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FREDERICK J. KIESLER ARCHIVE - ITEM 45

Material relating to the reconstruction of the Art of This Century Gallery, exhibited as part of the Paris-NY-Paris show, Centre Pompidou, 1977.

- A. Article by Cynthia Goodman in ARTS, June 1977 pp. 90-91 (photocopy)
- B. Review by Jacques Michel in LE MONDE, 9 Juin 1977. (photocopy)

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ARTS/June 1977

Kiesler Archive - Item 45A

FREDERICK KIESLER: DESIGNS FOR PEGGY GUGGENHEIM'S ART OF THIS CENTURY GALLERY

CYNTHIA GOODMAN

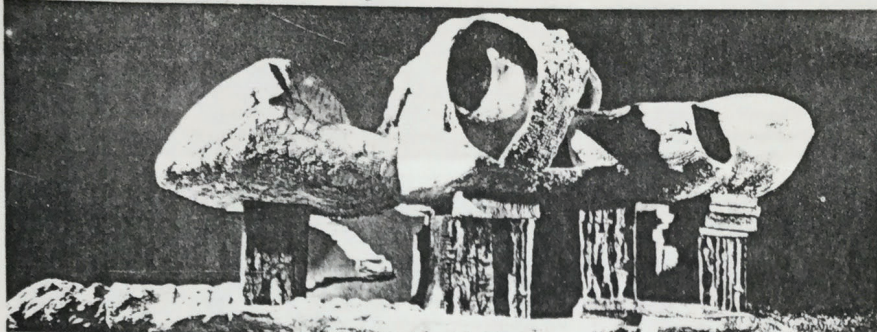


Fig. 1. Frederick Kiesler, Model for "Endless House," 1959-61. Wire mesh, 38" h. Courtesy Kiesler Archive.

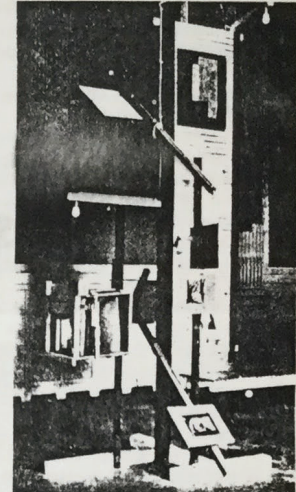


Fig. 2. Frederick Kiesler, Leger and Trager System, 1924. Exhibited at the International Exhibition of Theatre Technique, International Music and Theatre Festival of Vienna. Courtesy Kiesler Archive.

Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery was a Surrealist reliquary of the whole, defining a space and a design for the presentation of contemporary art.

Early in 1942, Peggy Guggenheim asked Frederick Kiesler, the Austrian-born architect, to remodel two floors at 50 West 57th Street into an art gallery. Many of the Surrealists who were exiled by the War had settled in New York City. The Art of This Century Gallery, as it was called, was to become one of the principal hubs of activity for the Surrealist group. Kiesler's work at Guggenheim's gallery, midpoint in his career, is pivotal not only in assessing his professional achievements; it is also important for the opportunity it affords to orient his accomplishments within the entire milieu of Surrealist architectural activity.

Guggenheim owned one of the most extensive collections of modern art. The 57th Street gallery would both house her private collection and serve as a temporary exhibition space. On March 9, 1942, Kiesler wrote Peggy Guggenheim to confirm the terms of the remodeling plans. Guggenheim's request that "some new method be developed for exhibiting paintings, drawings, sculptures, collages and so-called objects"¹ is included in this early document. Her demand evidences knowledge of Kiesler's previous accomplishments in the field of display. The Art of This Century Gallery consisted of four principal exhibition areas: 1) a painting library which functioned as a study area; 2) a Surrealist gallery with curved walls from which unframed paintings were suspended on special movable arms and biomorphic-shaped stands which displayed paintings and sculpture as well as functioned as seats for weary visitors; and 4) a gallery in which paintings were shown automatically.

Contemporary reviews indicate the furor which Art of This Century aroused. *The New York Times* commented: "Taking the frames off the pictures, Mr. Kiesler has framed the exhibition instead. . . in this rebel arrangement art moves out into the open. Sometimes, thus liberated it looks faintly menacing—as if in the end it might prove that the spectator would be fixed to the wall and the art would stroll around making comments sweet or sour as the case might be."² *Time* likened the interior to an "artistic Coney Island."³ Equally humorous was the review in *Newsweek* which described the automatic gallery as a "penny arcade peep show for which you didn't need pennies."⁴

Actually, these plans were but a continuation of ideas he developed much earlier in spite of the startled reactions his work aroused in the press. In his *Notes on Designing a Gallery*, a two-page pamphlet which appeared at the time of the inaugural exhibition at Art of This Century, Kiesler refers specifically to the significance for his present work of the special method of "spatial exhibition"⁵ which he had devised in 1924. Looking back in 1961, Kiesler acknowledged that "1922, 1923, and 1924 were the most fruitful years of [his] life. . . ."⁶

Kiesler's involvement with a search for designs of "spatial

continuity" and an awareness of "correalism," his term for a belief that every object in the universe must be considered in relation to its environment, were manifest in his earliest work. Implicit in his philosophy of correalism was the necessity for the builder to be as fully conscious "as possible of the life forces which bring about the small universe which he is to erect for human beings by enclosures of any kind, shape, or form."⁷ Accordingly, Kiesler approached each of his projects with a consideration of the potential psychological and sociological implications as well as the technical and aesthetic demands.

Kiesler's idea for an "Endless House" (Fig. 1), a structure "based on our inner needs and processes rather than on the dictates of mechanics,"⁸ evolved in his work over forty years. The impetus for his original design was based on his belief that ordinary walls and floors have concentration-camp-like restrictions. His ultimate solution was the egg-like form of the "Endless House" where the walls were a continuous shell, and all the living areas flowed from one into the next.⁹ Kiesler's explanation of the spheroid shape of his "House" as deriving from "the social dynamics of two or three generations living under one roof"¹⁰ is characteristic of the way his multifaceted considerations teamed to mold his design solutions.

Kiesler's first "Endless House" was designed in 1923 as a "space theatre." On the "space stage," sets followed a pattern of continuous motion coordinated with the actor's movements and special lighting effects.¹¹ In addition to a central area stage and two proscenium stages, "a continuous intertwining of vast ramps [that] lead into others at several levels"¹² functioned as additional stage area and expanded into the audience. Consequently, the actors might now appear anywhere in the interior space. The "Space Theatre" successfully integrated the stage and seating areas to promote greater audience participation.

