

Marlene Dumas

open-end

Texts for the visitors' booklet
written and collected by
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Rosenberg, Amsterdam.
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Mezzanine: *The Myths and Muses
of Marlene Dumas*, film by Rudolf
Evenhuis, 2022, 38 minutes, subtitles
in English and Italian, in loop



Kissed

2018, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 cm
Private collection

Kissed, to receive a kiss.

There is the first kiss, which may not be the best,
There is always the fear of a fall,
after which “nothing will ever be the same as before.”
(MD 2021)

This small painting was based on a still from Jean Renoir's film *Partie de campagne* (1936), showing the one and only kiss, which is the key moment in the movie.

In the painting, the sky is reflected in the woman's face. The face is the landscape where emotions are expressed (see *Kissing* in Room 14). To see the kiss, the viewer has to come really close to the painting, to see the light and dark colors merge to form an image of a couple.



D-rection

1999, oil on canvas, 100 x 56 cm
Private collection, long-term loan to De Pont Museum, Tilburg

Dumas looked at heterosexual and gay porn magazines to see what kinds of poses models adopt to arouse their viewers sexually. This painting, however is of a different genre. *D-rection* shows an icy colored young man, alone, looking down at his erect dark purple penis, not at his viewers. He seems slightly amazed by his own sexuality, by this miraculous natural phenomenon, which is not directed at anyone in particular. It is an ordinary, involuntary occurrence, just as the morning-glory flower opens at dawn and closes at sunset. The title, however, re-directs and changes the mood. This touch of humor reminds us that painting is a formal language in which shapes interact and directions matter.



Turkish Girl

1999, oil on canvas, 100 x 56 cm
Private collection, Madrid

Dumas' *MD-light* exhibition in 1999 consisted mainly of single naked figures in various titillating poses, inspired by photographs from sex magazines. The title of this exhibition aligns with the custom of assuming pseudonyms, which is a common practice among actors in the adult entertainment business. In Dumas' paintings the bodies dominate the space; they are unashamedly in your face, with their genitalia ostentatiously exposed. They provoke, often in bright candy colors, like the *Turkish Girl*, with her electrifying pink and purple tones which compel you to look at her, while she looks at you.

It's the pleasures of painting
the poses of pleasure
the privilege of being looked at
the plays of seduction
the light of the night
it's nothing personal
it's plain delight.
(MD 1999)



About Heaven

2001, ink and crayon on paper, 16 x 22 cm
Collection of the artist

Dumas often incorporates written text in her small suggestive ink-wash drawings. In this case she speculates on possible connections between eroticism, death, and time:

If death
Is a womb
then heaven
is a body without fear
that invites one
to enter from
any side
one pleases
and just for a while
Time doesn't matter.

Dumas' drawings are never studies for paintings, but finished works in their own right.



Longing

2018, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm
Private collection, New York

It is only through a few suggestive greenish contours in the lower left corner that the face appears out of the almost formless painting. The sensual expression thus created evokes a mood of longing and waiting. It is a momentum that Dumas deals with regularly.

I would like my paintings to be like poems. Poems are like sentences that have taken their clothes off. The meaning of a poem is what its beat and rhythms do, how the words move on the page. Poetry is writing that breathes and jumps and leaves spaces open, so we can read between the lines.
(MD 2012)



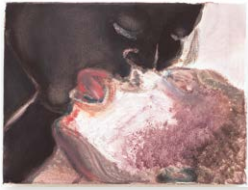
Awkward

2018, oil on canvas, 300 x 100 cm
Private collection

Awkward was inspired by a newspaper image of a man and a male youth on an ancient Greek earthenware cup. Dumas was fascinated by the elegance of the stylized figures. She initially thought they represented a man and a woman. In fact it doesn't really matter what sex they are; it's about two people, trying to touch one another.

In *Awkward* Dumas depicts two figures in profile, turned to face each other. Like mythological Greek deities the figures are at once larger-than-life and overwhelmingly human. Their awkwardness emerged spontaneously as Dumas struggled to fit two figures into the space of the narrow vertical canvas.

Dumas has likened the creation of this work to falling in love: an unpredictable and open-ended process which is filled with bliss and discovery as much as with disappointment and awkwardness.



Tongues

2018, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 cm
Collection of Leslie and Jeff Fischer

People kiss in different ways and kissing engages many different parts of the body. There are butterfly kisses or vampire kisses, but also, for example, kissing passionately, using our tongues, and with our mouths open, colloquially called “French kissing.” Compared to the paintings *Kissed* (see Mezzanine) and *Kissing* (see Room 14), *Tongues* is an example of a rougher type of kiss. It is not a careful, tender, or awkward touch, but an intertwining of tongues and textures, painted as if in a rush.



Homage to Michelangelo

2012, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm
Pinault Collection

“Fate” is a sad word. “Destiny” is slightly better. Either way, as we age, the difference between them diminishes. The older we grow the more likely it becomes that whatever we wish to do or are doing might be our last chance to do it.

In Milan you can see Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper*, as well as the sculpture Michelangelo was working on at the time of his death, the *Pietà Rondanini*. Michelangelo wrestled with this subject, but was unable to complete it. The sculpture represents Mother Mary trying to lift the corpse of her son in order to give him life a second time. Here we see a grieving mother in a desperate struggle to reconcile herself to the loss of her son.

The *Pietà Rondanini* in Milan inspired this Homage, as well as the exhibition *Sorte* in 2012, along with Dumas’ paintings *Pasolini*, and *Pasolini’s Mother* who, like the Virgin Mary, survived her murdered son (see Room 17).



The Gate

2001, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 cm
Private collection

This painting draws attention to the boundary between inside and out, seeming to suggest that the site of pleasure, in this case sexual, is neither in the one or the other, but between the two and often suspended. In *The Gate* the space between the woman’s thighs is as emphatic as the thighs themselves.

The title refers to Barnett Newman’s painting, *The Gate* (1954). Like Newman’s work, Dumas’ *Gate* plays with a notion of Heaven, and with positive and negative space in a formal way. Dumas has often said that her better works deal with abstract notions in figurative terms: the struggle to dispose of illusionism while being unable to do without it.



Miss Pompadour

1999, oil on canvas, 46 x 50 cm
Private collection, Amsterdam

"*Miss Pompadour* is painted in sketchy and scant, semi-transparent patches of color consisting of largely rubbed-out paint. Some parts of the body are rendered articulately – eyes, mouth, bottom – while others are merely sketched. The contours of the buttocks and garter are elegant, while the hair and forearm are rendered loosely. That contrast is crucial. The very life of the painting derives from the contrast between description and suggestion; between explicitness and subtlety, between the rough and the refined. Those contrasts fortunately remain unresolved. The woman shamelessly displays not only her buttocks, but, also, most unusually, her vulva and anus."
Dominic van den Boogerd, 2000

Although confrontational in her pose, the woman's facial expression seems gentle and somewhat melancholic. *Miss Pompadour* is also an allusion to the sugar-sweet nudes, the ideal mistresses of François Boucher (1703–1770), for whom Dumas has a soft spot.



Fingers

1999, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm
Private collection, Amsterdam

Dumas typifies *Fingers* as a cold painting of a hot subject. Like *Miss Pompadour*, this work, too, forms part of the *MD-light* series (see also *Turkish Girl* and *D-rection* in Room 1).

Hubert Damisch, a French philosopher who specialized in art history and aesthetics, argued that beauty is rooted in sexual arousal. In Dumas' depictions of naked men and women, the suggestive power of the images and the explicit nature of pornography lie uncommonly close to each other.

Adult entertainment or what I do (when you are far away)
What do I do when I use a picture of a man or woman that I do not love, know or even want to know in real life. Why do I use source images from pornographic books as models for my figures, if it's not pornography that I'm after? Because I can't see myself when I do the things I do, I don't know what I look like when I look at you.
(MD 2007)



The Crucifixion

1994, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 cm
Private collection. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

The Crucifixion shows the splayed body of a frog whose belly and thighs have the tender fleshy quality of Dumas' paintings of infants. And yet we know that children are often cruel to these amphibians and often tear them apart, responding perhaps to the sight of the upturned creature's exposed vulnerability. Frogs can breathe and absorb water through their very soft skin. They need a moist environment to survive.

Frogs carry many different associations related to magic and superstition. In a well-known fairytale it represents the notion of transformation: an ugly frog is kissed and turns into a handsome prince.

Paintings need lovers as frogs need kisses to reveal their secrets. Not every frog is a prince, however, and not every painting is worthy of a lover.

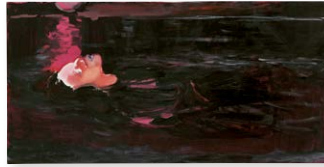


Lovesick

1994, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm
Private collection. Courtesy Frith Street Gallery, London

This is a gloomy painting. The naked figure, seen from the back with outstretched limbs, forms a cross, suggesting an abstract sign. In this position the woman looks very vulnerable, as if she has been arrested and is being investigated or subjected to a body search. Or could it be that she is just hopelessly in love and feels like climbing up the wall, perhaps because her love is unrequited.

There must be a way to make art about being in love, art that is erotic, sexy, tender and filled with a darkness that is awesome, but not sick. (MD 1994)



Red Moon

2007, oil on canvas, 100 x 200 cm
De Ying Foundation

A figure floats in the water, her face illuminated by a red moon that magically colors the darkness of the night.

Although the execution is different, pictorial associations link this work to John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (1851-1852). Ophelia, the tragic female protagonist in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, was heartbroken after hearing that Hamlet did not want to marry her. She gradually lost her mind and ended up drowning herself. For centuries the character Ophelia has been used for analyses of "female madness."

Dumas' lady, however, might not be drowning in desperation, but rather floating freely, at ease with her own independence and submission to the river taking her across to an unknown shore.



The Visitor

1995, oil on canvas, 180 x 300 cm
Private collection

In contrast to the established tradition of paintings that situate the viewer as voyeur, this work explores conventional notions of the "male gaze," most famously exemplified by Manet's *Olympia* (1863) and Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907). Dumas' *Visitor* locates the spectator behind the "spectacle," marking the viewer as both participant in the expectant line-up and as orchestrator of this female commodification. Along with the other players in the scene, the viewer's eye is drawn to the illuminated rectangle at the far end of the room, which suggests the imminent arrival of a client.



