SFMOMA ANNOUNCES SOFT POWER—INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITION FEATURING NEW COMMISSIONS AND RECENT WORK BY 20 ARTISTS

Opening in October 2019—the First Major Exhibition for SFMOMA Organized by Curator of Contemporary Art Eungie Joo

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (April 10, 2019)—Timely and provocative, SOFT POWER is an exhibition about the ways in which artists deploy art to explore their roles as citizens and social actors. Appropriated from the Reagan-era term used to describe how a country’s “soft” assets such as culture, political values and foreign policies can be more influential than violence or coercion, the title SOFT POWER suggests a contemplation on the potential of art and offers a provocation to the public to exert their own influence on the world. The exhibition opens at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) on October 26, 2019 and remains on view through February 17, 2020.

Organized by Eungie Joo, curator of contemporary art, and presented exclusively at SFMOMA on two floors of the museum, the exhibition features new and recent work by 20 international artists working in 12 countries. More than three quarters of the works in SOFT POWER are commissions and new works never before presented in the United States. Taken together, the works demonstrate what cultural theorist, filmmaker and catalogue contributor Manthia Diawara has called a solidarity between intuitions—a concept that acknowledges the complexity, darkness and opacity from which our reality emerges—the poetry and imagination of our differences. According to Joo, “Professor Diawara’s solidarity between intuitions expresses how specific works can enhance our understanding of others by association and relation, while maintaining their distinct contexts and content. I trust the public can
relate to many of the concerns of the artists in SOFT POWER, and hope that this exhibition will unleash an untapped energy among us.”

“SOFT POWER reflects SFMOMA’s commitment to living artists and the world we share, as outlined in our new Strategic Plan,” said Neal Benezra, Helen and Charles Schwab Director of SFMOMA. “The diverse practices and perspectives represented in this exhibition embody the goals of this museum: to embrace new ideas, push boundaries and share new ways of looking at our world through the lens of contemporary art.”

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The majority of works in SOFT POWER have never been presented in the U.S., including the four-channel video installation The Specter of Ancestors Becoming (2019) by Tuan Nguyen, co-founder of The Propeller Group. Co-produced by SFMOMA and commissioned by the Sharjah Art Foundation, the work explores the creation of memory and the agency that affords. Nguyen’s remarkable collaboration with descendants of French colonial soldiers once stationed in Vietnam—tirailleurs Sénégalais—features stories written by three members of the Vietnamese community in Senegal. Enacting fictionalized vignettes that reveal their own imaginings and experiences, his collaborators call forward the unresolved ghosts of history, receiving them with compassion and grace.

The 15 artists’ commissions for SOFT POWER also include five new sculptures by Haig Aivazian that explore the relationship between mythology and nation-building; the installation Who’s Afraid of Ideology, Part 2 by Marwa Arsanios; a site-responsive installation by Dineo Seshee Bopape; a new mural by Minerva Cuevas inspired by the history of Smokey the Bear and the environmental impact of fire; a sound sculpture enveloping the fourth floor by Cevdet Erek; a series of sculpture by Hassan Khan that echoes his concurrent solo exhibition at the Palacio de Cristal in Madrid; a performance and video by Tanya Lukin Linklater on encounter as a form of repatriation in collaboration with the Hearst Museum of Anthropology in Berkeley; an installation and photographic diptych by Cinthia Marcelle based on the traces of economic instability; a performance by Jason Moran in early 2020, along with a published conversation between Moran, IONE and Jessie Baird about the revolutionary power of the
dream state; the first chapter of Carlos Motta’s new project on LGBTQI Dreamers; four large-scale abstract paintings by San Francisco Art Institute alumnus Eamon Ore-Giron; ongoing research into the market potential of gas hydrate by Pratchaya Phinthong; Xaviera Simmons’ enormous painting installation inspired by and responding to Jacob Lawrence’s The Migration Series (1940–41); and a series of “flat” sculptures based on teepee covers by Duane Linklater. Highlighting the technology of mobile architecture, Linklater’s new canvases patch together distant elements that comprise indigenous reality. Incorporating the ancient geometric patterns of the Omashêko Cree, a large format inkjet printer and natural pigments that he harvests locally, Linklater produces objects masking their own purpose through their form: nonfunctioning teepee covers, now devoid of architectural purpose, but imbued with new cultural purpose.