Later in the year, Kiesler designed the sets for the Berlin production of Karl Capek's play *R.U.R.* Kiesler's theatrical intention "to create tension in space" is based on his belief that there was "only one space element on the stage: motion."¹³ Consequently, he planned the stage as a "peepshow [which] functions as relief not as space."¹⁴ In the first act, he pioneered the use of a motion picture instead of a painted backdrop for the scenery. In fact, "throughout the entire play, everything was in constant change and movement. Lights shone at the audience. The side walls moved."¹⁵

In the sets Kiesler designed for a 1924 production of Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* in Berlin, his concern for a "continuous flow of light, moving scenery, and color"¹⁶ continued. Kiesler inclined the elevated stage to an angle of 32 degrees, tilted the ceiling, and left the stage open without a curtain. The effect he

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created was that of a funnel with the wide end extending into the audience. At the sides were movable flats designed to constantly turn across the stage. Semitransparent varicolored materials hung from the tilted ceiling and also revolved. As the emperor fled across the stage to the beat of a drum, the stage metamorphized into an arena of perpetually moving parts.

In the same year, Kiesler was appointed artistic director and architect for the Exhibition of *New Theatre Techniques* of the International Music and Theatre Festival in Vienna. Kiesler's dissatisfaction with the contemporary presentation of the living arts now extended productively to the display methods of the fine arts as well. For this exhibition, Kiesler designed the first free-standing display systems called "Leger and Trager" units (Fig. 2). On some of the display stands, unframed paintings and sculpture were attached to a mobile cantilever system which allowed the viewer to adjust the display to the height and angle which best suited his viewing pleasure. Visually, the suspended "L and T" system, as it was called, "aimed at a varied transparency of the whole room."¹⁷

In Kiesler's search to be innovative, he frequently eliminated features that were formerly considered essential, redefining our viewing experience. As he earlier dispensed with the stage curtain, he now relinquished the traditional method of framing pictures. Theo Van Doesburg's reaction to Kiesler's installation

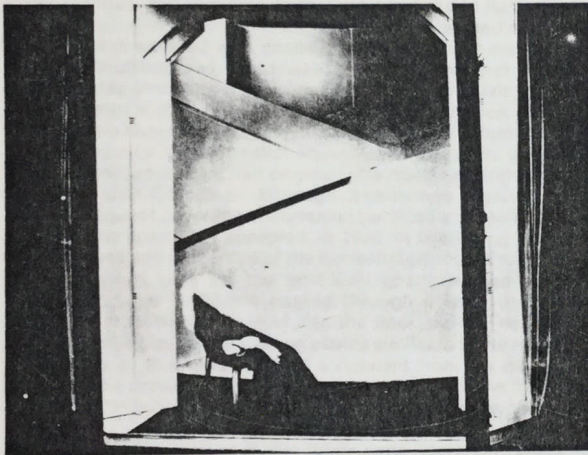


Fig. 3. Frederick Kiesler. Window Display for Saks Fifth Avenue, 1929. Courtesy Kiesler Archive.

best captures the essence of his innovations for his time: "I was taken completely by surprise when faced by the completely new form of demonstration. . . In contrast to previous exhibitions in which art products were hung next to one another without relation, in this method of demonstration, the closest relation between the different works were established by their arrangement in space."¹⁸ The concepts of transparency, paintings displayed without frames, and an installation sensitive to the viewers' needs, included in Kiesler's exhibition method and found so extraordinary by Van Doesburg, are all crucial to his design for *Art of This Century*.

In 1925, Kiesler was appointed by Josef Hoffmann to design the Austrian exhibition of the International Theater in the Grand Palais in Paris for the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes. The "City in Space" that he installed in the Austrian exhibition area was an even more dramatic exposition of his spatial building and display design theories than he had exhibited in Vienna. His visionary city's wooden structure composed of horizontal and vertical members was entirely suspended from the ceiling. Kiesler's "City" brought a "tearful response" from Mondrian when he encountered him at the exhibition and exclaimed: "You have done what we all hoped one day to do. You did it!"¹⁹

At the invitation of the Little Review and the Theater Guild, Kiesler came to the United States in 1926 as director of the International Technique Exhibition for the opening of Steinway Hall in New York. He remained in New York, and in 1928 and 1929 Kiesler designed window displays for Saks Fifth Avenue. Many

of the designs and much of the material he researched in their preparation were incorporated into his book, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display*, published by Brentano's in 1930.

Kiesler's windows for Saks were the first to use modern display techniques commercially. Kiesler believed that in the "coming architecture. . . everything which does not serve a function can be omitted."²⁰ Accordingly, he tore out all the partitions that normally demarcated the different display areas, replacing them with one continuous architectural background. By omitting the individual framing elements, he was able to conceive of the entire installation "as a frame as if for a picture."²¹ Later at *Art of This Century*, the architectural setting would frame the individual works of art in the same way.

In the Saks windows, Kiesler lavished care on every detail, acutely aware of the extent to which "window display contributes to the selling of merchandise."²² In 1929, Kiesler calculatedly posed a pair of white gloves and an evening bag on the lap of a black velvet coat with a white fur collar laid across a red-cushioned, gray wood chair (Fig. 3). The coat was draped across the asymmetrically placed piece of furniture at an angle that completed the zigzag pattern of the architectural setting behind it. The sparse array of clothing set against the combination of curvilinear and geometric elements of the neutral gray back-

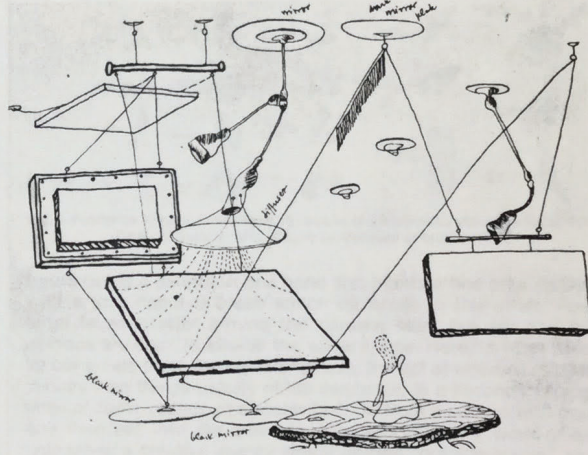


Fig. 4. Frederick Kiesler. Conceptual Drawing for Lighting System. *Art of This Century* Gallery, 1942.

ground shows both the sensitivity of his color design and the dramatic effectiveness of a rather stark setting.

Kiesler's approach to life as a theatrical arena extended naturally into his philosophies for window display. The storefront functioned for him as a stage and each passerby was a potentially captive member of the audience. Many of his theater techniques evolved into highly effective advertising tools. For example, the idea of lights flashing on and off as a highlighting method of dramatization was developed at Saks as an attention-drawing device.

