7pm

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

INFO: 213/621-1741 or [visitorservices@moca.org](mailto:visitorservices@moca.org)

FREE; priority entry for MOCA members

##### **LECTURE: CHON A. NORIEGA**

Thursday, April 21, 7pm

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

INFO: 213/621-1741 or [visitorservices@moca.org](mailto:visitorservices@moca.org)

FREE; priority entry for MOCA members

##### **ZÓCALO PUBLIC SQUARE AND MOCA PRESENT WERE THE '90S L.A.'S GOLDEN AGE?**

Thursday, April 28, 7pm

MOCA Grand Avenue, Ahmanson Auditorium

INFO: 213/621-1741 or [visitorservices@moca.org](mailto:visitorservices@moca.org)

FREE; priority entry for MOCA members

##### **LECTURE AND WALKTHROUGH: MATH BASS**

Thursday, May 19, 7pm

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

INFO: 213/621-1741 or [visitorservices@moca.org](mailto:visitorservices@moca.org)

FREE

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### **THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES (MOCA)**

**About MOCA:** Founded in 1979, MOCA's vision is to be the defining museum of contemporary art. In a relatively short period of time, MOCA has achieved astonishing growth with three Los Angeles locations of architectural renown; a world-class permanent collection of more than 6,800 objects, international in scope and among the finest in the world; hallmark education programs that are widely emulated; award-winning publications that present original scholarship; groundbreaking monographic, touring, and thematic exhibitions of international repute that survey the art of our time; and cutting-edge engagement with modes of new media production. MOCA is a not-for-profit institution that relies on a variety of funding sources for its activities.

**Hours:** MOCA Grand Avenue (located at 250 South Grand Avenue in Downtown Los Angeles) is open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 11am to 6pm; Thursday from 11am to 8pm; Saturday and Sunday from 11am to 5pm; and closed on Tuesday. The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA (located at 152 North Central Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90012) has the same hours as MOCA Grand Avenue during exhibitions. Please call ahead or go to [moca.org](http://moca.org) for the exhibition schedule for The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA. MOCA Pacific Design Center (located at 8687 Melrose Avenue, West Hollywood, CA 90069) is open Tuesday through Friday from 11am to 5pm; Saturday and Sunday from 11am to 6pm; and closed on Monday. The MOCA Store at MOCA Grand Avenue (located at 250 South Grand Avenue) is open Monday through Wednesday and Friday from 10:30am to 5:30pm; Thursday from 10:30am to 8:30pm; and Saturday and Sunday from 10:30am to 6:30pm.

**Museum Admission:** General admission is free for all MOCA members. General admission is also free for everyone at MOCA Grand Avenue and The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA on Thursdays from 5pm to 8pm, courtesy of Wells Fargo. General admission is always free at MOCA Pacific Design Center. General admission at MOCA Grand Avenue and The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA is \$12 for adults; \$7 for students with I.D. and seniors (65+); and free for children under 12.

**More Information:** For 24-hour information on current exhibitions, education programs, and special events, call 213/626-6222 or access MOCA online at [moca.org](http://moca.org).

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