Magdalena (A Painting needs a Wall to object to)

1995, oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm
Private collection. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery,
Antwerp

This was one of a group of paintings made for the Dutch Pavilion at the Venice Biennial in 1995 (see also *Magdalena* in Room 9). Most were large frontal views of female figures, whereas Dumas unveiled a series of tall and narrow canvases, hung in sequence and all christened “Magdalena,” alluding to the biblical Mary Magdalene, who has often been portrayed as a penitent “fallen woman,” a foil to the Virgin Mary. Each painting depicts a nude or semi-nude female figure emerging from a dark background. They were drawn from various sources including art-historical images of Venus, and the body language of contemporary fashion models such as Naomi Campbell. Removed from any obvious context, much of their possible “meaning” can be found in their subtitles.

The subtitle of this *Magdalena* refers to the way paintings are displayed: nearly always hung on a wall. It is also a pun on the word “object.”



The White Disease

1985, oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm
Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland

This painting from 1985 is based on a photograph taken by a friend of Dumas who worked at a dermatological clinic

The metaphorical title *The White Disease* likens the belief in white supremacy to a fatal illness of the spirit that has led to the discrimination and unbelievable cruelty, violence and intolerance, which perhaps more than anything else have epitomized evil in the twentieth century.

Racism is still present-tense history worldwide. White people share a collective guilt that will not be forgiven in our lifetime. (MD 1997)

I could say South Africa is my content and Holland is my form, but then the images that I deal with are familiar to almost everyone, everywhere. I deal with second-hand images and first-hand experiences. (MD 1994)



Betrayal

1994, ink on paper, 29 parts,
c. 60 x 50 cm each
Private collection. Courtesy David Zwirner

During the 1990s, Dumas created several large-scale sets of portrait drawings in grid formations. Starting with *Black Drawings* (1991–1992), followed by *Models* (1994), *Chlorosis (Lovesick)* (1994), and several others. Among the faces depicted there is usually at least one that changes the mood or disrupts the apparent logic of the whole.

Dumas grew up in South Africa during the apartheid era with its despicable policies of classifying people on the basis of their race, ethnicity, or appearance, and dividing the populace into corresponding categories, and then inciting animosity between those groups. Dumas is interested in people as individuals in relation to the category to which that person has been assigned and especially in how this kind of classification affects their interaction with others. With her background, Dumas has always been acutely aware of the ever-potent danger of identity politics.

The models for *Betrayal* were based on a wide diversity of photographic images. Among them are, for example, gallerists, friends, and even Nazis. The frog in the drawing refers to an evil omen, like the frog in the disturbing Bergman film *The Virgin Spring* (1960).



Dead Marilyn

2008, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm
Kravis Collection

Norma Jeane Mortenson was born in Los Angeles in 1926 and died there in 1962. Marilyn Monroe only cried off-screen in public on one occasion, and that was in 1954 when her divorce from Joe DiMaggio was pronounced. When the star died, it was DiMaggio who arranged her funeral.

Naming and framing

Naming (a work) is important.

Framing (a work) is crucial.

I wanted to make many beautiful new works for my USA show, *Measuring your own Grave*

But in the end, I only painted a portrait of Marilyn Monroe.

The Monroe who died.

(MD 2008)

I never wanted to paint Marilyn before, although Hollywood has always intrigued me. Andy Warhol made the best portraits of her as a star: timeless and superb. But looking at the sad, desolate images made after her death, I saw the end of the American Dream.
(MD 2021)

Dead Marilyn was based on an autopsy photo published in a 1985 Dutch newspaper review of a Monroe biography titled *Goddess*.



The Painter

1994, oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Fractional and promised gift of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg, 2005

The Painter brings together Dumas' principal themes: the portrait, the nude, and her chosen medium — painting. We see an image of a young girl, which we might read variously as vulnerable and strong, innocent and hostile. Her hands are coated with deep red and dark blue paint; her naked belly is light blue. Larger than life, she confronts us with a piercing gaze. Dumas based the painting on a photo of her daughter as a child, isolating the figure by setting it against a cold background. Here, the child performs the role of artist, and the work is thus an allegory of artistic practice. Conventionally, the artist is assumed to be a man, and his model a woman: in this case, both are female.



Eden

2020, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm
Private collection. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

This is a portrait of Dumas' grandson Eden at the age of two. Dumas seems to be fascinated by the way children sometimes gaze at adults with angry defiance.

To be young is to imagine and marvel at the world.

It is to be small, while adults are big and powerful; playing games and imitating adults is part of that.

A child may trust total strangers at times, then with others suddenly turn shy, defensive and unapproachable.

That, too, is part of being young. Your first encounter with death or the first time you kiss.

Being young is about all the first times.

(MD 2018)



The Particularity of Nakedness

1987, oil on canvas, 140 x 300 cm
Collection Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

The Particularity of Nakedness is a horizontal nude portrait of Dumas' lover at the time, and later life partner, and father of her daughter, the painter Jan Andriess (1950–2021). The title of the work comes from John Berger's "Distinction Between the Naked and the Nude" (*Ways of Seeing*, 1972). Dumas says that she is not dealing with "a type" but with a specific human being.

Nakedness requires particularity, even a certain awkwardness. She agrees with Berger's view that "the relationship between what we see and what we know is never settled."

The figure was composed by joining together different Polaroid photographs that Dumas had taken in her studio, which accounts for the unnatural perspective of the pose.



Die Baba

[The Baby]
1985, oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm
Private collection, USA

The Baby is a portrait of Dumas' six-year-old brother Pieter, when he was a baby. Pieter later became an activist pastor in the South African Dutch Reformed Church.

It is an arresting image. At first almost sweet, the child's subversive expression becomes an alarming display of defiance and willfulness. Bathed in a sickly blue-yellow light, Dumas' baby is unnerving. His opaque, black eyes are fixed in a challenging glare. His hair is tidy and his clothes are clean and neat. But this child seems already to be living in the far and disappointing realm of maturity.

In the words of Pieter Dumas, the subject of the portrait: "Even when I was only a baby, Marlene was able to discern a prominent aspect of the person I was to become: that critical look of distrust in the human race and a striving to match word and deed. Marlene dismissed the conventional image of a child's approving smile in favor of a mature prophetic judgement about evil and indifference, perhaps even anger at any assault on human dignity."



Dora Maar (The Woman Who saw Picasso cry)

2008, oil on canvas, 80 x 60 cm
Private collection. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

Dora Maar (1907–1997) was *not only* a model for many artists *but also* a photographer in her own right. She became known primarily for her unfortunate, lengthy relationship with Picasso. One of the best known of all his portraits of her, the *Crying Woman* of 1937 shows an emotionally shattered woman abandoned by Picasso, like so many before her.

Dumas based this work on a photograph of Dora Maar taken by Man Ray in 1936. The close cropping of Dora's face, her focused gaze and penetrating eyes convey proximity and intimacy.

Dumas' title reverses the role of the weeping female subject and the clichés about Picasso. Not only do we see Dora Maar, but we also imagine Picasso weeping in front of the beautiful, strong, young woman, on the spot where we stand as the viewer.

I have painted more women than men
I paint women for men
I paint women for women
I paint the women of my men
(MD 1997)



Birth

2018, oil on canvas, 300 x 100 cm
Pinault Collection

This larger-than-life image of a naked, pregnant woman was born out of Dumas' endeavor to create a different type of Venus. Trawling through art history Dumas used various models and muses and made them her own. She based this image on Inanna, also known as Ishtar, the Sumerian predecessor of Aphrodite and Venus, and likewise a goddess of love, sex and fertility. Inanna is often depicted with her hands raised on either side of her head. It is an ancient pose, replete with spiritual resonances.

At the time this painting was made, Marlene's daughter Helena was pregnant. She gave birth to her son Eden on the day of the opening of Marlene's exhibition *Myths & Mortals*, where *Birth* was shown for the first time.



Struck

2017, oil on canvas, 175 x 87 cm
ProWinko ProArt Collection

The title brings to mind the expression "to be struck by lightning," or the idea of being struck by someone. Here, we see a naked woman against a very dark background: she is kneeling, her right hand on the nape of her neck, with the elbow touching the frame, her eyes are wide open as she stares at something or someone who is not present in the painting. We do not know what is happening outside the frame.

An Intuition of Danger
The artwork itself is not dangerous.
Murderous thoughts are not the same
as actually committing a murder.
I paint because I am scared.
Give me artworks that vibrate
with a sense of their own futility.
Those committed by bloodhounds
Smelling the stains even
in the whitest wash,
in the brightest rain!
(MD 1986)



Missing Picasso

2013, oil on canvas, 175 x 87 cm
Private collection, Madrid

This painting, of a dreamy woman, rich in contrast, was based on one of the photographs from Man Ray's well-known series in which his young muse Meret Oppenheim was posing naked at the printing press, with black ink on her hands. The image Dumas used is one in which a man (an artist in a suit) is cleaning ink off Meret's hand. Dumas chose not to paint the man, but instead made use of his absence.

Dumas' title refers to yet another man, the artist Picasso who was also known for his use of nude female models. Dumas has always defended the master as a painter who did justice to his lovers as models in art, if not in life. It is thus rather the artist Dumas than the model who is missing Picasso.



Eye

2018, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm
Private collection

Painted with rough brushstrokes and fluid, dripping paint, this picture of a single staring eye seems unfinished. The extreme cinematographic close-up recalls the surrealist horror scene from the 1929 movie *Un Chien Andalou* by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. After that, no image of an eye feels safe anymore, even though the model for this painting was a “harmless” cosmetic advertisement for mascara.

Eyes are often called mirrors of the soul, but take care to protect yourself from the gaze of the evil eye.



Magdalena (Out of Eggs, Out of Business)

1995, oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm
Collection S.M.A.K. Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst Ghent/Flemish Community

This is not an actual portrait of the legendary American supermodel Lauren Hutton (born in 1943), although the painting and its subtitle were inspired by a statement Hutton once made about the position of aging women in the modelling industry. She returned to the catwalk at 75 years of age and changed the rules.

Although the woman shown here is called Magdalena (see Room 5 for the background history), she, like women in several other paintings, does not represent a specific biblical figure. Dumas has explained that she uses biblical names or names from fairy tales and folktales to suggest an association that will give viewers a familiar, widely known reference point that relates to all times. In this sense the painted figures are an ancient yet new mongrel race.



iPhone

2018, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 cm
Courtesy David Zwirner

This painting shows a smartphone, held firmly in two hands. It might be someone taking a selfie or someone scrolling or surfing the internet, consuming information. The screen is a dark field, an enigmatic black void, reminiscent of the hair of Amazon.

