

The museum as muse : [brochure] artists reflect : March 14-June 1, 1999

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Date

1999

Publisher

The Museum of Modern Art

Exhibition URL

www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/185

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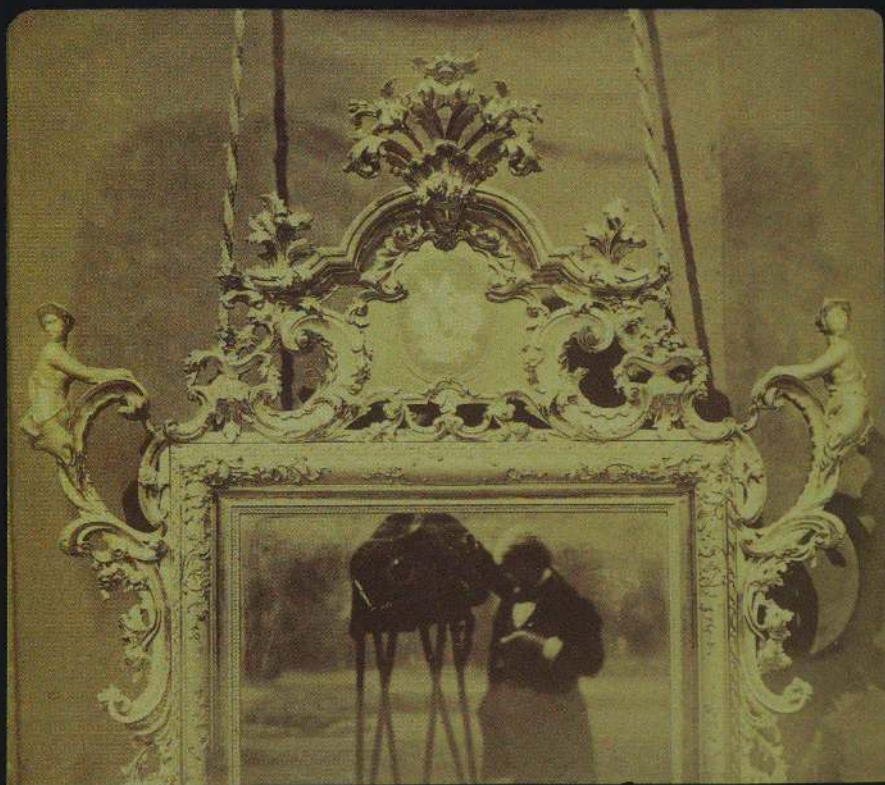


The Museum of Modern Art
New York

March 14–June 1, 1999

THE MUSEUM AS MUSE

Artists Reflect



MUSEUM

The Museum of Modern Art Library

The public museum, since its inception in the late eighteenth century, has enjoyed a complex, interdependent, and ever-changing relationship with the artist. This exhibition explores this rich and varied relationship through a broad-based, international survey of works about museums and their practices and policies. Focused on the postwar period, it also features earlier artists, including American portraitist Charles Willson Peale, several nineteenth-century photographers, and Russian Constructivist El Lissitzky. New works have been created specifically for this exhibition by Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Janet Cardiff, Mark Dion, Louise Lawler, and Fred Wilson; Wilson and Allan McCollum have also created special Web projects. Collectively, the artists in this exhibition have examined nearly every aspect of museums—from their curatorial and administrative policies to their exhibition strategies and fund-raising practices—using a range of media to frame their critiques, including painting, sculpture, photography, installation, audio, video, and performance art. Many have appropriated aspects of museum practice as a conceptual or formal strategy, and some have even constructed their own personal museums.

Herbert Distel. Detail of *Museum of Drawers*. 1970–77. Chest of drawers containing miniature works by various artists. Overall (approx.) 72 x 28 7/16 x 28 3/16" (183 x 42 x 42 cm). Kunsthau Zürich. Donation of Herbert Distel and The Foundation Julius Bär. Photo: ©1999, Kunsthau Zürich. All rights reserved

PHOTOGRAPHS

The Object and the Museum in Use

Perhaps the most obvious way artists have studied museums is through the camera lens, using photography to document works in a collection, to capture visitors responding to art, or to direct attention to overlooked areas of museums. This exhibition includes examples of nineteenth-century museum photography by Britons Charles Thurston Thompson, Roger Fenton, and Stephen Thompson, and Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Gustave Le Gray, all of whom showcased the beauty and preciousness of the objects in exhibition spaces such as the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the French Salon.

