2009

Intervention in painting by Marlene Dumas with titles of engagement: Ryman's brides, Reinhardt's daughter and Stern

Susan King Klinkenberg

University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the American Studies Commons

Scholar Commons Citation


This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
Intervention in Painting by Marlene Dumas with Titles of Engagement: *Ryman’s Brides, Reinhardt’s Daughter*, and *Stern*.

by

Susan King Klinkenberg

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Art History
College of The Arts
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Bradley Nickels, Ph.D.
Heather Vinson, abd: Ph.D.
Louis Marcus, MFA

Date of Approval:
July 10, 2009

Keywords: artistic reference, race, monochrome, portrait, figurative

© Copyright 2009, Susan King Klinkenberg
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family whose love, support, and prayers have sustained me throughout this long journey. Nurtured by the extraordinary encouragement of my mother Lori King, unshakable faith of my daughter Lindsay, and God’s graciousness, I was able to pursue this lifelong dream. The spirit of my sister Patty lives on in this endeavor. I thank my husband Jeff Klinkenberg for his patience and love.
Acknowledgements

My deepest appreciation goes to my committee and questioners for all their support. Thank you to Brad Nickels whose wisdom, thorough knowledge of art history, and belief in me kept me going. My gratitude goes to Heather Vinson who selflessly shared her time and scholarly gifts. It was on a USF trip to Venice led by Lou Marcus that I first found inspiration for this study. Many thanks for his contribution as a professor, but also for his compassion. I was most fortunate to have David Norr and Catherine Chastain-Elliott as great readers and questioners.

I thank all the faculty members whose seminars prepared me for this rite of passage. Special appreciation goes out to those who have mentored, supported, and inspired me over these last few years including; Sheramy Bundrick, Anne Jeffrey, Keli Rylance, Mary Fournier, David Norr, and Jennifer Hardin. I would also like to thank Wallace Wilson for his support and leadership. The financial assistance of USF made this work possible and I am grateful to all concerned. The patience and kindness of Helena Szepe, Noel Schiller, Richard Olinger, Debbie Dennison, Gloria Quigley, and USF’s library staff are also greatly appreciated. The support of friends has been unwavering and I am most thankful. Pamela Huchieson’s spiritual affirmation was a great help.

I extend my appreciation to Connie Butler, Esther Adler, and the Museum of Modern Art for providing access to research materials. Thank you to the Galerie Paul Andriesse in Amsterdam for supplying images. I would like to thank Marlene Dumas for talking with me about her work.
# Table of Contents

List of Figures .............................................................................................................. ii

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... v

Introduction.................................................................................................................... 1
   The Relationship Between the Artist, Image, and Viewer ........................................ 7
   The State of Scholarship on Dumas and the Discourse of Contemporary Painting ........................................ 13
   The Study of Ryman’s Brides, Reinhardt’s Daughter, and Stern ........................... 17

Chapter One: Intervention in Painting......................................................................... 18
   Negotiation of Artistic Identity ................................................................................. 18
   Construction of Identity and Self-Fashioning ......................................................... 24
   Interpretation and Ambiguity .................................................................................. 28
   Titles ......................................................................................................................... 30
   Intervention in Painting ......................................................................................... 33

Chapter Two: Dumas Plays in the Field of Painting’s Apocalypse: A Dialogue with the Monochromes of Ryman and Reinhardt .......................................................... 39
   Robert Ryman’s “whiteness” and Ryman’s Brides ................................................. 43
   Ad Reinhardt’s “blackness” and Reinhardt’s Daughter .......................................... 54

Chapter Three: Stern: An Act of Reference, Homage, and Emulation ...................... 70

Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 87

References Cited .......................................................................................................... 89

Selected Bibliography ................................................................................................ 93
List of Figures


Figure 10. Marlene Dumas, *Cupid*, 1994. Oil on canvas, 63 x 55 1/8 in. Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich. SOURCE: Image courtesy Galerie Paul Andriesse, Amsterdam............................20, 40

Figure 11. Marlene Dumas, *Dead Marilyn*, 2008. Oil on canvas. 15 3/4 x 19 11/16 in. SOURCE: Image courtesy Galerie Paul Andriesse, Amsterdam........................................23


Figure 16. *Het Kwaad is Banaal (Evil Is Banal)*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 49 3/16 x 41 5/16 in. Van Abbemuseum Collection, Eindhoven. SOURCE: Image courtesy Galerie Paul Andriesse, Amsterdam…………..65

Intervention in Painting by Marlene Dumas with Titles of Engagement: 
*Ryman’s Brides, Reinhardt’s Daughter, and Stern.*

Susan King Klinkenberg

ABSTRACT

Marlene Dumas is known for her portraits and figurative paintings and drawings. This study focuses on three paintings by Dumas that reference male icons of art: *Stern* (2004), *Ryman’s Brides* (1997), and *Reinhardt’s Daughter* (1994). In referencing Ad Reinhardt, Robert Ryman and in the case of *Stern*, Gerhard Richter, Dumas engages with each artist and the history of painting in specific ways. As this thesis title indicates, I argue that Dumas uses artistic allusion pervasively throughout her oeuvre to conduct an intervention in painting. I propose that this interposition is a way to navigate and question the canon, while strengthening her agency as an artist. Concurrently, this practice by Dumas provides insights concerning the status of painting in a contemporary art scene where new media is progressively dominant. By unpacking this artistic referencing through titling, concept, and the process of painting, I will demonstrate the significance of it to her production.

This analysis also functions as a commentary on the current state of painting and key aspects of its evolution over the last fifty years. I suggest that her use of incisive artistic reference interrogates power structures of the canon by disrupting boundaries, categories, and frames of enclosure. Her dialogue with art history ranges from homage and quotation to contestation and humorous exegesis.
Dumas relies on photography including personal snapshots and images from news media as source material, but her painting process is transformative rather than mimetic. Her evocative and often provocative work is frequently discussed in terms of race, gender, and sexuality. I consider how Dumas explores socio-historical issues while creating a dialogue with art history. Dumas investigates the problem of how to paint and claim new territory in our high-tech age when painting is often deemed obsolete. This thesis topic is understudied in any depth and merits further inquiry. By examining how these paintings engage with specific artists within Modern and contemporary painting, I seek to make a new contribution to the literature on Marlene Dumas.
Introduction

Marlene Dumas is a South-African born, Amsterdam based artist who is known for her evocative and often provocative figures and portraits. This study explores an aspect of Dumas’s practice that has yet to be investigated in depth. I argue that Dumas uses artistic allusion pervasively to conduct an intervention in painting. Dumas references artists of the canon in titles and content throughout her production. A number of works will be highlighted within this thesis, but in order to examine the specificity of this practice, a more in-depth analysis will be given to three paintings, figures 1-3, by Dumas: Reinhardt’s Daughter (1994), Ryman’s Brides (1997), and Stern (2004). In referencing Ad Reinhardt, Robert Ryman and in the case of Stern, Gerhard Richter, Dumas engages with each artist and critical moments in the last half-century of painting’s history.

Chapter one is an overview of the intervention in painting conducted by Dumas. By tracing her development as an artist and the ongoing importance of reference to her practice, I lay the groundwork for the examination of the aforementioned paintings. I suggest that Dumas’s form of reference is a way to self-fashion and position herself within an art history that was dominated by men for so long. The opening of her first retrospective in the U.S. at the Museum of Modern Art in December of 2008 placed her work within the very institution that houses many of the iconic artists whom Dumas references. I investigate her use of titling in relation to interpretation, as well as
ambiguity associated with her work. Her portrayals include blindfolded men, a serene Jesus, models, babies, corpses, nudes in provocative poses and even Osama Bin Laden. These images have been characterized by critics as having the power to confront, comfort, disturb, make the tragic palpable, seduce or polemicize. I explore a number of works by Dumas that combine art historical reference with images culled from contemporary culture.

Chapter two focuses on Reinhardt’s Daughter (fig. 1) and Ryman’s Brides (fig. 2). Is Dumas paying homage to these two Modernists who had reduced abstraction to black and white monochromes? Or do her works contest these supposed “final and last paintings” associated with the medium’s apocalypse? Reinhardt’s Daughter and Ryman’s Brides contain representational figures. Yet, in her titling and handling of the paint, the end result is staking a claim in painting’s history and engaging with the Modernist territory of abstraction, where art calls attention to art itself. Dumas’s engagement with the black-and-white monochromes of Reinhardt and Ryman is dually focused on pigment as paint and pigment of skin, invoking race. I explore correlations between Dumas’s quotation of the monochrome, and Okwui Enwezor’s discussion of how African artists like Iké Udé use cultural signs in the form of quotation and reappropriation in their work to interrogate gender, race and social divisions.

Her dialogue with Richter regarding representation, photography and painting are the subject of chapter three. Dumas refers to Dead by Richter (fig. 4). Richter’s Dead looks like a photograph with the blur intact, whereas in Stern (fig. 3) paint and

---

1 Monochromes are generally considered imageless, single-color works. These paintings may serve as a negation of the past and a blank slate preparing the way for new beginnings.
brushstroke enliven a morgue-like image, altering the source material dramatically. Chapter three explores a different kind of interaction than her dialogue with the monochrome painters. The subject matter of the source photograph invokes the political as both Dumas and Richter refer to a posthumous photograph of Ulrike Meinhof, a militant activist from the Red Army Faction who died in her prison cell in Germany in the late 1970s. The RAF, also known as the Baader-Meinhof group, had become a
controversial subject in Germany. Richter and Dumas confront political controversy, apparently without taking sides. Both artists raise underlying issues concerning the temporal and representational with distinctly different approaches. Richter manages to overcome the taboo against history painting in contemporary art and also calls assumptions about photography into question. As David Green says regarding the Baader-Meinhof series: “It is as though in these images painting finally takes its revenge on photography and, specifically, upon its claims to be the privileged agency of historical representation.”

Richter challenges the limits of photography while exploring

![Figure 4. Gerhard Richter, Dead [Tote], 1988. Oil on canvas, 24 1/2 x 28 3/4 in. GR 667-1. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.](image)

---

painting’s own failures in *Dead*. Dumas then gleans what she needs from his project. Her painterly image of Ulrike Meinhof contrasts sharply with Richter’s blurry photo painting. One wonders if it is true homage, or perhaps an act of emulation, where Dumas taps into Richter’s strengths as a leading painter of our time, and attempts to surpass his portrait with her own version. As dissimilar as the two paintings are, the moment in time a photograph represents remains embedded as a trace in both *Stern* and *Dead*.

Dumas translates contemporary problems into metaphysical realities involving broader themes by combining images from personal snapshots, and images from the news and popular visual culture, with the process of painting. *Stern, Ryman’s Brides,* and *Reinhardt’s Daughter* originate from photographs of the dead, popular culture, and a sleeping child, respectively. I argue that *Ryman’s Brides* and *Reinhardt’s Daughter* subvert and question the structures of Western art to which they allude. Dumas connects her own project with a contemporary in *Stern* and I suggest her dialogue with Richter is distinct and more of a homage. The titles and visual references used in these three paintings play a significant role in her artistic method and are primary to this investigation. All three artists referred to in these paintings produced work after 1950 and the approach is different in each painting varying with the time period, subject matter, and reference.

**The Relationship Between the Artist, Image, and Viewer**

Art historians are cautioned to stay objective and not allow personal reactions to color interpretations, but the very tension of objectivity and subjective experience may also force us to look and think harder about exactly what is going on when we encounter
a painting. In early July 2005, I attended the Venice Biennale and saw Stern (fig. 3) and other paintings by Dumas. The Italian Pavilion was relatively empty and I had just walked through the galleries where paintings of Francis Bacon and Philip Guston were hung. Next I entered the room that changed my perceptions about painting. A series of large portraits hung on the walls. One painting featured a man, who had an ominous shadow cast over his face. It was titled, provocatively, *Liberation (1945)* (fig. 5). What darkness had he faced?

Figure 5. Marlene Dumas, *Liberation (1945)*, 1990. Oil on canvas, 51 3/16 x 43 5/16 in. Collection of the artist.
Next I saw a picture reminiscent of a Goya etching: a man with outstretched arms stood blindfolded with his head bowed as if waiting for the next round of torture (fig. 6). A young girl wearing a towel and sandals grappled with modesty and budding adolescence (fig. 7).


The most overwhelming paintings, from my perspective, were four large close-up portraits of women with their eyes closed (fig. 8). *Stern*, more than the others, released a floodgate of emotions in me. It was as if I suddenly encountered a person whom I had known well, long ago, but hadn’t seen for years. It was as if my sister, like a best friend and twin when we were growing up, was before me in that portrait. Patty almost died as a teenager and was in a coma for seven weeks. When I visited her in the hospital, I realized that I had almost lost her; I was grateful just to sit and watch her breathe. *Stern* reminded

Figure 8. Marlene Dumas, Composite: (top left) *Stern*, 2004, Tate, London (bottom left) *Alfa*, 2004 (top right) *Jen*, 2005, MoMA, New York, (bottom right) *Lucy*, 2004. All four are oil on canvas, 43 5/16 x 51 3/16 in. Tate, London.
me of her time in a coma. My sister woke up with damage to her frontal lobes and leftside paralysis. Her plans to be a college student and ballerina were cancelled as months of rehabilitative therapy began. Patty learned to live with her disability. Years later, in her forties she suffered a seizure and was comatose again. When she woke after seven weeks, her brain was damaged beyond recovery. She spent the rest of her life in a nursing home.

When I saw Stern at the Biennale my sister Patty was still in the nursing home. I was struck by the stark peacefulness of the Dumas portrait. Paint was spare; each stroke looked free from constraint. Even though I had read about Dumas, that day in Venice was the beginning of my connection to her work. Three years later, a catalog essay in conjunction with the U.S. retrospective seemed to validate my experience with Stern. In his essay, “Less Dead,” art historian Richard Shiff explored a number of paintings including Stern. How can a painting that originates from a photograph of a dead person be so charged with life or at least “less dead?” Shiff’s essay addressed the question. Within the viewing experience exists a relationship between the image, the artist, and the viewer. Shiff differentiates between the photographic source Dumas uses and the resulting painting. As he says regarding Dumas on the subject of categorizing or classifying images, “…the emotional life of the image belongs to the painting, not its model, and [that] the emotions must also belong to the artist who makes the painting as well as to the viewer who takes its meaning.” As the viewer, I take its [the painting’s] meaning. The source material for Stern (fig. 3) has a complex history, which will be

---

discussed in chapter three. The discussion is different from my own experience with the painting, but the tension and the meaning I took from the painting are rooted in commonalities. Whether the painting speaks of that mysterious space between sleep and death, or how human trauma and a single instant dramatically changes lives, the art historical context and reference of Stern does not necessarily negate a personal experience. In this case, intensified interest sparked further exploration.

When I saw Stern at MoMA in 2008 it still provoked an intense reaction.4 My response was even more pronounced after studying the painting and tracing its history, but especially because my sister had died two years before. It was a death that freed her from a burdensome brain and body. Stern’s power to pull me in goes beyond physical resemblance to my sister. I share this story because the personal reactions we have to certain paintings are part of that triangle between artist, image, and viewer. These reactions affect our interpretations, but also make the viewing process a richer encounter with the potential to understand the painting more fully. “The emotional life of the image is in the painting,” not the source photograph.