The Surrealist concepts were difficult to translate into architecture. Although they might be attracted to the forms of aboriginal dwellings or a remote and hopefully haunted structure, the members of this group were often more intrigued by the ceremonial activities of the primitives and the legends of a house or castle than with the actual building form or method of construction.²³ Kiesler's design for *Art of This Century* was the major Surrealist architectural project built in the United States. An unexecuted apartment project by Matta, one of Kiesler's close friends, offered one of the only Surrealist architectural precedents.²⁴

The 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme in Paris left a profound impression on Matta. Although the individual activities of the Surrealists had been enlivened by avant-garde events, until 1938 their exhibition presentation had not been distinguished. However, for this exhibition, the whole space was turned into a theatrical environment which provided different tableaux for the visitor to experience. Among the installations was a *Surrealist Street* lined with mannequins styled by Ernst.

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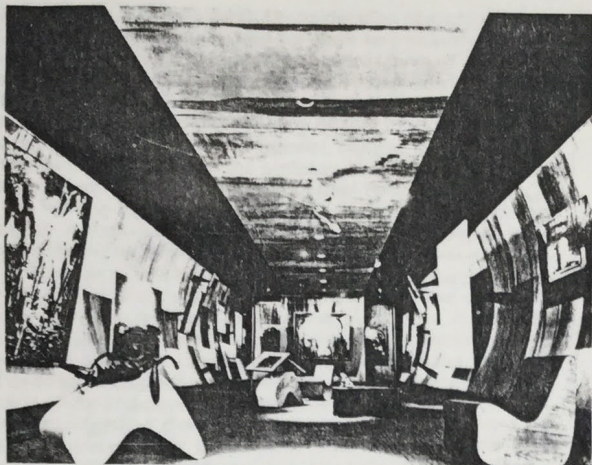


Fig. 5. Frederick Kiesler, Surrealist Gallery at Art of This Century Gallery, 1942. Photograph Berenice Abbott. Courtesy Kiesler Archive.

Arp, Tanguy, and Man Ray. In the lobby was Dali's *Rainy Taxi*, a construction in which the unlucky inhabitants, seated in a bed of lettuce and covered with snails, were periodically drenched by water. Duchamp had coordinated the exhibition, and the most memorable installation was his central hallway. Here, the floor was strewn with a forest-like bed of moss and leaves, and from the ceiling hung 1,200 bags of coal dramatically lit from below.

Inspired by the Surrealist show, Matta began to design an apartment project. He had originally trained as an architect and studied with Corbusier. Although architecture received scant and infrequent coverage in Surrealist publications, Matta's drawing for the apartment appeared, in 1938, in *Minotaure*, the most widely read and influential of the Surrealist periodicals.

In Matta's plan for the split-level apartment, an "ionique psychologique"²⁵ column passes through a large rectangular opening from the lower level into the floor above. The walls of the structure, formed of jostling planes similar to those in Matta's paintings of this time and still a remnant from his many long days at the drawing board, were to be pliable "comme des draps mouillés"²⁶ in order to be able to conform to one's psychological fears.

The only furnishings in this rather eerie apartment, which resembles Giacometti's *Palace at 4 A.M.* more than any human dwelling, are three easily movable biomorphically shaped rubber objects. On one of these a woman is shown reclining. Finally, the lighting throughout this dwelling was designed with a consciousness of the ability of lights to transform the moods of its inhabitants. Many of Matta's design concerns correspond to ideas Kiesler had been developing since his first "Endless House."

The leading theme of the Surrealists in their art was to wed the conscious with the unconscious. The hope, often by the use of startling juxtapositions, was to tap the inner recesses of the mind and to stir the viewer's imagination. Particularly in the ingenious and elaborate installation of the Surrealist gallery at Peggy Guggenheim's, Kiesler had successfully reflected the movement's goals in an architectural setting.

The architect's "Notes on Designing the Gallery" appeared in conjunction with the inaugural exhibition. Among the Kiesler archives have been discovered four pages of sketches, notes, and diagrams, the conceptual working model for his published formal statement. On the first page of this document, the architect marvels at the "miraculous power" primitive man must have experienced when he drew the first images on the walls of caves. However, Kiesler regrets, memorable as the accomplishment must have been, early man was not content to "stay on the cave wall retained."²⁷ On the second page, amidst sketches of a tattooed arm and a fully tattooed body, Kiesler explains the primitives' custom of engraving the tattoo "into his skin, like the buffalo engraved into the wall" as man's means of merging his "imagination with that of his ancestors and that of his daily experience."²⁸

Kiesler believed that in order to create the most conducive environment for rapport between the visitor and objects, it was crucial to once again attain the "primitive unity, the unity between man's creative consciousness and his daily environment which existed in primitive man's life."²⁹ Accordingly, at Art of This Century, he aspired to create a gallery in which the "principal of unity" would prevail in the "presentation of paintings, sculpture, furnishings, and enclosures." Hopefully then, he concludes in his *Notes*, "the artist's work [would stand] forth as a vital entity in a spatial whole, and art stand forth as a vital link in the structure of a new myth."

A three part flow-chart-like diagram appears on the third page of the conceptual model. The chart is identified by an inscription which is projected upside down onto a banner-like screen at the bottom of the page: "Personal DATA KIESLER leading to space-concept catalogue and digest of history." Below this inscription appears the not very surprising announcement that "the century museum is dedicated to the encouragement of those forces which create the contemporary expression of the arts." Above these inscriptions appear diagrams which identify the three aspects of his design: "psychological, physio and racialiological, and specific technological."

On the last page are two drawings that poignantly summarize Kiesler's motivating theories. In the first drawing, an abstracted

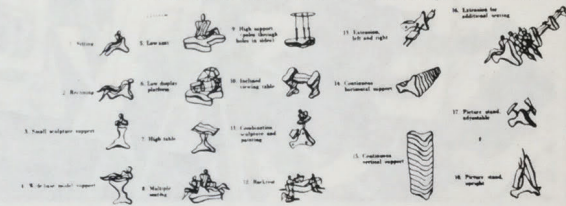


Fig. 6. Frederick Kiesler, Drawing of 18 uses of multi-purpose stands at Art of This Century Gallery, 1942. Courtesy Museum of Modern Art.

figure holds a palette in one hand and paints a line on a canvas with a long-handled brush which he holds in the other. Four large faces cluster around the canvas. Man, his art, and his demons are seen to inhabit the same space. Here, in what Kiesler considers to be the idyllic situation, the act of artistic creation insures man the perpetuity of his existence. In a second drawing, lines of force radiate in circular fashion from a canvas into man and then out into the universe. Interaction with a work of art unleashes a creative energy which unifies "outside-inside" and links man to the cosmos.

Kiesler's strong belief in the importance of the gallery visitor's active role in experiencing art accounts for the novelty of his designs. When man comes into contact with a work of art, Kiesler felt, he must "recognize his act of seeing—of 'receiving' as a participation in the creative process no less essential than the artist's own." Therefore, preeminent throughout his plans were efforts to achieve a design method that would promote contact.³⁰ Kiesler proposed his "spatial exhibition" method as the best way of enhancing the viewer's experience with the works of art.

