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**THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART DETROIT
DEBUTS**

HOLY HIP-HOP!:
New Paintings by Alex Melamid

FEBRUARY 8 THROUGH APRIL 20, 2008

*World Premiere Solo Exhibition of
Twelve Life-Size Paintings of Hip-Hop Icons by Alexander Melamid*

Detroit, MI – Icons from the world of hip-hop music will be the subject of an extraordinary exhibition of portraits by Russian-born American painter Alexander Melamid, the outspoken artist who once had his work dismantled and bulldozed by the Soviet government. *Holy Hip-Hop!: New Paintings by Alex Melamid* will be on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD) from February 8 through April 20, 2008. *Holy Hip-Hop!* marks the first-ever solo show for Melamid, who is world-famous for his collaborative partnership with fellow Russian-born artist Vitaly Komar. A fully-illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition.

The life-size portraits of twelve icons of hip-hop culture capture the larger than life personas embodied by these men, who are among the wealthiest and most influential individuals of our time. Snoop Dogg, 50 Cent, Common, Kanye West, Reverend Run, Easy Mo Bee, MC Duke, Lil Jon, Don "Magic" Juan, DJ Whoo Kid, Marc Ecko and Russell Simmons are portrayed by Melamid as they are in life – serious, ambitious, powerful and compelling. The twelve, dressed in their everyday clothes, are rendered with an Old Master style and quality, providing a provocative visual context and an association with masterpieces of the past. In these paintings, Melamid explores art, power and commodity, as well as displaying the wit that has long elevated his work.

Melamid was introduced to his subjects by his son, Dan "Dan the Man" Melamid, a successful music video director working in the hip-hop industry. For two years, from 2003 to 2005, Melamid spent time with each of the men, got to know them, then photographed and drew them as the basis for his paintings. "Art is the key that unlocked a door that would not have opened for me," said Melamid. "I thought it would be interesting to paint the men of hip-hop using the traditional European style I have been perfecting for 40 years."

"*Holy Hip-Hop!* is important for Detroit because it presents a world-renowned artist whose portraits and their meanings will resonate strongly within our community," said MOCAD Acting Director Marsha Miro. "Melamid's paintings explore the dominance of hip-hop culture and what it means to today's youth. The exhibition will stimulate a dialogue and provide opportunities that we haven't yet explored at the museum."

The Artist

Alexander Melamid (b.1945) is long-known in the art world for his partnership with fellow Russian artist Vitaly Komar, with whom he founded the Soviet Realist Pop Art Movement, *Sots Art*, which satirized Soviet Socialist Realism. During their almost 40 years of collaboration which ended in 2003, Komar and Melamid were noted as revolutionaries and, at times, rebels. Their work was often compared to that of Pop artists Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein.

Komar and Melamid's career began in Soviet Russia, where they met during an anatomy drawing class in a morgue. They started working together almost immediately, exhibiting first at the Blue Bird Café in Moscow in 1967. Komar and Melamid often faced government opposition and harassment. In 1974, they exhibited *Paradise*, featuring a Moscow apartment covered with light fixtures and small sculptural figures in various historical styles and movements. Audience members were locked inside and forced to listen to official Soviet radio. The installation was demolished on state order shortly after it opened. Just one year later, they participated in the *Bulldozer Show*, an outdoor exhibition that also was bulldozed by the government. These and other occurrences resulted in their expulsion from associations such as the youth section of the Moscow Artists Union and the Graphic Artists Association.

In February of 1976, Komar and Melamid's first U.S. exhibition opened at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York. *Biography of Our Contemporary* garnered rave reviews and launched the artists into the international spotlight. After their successes, they applied for exit visas to enter the U.S., but were twice denied by the Soviet government. In response, they declared they had created their own "state," called *TransState*, with a constitution, alphabet, language, passport, currency and border post. Eventually, they were allowed to emigrate to Israel and moved to New York shortly thereafter. That same year, 1978, their first museum exhibition, *Komar & Melamid: Matrix 43*, opened at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut.

In 1982, they mounted another show at the Feldman gallery. *Sots Art* resulted in critical and commercial success, and within the year The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acquired their work. Acquisitions by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, and The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, soon followed, and the pair subsequently had more than 60 solo exhibitions worldwide. Komar and Melamid both received U.S. citizenship in 1988, and for a number of years continued to create art, lecture and publish articles together.

In 2003, the duo decided to explore individual careers. Around this time, Melamid's first-born son, Dan, introduced him to the world of hip-hop, which included his clients and close friends DJ Whoo Kid and 50 Cent. Melamid was intrigued by the hip-hop society because of its rich history and world appeal, and began to paint the hip-hop portraits, which has become his first solo exhibition. According to the artist, these paintings will be followed by two additional series – twelve religious figures and twelve Russian oligarchs.

The Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit

MOCAD was established in 2006 to present art at the forefront of contemporary culture. The museum is located on the edge of Detroit's Cultural Center in a converted automobile showroom with a graffiti mural on its façade and an interior of raw, cavernous spaces.

Visitor Information

Holy Hip-Hop!: New Paintings by Alex Melamid will be on view at MOCAD from February 8 through April 20, 2008. MOCAD is located at 4454 Woodward Avenue at Garfield Street and is open Wednesday and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m.; Thursdays through Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.; and closed Mondays and Tuesdays. Admission to the museum is free, unless otherwise indicated. For more information about MOCAD, call 313.832.6622 or visit www.mocadetroit.org.

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