

marlene dumas measuring your own grave

organized by

CORNELIA BUTLER

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Frontispiece: *Moshekwa*, 2006; oil on canvas; 51 3/16 x 43 5/16 inches; courtesy the artist and Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

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Less Dead

RICHARD SHIFF

The guilt of never knowing if one has done the “right” thing.... I see it in my own eyes.

—MARLENE DUMAS, 1974¹

Guilty of being at too big a distance from the concreteness of life.—DUMAS, 1982²

Now that we know that images can mean whatever, whoever wants them to mean, we don't trust anybody anymore, especially ourselves.—DUMAS, 2003³

Marlene Dumas's moral dilemma is ours: try as we may, our choice of action is likely to fail us, if not now, then later. Good intentions are no guarantee that we do “the ‘right’ thing.” This moral insecurity was already Dumas's concern during her student years. Her allusion to “the guilt of never knowing” came in an undergraduate essay in which she discussed the anxiety evident in the art of both Francisco Goya and Willem de Kooning. Even at several cultural removes, the young South African could share in this anxiety. Scare quotes marked her reference to “the ‘right’ thing,” the equivalent, in everyday speech, of a shift in tone to acknowledge an enduring existential irony: no one knows what will prove right and to whom. To believe otherwise is to offer your mind to ideology.

Does an artist take the right meaning from her immediate situation? Whatever she perceives as the rational demands of the moment will be affected by the desires she feels. Reason and the emotions require

mutual adjustment. Does she make the right decision when she responds through an act of creation, both sensual and intellectual? At her core, a painter is a maker—this Dumas knows: “You can't TAKE a painting—you MAKE a painting.”⁴ By its very nature, painting is a decisive moral act. If the most transient meanings as well as the ultimate ones remain indeterminate for both artist and viewer—“images can mean whatever”—the decisions made in a painting have at least the advantage of being concrete. Just as in art, decisive acts intervene in a life, altering a person's direction. Moving this way or that, we enter into a moral void and feel the guilt of “never knowing.” Yet we risk all the more guilt by refraining from action, “being at too big a distance from the concreteness of life.” Although art can be an isolating enterprise—“my studio is my house, my country”⁵—Dumas is hardly a person who keeps her distance.

To the extent that photography connotes an objective uncensored vision (primarily because of its mechanical aspects), it establishes a viewer's distance from the image it presents.⁶ Dumas finds her models for painting in photographs—usually press or publicity images, or just as often Polaroids that she takes of family and friends. Transforming these images, she remakes the taken. Her distinction between making (making a decision, altering the state of things) and taking (taking a meaning, accepting the given identity) plays on a common understanding reflected in colloquial language: rather than make, we “take” a conventional photographic picture. “If you take a photograph, there's always something in front of you,” Dumas explained; “but with a painting there is nothing.”⁷ With photography, we frame a view, selecting the image from among all that reality offers, as if this view or any other needed only to be recorded by light-sensitive material. A photographer can pose a live model, compose the perspective, and perform any number of adjustments to achieve a desirable effect both before and after the image registers. Like a decision, the moment of actual registration is nevertheless unique and crucial, attesting to the living presence of the model in the captured instant.

Yet this moment of reality passes. Pondering the photographic paradox, Roland Barthes made an influential argument:

The Kiss, 2003; oil on canvas; 15³/₄ x 19¹¹/₁₆ inches; courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London

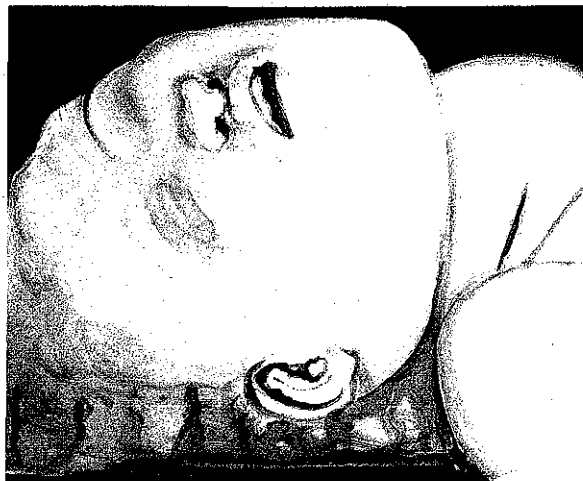
By shifting this reality to the past (“this-has-been”), the photograph suggests that it [the life of the subject or model] is already dead.... In Photography, the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric; and in the case of animated beings, their life as well, except in the case of photographing corpses.⁸

Why is the “presence” of the model not metaphoric? Because a photograph represents its subject without configuring it as something else—something it is not. A corpse is the exception; photography certifies “that the corpse is alive, as *corpse*: it is the living image of a dead thing”⁹—death metaphorically transformed into preserved life. In the case of a living model, the image caught by the camera transforms only in the sense that it stills the existing presence, which survives in its photographic death as the trace of itself. If photography creates a metaphor, the metaphorical figure is stillborn, a dead metaphor, a cliché at its origin.¹⁰

Dumas realizes that “images can mean whatever.” To this, she relates another provocative thought: “It’s not that a medium dies. It’s that all media have become suspect.”¹¹ All media are unstable, unreliable, subject to manipulation and simple error, but this is not the only cause of their being suspect. The opposite also applies: a medium can be used to control and limit meaning. In any particular context, a medium will tend either to yield to or restrict meaning’s free play, but the potential of each medium to turn in one direction or the other, toward either indeterminate or determined meaning, differs. Because the various media based on photography have long been the dominant suppliers of culturally coded, institutionally sanctioned imagery, painting by comparison is the less restrictive medium; it is far less likely to generate a cliché than a photograph.¹² (If this seems too bold a statement, consider a specific variant: Dumas’s paintings are much less of a cliché than the photographs from which they derive.) Unlike photography, the painting process has no critical stilled moment—

despite its stock of traditional imagery, no stilled pose that it fixes into cliché.

In 2004, Dumas painted a number of images of death, including close-ups of the heads of dead individuals: Ulrike Meinhof, the subject of *Stern*; Saint Lucy as represented by Caravaggio, the subject of *Lucy*; an anonymous Chechen terrorist, the subject of *Alpha*. Not long after, she painted the head and upper torso of a young Japanese woman, *Jen* (2005). Is there a significant aesthetic (and ultimately moral) difference between the image of a dead Meinhof, Lucy, or Alpha and the image of a living Jen? This has not been Dumas’s position. An image does not necessarily distinguish between the living and the dead. There is a difference, however, between photography and painting as representational media. When the subject is death, painting is more alive than photography, because it contributes its own animation. The photographic source for *Jen*, a film still reproduced as an illustration in a book, shows an unconscious drugged woman who by all appearances could be dead. She is doubly dead: dead to the world in having a dormant consciousness, and dead in having been photographed within a filmstrip. Ironically, film reanimates artificially what photography de-animates by stilling. Those who first commented on the live filming of actors and events applauded the technical achievement but recognized that the cinematic experience elicited thoughts of dead images, the cliché: “The actors perform once, and it is for the ages; their gestures have been fixed, and if they were all to die in a catastrophe, there would be no less of a continuation of the spectacle, forever identical to itself.”¹³ Unlike photography or even film, painting, as Dumas stated, “doesn’t freeze time.”¹⁴



In a phrase, 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.”¹⁵ Was it the woman (Jen revived) or the image of the woman (the film still retraced) that returned to the experiential world of the living? “Images don’t care. Images do not discriminate between sleep and death.”¹⁶ In its many forms, Dumas plays with the distinction (the appearance of the model in life versus its representation) and the nondistinction (the similar appearance of differing physical and psychological states of being). One aspect of the source photograph that attracted the painter is far more idiosyncratic than intimations of sleep or death: Dumas noticed how the photographic perspective had set the woman’s nipple extremely close to her face, and she even wondered whether the real nipple was not anatomically displaced (rather than merely appearing so). Dumas cropped the published image of the film still in order to feature this relationship in her painting—a detail that held visual curiosity and perhaps no other meaning, at least not to the artist.¹⁷

As a philosophical challenge to others, Dumas sometimes raises this issue—the interest to be taken in the fact of immediate appearance versus the identification of a proper category or classification. People move too quickly from the former to the latter: “Someone was interested in these smaller paintings of a naked young girl, and asked, ‘What is the age of the child?’ I said, ‘It’s not a child, it’s a painting.’”¹⁸ To appreciate Dumas’s reply is to understand that 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. The situation is further complicated because the emotional states of artist and viewer need not correspond or even be compatible. And yet, as Dumas explained,



I am dealing with emotions that everyone feels. But I’m always conscious of this tension between knowing that you are making an object, a physical thing, and being aware that you are also referring to things [the emotions] that cannot actually be painted. If the painting works, that tension is in there.¹⁹

Painting becomes something of a Lacanian attempt to provide, if only for a moment, the missing satisfaction of every desire and the realization of its lack: “No painting can exist without the tension of what it figures and what it concretely consists of. The pleasure of what it could mean and the pain of what it’s not”—for artist and viewer alike, fantasy and reality at one go.²⁰

If anything, painting increases the animation and multifaceted character of its model. This is tantamount to extending the emotional range. To think across the two media of painting and photography is to understand that photography—by comparison, only by comparison—is better equipped to picture a model passively, without responding to, enhancing, or altering its existing appearance or quality. The cultural significance of photography hinges on its capacity to function as a baseline archive of fact. It stills a mobile view and represents the singular moment in all the detail available to human vision and even more, since it registers the visual beyond the physiological limitations of the eye. Beneath a surface of photographic emulsion, no traces of earlier states of the same image will be discovered, only the trace of the archival photographic moment.²¹ Relative to our experience of other modes of depiction, the photographic image seems remarkably whole and

Opposite: *Lucy*, 2004; oil on canvas; 43⁹/₁₆ x 51⁹/₁₆ inches; Tate, purchased with assistance from Foundation Dutch Artworks and Bank Giro Loterij, 2007

Above: *Death of the Author*, 2003; oil on canvas; 15³/₄ x 19¹¹/₁₆ inches; collection Jolie van Leeuwen

Jen, 2006; oil on canvas; 43 ⁵/₁₆ x 51 ⁹/₁₆ inches; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, fractional and promised gift of Marie-Josée and Henry R. Kravis



instantaneous, as if bonding a certain space to a certain time and a certain time to a certain space. Exceptions prove the rule, including early portrait daguerreotypes, which, because they required a relatively long period of exposure, failed to realize the full potential of photography to still the instant. Aware of this limitation, Walter Benjamin argued that the early subjects of photographic practice lived “not out of the instant, but into it; during the long exposure they grew, as it were, into the image.”²² The early subjects seemed to adjust their depiction, paint their own portrait—actively, not passively. Benjamin’s description converts daguerreotype portraiture into an exchange of subjectivity. He suggested that the encounter between the model and the photographic apparatus was a mutual effort, with camera technology merely substituting for skills of the hand, since the speed of the picturing—even though vastly accelerated when compared to the process of drawing or painting—was not quick enough to outpace the sitter’s conventional behavior and habits of perception. By living “into it,” the model had time to adjust his or her performance and simultaneously adjust whatever the camera was registering.

