

With over 100 drawings and paintings from private and museum collections throughout the world, Marlene Dumas – The Image as Burden is the first major solo exhibition of Dumas in the Netherlands in 20 years. It is also the most comprehensive retrospective survey of the work Dumas has produced in Europe and presents a compelling overview of her oeuvre from the late 1970s to the present.

Marlene Dumas is considered one of the most significant and influential painters working today. Her emotionally charged paintings and drawings address existentialist themes such as eroticism, grief and shame while frequently referencing art-historical motifs and current political issues. With her work, she offers new possibilities to the meaning that painting can still have today, in an era dominated by visual culture.

Dumas often finds inspiration in newspaper and magazine images from her large visual archive. She believes that the endless stream of photographic images bombarding us every day influences how we see each other and the world around us. Dumas addresses this onslaught by revealing the psychological, social, and political aspects of these images.

Leontine Coelewijn, curator of the exhibition, says, “The paintings and drawings of Marlene Dumas have an enormous directness and expressiveness, which she couples with a certain analytical distance. In her portraits, Dumas does not shy away from controversial topics. The portraits of Mohammed B., the man who assassinated Dutch film director Theo van Gogh, and Osama Bin Laden evoke a strong response in the viewer. Her work confronts us with the ambiguity of the painterly image. In both her visual work and her writings, Dumas reflects on contemporary painting and what it means to be an artist.”

In addition to her most important and iconic works, the exhibition also presents lesser-known paintings and drawings, including many works never before shown in the Netherlands. Also included is a selection of the artist’s most recent paintings such as *The Widow* and *Nuclear Family*, both from 2013.

The title of the exhibition is derived from Dumas’s work *The Image as Burden* (1993), which refers to the conflict between the painterly gesture and the illusion of the painted image. Dumas draws a connection between the subject of the painting, a man carrying a woman in his arms, and the painter who carries the weight of her subject. The title also alludes to how an artwork can burden the viewer with its image. Dumas says, “I want to talk about what the painting does to the image, not what the image does to the painting.”

The exhibition devotes special attention to the works on paper that Dumas produced during her early years in the Netherlands, when she also exhibited her work for the first time at the Stedelijk Museum and Museum Fodor (1978-81). Themes such as love, death and longing, and the use of texts and images found in mass media – which are explored in her later paintings – are also evident in these early works.

Marlene Dumas, *The Image as Burden*, 1993, private collection, courtesy Marlene Dumas  
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The exhibition is curated by Stedelijk curator Leontine Coelewij in close collaboration with the artist and occupies a circuit of about fifteen galleries on the upper floor of the historic building of the Stedelijk Museum. The exhibition covers approximately 1,000 square meters.

Marlene Dumas was born in 1953 in Cape Town, South Africa. She came to the Netherlands in the 1970s to study at Ateliers '63 in Haarlem. On completing her study, Dumas settled in Amsterdam, where she still lives and works. In recent years, Dumas has held important exhibitions in the United States (New York, Houston, and Los Angeles), South Africa, Germany, Japan, and elsewhere. Her work is represented in the collections of numerous distinguished museums and private collectors throughout the world. Dumas is the recipient of many prestigious art awards, the most recent being the Johannes Vermeer Prize (2012).

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