Velazquez' Venus admires herself in a mirror, Narcissus looks into the echoing water.

Oh similar vanity, but reflected through different screens.
(MD 2019)

Even though it seems to be amateurs with mobile phones and cameras who produce the most dangerous and important historical records nowadays, painters can remind us of the fact that while the “old” moderns believed there was no progress in art, that's no reason not to record the never-ending cross-dressing and makeovers, the camouflaged ways in which history repeats itself in our own time.
(MD 2007)

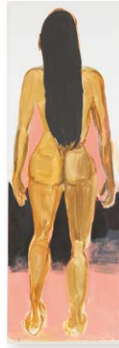


Alien

2017, oil on canvas, 300 x 100 cm
Pinault Collection

As children do, Dumas took the liberty of basing this figure on a combination of elements from various sources: her imagination and memory, fragments of different persons from her past. The term “alien” also means foreigner or stranger, not a citizen or national of a specific country. The work has shades of the 1922 silent horror film *Nosferatu* and melancholy undertones reminiscent of *Demon*, a poem by the Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov, published posthumously in 1842. Dumas has virtually incorporated the figure into a deep blue sky, the color of the light that lingers till late on Dutch summer evenings.

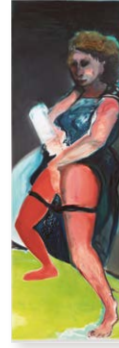
Paintings tell stories.
As zombies walk the earth,
I moved slowly from
the faces to the bodies.
From the eyes to the skin.
From the word to the flesh.
(MD 1989)



Amazon

2016, oil on canvas, 300 x 100 cm
Private collection, Switzerland

The source for this monumental female figure viewed from the rear, and towering above us, was a Polaroid photograph Dumas took of her daughter as a young adult, observed from a similar viewpoint, and standing fierce as an Amazon warrior. The body is rendered in a painterly manner as if it was done in just a few transparent brushstrokes, in contrast to the stylized black hair, which takes on a flat, opaque shape on its own. In that sense it is a homage to the American painter Alex Katz whose paintings are both flat and fast. Katz once explained that in order to create art more freely, he tried to paint faster than he can think.



Spring

2017, oil on canvas, 300 x 100 cm
Private collection. Courtesy David Zwirner

Spring is the season that follows winter. Think of the rite of spring, but also of spring water. Salon artists of the 19th century painted sweet allegories of spring: nymphlike girls among flowers. The Impressionists painted passive pale-skinned ladies with parasols in gardens. Dumas' *Spring* is a vibrantly painted not-young woman depicted in a dynamic stance, who dances to her own music.

The title of the painting signifies rebirth, and is at the same time meant to evoke the flow of liquid streaming down between the woman's legs. The painting was inspired by a photograph of a Haitian voodoo ritual. The clear bottle appears to contain water or something similar, but it was actually vodka with peppers that the woman in the photograph was using. Dumas said that while painting this, she really enjoyed being alive. She was thinking about “raging against the dying of the light.”



Taboo

2000, oil on canvas, 230 x 60 cm
Collection of Mitzi and Warren Eisenberg

Taboo is a mysterious dark figure in underwear, holding a horizontal bar. The image is reminiscent of certain African cultural *rites of passage*. As in the *Bride* the figure depicted here is partly veiled.

This work was shown in the exhibition *All is Fair in Love and War* in 2001. Dumas wrote about that exhibition: "It is not about how art, love and war can liberate you from yourself, or from others. It's more about tensions between, and hypocrisies of art, love and war, in that order."

Taboo was not based on a photograph. It unfolded by itself in the process of painting. Sometimes people think or have read that Dumas always works with an episcopo, which is not true, nor is it true that for her no subject is taboo.



Bride

2018, oil on canvas, 300 x 100 cm
Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland

Veiled women, such as brides in white, have always fascinated Dumas. So, too, Salome's erotic dance with the veiled Arabic women, seen in orientalist movies. Dumas' bride may not be a bride at all. She ultimately evolved into a mournful, gothic Venus.

Bride is both a vertical field of painted lines, edged in with dark sides that hint at an Egyptian mummy in her coffin or a widow without a groom.

Bodies or faces squeezed inside their frame are recurrent features of Dumas' compositions, which also attest to her quest to find different ways of depicting figures within the frame of her canvas.



Immaculate

2003, oil on canvas, 24 x 18 cm
Collection of the artist

The title calls to mind the Immaculate Conception of Mary born free of original sin from the moment of her conception. Moreover, her son Jesus was born to a virgin.

In 2004 Dumas wrote about this work: "It's so sad," I said. 'As if no-one entered here. As if no-one ever returned from there. As if it had never been used. As if all color has gone from the inside, has been drained. This is not the origin of the world. This is the end of the world. . . . There have been times when I invited you. There have been times when I confronted you. There have been times, but not this time.'"

Dumas strives to make her paintings as bare and minimal as a figurative work can possibly be, without becoming dead. Her images are constantly resisting their physical limitations: the frame, and the material conditions of the painted object. If her paintings need walls to object to, her images need edges to belong to.



Hierarchy

1992, oil on canvas, 40 x 55 cm
Private collection

This painting from 1992 was based on a still from the 1976 French-Japanese movie *In the Realm of the Senses*, a very sensual, controversial film about sexual obsession, with a fatal ending, directed by Nagasi Ōshima. In this small fragile-looking, yet brooding painting, it is unclear whether the woman on top is trying to save or harm the man. It is clear, though, that she has the upper hand. In general Dumas' women take responsibility for their own actions and often seem to opt for the possibility of rejection rather than abuse.

I situate art not in reality but in relation to desire.
(MD 1983)



Venus & Adonis I

2015–2016, ink wash and metallic acrylic on paper, 18 parts, dimensions variable
Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland

Dumas produced two series of works on paper, which were intended as illustrations for the Dutch translation of William Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis* (1593) by Hafid Bouazza in 2016. Shakespeare's story drew on Ovid's mythological poem *Metamorphoses*.

Dumas' drawings illustrate the story of Venus, the goddess of love, and her tragic insatiable passion for the handsome youth Adonis. However, Adonis, renowned for his otherworldly beauty, spurns Venus' love for him, choosing instead the thrill of the hunt. Recklessly ignoring Venus' warnings, Adonis is ultimately slain by a wild boar, with his spilled blood lending its color to the bloom of a flower.



Venus & Adonis II

2015–2016, ink wash, metallic acrylic, and pastel on paper, 15 parts, dimensions variable
Hartwig Art Foundation

"Adonis was born out of a union between Myrrha and her father, King Cinyras of Cyprus, who was deceived by his daughter into sleeping with her. When he learned that his daughter was pregnant, Cinyras intended to kill her, but the gods transformed her into a myrrh tree — a "bitter" tree. Adonis was born from this tree. The Naiads found him and, after washing him in mother's tears, raised him until he grew into a man so beautiful that even Venus, the goddess of love, fell in love with him."
Introduction to *Venus and Adonis* by Hafid Bouazza, 2016



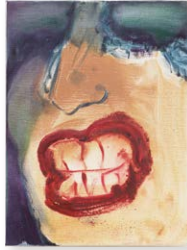
Magnetic Fields (for Margaux Hemingway)

2008, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 cm
Private collection Thomas Koerfer

The source for *Magnetic Fields* was a nude photograph of Margaux Hemingway posing with her unshaved pudendum prominently in view, published, in a Dutch *Playboy* magazine of 1990. Dumas isolated Hemingway's mound of Venus, turning it into a magnetic landscape. Water added to the oil paint produced a dewdrop effect, paying homage to this intimate part of the female anatomy.

Margaux Hemingway was the granddaughter of Ernest Hemingway. She was successful as a fashion model in the 1970s, but not as a film star in the 80s.

My best works are erotic displays of mental confusion (with intrusions of irrelevant information).
(MD 1985)



Teeth

2018, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm
Private collection, Madrid

Teeth is a more aggressive counterpart of *Lips*. Dumas really loves *Lips* but she did not want all her paintings to have that same soft tone. She wanted not only attractive lips that were kissable and available. Hence, she looked for an image that could be used for a different type of mouth. For many years Dumas had a small black-and-white photograph of Maria Callas, whom she had never painted. She thought it was fantastic how the singer's teeth and lips constituted a form in themselves. Dumas was thinking of Venus and how quickly she could switch from pouting seductively as in *Lips*, to insulting and cursing, as in *Teeth*.



Lips

2018, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 cm
Private collection. Courtesy David Zwirner

Lips is a small erotic jewel of a painting. The whole feel is soft, moist, and inviting. It was painted wet on wet in one sitting and then left to dry overnight on the floor. The skin of the face is a thin transparent artificial green, yet it feels as warm as if the purple-pink lips were glowing, luminous. The work was based on a lipstick advertisement in a late 1960s magazine. It had a pop-art element that was somehow transformed into a dreamlike trance.



Scent of a Flower

2018, oil on canvas, 70 x 70 cm
Private collection. Courtesy David Zwirner

Inspired by her work on the two *Venus & Adonis* series (Room 13). Dumas followed them with a number of intimately-scaled canvases that focus on details of various parts of the body and face, which the artist refers to as “erotic landscapes.” These works relate closely to Shakespeare’s extensive writings about the five senses in which he describes how the state of being in love affects a person:

“Had I no eyes but ears, my ears would love / That inward beauty and invisible; / Or were I deaf, thy outward parts would move / Each part in me that were but sensible: / Though neither eyes nor ears, to hear nor see, / Yet should I be in love by touching thee. / Say, that the sense of feeling were bereft me, / And that I could not see, nor hear, nor touch, / And nothing but the very smell were left me, / Yet would my love to thee be still as much; / For from the stillitory of thy face excelling / Comes breath perfum’d that breedeth love by smelling.”

William Shakespeare, from *Venus and Adonis*, 1593



Kissing

2018, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 cm
The Rachofsky Collection

Kissing, as a verb.

Unlike *Kissed* (see Mezzanine) this is a messy painting in the colors of a swamp: muddy and wet green blues. The facial features are sketchy. The paint runs from one to the other, as does the sensuality of kissing.

Here, as in the other works in the group of small intimate faces as landscapes in the exhibition *Myths & Mortals* to which this painting belongs, color and playfulness have returned to Dumas’ canvases.



Intoxication

2018, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm
Collection of Beth Swofford

Here’s to the green fairy, and the first lines spoken by Greta Garbo in *Anna Christie* (1930): “Gimme a viskey . . . ginger ale on the side. And don’t be stingy, baby.”