Shiff says: “If anything, painting increases the animation and multifaceted character of its model. This is tantamount to extending the emotional range.”5 The emotional range of Stern stretches out to evoke, then brings us nearer, prompting a more intimate exchange. Stern possesses an air of mystery. We can dissect the image, noting the dramatic contrast between the ghostly whiteness of her face against the surrounding

4 The exhibition was curated by Cornelia Butler, Curator of Drawings at MoMA and was on exhibit at MoMA from December 14, 2008 through February 16, 2009 and then on view at The Menil Collection, Houston (March 26 – June 21, 2009). It first opened at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (June 22 – September 22, 2008). This mid-career survey was comprised of approximately seventy paintings and thirty-five drawings. This information is from the MoMA press release dated December 9, 2008.
darkness, or point to its grand scale and close-up view that pulls us in. Depending on who is looking, the relationship between the image, artist, and viewer is variable and subject to change. When a painting works, there is a tension that draws us closer. Shiff compares photography and painting and suggests that animation is what makes the paintings “less dead.” In the case of Dumas, the act of painting as the artist’s hand articulates the image, animates the portrait. Animation is defined as the state of being full of life or vigor. Dumas draws vigor and life from a morbid photograph of a dead woman and Stern evokes and provokes with the empowerment of that liveliness.

The State of Scholarship on Dumas and the Discourse of Contemporary Painting

The literature on Marlene Dumas consists of monograph essays, exhibition catalogs, reviews, interviews, and artist profiles. There is an abundance of published material, but a limited amount of scholarly investigation. The debut of the exhibition catalog produced by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (in association with MoMA in New York) is a substantial new source on Dumas and is strengthened by the inclusion of scholarly essays by Cornelia Butler, curator of the exhibition, and art historian Richard Shiff. The catalog is a valuable visual resource, including for the first time a large collection of full-color reproductions available in one place. Attending the exhibitions at MoMA and MoCA provided an opportunity to study “the dialogue” amongst Dumas’s works. By “the dialogue,” I am referring to the associations, insights, and responses that arise when works are juxtaposed and how the installation affects interpretation. My research was enriched by the experiential dimension of studying specific paintings and drawings as part of an entire body of work.
Shiff’s catalog essay provided insightful scholarship specific to Dumas. My line of inquiry differs from Shiff’s regarding Stern. I consider one, how Dumas positions herself in relation to Richter and two, the dialogue that takes place between works. Dumas pays homage to Richter, but extracts what is useful to her. In a spirit of emulation, she goes beyond his blurred image in her painterly rendition.

Ernst van Alphen discusses Dumas’s portraits in terms of evoking emptiness and death, particularly in paintings such as Models, Rejects and The Teacher. Van Alphen says: “Like Boltanski’s installations these portraits give rise to a Holocaust effect.” I found van Alphen’s discussions of Models and Rejects persuasive in terms of their intervention in the aesthetic tradition of portraiture. His exploration of colonialism in relation to historical trauma supports my emphasis on Dumas’s intervention. He says: “It is precisely as an intervention that works of art must work.”

I was intrigued by the catalog for a Marlene Dumas solo exhibition at the Zwirner & Wirth Gallery, New York in 2005 with an essay by Marlene van Niekerk. It confirmed Dumas’s pattern of artistic reference. Van Niekerk addresses key issues concerning the centrality of art history to Dumas’s practice and says that Dumas wanted to be a referential artist early on. Van Niekerk briefly discusses Ryman’s Brides and Reinhardt’s Daughter in terms of their titles, artistic reference, and content. Reinhardt’s pungent philosophy concerning abstract painting and his disdain for the figurative is highlighted.

Dumas is a prolific writer, has authored numerous exhibition catalogs, and often

---

writes about her own work. A collection of her maxims, essays, and poems is contained in *Marlene Dumas: Sweet Nothings*. She has been interviewed frequently over three decades. She partakes in the discourse surrounding contemporary painting.\(^9\)

A number of writers and art historians have contributed to this discourse and I rely on certain scholars who provide useful models. I look to James Elkins in a general way, and Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin Buchloh regarding the specific artists whom Dumas references. Elkins suggests a way of framing the “death of painting” debate differently. He says: “Painting’s imminent and repeated death should be regarded not as a problem, a possibility, or a truth, but as an intermittent accompaniment of painting in the age of modernism.”\(^10\) This approach results in a more fruitful inquiry. Elkin’s clarity and Bois’s insights help create a kind of order and their scholarship is welcome in the midst of what can be an imbroglio within art history. I lean on aspects of the work of Bois as it relates to the death of painting in his essay, “Painting: The Task of Mourning,” as well as Bois’s writings on Ryman and Reinhardt. Buchloh, Robert Storr and David Green provided insights on Richter. (Storr was also a resource on Ryman). Okwui Enwesor’s writings informs my discussion of Iké Udé and race.

---

9 The structure of the discourse of contemporary painting is similar to what Allan Sekula outlines for the discourse of photography in “On the Invention of Photographic Meaning,” Sekula says, “A discourse can be defined as an arena of information exchange, that is, as a system of relations between parties engaged in communicative activity.” He suggests that it is a notion of limits in that it: “establishes a bounded arena of shared expectations as to meaning.”(452) He also characterizes the discourse: “…as the set of relations governing the rhetoric of related utterances. The discourse is, in the most general sense, the context of the utterance, the conditions that constrain and support its meaning, that determine its semantic target.” (453). Source: Allan Sekula. “On the Invention of Photographic Meaning,” (1975) in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981).

The aspects of the discourse relevant to this study concern the last fifty years. The New York School and Abstract Expressionism dominated from about 1945 to the end of the 1960s in the paintings of Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Clyfford Still, and numerous other artists. Considered late modernism, the formalist bent of Clement Greenberg and metaphysical approach of Harold Rosenberg defined the period. Even though women artists like Lee Krasner were actively painting, women were not recognized at the time in the way that their male counterparts were. Jackson Pollock was held up as the intuitive painter and came to symbolize the pinnacle of abstract expressionism. The period in abstraction when Ryman and Reinhardt painted their monochromes is associated with “the end of painting.” In addition to Elkins and Bois, a host of scholars and critics have explored this subject in writings such as “The End of Painting” (1981) by Douglas Crimp and The State of the Art (1987) by Arthur Danto. Thomas McEvilley frames the debate on the overall resilience of painting with a series of essays about various artists in The Exile’s Return: Toward a Redefinition of Painting for the Post-Modern Era (1993). From McEvilley’s perspective, painting never died, it just went into exile for a period of time.\footnote{Modernism’s demise was imminent once the ultimate in painting abstraction appeared to be exhausted in the monochromes by artists like Robert Ryman and Ad Reinhardt. A sense of cynicism may have pervaded the discourse surrounding Reinhardt’s and Ryman’s monochromes.} 

The faces and figures in Stern, Reinhardt’s Daughter and Ryman’s Brides connect artist, image, and viewer. However, Dumas’s titles focus attention on important aspects of the paintings. Literature on titles in general helped to make sense of this practice by Dumas and other artists. I rely mainly on John Fisher and Jerrold Levinson as sources on the process of titling and how titles affect interpretation.
The Study of *Ryman’s Brides, Reinhardt’s Daughter and Stern*

The scope of this project is to focus on three works in depth to demonstrate the specificity of this practice more fully and to explore the dialogue that occurs between Marlene Dumas, particular painters, and art history. How is this practice of titling and artistic reference carried out and what are the ramifications of this recurring invocation of other artists? How does this practice enable Dumas to engage with art history and the state of painting and what is accomplished in this process?

My expanded reading of *Stern, Reinhardt’s Daughter, and Ryman’s Brides* involves a three-pronged approach. First, I explore how the works engage with both art history and painting itself in ways that are highly specific. The second aspect investigates how Dumas, whether intentionally or not, positions herself in relation to prominent male artists. Her retrospective at MoMA, *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave*, created an efficacious backdrop for this study. Third, her use of photographs from magazines, newspapers, and personal snapshots, as source material, translates contemporary imagery into expressive figures and portraits. Thus, broader socio-historical themes are associated with her work. Like photographic images found in worldwide news media, these portraits invoke race, gender and politics. This is not to say that there is some explicit political message, agenda or single meaning within the paintings. Dumas coalesces the art historical with our media-saturated culture, which manifests in the work. This engenders a discussion that includes the state of painting, the construction of identity via artistic practice, and socio-historical issues. Marlene Dumas conducts an intervention in painting.
Chapter One

Intervention in Painting

Negotiation of Artistic Identity

Marlene Dumas sees herself first and foremost as a painter. Her initial preference was to install *The Painter* (fig. 9) prominently at the entrance of the MoMA exhibition. Instead, a bit further away, inside the next gallery, *The Painter* greets us through the doorway with a sullen expression. The image of a naked child stares at us. Caught in the act of painting, one hand is caked in blue, the other stained with red, contrasting with the light touches of muted grays and the flesh tones.


---

12 Marlene Dumas, interview by author, MoMA, NY, December 9, 2008.
If Dumas wanted *The Painter* to be the first image that viewers would see, why instead were the paintings *Reinhardt’s Daughter* (fig. 1) and *Cupid* (fig. 10) installed in the more prominent position at the entrance of the exhibition? Dumas worked closely with curator Connie Butler on the installation of the show, which was arranged thematically rather than chronologically. It was Butler’s suggestion, according to Dumas, to install *Cupid* and *Reinhardt’s Daughter* at the entrance instead of *The Painter*. At first glance we see an infant in each painting, upside down from our perspective, perhaps asleep in a crib. *Reinhardt’s Daughter* (fig. 1) is at eye level and *Cupid* (fig. 10) is hung diagonally higher on the wall. *The Painter, Cupid,* and *Reinhardt’s Daughter* all originated from snapshots of Helena, the daughter of Dumas, yet the works suggests a complexity that has little to do with the sentimentality often associated with paintings of children.


---

13 Ibid.
Artistic reference is at the forefront of Reinhardt’s Daughter, Ryman’s Brides, and Stern. “This engagement with art history,” Dumas has said, “informs my work more than being a woman or a mother.” It is as if she avoids being typecast as a woman artist focused on motherhood and domesticity. When Dumas says that art history informs her work more than being a woman, it suggests that art history is central to her practice.

The MoMA retrospective added to Dumas’s reputation within painting’s historical legacy. Robert Ryman, Ad Reinhardt, and Gerhard Richter have had major

---

14 Ibid.
career surveys at MoMA. More than eighty percent of retrospectives over the last decade have been devoted to male artists. Dumas is one of only five women to be honored with a retrospective in MoMA’s history. The others are Louise Bourgeois (1982), Lee Krasner (1984), Helen Frankenthaler (1989), and Elizabeth Murray (2006).

Griselda Pollock suggests that there have been two approaches for dealing with the exclusionary problems of the canon. The first is to expand the Western canon to include women and minorities. Or she says, ‘‘abolish canons altogether and argue that all cultural artefacts have significance.’’ Pollock proposes a more complex analysis than either of these flawed alternatives. The canon is encoded with binaries such as outsider/insider and ‘‘privileged white male’’/the Other with ‘‘difference’’ at its core. The move towards special studies and sub-disciplinary fragmentations into Women’s Studies, Latino Studies, Gay studies, and other formations carries the risk of leaving the outsiders on the outside. Pollock says: ‘‘Differences can co-exist, cross-fertilise and challenge, be acknowledged, confronted, celebrated and not remain destructive of the other in an expanded but shared cultural space.’’ Dumas is part of that shared cultural space and I argue that her dialogue with artists of the canon enables her to both resist the canon and take a stance that rejects the argument of the canon’s power to limit agency.

Progress is coming slowly. As an example, one of the world’s major art exhibitions, the Venice Biennale has had male curatorial leaders for more than a century.

---

16 Carol Kino, ‘‘A Visit With the Modern’s First Grandmother,’’ New York Times, October 2, 2005.
18 Ibid.
19 Pollock, 11.
In 2005 Rosa Martínez and María de Corral directed. (The Guerilla Girls\textsuperscript{20} were represented at this Biennale by six giant posters. “Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met Museum?” read one. “Less than 3% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 83% of the nudes are female,” said another. The statistics are based on a count conducted in 2004. The original count had been done in 1989 and fifteen years later there were actually fewer women artists represented.)\textsuperscript{21} At the 2005 Biennale, nine paintings by Dumas filled a room in the Italian Pavilion.\textsuperscript{22} They were placed prominently near the Bacon and Guston rooms.

At MoMA Dumas was in the midst of most, if not all of the artists of the twentieth and early twenty-first century canon. The physical reality of being in the building with Robert Rauschenberg’s \textit{Bed}, Andy Warhol’s \textit{Gold Marilyn}, Jackson Pollock’s \textit{One: Number 31}, Pablo Picasso’s \textit{Guitar}, Claude Monet’s \textit{Water Lilies}, and Cezanne’s \textit{The Bather} paves the way for an opportunity to define her own role within the history of modern and contemporary painting. Her referencing of male icons of art is an impetus towards that achievement.

Dumas’s \textit{Dead Marilyn} (fig. 11) may have been partly inspired by Warhol’s famous “Marilyns.” But at the time she was also haunted by the recent death of her mother. Dumas invokes Andy Warhol merely by choosing Marilyn Monroe as the subject of this work created for her first major retrospective in America. Dumas’s Monroe

\textsuperscript{20} The Guerilla Girls are a famous protest group of anonymous women artists who use humor, facts and bold visuals including startling posters to confront disparities in the art world concerning women and people of color. They often wear Gorilla masks and take the names of dead women artists to protect their anonymity. They formed their group in the mid-1980s and their focus has expanded from confronting the art world to broader visual production including film, pop culture and politics. Their website address is http://www.guerillagirls.com/index.shtml.

\textsuperscript{21} The Guerilla Girls website: http://www.guerrillagirls.com/posters/venicewallf.shtml, accessed on 2/19/08, 4:25 PM.

\textsuperscript{22} Dumas was also represented at the Venice Biennales in 1995, 2003 and 2007.
depiction contrasts with Warhol’s candy colored images with pouty lips and bedroom eyes. *Dead Marilyn* is an intimate portrait in white and grey tones, a hint of warm pastel, splotched skin and matted hair. The artist had tried to paint a portrait of her mother at the time, but instead pulled a photo from her loosely kept archive.23 Dumas explained: “I don’t seek, I find. People often ask, ‘How do you choose the subject matter?’ I think it was Picasso who said, ‘the subject matter chooses me.” Picasso also said ‘‘I don’t seek, I find.”24 The Picasso quote connects Dumas with the most famous artist of the twentieth century. It further serves as a way to describe herself as a person who invites chance and spontaneity into the selection process.

Although she commonly references male artists, Dumas mentioned thinking of Alice Neel’s portraits in the context of *The Drunk*25 (fig. 12). Dumas calls this depiction of a female nude a

![Figure 11. Marlene Dumas, Dead Marilyn, 2008. Oil on canvas, 15 3/4 X 19 11/16 in.](image)

---

23 Marlene Dumas, informal interview by author, press preview at the MoCA opening in Los Angeles, June 20, 2008.

24 Dumas said this during a lecture at MoMA on Monday, December 8th at 6:30 PM. Dumas was speaking extemporaneously, but it is still interesting that Picasso’s words ‘I don’t seek, I find’ become hers. According to the *New York Times*, Picasso said, “For me, a picture is neither an end nor an achievement but rather a lucky chance and art experience.” He once explained, “I try to represent what I have found, not what I am seeking. I do not seek--I find.” Source: Alden Whitman, “Picasso: Protean and Prodigious, the Greatest Single Force in 70 Years of Art,” *New York Times*, 3 April, 1973.

