

A photograph of a museum gallery. The floor is covered with a dense carpet of thousands of small, colorful, fuzzy figures in various shades of brown, green, and orange. In the background, there is a white wall with several framed paintings and a doorway with a small painting hanging inside it.

Second edition

Art and Artifact
The Museum as Medium

James Putnam

Thames & Hudson

JAMES PUTNAM

**ART AND ARTIFACT
THE MUSEUM AS MEDIUM**

SECOND EDITION

with 290 illustrations, 239 in color



Thames & Hudson

I N T R O D U C T I O N

open the box

‘Every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.’

Walter Benjamin, ‘Thesis on the Philosophy of History’

Anyone who has ever wandered around a museum that retains a nineteenth-century display, with a dense accumulation of objects in ranks of vitrines, may wonder how it could possibly relate to the kind of clinical white space usually associated with the contemporary art museum. One notable example of the traditional approach is the Pitt Rivers in Oxford (founded in 1884), which combines its founder’s quest for completeness with a continuing aura of ‘curiosity’ and preserving – virtually unaltered – what is in effect a time-capsule, cocooned from the ever-changing world outside. The diversity of its essentially ‘non-art’ collection, which lacks the tendency of modern museums to over-interpret, inspires the imagination and tends to generate questions rather than give answers. Many feel that the particular nineteenth-century display aesthetic of such institutions which have escaped modernization approaches an art form in itself. In complete contrast,

the modern art museum has created its own, purist display aesthetic, a highly self-conscious viewing space which proclaims the institutionalization of art. The resulting idealized neutrality of the white interior is thus offset by a need to re-establish the heterogeneous spirit of the traditional museum through art. What is most intriguing is the way in which the museum concept has developed into an expression of multiple commitments and roles, which have in turn become increasingly conflicting and ambiguous. Although the nineteenth-century encyclopaedic approach represents the very antithesis of methods of display in the modern art museum, the two types are in fact connected, not merely through the process of museological evolution but also because many contemporary artists have been inspired by the wider notion of the museum which such places embody – that is to say as an institution, an idea and a practice.

A natural starting-point for examining the relationship between artists and museums is the cabinet of curiosities or *Wunderkammer*, which existed in Europe from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.¹ This early ancestor of the museum possessed a special quality in tune with the creative imagination, a quest to explore the rational and the irrational and a capricious freedom of arrangement. It is this apparent lack of rational classification, with its bizarre sense of accumulation and juxtaposition, that makes the *Wunderkammer* concept aesthetically so appealing. But the unscientific form of these pre-Enlightenment collections eventually led to the dispersal of their contents and to the birth of the museum as we know it today. It is possible to identify two dominant tendencies, in which the artist confronts miraculous aspects of the *Wunderkammer*. One is as a collector, who uses assemblage through the arrangement and juxtaposition of diverse collected

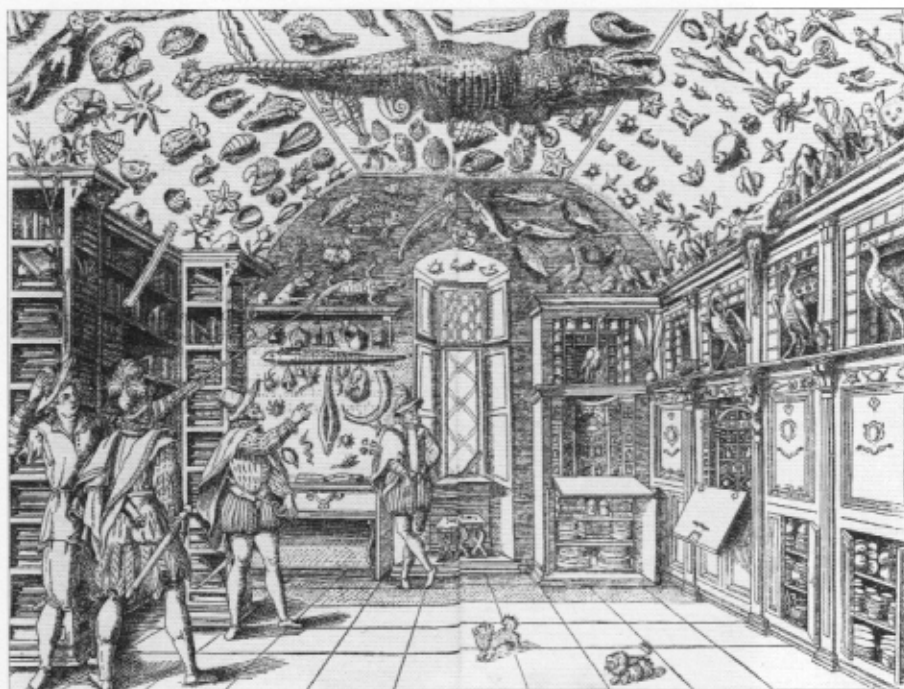
ROBERT FILLIOU
THE FROZEN EXHIBITION
 1972

