“David Michalek: Figure Studies” is presented at the Pomona College Museum of Art in collaboration with Pomona College’s Departments of Dance and Neuroscience. David Michalek is an artist who takes the concept and techniques of portraiture as the starting points for the creation of his works, on both a large and small scale, in a range of mediums. Noted for slow motion videography, in which he captures movement using high-speed film and then stretches it out, Michalek’s work explores the relationships between movement and art from both a scientific and aesthetic perspective.

“David Michalek: Figure Studies” will be on view September 3 through December 22, 2013, at the Pomona College Museum of Art in Claremont, CA. An opening reception honoring the artist will be held at the Museum on Saturday, September 7, 2013, from 5-7 p.m. A special presentation of Michalek’s award-winning video Slow Dancing will be projected on the façade of Bridges Auditorium at Pomona College every evening from September 26 through October 5, 2013. Presentations of “Figure Studies” and Slow Dancing are offered in conjunction with the interdisciplinary symposium, “The Moving Mind,” organized by the Pomona College Departments of Dance and Neuroscience.

“Figure Studies,” which will be on display in the main gallery at the Pomona College Museum of Art, applies the technology of high–speed HD video to the recording of specialized and non-specialized human movement. “Figure Studies” builds on a previous work from 2007, Slow Dancing, which consists of a series of video portraits of dancers in such slow motion that they often appear to not be moving at all, enabling viewers to discern normally overlooked details in the complex movements of the human body. Slow Dancing is presented at Pomona College, projected on the façade of Bridges Auditorium, every evening from September 26 through October 5, 2013.

The core premise of both “Figure Studies” and Slow Dancing is to record a small slice of time (a mere five seconds) at extremely high frame rates, so that when played back in real time, the five seconds stretch to roughly 10 minutes. As Michalek describes, “I carved up time. I took a small section of time and found a real edge. A degree of slowness that people could tolerate
watching, five seconds of movement, shot over 10 minutes gives a lyrical intensity that is quite unique.”

In “Figure Studies” Michalek applies that method to bodies shaped by athletics, dance, labor, physical trauma and the passage of time. He selected a range of participants because “I wanted to show a diversity of the human form. Although the figures are unclothed, you are able to read social class and other things through the body.” Initially the subjects were asked to perform movements that demonstrate biomechanical categories (carrying, throwing, jumping and so on). The final sequence of movement rendered in extremely slow motion evolved from interviews and improvisations with the subjects until a single movement idea was distilled into a five-second sequence. This final sequence is projected at larger than life size and slowed to a 10-minute meditation on the form and power of the human body. This new project brings together art and science. Harvard biologist Dr. Daniel Lieberman consulted on defining the biomechanical categories for the piece, as well as ways of demonstrating those actions. Dancer, choreographer and director of the Harvard Dance Program, Jill Johnson, took part in early discussions and development meetings with Dr. Lieberman. She continued to work with Michalek through to the completion of filming. “Figure Studies” embraces multiple referents: contemporary studies of bio-mechanics; the photographic motion studies of 19th-century photographer Eadweard Muybridge and French physiologist Etienne-Jules Marey; and the vocabulary of post-modern dance. “Figure Studies” is a commission of Summerhall Arts Venue at the Edinburgh Festival, and Pomona College and the Pomona College Museum of Art with major support provided by Le Laboratoire.

David Michalek worked as an assistant to noted photographer Herb Ritts, while earning a B.A. in English Literature from UCLA. He began his professional photographic career working as a portrait artist for publications such as The New Yorker, Vanity Fair, Interview and Vogue. Concurrently, Michalek began to delve into performance, installation and multi-disciplinary projects. Since giving up commercial photography in 1998, his work has been shown nationally and internationally with recent public art and solo exhibitions at the Brooklyn Museum, the Los Angeles Music Center, Harvard University, Sadler’s Wells, the Venice Biennale, Yale University, The Kitchen, Lincoln Center, and at the Edinburgh Festival at Summerhall with the Richard DeMarco Foundation. He has collaborated on the visual art component of two staged works with Peter Sellars: Kafka Fragments, presented as part of Carnegie Hall’s 2005-06 season; and St. François d’Assise, presented at the Salzburg Festival and Paris Opera. Other film and video work for theater includes collaborations with The Tallis Scholars, John Malpede and L.A.P.D., and with the Brooklyn Philharmonic in a project for the Brooklyn Museum’s “Music Off the Walls” series. He is a visiting faculty member at Yale Divinity School, where he lectures on religion and the arts. Michalek lives in New York with his wife Wendy Whelan, principal dancer of New York City Ballet.

The symposium, entitled “The Moving Mind: A Forum for Dialogue Between the Arts and Sciences,” takes place on the Pomona College campus from October 3 through 5, 2013. It will provide opportunities for dialogue and experiential workshops in which those interested in the
cognitive or neurosciences might explore ideas through the process of embodied exploration; performing or visual artists might find insight into the creative processes through the lens of research science; and scholars in the humanities and social sciences might consider the myriad of issues around the human body. The symposium aims to address the fact that creative thinking and the use of imagination are common goals for both artists and scientists. Information is available through www.dance.pomona.edu/movingmind.

The Pomona College Museum of Art is located at 330 N. College Avenue, Claremont, CA, and is open to the public free of charge Tuesday through Sunday, from 12-5 p.m. and Thursday evenings from 5-11 p.m. For more information, call (909) 621-8283 or visit www.pomona.edu/museum.

The Pomona College Museum of Art houses a substantial permanent collection as well as serving as a gallery for the display of temporary exhibitions. Important holdings include the Kress Collection of 15th- and 16th-century Italian panel paintings; more than 5,000 examples of Pre-Columbian to 20th-century American Indian art and artifacts; and a large collection of American and European prints, drawings, and photographs.