25 Ibid. Dumas said that she admired Neel’s work during the MoMA lecture on 12/08/08 when discussing this painting.
“self-portrait.” The middle-aged woman with drooping breasts and, ruddy cheeks and neck, faces us directly. Dumas admired Neel, who devoted her artistic focus to the figurative during a time when abstraction was favored. Neel is also known for her brutally frank nudes such as *Self-Portrait* (1980).

**Construction of Identity and Self-Fashioning**

Dumas positions herself purposefully throughout her oeuvre. Like many artists, her extensive knowledge of art history and the contemporary art scene connects her process with notable painters. Paintings by Dumas that reference prominent painters resist simple labels of pastiche and mere appropriation, however, her practice takes quotational painting a step further. As a strategy prevalent in the 1980s, quotational painting mocked the ideology of pure painting and deconstructed Modernism and artists’ embodiment of

---

26 The paintings within this study refer to other artists and their work. In the case of Ryman and Reinhardt, Dumas is referencing more than appropriating their work. This creates a kind of paradox. By referring to these non-figurative painters and using the figure to do it; Dumas merges incongruous practices and creates a new painting. Issues of authorship and opposition to the Modernist ideals of originality underlie this kind of production by Dumas. The practice is more subtle or indirect than the appropriation that we see in works such as the re-photographed images of modernist photographers by Sherrie Levine.
genius and progress.\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Reinhardt’s Daughter} and \textit{Ryman’s Brides} engage rather than merely mock. There is a gleaning from and then a merging into her work. This engagement with art history (and prominent male painters) may help undermine lingering remnants of patriarchy embedded in art history for so long.\textsuperscript{28}

Born in 1953, Dumas grew up under apartheid in a semi-rural area on the outskirts of Capetown, South Africa called Kuils River where her family has produced wine since 1916. Her father died due to alcoholism in 1966. When asked what Marlene was like growing up, Pieter Dumas, her brother shared, “My father always said—Marlene is the strong one.”\textsuperscript{29} She attended Capetown’s Michaelis School of Fine Art in the 1970s and was exposed to conceptual art, art theory, performance, photography, and painting. Richard Shiff discusses how Dumas as an undergraduate identified with notable

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} In the broadest sense the term Modernism is associated with the forces of social modernity and rooted in various myths. A sense of upward progress and the artist as genius and hero prevailed. Art was proposed as an exemplary realm. Greenberg and others positioned Modernism’s start with the latter part of the nineteenth century and the paintings of Edouard Manet, and the end with the abstract painters in the United States in the 1960s. The usage of the term ‘modernism’ as applicable to twentieth-century abstract art only became pervasive in the 1960s. Postmodernism developed in the later 1960s. Reference: Art in Theory: 1900 – 2000, An Anthology of Changing Ideas, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, rev. ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 2-4.
\item \textsuperscript{28} The patriarchal tradition has changed over the last four decades since Linda Nochlin’s seminal essay, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” published in 1970. The landmark exhibition, \textit{Women Artists: 1550-1950} opened in December of 1976 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and appeared at the Brooklyn Museum in November 1977. Put together by Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris and considered monumental, it changed perspectives on women artists of the past. A pioneering effort and the first of its kind to show an extensive array of works by women artists, it challenged the male dominated canon of art history. The standard textbook of art history, H. W. Janson’s \textit{History of Art} ignored women in the early editions published in 1962 and 1977. There have been numerous exhibitions that have been more inclusive and others that have had more of a global focus. In 2007, just about thirty years after the \textit{Women Artists} exhibition, Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly co-curated the inaugural exhibition at the Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, entitled \textit{Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art}. Curator Maura Reilly describes \textit{Global Feminisms} as a counterpoint to the show from thirty years ago; \textit{Women Artists: 1550-1950}. Situated as they are, the two exhibitions can serve as conceptual bookends separated by thirty years of feminist artistic practice and theory. Reference: Maura Reilly, Introduction: “Toward Transnational Feminisms,” in \textit{Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art}, ed. Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (London and New York: Merrell Publishers Limited, 2007), 15.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Pieter Dumas, Marlene’s brother said this to me at a post lecture gathering at MoMA on the evening of Monday, December 8, 2008. He also joked about how their father would say that the boys were “wimps” compared to Marlene. Pieter Dumas, as a minister, had fought racism within the Dutch reformed Church in South Africa in the 1980s.
\end{itemize}
artists and “shared in their angst.” Shiff mentions her uncertainty about whether we are doing “the ‘right’ thing,” as she writes about “the anxiety evident in the art of both Francisco Goya and Willem de Kooning.”

Dumas was exposed to a diversity of beliefs and cultural practices in the variety of people she met while attending art school in the 1970s. It was an environment where experimentation and openness in exchanging ideas was encouraged. In discussing this period of time and atmosphere Dumas says:

Art School in South Africa was very stimulating in a theoretical way, issues that only now are becoming important for some Europeans, like…what is political art? I learnt a lot about ethics, philosophy and theory in South Africa, while in Holland I started to look at paintings for the first time. I started to appreciate the pictorial or visual intelligence of remarkable paintings. So, that’s important to my work, as well as being white in a black country influenced my philosophy of life. I was not the victim of the bad system. I was part of the wrong system. So I don’t make work about being victimized (although apartheid as a whole was very bad for the spirit of its people). I rather find everyone capable of terrible things and I fear my own weakness and blindness first.

This quote by Dumas highlights three aspects of her background. First, steeped in theory, her orientation is conceptual. Second, she sees paintings “for the first time” in her move to Europe and continues to look to other artists for inspiration. In South Africa she was limited to reproductions in books. Third, race and living under apartheid shaped her worldview. She values the importance of socio-cultural influences on her development as an artist. Dumas constructs an identity that connects with her past of living under apartheid in her homeland, but she is also attempting to separate herself from it. She identifies with “the visual intelligence of remarkable paintings” and foregrounds the

---

importance of art history to her work.

As early as 1976, Dumas completed *Bed*, an ink on paper drawing. It is a direct allusion to Robert Rauschenberg’s famous work of the same title. Thus, Dumas uses artistic reference from the beginning of her career. Dumas left South Africa in 1976 to reside in the Netherlands. The racism and politics of her native country were motivating factors. She continued her art education at the Ateliers ‘63, Haarlem, and she studied at the Psychological Institute of the University of Amsterdam from 1979 to 1980.

Dumas’s pursuit of painting waned during only one period of her life when she changed her focus towards experimentation with other mediums. From 1976 to 1983 Dumas shifted from painting to Conceptual art including Minimalism and Process art. The negation of formal interest and her embrace of an intellectual process with works on paper, sculpture, and installation contributed to her growth as an artist. Conceptual explorations made her return to painting an empowering choice. That choice brought with it a renewed interest in pushing boundaries, stretching the limits of the medium, and an enhanced commitment to discovery and process. Dumas’s return to painting during times when photography, video, installation, and performance dominated the contemporary art world, hardly means she lost sight of the conceptual, as it continues to suffuse her production. Her work incorporates the conceptual and is tied to the representational implications of photography.

Dumas’s work is often discussed in both the art press and mass media in terms of the high prices it commands. Part of Dumas’s commercial success as an artist comes from the changing art market. The art market is part of the institutional framework Linda

---

33 Cornelia Butler, “Painter as Witness” in *Measuring Your Own Grave*, 53.
Nochlin said must change for equality to become a reality. In the 1970s Linda Nochlin presented ideas centered on the feminist critique that emphasized the importance of change at institutions being necessary for equality among the sexes to take hold in art history. Marlene Dumas set records for commanding the highest auction price twice—first in 2005 when her (1987) painting of a posed school photograph, *The Teacher (sub a)*, sold at auction for $3.34-million, then in July 2008 when a (1995) group figure portrait, *Visitor*, sold for $6.3-million.\(^{34}\) Dumas has an extensive international exhibition history and a strong following in Europe, but has been relatively unknown outside of U.S. art circles until recently. She has participated in a number of international biennials, and was invited to exhibit twice at Documenta in Germany. Dumas has participated in many group shows since 1978 and exhibited in solo exhibitions at the Tate Gallery, London (1996), the Centre Pompidou, Paris (2001), the Art Institute of Chicago (2003) and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2007). Earning the odd distinction of commanding a higher price for a work at auction than any other living female artist generated a new kind of international prominence. Exposure to new audiences also means more question about how to interpret her work, often characterized as ambiguous. Dumas sometimes refers to herself as *Miss Interpreted*.\(^{35}\)

**Interpretation and Ambiguity**

How does the artist’s intention figure in the relationship with the meaning or meanings of an art object being interpreted? The artist’s intention is part of the equation, but visual evidence, socio-historical context, and reception are significant factors in a


\(^{35}\) *Miss Interpreted* refers to an exhibition as well as the catalog under the same name from 1992.
thorough analysis. James Elkins has said in relation to interpretation of meaning, “pictures provoke emotions but resist explanations and ultimately refuse to let themselves be turned into words.”

If Dumas’s paintings are provocative and evocative, what specifically do they evoke and provoke? As Dumas depicts individuals and groups of people from various moments within the recent past and present she creates works open to discussions about race, gender and sexuality.

Dumas tends to use source photographs from a wide range of subjects including some controversial, suggestive, pornographic, or morbid—prompting questions about whether these works exploit trauma. Should it hurt to look at depictions of drowning victims, dead people hanging from nooses, and strippers exposing their genitals? Or, does the expressiveness of Dumas’s painterly ways aestheticize the experience for us? Many of her paintings, such as Stern, present viewers with a stark, highly aesthetic portrait originating from tragedy. Calling herself “Miss Interpreted” may be a humorous defense and part of the dialogue between artist and audience. Dumas says, “There is not a set message to decipher, there is ambiguousness to come to terms with, an existential awareness that the interpretation of my work operates like a movie with an open ending.”

Tackle the ambiguity of her images and one quickly discovers that “correct” interpretations don’t exist, but it is still possible to gain insights about artistic practice. Art historians, curators, and critics always bring up the ambiguity associated with her work. Mariska van den Berg says, “Paradoxically Dumas’ texts themselves rarely provide any answers. They reflect some of her intentions and in that sense they are

informative, but they prefer to leave the ambiguity of the artwork untouched. This ambiguity, however, is far from noncommittal, being targeted instead at creating space for a myriad of meanings.\(^3\)\(^8\) The work may be experienced visually, but the words within the titles, artist commentary, viewer interpretation, art criticism, and art historical discourse are rife with syntax, signs, and the complications of language. Thus the term “ambiguity” used by art historians, critics, curators, viewers, and Dumas herself can be a catalyst for insight rather than an obstacle. There are inherent challenges in studying an artist who once named an exhibition Miss Interpreted. How can work that viewers and critics describe as evocative, rich in meaning, confusing, and at times incomprehensible, be better understood? Titling is a significant part of her process and a useful navigation tool in reading paintings often construed as abstruse.

**Titles**

The titles that Dumas assigns to drawings and paintings can clarify or complicate readings of her paintings and drawings. Dumas gives titling serious thought because it is an important part of the work.\(^3\)\(^9\) In *Ryman’s Brides, Reinhardt’s Daughter* and *Stern*, Dumas explicitly refers to iconic artists and enables viewers to make connections between them and her. The combination of title and painting link Dumas’s work more specifically with Reinhardt’s “black” paintings, Ryman’s “white” paintings and Richter’s Baader-Meinhof series. Without titles, Dumas’s paintings might be looked at differently. For example, imagine if *Ryman’s Brides* was called *Brides in Vogue*. The connection with Ryman and those interpretive avenues would be closed off. What if *Stern*

---


\(^3\)\(^9\) Marlene Dumas discussed the titling process during a lecture at MoCA in Los Angeles on June 22, 2008 for the opening of *Measuring Your Own Grave*. I asked her to talk about the process that she goes through when she is giving titles. Among other things she said: “Titles always come after the painting is finished.”
was titled *Comatose Woman* or *Olympia Sleeping*? The painting’s connection to Richter and his controversial series that validated history painting in contemporary art would be lost. If *Reinhardt’s Daughter* were titled *Black Cupid Sleeping*, the associations with Ad Reinhardt and black monochromes versus figuration would be absent. In each case, changing the titles would make us think about all three paintings in vastly different ways.

According to Dumas: “‘Titles give direction to the way a picture is looked at. Desire is depicted, deficiency is central. The whole becomes more complex.’” While titles help viewers move beyond the hurdle of incomprehensibility, they hardly dictate one correct interpretation. They are guides.

John Fisher says: “‘Titling permits discourse about artworks.’” Fisher provides several examples: Picasso might have called a certain painting *Giant Picasso Mural*. *Guernica* accomplishes something significant. Fisher says, “‘It is doubtful that the impact of *Guernica* could have been achieved without that verbal identification with the historical event of 1937 and the attendant social and emotional consequences.’” Fisher gives an apt example of how a work can be known by more than one title and how this affects meaning such as a 1905 painting by Henri Matisse called *Madame Matisse* also known as *The Green Line*. The title *Madame Matisse* tells us the painting is a portrait of a woman, whereas *The Green Line* connotes the quintessential fauvist work with an emphasis on wild color. The title tells us how to look at the work.

---

40 Marlene Dumas quoted by Paul Andriesse in the exhibition catalogue *The Eyes of the Night Creatures* (Amsterdam: Galerie Paul Andriesse, 1985), 19.
42 Ibid, 292.
43 Ibid.
As tools of navigation and interpretation, Dumas’s titles are more than labels. In fact, in the case of *Ryman’s Brides, Reinhardt’s Daughter*, and *Stern*, the names of the paintings are part of the framework of their structure. Jerrold Levinson discusses titles and suggests that they are aesthetically relevant features of works of art. He argues that a title is part of a work’s structure, components of how a painting is artistically fashioned, and they must be included in an overall appraisal of a work, or risk an incomplete assessment. Like Fisher, Levinson advances the thesis that titles play a central interpretive role. He says: “the title of an artwork is an invariably significant part of that work, which helps determine its character, and not just an incidental frill devoid of import, or a mere label whose only purpose is to allow us to refer to the work and distinguish it from its fellows.” Levinson considers a kind of titling that he refers to as “focusing titles.” Dumas employs focusing titles most often, specifically in the three paintings under study here. Levinson says, “a focusing title accords a potent emphasis to what it picks out, and one that may be *prima facis* definitive interpretively, in the absence of strong contraindication from the body of the work.” A focusing title suggests what the main emphasis or theme may be in a work of art. How titles relate to particular images affects perceptions during the viewing process.

In an essay for the exhibition catalog *Marlene Dumas/Francis Bacon*, Ida Gianelli says: “Her texts, whether titles, part of the work, separate statements or articles, are very important. They are an essential element in her conceptual strategy for creating meaning.

---

46 Ibid, 35.

As names with a unique purpose, titles affect our perceptions and may contribute to a better understanding of complex paintings. A witty and sophisticated form of navigation is often evident in Dumas’s artistic reference. Her titles interrogate power structures of Western art and act as an impetus for an intervention in painting.