While Zoe Leonard's meditative photographs of mirrors at The Metropolitan Museum of Art relate to this tradition, more often twentieth-century photographers have focused on the vitality of museums, rather than on their collections. This is evidenced in the works by Henri Cartier-Bresson, David Seymour, Elliott Erwitt, Eve Arnold, and Lutz Dille in this exhibition. Thomas Struth's conviction that museums may be compared to train stations is evident in his vivid, large-scale images of crowds at The Museum of Modern Art, the Accademia in Venice, and the Louvre. Jeff Wall's sixteen-foot-long photograph *Restoration* (1993), a Cibachrome transparency displayed in a light box, depicts a staged scene: the simulation of restorers repairing a large-scale panorama. For Wall, however, this immediate theme is less important than emphasizing the massiveness and ultimate futility of the restorer's task. Christian Milovanoff photographs feet depicted in major paintings in the Louvre's collection, while Candida Höfer turns her attention to the unexpected and unseen in museums—vacant lounges and lobbies, for example—emphasizing their blandness and impersonality.

Vik Muniz created his *Equivalents (Museum of Modern Art)* (1995) shortly after visiting the exhibition *Alfred Stieglitz at Lake George* at The Museum of Modern Art. He photographed the Museum's marble floor to create a series of enigmatic images referencing Stieglitz's photographs of the same title and evoking skies, clouds, and the moon. Fred Wilson's new work *Art in Our Time* (1998), created for this exhibition, is also rooted in visual experiences at The Museum of Modern Art. He chooses to examine the Museum's memory of itself by mining its photographic archive, selecting images and presenting them in ways that reveal much about the Museum that cannot be apprehended from its public galleries. He further explores this collection of images in his special on-line project, *Road to Victory* (1999).

Thomas Struth. *Musée du Louvre IV, Paris*. 1989. Cibachrome print. 6' 7/16" x 7' 1 7/16" (184 x 217 cm). Marieluise Hessel Collection, on permanent loan to the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Photo: © Thomas Struth, Düsseldorf, courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York



ARTIST-COLLECTORS AND THE PERSONAL MUSEUM

museums, not only to preserve one's own work but also to apply museological principles to the production of art. Joseph Cornell, Marcel Duchamp, Marcel Broodthaers, Claes Oldenburg, and Barbara Bloom are among the artists who have created personal museums, varied in intent and design. Joseph Cornell's hermetic, intensely private, box constructions of the 1940s and 50s evoke his romantic obsessions. Over a number of years Cornell amassed photographs, clippings, and other abandoned artifacts that he would arrange in modest-sized boxes that serve at once as archives and as miniature exhibition spaces.

Duchamp worked on a similar scale when constructing the *Boîte-en-valise*, or box in a suitcase, a portable monograph including sixty-nine reproductions of Duchamp's own work. Between 1935 and 1940, he created a deluxe edition of twenty boxes, all in brown leather carrying cases but with slight variations in design and content. During the 1950s and 60s, he released an edition consisting of six different series that eliminated the suitcase, used different colored fabrics for the cover, and altered the number of items inside. Each box unfolds to reveal various works displayed on pull-out standing frames, diminutive Readymades hung in a vertical "gallery," and loose prints mounted on paper, among them a reproduction of *L.H.O.O.Q.* Duchamp created *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919), by taking an ordinary reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* and adding a moustache, goatee, and lascivious pun (understood when the letters LHOQ are pronounced rapidly in French to mean "she's got a hot ass"). Both his boxes and his altered *Mona Lisa* address museums' traffic in postcards, posters, and other reproductions, and thus question the relative importance of the "original" work of art.

