

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Museum of Modern Art

THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARTIST AND MUSEUM IS EXPLORED IN A MAJOR THEMATIC EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Exhibition Presents 188 Works by 60 Artists
Including Five New Works Commissioned for the Exhibition

The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect
March 14-June 1, 1999

The museum is the colossal mirror in which man, finally contemplating himself from all sides, and finding himself literally an object of wonder, abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed in art journalism.
Georges Bataille

From March 14 to June 1, The Museum of Modern Art presents *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*, an intellectually provocative and engaging exhibition that surveys the many ways in which artists have responded to this complex institution--examining its concepts and functions, commenting on its nature, exploring its relationship to the art it contains, and incorporating aspects of the museum into their own art. Organized by Kynaston McShine, Senior Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, the exhibition features roughly 188 works by some 60 artists, including paintings, sculptures, photographs, drawings, prints, videos, sound recordings, and installations. These works range from those made in the nineteenth century to several commissioned expressly for the show.

While most of the work is drawn from the present century, and in most cases is by living artists, the exhibition also includes photographs from the 1800s and Charles Willson Peale's *The Artist in His Museum* (1822). Many of the works are coming from abroad and will be on display in New York for the first time. Five works have been commissioned specifically for *The Museum as Muse*, and two more projects are presented exclusively on the Museum's Web site.

Installed on the Museum's ground floor, in the International Council Galleries, the show will assay several themes. It is not meant as an exhaustive survey of notable museum-related art, or to establish a single theoretical basis for the various responses of the artists included. "Rather," writes McShine in his catalogue essay, "recognizing the variety of motives and interests that artists have brought to the subject, this exhibition is designed to illuminate the approaches taken by artists and discuss the aspects of the museum's life on which they have chosen to settle." A provisional list of some of the exhibition's interwoven themes includes Photography and the Museum in Use, Artist-Collectors and the Personal Museum, Natural History Collections, Museum Practices and Politics, and The Museum Transformed.

More than two dozen photographs of the museum in use establish the institution as, simultaneously, a place of contemplation and of highly ordered activity. They include scenes of visitors immersed in thought or passing through galleries, details of the museum's physical spaces and

exhibits, and photographs of social events by artists including Roger Fenton, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Elliott Erwitt, Candida Höfer, Eve Arnold, Thomas Struth, Lutz Dille, Larry Fink, Garry Winogrand, and Günther Förg, among others. Together these images begin to limn the institution's multiple functions, pleasures, spaces, and symbolic effects.

The exhibition presents a number of "personal museums," from portable collections of miniature reproductions of artistic work, through introspective assortments of personal artifacts, to full-scale interiors displaying created or found objects. Some of these directly mimic, even parody, conventional museums, notably Marcel Broodthaers's *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (1968-72), Claes Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum* (1965-77), Herbert Distel's *Museum of Drawers* (1970-77), and the Fluxus *Flux Cabinet* (1975-77). Others are more personal imaginative constructs, for example, Susan Hiller's *From the Freud Museum* (1991-96), Barbara Bloom's *The Reign of Narcissism* (1990), and Christian Boltanski's *Vitrine of Reference II* (1970)--as well as, par excellence, Joseph Cornell's Romantic Museum boxes (1935-50) and Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* (1935-41) and later editions of the *Boîte*.

Explorations of ethnographic or natural history museums inspire a sense of wonderment at the world of taxonomic specimen cases, mineral cabinets, and indigenous flora. They also provoke critiques of the collecting process and the unequal relations between cultures. For this exhibition, Mark Dion has created *The Great Chain of Being* (1999), a contemporary *Wunderkammer* based on Aristotle's hierarchical organization of the natural world. Works by Hiroshi Sugimoto, Lothar Baumgarten, and Christopher Williams, in turn, reveal the artificiality of museum collections and their dislocation from the actual worlds they represent. In particular, Williams's *Angola to Vietnam** (1989), a series of photographs of glass flowers in the Botanical Museum at Harvard, captures both the beauty and the ahistorical oddness of many museum artifacts.