Engaged in what is often an isolated intimate process, a painter “lives into” a painting and whatever it represents. Dumas has said as much in several different ways, including the distinction she makes between sympathy and empathy: “Sympathy suggests an agreement of temperament, and an emotional identification with a person. Empathy doesn’t necessarily demand that. The contemplation of the work (when it ‘works’) gives a physical sensation similar to that suggested by the work.”²³ Put simply, empathy is the more direct and also more dynamic relationship, established through an experiential bond of sensation. It is never as stable and abstract as a person’s sympathetic identification with a personality type or a cultural orientation. Empathy, Dumas indicates, can be felt in relation to a mere scribble.²⁴ Representational painting becomes a matter of feeling the individual marks and tracings as well as the more general image they constitute. The surface of *Jen* makes this evident. It presents a

catalogue of sensations from one detail of facture to another: wet and dry, matte and reflective, thin and thick, neutral tones and strong chromatics—accents of blue for the eyes and mouth, green at the neck, a rose nipple, rich tones of violet and magenta surrounding the foreshortened face. Each element plays its part in creating the whole but remains relatively distinct. Looking at a painting or drawing by Dumas, you feel that you can count the separate marks that made it. The individual strokes of *Jen* feel their way around contours of the lost profile, the plaits of hair, and even the nostril. Dumas keeps the strokes visible as fluid gestures, disdaining any degree of correction that might refine them into fussiness. “For me, painting has to show its method, how it becomes what it is; [it should] move back and forth from the ‘illusion’ to the ‘gesture.’”²⁵

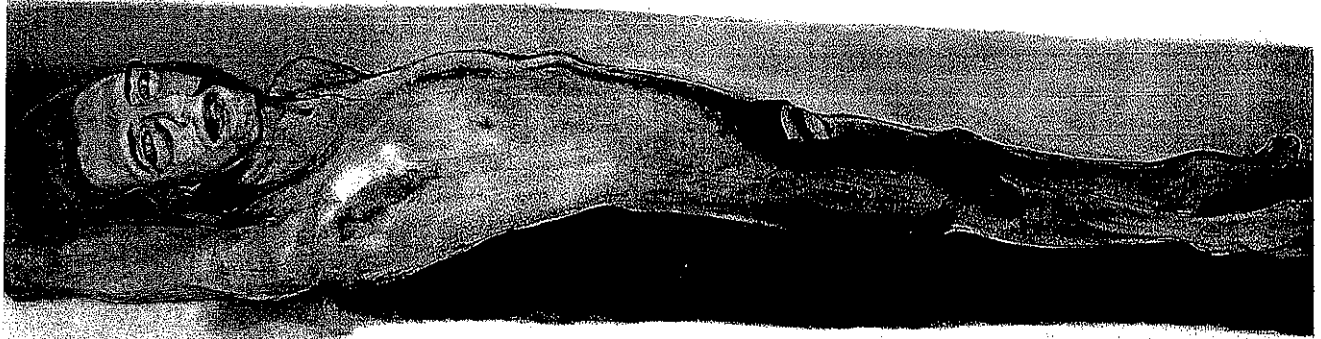
Dumas is a mimetic painter, coordinating her process with the model it both presents and represents; it is as if her touch were touching the model, forming it while sensing it. The three axes of the equation—artist, model, and painting—come to resemble each other through the mimetic process. They also alter each other. My description above licensed Dumas’s strokes to “feel their way around”; this is to attribute a certain subjectivity and even sentience to the material and physical components of representation, as if they were leading the painter’s brush as well as following it. (I will have more to say about this transfer of subjectivity.) The direction of Dumas’s brush, its vector, matters. With flowing strokes that reveal their material origin, she represents a model by imitating the feel of its form as much as the look. Her graphic markings attend to the volumetric nature of the body and the functional movements of its parts. When she represents a full-length figure, as in *After Photography* (2003), she articulates the different parts of the body according to an intuitive sense of their physicality: she renders a head with a rotating stroke, a torso with a repeating arching stroke, legs and arms with long contour strokes.²⁶ Dumas can establish the contoured edge of a form either by tracing a line in a conventional way or by lifting the sheet of

paper and guiding the rapid flow of liquid pigment as gravity makes the edge. Sometimes a stray line or band extends out from an articulated body—a runoff of excess liquid. For large wash drawings on paper, she often uses metallic acrylic as well as ink. Its color (yellow or gold in the case of *After Photography*), coupled with the blacks and grays of the ink, aids in giving the rendered volumes the sense of a third dimension. But this type of acrylic also has a contrary effect, similar to that of the visible runoffs of color. Its glitter increases the specific material presence of the drawing surface. Although the effect is restrained, metallic acrylic catches the light, bringing extra attention to accidental spots of color that may lie outside the contours of the image proper (in *After Photography*, this chance element adds character to the otherwise blank area below the legs). The spots mean nothing—or mean “whatever.” In any event, they cannot but be seen.

In 1997, Dumas provided a procedural description for her works on paper: “Paper used on the floor. Watery ink thrown onto paper like a big blob. Work with Japanese and Chinese brushes very quickly while still wet. Hold paper up to let water run down or from left to right, to create skin-like texture.... The fluid quality is important.”²⁷ She works physically close to her sheet of paper, either squatting or resting on her knees in front of it, in position to lift it quickly to catch the potential of a flow of pigment. The paper is often human size and its manipulation requires a deft hand. “Painting is about the trace of the human touch,” she stated; “It is about the skin of a surface. A painting is not a postcard. The content of a painting cannot be separated from the feel of its surface.”²⁸ Here, Dumas inserted what might seem to be an irrelevant aside (her mind tends to race)—a painting, she said, is not a “postcard.” Her remark implies that painting—good painting, guilty painting—cannot be reduced to pure message, to an image as explicit as a postcard view, so explicit that its title must read redundantly. The stock imagery of a postcard limits both visual and verbal imagination to cliché. In contrast, the message of a

painted image, with its “trace of the human touch” and “feel of its surface,” moves beyond the nominal identity of its model. Even the most representational of images becomes complicated by having been drawn or painted, complicated by feelings experienced as the image was being made (not taken). So Dumas concluded: “Therefore, in spite of everything, Cézanne is more than vegetation and Picasso is more than an anus and Matisse is not a pimp.”²⁹ To put it less colorfully, the art of Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Matisse will never be interpreted adequately by those who attend to the stock associations of its subject matter alone. Cézanne’s view of a forest, Matisse’s display of his coy and brazen models, Picasso’s exposure of an anus no matter what the anatomical perspective—none of these characteristic features conveys the specific feel of the work. The thematic material amounts to what Dumas might call the nudity factor, the generalization, the predictable cliché in Cézanne, Matisse, and Picasso. The antidote to nudity is nakedness, as Dumas implies in a different context, considering *The Particularity of Nakedness* (1987): “It was not the nude I was looking for, nor the posing figure, but the erotic conditions of life that I was after. Two ‘subjects’ confronting each other.”³⁰ Nudity is repetitive impersonal cliché. Nakedness lives in the sensual exchange of the moment.

Dumas has been particularly sensitive to the factor of exchange in both art and life. “Painting,” she stated, “is about the trace of the human touch”³¹—a moving trace, passing through the experience of time and space. Having selected a photograph, she reproduces its general configuration, often tracing it with the aid of an opaque projector. She renders the taken image less dead, converting its formulaic nudity into the specificity and immediacy of nakedness.³² Touch is the vehicle, a medium in itself. It is reciprocal, a matter of touching and being touched: “two ‘subjects’ confronting each other.” The hand feels the set of sensations produced by its own actions. Dumas associates the painter’s touch with an erotically charged human relationship. The situation of the painter is analogous to what once occurred when the subject of portraiture encountered



the daguerreotype medium during photography's evolutionary infancy. The daguerreotype itself became a subject of representation, changing according to, and therefore depicted by, the portrait it "took."

Instantaneous photography abandoned this exchange, this erotic love affair between, on the one hand, the photographer and the equipment and, on the other hand, the equipment and the model: "With photographic activities," Dumas wrote, "it is possible that they who take the picture leave no traces of their presence, and are absent from the pictures."³³ Even the model may be absent: dead. Dumas turns to her own advantage the authorial anonymity of the press photographs she tends to favor, stating that the use of such sources eliminates the "mannerisms" that would enter her painting were she to work exclusively from her imagination.³⁴ She explained, "I don't want to worship my own handwriting."³⁵ Her personality and fantasy life are present in her art but her procedural decisions ensure that the "Dumas" in Dumas is not all that exists there. She is not her own cliché.

As one person responds to another (or to the Other in oneself), each party becomes the expressive medium for the other's self-understanding. The central meaning of Dumas's art is the fluidity of such relationships—in love, in politics, in art itself. Recounting her decision to move from her native Cape Town to Amsterdam in 1976, a development made possible by a scholarship grant, she acknowledged (with irony) the parallel significance of the three categories of experience to which she had committed herself. One: "My whole love life

was mixed up"—she was dividing her love between two men. Two: "My politics were mixed up"—she was resisting the divisions of apartheid, which put her at odds with her own society. Three: "My concept of art was mixed up"—as both a "so-called painterly person" and an "anti-painter," she was aesthetically divided against herself.³⁶ Her conclusion: "It was a good time to leave."³⁷ Dumas's love of a second man is the easiest of her problems to grasp in terms of its existential dilemma. Already in love with the first man, she began to love the second because she allowed experience (the unforeseen development of an emotional attachment) to interfere with the cultural law (love only one) that would have prevented her from recognizing her emotions in their full immediacy. Yet the spontaneity of an emotional experience does not guarantee that it is "the 'right' thing," and Dumas could not help but be troubled by her situation.

When Dumas paints from a source or model in photographic form, photography and painting, as well as the real-life model, become subjects to be experienced; photography and painting confront each other in Dumas's understanding. Whatever the status of the

The Particularity of Nakedness, 1987; oil on canvas; 55 1/8 x 118 1/8 inches; Van Abbemuseum Collection, Eindhoven

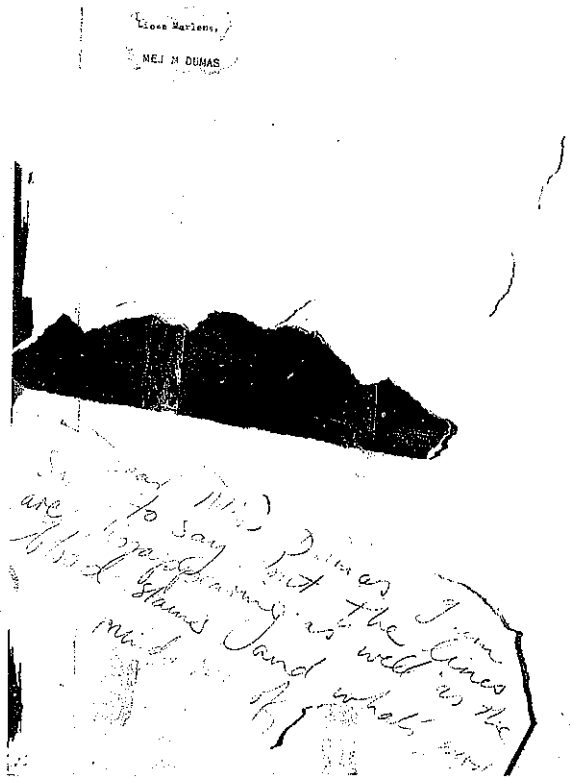
source image, she actively changes it in painting it, accepting her responsibility beyond the taking for several aspects of making—or remaking. The making may be more of a remaking because the relationship between taking and making is fluid. If it were more stable, Dumas would have little to worry over, less guilt to fear. Even during the nineteenth century, theorists understood photography as making as well as taking or finding. Against the concern that the new medium would “substitut[e] mere mechanical labor in lieu of talent and experience,” William Henry Fox Talbot, inventor of the paper-print process, noted that the new photographic medium left “ample room for the exercise of skill and judgment.”³⁸ According to Francis Wey in 1851, the soft-focus paper print, as opposed to the crisp daguerreotype plate, effectively “animated” the camera image, affording not only “the reproduction of planes and lines” but also “the expression of feeling”—feeling to be identified with the photographic image as well as with the object of representation and the emotional state of the photographer-artist who chose to arrange the picture.³⁹ The early critics and theorists were free to stress the photographic moment of stillness as a pictorial advantage; or, to the contrary, they could focus on all the allusions to movement and duration that such a finely descriptive image might still retain.⁴⁰ The photographic medium was there to be used. Which way might be the right way, the best way, was logically indeterminable and subject to being declared according to the politics of the moment.