SOFT POWER is also enlivened by several existing works, including a changing installation of five massive landscape drawings and tent from the durational performance Drawing a Line through Landscape by Nikhil Chopra at documenta 14; the premier of LaToya Ruby Frazier’s, Flint is Family, Part 2, in which Shea Cobb and her daughter Zion escape the ongoing Flint water crisis and “return” to their inheritance in Mississippi; Hassan Khan’s remarkable video installation Jewel (2010); a series of 15 banners and small abstract sculptures by Dave McKenzie; Pratchaya Phinthong’s “documentation” of migrant bilberry pickers in Finnish Lapland, Give More Than You Take (2010); and a wall installation and sculptures by Tavares Strachan from his Invisibles series. The exhibition features two works by Nairy Baghramian, including Retainer (2013), produced for her first major exhibition in the U.S. and extending her examination of systems of power, context, architecture and the materiality of sculpture. In this work, chromed steel supports large translucent slabs of cast resin and silicon reminiscent of a dental or gynecological intervention in process, but at a scale that confronts the full body. Within the context of the exhibition, Baghramian’s work suggests the temporal precision of physical states of matter, conjuring vast possibilities of adaptation, suffering and survival.

FULL LIST OF ARTISTS INCLUDED IN SOFT POWER:

Haig Aivazian (b. 1980, Beirut, Lebanon; lives and works in Beirut)
Marwa Arsanios (b. 1978, Washington, D.C.; lives and works in Beirut)
Nairy Baghramian (b. 1971, Isfahan, Iran; lives and works in Berlin)
Dineo Seshee Bopape (b. 1981, Polokwane, South Africa; lives and works in Johannesburg)
Nikhil Chopra (b. 1974, Kolkata, India; lives and works in Goa)
Minerva Cuevas (b. 1975, Mexico City, Mexico; lives and works in Mexico City)
Cevdet Erek (b. 1974, Istanbul, Turkey; lives and works in Istanbul)
LaToya Ruby Frazier (b. 1982, Braddock, Pennsylvania; lives and works in Chicago)
Duane Linklater (b. 1976, Ontario, Canada; lives and works in North Bay, Ontario)
Tanya Lukin Linklater (b. 1976, Kodiak, Alaska; lives and works in North Bay, Ontario)
Cinthia Marcella (b. 1974, Belo Horizonte, Brazil; lives and works in São Paulo)
Dave McKenzie (b. 1977, Kingston, Jamaica; lives and works in Brooklyn)
Jason Moran (b. 1975, Houston, Texas; lives and works in New York)
Carlos Motta (b. 1978, Bogotá, Colombia; lives and works in New York)
Tuan Andrew Nguyen (b. 1976, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City)
Eamon Ore-Giron (b. 1973, Tucson, Arizona; lives and works in Los Angeles)
Pratchaya Phinthong (b. 1974, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand; lives and works in Bangkok)
Xaviera Simmons (b. 1974, New York, New York; lives and works in New York)
Tavares Strachan (b. 1979, Nassau, Bahamas; lives and works in New York)
PROGRAMMING

October 24 – Artists’ talk with exhibition curator Eungie Joo
October–February
• Open rehearsals by Tanya Lukin Linklater in the galleries
• Performance by Jason Moran
• LaToya Ruby Frazier and The Sister Tour
• Conference on sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity and race at the border conceived by Carlos Motta in conjunction with the University of California, Santa Cruz

ORGANIZATION + SUPPORT

Lead support for SOFT POWER is provided by Helen and Charles Schwab. Major support is provided by the Ford Foundation, Diana Nelson and John Atwater, and Katie and Matt Paige. Generous support is provided by Sir Deryck and Lady Va Maughan.

ABOUT EUUNGIE JOO, CURATOR OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Eungie Joo joined the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) in 2017 as curator of contemporary art, a newly established role that supports the museum’s mission to engage with the art and artists of our time. Previously Joo was curator of Sharjah Biennial 12: The past, the present, the possible (2015) in the United Arab Emirates. The exhibition included the work of over 50 artists and cultural practitioners from 25 countries and featured new works, performances and site-specific commissions by 36 of those artists, including SOFT POWER participating artists Nikhil Chopra, Hassan Khan and Cinthia Marcelle; as well as Julie Mehretu, Damián Ortega, Taro Shinoda, Adrián Villar Rojas, Haegue Yang and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye.