Broodthaers, who acknowledged a debt to Duchamp, also set up a personal museum, the *Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles*. Created in 1968, this fictional museum represents a pioneering effort to dispute traditional museum practices precisely by appropriating and altering them. With neither permanent collection nor permanent location, Broodthaers's museum manifested itself in sections that appeared at various sites between 1968 and 1971. Items from the *Financial Section* (1970–71), in which the artist attempted to sell the museum "on account of bankruptcy," are exhibited here. Notable is the gold ingot stamped with an eagle, one of an unlimited edition that was sold to raise money for the museum. Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum* (1965–77) also

At the heart of the relationship between artists and museums is the phenomenon of the artist-collector, and from this developed the urge to create personal



Claes Oldenburg. *Mouse Museum*. 1965–77. Enclosed structure of wood, corrugated aluminum, and plexiglass display cases containing 385 objects. 10' x 31' 6" x 33' (304 x 960 x 1030 cm). Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna. Photo: Nic Tenwiggenhorn

appropriates methods of museum display and, with the wry humor typical of his work, comments on the obsessiveness of collecting and on the excessiveness of consumer culture. The architectural shape of Oldenburg's freestanding museum is borrowed from the contour of Mickey Mouse, and thus a cartoon figure becomes the setting for the display of hundreds of found objects, popular knickknacks, and by-products of Oldenburg's art-making process. Bloom addresses the obsessive and narcissistic nature of art collecting in *The Reign of Narcissism*, a museum devoted to objects bearing her own likeness. She emblazoned her image on Greek-style sculptures and bas-reliefs, on tea sets and chocolates displayed in vitrines, and published a series of books titled *The Complete Works of Barbara Bloom* (1989). These are displayed in a hexagonal parlor room suggestive of a private, salon-style museum.

Whereas Duchamp, Oldenburg, and Bloom created museums of their own work, Herbert Distel adopted the role of museum curator when he invited artists from around the world to contribute miniature works for display in the tiny "galleries" of his *Museum of Drawers* (1970–77). The drawers in this found cabinet are filled with 500 works by a wide range of artists, creating a comprehensive survey of artistic currents in the 1960s and 70s. A similar cabinet was created by the founder of the Fluxus movement, George Maciunas, in 1975–77, to anthologize the creative output of the Fluxus collective.

Christian Boltanski recognizes something mournful in the way museums collect and display objects. His *Vitrine of Reference II* (1970) presents fragmentary artifacts of the artist's childhood—photographs, a 45 r.p.m. record, a slingshot—in a museum-style vitrine. He has written: "If I put my glasses in a vitrine, they will never break, but will they still be considered glasses?... Once the glasses are part of a museum's collection, they forget their function, they are only then an image of glasses." In Boltanski's *Archives* (1987), blurred portrait photographs of hundreds of anonymous individuals are arranged, with somber evocations, on wire-mesh grills that recall the racks of museum storage areas. A certain sense of melancholy is heightened by the cramped, dimly lit room in which these photographs are hung.

NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

Questioning Modes of Classification

Founded in Philadelphia, Peale's museum included an extensive portrait gallery and specimens from the animal, vegetable and mineral worlds, all arranged according to a taxonomic structure that can be seen in his life-sized self-portrait, *The Artist in His Museum* (1822). In this painting, Peale depicts himself as the epitome of the gentleman connoisseur, holding back a velvet curtain to reveal his prized collection. The same taxonomic systems followed by Peale are addressed by contemporary artist Mark Dion in *The Great Chain of Being* (1999), created for this exhibition. Dion bases his display method on a Wunderkammer, or "cabinet of curiosities," in order to trace the "evolution of the natural history museum, as an exploration of what gets to stand for nature at a particular time for a distinct group of people."

Charles Willson Peale, best known as a late eighteenth-century portrait painter, was also the creator of the first American museum, an encyclopedic institution devoted to cultural and natural history.

The subject of Lothar Baumgarten's *Unsettled Objects* (1968–69) is the Pitt Rivers Museum, a Victorian anthropological institution and natural history museum in Oxford, England. This work includes eighty ektachromes showing artifacts in vitrines displayed much as they were when the museum opened in 1874. Removed from their original context and function, cluttered in display cases, and shackled to their descriptive labels, these objects



invite an aesthetic—and exotic—appraisal, effectively becoming something else. The boxes of Susan Hiller's *From the Freud Museum* (1991–96) evoke the cases and drawers of an anthropological museum, but hers is a museum created from “unspoken, unrecorded, unexplained, and overlooked” materials—personal mementos, private relics, and talismans. These materials are presented as precious objects in museum-style conservation boxes.