The continued importance that Kiesler assigned to his early method of displaying paintings without frames is attested to in the *Notes* for the first Guggenheim exhibition. Kiesler observes that primitive man "knew no separate worlds of vision and of fact. . . . When he carved and painted the walls of his cave or the side of a cliff, no frames or borders cut off his works of art from the space of life. . . ." A two page essay on the historical evolution of the frame, a topic Kiesler had researched when he was working on his designs for Art of This Century, also demonstrates the additional thought he gave the subject of the frame at this time.³¹

A number of the other features of the Art of This Century design are noteworthy: all the installations were mobile and demountable: walls, partitions, mechanical elements, and lighting fixtures were flexible. The details of his designs, therefore, could easily be tailored to the needs of the different galleries as well as accommodate changing exhibitions.

A conceptual drawing in the Kiesler Estate shows how elaborate Kiesler envisioned his lighting system to be (Fig. 4). The

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drawing reflects Kiesler's careful consideration of each painting: the lighting could be controlled for each one individually. For Kiesler, the objects in a gallery were like members of a family, a cohesive unit of distinctive personalities whose individuality had to be maintained and respected. Kiesler planned "to correlate the color, intensity, and the diffusion of light in all the galleries" in what he heralded as "a new manner, namely, by planning the reflection coefficient of all the surfaces of the room in color as well as volume and their combined effect upon the painting."³²

The lighting system in the Surrealist gallery was particularly complex. A photograph of the opening exhibition shows how the system looked when installed (Fig. 5). The wood-paneled ceiling, as well as the exterior walls of the gallery which supported the concave wood display area, were painted black. The dark color added to the mysteriously cavernous aspects of the setting and increased the drama of the lighting. The system, which never quite functioned as effectively as it was planned, called for lights to shine on one side of the room for two minutes and then, after a three-and-one-half-second interval, on the other, alternately highlighting different objects. Some of the lighting fixtures were concealed, which made their flashing all the more unpredictable and spectacular. Several of the visible lighting fixtures stretched out in tentacle fashion toward the paintings on the wall and echoed the form of the appendages of the sculpture menacingly posed on the display stand in the front left corner of the room. The thrust of these fixtures also accentuated the protrusion of the paintings from the walls. The resulting effect was eerie: shadows crept behind the suspended paintings and slithered across the floor, reflecting and transforming the biomorphic forms of the display stands.

Coordinated with the eccentric lighting system were special sound effects that caused a *Time* reviewer to refer to the gallery as a "decorated subway."³³ Every two minutes, the roar of an approaching train was amplified through the long tunnel shape of this exhibition area. When asked why he felt the need for such an elaborate light system, Kiesler replied: "Why? ...because it's

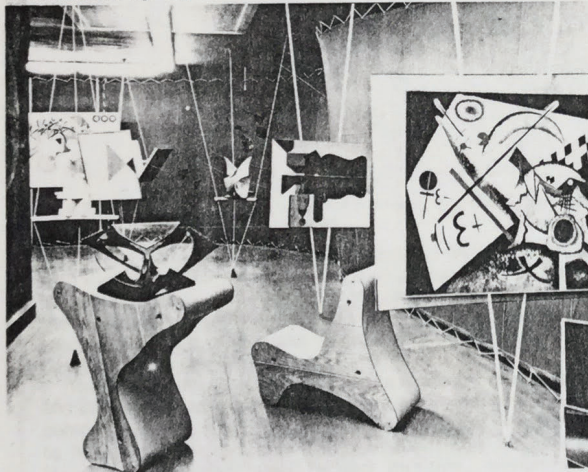


Fig. 7. Frederick Kiesler, Abstract Gallery at Art of This Century Gallery, 1942. Photograph Berenice Abbott. Courtesy Kiesler Archive.

dynamic, it pulsates like your blood. Ordinary museum lighting makes painting dead."³⁴

Another distinctive feature of the Surrealist gallery was the armatures that held the paintings. A second conceptual drawing shows that Kiesler thought of these protruding elements as outstretched human arms, an explicit representation of his efforts to unify man and art. Actually, sawed-off baseball bats were used in the final installation, because they were inexpensive. As with all elements in the gallery, the handles for the paintings were movable; the spectator could incline the painting at whatever angle and height he felt made for the best inspection, including sitting down. Because labor was at a premium during the war, Kiesler himself helped a carpenter to construct these arms in a garage in the Bronx.

Kiesler gave considerable thought to the question of body

comfort while viewing art. Peggy Guggenheim's press release for her first exhibition again explains that his designs for three types of movable seats were based on his desire to "solve the problem of fatigue during a visit to the gallery," as well as his recognition that a flexible seating unit had to be developed to accommodate the "new aspect of correlating the visitor to the painting."³⁵ Because the paintings were displayed at different angles, a visitor had to lean backward or forward for the best view, and an ordinary chair would not do. The three different designs were a lightweight portable folding chair with a back, a rocker, and a seven-way unit for seating and display. Kiesler



Fig. 8. Frederick Kiesler, Painting Library at Art of This Century Gallery, 1942. Courtesy Kiesler Archive.

once again helped in the construction of the multi-purpose chairs, which were ash covered with linoleum, built and delivered as he carefully records in his correspondence, for only seven dollars apiece. Eighteen of the different functions of the biomorphic wooden shapes are illustrated by Kiesler in a diagram (Fig. 6). Not only can the unit be used for the display of a single painting or piece of sculpture but, by the addition of poles through its sides, several objects can be exhibited on the same stand. The level of the object can also be adjusted. Additional wooden pieces can join several of the units together in bench-like fashion, or a group of them can be placed side by side as if to form a sectional sofa.

Though a debt to Arp and possibly to Matta must be acknowledged, an interesting prototype for these chairs is to be found in Kiesler's own theatrical work. From 1934 to 1937, Kiesler served as director of Scenic Design at the Juilliard School of Music where he designed over seventy-five sets. As early as 1934, in a set for the George Antheil-John Erskine opera, *Helen Retires*, the forms Kiesler designated as the ghosts of the great were biomorphic.

In the abstract gallery, the paintings were fastened by wooden wedges to triangular suspension columns of cloth tape and rope (Fig. 7). Each wedge had a universal joint fastening so that the picture might be tilted in any direction. The wedges could support sculpture as well as hold paintings and their height could be either raised or lowered. The number of these units could also be easily increased or decreased and their location in the room changed.

In the initial exhibition, only three or four out of approximately thirty paintings in this gallery space hung from the wall. The rest were seemingly suspended in mid-air by Kiesler's "invisible column" system. The architect was especially intrigued by what he called the "transparency" of this system. The column system also had a practical function, greatly increasing the hanging capacity of the gallery; it seems, however, that Kiesler was more concerned with the visual aspects of the design.