Whatever: From Guilt to Grief

Perhaps images mean what they will: you make them, but they act too, by virtue of their material properties and emotional potential. They act on you, their viewer-creator—on your psychic state—just as they act on others. Dumas has referred to the demise of “the so-called passive spectator”; artists, she says, are now “stuck with (over)active collaborators, finishing off the artworks.”⁴¹ Does it matter what the interpreters say?

Whatever. In 2003, Dumas uttered this word in all its irony: “Now that we know that images can mean whatever.” In today’s colloquial English, “whatever” connotes critical resignation, an indeterminateness more comedic than tragic. “Whatever” intones with a shrug. It also expresses suspicion and can even be accusatory when coming as the sarcastic response to someone else’s statement. Dumas, a master of the tragic-comic, gives the word a humorous edge, yet embeds it in sober reflection. She knows that the viewer of an image brings his or her cultural indoctrination and personal history to bear on the perception of meaning, that differing cultures and histories generate a conflict of interpretations, that competing ideological structures lead individuals deep into moral confusion. “When I paint a ‘terrorist’ or ‘freedom fighter’ (the description depends on your point of view)...my painting does not clarify politics or explain a cause. I paint my anxiety.”⁴² She sees this doubt in her own eyes, and we see it in ours. “Whatever” (as a qualification) leaves morality open.

Dumas embodies cultural division: South African by birth and upbringing; privileged as white; disempowered as female; Afrikaans-speaking; speaking against the policy of apartheid that would maintain her white Afrikaner privilege; living in Amsterdam while maintaining emotional ties to Cape Town; nevertheless, by choice, more international than either Dutch or South African; a painter of the backsides of porn stars (*Mandy*, 1998) and of infants (*The Secret*, 1994); confronting fantasy (*Snow White in the Wrong Story*, 1988), fact (*Blindfolded*, 2002), and a theory of both (*Death of the Author*, 2003).⁴³ (What is theory?—a generalizing fantasy about particular facts.) For a Paris show in 1994, she wrote, “My fatherland is South Africa, my mother tongue is Afrikaans, my surname is French. I don’t speak French.”⁴⁴ And for a New York show the same year: “I am NOT a New Yorker. I am NOT Dutch. I am NO longer living in South Africa. I am always ‘not from here.’”⁴⁵ With a mobile identity, Dumas makes no excuses for who she is not. She is too many people to be typecast as one.



Coming of artistic age during the 1970s and 80s as a skilled painter, Dumas was “not from here” in an art-historical sense—out of sync with the prevailing view as to where artistic practice should be heading. Painting and its existentialist anxieties were supposed to have died a formalist death. During her early years in Europe, from 1976 to about 1983, this “born painter” (as one teacher called her⁴⁶) yielded to peer pressure, channeling much of her creativity into collage and other forms of construction with materials gleaned from features of the common culture. She often included language as an internal guide to her multivalent meaning (*Don't Talk to Strangers*, 1977) and sometimes arranged found images according to a structural principle (*Couples*, 1978).⁴⁷ Some might classify this body of work as a variation on Conceptual art, informed by psychology, anthropology, and the other human sciences; others might regard it as a type of structural abstraction, as formal an exercise as the painting that this type of work supplanted. Whatever the verdict, Dumas returned full time to her first love and recommitted herself to painting the human figure.⁴⁸ This took courage, for she had observed within her local community that “all the smart artists were doing other kinds of work”⁴⁹—almost anything but painting, especially the representational type.

To complicate matters, Dumas was choosing to concentrate on a medium traditionally identified with men—or, what may have been worse, dead men, those “authors” whose authority was rapidly passing from history, or at least from fashion.⁵⁰ Painting, “a medium declared dead...[i]t is an anachronism. It is outdated.”⁵¹ “The idea was that, apart from the fact that painting is dead, it’s also for dead males,” Dumas recalled.⁵² To the extent that painting had been associated with a lineage of great male “geniuses,” the political meaning of the death of painting was the demise of patriarchy, the end of gendering social and cultural authority as male. “Why not turn it around?” Dumas asked herself: “So I decided that instead of saying that in spite of the fact I’m a woman, I also like to paint, I’d say I paint because I’m a woman, I paint because I’m a blonde.”⁵³ Dumas wears her artificial blondness as a sign of her power to choose and to create according to her will.⁵⁴ “I paint because I like to be bought and sold,” she said, alluding ironically to her success in the art market (traditionally enjoyed by men far more than women) and with a nod to the history of women who have been led to sell their bodies in lieu of their creativity and imagination.⁵⁵ She is contradictory. She resembles a gestural artist like Willem de Kooning in the broad flow of her brush technique, but usually remains quite faithful to her base in photographic representation. Her images shock viewers out of the customary intellectual and emotional abstractions that would shield them from the problematic features of ordinary life, its sexuality, social contracts, and political conflict. She reveals the alien nature of babies (*Warhol's Child*, 1989–91); lends her personal touch to pornographic poses that offer predictable obscenities (*D-rection*, 1999); introduces the more disturbing obscenity of violence and torture, which should never be expected (*The Blindfolded Man*, 2007); and pictures the death that occurs against nature, by murder or suicide (*Stern*).

Don't Talk to Strangers, 1977, detail; oil, collage, pencil, and Sellotape on canvas; 49³/₁₆ x 61⁷/₁₆ inches; collection De Ateliers, Amsterdam

Opposite: Gerhard Richter, *Tote from 18. Oktober 1977*, 1988; oil on canvas; 24 1/2 x 28 3/4 inches; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection, gift of Philip Johnson, and acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest (all by exchange); Enid A. Haupt Fund; Nina and Gordon Bunshaft Bequest Fund; and gift of Emily Rauh Pulitzer



The figure shown in *Stern*, the political radical Meinhof, was dead when photographed. In Dumas's painting, this image survives a double death, like the figure in *Jen*. Meinhof's picture appeared in the German news magazine *Stern* (hence Dumas's title), and the painter took it—"took" with a particular irony, for her actual source was already once or twice removed from its origin. The original image was a police photograph, which *Stern* then published. Gerhard Richter took the image from *Stern* for his archive and in 1988 painted it three times. 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.⁵⁶ Richter had appropriated the image and similar photographs for his cycle of paintings *18. Oktober 1977* (1988), representing the deaths of several members of Meinhof's group, the Rote Armee Fraktion. Because Dumas chose to paint a photograph that had already been painted by an artist senior to her, her work became a commentary not only on the photograph and its subject matter but also on Richter, a ranking figure in a new European order of art. She commented playfully: "I also wanted to see with *Stern*, if I could take Richter's source out of its blur."⁵⁷

Richter blurred his images, mimicking a type of photographic filmic look: a distancing quality, an emotional fade. In contrast, Dumas's version is more graphic, more immediate; she made the image of death less dead. Her relatively crisp rendering of the rope

burn and shadow on Meinhof's neck gives it the potential to be seen as a necklace or decorative ribbon (ironically, known in English as a "choker"). Perhaps we learn from the ambiguity in Dumas's rendering of Meinhof that we should be wary of judging moral character from appearances. "It's not that *I* make things so ambiguous," Dumas insisted; "they are ambiguous."⁵⁸ But Richter, too, altered and ambiguated the image: "The photograph provokes horror, and [my] painting—with the same motif—something more like grief." Asked toward what his grief was directed, he replied: "That it is the way it is." He was grieving over human nature: "Grief is not tied to any [political] 'cause.'"⁵⁹ We grieve because we become aware that circumstances force individuals into ideological molds, models of one kind or another for a social order. When the social order fails, it takes the individuals with it. We grieve because we cannot prevent the tragedies that result from our beliefs, ideas, and causes. Richter's point was much the same as Dumas's—his grief was her guilt over realizing that we act in ignorance of the right course. What dies with the "death of painting," with the death of any medium, is its insight into intellectual and emotional life—its potential to make an indoctrinated person, any individual, less fixed in the social order, less dead. "Acknowledging and embracing ambiguity does not place one above suspicion," Dumas explained.⁶⁰ But painting is worth doing for the sake of extending the possibilities of moral choice.

Stem, 2004; oil on canvas; 43^{5/16} x 51^{3/16} inches; Tate, purchased with assistance from Foundation Dutch Artworks and Bank Giro Loterij, 2007



Now

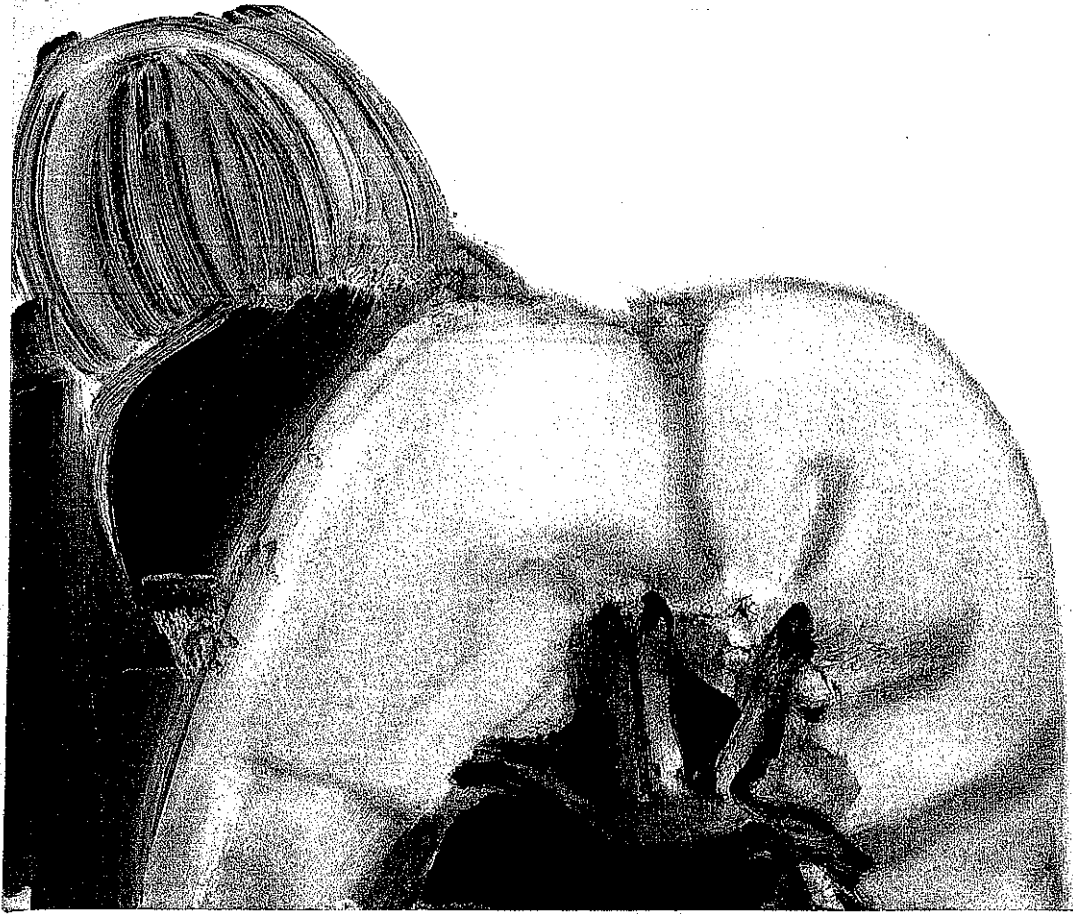
"Now that we know that images can mean whatever":

Dumas expressed the irony accompanying not only her "whatever" but also her "now." "Now," she said, now that we know that anything can mean anything, we have all the more need to be suspicious of the unacknowledged motivations that would lead meaning this way or that; we need to accept responsibility for our decisive actions. She seems to express the sensitivities of an existentialist, a type hardly belonging to "now." "All choices lead to ethics," she told her friend, artist Barbara Bloom; "Too many alternatives, combined with a lively imagination, lead you into an existential anxiety, where you are in continuous confusion and darkness."⁶¹ Her early references to guilt relate to her reading works by major figures of postwar European intellectual life, such as theologian Paul Tillich and perceptual psychologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In her undergraduate essay of 1974, she quoted from both (for example, this from Tillich: "The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt"⁶²). "Now"—with several decades of poststructuralist speculation leading us to accept the evasiveness of meaning as a quotidian fact—we may have become inured to living in a state of moral confusion. The confusion that extends beyond doubt no longer causes deep personal anxiety. Neglecting to accept responsibility for individual action in a conflicted society, we are likely to blame the evils of the world on conceptual abstractions rather than on our existential selves: the fault will lie in ideology, essentialism, and hierarchy, as well as in a certain "whatever" factor, the unavoidable play of structural difference.