This scaled-down retrospective in a cardboard bowler hat evolved from Filliou's earlier Galerie Légitime, 1962. As a challenge to the static nature of the conventional museum, the artist would wear a real hat around Paris and present its contents to strangers and to those he met in the street.



The *Wunderkammer* of Ferrante Imperato, Naples
From *Historia Naturale* by Ferrante Imperato
1599

Based on the idea that the entire cosmos could be controlled within the confines of a private room, the *Wunderkammer* was an expression of a particular individual's collecting interests. Rare, precious and bizarre objects were intended to arouse wonder in the mind of the viewer and to provide aesthetic pleasure. A delight in the anomalous was also in tune with the Mannerist taste of the late sixteenth century. The *Wunderkammer* was linked to the creative imagination and has parallels with the work of the Dadaists, the Surrealists and some contemporary artists.



The Pitt Rivers Museum,
Oxford

The diverse collections of the noted anthropologist General A.H.L.F. Pitt Rivers (1827–1900) form the basis of the museum, which has been greatly expanded since its foundation in 1884. They include ethnographical, prehistoric and natural history material. The museum's original closely packed style of display, with its selective taxonomies, remains unchanged and continues to provide artistic inspiration.



objects. The other is by exploring the parameters between natural and artificial materials, by imaginative manipulation and transformation, as illustrated in the work of the Surrealists. The *Wunderkammer* was a very private and devotional place specially created with the profound belief that nature was linked with art.

The collections were usually displayed in multi-compartmented cabinets and vitrines and arranged in such a way as to inspire wonder and stimulate creative thought. They included exotic natural objects that crossed the rational boundaries of animal, vegetable and mineral, such as fossils, coral formations and composite creatures,

basilisks and mermen. Particularly desirable were anomalies or freaks of nature and optical wonders like special mirrors and lenses capable of distorting reality. It is possible to apply the '*Wunderkammer* principle' to the invention of the miraculous in art. Many artists have shared this fascination with the subversion of natural

order, as illustrated in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch and Giuseppe Arcimboldo which include fanciful composite creations derived from animal, vegetable and mineral sources. A thread of continuity extends into the twentieth century and it is possible to see similar mechanisms at work particularly in the case of the Dadaists and Surrealists, and