**Intervention in Painting**

All three paintings in this study reference painters of the last half-century. To examine the dialogue Dumas conducts with painting more fully, and to situate Dumas appropriately I will offer an overview of the state of painting since the late 1960s. Is Dumas defending painting? Her work resists marginalizing painting, yet acknowledges the realities of the medium’s changing position in image making. The post-1960s idea that painting is a wasteland, dead to new ideas, impotent in a world of new media, is anathema to Dumas. If the intermittent death and resurgence of painting is merely a lapse of time where dormant fields lay low and gradually grow up to provide fertile ground for new thinking and fresh approaches to painting, how do *Stern, Ryman’s Brides*, and

---

Reinhardt’s Daughter fit in? Dumas’s interaction with Richter, Reinhardt, and Ryman involves a critical relationship to the tradition of painting.

Historian and theorist Thierry de Duve says, “I am personally convinced that as soon as a painted canvas demands to be appreciated as art, it inevitably calls for the test of comparison with the painting of the past; and that is one of my ‘criteria’ when I find myself before a canvas.”48 What criteria apply when viewing Ryman’s Brides, Reinhardt’s Daughter, and Stern by Dumas? Comparisons are not only inevitable with the painting of the past in these works, but every aspect, including the title, palette, facture, tactility, and subject matter, demands them.

Dumas engages with ‘‘white’’ and ‘‘black’’ monochromes in Ryman’s Brides and Reinhardt’s Daughter. She alludes to a volatile period as modernism shifted to post-modernism. The monochrome has been associated with the ‘‘end of painting’’ and was not a new phenomenon in the 1950s and 1960s when Ryman and Reinhardt pursued its limited framework. Its original emergence is associated with previous proclamations about the death of painting. A similar phenomenon had occurred in 1918 when Kazimir Malevich made what is considered the first bona fide monochrome when he painted a white square on a white background and called it Suprematist Composition: White on White.49 Talk about the demise of painting arose earlier with the birth of photography in

49 Barbara Rose, Monochromes: from Malevich to the Present (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 27. This white monochrome came after the important work, Black Square on a White Field, painted by Malevich in 1913. In between those two works, in 1914, the first of Marcel Duchamp’s ready-mades began to strain the definition of art. Then in 1917, by placing a urinal within the gallery space and naming it Fountain, Duchamp challenged the supremacy of painting in the modern world. In 1921, Alexander Rodchenko exhibited a red, yellow and blue triptych, each individual painting part of the monochromatic primary color threesome. The intention was to represent the final paintings to be made which were therefore emblematic of the ‘‘death of painting.’’
1839. About then artist Paul Delaroche declared: “From today, painting is dead.” Delaroche was also an advocate of photography. The quote may be fictitious, yet it has become a part of photography’s folklore.\(^{50}\) Industrialization, mass production and photography are associated with “the end of painting” discussions. I agree with Thomas McEvilley in his assertion that painting never really died, it just went into exile for a period of time.\(^ {51}\)

In the 1980s, neo-Expressionism created a resurgence and interest in painting. The rhetoric and myth of the artist as genius resurfaced in the 1980s with the groundswell of neo-Expressionism. Accusations that market forces drove the supposed rebirth of painting were plentiful. The male-artist-hero was back. Julian Schnabel was the quintessential symbol of the period and all its hyperbole. He experimented with surfaces and materials such as animal hides, crockery, tarpaulin, and velvet. Schnabel’s style was appropriative and he culled imagery from both fine art and popular culture. Thomas McEvilley describes Schnabel’s role:

> His first New York show, in 1979, was perceived as instrumental in what was called apocalyptically, like the Second coming, ‘The Return of Painting,’ that is, of painting that wished to continue the Modernist line instead of deconstructing it. The post-Modern dread of, and rage at, Modernism singled him out as the new champion of the old-style self and its disasters. As Modernism resurged, he was seen as an enemy of women artists, of conceptual artists in whatever form, of critical rather than visionary art, and so on. His personal career interacted violently with the struggle between two views of history, as he was tossed about by the waves of the moment.\(^{52}\)


\(^{51}\) Noted critic Thomas McEvilley writes about the state of painting from the 1960s to the present in a series of essays and also looks at broad and revisionist view of painting going all the back to 1850. McEvilley characterizes the ebb and flow of painting in terms of exile and return rather than death and resurrection. Thomas McEvilley, *The Exile’s Return: Toward a Redefinition of Painting for the Post-Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

\(^{52}\) Ibid, 109.
Dumas references Schnabel and his German counterpart, Georg Baselitz, in a painting of a nude titled *Velvet and Lace, (Schnabel Meets Baselitz)* (fig. 13). The velvet painting allusion to Schnabel by Dumas in conjunction with a female nude as a stripper connotes kitsch. One noticeable attribute of this image is inversion. Baselitz employed the same tactic to move from representation to abstraction. Thomas McEvilley says Baselitz’s fracturing of images indicates the elimination of reference to the representational. His inversion of the image abstracts the figure from its expected appearance.53

*Velvet and Lace, (Schnabel Meets Baselitz)* (fig. 13) in both image and title, demonstrates a playful humor as well as a boldness of intervention into the state of painting created by the neo-Expressionists. *Velvet and Lace* also has those very recognizable characteristics of a Dumas nude; the figure fills the picture plane; the canvas is assuredly painted with gestural strokes and accented with defining

---

lines; sexual areas are revealed rather than hidden; the background is a kind of empty space, similar to what we see in Francis Bacon. In this case the subject is looking back at us albeit with smudged eyes. Dumas’s figure is actually bent over in contrast with the way that Baselitz just turns the entire figure upside down—as if the painting is turned the wrong way. Rather than nodding to what the neo-Expressionists represented, *Velvet and Lace* literally stretches the nude to further limits than Baselitz with a parodic seediness. She mirrors the glow of Schnabel’s velvet paintings and gives her nude a burlesque twist. Dumas resists neo-Expressionism with the fuzzy visage of a stripper.

Dumas painted *Velvet and Lace (Schnabel Meets Baselitz)* in the late 90s, but a decade before she had already grappled with the longstanding figurative tradition that had been dominated by male artists. Fraught with reversals such as the male artist/female-model relationship, she entered an arena that presented challenges. Neal Benezra addresses the situation she faced:

> On the one hand, figurative painting was the province of male painters, and predominant among them were the Neo-Expressionists. Obviously unsympathetic to both the self-consciousness of their processes and what she considered to be the sexist ramifications of their work, Dumas sought an art that would redefine the role of the figure in painting and which might also reconsider existing definitions of beauty.

Painting’s reemergence was reinforced by the exhibition, “A New Spirit in Painting” held at London’s Royal Academy in 1981. The show featured thirty-eight artists including contemporary painters Julian Schnabel, Georg Baselitz, Lucian Freud, and Anselm Kiefer alongside modernists like Picasso and Balthus. Painting’s resurgence in the 1980s and 1990s, with the ascension of neo-Expressionism and revival of

---

55 Ibid.
figurative painting, substantiated claims that painting was very much alive. This hardly means that painting’s revival was unequivocally accepted. Neo-Expressionism, although commercially successful, was considered by some critics and historians to be a futile resurrection of the worst elements of Modernism. On the other side of the debate were those who saw painting’s revival within contemporary art as a sign of triumph for an artistic tradition that had been threatened and argued about for two decades.

The arena within the history of contemporary painting where Dumas creates art is indeed a complex labyrinth. James Elkins points out an approach to writing about “current painting that take its history as its central problematic.”56 The writing of art history and the visual arts has painting as its core no matter what the new media. Elkins says: “Painting retains this special relation to the history of art, I think, because the terms of art criticism, the concepts that give sense and direction to discussions of art of all kinds, come nearly exclusively from the language of painting.”57 Discussions about whether or not painting is dead, in exile or just irrelevant, are just part of the discourse. Here, our main concern is how Dumas positions herself within the discourse. She performs an intervention that embeds her form of contemporary painting in art history. The clever use of entitling solidifies Marlene Dumas’s role as an artist who is in a position to refer to male icons of art. Her work says that painting not only exists, but it has more to say. The historical legacy of painting is powerful. To gain insight into Dumas’s artistic production, I seek to better understand how she navigates that legacy.

57 Ibid.
Chapter Two

Dumas Plays in the Field of Painting’s Apocalypse: A Dialogue with the Monochromes of Ryman and Reinhardt

A baby with closed eyes, painted like a dark mysterious landscape in a night sky, is counterbalanced by a painting of a creamy-colored child positioned diagonally above it like an angel in the heavens. Two paintings, one predominantly brown and black, and the other mainly white, hang on the wall opposite the grand plaque for the installation of Marlene Dumas’s retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The child with brown-colored skin is titled, Reinhardt’s Daughter (fig. 1) and the other is called Cupid (fig. 10). Cupid conjures associations with the cherubs found in Baroque painting, and affiliations with the god of love and the prominence of myth in Ancient Greek art. Reinhardt’s Daughter refers to the “black” paintings produced in the 1950s and 60s by Ad Reinhardt in which abstraction was reduced to monochromes. Painted in 1994, the infants illustrate the evolving dialogue that Dumas has conducted with painting since the beginning of her career through the present. Reinhardt’s Daughter and Cupid share the same photographic origin and suggest themes about race. The artist’s source is a snapshot of her white daughter, Helena. First she painted Cupid, (fig 10) then Reinhardt’s Daughter (fig.1). The combination of artistic reference, photographic source of a snapshot, and race creates a tension where the art historical and the contemporary conflate.
Marlene Dumas. Top left is figure 10. Cupid, 1994. Oil on canvas, 63 \times 55 \frac{1}{8} \text{ in.} \quad \text{Bottom right is figure 1. Reinhardt’s Daughter, 1994. Oil on canvas, 78 \frac{3}{4} \times 39 \frac{3}{8} \text{ in.}}

Reinhardt’s Daughter and Cupid introduced viewers to Marlene Dumas:

Measuring Your Own Grave, a vast exhibition of Dumas’s production at MoMA. Her oeuvre is rich in layered underpinnings like a palimpsest. The juxtaposed images of a black and white child, foregrounded so prominently at the world’s premier modern art museum in the midst of a major historical event in the United States and the world, appeared to be timely. These paintings were first shown to the viewing public at MoMA
in New York on December 14, 2008, just about a month after the election and a month before the inauguration of the first African-American president. Interestingly, *Reinhardt’s Daughter* and *Cupid* were hung in an interior gallery with less prominent placement for the installation of the same exhibition at MoCA in Los Angeles that had opened June 22, 2008. Black and white juxtaposed so prominently as principal images during a pivotal time in the transformation of race relations in America, *Cupid* and *Reinhardt’s Daughter* reverberated a historical moment.

The first images at the entrance to a show can set the tone for the entire exhibition. Marlene Dumas tends to work associatively as ideas, mental connections, and emotional links develop so that groupings and placement affect meaning. As mentioned in chapter one, Dumas’s initial preference was to display *The Painter* at the entrance to the exhibition but, according to her, MoMA curator Connie Butler suggested that *Cupid* and *Reinhardt’s Daughter* worked better within the space of the high wall. Somehow, I think the choice to place *Reinhardt’s Daughter* and *Cupid* as the first images to be seen involved other factors. The stain of slavery and the long, complicated history of racism in the United States underwent a healing metamorphosis as Barack Obama, son of a father from Kenya and a white mother from the U.S. took the presidential oath and became “leader of the free world.” Prior to 1994 when apartheid ended in South Africa, interracial marriage was illegal. Up until 1967 bi-racial marriage was illegal or barred in certain American states. Issues of space may have played a part in the decision, but the result of the installation of *Cupid* and *Reinhardt’s Daughter* is a foregrounding of race.

---

58 Marlene Dumas, interview by author, MoMA, NY, December 9, 2008.
This chapter begins with the MoMA exhibition and the placement of Reinhardt’s Daughter for reasons that are related to my three-pronged approach to the expanded readings of the paintings examined in this thesis. This approach is central to my argument. First, this placement illustrates the primacy of the work’s engagement with the history of painting that is highly specific, in this case monochromes associated with Modernism. Second, it demonstrates that Dumas positions herself in relation to a prominent male artist, specifically Ad Reinhardt. This kind of allusion can be homage, but in this case, a number of factors add up to a questioning or even subversion of what Ad Reinhardt and other Modernists stood for. This dialogue with a particular moment in painting enables Dumas to strengthen her own agency and contribute to the discourse on painting. Third, the prominent installation and juxtaposition of Reinhardt’s Daughter with Cupid creates meaning and contemporary relevance regarding race. Dumas takes the source material of an everyday snapshot and translates it into an image with the potential to portray broader socio-historical themes. Dumas’s practice of artistic reference and intervention in painting is spotlighted by Reinhardt’s Daughter’s placement at her first retrospective in the United States.

Layered within Reinhardt’s Daughter (fig. 1) and Ryman’s Brides (fig. 2) is the tradition of artists’ dialogue through their work. This tradition involves a variety of possible responses by the artist including homage, parody, identification, or referral. Even if Dumas is thinking of homage to well-respected bodies of work on one level in her references to Ryman and Reinhardt, on another level there is contestation. The dialogue that Dumas conducts with both Ryman and Reinhardt is rife with parody. Undoing the foundations of assumptions concerning the painting of that period may not
be the intention, but that doesn’t negate the end result. Why would an artist who paints portraits and figures like Dumas choose to name her paintings after a couple of Modernists whose own canvases are so different from hers, and what insights does it provide about her artistic practice? I answer this question and also seek an understanding of the specificity of the dialogue initiated by Dumas with Ryman and Reinhardt. The two Modernists share a focus on monochrome paintings, but their artistic practices are distinctive. In the following pages of this chapter I will first explore Ryman’s Brides and consider Dumas’s project in relation to Robert Ryman’s white monochromes. Secondly, I will investigate how Dumas interacts with Ad Reinhardt and his black monochromes. Finally, I will analyze how race is also central to a full analysis of both paintings. Color operates simultaneously as pigment of paint and pigment of skin in Ryman’s Brides and Reinhardt’s Daughter.