Within the play of difference, anything can mean or refer to anything else—arbitrarily. When we live within this play of meaning, experiencing it, we feel liberated; but when we theorize this play, we risk stilling it. Dumas once quoted some relevant words of painter-critic Fairfield Porter: "Art is concerned with the particular and it reconciles us to the arbitrary. There can be no 'logical' communication at all, for the arbitrariness of the original experience will not survive a generalization

that is necessary for logical communication."⁶³ Wary that her contemporaries were replacing experience with a structural logic (playful or not), Dumas stated in 1998: "There is too much emphasis on the body these days, not our bodies but *the* body."⁶⁴ The body had become a conceptual abstraction, a photographic type, a pose: the female body, the male body, the black body, the white body—whatever. In a racist society, any marked perceptible difference in the body has the potential to inject race or ethnicity into a discourse, assigning to the terms of the difference a relative value. "There's black and white as races," Dumas noted, "and there's black and white as colors."⁶⁵ The former distinction (color as sign) holds meaning conceptually; the latter distinction (color as matter or mark) holds meaning experientially. Our existential doubt stems from our need for meaning, that is, the need to convert the mark into a sign. In matters of race, our culture suffers from having acquired the distinctions in meaning that it demands. In pictures, however, a white person can be colored black, and a black person can be colored white. Black and white, brown and pink, are mere colors. Dumas's explicit style of rendering—taking "Richter's source out of its blur"—provocatively blurs this other field of difference.⁶⁶

A large number of Dumas's paintings and drawings might be cited in this regard. *The Conspiracy* (1994) shows two young girls, one black with dyed blond hair (a Dumas alter ego?), the other white with dark hair. Is it a conspiracy of two races, threatening to combine what ought to remain separate? Or a conspiracy of two children, for two of any kind constitutes a conspiracy, an illicit like-mindedness? To know Dumas's source is to think differently, for the "black" girl is based on a family Polaroid of her daughter Helena looking quite dark and tanned in relation to a pale friend. The painter has merely extended the difference, not a matter of race but of color. For *Thumbsucker* (1994), Dumas rendered a white boy mostly black (but partly white and also blue and orange). The coloration is specific to the painting, not a cultural generality—color as an arbitrary mark that resists becoming a sign.⁶⁷ Among Dumas's models for the Magdalenas are both white ones like *Magdalena*



Fingers, 1999; oil on canvas; 15³/₄ x 19¹¹/₁₆ inches; collection Jan Andriessse



Miss Pompadour, 1999; oil on canvas; 18 ¹/₈ x 19 ¹¹/₁₆ inches; collection Dominic van den Boogerd, Amsterdam

(Newman's *Zip*) and black ones like *Magdalena* (Manet's *Queen*) (both 1995); but there are still others that seem to perform a coloristic transformation. An example is *Magdalena* (1995), a white, even blonde, woman who appears dark, even black. To complicate matters, areas that at first may appear as deep grays or blacks within this figure prove to consist of modulated reds, blues, and yellows. In the end, we are likely to perceive this figure as "white." But does not "black" skin also consist of reds, blues, and yellows?

Those desperate for meaning will convert color-marks into color-signs. And signs into other signs: "I get irritated when I draw a 'wortel' [carrot] and it is suggested that I want to draw a penis. If I want to draw a penis," Dumas stated, "I'll draw one."⁶⁸ We conveniently forget that the whatever factor in interpretation reflects on the interpreter first and only secondarily on the artist, if at all. If we are affected one way or another by sexual imagery, our response accords with our own sexuality, our desires for and fetishizing of bodies and objects. Each of us probably resists the notion that our own sexuality may not be private but instead fully shared with a class of people similarly indoctrinated by the general culture. However we think of this, we cannot assume that the situation has affected the artist in the same way. She, too, locates her sexuality in the particularity of her nakedness, not her nudity. In any event, the potential for meaning becomes all the stronger to the extent that painting remains open and ambiguous, resisting the photographic fixations of culture. This is its value, relative to photography. Culture is the objectifying fetishist, served by photographic imagery. Painting is the lover.

Closeness

In this brief passage of my lips toward her
cheek it was ten Albertines that I saw...
At the actual contact between flesh and flesh,
the lips...are alone; the sense of sight [has]
long since deserted them.

—MARCEL PROUST, 1920—21⁶⁹

When you're dead, you're dead for a long,
long time. —WILLEM DE KOONING, c. 1970⁷⁰

The closeness and contact characteristic of painting leads not to stillness and the death of the image but to increased animation. Dumas has produced at least one oil-on-canvas painting (there may be others) that brings images of death and kissing into generative ambiguity: *The Kiss* (2003). Her source photograph for this relatively small painting is a still from Alfred Hitchcock's black-and-white movie *Psycho* (1960), reproduced in a book illustrating the film's celebrated murder scene, which occurs as the female lead, Janet Leigh, showers. Stabbed multiple times, the character bleeds to death in the flow of water. The camera records her face-down on a cold porcelain-white floor—dead—yet seemingly returning the photographic look with an open-eyed stare. Rendering *The Kiss*, Dumas decided to close the woman's eye: "I couldn't get the 'open eye' to work in a painterly plausible way."⁷¹ She also gave the figure more of a true profile view, altering her relationship to the ground beneath. This slight change in perspective was not necessarily a deliberate strategy; it may have resulted from the rapid application of paint, as if the dead woman's orientation were a material as much as a figural intuition, a change occurring within the "mind" of the painting as much as in that of the artist. "If the painting does not want to go in the direction where I thought it was going when I started, then I let it go its own way to some extent. I love chance... Without surprise, no drawing."⁷² Dumas has also spoken of the chance perspectives introduced by the opaque projector she uses as an aid for large compositions: "It is not very 'accurate' and also does not care to be so. 'Strange' angles of perspective can be due to whatever type of chair I put the [projector] on."⁷³ Her language is significant: the painting will not go where it "does not want to go"; accurate is something the projector "does not care to be." I will return to this very familiar yet "strange" attribution of an alien volition.

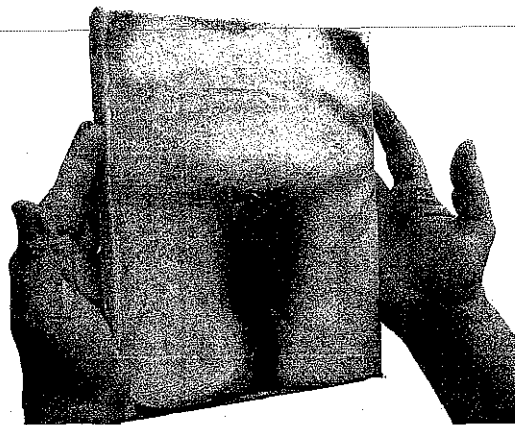
Even in death—but it has become less dead—the figural pose of *The Kiss* is ambiguous. It is an open question whether the cause of the ambiguity is Dumas's will or the painting's will. The Janet Leigh figure could just as well be kissing the ground as having fallen dead.

Dumas set the head tightly into the rectangular space of the canvas, hitting its four edges with four different elements present in her source: “two subjects confronting each other,” as she might say, Hitchcock’s film still and her rectangle. At the left, a ridged neck; at the right, ridges of the brow; at the top, an ear (not visible in the still); and at the bottom, lips against a horizontal slab, conceivably kissing. With a rational application of fantasy, Dumas imagines that the figure could be kissing another painting.⁷⁴ If so, *The Kiss* would be a painting on the theme of painting, not the themes of death and stillness. A painting can feature its play of mark (sensuality) as opposed to its play of sign (meaning). In this respect, *The Kiss* resembles *Immaculate* (2003), a torso fit snugly into its rectangle, as if kissing the framing edges (in the sense that two billiard balls are said to “kiss”). “An image needs edges to belong to,” Dumas wrote; and here we imagine a representational painting in love with its abstract frame.⁷⁵ As in composing *The Kiss*, Dumas rotated the source image slightly, causing the subject’s nipples to fit in near symmetry into the two upper corners of the small vertical canvas (two spots, like tacks on a studio wall).⁷⁶ The delicately brushed areas of this painting can cause a viewer to forget that it presents a full-frontal vulvic view—a description that evokes the pornographic character of its source. But this work is too personal, too touched, to function as porn.⁷⁷ It can be no more than the sign of pornography. Its specific materiality, its painterly mark, interferes with the viewer’s fixation on the clichéd porno pose of genital exposure. *Immaculate* is less dead than its source, more naked than nude. Without passing judgment on this body, Dumas takes it, remakes it with “the freedom of the amoral touch,”⁷⁸ and regards it only for what it is. She redeems *Immaculate*, buying back from society a body that had sold itself too cheaply.

Perhaps the main reason that an image of death became *The Kiss* is that Dumas closed its open eye. A few years prior, she had rendered the Proustian act of *Kissing with Your Eyes Closed* (1998) as a small work on paper. Proust famously elaborated on the closeness of kissing, its negation of the distance that vision needs for its effective operation. Dumas similarly noted that an artist is handicapped in attempting to show how kissing feels, for the act cannot be coherently repre-

sented from the position in which it occurs; to represent the kiss is to admit one’s distance from the actual sensation.⁷⁹ The closeness of kissing also eliminates the distance of gender (male and female lips are functionally the same, marked as different only by a culture of cosmetics). Dumas has commented on the irrelevance of sexual difference when applied to this type of human relationship: her image could be of two women, two men, or the more standard combination—“it doesn’t matter at all what the sex is.”⁸⁰ The eyes in *Kissing with Your Eyes Closed* are shut by the darkness of dark pigment. The rendering of the lips depends for its articulation on a narrow reserve of white between the two faces. The prominent hands, one dark and firmly drawn and the other somewhat tentative and faint, represent an exchange of the figures’ caress. Their linearity also lies flat and broad against the paper, evoking the touch and presence of the artist, who goes only so far in adjusting her handling of materials to the implicit demands of illustrative refinement. Her comment on *Kissing with Your Eyes Closed* moves from the general to the specific: “Certain (intimate) activities make people close their eyes, although not all of the people all of the time. Picasso is more the type that says a painter can be blinded...while others emphasize the actual seeing and optical effects more. I am more the Picasso type, in art, not necessarily in life, when it comes to kissing.”⁸¹