One source for the illusion of "transparency" may have been Duchamp, whose concurrent installation of Surrealist art at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion suspended the paintings among sixteen

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miles of rope. Duchamp and Kiesler probably first came to know each other in Paris in the twenties, when both were concerned with optical cinematic effects. Their many mutual interests created a dialogue that that was to continue throughout their careers.

Kiesler's interest in Duchamp's *Large Glass* (1915-1923) and his estimation of Duchamp's achievement as "nothing short of being the masterpiece of twentieth century painting"³⁶ had led in 1937 to his publication of an article on *The Large Glass* in *Architectural Record*.³⁷ Kiesler's admiration of *The Large Glass* was largely generated by Duchamp's success in uniting "architecture, sculpture, and painting in ONE. . . ." Keynote in Kiesler's praise here is Duchamp's ability to animate the inanimate. He marveled at the painting's floating nature and at the fact that this mid-air suspension enabled the artwork to be "in a state of eternal readiness for action, motion and radiation."³⁸ Kiesler's own suspension system sought to create the impression of belying the force of gravity and endowing his objects on display with supranormal abilities. Indeed, so fervently did Kiesler believe in his own creative powers of transformation that he saw all his work as "[a] kind of magic—a creating of life and a creating of freedom."³⁹

A sinuous blue curtain wall fastened at top and bottom by

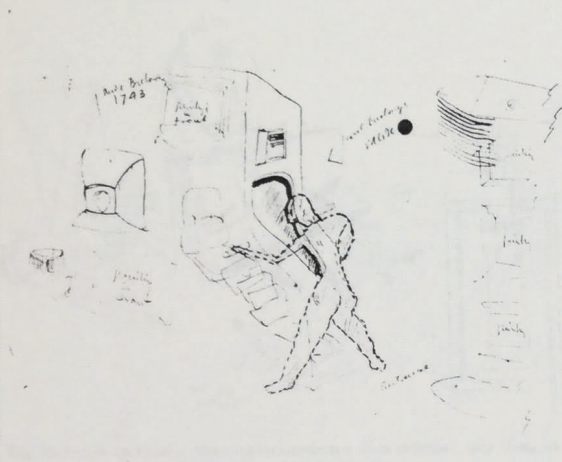


Fig. 9. Frederick Kiesler. Drawing for Kinetic Gallery at Art of This Century Gallery, 1942.

white rope completed the abstract gallery's design. In keeping with Kiesler's attempts to increase one's experience of a space, the canvas defies planar wall construction. Perhaps the use of the ultramarine blue material was also motivated by Kiesler's wish to achieve a pliable wall surface with the ability to reflect one's anxieties envisioned by Matta.

The seven-way units were used once again to provide seating and display space and to function as an element of the room's composition. The spatial ambiguousness Kiesler has achieved by his installation of a less-than-permanent wall, coupled with his use of movable freely formed furniture, reinforces the dynamics of the paintings and sculpture on display.

In the painting library, a daylight gallery, Kiesler achieved his most traditional rendition of the gallery experience as a traditional one. The spectator could sit in front of mobile stands and choose paintings from storage at his leisure for study (Fig. 8). Once again, the work of art could be displayed at any angle, and the seating arrangement was made as comfortable as possible.

The architectural notes for the Art of This Century Gallery state that the fourth gallery "is devoted to an automatic method of showing paintings." A contemporary reviewer commented on the Coney Island aspects of this so-called kinetic gallery with its "shadow box. . . peep show gadgets."⁴⁰ The peep show analogy is a perceptive one. The idea of the peep show is one Kiesler had been developing ever since his first stage designs. The kinetic gallery offered Kiesler a virtual playland opportunity to combine his ideas on movement with display methods that promoted participation.



Fig. 10. Peggy Guggenheim Turning the Wheel of the Machine which displayed Marcel Duchamp's *Valise*. Kinetic Gallery at Art of This Century Gallery.

A drawing in the Kiesler Estate shows that Kiesler's conception of the installation of this room was based on both his need to save space as well as his interest in incorporating movement in the display of art (Fig. 9). In the drawing, a man is operating the machine that showed the work of Marcel Duchamp. An x-ray view into the installation reveals reproductions from Marcel Duchamp's *Valise* rotating on a conveyor belt so that they appear one by one in the viewer's field of vision. André Breton's *Poem Object*, incorrectly labeled, is installed on the front of the machine. A movable seat permitted comfortable viewing. A pamphlet found among Kiesler's notes on Art of This Century advertises the Spencer Microfilm Reader, and the operating principles for both machines in this gallery do bear a strong resemblance to this study device.

In the actual installation, Klee's paintings were displayed on a paternoster, a machine which provided for the automatic release of his paintings on a conveyor belt. An invisible light beam controlled their rotation. Each one of the seven paintings appeared in the spotlight for ten seconds and then disappeared. If the visitor wanted to look at any of the paintings any longer, he pushed a button.

Opposite the Klee machine was a large wooden wheel which, when turned by hand, permitted one to see through a peephole a succession of fourteen different reproductions from Duchamp's *Valise* (Fig. 10). A replica of the *Valise* was installed nearby. Kiesler's fascination with Duchamp's *Valise* reflects his own keen interest in making art accessible to the public in as facile and comfortable a way as possible. Duchamp had worked on a limited edition of the *Valise*, which contained small reproductions of most of his major pieces, from 1938 to 1941. The *Valise* became, in effect, a portable museum. As easily as one could open a suitcase, one could have access to Duchamp's lifework. Duchamp had developed his optical experiments during the twenties when Kiesler was similarly involved with expanding the visual effects of movement.⁴¹ Finally, perhaps even more intriguing in terms of these two men vis à vis the kinetic gallery at Art of This Century is the peep-show presentation of Duchamp's own last piece *Étant Données* (1946-66). *Étant Données* can only be seen by one person at a time through two holes in a large door and is permanently installed in a small gallery at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The most complex machine in the automatic gallery displayed André Breton's *Portrait of the Actor A.B.*, one of a series of Poem-Objects which Breton had begun in 1935 in which both verbal passages and visual images were combined (Fig. 11). Frederick Kiesler explains this construction, perhaps not very helpfully, in a 1942 article in *VVV* as "an instrument to facilitate the co-reality of fact and vision. . . specifically to demonstrate the transformation of objects into eidetic visions."⁴²

There were three apertures in this shadow box: an oval frame of wood, a circular opening cut into black glass, and an iris diaphragm shutter. André Breton's *Poem-Object* was to be

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placed within the box. The design on this object is a compilation of images relating to events of the year 1713. A clue to his choice of this particular poem of Breton's may be the valise which dangles in the bottom left corner of the object. A photograph of Breton appears on the iris shutter. Above the photograph is Breton's signature. The letter A looks like the number 77, and the letter B resembles 13. The spectator finds himself mirrored in the black glass as well as in the seven different-sized mirrors which have been cut into it. The crystal ball associations of both the reflections in the glass and the picture of Breton are particularly appropriate for displaying the work of this artist. Breton was himself intrigued by the concept of cryptic messages appearing out of darkness and had written an article on the mysterious ball in a 1933 issue of *Minotaure*.⁴³

To operate the box, the spectator lifts a lever; the portrait of Breton swings around, and the shutter opens completely to reveal the Poem-Object within. When the viewer has finished, he returns the lever to its upright position. Kiesler had used a similar idea in 1928 in his "Screenoscope" for the Film Guild on 8th Street in New York City. In order to rivet the audience's attention on the beginning of the film, a diaphragm installed at the front of the theater opened to reveal the movie screen.