Robert Ryman’s “whiteness” and Ryman’s Brides

Robert Ryman (1930-) painted his “white” monochromes beginning in the late 1950s within the restriction of a square format. For Ryman, white eventually replaced and generally wiped out all other hues. White’s neutrality enabled Ryman to bring other aspects of painting to the surface beyond color. In Winsor 34 (fig. 14) for example, he has painted a white monochrome with a textured surface that is visible in the mechanical reproduction. Horizontal brushstrokes are applied fairly evenly on the left and center of the canvas, but appear to fade slightly on the right side. Robert Storr painstakingly describes Ryman’s process of making the Winsor paintings from “the cool white Winsor
& Newton oil pigment that lends its name to the group,” to “the tiered addition of strokes pulled across the canvas in close-knit formation, leaving the warm brown of the canvas showing between the strokes.” The characteristics of Ryman’s process from the size of the brushes to how the paint is applied to the canvas are described in great detail on page after page of the exhibition catalog for Ryman’s 1987 retrospective at MoMA. Storr’s description of the Winsor series compares the striations of paint with how “light

---

60 Ibid.
vibrates with an intense pitch’” when it is reflected off white venetian blinds.\(^{61}\) The \textit{Winsors} invite connections with Frank Stella’s “black paintings” and demonstrate the influence of Ryman’s time spent looking at Modernist works, yet Storr points out the differences when he says, “Stella tries to make things happen to painting; Ryman paints in order to see things happen.”\(^{62}\) Storr takes Ryman’s approach, which appears to be highly methodical, and frames it within a light of experimentation and chance, positioning Ryman favorably in relation to Stella. Ryman taught himself by looking at paintings while working as a security guard at MoMA. As Storr says: “Informed by his own habits of looking at classic modern art, Ryman insists example by example on contemporary painting’s equal demand and capacity to exist and be experienced as an irreducibly physical and aesthetic presence.”\(^{63}\) Ryman’s approach could be construed as methodical, but Storr speaks of Ryman’s fascination with “random incident.” Apparently this is not found in changes in overall design within the \textit{Winsors}, but in “minor shifts in painterly emphasis.”\(^{64}\) Paint and “whiteness” are central in the works of Ryman. Thierry de Duve positions Ryman among the great painters and says that Ryman “wants to be a painter and nothing else.”\(^{65}\) Respect for the medium of painting looms large in the words of de Duve: “Ryman is a technician who is left cold by utopias and messianic promises, but who feels an incredible tenderness for his medium. It’s the tenderness of a puritan, but it’s tenderness all the same.”\(^{66}\) Dumas’s reference to Ryman in her painting \textit{Ryman’s Brides} (fig. 2) appears incongruous at first. Dumas may share

\(^{62}\) Ibid.
\(^{63}\) Ibid, 15.
\(^{64}\) Ibid, 25.
\(^{65}\) Thierry de Duve, \textit{Painting on the Move}, 39.
\(^{66}\) Ibid.
Ryman’s “tenderness” for paint, but it is not puritanical. She has an aim in common, albeit a temporary one, with Ryman in *Ryman’s Brides* but other factors are at work in her dialogue with him that separate her practice from his.

How does Dumas interact with Ryman’s project? *Ryman’s Brides* resists Ryman’s oeuvre in certain ways, but she also extracts what is useful. The brushwork and texture of Dumas’s painted brides, and Ryman’s *Winsor 34*, (fig. 14) both in their denseness and thickness of paint, call attention to the painting as material surface. The background area on Dumas’s painting is similar in application to the figures themselves, so the illusion of depth is minimized. Ryman’s creamy ribbons of paint are layered over the slightly darker canvas beneath, which barely gives a hint of depth. Dumas borrows Ryman’s characteristic focus on paint itself and “whiteness.” The majority of her paintings tend to use paint sparingly, but in this work, paint is applied thickly with an emphasis on texture. The intensity so characteristic of Ryman’s brushwork and exploration of tactility radiates from texture of the bridal gowns by Dumas and the tonally gradated whiteness of the paint. Yet it is a polemical mixture of image with Ryman’s project of bare abstraction.

By Modernist standards, Dumas jeopardizes paintings’ independence as an art by incorporating recognizable objects. Leaning figures fill the space. The whiteness of their bridal dresses and the space around them gives the sense that the artist is yielding to the flatness of the canvas, yet the rich textures of the dresses and splotches of red and brown show a resistance to that same flatness. The brides are painted by Dumas, not Ryman, yet she is indicating by her use of the possessive that they belong to him. Some modeling is visible mainly in the contours of their bodies. Shadowing is most apparent in the very
area that would define their physical femininity, their breasts. The wedding gowns are somewhat layered over their skin; the black bride’s garment, has the look of netting, as if it is see-thru and the skin is visible beneath. The brides embody the wedding masquerade in a humorous manner with faces that resemble masks, and eyes that range from blackened occipital openings to cartoon-like renderings including dark irises with just a hint of surrounding whiteness.

In _Ryman’s Brides_ Dumas makes us aware of material surface, yet unlike Ryman, she includes images of human figures. A first look at _Ryman’s Brides_ brings on an acute
awareness that it is a painting with figures that push against the space of the canvas. The way that the tops of their heads and forearms line-up; the darker contrasting shapes of feet and shoes, form strong horizontals. The vertical lines that wedge the figures into the picture plane are gestural rather than realistically defined. By causing the viewer to see it as a painting right away, an attempt is made to create a work with representational figures that is about painting first and foremost. Dumas uses art (Ryman’s monochromes) to call attention to art.

The initial idea for Ryman’s Brides came to Dumas as a way to respond to critics who said that she failed to deal with color. Dumas decided to make a white painting as a response. The dialogue with Ryman is evident in the texture and conceptual theme of what began as a ‘‘white’’ painting and became Ryman’s Brides. In a prism, white is the presence of all color and reflects all visible light of the spectrum. Dumas may have set out to make a white painting, but the end result was a colorful figurative work as a rainbow of brides overtakes whiteness. Dumas intervenes in the very barest of all abstract art. The label of Ryman’s Brides may pay homage to, poke fun at or perhaps even compromise the work of Ryman. Compromise applies in the sense that the white paintings by Ryman are not about references to any representational influence. In Dumas’s painting, the neutrality of whiteness that Ryman sought is not the primary purpose in her use of white. Ryman’s Brides (fig. 2) differs from Winsor 34 (fig. 14) in its variegated coloration even though her work originates with the idea of creating a white painting. Making a white painting is an interesting choice for Dumas to deal with issues of color, in terms of both pigment and race.

67 Cornelia Butler, 8/20/2008 podcast on Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave, Recorded Sunday, August 3, 2008 at MOCA Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, accessed on 10/14/08 http://www.moca.org/audio/
Dumas may tell me that she is fascinated by Ryman’s systematic and exhaustive exploration of paint and supports, and I acknowledge that intention. But as a viewer I may choose to interpret the artistic reference as more of a challenge to or even parody of Modernism and Ryman’s limited focus. I suggest that *Ryman’s Brides* is a satirical and defiant title. Initially I see the playfulness of the humor, and then sarcasm erupts. *Ryman’s Brides* (fig. 2) looks like a hodgepodge of identity with its row of brides lined-up on display. This conglomeration of typecast femininity, whose nuptial gowns are lushly painted with rich texture and gradations in white, refer back to Ryman’s exhaustive explorations of texture and paint. But Dumas goes well beyond homage and reference. Dumas’s experimentation emulates Ryman’s and inserts the figure and her mode of artistic process into his monochrome project creating a commentary.

Her allusion to an artist who painted white monochromes with her own figurative approach could be construed as a pungent act of defiance of Modernism’s negative connotations. The Modernist project lost its luster in the early postmodernist period of the 1960s and early 1970s and its associations of prettifying reality with an imminent sublimity brought revulsion. Paul Wood discusses critic Lucy Lippard’s move away from Modernism. Lippard found it to be “something constraining, imprisoning even.”

---

68 When I asked Dumas if she was paying homage or mocking Ryman’s white paintings, she explained her admiration for Ryman’s exhaustive focus and how he was able to limit himself to such a narrow framework. Interview by author, MoMA, NY, December 9, 2008.
comparing [Jules] Olitski’s painting to “Visual Muzak.” Paul Wood says:

This was not just a witty way of saying it was boring, an irony on the classic modernist claim that abstract art was ‘visual music.’ The description hinted at something deeper. In so far as Muzak lulls us into passivity and consumption, there is an implication that modernist art is a cultural opiate, part of the ideological smokescreen concealing reality, rather than a genuine producer of increased self-consciousness.

Dumas is not concealing reality, but pulling an image into painting with connotations of race, gender, and notions of beauty. The original source photo in Ryman’s Brides brings the low art of mass media and material consumption into the realm of painting. At the forefront of Dumas’s engagement with Ryman is the introduction of the socio-historical in Dumas’s depiction of the rainbow of brides. Next, consider that Dumas is using a pop culture photo from a bridal magazine as her source material. The socio-historical and pop culture stand in stark contrast to Ryman’s project.

Photography has flattened the six brides in the original source and they were originally “shot” for consumption to be displayed in the fashion pages of the mass media. Issues of representation concerning the photographic image are at play in Dumas’s project, whereas Ryman stays far away from those kinds of connections. Dumas’s painting is a third remove from the source as the photograph has been taken by the camera, and then mechanically reproduced on the printed page of a magazine. By the artist’s hand the image is transformed into a painting. While Robert Ryman explores

---

70 Ibid. Wood goes on to discuss taking some care in avoiding the kind of stereotyping about Modernism that creates misrepresentations.
71 During an interview with me on May 15, 2007 at MoMA, Connie Butler told me that the original source of the photograph was from a bridal magazine.
every facet of the color white in his monochromes, Dumas says “I need the portrait and figure to paint.”

Dumas uses painting in a self-critical way towards the medium, one of the tenets of Modernism, but she is mixing it with the representation of a multi-ethnic group of brides. Ryman focuses on the absence of color in making a white painting, whereas Dumas is reinvesting color with meaning in her depiction of the rainbow of brides. The brides are lined-up and appear to represent a variety of ethnicities and physical types of women. Typcast into a row of diversity, we see women that range across the color spectrum: red-faced (or blushing bride), black, and hues of brown, to blondes and brunettes. Dumas uses brides posing in wedding dresses, the height of traditional portrayals of femininity to challenge assumptions about painting and gender.

In Modernist terms, Dumas’s work would fail in its self-criticism of painting because it would be all about associations of what is being represented in the picture—a group of brides. Yet one of the primary characteristics of Ryman’s Brides is that it is about painting. As Leo Steinberg argued in Other Criteria: “All major painting, at least of the last six hundred years, has assiduously ‘called attention to art.’ Except for tour de force demonstrations and special effects, and before their tradition collapsed in nineteenth-century academicism, the Old Masters always took pains to neutralize the effect of reality, presenting their make-believe worlds, as it were, between quotation marks.” Steinberg cites several examples including the Sistine Chapel Ceiling and the way that the project as a whole is “a battleground for local illusion, counter-illusion, and

---

72 Marlene Dumas, interview by author, MoMA, NY, December 9, 2008.
emphasized architectural surface-art turning constantly back on itself.” He further points out that as the art of the “Old Masters” became more realistic, they took precautionary measures to protect that art from undue emphasis on illusion, “ensuring at every point that attention would remain focused upon the art.”

Steinberg lists the way the “Old Masters” did it, including “radical color economies, or by eerie proportional attenuation; by multiplication of detail,” and he also brings up a form of artistic reference that is very similar to what Dumas does in Ryman’s Brides and Reinhardt’s Daughter.

“They did it—as modern films do with spliced footage taken from older movies—by quotations and references to other art; quotation being a surefire means of shunting the ostensible realism of a depicted scene back into art.”

Steinberg’s argument is applicable to the works that are the subject of this thesis and numerous others by Dumas that employ reference. Ryman’s Brides and Reinhardt’s Daughter quote and interface with two Modernists and the works are clearly about art.

Yve-Alain Bois begins an essay about Ryman with a discussion of how difficult it is to write about Ryman. Differing from writers like Naomi Spector, who argued for a process based focus regarding Ryman, Bois says, “He attempts instead to construct a structure of oppositions: a paradigm. This is what the visual ‘asceticism’ in his paintings is always ready to provide.” In quoting Ryman, the asceticism is apparent, “What the painting is, is exactly what [you] see: the paint on the corrugated and the color of the

---

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid, 72.
76 Ibid.
corrugated and the way it’s done and the way it feels. That’s what’s there."

Bois lays out the complexity of Ryman’s project and finishes by discussing how the “lethal delicacy” that Ryman employs goes beyond the reflexivity [so often associated with Modernism], “forcing reflexivity to reflect on itself.”

Perhaps Ryman’s Brides is done in the spirit of reflecting on Ryman’s reflection on reflexivity itself. Dumas faces Ryman without reserve, the same artist Bois says is extremely difficult to write about.

Dumas engages with Ryman and Reinhardt who explore “whiteness” and “blackness.” Even though their projects profess to be all about paint, Dumas’s engagement brings other themes to the fore as she references them. In their respective “white” and “black” monochromes, Ryman and Reinhardt both reduced painting to its barest essentials. They are often discussed together as when Philipp Kaiser interviews Douglas Crimp and says, “The most radical formulation and zero level of the apocalyptic myth (Yve-Alain Bois) that invariably accompanied Modernism was exemplified by Ad Reinhardt’s so-called ‘last pictures’ or the work of Robert Ryman.”

If Ryman’s white paintings and Reinhardt’s black paintings were to be the ultimate and final works signaling the end of painting, Dumas tells us that painting is far from being over, much less dead. Death of the image is even played with in the zombie-like faces of the brides. The supposed end of Modernism that marked the beginning of postmodernism, introduced questions concerning the possibilities for painting’s future. As Bois proposes, if abstract painting was the bare essence, meant to tell the final truth, then painting was destined to terminate itself at the end. The abstract painters stood for the whole modernist

---

79 Bois, “Ryman’s Tact,” in Painting as Model, 226.
quest to be free from external constraints: “The pure beginning, the liberation from tradition, the ‘zero degree’ that was searched for by the first generation of abstract painters could not but function as an omen of the end.”\(^8^1\) The beginning forebodes the ending and inevitably endings often clear the way for new beginnings.

**Ad Reinhardt’s “blackness” and Reinhardt’s Daughter**

Black monochromes devoid of imagery and color create the perfect slate for this ending/beginning paradox. Dumas invokes an incongruousness in her reference to the black monochromes by an artist who would have found her use of the figurative in *Reinhardt’s Daughter* (fig. 1) a failure. Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967) was an American writer and painter known for his hard-edged geometric works and later his monochromatic “black” paintings. He was also a lecturer and a cartoonist, yet in painting, he avoided all reference to representational objects. In the catalogue for his 1991 retrospective at MoMA, William Rubin speaks of the lyricism and luminosity of Reinhardt’s early and middle periods and how they became distilled, “and distilled again” in his later period when he focused solely on the “black” paintings.\(^8^2\) As Bois said: “One did not have to wait for the last painting of Ad Reinhardt to be aware that through its historicism (its linear conception of history) and through its essentialism (its idea that something like the essence of painting existed, veiled somehow, and waiting to be unmasked), the enterprise of abstract painting could not but understand its birth as calling for its end.”\(^8^3\) How appropriate that Dumas’s intervention in this period of

---

\(^8^1\) Yve-Alain Bois, “Painting: the Task of Mourning,” in *Painting as Model*, 230.
\(^8^3\) Bois, “Painting: The Task of Mourning,” in *Painting as Model*, 230.
Modernism, (1950s-1960s) harkens the “final paintings” in the black monochromes with an image of a baby signifying birth.