In Dumas’s experience, making art about bodily sensations is very much a tactile matter—articulated by following one’s hand, often rather blindly, instead of comprehending by eye the fixed image of a codified expression. By this standard, de Kooning, too, was “more the Picasso type.” Dumas’s interest in his art is longstanding, as her undergraduate essay demonstrates, although for many years she knew his work only through reproductions.⁸² The two painters have much in



common, beyond their connection to the culture of the Netherlands. In Dumas's sense, both are empathic types, releasing their feelings from the restrictions set by concepts. Like Dumas, de Kooning, who had worked as a commercial artist, was acutely conscious of fashion, the world of advertising, and the power of established photographic icons. He treated some of the vast store of modern popular imagery with reverence, but most of it with irony. His titles came after the fact and were also ironic, occasionally referring to specific individuals such as Mae West or Marilyn Monroe. His *Mae West* (1964) assumes a Dumas-like vulvic pose, as if the star were displaying her body before an adults-only audience.⁸³

De Kooning's *Marilyn Monroe* (1954) has the more iconic tempered sexuality of a smiling pin-up girl. "She" does not depict the real Marilyn Monroe but a Marilyn Monroe type, determined by the resemblance that de Kooning and his friends perceived once the painting had been completed.⁸⁴ A film shot in 1959 shows de Kooning turning his attention to a pin-up calendar in his studio, with a photograph modeled after well-known images of the Hollywood star. In a deadpan but bemused manner, he remarked: "I like the type more than the original."⁸⁵ If only because of Monroe's preeminence, her appearance having been converted by publicity photos into gendered cliché, de Kooning's preference for the derivative type over the original model must have been an odd position to hold. Why would he have chosen the secondary image over the primary, the look-alike rather than the look? Perhaps he intuited that the type offered him a choice: although he could have focused on the regularity of the pose, he was also free to perceive the variation, the degrees of color in the type, as it shifted, so to speak, from black to white, white to black. The generic anonymity of the pin-up—this general and yet specific image—demonstrates that it is as much in the nature of the type to change as to remain fixed in its representation of the authoritative original. Like de Kooning's *Marilyn Monroe*, each of Dumas's models, whether the "white" *Magdalena* (*Newman's Zip*) or the "black" *Magdalena* (*Manet's Queen*), raises its dead cliché to a higher form of life.

Opposite: Dumas holding *Immaculate*, 2003; oil on canvas; 97/16 x 7 1/16 inches; collection of the artist

Above: *Kissing with Your Eyes Closed*, 1998; mixed media on paper; 13 x 14 inches; collection Jerome L. and Ellen Stern



De Kooning imitated the postures of the models he actually drew from life as an attempt to assimilate the internal feel of another's body; this allowed him to draw the body with conviction. Like Dumas, he enacted a physical closeness to his art, stressing the substitution of hand for eye as a way of making the configured view intimate. He went so far as to practice drawing with his eyes closed, feeling his way around the confines of the paper, separating his sense of handling from ordinary vision, giving the paper a Proustian "kiss." He also drew in an intentionally casual distracted state, often taking his sources from the transient imagery of the television screen.⁸⁶ A drawing he did sometime during the late 1960s or 70s, one of many of the type, shows a female figure again in a Dumas-esque vulvic pose, recalling his image of Mae West. He created this drawing either blindly or extraordinarily quickly, with the result that insufficient space remained at the top of the small sheet to establish a properly proportioned head. The eyes lie atop a flattened head; the hair hanging off to the left side is composed of two or three fluid strokes. De Kooning produced great numbers of these rapid office-pad sketches. They are alive in the extreme, a distraction from any thoughts of being "dead for a long, long time."

Dumas has a deftness analogous to de Kooning's. She often challenges her talent, as he did his, by setting obstacles to its execution. Painting images of female and male exhibitionism from the pages of pornography, she focuses on the cultural (not moral) affront of genital



and anal exposure.⁸⁷ She often highlights the nominally offensive features of the imagery as a homeopathic strategy to return them to the body in its psychological wholeness, its nakedness. She reintroduces ambiguity to these images of formulaic ritual, making the poses less dead by mimicking them within the range of gestures that can be scaled to her hand moving within the range of canvas or paper. The watercolor *Head Rest* (2001) shows a female figure bent over and around herself so that her underside is on top and her top, her head, rests at the bottom. The anatomical orientation, in relation to the pictorial frame, has been inverted. Like de Kooning's spread-leg vulvic figure set into the unyielding boundaries of his paper, Dumas's *Head Rest* seems to have been generated by a felt miscalculation. As if having run out of pictorial space as she followed the bend of the figure, she resorted to compressing its dark head into the lower right corner of the vertical rectangle. The rest of the figure, quite pink, tilts upward toward the left, crowned by a splayed hand that suggests a narcissistic caress and perhaps masturbation. The woman touches herself. Yet each of us has hands, and any person, male or female, can imagine his or her hand being substituted for the one Dumas has indicated—just as Dumas's own hand, while drawing, must have been fondling the figure's hand and every other form in the artwork, including the flat plane of the paper. Like attracts like; a mimetic process imitates at every opportunity. Pornography, however, is not mimetic: generic in nature—nude rather than naked—it is already like other pornography.⁸⁸ As pornography, *Head Rest* seems to call out like a generic template: any hand, your hand here (imagine it where the figure's hand is). But the placement of the image within the rectangle is another matter entirely, with an emotional valence of a different sort.

The formulaic gesture of hand fondling backside also characterizes the pose in *Fingers* (1999). Here, too, Dumas distinguishes her work by setting the figure into the rectangle in a challenging manner, with the head as far to the upper left as possible. The splay of the figure's hand corresponds to the splaying of her legs, while variations in hue—bluish, pinkish violet, and yellowish tones—fan out across the buttocks, as if extending the implied touch and movement of the hand. This hand belongs not only to the figure but also to the artist and, by empathic contact, the viewer. Apparently, Dumas followed *Fingers* with the rapidly executed brush-and-ink drawing *After Fingers* (1999). Its hand is all fingers, no thumb, as it spreads over the vulva, touching but not grasping. My guess is that this way of rendering the hand is Dumas's erotic intuition; it feels "right," this "amoral touch," which involves nothing so aggressive as grasping (hence, no thumb). The pornographic image, as Dumas remakes it, suggests an exploratory, potentially masturbatory touch that is neither more nor less erotic than Dumas's own flowing exploratory line. The line moves so engagingly that you imagine your hand here, drawing.

Willem de Kooning, from left to right:
Mae West, 1964; oil and charcoal on resin-coated paper;
23¹³/₁₆ x 18⁵/₈ inches; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,
Smithsonian Institution, gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966

Marilyn Monroe, 1954; oil on canvas; 50 x 30 inches;
Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University
of New York, gift of Roy R. Neuberger

<no title>, c. 1965–80; charcoal on paper; 10 x 8 inches;
The Willem de Kooning Foundation

<no title>, c. 1965–80; charcoal on paper; 10 x 8 inches;
The Willem de Kooning Foundation

Stretch: From I to Me

When Dumas draws a line, the line says "I am aware and conscious." —JAN ANDRIESSE, 2003⁸⁹

At two points in this essay, I implied a need to return to a constellation of related issues: the play of chance in Dumas's art, the importance of relationships of exchange, and the transfer of will from artist to work of art. Speaking to this set of concerns, her partner, painter Jan Andriesse, attributes consciousness to lines that exist only because Dumas drew them. I take his remark quite literally.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was not uncommon for philosophers to speculate that consciousness extended down from the higher forms of animal life to the lower ones and, even beyond this, to forms of inanimate being. During the late 1960s, this idea of a universality of sentience was revived by Gilles Deleuze in his studies of Henri Bergson. The notion was that all forms of life are composed of physical matter, and the degree of concentration of matter yields consciousness. We have to imagine that highly conscious beings like ourselves are somehow dense with matter—matter that converts to mind—whereas the barely conscious rocks are rather loosely put together. Deleuze would say that each of us is physically "contracted" and therefore tense with energy, whereas a rock is physically "expanded" and therefore lax, or relaxed, so relaxed that it is unlikely to have a serious thought.⁹⁰ Rocks incline to the cliché; they resist change.

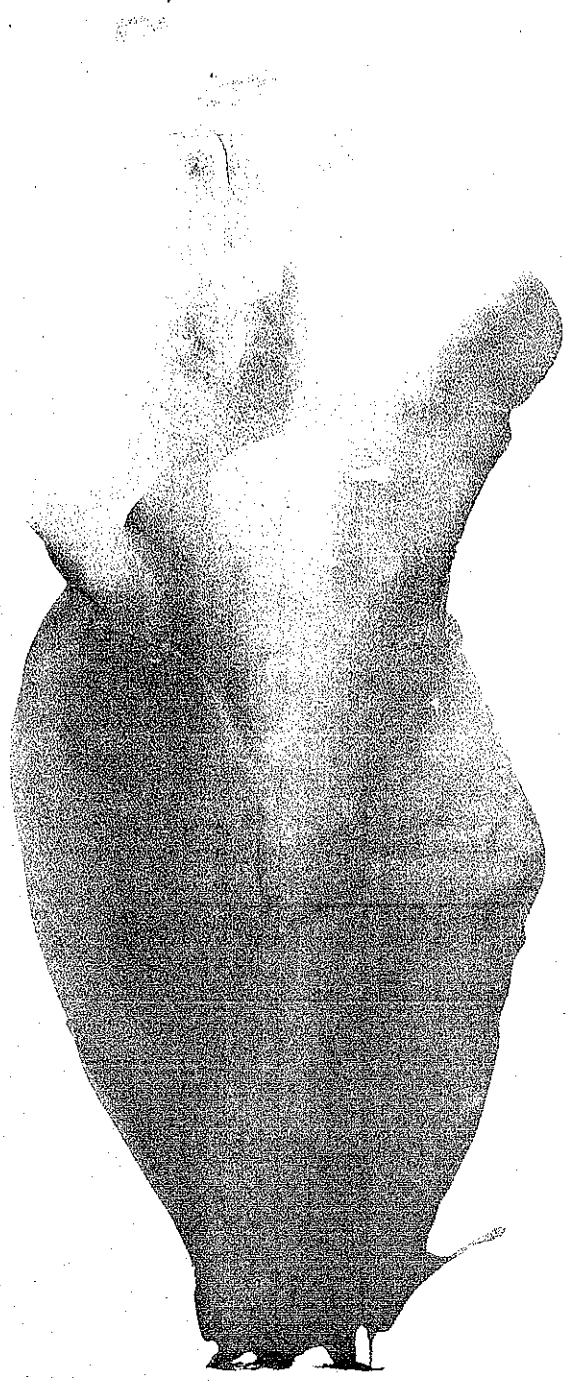
Charles Sanders Peirce, who was Bergson's somewhat older contemporary, expressed the same notion by stating that physical "matter is effete mind."⁹¹ He meant that all the stuff we regard as mere stuff does have a mentality, but its consciousness has grown inactive because of habit and regularity. The problem with mere matter is that it follows the laws of nature too predictably. Even in some humans, the pattern of thought can become so rigid that we feel that the person's brain must be composed of stone. "Thought is not necessarily connected with a brain," Peirce noted; "it appears in the work of bees, of crystals, and throughout the purely physical world."⁹² Peirce and Bergson, and then later

