

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
October 1990

PROJECTS: KIKI SMITH

November 9, 1990 - January 1, 1991

The Museum of Modern Art's next exhibition in its PROJECTS series is an installation by American artist Kiki Smith, on view from November 9, 1990, to January 1, 1991. Organized by Jennifer Wells, curatorial assistant in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, PROJECTS: KIKI SMITH features recent works, many of them never before shown in New York, that explore the human body and attempt to demystify it in light of contemporary concerns.

In the objects in the installation, Smith's vision of the body as an "open vessel," subject to both clinical and metaphorical interpretations, is paralleled by her alternating use of impersonal and "homemade" materials. In several works, for example, she uses embroidery, dyeing, and quilting--traditionally feminine forms of production--to suggest the frailty of the circulatory and nervous systems. In another piece, twelve water cooler bottles are elegantly inscribed with the names of life-sustaining fluids, such as blood, semen, sweat, and saliva.

Smith's work seems particularly compelling now, when the body has become a medical and political battleground. Her most recent piece in the installation consists of dozens of sperm-like forms individually cast in glass and placed on a black rubber mat. At once fragile and disturbing, these objects suggest interpretative frameworks such as biology and romance, and associations ranging from contagion to conception. Viewed in the same installation as a pair of cast bronze hands of identical twins, such a work also raises questions about uniqueness and individuality.

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Since 1980, Smith has worked in a variety of mediums, including fabric, glass, paper, ceramic, and bronze, to create objects that derive their forms from human anatomy and biological processes. Recalling scientific notebooks of the Renaissance or unorthodox medical models, her works reflect her training as an emergency medical technician. By focusing on organs, skin, and limbs, rather than head and heart, Smith emphasizes that it is the body, not the mind, that is the primary vehicle for experiencing life.

Born in 1954 in Nuremberg, Germany, Kiki Smith is the daughter of sculptor Tony Smith (1912-1980). In the late seventies, she joined Collaborative Projects, Inc. (Colab), an artists' organization committed to social change and political involvement, and with them exhibited her first anatomically derived work in the Times Square Show (1980). Smith has had solo exhibitions at the Dallas Museum of Art (1989) and the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva (1990), and her work has been included in various group exhibitions, including COMMITTED TO PRINT (1988) at the Museum.

The PROJECTS series is made possible by generous grants from The Bohen Foundation, the Lannan Foundation, The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Next in the series is PROJECTS: DENNIS ADAMS (January 11 - February 28, 1991), followed by MICHAEL CRAIG-MARTIN (March 8 - February 23, 1991).

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For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.