In discussing what the beholder sees when looking at a black painting by Reinhardt, Bois says, “At first there is nothing, but gradually, of course, one discerns almost nothing, evanescent entities, phantoms of colors and shapes one can never be quite sure one has seen.” Reinhardt’s black paintings do not reproduce well and will be described rather than reproduced in these pages. In the catalog for Reinhardt’s 1991 retrospective at MoMA, there were more than twenty black paintings depicted. Most are titled, Painting or Abstract Painting with one called Black Painting. There are rectangular shaped canvases from 108 x 40 inches to 80 ¼ x 43 1/8 inches and squares that are 60 x 60 inches. Although grayish rectangles are visible within darker tones, for the most part, the reproductions look very black. The following description of Reinhardt’s process brings out the complication of making a painting supposedly about “pure art,” while

Figure 1. Marlene Dumas, Reinhardt’s Daughter, 1994. Oil on canvas, 78 3/4 X 39 3/8 in.

representing painting’s destruction. Bruno Haas outlines Reinhardt’s procedure:

The three primary colours are applied on top of each other until they finally yield black through a process of subtraction. The resulting black varies slightly depending on the sequence in which the colours are applied. That might be called the trace which the colours have left behind. –Inasmuch as the painting destroys itself but still leaves behind a trace, it becomes pure art which is nothing but pure art: but in a certain respect it is important that it is no longer painting because that which is intrinsically painterly has been destroyed.85

According to Haas, Reinhardt set out to make pure art, but his painting was about the annihilation of painting.86 Bois discusses how Reinhardt’s paintings hold more than what is visible to the viewer: “there is always more in his canvases than can be seen, there is always a virtuality about them.”87 He considers Reinhardt’s “black” canvases the artist’s major achievement and uses words like temporality and timelessness to describe viewers’ reactions to the black paintings. Reinhardt’s “black” paintings require time and attention to view; they are often described as meditative by viewers who take the time to look.

In what other ways does Marlene Dumas intervene in painting, and dialogue with Ad Reinhardt in Reinhardt’s Daughter? Dumas inserts a figure of a baby into Reinhardt’s world of blackness, completely negating the dictates of Modernism that Reinhardt painted by. He claimed to be painting the very last paintings and Dumas names a work after him, painted about thirty years after the supposed “last paintings.” Van Niekerk discusses Reinhardt’s Daughter and uses a contentious quote by Reinhardt. It suggests

86 Ibid, 97.
what his reaction might be to this painting of “his daughter.” She says:

Its overt pictorial intent recalls Reinhardt’s distinction between a painting and a picture: a picture has a subject matter, tells some story, is photographic or cinematographic, and is sometimes hand-painted. The best and most effective pictures according to Reinhardt, can be found in magazines and movies, and an artist concerned with communication and a larger public should get a job in mass publishing or the picture industry. An abstract painting, on the other hand, ‘is not a re-arrangement or distortion or recreation of something else. It is a totally new relationship.’ According to Reinhardt, artists who try to make pictures that are also paintings usually fail to do either well.\(^{88}\)

What is the significance of the fact that Dumas used the same photograph of her white-skinned daughter to paint an infant with dark-skin? *Reinhardt’s Daughter* (fig. 1) and *Cupid* (fig. 10) make us acutely aware of blackness and whiteness—particularly in exhibitions and books when the images are positioned next to each other such as at the entrance of the MoMA retrospective. They could be considered bi-racial images since they are derived from the same source photograph. It is logical to examine how these images may be experienced and interpreted concerning issues of whiteness and blackness.

Despite originating from the same source material, if the contrast between black and white is perceived immediately when looking at the two paintings together, then their difference is emphasized. The first time I saw a picture of *Reinhardt’s Daughter* I noticed the slightly curved line near the babies’ hands as ropes or chains. Instead of a peacefully sleeping baby, it looked more like an enslaved child, captured within the surrounding darkness. The overall dark background in *Reinhardt’s Daughter* and the lighter

---

background of *Cupid* affect how each painting is viewed. In the exhibition at the Zwirner Gallery in New York in 2005 *Reinhardt’s Daughter* was hung in the same room as *The Deceased* and *The Blindfolded*. This juxtaposition of a dark skinned child, upside down, bound and tied, with images of human captivity and death is charged with associations and references that create new meanings as perhaps victim, site of trauma, or oppression. This tension between the image of a serene baby and an enslaved child is effective and requires more effort on the viewer’s part. Dumas in essence explores blackness in multiple ways. As the artist herself has said in specific reference to *Reinhardt’s Daughter*,

> You change the color of something and everything changes (especially if you’re a painter).  \(^{89}\)

Van Niekerk also cites this quote and suggests that Dumas is interested in ambiguity and expanding the evocative meaning of the painting. “Dumas is interested here in Reinhardt’s distinction between black as a symbol denoting the negative (e.g., of ‘race’ or ‘evil’) and black as a color devoid of any of these negative associations. She insists on exploiting both dimensions and on using the ambiguity to extend the expressive reach of the painting.” \(^{90}\) The final image stems from a process rife with contradiction and mixed messages. The title *Reinhardt’s Daughter* is integral to that process and anchors our interpretation, albeit in waters that are murky rather than crystal clear.

Once again, as she did in *Ryman’s Brides*, Dumas combines the socio-historical by invoking race and merges it with a monochrome painter whose exploration of

---

89 Marlene Dumas, *Sweet Nothings*, 86.  
blackness within the abstract was quite different from hers—so closely linked to the human figure. In addition to “needing” figuration, she maintains a connectedness with her homeland of South Africa. As just one example, Dumas recently had a solo retrospective (*Marlene Dumas: Intimate Relations*) in Capetown, South Africa (2007-2008). It has already been established that issues of race inform the subject matter of *Ryman’s Brides* and *Reinhardt’s Daughter*. These paintings call for a more in depth exploration of race. Dumas intervenes in painting, simultaneously addressing post-colonial and gender equity issues.

When artists from other continents and nations leave their countries of origin for various reasons, often a strong sense of place about their homeland embeds within their work. Dumas is part of the African Diaspora. Her reasons for leaving may be different from others who have left the region, but growing up in South Africa made her a witness to apartheid, something that she still grapples with after 30 years. Okwui Enwezor discusses many artists from Africa including Iké Udé, Bili Bidjocka, Olu Oguibe, and Ouattara and how they use diverse cultural signs in the form of quotations and reappropriations in their work. “These devices [which are hardly unique] are used less to seek resolution for a specific artistic transcendence, than to disrupt the boundaries, categories, and frames that persistently enclose them in marginal economies of production and representation.”91 Enwezor speaks of the plurality and multiplicity that frame their aspirations and point to: “the creation of new territories, towards a kind of

new boundary of difference.” Dumas is in dialogue with the canon of Western art in
Ryman’s Brides and Reinhardt’s Daughter, pushing the boundaries of how painting is
defined and resisting the enclosures and impositions of Modernism. They are black artists
and Dumas is white, but interesting parallels emerge. To illustrate this point, a
comparison will be made between Dumas and a fellow artist from Africa Iké Udé.

Originally from Nigeria, Udé now resides in New York. His Cover Girl Series
(fig. 15) is conceptually based and combines photography and text. Udé poses, giving
himself front-page placement on glossy magazine covers that he replicates and
transforms. These covers have the theatricality of performance while confronting us with
both a wit and a transgressiveness that are provocative. Udé interrogates gender, race and
social divisions and their aesthetic politics in the Cover Girl Series. In Reinhardt’s
Daughter and Ryman’s Brides, figures 1 and 2, Dumas questions the power structures of
Western art that have tended to marginalize women and people of color. They both
accomplish their goals with wit and humor rather than the weakened position of assuming
the role of victim. A correlation exists between what Udé does in his Cover Girl Series
with Western culture and Dumas’s intervention in painting. Udé inserts himself into that
commodified world of the magazine empire; Dumas positions herself within the
bastions of Modernism where the chosen few rule the canon. For Udé the cultural
battlefield is the stage where consumerism and a narrow definition of beauty and glamour
reign. Udé pushes the edge of postcolonial borders in all three of the mock covers shown
in figure 15 by employing transgressive text and cynical article titles. Dumas uses titles
that grant possession of a rainbow of brides to a modernist whose attitude toward pigment

92 Ibid.
Figure 15. Iké Udé, *Cover Girl Series*, 1994-95. Type-C prints mounted on aluminum, 11 x 8 ½ in. each.
has been described as puritanical. By bringing issues of race to the fore Dumas introduces postcolonial issues, oddly joining them with white male iconic Modernists. Her actions incorporate forms of appropriation, such as names of artists in her titles, aspects of painterly process and in the case of the monochromes their usage of black and white.

How does Udé disrupt those boundaries both visually and in text in the *Cover Girl Series*? Authorial authenticity is played with as he appropriates a *Town & Country* magazine cover. Like Dumas, he takes what is seemingly incongruous and makes it his own. As Dumas flips Ryman and Reinhardt back on themselves in contestation; Udé flips *Town & Country* back on itself to present imagery and text that creates friction. Udé’s self-portrait mixes the conservatism of a tweed jacket and white shirt with the stereotyped exoticism of his African visage painted with zebra-like stripes. The combination mocks the exclusivity of the tasteful luxury lifestyle. African culture clashes with Western privilege. Elitism is exposed for its lack of inclusiveness. He employs the headline “The Noble Savage is Dead” conjuring that mythic and loaded connotation designed to control with its end. *Town & Country* magazine is entwined with Udé’s self-portrait and that “‘noble savage’” symbolism, rife with negative associations and reinforcing impressions that include “fear, horror, demonisation and degradation.”³⁹³ Udé takes what can normally be consumed en masse for the cover price of a few dollars and disallows the viewer or reader the pleasure of fulfilling their voracious appetite for the consumption of the Other by “throwing textual bombs at his intended audience-coloniser and colonised alike.”³⁹⁴

Dressing in drag and placing himself on the virtual covers of *Vogue, Glamour* and other

³⁹³ Ibid, 257.
³⁹⁴ Ibid.
popular magazines has a different purpose than shock value. Enwezor says, “Instead, he [Udé] was aiming to ironise and subvert the whole notion of gender and racial permission, as well as the self-congratulatory narcissism [of which Europeans remain the primary beneficiaries], which many popular-culture magazines celebrate.” Both Racial and gender assumptions are interrogated. In questioning the magazine as a mode for ideal representation and hypocrisy, Udé confronts its inherent mode of exclusion. Dumas disrupts boundaries, categories and frames of enclosure through the mode of representation that she is employing.

Dumas’s position as a white woman from South Africa relocated in Europe is obviously different from being a black African artist, yet that environment from whence she came is embedded in her perspective and production. Dumas handles her South African background in a forthright manner. Aware of the injustice of apartheid and its lingering issues, she acknowledges her part as a white woman, without pretending to be the voice of authority concerning black South African history. By acknowledging her own (albeit undesired) role, Dumas may be inviting in rather than pushing away a diversity of viewers. By not hiding her position as a white South African artist and the limitations of that perspective, Dumas inadvertently heeds the words of Enwezor: “For white women must first recognize their own complicity in constructing the African subject.” In *Evil is Banal* (fig. 16), a self-portrait painted by Dumas in 1984, her blond hair glows with a fiery redness and the whiteness of her skin is layered by a dark shadow beneath. The title is inspired by Hannah Arendt’s reports on the Nazi regime. As a young

---

95 Ibid, 256.
96 Okwui Enwezor, “Reframing the Black Subject Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation” in *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, 395.
white woman in South Africa growing up under apartheid, despite the choice to distance herself from that repressive government, residual guilt and shame may linger in the knowledge of what transpired under an oppressive system. There are no easy answers concerning the nature of power and the role of the individual. In *Evil is Banal* Dumas gazes past us, perhaps far off into the land that was once home, and also site of trauma. Enwezor writes about the complexity of the entire continent in describing one of the most important aspects of Udé’s project: “he uses this interrogation not only to excoriate the representation of Africa as the backwater in which the sinister lurks but also to reclaim her as a ‘site of beauty.’”

Dumas explores the African subject in a variety of works including the *Black Drawings* (fig. 17) which consist of 111 portraits of black people. As van Alphen points out, each portrait is different and “they all deserve their own panel within their collective portrayal.” Dumas discusses some of her depictions of black people by stating:

> I don’t want to make anti-images; I want to make more desires possible. It’s not that the problems have gone away. In South Africa there was a time when I definitely would not have been able to make work about blackness. If you wanted to express things about apartheid, and belonged to the privileged class, how would you deal with someone else’s sorrow and your own shame and guilt? Eventually, when I did address it, I felt that even though I was not showing abuse, not saying, ‘Look how bad discrimination is,’ nevertheless somehow I felt okay about making this work.

---

97 Okwui Enwezor in “Between Worlds,” *Reading the Contemporary*, 256.
Okwui Enwezor is interested in examining issues of representation within South African culture, which has: “lived for generations with racist stereotypes as a prevailing attitude.”[100] The discourse concerning whiteness and blackness is central to Enwezor’s examination of race in South Africa. In understanding the basis of South Africa’s apartheid and comparing them with Jim Crow laws of the southern United States he

[100] Okwui Enwezor, “Reframing the Black Subject,” Reading the Contemporary, 377.
posits that, “they are both founded on blackness as anathema to the discourse of whiteness; whiteness as a resource out of which the trope of nationality and citizenship is constructed, and everything else that is prior is negated, defaced, marginalized, colonized.”  

In order to examine what is central to the ‘New South Africa,’ a diverse and multi-cultural nation, an awareness of subtleties and nuanced new uses of whiteness is called for. Enwezor brings this factor to light and suggests that the issue of whiteness is

---

101 Ibid, 378.
integral to both South Africa and the American model. Whiteness tends to be the power center set up against the binary of the ‘Other.’ Ryman’s exploration of whiteness is within the realm of pigment as paint, but in Ryman’s Brides, Dumas introduced pigment of skin in her row of multi-colored brides. She is bringing these figures into Ryman’s world of white paint by naming her brides after him. One of the six brides is black and she is one of several “‘types.” The bride to her left has red pigment plastered on her face and neck, so that it is impossible to see her features. In this depiction of brides and reference to Ryman’s whiteness, the non-white brides tend to stand out as ‘Other.’ I agree with Ross Chambers in his characterization of whiteness as the unexamined norm against which other multiple (black, Latino, Asian, etc.) identities are defined, compared and examined. He also suggests that whiteness is not a classificatory identity, but that white people are perceived as individual agents and others have group identities.

Blackness is germane to this study of Reinhardt’s Daughter partly due to the origin and the transformation of the source photo and the juxtaposition of black and white infants in the MoMA installation. In Cupid most of the background is white with darker tones just above the baby’s torso, perhaps signifying nighttime. Reinhardt’s Daughter conversely has a very dark background that is almost completely black. Dumas is gleaning the “‘blackness’” from Reinhardt and putting her own stamp of figuration on it. As an artist, she may not be consciously confrontational, but in light of Reinhardt’s philosophy about the figure in painting, this is definitely an intervention.

102 Ibid, 379.
Titles function as a diving board, inviting us to enter the pool of art historical discourse. The title *Ryman’s Brides* in combination with the imagery of the painting, foreground race as Dumas pulls the pop culture image of the rainbow of brides into Ryman’s world of white pigment. *Reinhardt’s Daughter* in both title and visuals is particularly transgressive as Dumas invades the pure blackness that is all about paint with a dark skinned child that originated from a snapshot of her white infant. The artistic reference and intervention in painting is enlivened by the way that the works invite the socio-historical to become part of the dialogue.
Chapter Three

*Stern: An Act of Reference, Homage and Emulation*

*Stern,* (fig. 3) a portrait in profile, recumbent with eyes closed, and mouth gaping open emits a powerful visual impact with its large scale, close-up view, and elegantly spare facture. If we look at *Stern* as a portrait, without knowledge of its source material or reference, what do we see? The size of the painting is large at over 43 by 51 inches. The dramatic perspective and scale draws us in. The paint barely stains the canvas with its thin application. The overall image is relatively flat despite slight shadowing around the eyes, nose, mouth, chin, and neck. The ghostly whiteness of the subject’s complexion and flat dark background are painted without a noticeable application of texture. Her hair forms a gestural contour in the foreground as dark as the black atmosphere that frames her profile. A variety of possibilities exist as we attempt to interpret what is before us on the canvas. Perhaps we are seeing a woman who is sleeping as her turquoise breath filters through the darkness of her nighttime surroundings.