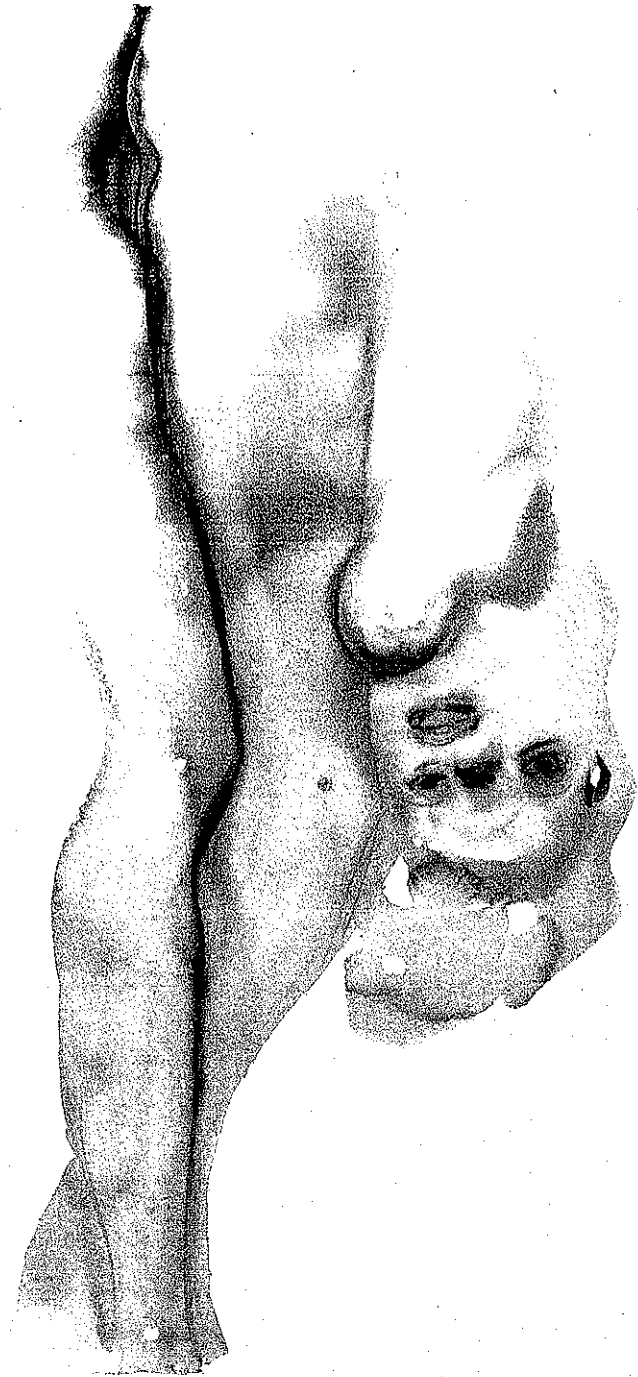


Deleuze, escaped the strict dualism of mind and matter, believing that materials can become energized like living bodies, and that matter has the potential to respond to every stimulus and stress with feelings of its own.

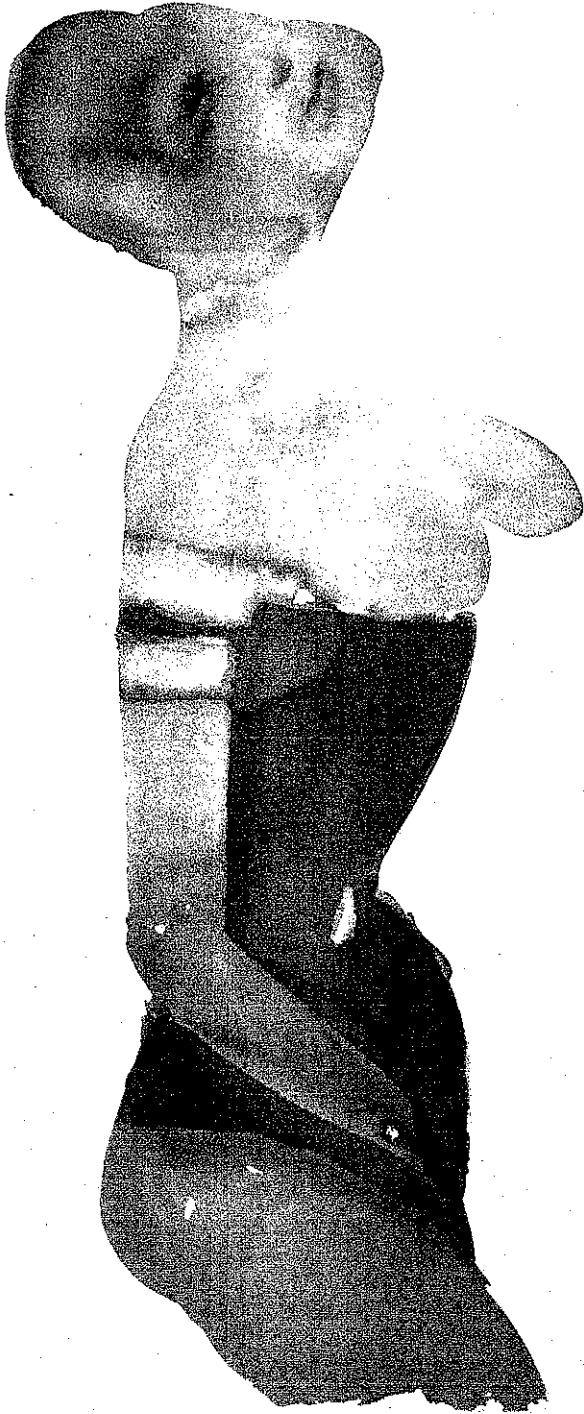
When we think this way, we may find ourselves imagining that a piece of matter—a spread of colored canvas, for example—must be thinking too. But our habit is to resist this explicit conclusion. We reason instead that we project our thoughts onto matter as an indirect way of representing and objectifying them. Why would we do this? Perhaps to be able to think about our thoughts, to be self-reflective. But what can it mean to "project" thoughts? Is it like film projection—an image that can alight onto any surface without leaving a material trace? Rather than conceiving of projection as a dematerialized phenomenon, the Peirce-Bergson-Deleuze position implies that the material stuff we use to express our thoughts and feelings is capable of absorbing this psychic energy; as a result, the material stuff itself receives a boost in sentience. Otherwise, why would we feel that virtually any material thing is capable of responding to us and even capable of initiating the exchange, of "speaking" to us? We find it natural to use this metaphor about mere material things. Among such things, works of art "speak" the most clearly, as if they achieved the highest degree of sentience, becoming our equals—

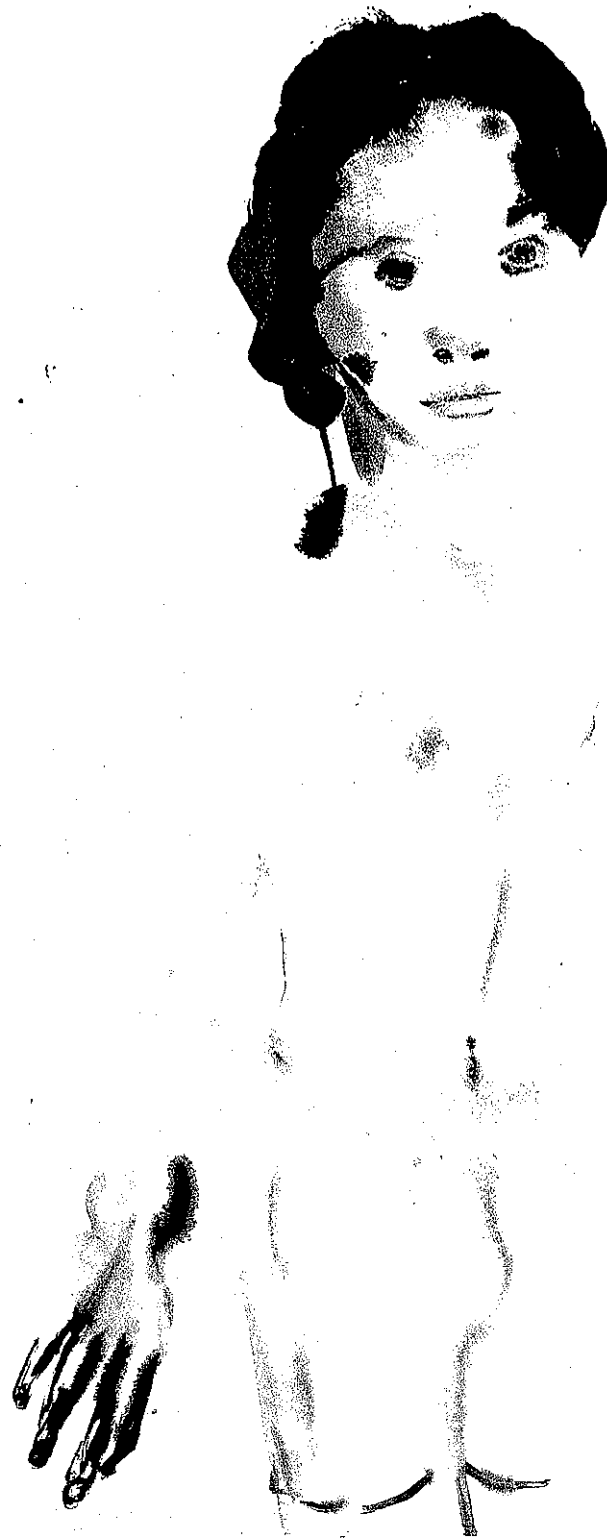
Head Rest, 2001; watercolor on paper; 26 x 19 1/2 inches; private collection





Dorothy D-lite, 1998; ink and acrylic on paper; 49³/₁₆ x 27⁹/₁₆ inches; collection of the artist, on long-term loan to the De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg, The Netherlands, 2002





Young Boy (Pale Skin), 1997; ink and watercolor on paper; 49³/₁₆ x 27⁹/₁₆ inches; private collection



or maybe better. Given Dumas's opinions and practices, we would surmise that her painting speaks more forcefully than the photography she uses as its source. But it also speaks ambiguously and in riddles.

When we attend to a Dumas painting—or when Dumas attends to a Dumas painting—it is as if human will were acknowledging a certain necessity: it must yield to human sensation as well as to the sentience of other bodies, including other material things. This is the meaning of a line that says, “I am aware and conscious.” We learn this lesson from the flow of lines in *After Fingers*, and it might also be gathered from a remarkable statement by Barnett Newman, who, like de Kooning, always occupied a place on Dumas's horizon of historical reference.⁹³ When asked about the meaning of *Uriel* (1955), a painting eighteen feet wide, Newman offered a witty deflection, yet a statement more serious than it might appear (his humor is not unlike Dumas's own). Referring to the great expanse of greenish blue that occupies about three quarters of the width of *Uriel*, he explained: “I wanted to see how far I could stretch it before it broke.”⁹⁴

Newman's statement exemplifies a grammatical switch that all of us tend to make, Dumas included. We pass from a transitive mode to an intransitive mode, taking responsibility for the initial action but not for the entirety of the consequence. The situation proves how limited our control is, but also relieves some of the anxiety: we have “things” with which to share the blame. Newman did not say, “I wanted to see how far I could stretch it before I broke it.” Instead, he ended his sentence on an intransitive note, as if his action were stepping into an unknowable void. He seems to ascribe consciousness to the color of *Uriel*, which would break

when it wanted or needed to. This was not a situation that the painter could control but rather one of equal exchange—not a matter of surrender but of risk and indeterminacy. The painter and the paint were engaged in active existential dialogue, “two ‘subjects’ confronting each other.” Newman's side of the exchange had no known law to guide it; he had to act without conscious regulation, “never knowing.” Forcing his art beyond what he understood would succeed, he extended his hand to feel how it felt. It was the color that stretched and became energized, and Newman borrowed the sensation back from the condition of the material. In Dumas's case, energy returns to her from the form of the drawn hand as it quickly emerges in works like *Fingers* and *After Fingers*.

The language of Newman's explanation came only as an afterthought. He recognized the desire expressed in his word *want*—“I wanted to see how far I could stretch it”—only after he had exercised his pictorial judgment, which had no fixed purpose to guide it. Art must be experiential, a learning process more than either the application of knowledge or the satisfaction of selfish desire. The moral point in Newman's case was not so much to acknowledge the independent consciousness of the colored paint but to perceive the human value of stretching to the point of breaking—that is, the value of acting in whatever capacity one can, when one cannot predict the consequences.