When Dumas painted *Intoxication* she was thinking about Edvard Munch’s drinking habits, so you have the green fairy and all the lovers of absinthe – (Hafid Bouazza drank absinthe in large quantities, as did Baudelaire, van Gogh, and many other great artists) – and then she thought about Venus’ obsession with Adonis. She has to have him; this, too, is a kind of intoxication. Her obsession can be seen as a religious ecstasy, or an alcohol-induced delirium. So it all comes together.

It has to be dark
and one has to be drunk,
without some sort of
intoxication
many a love story would never have
started
(MD 2018)



Blue Marilyn

2008, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm
Collection De Bruin-Heijn

It is not unusual for Dumas to paint a figure blue. It emphasizes the artificiality of a painterly representation and evokes a mood of feeling blue. *Blue Marilyn* was inspired by a magazine article with photographs from a blue movie (a term for pornographic films), claiming that Marilyn Monroe played in this 1948 stag movie about a blonde, an apple, and a Coke bottle. However, this was a case of mistaken identity as the girl in this soft-porn 8mm film was in fact Arline Hunter whose reputation was built on her resemblance to Monroe.

Blue Marilyn shows clearly that the line between drawing and painting is blurred in Dumas' work.



Smoke

2018, oil on canvas, 80 x 80 cm
Private collection, Germany

Initially Dumas was trying to capture the expression of Bernini's sculpture *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* in Rome, but instead ended up with an image of someone blowing out cigarette smoke.

Although smoking and drinking have been banished almost completely from our lives, we cannot erase all the beautiful, sensual images of women smoking on the silver screen. Remember the orgasm scene, with Hedy Lamarr smoking, in *Ecstasy* in 1933. Dumas could dwell endlessly on the beauty of smoke. But maybe it's time for her to stop, too many anecdotes, too many names dropped.



Drop

2018, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm
Collection of Susan and Leonard Feinstein

The painting *Drop* is a close-up portrayal of a woman. Her skin has a faint blue tinge, and concentric rings surround her head, suggesting an aura or halo.

As you enter the room this small portrait commands your full attention. It's quiet and your eye is drawn to a drop, as in a raindrop, a teardrop, a drop in the ocean, a watery face reflecting the moonlight, resembling a very young Maria in Pasolini's *Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964). I tried to couple her with a Jesus, but she preferred to be on her own. (MD 2019)



Drunk

1997, oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm
Collection De Bruin-Heijn

Although Dumas uses humor quite explicitly in her smaller drawings, often by including a caricature of herself, in her paintings there is a deeper underlying self-mockery at play, which is more subtle. She knows that heavy drinking used to be *de rigueur* among male artists of all kinds. It was a man's game. Actual drunkenness, however, has always been frowned upon, especially for women. And the older the woman, the more it was disapproved. Put them all together: naked, old, drunk and female – that's as bad as it gets.

Nevertheless, *Drunk* is somehow an endearing portrait of the artist exposing herself. Her pose is similar to that of the figure in *The Painter* (see Room 7), but here the woman is in a different phase of life. She may be tired: perhaps art has become a struggle against blackouts and hangovers. Perhaps she has become an embarrassment to herself, or maybe she just wants to engage with the self-portrait of the naked, elderly Alice Neel, and propose a toast to her.



Omega's Eyes

2018, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm
Private collection

The source for *Omega's Eyes* was a still from the film *Mamma Roma* by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1962) showing an anguished Anna Magnani, with her hand partially covering her mouth. The painting was done quickly and loosely, resulting in a very expressionistic surface.

In some way this painting became a homage to Edvard Munch's *Omega* who grew bored on an island and initiated sexual relationships with animals. In his bizarre creation story *Alpha and Omega*, Omega liked the smell of flowers and her favourite pastime was kissing. There is humor, and tragedy, but it's quite gentle too, even though both Omega and Alpha die violently in the end.

Dumas has always liked Munch's description of Omega: "Omega's eyes would change; on ordinary days they were pale-blue, but when she looked at her lovers, they turned black with flecks of carmine, and occasionally she covered her mouth with a flower."



Areola

2018, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm
Collection of David and Monica Zwirner

The human areola is the pigmented area on the breast around the nipple. The color can range from pink to red, dark brown or nearly black. During pregnancy the pigment generally darkens.

Dumas has always been interested in those parts of the body that are especially sensitive to touch, like the mouth, the ears, and the breasts – a particularly sensitive erogenous zone. She has also given ample attention to male nipples in her works in the past. In this portrait of a breast the nipple is hard. It may be a reflex reaction to cold or, perhaps in anticipation of a caress or in response to a sexually arousing thought.



The Martyr

2002–2004, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm
Pinault Collection

This is a disturbing painting, as if Dumas is angry or upset with her medium and with her subject matter, or rather with death itself. Even though from an early age she has been present at the deathbed of family members and others dear to her, Dumas has never painted their deaths. Her father died when she was twelve and she recalls that from then on she would “judge” potential boyfriends by their ability to say something meaningful about death.

In 2002 Dumas painted a lying figure covered with a blanket, on a canvas of 60 x 230 cm. In 2004, she transformed the painting into its present state, a portrait, by reducing the canvas to 60 x 50 cm.

Reflecting on this work, Dumas now says “I have always felt that in death the face becomes a mask.”



Die moeder van die veroordeelde

[The Mother of the Convict]
1985, oil on canvas, 125 x 105 cm
Private collection

This early portrait differs in some respects from the other large close-up heads from the 1980s. The face is not cropped as closely. It is rendered more out of focus, as if illuminated by some light-source within, blurring her features. In fact, the paint has been wiped off to reveal the skin-like surface of the canvas.

This portrait was based on a photograph of an elderly woman in the doorway of her house in a township (one of the Black ghettos that developed during the apartheid era, usually on the outskirts of a Whites-only city or town) in South Africa. The title refers to her son, who has been convicted of a crime, the nature of which is unknown to us. Is she waiting for his execution, or is she a ghost that haunts him in prison? Her hands are as present and as large as her face.



Mamma Roma

2012, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 cm
Pinault Collection

Mamma Roma is a portrait based on a still of the magnificent Anna Magnani as the tragic mother and former prostitute from Rome in the 1962 film of that title, written and directed by Pasolini. She emits a silent scream; a cry smothered by the intensity of the emotion of a mother who has lost her son and everything she had fought for after her son dies in prison after being arrested for committing a petty theft. Dumas admires the way Pasolini creates an interaction between the sacred and the profane.

This small painting is cropped in a similar way, and has an affinity in scale and intensity with *Immaculate* (see Room 11), another disquieting work done in almost entirely black and white tones.



Pasolini

2012, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm
Collection of the artist

Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–1975) was a controversial Italian poet, novelist, filmmaker, and political intellectual. His early poems were written partly in his mother's Friulian dialect. She was the most important person in his life and they shared a home throughout his lifetime.

In 1975 Pasolini was found dead in Ostia, the victim of a gruesome murder. His last film *Salò* was released posthumously in 1976.

Dumas made drawings of him in the '80s and also included him in her *Great Men* series in 2014 (see Room 28). She painted this portrait, and the one of his mother, for the exhibition in Milan, titled *Sorte*, which means "written in the stars."

In 2012 Dumas wrote about what attracts her to Pasolini and his work as follows: "His sensuous use of light and dark, the 'unrealistic' way he treats the narrative in his films. The way the characters appear and disappear. The fact that he does not trust himself."



Pasolini's Mother

2012, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm
Collection of the artist

Susanna Colussi Pasolini (1891–1981) was a school teacher from the Italian region of Friuli, who loved books. Besides playing an important role in her son's life, she also played small parts in some of his films, such as *Teorema* (1968), and as the mother Maria in agony at the crucifixion of her son Jesus in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964).

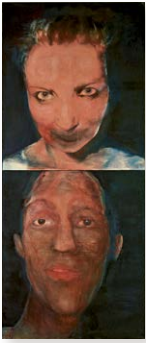
In a heartbreaking poem, Pasolini wrote how his love for his mother surpassed all others:

Prayer to My Mother

"Only you in all the world know what my heart always held, before any other love.

You're irreplaceable. And because you are, the life you gave me is condemned to loneliness".

Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1962



The Occult Revival

1984, oil on canvas, 260 x 110 cm,
2 parts, 130 x 110 cm each
Collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

This double-portrait consists of two larger-than-life faces hung above one another without interspacing. Both paintings are bathed in an overall reddish, warm, glowing color and atmosphere that convey the subjects' feelings for each other, the attraction, the bond between them. In this case they record the beginning of a love affair between the artist and a former lover.

The work was part of the exhibition *The Eyes of the Night Creatures* (1985), held in Amsterdam, in which, for the first time, Dumas showed only paintings of isolated large close-ups of human faces. Dumas called them "situations," rather than portraits.

In this period she frequently used a Polaroid camera to record the people in her inner circle. The artificial coloring and distortions of this medium were translated into her paintings, as can be clearly seen in *The Occult Revival*.

Homage to the Polaroid

The only camera I ever liked and used was the Polaroid camera.

The Polaroid, always and only, true to its own sublime distorted nature. Fast and fickle and hands-on physical, indifferent to digital vanity.

Cheap and expensive at the same time. No copy and no negative.

(MD 2008)



Candle Burning

2000, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm
Pinault Collection

Dumas's visits to strip clubs at the turn of the last century led to the making of this small intriguing and foremost colourful painting, based on different Polaroids she took of a young acrobatic stripper, known for her special acts with burning candles.

The striptease as an art-form, like the belly dance and the circus, is dying. The pleasure in the games played and the tricks turned, will soon all be lost.

(MD 2022)

Candle Burning was shown for the first time in a group show in Kunstmuseum Luzern in 2000, called: *Mixing, Memory and Desire*.

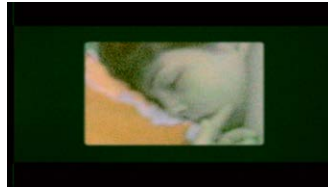


Underground

1994–1995, ink, crayon, and acrylic on paper, 28 parts, 62 x 50 cm each, in collaboration with Helena, daughter of Marlene Dumas
Collection Helena Michel

The work is a collaboration between Marlene Dumas and her daughter Helena then aged five. Helena decorated, improved, and worked with color as if applying make-up on Dumas' black and white ink wash drawings of female faces which she found boring. It was her underground. It was not set up as an art project but it was the child's subversion of her mother's work that led to this series.