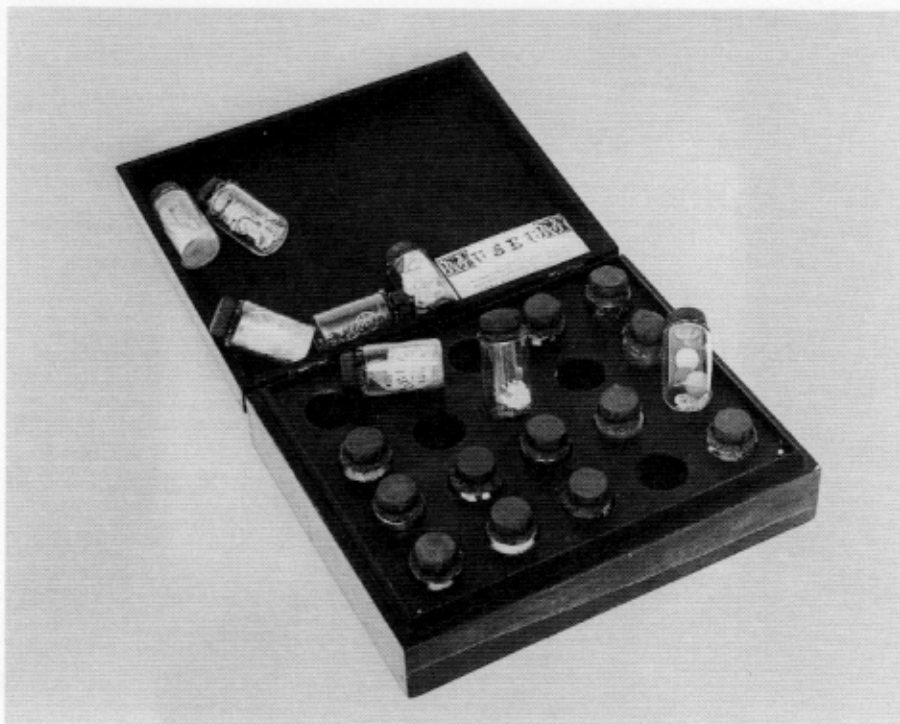
of the Post-Modern avant-garde artists in the 1970s and 1980s.² The *Wunderkammer* also embraced the notion that the world exists to be containable in one room or cabinet, a pre-programmable personal environment. A parallel process exists in the way some artists create and orchestrate their own aesthetic spaces, in isolation from the outside world. Kurt Schwitters

used his own house in Hanover as a vehicle for his spatial experiments with his *Merzbau* (begun in 1919), which became a microcosm of his artistic practice. In his poetic assemblages, created from ephemera and small found objects, Joseph Cornell also constructed very personal microcosms in the form of narrative assemblages. The earlier versions in 1932

KURT SCHWITERS
HANOVER MERZBAU: VIEW
WITH BLUE WINDOW
 1933

Throughout the 1920s and up to 1936, Schwitters obsessively transformed a number of rooms in his home into a unique spatial environment. The *Merzbau* functioned as a sort of container for a variety of objects having personal significance for the artist, a synthesis between Constructivist and Dada elements. Schwitters went on to develop various 'caves' and 'grottoes', some of which were left visible through glass fronts, while others became completely hidden. At its most developed stage the *Merzbau* contained 40 grottoes, variously dedicated either to people or to symbolic or topographical subjects.





JOSEPH CORNELL MUSEUM

c. 1944–48

One of a series of works in boxes which Cornell began in 1940, the museum is based on a form of jewel casket; it had a dark velvet lining which emphasized the delicacy of the contents, suggesting personal objects to be treasured.

were contained in bell-jars of the type used for the display of stuffed birds, but small glass-fronted containers – ‘shadow boxes’ – became his most familiar mode of presentation during the 1940s and 1950s.

The Surrealists made unusual accumulations of disparate objects. André Breton’s collection included a mandrake root in the shape of a person, embalmed animals, shells, ethnographic objects from Africa and Oceania, incised bones and stones and a mirror that multiplied the image. Surrealism practises on a wide scale the *Wunderkammer* principle, with its mixture

or fusion of diverse elements and materials, because of its resistance to their separation by specialized classification in the real world. Many twentieth-century artists have followed a collecting principle, akin to the *Wunderkammer*, which embodied an element of free association where the mind could roam at will. The subject matter of such a collection might be both eclectic and personal, bound up with memory and imagination, accumulation rather than sheer calculated order and selection. The artist frequently has an attitude of mind similar to that of the *bricoleur*, motivated by an instinctive and mysterious love of things which have no known relationship to one another. This is the result of a *Sammeltrieb* or primal urge to collect, or as Walter Benjamin put it: ‘Animals (birds, ants), children, and old men as collectors.’ According to Benjamin, collecting is also a form of memory: ‘Every passion borders on