The animals and vegetation photographed by Hiroshi Sugimoto have also been decontextualized by their placement in dioramas at a natural history museum. Yet the photographs are deceiving because, appearing at first to capture animals in the wild, they ultimately prove to be still images of long-dead animals and synthetic models of other life-forms. Christopher Williams also explores the natural world in the museum context in his work *Angola to Vietnam** (1989). This series of photographs depicts the painstakingly accurate glass replicas of plants housed in the Botanical Museum at Harvard University. Williams opted to photograph plant models from countries where political disappearances had been recorded in 1985 and reclassified and renamed the flora according to their country of origin. Over the institution's botanical classification, based on science, the artist proposes another, based on politics.

MUSEUM PRACTICES AND POLICIES

Crucial to this survey are those artists who have scrutinized and challenged the social and political dynamics of the museum as an institution. A notable

figure in this tradition is Hans Haacke. His *Cowboy with Cigarette* (1990) takes issue with corporate sponsorship of museums by turning Picasso's collage *Man with a Hat* (1912–13, from MoMA's collection) into a cigarette advertisement. This commentary is directed at Philip Morris, as well as at The Museum of Modern Art which accepted sponsorship from the tobacco company for its exhibition *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism* (1989–90).

The works by Jac Leirner and General Idea in this exhibition study the relationship between museums and their marketing strategies. For her

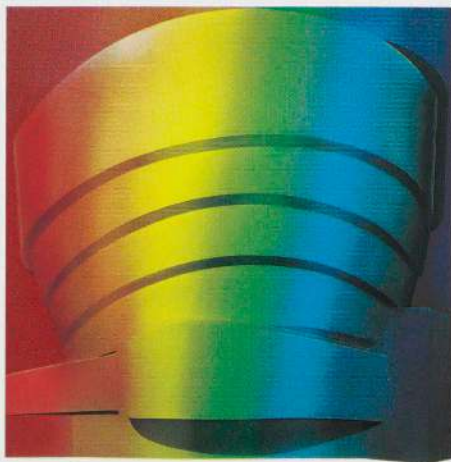
Names (Museums) (1989–92) Leirner acquired shopping bags from various museum gift shops around the world and sewed them together into a wall-sized, quilt-like collage. General Idea's *Boutique for the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion* (1980), built in the shape of a dollar sign, functions as a museum shop within the exhibition space and blurs the line between art and commerce by offering a selection of General Idea's publications and multiples "for sale."

Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler, as well as Louise Lawler, have focused on the more-or-less invisible framework that a museum provides for the display of its collection. Lawler's new work for this exhibition consists of glass paperweights showing installation views of the Museum's permanent collection. Ericson and Ziegler drew attention to one of the most subtle of curatorial choices in their work *MoMA Whites* (1990), a collection of jars containing various shades of white paint preferred by individual curators at The Museum of Modern Art.

Sherrie Levine and Allan McCollum address the aura of artworks in the age of mass-produced objects. Each element in McCollum's *Collection of Four Hundred and Eighty Plaster Surrogates* (1982/89) is a plaster mold in the shape of a framed painting, but with blackness where the picture should be. By installing large groups of these surrogates McCollum creates a visual spectacle in its own right that suggests, perhaps, that the "face" of any one painting is less important than the overall impact of the gallery or museum setting. In McCollum's on-line project created for *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*, the

obsessional nature of registrarial techniques in museums is explored in an exhaustive cataloguing of *Collection of Four Hundred and Eighty Plaster Surrogates*. Levine takes up André Malraux's notion that the world of reproductions forms a "museum without walls" and turns it inside out. Pronouncing herself a "still-life artist" who photographs art reproductions from books, she makes what she calls "ghosts of ghosts" whose relationship to the original work of art is "tertiary . . . three or four times removed."