Helena enjoyed working over the drawings, which until then she had never been allowed to touch. She used her crayons, glitter, and acrylic paint to beautify the cheeks of the fluidly drawn faces and colored cheeks, and added tears, flowers, and accessories. The ink washes have to some extent been relegated to the background by the brightly colored overlay of splatters, dots, and decoration that Helena applied. Helena did not fill in the drawings as a child would in a colouring book, but made her own marks without regard to the outlines of the underlying drawings. She left her handprints on some of the faces, recalling prehistoric hand marks in caves, as if she wanted to cure or possess her "patients" by laying on hands, to drawing the sickness out of them into her own body.



My Daughter

2002, Super 8 film (3:20 minutes), with music by Ryuichi Sakamoto, for the project *Loud & Clear*, in collaboration with Erik Kessels/KesselsKramer
Collection of the artist

My Daughter is the first and only short film Dumas has made. Not knowing how to work the light meter of the old super 8 camera she chose, the colors started to break into pointillist flickers. Filming her daughter Helena while sleeping, with a peaceful yet unstable hand, the eye of the camera glides, or rather, wanders across her body. The film evokes different associations depending on the viewer's own experiences and cinematic background: Brigitte Bardot on the bed in Goddard's *Le Mépris* (1964) . . . or a Lolita effect may come to mind. When the camera moves around the room passing a human skull placed on top of a television-set standing on a table, the film acquires a vanitas element. The tense repetitive sounds of Ryuichi Sakamoto's music give the film yet another uneasy dimension.



Green Lips

1996, ink, crayon, and oil pastel on paper, 124 x 70 cm, in collaboration with Helena, daughter of Marlene Dumas
Collection of the artist

When Dumas' daughter Helena drew on her mother's portrait heads in *Underground*, she was about five years old. Now two years older, she does not take over in quite the same way but is more aware of the effects of what she is doing. She deliberately leaves the breasts open while she covers, or rather "dresses" other parts of the body and makes the figure thinner around her waist. Boldly, she states her own norms of what beauty is.



Mama als Belly danser

[Mama as Belly Dancer]

1996, ink and acrylic on paper,
124 x 70 cm, in collaboration with Helena,
daughter of Marlene Dumas
Collection of the artist

The two layers in dialogue in these works can be understood as a carefree game, or as an intimate interaction between mother and daughter. Helena used language as well as colors to make her intentions clearer. A figure that was simply an anonymous nude has become Helena's mother as a dancer. Although neither of them knew this at the time, belly dancing began as a ritual for preparing a woman for childbirth in the ancient Middle East before the advent of Christianity and Islam; when the mother goddess was worshipped the dance was performed by women for women. Later its function changed and it was seen as sinful by the ruling patriarchal religions. Nowadays, belly dancing is banned in most Arabian Gulf countries.



Monica (L.)

1996, ink and acrylic on paper,
124 x 70 cm, in collaboration with Helena,
daughter of Marlene Dumas
Collection of the artist

Just as artists sign their works to identify them as authentic pieces from their own hand, theirs, as a sign of authenticity, so Helena has signed her name in a very prominent place on the drawing, thus claiming it as hers. The ribbon of the scanty apron, like covering of the figure's private parts, calls to mind some kind of adult entertainment, but it does not explain the red paint marks or drippings between the legs.

Dumas provided the title much later, long after the work was done.



Girl with Head

1992, oil on canvas, 25 x 30 cm
Private collection

Dumas made *Girl with Head* for Jan Hoet as a souvenir during her participation in his Documenta of 1992. It makes associations with the biblical Salome asking for the head of John the Baptist arise.

"My head her ball to play with but at the same time she protects me. I am protected by the child in myself. Indeed just like the famous sentence from Wordsworth: 'The child is father of the man. . .' And at the same time, my head is a skull with sunken eyes. The eternal theme of the girl and death. It reminds me of the Flemish Primitives of Mary and the child Jesus that holds an apple in his hand that symbolises the world."
Jan Hoet, *Geen dag zonder* [No Day Without], 2009



Light and Dark

1990–2000, oil on canvas, 20 x 25 cm
Collection of Atsuko Koyanagi

It took ten years before this small painting was completed by adding white to cover parts of the body. This created a specific contrast in the image, making it look like a negative photograph, transforming the image from daylight to night.

Paintings are often made with a particular person in mind, but not always. Some happen in one night and remain as they are, as if they couldn't be anything else. Others linger in the studio untouched for many years. Then, one day, you look at them again and know it's time for a change and act on the spur of the moment.

(MD 2021)



Snowwhite and the Next Generation

1988, oil on canvas, 140 x 200 cm
Centraal Museum, Utrecht

In the late 1980s, feeling that the nude had become a worn-out and misrepresented subject in painting and advertising, Dumas endeavored to make a relevant painting about a female nude. In her exhibition *Waiting for Meaning* (1988), she combined female passivity, the nude, and aspects of the Snow White figure to create her own witches' brew. *Snow White* was originally a nineteenth-century German fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm that warned against the dangers of vanity. In 1937 it was also the subject of the first feature-length animation film produced by the Walt Disney Studio.

Dumas does not see whiteness as the fairest of them all, but as a dangerous and desperate ideology when used as a political category.

In this painting the dwarves of the next generation are not the jolly chaps they used to be in the old story.



See no Evil

1991, oil on canvas, 2 parts,
50 x 60 cm each
Private collection

Dumas has always been interested in the idea of couples, in relation to paintings as well as people, in regard to the present work.

The title *See no Evil* alludes to the saying "see, hear, speak no evil," symbolized by three monkeys: the first, covering his eyes, sees no evil, the second, covering his ears, hears no evil, and the third, covering his mouth, speaks no evil. The phrase is often used to describe the behavior of people who turn a blind eye to something that is legally or morally wrong. Dumas expresses the concept in a diptych whose two components reflect one other.

Each shows a group of three girls dressed in their Sunday best. One group is light and the other, dark. The lower painting is like a mirror image of its companion piece, but muddier in tone, like a reflection seen in murky water on a dark moonless night. Dumas' intention is not clear.

Maybe evil is simply the reverse side of good, in the sense that one cannot exist without the other. The ambiguity of meaning and the relativity of truth are central themes in Dumas' oeuvre.



The Ritual (with Doll)

1992, oil on canvas, 110 x 130 cm
Private collection, long-term loan to
De Pont Museum, Tilburg

Dumas has never felt comfortable in a group. In the late 1980s she made two paintings in which she herself appears but for the last time, as part of a group. In those pictures she is a young girl surrounded by her classmates with the teacher in the center. When children form gangs or wear uniforms they tend to become cruel, violent, or destructive, not only towards adults but towards other children as well. Dumas has always been scared of this tendency. In this painting we see a group of young girls wearing zombie-like expressions as they are about to sacrifice a doll in a macabre ritual.

Professor Ernst van Alphen describes the mask-like quality of the faces: "they look like sheets or screens which are empty. In these bleached faces black eyes attract our attention as they are surrounded by white. The eyes are uncannily ambiguous. It is not clear whether in their round darkness they should be read as remnants of subjectivity, as icons of the eyes peeping through holes in the artificial masks, or if they are nothing but stereotypical symbols or signs of eyes as in a mask. This mask-like quality of the faces in Dumas' portraits produces a particularly relevant effect. The mask, as well as the caricature, have had important functions in dismantling the traditional portrait in twentieth-century art." Ernst van Alphen, *Facing Defacement*, 1995



Le Joujou du Pauvre (The Poor Boy's Toy)

2020, oil on canvas, 190 x 130 cm
Courtesy the artist and Zeno X Gallery,
Antwerp

Dumas has great admiration for contemporary cartoonists. She also enjoys and appreciates the dark political caricatures and wit of Honoré Daumier, and the colorful and mischievous satirist, James Ensor. Ensor loved the work of Edgar Allan Poe, as did Baudelaire, who was the first to translate him into French, and remark on similarities in their views of class injustice.

In this painting Dumas sets out to illustrate or do justice to Baudelaire's political allegory in the nineteenth prose poem in *Paris Spleen*:

The Poor Child's Toy

"I should like to offer a suggestion for an innocent diversion. There are so few amusements that are not culpable! . . . Through the symbolic bars separating two worlds, highroad and mansion, the poor child was showing the rich child his own toy, which the latter was scrutinizing breathlessly, as though it had been some rare and unheard of object. Well, this toy that the grimy little brat was shaking, teetering and turning in a box covered with wire, was a living rat! The parents, out of economy, I suppose, had taken the toy from nature itself. And the two children were laughing together like brothers, with teeth of identical whiteness". Charles Baudelaire, 1869



Rat

2020, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 cm
 Courtesy the artist and Zeno X Gallery,
 Antwerp

In March 2020, Europe went into lockdown due to the covid pandemic. This was the last painting Dumas made for her exhibition *Double Takes*, which opened in Antwerp that month. Dumas painted a toxic-hued, almost transparent rat. Rats are notorious for spreading viruses and bacteria.

Dumas said in 2020 about the *Rat*: "It's about my time, about these times, and about Time. Baudelaire once said that 'the only good news a person can receive is that he dies.' He meant this cynically, but in the present circumstances his words resonate. The pandemic has reminded us once again just how easily a climate of fear can develop. We resist the prospect of our imminent death with a fear that is greater than death itself. Just as in the age of the plague."

Double Takes

Double takes are fine, but double talk not so. Yet I am endlessly in doubt as to what my art is all about. Portraits: classical, intimate, allegorical, abstract, satirical, absurd. How to explain the ever-changing names and secret games between the models and the times of our lives.
 (MD 2020)



Einder (Horizon)

2007–2008, oil on canvas, 140 x 300 cm
 Pinault Collection

When my mother was alive I never painted flowers for her. After her death, in 2007, I tried to paint the flowers on her grave. I wanted to paint a portrait of her without painting her. I was trying to paint something that had no end.
 (MD 2021)

The title comes from an Afrikaans poem by Elizabeth Eybers, in which the word "einder" suggests both "the end", and a horizon one cannot reach.



Tombstone Lovers

2021, oil on canvas, 100 x 70 cm
 Collection of the artist

The inspiration for this work was a tombstone for a husband and wife from 1474, located in the Pieterskerk in the Dutch city of Leiden. The stone was embedded in the floor of the old church, where, for centuries, congregants and visitors walked over it. The couple were represented lying beside each other. Nowadays the stone is displayed vertically, attached to the wall, so that the couple appear to be standing on their toes, or floating above the ground. The sculpted figures can only be seen in the remaining relief of the stone. The seemingly naked couple stand with their hands crossed over their genitalia. Their sexuality has been deleted by time.