A conceptual drawing exists for an additional peep-show

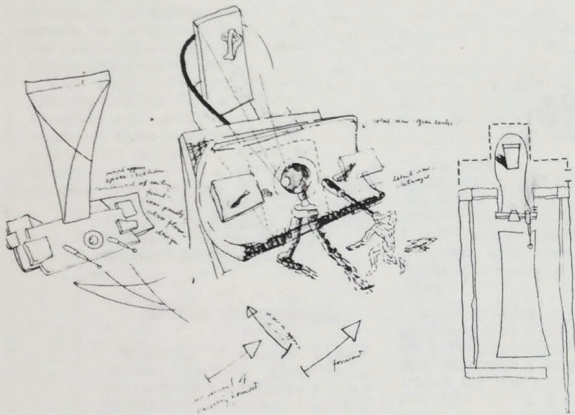


Fig. 12. Frederick Kiesler, Drawing for Telescope View of Street, 1942. India ink and tempera on paper, 11 x 15".

machine, which was never constructed, for viewing the "outside environment." By means of a mysterious telescope device, the viewer would be able to see one mile away on the street. Kiesler's visionary machine would extend the dialogue between the gallery and its visitors to the world beyond (Fig. 12).

Kiesler's originality and commitment were founded in his understanding of the magical essence of the artist's creation. In each of his architectural projects, the unifying, motivating force of his design concept was to make the viewing experience so vital that a correlation of viewer, art, and architecture would be achieved. Kiesler believed fervently that "the waiting room of art is full of people"⁴⁴ and did everything in his power to let them in.

The Art of This Century Gallery is being reconstructed in the *Paris-New York-Paris* exhibition at the Centre Nationale d'Art et Culture Georges Pompidou, Paris, June 1-Sept. 19, 1977.

1. The March 9, 1942 letter from Peggy Guggenheim to Frederick Kiesler is in the Kiesler Estate. A copy is available in the Hilla Rebay Archives of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC. Special thanks must be given to Mrs. Frederick Kiesler who not only released all the Kiesler archival material to me but also allowed a group of Kiesler's conceptual drawings to be published for the first time. Throughout my research Mrs. Kiesler was more than cooperative; she enthusiastically researched problematical issues herself. Her own extensive biography and bibliography on Kiesler serve as the starting point for all Kiesler research. Mrs. Angelica Rudenstine, Research Curator of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and Mr. Daniel Abadie of the Centre National d'Art et Culture Georges Pompidou, Paris, must also be thanked for their cooperation.
2. E.A. Jewell, *The New York Times*, Oct. 25, 1942.
3. *Time*, Oct. 2, 1942.
4. *Newsweek*, Oct. 2, 1942.
5. Frederick Kiesler, "Notes on Designing the Gallery," 1942, p. 1. Available in the Kiesler Archives.
6. "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," *Progressive Architecture*, vol. 42, 1961, p. 110.
7. "Kiesler by Kiesler," *Architectural Forum*, Sept. 1965, p. 64.
8. *Op cit* p. 121.
9. Kiesler and Corbusier had met in the twenties through Léger. A number of their

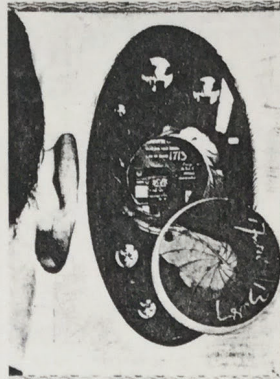


Fig. 11. André Breton, Portrait of the Actor A B (on display at Art of This Century Gallery), 1941.

designs show an exchange of ideas. For example, Corbusier's *Villa Contemporaine* (1922) was a development of apartment houses built with long continuous walls.

10. "Frederick Kiesler's 'Endless House' and its Psychological Lighting," *Interiors*, vol. 110, Nov. 1950, p. 124.
11. The exchange between Kiesler's theatrical experiments and those of the Russian avant-garde bears further investigation, particularly in light of his friendship with El Lissitzky dating from 1923.
12. *Progressive Architecture*, p. 110.
13. *Frederick Kiesler*, Exhibition Catalogue, Galerie St. Stephan, Vienna, p. 23.
14. Frederick Kiesler, quoted in *Frederick Kiesler*, Galerie St. Stephan, p. 23.
15. *Architectural Forum*, p. 64.
16. *Progressive Architecture*, p. 111.
17. Frederick Kiesler, quoted in Lillian Kiesler's biography of Frederick Kiesler. Available through the Frederick Kiesler Estate.
18. "New Display Techniques for 'Art of This Century' Designed by Frederick Kiesler," *Architectural Forum*, Feb. 1943, p. 50.
19. *Progressive Architecture*, p. 110.
20. Frederick Kiesler, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and its Display*, New York, 1930, p. 102.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
22. Frederick Kiesler, "Shop Window Displays," *Architectural Record*, vol. 68, Sept. 1930, p. 215.
23. "La Mission Ethnographique et Linguistique Dakar-Djibouti," by Paul Rivet and Georges Henri-Riviere, *Minotaure*, no. 2, 1933, pp. 2-5, typifies the way in which the Surrealists combined interests in architecture and myth.
24. William Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage*, New York, 1968, p. 154.
25. Mattia Echaurren, "Mathématique sensible—Architecture du temps," *Minotaure*, No. 11, 3rd series, 1938, p. 43.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
27. Untitled conceptual model for Art of This Century Gallery, n.d., p. 1, Frederick Kiesler Estate.
28. Frederick Kiesler, "Notes on Designing the Gallery," p. 1.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Progressive Architecture*, p. 116.
31. This two page document is now in the Kiesler Archives. The first page from an untitled manuscript and identified only as being from Bode concerns the development of the frame from the thirteenth century to its most successful form in the Italian Renaissance. The second page from Esswein is particularly significant for Kiesler, because it traces the issue of the role of the frame all the way back to the detachment of the fresco from the wall when the cohesion of painting and architecture was dissolved.
32. Frederick Kiesler, quoted in a press release issued by the Peggy Guggenheim Gallery at the time of the opening exhibition to explain the architectural plan of the Art of This Century Gallery (1942), p. 1.
33. *Time*, Oct. 2, 1942.
34. *Newsweek*, Oct. 2, 1942.
35. Kiesler, in an interview for *Camera III*, March 20, 1960.
36. Frederick Kiesler, "Design Correlation," *Architectural Record*, vol. 81, 1937, pp. 53-58.
37. When Kiesler moved to 56 Seventh Avenue in 1936, Duchamp's 14th Street studio in which he created *The Large Glass* was just around the corner. At some point in the thirties Duchamp lived with Kiesler for a while in his apartment.
38. *Architectural Record*, p. 55. A letter in the Kiesler Archives from Marcel Duchamp to Frederick Kiesler praises him for his perceptive analysis of his work.
39. *Architectural Forum*, p. 146.
40. *Newsweek*, Oct. 2, 1942.
41. As early as 1920, Duchamp and Man Ray had created the *Rotary Glass Plate (Precision Optics)* in which five painted glass plates turned on a metal axis to form continuous circles when seen from a distance of one meter. The *Anemic Cinema* was produced in Paris in 1926, in collaboration with Man Ray and Marc Allegret. *Anemic Cinema* was a film composed of ten discs bearing drawings alternating with nine discs bearing inscriptions. Although in the Duchamp, the movement generated by turning the wheel was of such a speed that the images and script became blurred until only a spiral design was visible, the basic idea is that of displaying pictures on a hand-operated rotating device.
42. Frederick Kiesler, "Design Correlation," *VVV*, no. 2-3, March 1943, p. 78.
43. André Breton, "La Message Automatique," *Minotaure*, no. 3-4, 1933, pp. 55-65. A possible source for Breton's choice of the year 1713, or maybe just a reflection of a mutual interest in subject matter, is Paul Eluard's "Par un apres-midi tres froid des premiers jours de 1713 ou le Monde tel qu'il est," which appeared in *Minotaure*, no. 5, 1934.
44. Frederick Kiesler, "Art of Architecture for Art," *Art News*, vol. 56, Oct. 1957, p. 54.

