

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum of American Art

PRESS RELEASE

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Whitney Museum of American Art
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WHITNEY TO PRESENT BUCKSBAUM AWARD-WINNER IRIT BATSRY'S LATEST WORK AS PART OF THE CONTEMPORARY SERIES

Beginning December 11, the Whitney Museum of American Art will present *Set*, a new video installation by 2002 Bucksbaum Award-winner Irit Batsry (b. 1957), made especially for the Whitney. Shot in Brazil on the set of *Madame Satã* – a critically acclaimed feature film by Karim Aïnouz that was recently released in this country – Batsry's latest work explores the tension between artifice and reality, between the projected and the painterly image.

The new work, to be shown through February 22, 2004, continues the artist's investigation of the construction and perception of images, which began in her feature film *These Are Not My Images (neither there nor here)* (1994-2000), which was shown in the 2002 Biennial and for which she won the Bucksbaum Award. *Set* is a site-specific, multi-media installation created during the artist's two-year Bucksbaum Award residency at the Whitney. The work will be shown in the Kaufman Astoria Studios Gallery on the museum's second floor. A component of the piece is a projection on the exterior of the museum building that will be visible every Friday from 4 to 9 pm on the south side of the cantilevered bridge that connects the museum's lobby to the sidewalk. The presence of the outdoor projection extends the parameters of the exhibition and links it to the flow of daily life on the street. Part of *The Contemporary Series*, the exhibition was coordinated by Debra Singer, associate curator of contemporary art at the Whitney, and features a brochure with an essay by Lawrence Rinder, the museum's Anne & Joel Ehrenkranz Curator of Contemporary Art.

In his essay, Mr. Rinder notes: "...Batsry's art is existential, reflecting on the nature of being. In this sense, her work is clearly philosophical. By using images to investigate images, she engenders in the viewer a deepened sensual acuity as well as a heightened self-awareness...Her work is typically self-reflexive; that is, each piece contains a commentary on its own creation, expressing the logic and history of its existence. Simultaneously, no matter what the ostensible 'subject' or thematic content of her work, Batsry's art always brings the viewers' attention back to their own experience in the present, their own processes of seeing and comprehending."

The installation uses multiple projections to depict moments from the making of the film *Madame Satã*. The film tells the real-life story of João Francisco dos Santos, a flamboyant carnival performer who led an extraordinary life in the slums and prisons of Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s and 1930s. "Madame Satã," the stage name dos Santos adopted, is taken from Cecil B. DeMille's film *Madame Satan*. In *Madame Satã*, dos Santos is vividly portrayed by Lázaro Ramos, who conveys both the beauty and vulnerability of this tragic figure.

Projectors arranged around the perimeter of the gallery cast silent, looped videos of carefully selected moments from the film's production. *Make: Measure 1* and *Make: Measure 2*, which form a diptych, show the actor Lázaro Ramos being made up and having his distance from the

camera measured for a shot; another diptych juxtaposes *Setup*, a video projection including documentary-style scenes of technical aspects of filmmaking, such as blocking, lighting, and shooting, with *Light*, depicting effects of light and shadow. *Reflect*, the fifth projection, consists of imagery from the video monitor used by the director, actors, and crew to review the day's work.

Using various techniques, Batsry's installation explores the relationship of projected and painted images. In some cases, the projected images in *Set* closely resemble antecedents from the history of art, especially certain paintings from the Renaissance. Technically, too, Batsry suggests the similarities and differences between these two mediums. Plexiglass screens placed in front of each projector allow the image to be seen on a small screen leaning against the wall, while also reflecting each image, much larger, at an angle against an adjacent wall. The presentation of each loop in both small- and large-scale versions suggests a dialogue between the expected monumentality and immateriality of the projected image and the intimacy and materiality of a painted one.

Set brings the viewer into an ambiguous space located between the fiction of the cinema and the actuality of its creation. At the same time, Batsry calls attention to received assumptions about how we understand visual information in its various material and virtual forms.

The exhibition has been made possible by support from the Martin Bucksbaum Family Foundation and the Director's Council of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

About the Artist

Irit Batsry has worked mainly in video and installations. In addition to the Bucksbaum Award, she received a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in 1992 and the Grand Prix Video de Création of the Société Civile des Auteurs Multimedia, Paris (1996 and 2001), as well as many prizes from international festivals, including the Grand Prix, Locarno (1990 and 1995), First Prize, Vigo (1994 and 2001), and Best International Artistic Contribution, Cádiz (1991). Her work has been shown at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C.; the National Film Theater and the ICA (London); the Reina Sofía Museum (Madrid); the Palais de Tokyo (Paris); Museu d'Arte Moderna (Rio), Ludwig Museum (Cologne), Tel Aviv Museum; and The Museum of Modern Art (New York). Her work has been broadcast in the United States on PBS and in Europe on La Sept, WDR and ARTE.

The Bucksbaum Award

In the 2002 Biennial, the second Bucksbaum Award was conferred on Irit Batsry for her film *These Are Not My Images* (*neither there nor here*). In 2000, Paul Pfeiffer was the first recipient. Endowed by trustee Melva Bucksbaum and her family, the Bucksbaum Award is given by the Whitney to an outstanding artist chosen from among those in the Biennial. It includes a grant of \$100,000, and an exhibition in the Whitney's Contemporary Series. The third Bucksbaum Award will be presented in conjunction with the 2004 Biennial, opening at the Whitney on March 11, 2004.

About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the leading advocate of 20th and 21st-century American art. Founded in 1930, the Museum is widely regarded as the preeminent collection of 20th-century American art and includes the entire artistic estate of Edward Hopper, the largest public collection of works by Alexander Calder, Louise Nevelson, and Lucas Samaras, as well as significant works by Arshile Gorky, Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, Bruce Nauman, Georgia O'Keeffe, Claes Oldenburg, Kiki Smith, and Andy Warhol, among other artists.