Dumas painted the *Tombstone Lovers* in a desperate moment of impatience against the ticking of the clock, while trying to grasp the notion of eternity.



The Origin of Painting (The Double Room)

2018, oil on canvas, 300 x 100 cm
 Courtesy the artist and Zeno X Gallery,
 Antwerp

The title *The Origin of Painting (The Double Room)* hints at a Greek legend from about 600 BCE that the art of painting began with Kora of Sicyon, daughter of Boutades, tracing her lover's shadow on a wall; perhaps anticipating his departure.

Painting as a shadow play

Painting as a gesture

The making of a move towards

Painting is about something that isn't there

(MD 2021)

When Hafid Bouazza first saw *The Origin of Painting* in Dumas' studio, he felt that he was seeing *La Chambre Double*, referred to in Baudelaire's fifth prose poem. Bouazza was now convinced that Dumas should illustrate or visually interpret his Dutch translation of *Le Spleen de Paris*. Dumas decided to make oil paintings to capture the complex mood of disgust in Baudelaire's work, where the pleasures of the flesh and the burden of being alive are treated in a morbid, albeit humorous fashion. His verse might start lyrically, but suddenly end with an unexpected punch in the stomach. You might think he is praising the virtues of wine, while he is in fact longing for the intoxication of Art. *The Double Room* is both daydream and nightmare.



Time and Chimera

2020, oil on canvas, 300 x 100 cm
 Courtesy the artist and Zeno X Gallery,
 Antwerp

A female figure is paired with a strange and undefined creature: spirit, deity, or chimera? In Greek mythology a chimera was a mythical fire-spewing monster with the head of a lion, the body of a goat, a snake as a tail, and wings on its back. On the differences between the two figures of *Time and Chimera*, Dumas wrote in 2021: "Rigid Death, as old age tapping on the shoulder of supple Beauty."

The tall format is crucial, as it enables the artist to paint freely with uninhibited body movements that allow for a boldness, analogous to the unpredictable style and rhythm of Baudelaire's verses. Chance plays an important role in shaping the forms. Dumas places the canvases on the floor and according to the way she pours the paint and moves the canvas, the paint interacts with the canvas in an unpremeditated fashion, and she responds to the "figure" that has appeared and decides intuitively on the companion to make for this first figure. Because of the way they are created, and in formal terms as well, the works follow naturally from the process of her ink drawings, although in the drawing process her physical movements are less exuberant and water is more fluid than oil.



The Making of

2020, oil on canvas, 300 x 100 cm
 Courtesy the artist and Zeno X Gallery,
 Antwerp

The Making of depicts a naked girl or young woman touching or pulling at a green Hulk-like figure that evokes a scene, as if she were molding or creating him out of clay, like a sculptor at work, or busy dismembering a figure in her imagination.

The female figure recalls a drawing Dumas once made where the girl, like the artist, says, "Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies."

Few poets have generated a controversy as heated as Baudelaire did around the question of artistic freedom and imagination versus morality. The publication of his collection of poems *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1857 caused such a scandal that the poet was prosecuted for "offending public decency" and his poems were banned.

Dumas is not only fascinated by the vehemence of Baudelaire's poetry, but also by the idea of translation – whether from one language to another, as in Bouazza's work, or from one medium into another, a visual medium in the case of her own work.



The Lady of Uruk

2020, oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm
Private collection

The Lady of Uruk, with her stone face and hollow eyes, was inspired by the seventh prose poem in *Paris Spleen*. This painting was based on a marble mask of a Sumerian deity, dating from 3100 BCE. Believed to be one of the oldest representations of the human face, the mask is now in the National Museum in Iraq.

Venus and The Motley Fool

"What a wonderful day! The vast park lies swooning under the sun's burning eye, like youth under Love's dominion. . . . Yet, in the midst of all this universal joy I caught sight of a grief-stricken soul. At the feet of a colossal Venus, all of a heap against the pedestal, one of those so-called fools, those voluntary buffoons who, with cap and bells and tricked out in a ridiculous and gaudy costume, are called upon to make kings laugh when they are beset by Boredom or Remorse, raises his tear-filled eyes toward the immortal Goddess. And his eyes say: 'I am the least and the loneliest of men, deprived of love and friendship, wherein I am inferior even to the lowest animals. Yet I, too, am made to understand and to feel immortal Beauty! Ah! Goddess! take pity on my fever and my pain!' But the implacable Goddess with her marble eyes continues to gaze into the distance, at I know not what."
Charles Baudelaire, 1869



Hafid Bouazza

2020, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm
Collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.
Gift of the artist and Zeno X Gallery,
Antwerp

Hafid Bouazza (1970–2021) was a Dutch writer, a translator from English, French, and Arabic and a critical columnist and free thinker. Although he passionately renounced the Islamic religion he grew up in, he retained his pleasure in the lyrical language of the Koran and the Bible. Dumas is especially fond of his translations of ancient Arabic love poems and pornographic verse.

Bouazza was also known for embracing a life of intoxication and spoke openly about his former addictions. Yet what he really wanted most was to write. He once said, "Working on a book verges on delirious euphoria – with all its ensuing weariness and melancholy." He and Dumas became friends while working on Bouazza's Dutch translation of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, which Dumas started to illustrate in 2015. Bouazza was working on a novel and, in collaboration with Dumas, on the prose-poems in *Paris Spleen* when he died.



Le Désespoir de la Vieille (The Old Woman's Despair)

2020, oil on canvas, 190 x 130 cm
Courtesy the artist and Zeno X Gallery,
Antwerp

This painting was inspired by the second prose poem in *Paris Spleen*, "and foolish me as I flutter desperately to escape the claws of old age," explains Dumas.

The Old Woman's Despair

"A wizened little old woman felt gladdened and gay at the sight of the pretty baby that everyone was making such a fuss over, and that everyone wanted to please; such a pretty little creature, as frail as the old woman herself, and toothless and hairless like her. She went up to him all nods and smiles. But the infant, terrified, struggled to get away from her caresses, filling the house with his howls. Then the old woman went back into her eternal solitude and wept alone, saying: 'Ah, for us miserable old females the age of pleasing is past. Even innocent babes cannot endure us and we are scarecrows to little children whom we long to love.'"

Charles Baudelaire, 1869



Charles Baudelaire

2020, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm
Comma Foundation, Belgium

Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) was a French poet, essayist, translator, and art critic known for his prose poetry and credited for coining the term “modernity.” He composed the series of prose poems known as *Paris Spleen* between 1855 and his death in 1867.

In *Paris Spleen* he writes about the melancholic state of sadness and disgust he felt while wandering the streets of Paris observing the crowds and reflecting on class differences and the disconnections between men and women.

Many of the poems revolve around the relationship between good and evil in human nature.

Dumas agrees with Baudelaire’s view of what an artist should be to be an artist, as expressed in his 1855 essay *On the Essence of Laughter* “. . . the artist is an artist only provided that he can be *himself* and *another person* at the same moment, and does not ignore any aspect of his *dual nature*.”



Jeanne Duval

2020, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm
Private collection, Madrid

Jeanne Duval (c. 1820–1862) was an enigmatic Haitian-born actress, singer, and dancer, who, in 1842, through her photographer friend Nadar, met Baudelaire and maintained a stormy twenty-year relationship with him, up to the time of her death. Her perfume and her magnetic flowing black hair inspired many poems. Baudelaire called Duval his Black Venus, muse and demon.

The seventeenth prose poem in *Paris Spleen* provided the inspiration for Dumas’ portrait:

A Hemisphere in Your Hair
“Long, long let me breathe the fragrance of your hair. Let me plunge my face into it like a thirsty man into the water of a spring, and let me wave it like a scented handkerchief to stir memories in the air. If you only knew all that I see all that I feel! all that I hear in your hair ! My soul voyages on its perfume as other men’s souls on music. Your hair holds a whole dream of masts and sails; it holds seas whose monsoons waft me toward lovely climes where space is bluer and more profound, where fruits and leaves and human skin perfume the air.”

Charles Baudelaire, 1869



De acteur (Portrait of Romana Vrede)

[The Actor]

2019, oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm
The Abrishamchi Family Collection

De acteur is a portrait of the Dutch-Surinamese actor Romana Vrede, who in 2017 won the Theo d’Or acting award for the best female leading role. The first black actor in the Netherlands to achieve this honor, Vrede won the award for her role in *Race*, a play written by David Mamet. The award includes a portrait of the winner by an artist of her choice. Vrede opted for Marlene Dumas, who ultimately made not one, but five portraits of her. The work shown here, *de trois quarts*, is not the one Romana chose, but, in its formal execution, it is a far more classical depiction of an actor than the one Vrede actually did choose.



Io

2008, oil on canvas, 100 x 90 cm
Private collection

In 1994 Dumas portrayed Io for the first time in one of her drawings for the *Models* series. She based that drawing on a painting by Correggio (c. 1530) in which Zeus, in the guise of a grey cloud, seduces the ancient Greek priestess. In 2008 Dumas painted Io's profile in a state of ecstasy and pain. In the painting, Io's forehead is a whitish area with azure spatters, which can be associated with magnetic fields and volcanic activity on the moon closest to the planet Jupiter, named after Io. Dumas based this work on a still showing the resurrection scene at the end of the Carl Dreyer film *Ordet* (The Word) from 1955.



Romana Vrede

2019, oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm
Long-term loan to ITA (Internationaal Theater Amsterdam)

Romana is large and strong, in body and spirit. Not only is she an actor, but she has also produced a play about her son Charlie and written a novel about him, published as *De Nobele Autist*. As a mother, she claims to possess supernatural powers that enable her to do anything, if need be.

Of the various portraits Dumas has made of Romana, this was her favorite and Romana's choice for inclusion in the permanent portrait gallery of the Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam (now the Internationaal Theater Amsterdam).

All the senses are alert, tense. Listening, Smelling, Feeling, Watching. And at the same time we see the inevitable departure and decay.
(MD 2020)

Dumas sees in this face, a landscape map with ancient oceans and rivers running through her veins. Seas of tears. Romana understands the vanity, as well as the transience and irony of accolades and awards in the arts. She has spoken about the time when she is no longer able to honor the goddess Theatre and then will fade into oblivion, like so many others before her.



Nefertiti

2020, oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm
Private collection

Like Baudelaire, Dumas is sensitive to the notion of the beauty of Art being icy and untouchable.

