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The Museum of Modern Art

ROBERT CUMMING'S STAGED PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE 1970S ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Clutter of Happenstance: Photographs by Robert Cumming

March 19–June 15, 1998

An exhibition of some 40 photographs by contemporary artist Robert Cumming (American, b. 1943) opens at The Museum of Modern Art on March 19, 1998. *The Clutter of Happenstance: Photographs by Robert Cumming* presents photographs from MoMA's collection, and loans from The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; The Art Institute of Chicago; and a private collection.

Known for his work in a range of mediums, including painting, sculpture, and performance, Cumming concentrated on photography from 1969 through 1981. Fascinated by the spatial and perceptual transformations that occurred when he made photographs to document objects and models, he began rigging tableaux in his studio, kitchen, and backyard expressly to be photographed.

Studio debris, household appliances, bars of soap, and other domestic articles are props in Cumming's fabricated reality. Ordinary objects are subjected to bizarre circumstances, displaced from their familiar contexts, and endowed with unusual attributes. A chair is balanced on one leg; a toy boat "sinks" in a fake pond; and a ball flies mysteriously through a window screen.

Each photograph is a hypothetical problem or narrative the viewer is invited to unravel. This unraveling involves reconciling what is shown with information conveyed through the title. Understanding that perception is highly malleable, Cumming uses language alternatively to disclose and obscure meaning. By engaging the viewer's imagination, Cumming aspires to "let in some light, and some fantasy, and turn metaphor loose again."

In addition to the photographs, the exhibition includes objects used by the artist in his sets and preparatory drawings.

On view through June 15, *The Clutter of Happenstance: Photographs by Robert Cumming* is organized by Darsie Alexander, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art. This 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.

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