Issues of memory and subversion, as well as museum security, underlie the works of Robert Filliou and Sophie Calle in this exhibition. Calle creates a poetic remembrance of a famous crime: the theft in 1990 of works by Degas, Rembrandt, Flinck, Manet, and Vermeer from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. Gardner's stipulation in her will that the arrangement of the galleries remain static ensures that a sense of loss remains a permanent fixture of the museum. Calle interviewed curators, guards, and other staff members



Richard Hamilton. *The Solomon R. Guggenheim (Spectrum)*. 1965–66. Fiberglass and cellulose. 48 x 48 x 7 1/4" (122 x 122 x 18 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. © Richard Hamilton/DACS, London/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: David Heald, © Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

asking them to describe the absent works; their varied responses are displayed as a counterpart to photographs of the labels, empty pedestals, and bare hooks on the walls left behind after the theft. Filliou's series titled *Poussière de Poussière* (Dust to Dust) provides evidence of the artist's own act of vandalism—his surreptitious cleaning of renowned masterpieces in the Louvre and the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Proof of this discreet act—documentary photographs and the actual cloth dusters, complete with dust particles—is displayed in archival boxes with mock solemnity. The funereal tones of the title reflect the metaphorical laying to rest that many artists equate with having works of art reside in museums.

Art & Language merge the sites of art's production and consumption—the studio and the museum—in *Index: Incident in a Museum XXI* (1987), part of a series of paintings depicting the galleries of the Whitney Museum of American Art. The performances of Vito Acconci documented in this exhibition similarly intruded upon the sanctity of the museum space. In *Proximity Piece*, created for a 1970 exhibition at the Jewish Museum titled *Software*, Acconci interrupted the contemplative privacy of museum visitors, chosen at random, by invading their personal space. "I'm standing beside that person, or behind, closer than the accustomed distance. I crowd the person until he/she moves away, or until he/she moves me out of the way." For *Service Area* (1970), Acconci forwarded his mail to a display case placed in The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Information*. Through this gesture, the Museum and the postal service were put into the artist's service, and the exhibition space was extended to include the transportation Acconci used to go collect his mail, the postal system, and the artist's start and finish point, his home.

The realm of museum education provides the basic structure for the works of Janet Cardiff and Andrea Fraser included in *The Museum as Muse*. In her new work commissioned for the exhibition, Cardiff continues her series of acoustic guided tours. By weaving words, music, and sound effects into her tour, which alters the perception of the surrounding gallery space, Cardiff transports her listeners to a realm suspended between the context in which they walk and a fictional one. Fraser assumes the role of a museum docent under the name Jane Castelton in *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*, a performance held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1989 and documented on video. She conducts a tour of the museum galleries, cafeteria, and lobby areas making comments largely drawn from institutional texts and speeches but synthesized in an incongruous fashion. For Fraser, Jane Castelton personifies a non-expert volunteer from an upper-class background who possesses "the leisure and the economic and cultural capital that defines a museum's patron class."

Garry Winogrand and Larry Fink document, in their photographs of openings and parties, the role of museums as social environments for the wealthy and genteel. Winogrand's images of exhibition openings read like a *Who's Who* of museum culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Fink's photographs zero in on a strand of pearls or a table full of place-cards and direct the viewer to the small but significant details that are politically important elements of museum culture.

THE MUSEUM TRANSFORMED

In 1796, French painter Hubert Robert made two paintings of the Louvre, one depicting the Grande Galerie as he



proposed to redesign it, the other showing it in ruins. As its first official curator, Robert had an interest in the public spaces of the Louvre, and his imaginary view of the edifice in ruins aimed to convey upon it a certain grandeur associated with classical ruins. Since Robert's time, a number of artists have envisioned the museum in an altered, manipulated, transformed, or even ruined state, each with a particular objective.

A project by Christo of 1968 proposed a radical, temporary transformation of the entire Museum of Modern Art: the wrapping of the building in 70,000 square feet of heavy-gauge canvas tarpaulin bound with thousands of feet of nylon rope, the enveloping of its sculpture garden in a vast skin of translucent polyethylene, and the construction of a twenty-foot-high steel barricade on 53 Street using 441 stacked oil barrels. Although Christo created numerous architectural renderings, drawings, and scale models to back his proposal, the project was never realized. Richard Hamilton's series of fiberglass reliefs of 1965–66, based on Frank Lloyd Wright's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum completed only a few years earlier, was, according to the artist, "an attempt to mirror the whole activity of architecture in the confines of a four-foot-square panel." Hamilton's precious Guggenheims, in gold, shiny black and

white, or multi-colors, are suspended ambiguously, and perhaps ironically, between the museum as artwork and the artwork as museum.