One of the many artistic representations of goddesses or ancient queens that personify the distancing power of art is the famous Nefertiti bust, sculpted by Thutmose around 1345 BCE, looted from Egypt and now on display at the Neues Museum in Berlin. In addition to its mathematically elegant proportions, this bust is remarkable for the color pigments on the porous limestone and the inlay missing from the left eye.

Like *The Lady of Uruk*, the painting of Nefertiti was executed in one sitting. Dumas used a canvas she had been working on some time earlier and painted over the unfinished images.



Great Men

Series of drawings, 2014–present,
ink pencil and metallic acrylic on paper,
44 x 35 cm each
Collection of the artist

In 2014 Dumas participated in Manifesta 10, the European nomadic biennial of contemporary art, held in St. Petersburg that year. In response to Russia's laws against the promotion of homosexuality, a bill approved in 2013, she created and exhibited 16 portraits of notable gay and bisexual men from the 19th and 20th centuries who made major contributions to world culture, most of whom were criminalized and persecuted one way or the other for their sexuality. Beneath each portrait, Dumas wrote a small biography and a commemorative sentence.

The still-ongoing series started with a drawing of the British mathematician and computer pioneer Allan Turing who was prosecuted in 1952 under "gross indecency" laws. He accepted chemical castration as an alternative to prison. Before 1967 gay men could be imprisoned for homosexual acts in Britain for up to two years. Other portraits include writers like Nikolai Gogol, Yevgeny Kharitonov, James Baldwin, Tennessee Williams, dancers and choreographers Rudolf Nureyev, Vaslav Nijinsky, Sergei Diaghlev, filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein, Rainer Fassbinder, the composer Pjotr Tchaikovsky and American Vietnam War veteran Leonard Matlovich, recipient of the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star. His tombstone reads, "When I was in

the military, they gave me a medal for killing two men and a discharge for loving one."

Dumas has been especially inspired by non-heterosexual artists throughout her career.

Non-Traditional Relationships

Modern art is by its very nature a non-traditional activity. Or rather it aims to expand our notions of the traditional and the normal. Art is there to help us to see more and not less. Laws are there to help us to love more and not less. Laws should protect us from hatred and not from love.

(MD 2014)

On Words and Images

I can see why many visual artists dislike words in artworks. They feel that words dirty the clear water that has to reflect the sky. It disturbs the pleasure of the silent image, the freedom from history, the beauty of nameless forms. I want to name our pains. I want to keep on changing our names.

(MD 1984)



Oscar Wilde

2016, oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm
Tate. Purchased with funds provided by The Joe and Marie Donnelly Acquisition Fund 2018

In 2014 Dumas included writer, playwright, and poet Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) in her *Great Men* drawing series. In 2016 she painted him and his lover Lord Alfred Douglas, nicknamed Bosie, specifically for a multi-disciplinary tribute to Oscar Wilde – a project realized by the UK cultural association Artangel in 2017 at Reading Gaol, England, titled *Inside: Artists, Writers and Readers in HM Prison in Reading*. It was the first time the public could actually visit this Victorian compound. This is where Wilde, convicted in 1895 for acts of "gross indecency," was imprisoned for two years with nothing but the Bible to read for the whole first year. In the so-called "separate system," prisoners were not allowed to converse or see one another's faces. They were allowed to write letters though. This is where in the isolation of his cell, he wrote *De Profundis*, one of the longest and most complex love letters in literature. The letter captures his bitterness towards Bosie as well as his extraordinary attachment to him. He repudiates Bosie's vanity as well as his own weakness.

Dumas painted Wilde not as the proud and popular author he used to be but as the mournful and vulnerable man he became in relation to the young lover who led to his tragic end.



Lord Alfred Douglas (Bosie)

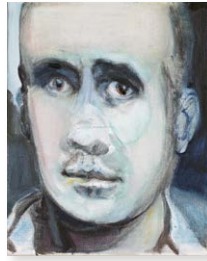
2016, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm
Tate. Presented by an anonymous donor
2018

Lord Alfred Douglas (1870–1945), was an English poet and journalist and the young lover of Oscar Wilde. He was his mother’s favorite child and she called him Bosie, a derivative of boysie, as in boy. Douglas has been described as a very beautiful, blue-eyed golden boy, but also as spoiled, reckless, insolent, and extravagant, spending money on boys and gambling and expecting Wilde to contribute to funding his tastes. The famous expression, about the love that dares not speak its name, is actually by Alfred Douglas and not by Oscar Wilde.

They had a stormy relationship. They often broke up, but would always be reconciled again. Douglas’ father, the Marquess of Queensbury, was opposed to their affair and eventually began a public persecution of Wilde that led to Wilde suing the father for calling him a “sodomite,” but resulting in himself being put on trial and convicted. Wilde was physically ruined by the harsh prison regime and died three years after his release.

Dumas’ paintings of the loving couple shows a discrepancy between Wilde’s amiable expression and the rather sly grin on Bosie’s face.

These portraits were hung together as a pair, in the actual cell where he was imprisoned so many years ago.



Jean Genet

2016, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm
Private collection

For the Reading Gaol project in 2017 (see *Oscar Wilde*), Dumas painted yet another writer who was more than familiar with prisons and prostitution, Jean Genet (1910–1986), the French novelist, poet, and playwright who intrigues her with his shamelessness. Genet had already been included in 2014 in her *Great Men* drawing series, with this quote by him written underneath, “Anyone who hasn’t experienced the ecstasy of betrayal knows nothing about ecstasy at all.”

At the age of 15 Genet was sent to a penal institution for acts of petty crime. At 19 years he joined the Foreign Legion and eventually was given a dishonorable discharge on grounds of being caught in a homosexual act. After returning to Paris he was in and out of jail.

He started writing in prison. Jean Cocteau, who was impressed by his writings, made it possible for Genet to get published. During the May revolt in 1968, he drew attention to living conditions of immigrants in France and supported the Black Panthers and the Palestinian cause. Dumas sees a link with Pasolini who seemed sympathetic to the hippies, but was attracted to the cops.

Dumas painted also two of his lovers to be reunited with him in a cell, on the occasion of the exhibition in Reading Prison.



Abdallah Bentaga (Jean Genet’s first long time lover)

2016, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm
Private collection

As the title reveals, the subject of this portrait is the man with whom Jean Genet enjoyed his first lasting relationship. When the French novelist, already in his 40s met the 18-year-old German Algerian Abdallah Bentaga in 1956, he was fascinated by the young circus performer who was training to become a professional acrobat-tightrope walker. The peculiar appeal of danger and death that is the core of this art form no doubt was a large part of the attraction that Genet felt towards Bentaga. As their relationship progressed, Genet urged the young man to attempt increasingly dangerous acts.

In one of his emblematic texts, the love-poem *Le Funambule* (1958), Genet explores the similarities between an acrobat and a poet, likening a tightrope dancer and his rope to a poet and his words. Genet eulogized the excellence of the tightrope dancer’s supreme lightness and focus, the unrelenting power and immeasurable loneliness to which both the acrobat and the poet expose themselves. Genet addresses his lover and inspiration Abdallah Bentaga throughout the text.

After sustaining severe injuries in a fall, which brought an end to his career, Abdallah took his own life in 1964 at the age of 26.



Mohamed El-Katrani (Jean Genet's last companion and lover)

2016, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm
Private collection

In 1974 Jean Genet met his last significant companion, Mohamed El-Katrani, in a street in Tangier. In Mohamed he saw his younger self. Both men had a history of delinquency, thieving, and prison.

Genet first took his friend to France, and later decided to build a house in Morocco for Mohamed and his wife. It is unclear how important the sexual component of their relationship was: financial considerations and emotional ties may have played a bigger role in keeping them together.

After succumbing to throat cancer, Genet was buried in Morocco in the old Spanish cemetery of Larache.

Dumas painted this portrait after a photograph of El Katrani, his son Azzedine and the Moroccan writer Mohamed Choukri, taken at Genet's modest grave.

"Erotic play discloses a nameless world which is revealed in the nocturnal language of lovers. Such language is not written down. It is whispered into the ear at night in a hoarse voice. At dawn it is forgotten."
Jean Genet, 1949



Canary Death

2006, oil on canvas, 80 x 70 cm
Pinault Collection

The inspiration for this work was a newspaper photograph of a drowned migrant drifted ashore. Since the beginning of this millennium the world has been confronted with increasingly tragic reports of sea crossings unsuccessfully attempted by African refugees whose bodies have been washed up on Mediterranean beaches and the shores of islands such as the Italian Lampedusa or the Spanish Canary Islands, beaches previously famed as tourist paradises for their beautiful sand and sunny weather.

In 2003 Dumas painted a darker version of the same subject called *Drowned*.

Is commentary useful. I say yes.
Is not all the necessary information contained in the work itself?
I say no. It is largely contained outside the work.
(MD 1992)



Figure in a Landscape

2010, oil on canvas, 180 x 300 cm
Private collection. Courtesy David Zwirner

This large work was first shown in the *Against the Wall* exhibition in New York in 2010. The works in this exhibition are primarily inspired by newspaper images. Focused on the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian human rights disaster, the title refers to the fence erected throughout the region to separate territories and people. It also refers to the feeling of being up against a wall. Dumas' representations acknowledge universal themes of isolation and lack of communication.

Dumas has said about these works: "In a sense they are my first landscape paintings, or should I say 'territory paintings.' That is why they are so large. For once it is not zoomed-in vertical frontal heads and naked figures that take center stage, but a man-made structure in a wider perspective. It leads us not into a holy land, but rather to a barren no-man's land."

Unlike the atmospheric landscape paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, where figures are dwarfed by nature and its vastness, here a massive fence has diagonally taken over the whole canvas and almost all of our view. A tiny child stands helpless against an impenetrable wall.

The "romantic" sounding title *Figure in a Landscape* is thus quite ironic in tone.



Child Waving

2010, oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm
Private collection. Courtesy David Zwirner

What at first glance looks like a cheerful moment, except for the dark color tonality, is deceptive. Once we know that this work was based on a newspaper photograph taken during the Iraq War, the image becomes even more disconcerting. The photograph was taken from a military helicopter. It is the only painting from the *Against the Wall* exhibition in which Dumas uses an aerial perspective, and where a figure is doubled by the shadow it casts on the ground. The boy is waving to welcome the soldiers. But is he a friend or a foe?

In 2008 Kathryn Bigelow made one of the best modern war movies inspired by the highly controversial Iraq War. *The Hurt Locker* shows that it can be fatal to jump to conclusions about even an innocent-looking child or gesture.



