

Vice Chancellor, I have the honour to present, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Fine Art, honoris causa, Marlene Dumas.

Marlene Dumas, one of the most influential painters in the world today, occupies a simple, sparsely furnished ground floor apartment on the southern side of Amsterdam. Although she lives in the Netherlands, she does not attempt to capture the famous Dutch light, nor does she swim or ride a bicycle. She also doesn't drive or travel, doesn't see a therapist, doesn't have hobbies and doesn't take holidays. She lies in bed and reflects, and she paints.

And when she paints, she paints. Squatting on a little wooden stool, a huge page spread out in front of her, a roll of paper towel and a photograph at her side, she pours paint, lifts the page to let it flow, dabs and corrects, stabs and strokes with a brush and out of this emerges her trademark compelling and challenging paintings. Mostly portraits, close ups, stripped of extraneous background detail, "babies who look like dictators, brides in wedding dresses lined up like zombies" – all exploring the big questions: birth, life, sex, death, evil.

She was born in Cape Town, grew up in Kuils River and studied at Michaelis in the 1970s. Prof Neville Dubow, director of the school, said to her: "You are a natural painter". She says: "Everything everyone holds against painting is true. It is an anachronism. It is outdated. It is obscene ... It's decadent. It's arrogant. The way it insists it's unique. And then it's stupid because it can't answer any questions. So why do we still care to look at images? That's why I continue to create them."

So she is a painter. An exceptionally talented and challenging painter. She has taken a medium that is generally considered to be reactionary and traditional and shattered its formality and distance. Over the thirty-six years of her career, she has challenged the pictorial tradition that is predominantly male, analytical and removed and liberated it into something expressive, intimate and sensuous. Her paintings have a distinctive quality, kind of humorous and wry, but also deeply open and emotional.

Her work is held in major museum collections all over the world, including the Georges Pompidou in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo. Among many other accolades and prizes, she recently won the prestigious Johannes Vermeer prize, the Dutch state prize for the arts. The jury made its unanimous decision on account of her exceptional artistic talent and ability to capture human emotions.

Perhaps the Dutch have forgiven her about the Dutch light, for not understanding Dutch humour and for running away from her accountant and her dentist. Marlene Dumas paints as a positive act. It's her method of finding meaning through images. Her painting is erotic and moving and deeply contemporary. Balzac wanted to write the human condition. Marlene Dumas is painting it.

Vice Chancellor, I have the honour to invite you to admit to the degree of Doctor of Fine Art, honoris causa, Marlene Dumas.

1. Solomon, D., 2008 *Figuring Marlene Dumas*. New York Times, **15 June 2008**.
2. Evenhuis, R., *Miss Interpreted*, 1997, MM Filmproducties: The Netherlands.
3. Dumas, M., et al., 2007. *Marlene Dumas: Intimate Relations*: Jacana Media.
4. Bonacossa, I., 2006. *Marlene Dumas: supercontemporanea*: Electa.
5. Dumas, M., *Personal Communication*, 27 November 2012, 2012.
6. Solomon, J.A.q.i.D., 2008.*Figuring Marlene Dumas*. New York Times, **15 June 2008**.