As explained, this thesis and my interest in Dumas’s oeuvre began when I saw *Stern* at the Venice Biennale in 2005. Portraits show us human faces that potentially activate and satisfy our desire to relate to others. The relationship between the image, artist, and viewer, elucidated by Shiff’s discussion earlier, is readily at work. The emotional life of the image belongs to the painting, not the source photograph. As viewers, we “take” the painting’s meaning. However, the reference photograph, title, and process are critical to a thorough analysis of the work. By studying *Stern* (fig. 3)
within the context of the source material, the painting can be read more fully. This does not necessarily point to one correct interpretation, but is more of an attempt to understand the artistic process and the final result that breeds a variety of viewer responses.

In this chapter, I seek to go beyond the emotional life of the image, yet not lose sight of how that intensity contributes to the effectiveness of the painting. My expanded reading of Stern is based on the three-pronged approach pursued in the study of Ryman’s Brides and Reinhardt’s Daughter. However, Richter is a contemporary of Dumas, Stern is a recent painting, and the photographic source is morbid and political. Alluding to

Figure 3. Marlene Dumas, Stern, 2004. Oil on canvas, 43 5/16 X 51 3/16 in. Tate, London.
modernists who painted monochromes in the 1960s differs from Dumas’s more reverent engagement with Richter. As such, temporality shifts and the Dumas/Richter dialogue contrasts in tone and content with her Ryman and Reinhardt interaction. This study of Stern varies slightly from the modality employed in chapter two, but the same basic approach applies. First, an analysis of Stern (fig. 3) and Dead (fig. 4) reveals marked differences in the methods of Dumas and Richter. The primacy of Stern’s engagement with Richter’s oeuvre in general, as well as a specific work (Dead, 1988), is considered within the context of history painting and the history of painting. Secondly, a comparison of Dumas’s and Richter’s artistic methods will show how their distinctive practices result in contrasting content and meaning. I regard how Dumas positions herself in relation to Richter, one of the most prominent painters alive today. Thirdly, I consider how Stern fits in with Dumas’s intervention in painting. The source photograph for Stern is rife with controversy and political content. Details of the historic and socio-cultural themes that surround Dead, which is part of Richter’s controversial October 18, 1977 series, will be discussed in the last section. My main argument in this chapter concerns what happens when Dumas, through experimentation and chance, transforms her source material into a more painterly work and, as she says, attempts to take, “‘Richter’s source out of its blur.”¹⁰⁴ This becomes an act of emulation, where she gleans what is useful and pursues her own direction in painting. Dumas emulates Richter through reference of his history painting project, but takes her own version into the realm of highly emotive portraiture.

What is it that makes Stern so evocative and lends it an air of mysteriousness? Questions about the subject’s state of being is a contributing factor. Whether she is

¹⁰⁴ Shiff, “‘Less Dead,’” 155.
asleep, in a state of ecstasy, comatose, or dead is not clear from the image alone. If *Stern* is a corpse, this premise immediately brings questions to mind about her death, particularly because her skin appears to be smooth and young. If we assume this woman is dead, we see visual clues, such as what looks like a choker necklace wound tightly around her neck. Was she murdered or did she commit suicide? The injurious markings on the neck are said to be remnants of a suicide hanging. Controversy surrounds the death in the source photograph. Naked brutality invites contemplation.

Dumas asserts that it is not just about identifying who the portraits are or where the inspiration came from:

> To understand what the work means is to look at the relationship between the technological source material (i.e.: photographic models) and the metaphysical imagination (of the artist) it’s associative rather than descriptive, it’s about the physical qualities of the actual works coming together in the cultural space of the exhibition. For us to resurrect or make new meanings from the ashes of the old, you’ll have to come again, too.¹⁰⁵

These words by Dumas foreground issues of photographic source material, an associative rather than a descriptive approach and the history of painting—making “new meanings from the ashes of old.” Indeed, she talks about the works “coming together in the cultural space of the exhibition,” suggesting that juxtapositions create interaction among the paintings. By juxtaposing *Stern* (fig. 3) and *Dead* (fig. 4) I examine the relationship between these two paintings and consider if new meanings emerge. This analysis will consider method, content, and meaning and discuss the considerable differences in two paintings, which share the same source material.

Richter’s painting, *Dead [Tote] (fig. 4)*, has the appearance of a black and white photograph. It is as if Richter chose to meticulously reproduce his source material with the starkness of Photorealism. The heaviness of her head is evident, as she appears to be sliding into darkness. Richter’s image shows more of the neck and her shoulder area. It looks like a morgue photograph of a crime victim. *Dead* is slightly blurry, but the haziness is not as pronounced as other paintings in the *October 18, 1977 series, Arrest, Cell and Hanged*. Richter is staying fairly close to the photographic reference, with a bit of a blur. Dumas’s version does not show much interest in trying to stay close to the photograph’s characteristics. Dumas is making a painting and it really is “less dead,” as
Shiff has argued. Both depictions of the woman are connected by various details such as: she is in profile, her eyes are closed, and her hair is painted to partially cover her ear. Even though both images are fairly flat, some modeling is evident in each. She is lying down on her back and in the same position in both. The mouth in Dumas’s painting looks like it is open more and there are hints of turquoise paint above it not visible in reproductions. The markings on the neck in both images are pronounced, but Dumas’s looks more like a thick black choker necklace, perhaps a nod to Manet’s Olympia. The three versions of Dead within the Richter’s series are small (24 ½ x 28 ¾, 24 ½ x 24 ½ and the smallest is 13 ¼ x 15 ½). Stern is just about twice the size of Dead.

What is Dumas’s relationship to Richter’s work and how does that manifest in Stern? Despite all the evidence that Dumas is visually referencing Richter’s painting and photographic source, Dead and Stern come across as dramatically different pictures. Dumas absorbs what he does and makes the statement that she extracts what is useful and pursues a different way of painting. As alluded to earlier, she said, “I also wanted to see with Stern, if I could take Richter’s source out of its blur.”106 The artist’s hand that is so present in Stern is nearly absent in Dead. Richter is probably the most famous contemporary painter living today. Elements of homage are present. Dumas shows reverence for the subject and the parody found in other paintings is absent in favor of homage and respect. On the other hand, Dumas makes a painting that looks like a painting unlike Richter’s Dead. In Stern Dumas has gone beyond methodically reproducing a morgue-like photo to create an emotionally charged portrait. In all its detail of the photograph Dead lacks the freshness of the spare brushstroke and the crisp delivery

---

106 Shiff, “‘Less Dead,’” 155.
of Stern. In Dumas’s version, it is easy to imagine that the slightly parted eyelid will open at any moment and she will turn and look at us awakened by our gaze.

Richter’s title Dead is most appropriate and there is finality to the end of Ulrike Meinhof’s life. Stern engages with Dead and may very well be using paint to bring Meinhof back to life in one form or another. Or as Dumas said, “For us to resurrect or make new meanings from the ashes of the old, you’ll have to come again, too.” Of all the images to reference in Gerhard Richter’s massive oeuvre, Dumas chose a painting from the series that helped to make him an international art star. In our modern world the current events of today which become our history are received in a rush of images and words in newspapers, on television, and the Internet. In the Baader-Meinhof series, Richter has taken those media saturated images and made them into history painting. He slows us down, so that we can mourn, whether it is regret for misrepresented ideals or for the trauma that humanity inflicts on itself. This series dared to revive history painting, a genre considered antiquated and taboo in our postmodernist era. In fact, Dumas’s interest in Richter’s painting and series may be a fascination with the way that he has been able to resurrect history painting as a viable project.

Or it may be an opportunity for her to engage in emulation.107 An artist pays homage to another, but also seeks to absorb lessons from that contender and perhaps surpass a particular work in some way. Emulation is most effective when it is not necessarily mere imitation, but a move to take ones owns strengths as an artist and apply them to the completion of a specific project. Using paint towards expressionistic ends that

107 Dumas’s emulation of Richter takes place in our time, but brings to mind a text on the subject. The context and art-historical concerns of Thomas Crow’s book are different, but the spirit of the engagement is found in Stern. Thomas Crow, Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
create emotive responses is the method that Dumas uses to “take the blur out of Richter’s source.” Dumas accomplishes her objective.

A major difference between Dumas and Richter is their process. In Dead Richter meticulously reproduces a photograph and emphasizes the blur. It is not an expressionistic method and despite the depth of his project, there is an emotional distancing or coldness in the final result. As viewers, we can almost feel the chill of the cold slab that her body lies on. For Dumas, photographs serve as source material and documents of human experience, but the goal is not a mimetic likeness. The fact that her paintings originate from photography, including film stills, means that the image is already at least one-step removed from the model, but in her painting method, that also allows for the possibility of experimentation and discovery.

Dumas said, “Richter is so systematic,” and that she is not that way as if it was a shortcoming on her part.108 During a lecture she gave at MoMA, she compared her rather makeshift collection of reference photographs and their extremely loose organization with the methodical way that the artists Gilbert and George keep such organized archives. She showed a film clip of her messy space that illustrated the sharp contrast with their “buttoned-up” system of files. Her self-deprecating humor may have brought laughter from the audience, but her unconstrained and more intuitive ways reveal an important distinction between herself and “systematic” artists like Gilbert and George or Richter.109 For Dumas, her approach seems to allow for a higher degree of chance.

---

109 Marlene Dumas presented a lecture in conjunction with the opening of her retrospective on Monday, December 8, 2008, 6:30 PM at MoMA, New York.
Gerhard Richter is meticulously organized. His studio was described in the following way by Michael Kimmelman, “Only operating rooms are this immaculate.”

For Dumas, painting involves a balance of control and chance. She suggests that it takes time and that there are meditative aspects. She says, “I like the combination of control and accident. There is a give and take. Lose control, keep it, lose it.” Once the painting process begins, a transformation takes place. A physical painter, Dumas works on the floor and welcomes chance as the ink washes and watercolors drip and flow. The firmness of oil paint is often stretched in thin washes that stain the canvas. Her process is free flowing. For Dumas, key images contain a transformative power released by paint. Experimentation and serendipity play a role and the final content may be very different from the original intention. Performance is part of her painting process. She is stretching and pushing the physical capabilities of her materials. The results can be highly expressionistic. In a profile Deborah Solomon discusses that even though the choice is intentional on Dumas’s part, chance plays a role. She said, “Still, Dumas manages to put photography to expressionistic ends. If her point of departure is an in-focus photograph, she proves that pixels aren’t everything in paintings that inhabit a realm somewhere between figuration and abstraction, between outer and inner worlds.”

Richter may be resurrecting and re-creating history painting, but Dumas is using paints’ transformative

---

12 Dumas mentioned this process during a lecture she gave on December 8, 2008 at MoMA. For example, Dumas said, “You react to what is happening to the paper,” and “You start somewhere and the painting goes a different way.” She also discussed that it is a “dialogue with the painting.” This is reiterated throughout the literature. Also in writings by Marlene Dumas in Marlene Dumas: Sweet Nothings, 104.
process towards a different end. In referencing Ryman and Reinhardt, Dumas chose photographic sources as content that had no connection to either artists’ production. In Stern Dumas is referencing both Richter and his photographic source. She is taking the content from him and putting it to different narrative and formal ends. Stern is creating space for a personal encounter. As in many of her works, there is no visible background, just darkness and empty space. In Dead, a slab is visible, giving the portrait a physical place to rest. Stern is not a static image and the emptiness around her just focuses our attention on the face itself.

The problem of how to continue painting after the decisive change in its status during the last third of the twentieth century is a central issue for Gerhard Richter. Dumas connects herself with aspects of that project and makes it her own through animating the photographic image. Inadvertently she addresses the death of painting issue through an individual painting like Stern. She can make a new painting through her engagement with photography, painting, and other artists. Richter is considered a post-painter. Eventually the very paintings he makes form a criticality to what is intrinsic to painting and what defines it as a medium.¹¹⁴ Like Dumas, photography is at the heart of his practice. David Green summarizes the critical relationship that Richter’s work poses to the tradition of painting. He says, “Thus it is argued that Richter’s work constitutes a ‘second order representational strategy’ in which the pictorial technical and aesthetic conventions of painting are consciously subsumed as the objects of a metadiscursive practice, albeit one which takes the form of painting.”¹¹⁵ Both Dumas and Richter use this ‘second order

¹¹⁵ Ibid.
representational strategy,’ but the results achieved in the two paintings are quite different. In the case of *Stern* it is a third order representational source.

Both artists go beyond mere imitation or rehearsal of the art of the past in *Dead* by Richter and *Stern* by Dumas, yet particularly in Richter’s case, it is done in a self-reflexive manner where he subsumes the discourse. Concerning Richter, Jason Gaiger writes, ‘‘Richter has made the problem of how to continue painting central to his work as an artist, producing a body of work that incorporates a critical and reflexive understanding of the history of painting alongside a close engagement with the forms and structures of the modern, mediatised world.’’ Dumas shares this connection with Richter, but as I have established, with very different results. Looking at *Stern* in relation to Richter’s *Dead* within the context of our contemporary world and the history of painting carries the process a step further. Dumas engages with Richter in distinctive ways and the dialogue involves intriguing commonalities and striking differences.

Richard Shiff clarifies the photographic reference used by Dumas. Almost sixteen years before Dumas painted *Stern*, Richter took the image from the magazine *Stern* and placed it into his own archive until he retrieved it to paint it three times in 1988. Shiff verified the source: ‘‘Documenting these works, the catalogue of an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, reproduced it once more, ultimately becoming Dumas’s proximate source.’’ *Stern* is an image that is ‘‘three times removed,’’ first as a police photo, second as a news magazine reproduction, then third as a reproduction in a museum catalog. Dumas does not directly name the artist in the title and call it something

---


117 Shiff, ‘‘Less Dead,’’ 155.
like *Richter’s Dead*. Even when the artist is not directly named in a title the reference is known because Dumas has told us so, or it is indirect but quite fathomable as in *The Shrimp* or *Woman of Algiers*, with allusions to Wilem de Kooning and Pablo Picasso/Eugène Delacroix respectively. This is not to say that there is a denial of Richter or these other artists by not naming them in the titles, just a different order of priority.

Dumas granted a sense of possession or ownership in *Ryman’s Brides* and *Reinhardt’s Daughter* that is absent here. In comparison, the choice of *Stern* may remove possession by the referenced artist and direct us to the source from which the image came. In this instance, this action could be interpreted as co-joining her method of using photographic sources with Richter’s. It’s a way of linking herself with Richter, but especially with Richter’s own source material. In fact, this strategy points us back to the news source and the subject, a deceased woman named Ulrike Meinhof rather than directly to Richter. The Richter connection would be an obvious one because this particular series made Richter an internationally known artist.  