Anonymous

2005, oil on canvas, 70 x 50 cm
Private collection

In this small drawing-like painting, color is used sparsely. A dark line runs down the white garment of a central figure, or rather divides the painting itself in the middle. It is not clear what this figure with outstretched arms, looking at the floor, is doing, and the title *Anonymous* deliberately gives no clue as to the identity of the subject. This was precisely Dumas' intention. She is reflecting on the ambiguity of images and the complex position of painting in visual culture today.

Dumas does not call this work *Untitled*. She gives her works very specific titles. In this case *Anonymous* evokes the unidentified persons we see in media photographs accompanying reports on current affairs and wars. Even though the image might elicit associations with prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib, this figure could also be a child playing *Blind Man's Bluff*. Dumas leaves the question open.

Looking at images does not lead us to the truth, it leads us into temptation. It's not that a medium dies. It's that all media have become suspect. It's not the artists' subject matter that's under fire, but their motivation that's on trial. Now that we know that images can mean whatever, whoever wants them to mean, we don't trust anybody anymore, especially ourselves.
(MD 2003)



Death by Association

2002, oil on canvas, 70 x 80 cm
Pinault Collection

At the turn of the century, Dumas moved towards representations of death, especially in the case of young people being sacrificed in wars, as martyrs, suspects, look-alikes or friendly-fire casualties.

Death by Association was first shown in the *Time and Again* exhibition in Antwerp in 2002 together with paintings like *Dead Girl* (2002) and *Death through Mistaken Identity* (2002), works whose subjects are young Palestinians who died in violent circumstances. One might call them paintings of grief, seen with a maternal gaze, as if a mother were looking at her lifeless child, as if Dumas executed these paintings like prayers.

In *Death by Association*, relatives (seen in the newspaper photograph on which Dumas based the painting, but not in the painting itself) read to the deceased from the Koran. Dumas said that seeing the holy Islamic book on the dead boy's chest reminded her of paintings in the Academia in Venice, where she saw, for the first time, red and blue angels together and skeletons reading books in the hereafter.



Straitjacket

1993, oil on canvas, 90 x 70 cm
Private collection. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

This formally nearly abstract work, painted in restrained colors, is an example of how Dumas creates a maximum effect with minimal effort. The paint was applied with fast and deliberate brush strokes and an urgency of touch.

Straitjacket was exhibited in *Give the People what they Want* in 1993. The exhibition presented small-scale paintings in which primarily children figured as cultural constructs and allegories for concepts or values such as Liberty, Equality, and Justice. On a metaphorical level the work deals with isolation and alienation or the constant fear of being somewhere or somehow and being unable to move or escape.

It was based on a newspaper report about the death, in a South African prison, of a young woman who had been constrained in a straitjacket for twenty-three hours.



Blindfolded

2002, oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm
Private collection Thomas Koerfer

Blindfolded was first shown in the *Time and Again* exhibition in Antwerp in 2002. It was based on an image of a blindfolded Palestinian man in a refugee camp after being arrested by an Israeli soldier.

The exhibition introduced somber political themes that preoccupied Dumas for roughly the next ten years and recurred in exhibitions such as *Man Kind* in 2006, *Against the Wall* in 2010 and *Forsaken* in 2011. The Israeli writer Amos Oz made Dumas aware of the fact that both Jews and Arabs were once victims of the same European oppressor and that both groups had suffered humiliation, discrimination and persecution, which only exacerbated their conflict. Dumas' palette became muted and her sense of humor dulled.

The purpose of blindfolding a person is to render them sightless. It prevents a hostage or prisoner from being able to identify people or places. During executions a blindfold was used to make the condemned person less likely to panic. In depictions of Law or the Court, however, it is conventionally worn by Lady Justice to symbolize objectivity and impartiality. In 1992 Dumas made a very small painting of a blindfolded naked young girl, called *Justice*.



No Belt

2010–2016, oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm
Pinault Collection

What you see is not a pin-up of a young boy showing off his lean torso and jogging pants.

The title refers to a sight all too familiar in parts of the Middle East over the last few decades. At a checkpoint or in a hold-up, a teenage boy is lifting his tee shirt to show that he is not wearing a bomb-belt.

Here is to the dead, those killed, for us, and by us.

To those who are dying now. To the "incidents" that happen. The occupations that continue.

The mindless glorification of military solutions.

The terminology that grows softer, as attitudes harden and hatred increases.

One cannot colonise a land if you call it empty but when you do a body count, you'll find plenty. (MD 2006)



Losing (Her Meaning)

1988, oil on canvas, 50 x 70 cm
Pinault Collection

This painting was a key work in the *Waiting for Meaning* exhibition of 1988. (See *Snowwhite and the Next Generation*, Room 20)

The model floats face down, in dark green-blue water. It is a work not only about questioning representations of the female body, but also about the quest for a language that facilitates discussion of this issue.

The Artwork as Misunderstanding
There is a crisis regarding Representation.

They are looking for Meaning as if it was a thing.

As if it was a girl, required to take her panty off as if she would want to do so, as soon as the true interpreter comes along.

As if there was something to take off. (MD 1991)



Groupshow

1993, oil on canvas, 100 x 300 cm
Centraal Museum, Utrecht

Groupshow depicts a row of naked women from the back, all looking in the same direction over a fence at something that we cannot see. It was based on a photograph in a nudist magazine from the 1960s. Dumas removed it from its original context and turned it into a conceptual work as a commentary on art, or more specifically, a humorous commentary on group shows in general. It was first shown in a large group exhibition, *The Broken Mirror*, about the position of painting in the 1990s. Then serving as a type of meta-painting: A group show within a group show. Dumas commented in 1993 that "she never experienced paintings as windows or mirrors."



The Death of the Author

2003, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm
Private collection

The Death of the Author was based on a photograph of the death-bed of the French novelist Céline, the author of *Journey to the End of the Night* and the frequently cited adage "the truth of this world is death."

The title of the painting refers to the 1967 essay *La mort de l'auteur* by the French philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes, in which Barthes argues that the reading of a text should not be influenced by the author's identity.

Dumas agrees with Barthes' notion that readers themselves give meaning to the texts they read, and that accordingly the responsibility for interpretation lies with the beholder, thus passing the work from its creator to the reader. The same applies mutatis mutandis to artworks. Dumas, however, sees herself as both author and beholder and continues to ponder whether meaning resides in "origin" or "destination".



Persona

2020, oil on canvas, 125 x 105 cm
Collection of the artist

Persona is the Latin word for mask, the face worn over an actor's face in ancient theatre. It is related to *persono*, meaning "to sound through" or "speak through."

Dumas' *Persona* was based on a photograph of a plaster copy of a grieving mask-like head by Rodin (1840–1917). It was one of several variations of mournful faces that Rodin made for his monumental *Gates of Hell*, which was mainly inspired by the first section of *The Inferno* from Dante Alighieri's epic narrative poem *The Divine Comedy*.

Rodin excelled in portraying faces expressing, doom, pathos, or pain.

Dumas painted this portrait of a mask during a period of anguish in her own life.

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Assisted by
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Caroline Bourgeois, Elisabeth
Lebovici and Ulrich Loock.

Podcast: palazzograssi.it
*Some Sort of Tenderness – Marlene
Dumas between words and images*,
with the participation of the artist
and Caroline Bourgeois, Ivan
Carozzi, Adriana Cavarero, Claudia
De Zordo, Marco Ferraris, Donatien
Grau, Olivia Laing, Elisabeth Lebovici,
Makwena Modimola, Marlene van
Niekerk, Walter Siti, and with a song
by Marianne Faithfull.

The podcast is produced in
collaboration with CHORA.

For more information about the artist
www.marlenedumas.nl

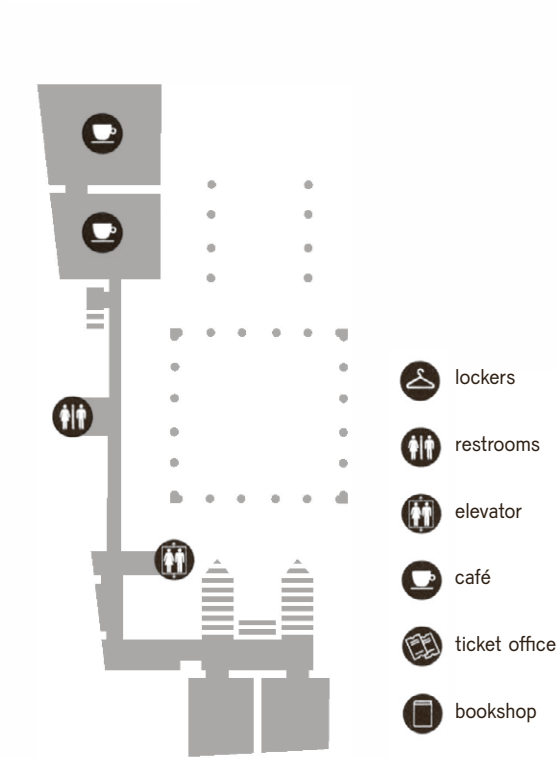
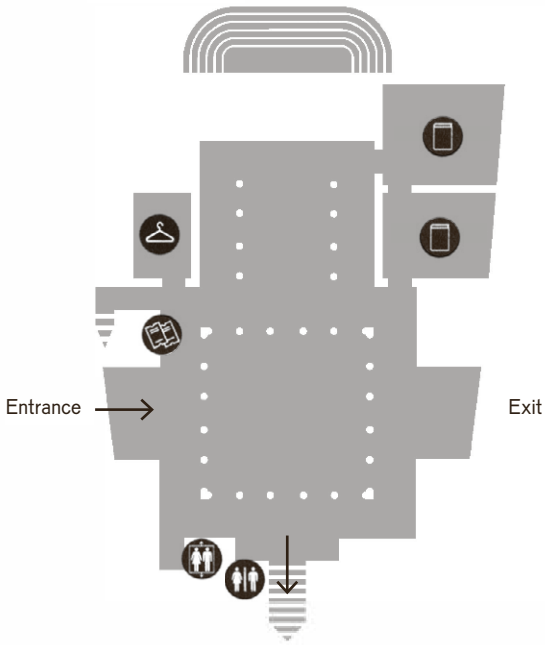
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Dumas (pp. 23, 33); Emma Estwic, New
York (p. 8); Robert Glowacki Photography
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Canal Grande

Atrium

Mezzanine



First Floor

Second Floor