Joo was Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Programs at the New Museum in New York from 2007–12, where she spearheaded the Museum as Hub initiative and curated the 2012
New Museum Generational Triennial, The Ungovernables. She was artistic director of the 5th Anyang Public Art Project/ APAP 5 (2016); director of art and cultural programs at Instituto Inhotim in Brazil (2012–14); commissioner for the Korean Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009); and founding director and curator of the Gallery at REDCAT in Los Angeles (2003–7). In addition to many other distinctions, Joo received the Walter Hopps Award for Curatorial Achievement in 2006. A frequent contributor to exhibition catalogues and magazines, she is editor of Rethinking Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education (Routledge, 2011) and co-editor of Art Spaces Directory (ArtAsiaPacific and New Museum, 2012). She received her doctorate in Ethnic Studies from the University of California at Berkeley.

PUBLICATION: Soft Power: A Conversation for the Future

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, Soft Power: A Conversation for the Future, with essays by artist Marwa Arsanios on Ecofeminism; filmmaker and cultural theorist Manthia Diawara on the poetic concepts of Edouard Glissant; Whitney Museum of American Art curator Adrienne Edwards on the state of time-based art; writer Yasmine El-Rashidi on the colonization of narrative: SOFT POWER curator Eungie Joo on the exhibition; and composer Jason Moran in conversation with playwright and poet IONE and linguist Jessie “Little Doe” Baird on dreams and their manifestations. In addition, each participating artist is profiled in a 6-8 page section featuring installation images of the exhibition and commissioned contributions by a striking lineup of curators, thinkers and writers including: Haytham el-Wardany on Haig Aivazian; Athena Athanasiou on Marwa Arsanios; Eungie Joo on Nairy Baghramian and Cinthia Marcelle; Portia Mahlodi "Uhuru" Phalafala in conversation with Dineo Seshee Bopape; Naem Mohaiemen in conversation with Nikhil Chopra; Max Haiven on Minerva Cuevas; Cevdet Erek on his practice; LaToya Ruby Frazier on her project Flint as Family; Hassan Khan on the concepts at play in his work; a photo essay by Duane Linklater; Magdalyn Asimakis on Tanya Lukin-Linklater; Meg Oní in conversation with Dave McKenzie; Karma Chávez on Carlos Motta; Jovanna Venegas on Jason Moran; Koyo Kouoh in conversation with Tuan Andrew Nguyen; Marcela Guerrero on Eamon Ore-Giron; Thanavi Chotpradit on Pratchaya Phinthong; Brian Keith Jackson on Xaviera Simmons; and Stamatina Gregory on Tavares Strachan. The publication Soft Power: A Conversation for the Future is distributed by Rizzoli and will be available in January 2020.

HOURS AND ADMISSION
Open Friday–Tuesday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Thursday 10 a.m.–9 p.m. Closed Wednesday.

Adult general admission to SFMOMA is $25; admission for seniors 65 years and older is $22; and admission for visitors ages 19 through 24 is $19. General admission and special exhibitions for all visitors aged 18 and younger are free.

Private guided tours and group discounts for SOFT POWER are available through the SFMOMA Group Sales team. Tours are one hour in length and are not included with museum admission. Tours must be booked at least two weeks in advance. For more information or to submit an inquiry, please visit sfmoma.org/groups.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
151 Third Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
SFMOMA is dedicated to making the art for our time a vital and meaningful part of public life. Founded in 1935 as the first West Coast museum devoted to modern and contemporary art, a thoroughly transformed SFMOMA, with triple the gallery space, an enhanced education center and new free public galleries, opened to the public on May 14, 2016. Since its inaugural year, the expanded museum has welcomed more than one million visitors annually.

Visit sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

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IMAGE CREDITS

Tanya Lukin Linklater with Liz Lott, The treaty is in the body, 2017; courtesy the artist and Winnipeg Art Gallery; © Tanya Lukin Linklater

Nairy Baghramian, Retainer, 2013 (installation view 2013, SculptureCenter, New York); courtesy the artist

Nikhil Chopra, Drawing a Line through the Landscape, 2017 (production view, Bratislava); courtesy the artist, Chatterjee & Lal and Galleria Continua; photo: Madhavi Gore