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AU CENTRE GEORGES-POMPIDOU

Le « ping-pong » Paris - New-York

Si vous voulez voir New-York, allez à Beaubourg. Vous trouverez également Paris. La capitale artistique de l'ancien monde et celle du nouveau monde sont réunies, après tant de divergences qui les ont séparées. Les musées américains ont généreusement prêté, pour l'occasion, une suite spectaculaire d'œuvres américaines ou françaises, faites à New-York ou à Paris par des artistes de l'un et l'autre pays. Leur rassemblement illustre ce « ping-pong » culturel qui, depuis le début du siècle, s'est joué des deux côtés de l'Atlantique.

Quelques œuvres importantes n'ont pas fait la traversée : « Guernica », « les Demoiselles d'Avignon », de Picasso, « la Dame au chapeau », de Matisse. Mais l'ensemble de l'exposition n'en suffirait pas moins à remplir un éblouissant musée d'art moderne.

C'est aussi la première fois que l'architecture du Centre Georges-Pompidou est confrontée à l'aménagement d'une exposition qui nécessite une articulation complexe et claire. Il faut le dire, les vertus du plan libre n'ont pas fait mer-

veille. Le circuit est un dédale où il faut renoncer à chercher un déroulement linéaire. Mieux vaut s'y perdre. Il est pavé de « chefs-d'œuvre » contemporains. Les tableaux illustrent leur propre mythe. Ce sont ceux-là même qui ont figuré dans telle ou telle exposition « historique » comme le « Nu descendant l'escalier », de Duchamp, qui provoqua un scandale lorsqu'il fut présenté à l'Armory Show de New-York en 1913 ou telle toile de Pollock que le Paris des années 50 reçut dans l'indifférence. Deux peintures qui sont devenues des pièces significatives du musée imaginaire de l'art d'aujourd'hui.

L'exposition Paris-New-York est le premier volet de deux manifestations (le second devant être, l'an prochain, Paris-Moscou) qui sont appelées à établir le rôle de Paris dans l'art de ce siècle. Précédée par les rétrospectives Picabia, Masson et Duchamp, elle montre, en fait, les dernières années de l'empire esthétique parisien et la montée du nouveau monde artistique.

(Lire page 19)
 Article de JACQUES MICHELLO, dans un pays qui en a les moyens techniques et financiers. En attendant qu'une nouvelle génération d'architectes américains se rebelle contre la « germanité » fonctionnelle.

Siècle d'expatriés

Duchamp et Picabia à Manhattan, Gertrude Steln et les intellectuels « expatriés » à Montparnasse. Paris est une fête, disait Hemingway. Pendant l'entre-deux-guerres, le dollar cote haut. Avec de modestes moyens on peut boire du beaujolais et acheter la baguette de pain à bon compte. Et même des tableaux. Ce que fait Gertrude Stein, qui amasse des chefs-d'œuvre cubistes de Picasso, Braque, Gris ; fauves de Matisse ; des Cézanne, tous laissés pour compte par les collectionneurs parisiens.

Dans le Paris des années 30, les artistes peignent beaucoup mais les amateurs sont rares. Mondrian y vit dans l'indifférence, pendant vingt ans, de 1919 à 1939. Pas un seul tableau acheté par l'Etat. A New-York, il sera reçu à bras ouverts ; on lui demande d'enseigner. Il est stimulé, inspiré. On a reconstitué ici son atelier, accroché quelques-unes de ses toiles new-yorkaises, dont *Boogie-woogie*, achetées, entre d'autres, par un marchand de chemises nommé Sydney Janis, qui, enrichi dans le commerce des vêtements, avait décidé d'« enrichir » sa vie en se consacrant au marché de l'art contemporain et finit par y jouer un rôle remarquable. Emouvante cette salle où sont réunies

Ce qu'il advint dans l'architecture face à la tradition du Bauhaus s'est, en quelque sorte répété dans le domaine de la peinture à l'égard de l'école de Paris. L'année 1936 fut à New-York une année exceptionnelle dans l'activité des musées, plus qu'à Paris où même l'idée de musée national d'art moderne n'était pas encore née. Le MOMA (Museum of Modern Art) de New-York, soutenu par des mécènes de grande carrure, comme les Rockefeller, organisent des expositions sans équivalent. Les musées qui se créent sont des chefs-d'œuvre d'architecture américaine, comme le Guggenheim sur la 5^e avenue de Frank Lloyd Wright, qui ouvre avec une éblouissante collection où les Kandinsky sont légion, et les Chagall de première importance, comme le *Violoniste vert*.