Dennis Oppenheim and Robert Smithson have produced earthworks that physically challenge or defy the limitations of an institutional building. In *Gallery Transplant* (1969), Oppenheim traced the floor plan of a gallery from the Cornell University art museum in snow at a bird sanctuary nearby. Although intended to be an ephemeral gesture, the piece left behind collectible traces in the form of photographs and a map, which are exhibited in *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*. Smithson, too, adapted his outdoor art practices to the gallery by placing natural elements inside it. By creating these "non-sites" he provoked a certain dislocation of the museum's conceptual premise.

A particularly fatalistic and ironic vision of the museum is Edward Ruscha's painting *The Los Angeles County Museum on Fire* (1965–68). Perhaps a response to this unpopular and unfriendly building designed in 1964 by William Pereira, the painting also speaks to an uproarious period in which artists felt increasingly alienated from cultural institutions. A decade later, Komar and Melamid created a series of paintings titled *Scenes from the Future* showing prominent buildings,

such as John F. Kennedy Airport, the Guggenheim Museum, and The Museum of Modern Art, in ruins. Seemingly indebted to Hubert Robert, these ominous images combine a charged contemporary subject with a style reminiscent of eighteenth-century landscape painting.

Since the late 1960s, Daniel Buren has written extensively about issues pertinent to museum installation and display and has made a number of interventions that radically transformed museums. In this exhibition, Buren appropriates a section of MoMA's permanent collection, complete with its labels, gallery inscriptions, and lighting system, and transports it to *The Museum as Muse*. In its place, he installs his signature vertical stripes, leaving blank those areas where the paintings were positioned. Such works *in situ* "reinforce the fact that, as banal and convenient as people want us to believe [the museum walls] are, they embody everything possible and are never neutral."

The word museum stems from the Greek *museion* meaning house of the muses, the nine goddesses of creative inspiration. Yet as this exhibition reveals, during the twentieth century the museum has expanded its function as simply a home or repository for art to become a locus for artistic inspiration and activity.

Kristen Erickson, Curatorial Assistant,
Department of Painting and Sculpture

The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect was organized by Kynaston McShine, Senior Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture.

COVER ABOVE: Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte-en-valise (de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy)*, 1935–41. Leather valise containing miniature replicas, photographs, and color reproductions of works by Duchamp, and one "original": *Large Glass*, collotype on celluloid (69 items) 7 1/2 x 9 1/4" (19 x 23.5 cm); overall 16 x 15 x 4" (40.6 x 38.1 x 10.2 cm); IX/XX from Deluxe Edition. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. James Thrall Soby Fund. © Marcel Duchamp, ARS, New York / ADAGP, Paris 1999. Photo: John Wronn, ©1999 The Museum of Modern Art, New York

COVER BELOW: Charles Thurston Thompson, *Venetian Mirror*, ca. 1700, from the Collection of John Webb. 1853. Albumen print from wet-collodion-on-glass negative. 7 1/4 x 8 3/4" (19.1 x 21.3 cm). Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Photo: V&A Picture Library

BROCHURE ©1999 The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Edward Ruscha, *The Los Angeles County Museum on Fire*, 1965–68. Oil on canvas 53 1/2" x 11' 1 1/2" (135.9 x 339.1 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1972. Photo: Lee Stalworth, courtesy Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution

PUBLICATION

The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect. Kynaston McShine. 9 x 10 3/4". 296 pages; 250 illustrations, including 76 in full color. Cloth \$50.00. Paper \$24.95. Available in The MoMA Book Store.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Panel Discussion: "The Imagined Museum." Tuesday, May 18, 1999, 6:30 p.m. The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2. A panel discussion with art historians and authors. Tickets are \$8; members \$7; students and seniors \$5, and are available at the Lobby Information Desk. For more information, please call the Department of Education at (212) 708-9832.

The exhibition is made possible by the Contemporary Exhibition Fund of The Museum of Modern Art, established with gifts from Lily Auchincloss, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder.

The artists' commissions are made possible by The Bohen Foundation.

Additional support is provided by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

The accompanying publication is supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

The accompanying Web site and on-line artists' projects are made possible by The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art.

The exhibition Web site and on-line artists' projects may be viewed at www.moma.org.