Several works in the exhibition envision the museum as a cultural or architectural icon that is altered, manipulated, or transformed: for example, Komar and Melamid's ironic future ruins of The Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum, New York. (Like a number of exhibits in the show, these paintings are almost certainly descendants of an earlier work--in this case, Hubert Robert's illustrious 1796 portrait of the Louvre's Grande Galerie in ruins.) Edward Ruscha's *The Los Angeles County Museum on Fire* (1965-68), Christo's unrealized project to wrap The Museum of Modern Art (1968), Jan Dibbets's studies of museum-interior light, and Richard Hamilton's fiberglass molds of New York's Guggenheim Museum, among other works, are further variations on the idea of the museum transformed.

Crucial to the exhibition are works that reveal how artists have interrogated and challenged the museum's political, bureaucratic, and corporate dynamics. Hans Haacke's text-based installation *Seurat's "Les Poseuses" (small version), 1888-1975* (1975), presents a detailed history of this work's provenance. The art collective General Idea, for its part, has created a museum shop with a sales counter in the shape of a dollar sign, while Jac Leirner has made a wall piece with a collection of shopping bags from museums around the world. This thread is also taken up in the selection of artists' writings in the exhibition catalogue.

Still other artists disrupt, or reveal disruptions in, the seamless art-historical narratives that museums present. For example, Daniel Buren, in a work commissioned for the show, places his trademark stripes in a permanent collection gallery and moves four Giorgio de Chirico paintings

from that gallery to a space in *The Museum as Muse*--creating a fault line, as it were, in The Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection. Sophie Calle's *Last Seen...* (1991) collects testimonies from staff at Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum of Art about several paintings that were stolen from that collection, while Fred Wilson's *Art in Our Time* (1998) creates an arrangement of images culled from The Museum of Modern Art's documentary photographic archives, the Museum's candid and private memory of itself.

Besides Buren and Dion, Michael Asher, Louise Lawler, and Janet Cardiff have been commissioned to create works specifically for *The Museum as Muse*. In addition to their works in the exhibition galleries, Fred Wilson and Allan McCollum have created projects exclusively for the Museum's Web site (see separate release). Videotapes of Andrea Fraser's 1989 and 1991 performances as a museum docent are shown, and there is textual and photographic documentation of two pieces performed by Vito Acconci in 1970 at The Museum of Modern Art and the Jewish Museum, titled *Service Area* and *Proximity Piece*, respectively.

A complete list of artists and works in this exhibition is available on request.

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EDUCATIONAL BROCHURE

A brochure will be available to visitors at the entrance of the exhibition. This publication discusses all the works in the exhibition, focusing on the following themes: Photographs and the Museum in Use, Artist-Collectors and the Personal Museum, Natural History Collections, Museum Practices and Politics, and the Museum Transformed. The brochure was written by Kristen Erickson, Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Painting and Sculpture.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

The Museum of Modern Art will host a panel discussion titled "The Imagined Museum" on Tuesday, May 18, at 6:30 p.m. in The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2. Participants will include Lawrence Weschler, author of *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder*, and other writers. The panel will be moderated by Linda Shearer, Director, Williams College Museum of Art. For more information, please call the Department of Education at 212.708.9781.

PUBLICATION

The fully illustrated publication will contain an introductory essay by Kynaston McShine and short entries by different authors on each work or series of works in the exhibition. The catalogue will also include an

anthology of artists' writings and statements on the topic of the museum, a general bibliography, and biographies and bibliographies of each of the participating artists. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. 296 pages, 9" by 10". 250 illustrations, 76 in full color. Clothbound \$50, distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, paperbound \$24.95; both available in the Museum Book Store

TRAVEL

The exhibition will travel to The Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, in La Jolla from September 18, 1999 through January 2, 2000.

WEB SITE

A subsite devoted to the exhibition will be available via the Museum Web site at www.moma.org. It will include introductory text, a checklist of works, a selection of 25 works accompanied by an image and commentary, and links to information about the exhibition's public programs and how to purchase the catalogue. The subsite will also feature online projects created specifically for the site by two artists featured in the show, Allan McCollum and Fred Wilson. See separate release for details.

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