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culturel -York

Arshile Gorky va reprendre la viscéralité, un *Nu* de Magritte, en cinq tableaux, le portrait mythique de Sade par Man Ray, américain de l'Ecole de Paris, une sculpture de Giacometti, la *Tasse de nourriture* de Merret Oppenheim, le tout entourant une sculpture totémique de l'architecte surréaliste Kiesler, nouveau venu également à New-York. C'est à lui que Peggy Guggenheim doit le singulier aménagement de sa nouvelle galerie dans le New-York d'après 1940, Art of this century.

Ce lieu, en partie musée privé en partie galerie marchande, était le point de rencontre des Français de New-York. On le retrouve au Centre Georges-Pompidou avec ses cimaises concaves, où le délirant Kiesler avait fixé des bannes de base-ball pour présenter ces mêmes peintures de Dali, de Héliou, de Tanguy, de Hirschfeld (peintre naïf américain), de Man Ray, dans une esthétique moderniste très 1930. C'est là notamment que venaient rôder les jeunes américains qui se sentaient une vocation d'artiste.

Soudain Pollock

Parmi eux, un jeune marginal, inconnu, qui pour l'instant gagne sa vie en tant qu'homme à tout faire au musée Solomon-Guggenheim : Jackson Pollock ne tardera pas à faire parler de lui. Il remarque les tableaux à « écriture automatique » d'André Masson, écriture sortie de l'inconscient, d'une étrange liberté d'allure, mais qui semble extraordinairement concertée. Il visite l'atelier de Max Ernst, où il voit des boîtes de peintures percées couler directement sur la toile et tracer des arabesques dont aucune main ne saurait restituer la fraîcheur. C'est de ces « rencontres » qu'on date l'invention de la peinture de Pollock, faite de « coulures », qui allait devenir le prototype de l'art contemporain américain. De Léger, on voit l'influence très directe sur des peintres tels que Stuart Davis et d'autres, qui sont, dès ces années-là, sans qu'on l'ait jamais remarqué, des précurseurs de l'imagerie pop'art.

Ces rencontres sont importantes pour les artistes new-yorkais. L'exemple européen montre que l'artiste n'est pas un exclu, qu'il joue un rôle dans la société. Son

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AU CENTRE GEORGES-POMPIDOU

Le « ping-pong » Paris - New-York

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(Lire page 19
l'article de JACQUES MICHEL.)

AU CENTRE GEORGES-POMPIDOU

... LE MONDE — 9 juin 1977 — Page 19

Le ping-pong culturel Paris - New-York

Le jeu commence par l'avance culturelle de Paris, sa situation de capitale de l'art héritée du siècle dernier. L'Amérique du dix-neuvième siècle, enrichie par sa révolution industrielle, aspire à la culture et à l'art. Se remplissent les demeures et les musées de chefs-d'œuvre fournis par les marchands Vollard et Durand-Ruel. Des artistes new-yorkais vont à Paris, où ils se sentent plus libres. En même temps, à l'approche de la première guerre mondiale, des artistes français, comme Duchamp ou Picabia, vont à New-York, où ils étonnent les Américains par leur créativité dadaïste. A l'époque, les « maîtres » sont à Paris et les « suiveurs » à New-York. Il suffit de lire les dates sur les tableaux. Tel peint en 1910 (Max Weber) un tableau à la manière de Picasso en 1907. Tel autre (Stella) fait du futurisme à la manière de Severini.

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des peintures « néo-plasticiennes » de ses élèves et admirateurs, qui copient le chef de file, tantôt naïvement, tantôt « à côté ».

Pendant les années de crise qui précèdent la dernière guerre, l'Europe se trouve sans force. Les artistes se sentent menacés, cherchent un refuge. Un comité — non officiel — composé de Edward Warburg, l'architecte Philip Johnson, l'historien d'art Alfred Barr, les invite aux Etats-Unis. C'est ainsi que les architectes antinazis du Bauhaus, Gropius, Breuer, Mies Van Der Rohe, traversent l'Atlantique. Cadeau inattendu de l'hitlérisme. Toute l'architecture américaine de ces tours d'acier et de verre, rêvée au Bauhaus, va être réalisée à Manhattan et à Chicago, dans un pays qui en a les moyens techniques et financiers. En attendant qu'une nouvelle génération d'architectes américains se rebelle contre la « germanité » fonctionnelle.

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Ce lieu, en partie musée privé en partie galerie marchande, était le point de rencontre des Français de New-York. On le retrouve au Centre Georges-Pompidou avec ses cimaises concaves, où le délitant Kiesler avait fixé des bannes de base-ball pour présenter ces mêmes peintures de Dali, de Héliou, de Tanguy, de Hirschfeld (peintre naïf américain), de Man Ray, dans une esthétique moderniste très 1930. C'est là notamment que venaient rôder les jeunes américains qui se sentaient une vocation d'artiste.

Soudain Pollock

Parmi eux, un jeune marginal, inconnu, qui pour l'instant gagne sa vie en tant qu'homme à tout faire au musée Solomon-Guggenheim : Jackson Pollock ne tardera pas à faire parler de lui. Il remarque les tableaux à « écriture automatique » d'André Masson, écriture sortie de l'inconscient, d'une étrange liberté d'allure, mais qui semble extraordinairement concertée. Il visite l'atelier de Max Ernst, où il voit des boîtes de peintures percées couler directement sur la toile et tracer des arabesques dont aucune main ne saurait restituer la fraîcheur. C'est de ces « rencontres » qu'on date l'invention de la peinture de Pollock, faite de « coulures », qui allait devenir le prototype de l'art contemporain américain. De Léger, on voit l'influence très directe sur des peintres tels que Stuart Davis et d'autres, qui sont, dès ces années-là, sans qu'on l'ait jamais remarqué, des précurseurs de l'imagerie pop-art.

Ces rencontres sont importantes pour les artistes new-yorkais. L'exemple européen montre que l'artiste n'est pas un exclu, qu'il joue un rôle dans la société. Son

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Excerpt from Jacques Michel's article, "Le ping-pong culturel Paris-New York"; Le Monde, 9 juin 1977.

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... A splendid Masson ... a Nu by Magritte ... the mythical portrait of Sade by Man Ray ... a Giacometti sculpture ... a Fur Pile by Merret Oppenheim, all surround a totemic sculpture by the surrealist architect, Frederick Kiesler, another recent arrival in New York. It is to him that Peggy Guggenheim owes the remarkable installation of her new gallery, Art of This Century, in New York of the forties.

Partly museum, partly commercial gallery, it was a meeting place for the New York French. It is to be found in the Pompidou Center, with its concave walls, to which the exuberant Kiesler attached baseball bats as a means of displaying these same paintings by Dali, Héliou, Tanguy, Hirschfield (a naïf American painter), Man Ray, in a modernist esthetic very much in the mood of the thirties. Young Americans, feeling their artistic vocation, made it their hang-out.