Some of Dumas's images are stretched to the breaking point. I think of *Dorothy D-lite* (1998), a representation of a porn star with a remarkable capacity to bend her body in two—another vulva-and-anus view. In this instance, Dumas severely reduced the presence of a self-caressing hand prominent in the source photograph. Why? Perhaps because she wanted to emphasize the length and character of the line running up from the ankles to the anus (or down from anus to ankles). The line is not necessarily a continuous stroke, but it has a compelling character as an integrated sensation. As it took its form, it may have changed the artist's direction in relation to her own composition. The line went as far as it could, just like its living model, but liberated from her pose and its cliché. There is something of

After Fingers, 1999; ink on paper, 5 7/8 x 8 1/4 inches; collection David Teiger



Newman's risk in *Dorothy D-lite* and, also, a bit obscurely, something of de Kooning. He, too, could find aesthetic interest in a long and varied leg line. A woman seen from the rear, probably bending over, is the subject of one of his series of rapid-fire sketches.

When Dumas spoke of her interest in two subjects confronting each other—she and de Kooning, she and Newman, she and a lover, she and a line—she may have associated the status of “subject” with the capacity to use the pronoun “I.” This would be natural: if you have a serious encounter with a line, you may feel that “the line says ‘I am aware and conscious.’” It is an I; you are an I. Because the association of the I with subjectivity is so natural, it is also, as Dumas might say, “suspect” (for the very reason that, like the accepted use of a medium, anything declared natural drifts into ideological cliché).⁹⁵ When involved in an exchange with a person or a thing, even just a line, you are not only an I but also a Me. Things happen—to you, to me. The problem with speaking from the position of the I lies in its distance from the Me; the I, isolated and untouchable, creates a fixed self-image, like a photographic pose. It repeats itself, becoming unreceptive to changing conditions, insisting on acting in character. The Me is less like an image (dead), more like a mark (less dead). It has its own character but is forever affected by the marks surrounding it. It can move and change, responding to contingencies.

If there are two kinds of artists (but, of course, there are many), then Marlene Dumas is a Me more than she is an I. “If the painting does not want to go in the direction where I thought it was going when I started,” she said, using the I (as we all must), “then I let it go its own way to some extent.” This statement has already been cited. I repeat it for its manifestation of exchange in action, Dumas as an I becoming a Me. If only “to some extent,” she lets the painting “go its own way.” She followed with this: “I love chance.”⁹⁶ She is entirely open to chance, which belongs to no one but targets the Me. Chance accepted, rather than directed, bears no guilt.

NOTES

1. Marlene Dumas, "A Comparison Between Goya's *Saturn Devouring One of His Sons* and de Kooning's *Woman I*," undergraduate essay, Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, 1974; courtesy Dumas. Dumas made a point of calling this early writing to my attention as a relevant document. It seems entirely consistent with her later thinking. Attending to Dumas's early notebooks and drawings, Matthias Winzen also noticed a remarkable degree of continuity in the artist's way of articulating intellectual and aesthetic matters from her childhood years to the present time; see Winzen, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman," trans. Pauline Cumbers, in Winzen, ed., *Marlene Dumas: Female* (Cologne, Germany: Snoeck, 2005), 35–41. During the course of preparing this essay, Marlene generously answered numerous questions and offered fruitful suggestions for research; exemplary in her self-reflection, she remains her own best interpreter. I thank those who graciously allowed me to view Dumas's works in their collections: Jerome and Ellen Stern, Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg, Jan Maarten Boll, and Blake Byrne. For essential aid in gathering documentation, I am grateful to Jolie van Leeuwen, Rudolf Everhuis, Esther Adler, Jack Tilton, Barbara Schwan, Amy Schichtel, and Roger Anthony. For his insights, I thank Jan Andriessse. My graduate assistant Caitlin Haskell contributed her independent research and understanding to this essay.
2. Dumas, "Background" (1982), reprinted in Marlene Dumas, *Sweet Nothings: Notes and Texts*, ed. Mariska van den Berg (Amsterdam: Galerie Paul Andriessse, 1998), 18.
3. Dumas, "Suspect," in Gianni Romano, ed., *Marlene Dumas: Suspect* (Milan, Italy: Skira, 2003), 35. Dumas sometimes writes in a form of free verse, using separate lines for individual sentences or phrases. Here and in several other instances, I have eliminated the versification of her statement, so long as it does not bear on my use of it. When quoting her, I do, however, retain her various forms of emphasis, such as capitalization.
4. Dumas, "The Private Versus the Public," in *Marlene Dumas: Miss Interpreted* (Eindhoven, The Netherlands: Van Abbemuseum, 1992), 43 (original emphasis).
5. Dumas, narration for the film *Miss Interpreted* (Marlene Dumas), directed by Rudolf Evenhuis, Joost Verhey, and Eugène van den Bosch, MM Productions, The Netherlands, 1997.
6. The point is not that the photographic image need be regarded as objective, but that it has been playing this cultural role convincingly. See, for example, Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message" (1961), in *Image—Music—Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 15–31; and my "Phototropism (Figuring the Proper)," *Studies in the History of Art* 20 (1989): 161–79.
7. Dumas, in Robert Enright, "The Fearless Body: An Interview with Marlene Dumas," *Border Crossings* 23, no. 3 (August 2004): 32.
8. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981 [1980]), 78–79 (sentence order reversed).
9. *Ibid.*, 79 (original emphasis).
10. For an account of photography as a dead metaphor—otherwise known as a catachresis or cliché—see my "Photography/Catechresis," in Michael Kelly, ed., *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 4 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3:502–06. In French, the noun *cliché* refers to both photographic negatives and snapshots.
11. Dumas, "Suspect," 35.
12. This distinction does not preclude the use of media other than painting to combat the perniciousness of clichéd imagery. Photography itself has been used with critical acumen by artists as diverse as Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall, and Chuck Close. The danger is to fall into demonstrating how dead the photographic cliché can get to the exclusion of offering an alternative practice—restating the problem so that the theoretical side of the question gains acceptance without corresponding movement on the pragmatic side.
13. Rémy de Gourmont, "Cinématographe," *Mercure de France* 69 (1 September 1907): 126 (author's translation).
14. Dumas, "Women and Painting" (1993), in *Sweet Nothings*, 74.
15. Dumas, statement to the author, 30 June 2007. For the photographic source, see Amos Vogel, *Film as a Subversive Art* (New York: Random House, 1974), 273. Dumas used the Dutch edition of this book. The still image is from Yoko Ono's film *Fly* (1971). Dumas cropped the image to focus on the relation of the woman's head to her upper torso.
16. Dumas, "Seeing Is Not Believing," in *Marlene Dumas: The Second Coming* (London: Frith Street Books, 2004), n.p.
17. Dumas, statement to the author, 22 August 2007.
18. Dumas, in "Barbara Bloom in conversation with Marlene Dumas" (July 1998), in *Marlene Dumas* (London: Phaidon, 1999), 21. Dumas credited this corrective thought—not an X but a painting of an X—to Henri Matisse (Dumas, statement to the author, 2 January 2008).
19. Dumas, in Enright, "The Fearless Body," 34.
20. Dumas, "Figuration" (1999), at www.postmedia.net/dumas/dumas6.htm. For the Lacanian connection, see Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 105–22 (seminar of 11 March 1964).
21. Analogously, painting that represents the "death" of its tradition eliminates the organic quality of its process: "[Robert] Rymán produces a kind of dissolution of the relationship between the trace and its organic referent. The body of the artist moves toward the condition of photography: the division of labor is interiorized." Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning" (1986), in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990), 231. Rymán investigated the painting support, its attachment to a wall, the nature of paint and marking, the act of signing, and other features of the traditional medium as if they were separable components of the product, like the photographer's posing of a model, arranging the lighting, and so forth. With Rymán's *Brides* (1997), Dumas answered Rymán's challenge, characteristically combining irreverence, incisiveness, and humor; on this work, see Marlene van Niekerk, "Seven M-blems for Marlene Dumas," in *Marlene Dumas: Selected Works* (New York: Zwirner & Wirth, 2005), 13, 15. *Colorfields* and *Lead White*—paintings of 1997, like Rymán's *Brides*—might also be viewed as Dumas's response to the extremes of modernist abstraction. In addition, *The Brides of Dracula* (1997), a particularly colorful and exuberant painting, plays on the so-called death of painting: "Painting can't die. It belongs to the realm of the non dead. It's too old, primitive, and pleasurable. And it is protected by Count Dracula, who does not reflect in mirrors, nor show up on photographs." Dumas, "A Gothic Story," in Annette DiMeo Carlotto, ed., *Negotiating Small Truths* (Austin: Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, 1999), 33.
22. Walter Benjamin, "Short History of Photography" (1931), trans. Phil Patton, *Artforum* 15, no. 6 (February 1977): 48 (original emphasis).

