

The Museum of Modern Art presents the exhibition Aernout Mik, the first North American survey of the artist's work. Mik (Dutch, b. 1962) is distinguished for his ability to combine, shift, and transform artistic practices by creating installations that integrate moving images, sculpture, and architecture into single constructions. Eight of the artist's works are installed in gallery and non-gallery spaces throughout the Museum, ranging from Mik's first filmed work *Fluff* (1996) to *Schoolyard* (2009), which was commissioned by the Museum for the exhibition. Aernout Mik is organized by Laurence Kardish, Senior Curator, with Kelly Sidley, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art, and is on view from May 6 to July 27, 2009.

Silent, looped films are the focus of each installation, which often include a structure specifically built to display Mik's moving images. In these films the artist implies current societal issues, from economic crises and immigration struggles to parliamentary clashes and outright warfare. Although Mik's films appear to document actual events, the scenes are often fully staged by the artist, challenging viewers' systems of belief and interrogating basic cinematic concepts of narrative and realism. As incidents unfold in silence, very little becomes clear. No characters are introduced, no plots develop, and no boundaries are defined, making it difficult to interpret the content and context of each circumstance.

Mr. Kardish states: "Aernout Mik is an artist who exemplifies the fluidity of boundaries. With his moving-image installations, Mik creates a kinesthetic relationship between the installation and viewer, who immediately absorbs the geography of the piece, the curious nature of the structure itself, and the compelling images that occupy the volume Mik has created."

The single-screen floor piece *Middlemen* (2001) confronts visitors as they enter the main lobby of the Museum from 53rd Street. Approximately 36 feet in length and seven feet tall, the construction inevitably choreographs viewers, both in determining where they stand and how they engage both with other observers of the work and the moving images themselves. In the film component of *Middlemen*, Mik portrays a stock market floor or commodities exchange peopled with workers who appear to be nervously awaiting something unknown. Capturing the internal anxieties of these "middlemen," the camera's movements—long pans mixed with close-up details that jump to wider views of the room—mimic the motions of the bodies and emphasize the jittery atmosphere felt within the space.

At the other end of the lobby, the single-channel video installation *Osmosis and Excess* (2005) hangs near the Museum's main information desk. The work opposes detailed views of two very different settings: a mega-pharmacy in Tijuana, Mexico, and a car-strewn landscape just outside that

city. Although these two scenes appear to be opposites, similar imagery connects them, emphasizing the tangled relationship between consumers and their waste.

The installation *Vacuum Room* (2005) is on view in the Special Exhibitions Gallery on the second floor. *Vacuum Room* is a freestanding architectural structure featuring a six-channel film projected onto screens inserted into the walls, creating an interior space scattered with floor pillows and chairs for viewers to sit upon. The work documents an ambiguous conflict among a band of rebels within a legislative or judicial chamber—but as with most of Mik's works, the exact setting of the film is left unclear. While each channel features moving images from a different stationary camera set within the legislative chamber, the images do not follow a linear sequence. *Training Ground* (2006), also on display within the same gallery, is a freestanding architectural structure holding a two-channel projection. The film portrays uniformed guards performing field exercises; yet the actions of the film eventually and slowly reverse, with those in power and those submitting to power becoming blurred.

The newly commissioned *Schoolyard* (2009), on view outside the Special Exhibitions Gallery, is a two-channel video installation set at a vocational high school in The Netherlands. After the school has been evacuated for an unspecified reason, groups begin to form outside, including students of various ethnic backgrounds, including Dutch, Turkish, Surinamese, and Moroccan. In turn, various processions arise, with participants either celebrating ecstatically or mourning together, erupting in brief flashes and then just as quickly subsiding. Also on the second floor, the single-channel video installation *Scapegoats* (2006) comprises a freestanding screen that sits directly on the ground. It is set in an unspecified sports arena, where military operations dominate the entire atmosphere, from combat trucks parked inside the structure to frequent displays of weaponry.

*Raw Footage* (2006) is on display in the Museum's Roy and Niuta Titus 1 Theater Lobby Gallery. This two-channel film installation marks a turn for the artist. Instead of devising scenarios and shooting the imagery himself, Mik used materials from newsreels documenting the civil war in Yugoslavia. Mik often pairs related subjects side-by-side, ranging from soldiers loading and firing their guns to visual records of their off-duty hours as they nap and listen to music. This work retains the sound from the original news tapes, and is the only work with audio in the exhibition.

Mik's 1996 single-channel video, *Fluff*, will be installed on the 6th and 4th floors. It will also be shown 24 hours a day on a monitor visible from the sidewalk near the 11 West 53rd Street film entrance. Shot in super 16mm, *Fluff* proceeds in a series of stationary shots. As a small cast

meanders through what appears to be a warehouse filled with plastic-wrapped furniture and shipping pallets, wads of fluff inexplicably pelt their bodies.

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