David Green calls Richter’s *Baader-Meinhof* series, “‘a series of paintings which might be seen as one of the most ambitious *and* ambivalent attempts to produce a form of contemporary history painting in recent times.’” This series is the only time that Richter has chosen subject matter that is so overtly political for a painting. Dumas and Richter are both committed to further exploring painting. Yet in the enormous literature on Richter
there is a contradictory opposition on his part regarding the tradition of painting, and it is
brought up over and over again. Green sums up the fact that there is “a large degree of
unanimity within the literature that whilst we are dealing with works that resemble
paintings they also stand in a critical relationship to the tradition of painting and to the
types of discourse that have sustained that tradition.” There are some parallels here
with Dumas, however as in Stern, Dumas’s paintings don’t just “resemble paintings” as
Green says about Richter, they act like paintings too. Her interaction with painting and
her methods are different from Richter’s, but the dialogue with the discourse of
contemporary painting is active and rigorous.

*Dead*, as part of the *October 18, 1977* series by Richter falls within the genre of
history painting. On the other hand, *Stern* by Dumas is more about the *history of painting*
than history painting. Dumas interacts with Richter’s legacy, connecting her practice with
his place in art history. Richter is resurrecting a historical moment many people in
Germany wished he had left in its grave. A news article headline published in 1976, said:
“Ulrike Meinhof, an Anarchist Leader In Germany, Is Found Hanged in Cell.” Twenty
years later Meinhof was referred to in another story as someone who had “long since lost
her identity and become a mythical figure, a symbol of either martyred idealism or
mindless terror.” While Meinhof, a former journalist, pacifist and a divorced mother of
two children is recognized as one of the most famous women “terrorists,” there are
aspects of her identity unknown to most viewers. Richter included one painting in the
series not from a press image or police archives, *Youth Portrait*. It is a depiction of

---

120 Ibid.
81
Meinhof from a studio photograph taken just before her career change from political journalist to underground activist. Youth Portrait depicts a young woman that could be a viewer’s sister, daughter, mother or friend. She died in prison about a year before other members of the RAF. The group had been incarcerated for participating in bombings, robberies and other underground guerilla acts.

By the time Dumas paints Stern in 2004, an article had published in 2002 highlighting research that was carried out on Meinhof’s brain for five years. Changes to her brain apparently were caused by an operation to remove a tumor in 1962. A psychiatrist, Bernhard Bogerts, said “although there were other factors involved, the operation could have led to behavioral changes that turned her from an aspiring journalist to co-founder of the far-left Red Army Faction.” Meinhof is a complicated figure in German history and as time passes, her story continues to unfold. Meinhof’s identity is an unfixed phenomenon and its fluidity manifests in Stern. Dumas has chosen to reference Richter’s work and a figure in contemporary history loaded with complex connotations.

The title for Richter’s series, October 18, 1977 dates the end of the resistance of a group of activist students who became armed revolutionaries fighting against the German Federal Republic. Ulrike Meinhof was among the militant activists whose struggle went beyond the police, courts and government and involved significant numbers of the population. Robert Storr discusses the Baader-Meinhof group, also known as the Red Army Faction in relation to October 18, 1977 series in the catalog produced for Richter’s retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2002. The militant activists

---

eventually known as the Baader-Meinhof group demonstrated alongside fellow students and activists, protesting in earnest against their government and culture’s lack of resolve in facing their Nazi past. They rebelled against the proliferation of materialism. They criticized their government for militaristic solutions in the midst of the Cold war and involvement concerning the Shah of Iran and the Vietnam War. Peaceful protest was met with strong reaction by the state and police, and certain members of the Left retaliated with a more violent reaction. Part of the rebellion that spiraled out of control was against the denial of fascism, so recent in Germany’s history. The deaths of the five RAF members may have been presented to the public as a collective suicide, but twenty years later, the debate continues concerning the possibility of murder sanctioned by the state.

Benjamin Buchloh argues that October 18, 1977 is the first real effort on Richter’s part to represent history within the context of a particular public event. It is an event that happens to be highly charged in political controversy. In an article published in 1989, just months after the series was painted, Buchloh says, “Richter’s recent decision to represent current public history, that is, simultaneously to violate the prohibition against representing historical subjects in modern painting and to break the taboo against remembering this particular episode of recent German history -- the activities of the Baader-Meinhof Group and the murder of its members in Stammheim Prison -- distinguish these paintings from all earlier works by Richter.” This is the kind of action that confronts the status quo of what can be done in painting. The October 18, 1977 series challenges those who would marginalize painting’s relevance in our present time.

125 Robert Storr, Gerhard Richter, 74.
In the specificity of her reference to Richter, Dumas canonizes him and links herself with highly significant paintings of our contemporary period. Political undertones are apparent in Stern, but hers is a more intimate exploration of portraiture. She painted Stern along with several other portraits of the dead in 2004. Among other factors, Stern helped solidify Dumas’s standing as a contemporary artist. It may or may not be coincidental that within a year of painting Stern, Dumas’s work would set a record for commanding the highest price of a living artist. Her version minimizes the historical and political content and emits an emotional intensity. Dumas engages with the Baader-Meinhof series in a spirit of homage and respect, but also as a way of staking a claim in painting.

Varying associations and multiple readings are an integral factor in works by Dumas. Whether these connections confuse or enhance the viewing experience, Dumas is intentional in provoking discourse when she openly admits her references to both photographic materials and artists such as Richter. In talking about Stern and several works that were part of a series, Shiff says, “An image does not necessarily distinguish between the living and the dead.”127 Shiff explores the aliveness of painting in comparison with the stillness of photography. I fully agree with him regarding the way that painting contributes to its own animation. In a discussion of the source photograph for Jen, he says the photograph on which Jen is based is DEAD TWICE. It is as if the camera shot her---she is dead within the stillness of a filmstrip. He goes on to say that Dumas: “seized on the difference between Jen and the image of the same woman in the

source photograph: by painting, as she put it, she had made the woman less dead.”

Shiff further outlines Dumas’s thoughts about the relationship between the artist, image, and viewer. “The emotions must also belong to the artist who makes the painting as well as to the viewer who takes its meaning.”

The intervention Dumas makes into Richter’s project operates on multiple levels. Like a palimpsest, one layer is uncovered to reveal yet another. Beneath the painterly aesthetics of Stern, Dead serves a purpose, yet is subsumed. Traces of Richter remain under the surface, but the visible appearance is new. Even though she identifies with his use of photography as source material her painting contrasts sharply with Dead. The history aspects of Richter’s project are present, but no longer visible. The political aspects are another layer as is the fluidity of the subject’s identity. By taking Richter’s image, making it her own while making it “less dead,” Dumas accomplishes another feat in her construction of identity and self-fashioning. By referencing one of the most famous living painters today as well as the series largely responsible for that fame, she is laying claim to her own territory.

The intermittent death and resurrection of painting debated periodically may seem absurd, but that death force or death wish may be part of what activates the creative interaction that compels artists like Dumas to paint. Painters paint and experiment with their medium’s alchemy. They attempt to transform pigment and fluids into visual art. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, painting’s resurgence is going strong. Ten years from now painting as a forceful medium with a strong position in the art world could falter. The acceptance or lack of acceptance phases of painting may not matter, but

---

128 Ibid.  
129 Ibid.
painters like Dumas and Richter keep the discussion going. In Stern Dumas alters her original source material and subjects it to her painting process. She ‘takes the blur out’ and through this transformation creates a new work. This alteration thrives on artistic reference and creates a tension in the painting that draws us in and compels us to engage with the portrait on multiple levels.
Conclusion

Without titles, *Ryman’s Brides, Reinhardt’s Daughter,* and *Stern* remain compelling images. However, with their names in place, a rainbow of brides, sleeping baby, and dead woman invite a comparison with the painting of the past. This invocation of art history is the reasonable criteria Thierry de Duve requires of painting that demands to be viewed as art.\(^{130}\) Dumas has found advantage in tapping into the arena of those who have come before. Her titles position the works in opposition or contrast to three iconic male painters. Thus, a dialogue begins. I have explored Dumas’s engagement with specific artists. Historically, this study is rooted within the context of the discourse of contemporary painting, over the last half-century. The pendulum of “painting’s death” may swing back and forth. If the death drive sparks the creative process, then swing away. Elkins said, “…painting remains the central medium for the articulation and historiography of the visual arts.”\(^{131}\) This means that painting and its language is at the core of “the conceptualization of visual art.”\(^{132}\) In the twenty-first century painting is one medium among many. The discourse need not require a privileging of one form of art making over another.

In this thesis I have argued that Dumas uses artistic reference to intervene, pay homage, engage, and subvert. An intervention in painting is different from a defense. Dumas intercedes in painting rather than pleading its case. She acts as an intermediary,\(^{130}\) Thierry de Duve in *Painting on the Move,* 43.  
\(^{132}\) Ibid.
slipping in and making her marks. She interjects and interposes more than defends. Painting does not need Dumas to protect or exonerate it, and that is not central to the reading of her work that I suggest. Dumas changes the dialogue with her titles and process. Her titles guide us in our interpretive analysis, providing focus rather than dictating meaning.

In naming a group of multi-ethnic brides after Robert Ryman, Dumas emphasizes a potent theme. *Ryman’s Brides* invokes the power of parodic reference in challenging the canon. She invades monochrome territory and inserts an image of a black child, bound and tied into Reinhardt’s purity of bare abstraction and blackness in *Reinhardt’s Daughter*. I argued that whiteness and blackness operate in the paintings as pigment of paint and pigment of skin. Dumas paints expressionistically creating emotive portraits like *Stern*. She invokes Richter and the controversy surrounding his history painting project. Emblematic of death and a resistance to the past, both portraits push further, investing paint with new meaning. A collective merging occurs as authorship blurs. The constant flow of ideas swirl around; like a never-ending river. *Dead* elicits mourning, *Stern*, resurrects and animates, reeling us in. Her use of quotation has a long and rich tradition. Leo Steinberg explained how using quotation detours realism back into art and compared what painters do to the splicing of old movie footage into newer film effectively using quotation.133 As the “Old Masters” quoted and referenced other artists and kept the focus on the art and off the illusion, so Dumas uses art to call attention to art.

133 Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 71.
References Cited


Dumas, Marlene. *The Eyes of the Night Creatures*, Galerie Paul Andriesse, Amsterdam, 1985. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “The Eyes of the Night Creatures,” shown at Galerie Helen van der Meij, Amsterdam.


---. Marlene Dumas: Intimate Relations. Edited by Marlene Dumas and Emma Bedford. Johannesburg: Jacana Media; and Amsterdam: Roma Publications, 2007. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Marlene Dumas: Intimate Relations” shown at the Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town; and The Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa.


**Interviews, lectures, films and podcasts:**


*Miss Interpreted*. Film by Rudolf Evenhuis and Joost Verhey. Produced by MM Productions and The Humanistic Broadcast, 1997.


Interview with Marlene Dumas by the author, MoMA, New York, December 9, 2008.

Marlene Dumas presented a lecture in conjunction with the opening of her retrospective on June 22, 2008, at MoCA in Los Angeles.

Marlene Dumas presented a lecture in conjunction with the opening of her retrospective on December 8, 2008, 6:30 PM at MoMA in New York.

Cornelia Butler, 8/20/2008 on *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave*, Podcast recorded Sunday, August 3, 2008 at MOCA Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, accessed on 10/14/08 http://www.moca.org/audio/
Selected Bibliography


---. *Marlene Dumas: Miss Interpreted.* Eindhoven, the Netherlands: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1992. Texts by Jan Debbaut, Marlene Dumas, Selma Klein Essink, and Marcel Vos. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Marlene Dumas: Miss Interpreted” shown at Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands; and Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia.

---. *Marlene Dumas: Land of Milk and Honey.* Hamburg, Germany: Produzentengalerie, 1993. Text by Annelie Pohlen. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Marlene Dumas: Land of Milk and Honey” shown at Produzentengalerie, Hamburg, Germany.

---. *Marlene Dumas: MD.* Antwerp, Belgium: MUHKA; London: Camden Arts Center; and Hovikodden, Norway: Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 1999. Texts by Dumas, Gavin Jantjes, and Dominic van den Boogerd. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Marlene Dumas: MD” shown at Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp, Belgium; Camden Arts Center, London; and Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Hovikodden, Norway.

---. *Marlene Dumas: Nom de personne/Name No Names.* Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 2001. Texts by Marlene Dumas and Jonas Storsve. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Marlene Dumas: Nom de personne/Name No Names” shown at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; and De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg, The Netherlands.

---. *Marlene Dumas: One Hundred Models and Endless Rejects.* Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art; and Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Berlag, 2001. Texts by Marlene Dumas, Jill Medvedow, and Jessica Morgan. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Marlene Dumas: One Hundred Models and Endless Rejects” shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

---. *Marlene Dumas: Suspect.* Milan: Skira; and London: Thames and Hudson, 2003. Texts by Jan Andriesse, Marlene Dumas, Barbara Poli, Gianni Romano, Dominic van den Boogerd, and Angela Vettese. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Marlene Dumas: Suspect” shown at Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Palazzetto Tito, Venice, Italy.

---. *Marlene Dumas: Female.* Baden-Baden, Germany: Staatliche Kunsthalle, 2005. Texts by Marlene Dumas, Rudi Fuchs, and Van Warmerdam. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Marlene Dumas: Female” shown at Kunsthalle, Helsinki; The Nordic Watercolour Museum, Skärhamn, Sweden; and Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden, Germany.

---. *Marlene Dumas: MAN KIND.* Amsterdam: Galerie Paul Andriesse, 2006. Texts by Paul Andriesse and Marlene Dumas. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Marlene Dumas: MAN KIND” at the Galerie Paul Andriesse, Amsterdam.


Dumas, Marlene and Silvia Eiblmayr. *Marlene Dumas: Models.* Stuttgart: Oktagon, Portikus (Gallery), 1995. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Marlene Dumas: Models,” shown at Kunstverein in Salzburg, Austria, Portikus in Frankfurt am Main, Germany and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst in Berlin.

Dumas, Marlene, Francis Bacon, Marente Bloemheuvel and Jan Mot. *Marlene Dumas/Francis Bacon: the Particularity of Being Human.* Milano: Edizioni Charta, 1995. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “The Particularity of Being Human: Marlene Dumas/Francis Bacon” shown at Konsthall in Malmö, Sweden and Castello di Rivoli, Museo d’Arte Contemporanea, Turin, Italy.

Dumas, Marlene, Maria Roosen and Marijke van Warmerdam. *Marlene Dumas, Maria Roosen and Marijke van Warmerdam: XLVI Biennale di Venezia, Padiglione Olandese.* Rotterdam: Witte de With in association with the Center for Contemporary Art, 1995. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Marlene Dumas, Maria Roosen and Marijke van Warmerdam: XLVI Biennale di Venezia, Padiglione Olandese” shown at XLVI Biennale di Venezia, Giardini di Castello in Venice.

Dumas, Marlene and Anton Corbijn. *Strippinggirls.* Amsterdam: Stichting Actuele Kunstdocumentatie, 2000. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Strippinggirls” (Marlene Dumas and Anton Corbijn) shown at Theatermuseum, Theater Institute Nederland, Amsterdam; Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, Belgium; and Institut Néerlandais, Paris.


Snodgrass, Susan. “Marlene Dumas at the Art Institute of Chicago.” *Art in America* 91, no. 9 (September 2003): 130.


Van der Vlist, Eline, “Face Value.” *Modern Painters XX*, no. 5 (June 2008): 82-87.