23. Dumas, "The Eyes of the Night Creatures" (1985), in *Sweet Nothings*, 25.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Dumas, statement to the author, 30 June 2007.
26. Dumas has exhibited *After Photography with After Stone* (2003) and *After Painting* (2003), so that the reference is to renderings of the dead in the three media: photography, sculpture, and painting. She has also added a similar image titled *After All (Is Said and Done)* (2003).
27. Dumas, notes (3 May 1997), collection records for *Chlorosis (Love sick)* (1994), the Museum of Modern Art, New York (courtesy the Museum of Modern Art). Jean Christophe Ammann has linked Dumas's sensitivity to water and wateriness to her concentrated touch: "She is the water-saturated earth itself. She is not the one who sees, she is the one who touches." Ammann, "Tender, Loathsome, Shrewd and Ecstatic," trans. Rebecca van Dyck, in Thomas Knubben and Tilman Osterwold, eds., *Marlene Dumas: Wet Dreams*, exh. cat. (Ravensburg, Germany: Städtische Galerie; and Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2003), 112.
28. Dumas, "Women and Painting," in *Sweet Nothings*, 75.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Dumas, "The Private Versus the Public," 42. See also Dumas, "The Private Versus the Public" (1987), in *Sweet Nothings*, 36–37, in which she alludes to John Berger's commentary on nakedness and nudity: "To be naked is to be without disguise.... The nude is condemned to never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress"; Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1972), 54.
31. Dumas, "Women and Painting," 75.
32. For large works, Dumas's use of an opaque projector (also known as an episcopo) allows her to establish the general compositional layout of a figure or scene immediately, which in turn enables her to introduce the various details rapidly and assuredly, suiting her concern for fluidity (Dumas, statement to the author, 28 June 2007).
33. Dumas, "The Private Versus the Public," in *Miss Interpreted*, 43.
34. Dumas, statement to the author, 28 June 2007.
35. Dumas, "Background," 15.
36. See the statement dated 1975, from a notebook Dumas kept while at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town; reproduced in Dumas, "The Michaelis School of Fine Art (1970s)," in *Marlene Dumas: Intimate Relations*, exh. cat. (Johannesburg: Jacana Media; and Amsterdam: Roma Publications, 2007), 15.
37. Dumas, narration for the film *Miss Interpreted (Marlene Dumas)*.
38. H. F. Talbot, "Calotype (Photogenic) Drawing," *Literary Gazette*, 13 February 1841, 108.
39. Francis Wey, "De l'influence de l'héliographie sur les beaux arts," *La lumière* 1 (9 February 1851): 2.
40. For an early statement stressing stillness, see George Butler, letter to Fox Talbot, 25 March 1841, quoted in Larry J. Schaaf, *The Photographic Art of William Henry Fox Talbot* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 150.
41. Dumas, "Why Do I Write (About Art)" (1998), in *Marlene Dumas: Suspect*, 91.
42. Dumas, "About Time and Again" (2003), in James Rondeau, ed., *Marlene Dumas: Time and Again* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2003), n.p.
43. On "internationalism": "I have been using the term internationalism as an open-ended term. I have not used multi-culturalism because I think that certain associations, both historical and cultural, make it a discourse of the past.... I personally tend to talk of a new internationalism. I want to see an internationalism that constantly questions contemporary practice"; Dumas, in Gavin Jantjes, "Interview with Marlene Dumas," *Fruitful Incoherence: Dialogues with Artists on Internationalism* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1998), 55. Dumas also wrote, regarding the conflict of her artistic identities as South African and Dutch: "I don't want it both ways. I want it more ways." Dumas, in *Marlene Dumas: Intimate Relations*, 88. Dumas's title *Death of the Author* is an allusion to the well-known essay by Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (1968, reprinted in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard [New York: Hill and Wang, 1986], 49–55). Her image derives from a deathbed photograph of writer Louis Ferdinand Céline. She described her depiction as "a geometry of tragedy at work.... The skull is bending, pulled down by gravity"—an effect of her empathic manner of rendering. Dumas, "The Death of the Author," in *Marlene Dumas* (Amsterdam: Galerie Paul Andriessse, 2004), n.p.
44. Dumas, "Home Is Where the Heart Is" (1994), in *Sweet Nothings*, 82.
45. Dumas, "Not from Here (I)" (1994), in *Sweet Nothings*, 84.
46. Dumas, in "Barbara Bloom in conversation with Marlene Dumas," 8.
47. On Dumas's works from this period, see Jonas Storsve, "Good Lady, You That Have Your Pleasure in Exile," trans. Gila Walker, in Storsve, ed., *Marlene Dumas: Nom de Personne/Name No Names* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2001), 19–20.
48. On Dumas and the situation of the early 1980s, see Matthias Winzen, "Sensitive Surfaces, Clear Thinking: The Work of Marlene Dumas," in Michaela Unterdörfer and Winzen, eds., *(In Search of) The Perfect Lover* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2003), 68.
49. Dumas, in "Barbara Bloom in conversation with Marlene Dumas," 8.
50. Eric Fischl, also committed to representational painting, remarked: "The death of painting is a metaphor. It is a way of speaking about how our relationship to the sacred, to [the] abstract, or to the purely human has changed. The argument is whether the change is an evolution or a devolution"; Fischl, interview by Miriam N. Kotzin, in *Per Contra* (fall 2006), available at www.percontra.net/4fischl.htm. On the "death of painting," see also note 21.
51. Dumas (stating the general opinion), "About Time and Again," n.p.
52. Dumas, in "Barbara Bloom in conversation with Marlene Dumas," 15.
53. *Ibid.* See also Dumas, "Women and Painting," 74: "I paint because I am an artificial blond woman."
54. Her natural hair color is darker; see Storsve, "Good Lady, You That Have Your Pleasure in Exile," 18.
55. Dumas, "Women and Painting," 75.
56. Dumas used the version of the image from the Richter archive as she knew it from its reproduction in Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2000), 111.
57. Dumas, statement to the author, 29 November 2007.
58. Dumas, statement to the author, 30 June 2007 (in conversation: her emphasis).
59. Gerhard Richter, "Conversation with Jan Thorn Prikker Concerning the Cycle 18 October 1977, 1989," in *The Daily Practice of Painting*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Obrist, trans. David Britt (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995), 189, 200, 203.
60. Dumas, "Do the Right Thing (extracts): Catch 22" (1997), in *Marlene Dumas* (1999), 141.
61. Dumas, in "Barbara Bloom in conversation with Marlene Dumas," 26.

62. Quoted in Dumas, "A Comparison Between Goya's *Saturn Devouring One of His Sons* and de Kooning's *Woman I*" n.p.; from Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1952), 190.
63. Fairfield Porter, as quoted by Dumas, "The Private Versus the Public," in *Miss Interpreted*, 42. The statement is from Porter's essay of 1969, "Art and Scientific Method," referring to the advantage of open suggestive description of works of art—in effect, an avoidance of ideological implications. Dumas's quotation conflates two different sentences but captures the sense: see his "Art and Scientific Method," in Porter, *Art in Its Own Terms: Selected Criticism 1935–1975* (New York: Taplinger, 1979), 267–68. If one theorizes Porter's position itself, one finds it expressed by others in many different ways. For example: theory "get[s] us to recognize similarities between things that, so long as we continue to think about them in the fullness of their empirical detail, will always seem very different." Richard Wollheim, "Response to James I. Porter," in Shadi Bartsch and Thomas Bartscherer, eds., *Erotikon: Essays on Eros, Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 143.
64. Dumas, in "Barbara Bloom in conversation with Marlene Dumas," 28.
65. Dumas, "Blackbirds and Young Boys" (1994), in *Sweet Nothings*, 85. On Dumas's use of black and white, sometimes to signify race, sometimes as a play on color in drawing or painting, see also her discussion in Jantjes, "Interview with Marlene Dumas," 59.
66. "There is a dark figure lying on a white sheet in *Waiting (For Meaning)* (1988). It is NOT that there is an Afro-American lying in a (hospital) bed"; Dumas, statement to the author, 21 October 2007 (original emphasis).
67. Dumas wrote of her painting *Reinhardt's Daughter* (1994), one of two pictures, similar but for the color, of her daughter Helena: "You change the color of something and everything changes (especially if you're a painter)." Dumas, "Reinhardt's Daughter" (1994), in *Sweet Nothings*, 86.
68. Dumas, in Jantjes, "Interview with Marlene Dumas," 56. See also Dumas, "Why Do I Write (About Art)" (1998), 91; and Dumas, in Enright, "The Fearless Body," 34.
69. Marcel Proust, *The Guermentes Way* (third book of *Remembrance of Things Past*), trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Random House, 1970 [1920–21]), 262–63 (sentence order reversed).
70. Willem de Kooning, quoted by John McMahon, the artist's studio assistant during the 1960s and early 70s, in conversation with the author, April 2001.
71. Dumas, statement to the author, 27 December 2007. For Dumas's source image, see Mark Cousins, *Scene by Scene: Film Actors and Directors Discuss their Work* (London: Laurence King, 2002), 64.
72. Dumas, in Yuko Hasegawa, "Interview with Marlene Dumas" (2 and 7 December 2006), in *Marlene Dumas: Broken White* (Tokyo: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), 150; and statement to the author, 7 October 2007.
73. Dumas, statement to the author, 29 November 2007.
74. Dumas, statement to the author, 27 December 2007.
75. Dumas, "Immaculate," in *Marlene Dumas* (2004), n.p. Ironies accompany the term "immaculate" because it refers to being without spots or marks of any kind. A painting cannot be "immaculate" in the strictest sense; this degree of virginity would constitute a "death of painting" in blankness.
76. For the source image, see Mark Rotenberg and Laura Mirsky, *Forbidden Erotica: The Rotenberg Collection* (Cologne, Germany: Taschen, 2000), 387.
77. "I don't think that painting actually works very well at the level of turning people on. If I really want to get aroused quickly, I wouldn't go to paintings." Dumas, in Enright, "The Fearless Body," 28–29.
78. Dumas, "Amoral Touch," statement (February 2000), in Christianne van Lomm, ed., *Anton Corbijn/Marlene Dumas: Strippinggirls*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Stichting Actuele Kunstdocumentatie, 2000), n.p.
79. Dumas, statement to the author, 28 June 2007.
80. Dumas, statement to the author, 21 October 2007.
81. Dumas, statement to the author, 7 October 2007.
82. Dumas, statement to the author, 17 December 2007. Dumas recalled that certain of her early paintings and drawings had features inspired by what she knew of de Kooning and other members of the New York School. See the works of the early 1970s reproduced in Dumas, "The Michaelis School of Fine Art (1970s)," 16–18.
83. Titles for de Kooning's works were often generated by playful conversations among the artist, his wife Elaine de Kooning, and a circle of friends and associates including critic Harold Rosenberg, as well as various studio assistants and dealers. When Dumas discovered that de Kooning had named a painting *Mae West*, a reference she herself had made in *West* (1997), she took this as confirmation of the two painters' subtle affinity. She was struck in addition by de Kooning's *Lobster Woman* (1965), for it reminded her of her own *The Shrimp* (1998) (Dumas, conversation with the author, 30 June 2007). In both of these oddly titled works, Dumas's watercolor and de Kooning's tracing in oil, an exploratory painting process generated shapes and markings suggestive of crustacean bodies within the context of rendering a female figure.
84. On the fortuitous resemblance of this image to Marilyn Monroe, see Selden Rodman, *Conversations with Artists* (New York: Capricorn, 1961), 104; and Thomas B. Hess, *Willem de Kooning Drawings* (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1972), 41. During 1954, the year of her marriage to Joe DiMaggio and subsequent divorce, Monroe was an especially newsworthy character and a common cultural reference; nearly any image of a woman with blond hair and red lips was likely to evoke her. According to Edvard Lieber (representing Willem and Elaine de Kooning, letter to Teresa Spillane, 3 February 1988, De Kooning Foundation, New York), "neither Mr. nor Mrs. de Kooning recall an instance when he titled a work before painting it" (original emphasis).



85. De Kooning, statement from the printed script for a film by Robert Snyder, *Sketchbook No. 1: Three Americans, Willem de Kooning, Buckminster Fuller, Igor Stravinsky* (written by Michael C. Sonnabend, distributed by Time Inc., 1960). The complete audiotape passage from the film itself is as follows (de Kooning referring to the calendar nude on his studio wall): "Not the same as Marilyn Monroe. Maybe I like this one more than Marilyn Monroe. In other words, I like the type more as the original version." With his linguistic quirkiness, de Kooning substituted "as" for "than."
86. On de Kooning's various methods, see my "'With Closed Eyes': De Kooning's Twist," *Master Drawings* 40, no. 1 (2002): 73–88.
87. "Showing a naked backside is different from showing an anus. The anus being a bigger taboo than any other, still." Dumas, quoted in Storsve, "Good Lady, You That Have Your Pleasure in Exile," 26.
88. There is comedy to be perceived in Dumas's arrangement of three similar splayed-leg poses of 1999, hung along a single wall: (*Male*) *Stripper*, *On Stage*, and *Spread*. It is as if she were conducting a structural analysis of pornographic practice: the first pose, male and frontal; the second pose, female and rear; the third pose, female and frontal. Abstractly, from a visual distance, the form of all three poses is the same.
89. Jan Andriessse, "Paint Is Matter and Paint Matters (On How She Does It)," in *Marlene Dumas: Suspect*, 33.
90. Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1988 [1966]), 74.
103. "Consciousness and matter, body and soul...meet each other in perception... We may without scruple attribute to perception something of the extensity of matter." Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1911 [1896]), 292–93.
91. Charles Sanders Peirce, "Scientific Metaphysics: The Architecture of Theories" (1891), in *Collected Papers*, ed. Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and Arthur W. Burks, 8 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958–60), 6:20.
92. Peirce, "Apology for Pragmaticism" (1906), in *Collected Papers*, 4:438.
93. For Dumas's commentary on her *Magdalena* (*Newman's Zip*), see Silvia Eiblmayr, ed., *Marlene Dumas: Models* (Stuttgart, Germany: Oktagon, 1995), 28.
94. Barnett Newman, quoted by Harold Cohen, introduction to "Barnett Newman Talks to David Sylvester," BBC radio broadcast, 17 November 1965, typescript, Barnett Newman Foundation, New York. The context may be significant. Newman was speaking to painter Harold Cohen, who had restretched *Uriel* when Newman delivered it to a collector in London. Cohen may have understood a friendly pun at his own expense: he was good at stretching canvas, but Newman was good at stretching color.
95. Dumas, "Suspect," 35.
96. Dumas, in Hasegawa, "Interview with Marlene Dumas," 150.



Opposite: Willem de Kooning, *Lobster Woman*, 1965; oil on tracing paper; 18⁷/₈ x 23⁷/₈ inches; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Bequest, 1981

Right: *The Shrimp*, 1998; watercolor on paper; 49⁹/₁₆ x 27⁹/₁₆ inches; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main