the chaotic, but the collector’s passion borders on the chaos of memories.’³

The artist’s urge to accumulate objects in the studio is part of the age-old human impulse to gather and hoard. But artistic collecting is very different from that of the hobbyist or the ‘serious’ collector and it has a distinct character which links it to the creative process. Historically, paintings have shown artists at work in their studios surrounded by diverse collected objects which they might depict as still-life studies to enhance the background of formal portraits. In the twentieth century artists may actually use the things they collect as an integral part of a work. With the early modernists, collage became an offshoot of artists’ collections where cut-out images, ephemera and even small found objects were applied directly to the canvas support. Max Ernst used printed illustrations, Kurt Schwitters used discarded tram tickets and Hannah Höch made assemblages from photographs. The increasing assimilation of the found object into a work of art of course owes much to Marcel Duchamp.

Through his principle of the ‘Readymade’ Duchamp was able to demonstrate in 1917 that something as ordinary as a standard urinal could be accorded the title *Fountain* and transformed at will into an art object. He claimed to have chosen mass-produced objects like the urinal, bottle-rack and snow shovel in moments of ‘aesthetic amnesia’ and to have displayed them, alone and empty of aesthetic presumption, precisely to ridicule the ‘aura’ of value and prestige that traditionally accrues to the art object.

Through his Readymades Duchamp had indirectly mocked the museum concept and challenged the uniqueness of genuine works of art – an idea that has continued to inspire succeeding generations of artists. The artistic tendency to gather together large quantities of society's cast-offs and the extension of the notion of the *objet trouvé* coincides with the vast post-World War II growth in consumer goods. In the early 1960s, flea-markets, rubbish tips and the streets provided endless supplies of working materials for artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Allan Kaprow and Ed Kienholz, just as they had for the Surrealists in the 1930s.

During this period Claes Oldenburg created a series of works that broke through the boundaries of performance, installation and display. His installations 'The Street' of 1960 and 'The Store' of 1961 were sites for exhibition, live art and the selling of work. In his notebook written during the year-long life of 'The Store', he wrote: 'I am for art that is political-erotic-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum.'⁴ In this installation Oldenburg used found and altered objects as display and as consumable art. The inventory for 'The Store' of December 1961 lists

107 items which he referred to as 'charged objects'; these were things which had been transformed, not only through the artist's intercession but also through actual change via their 'participation' in the installation and 'The Store'. Oldenburg's position was to shift later in the decade, when Pop art became a runaway success and much of the work made by the Pop artists, including that by Oldenburg himself, did indeed sit 'on its ass in museums'. A similar idea was explored by Daniel Spoerri, who created a grocery store stocked with all sorts of packages stamped 'Attention – work of Art'. Here each item was offered for sale at the same price as the genuine article when sold in a normal store. Of course,

much of this work depends for its historical legitimacy on the foundations laid by Duchamp with his 'Readymades'.

Daniel Spoerri, along with Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely and Arman, was a member of the French movement Nouveau Réalisme, which was formed in 1960. In common with a number of prominent artists based in New York at the time, they used collections of discarded materials which were presented in the form of assemblages, tableaux, happenings and environments. Perhaps the most notorious example of mass-accumulation was Arman's exhibition 'Le Plein', where an art gallery was crammed from floor to ceiling with detritus

ARMAN LE PLEIN ('FULL-UP')

Detail of installation at the Iris Clert Gallery, Paris 1960

With the help of his artist friend Martial Raysse, Arman spent an intensive week collecting enough rubbish from streets and dustbins in Paris to fill the entire gallery and kept an inventory of everything he included. Although the original intention had been to exhibit only household cast-offs, he also included a quantity of organic material, but after thirteen days the resulting smell had become so unpleasant that the exhibition had to be closed.





DANIEL SPOERRI 

SNARE PICTURE

1972

From the early 1960s, Spoerri produced a series of *tableaux pièges* (literally 'snare pictures'), trapping random groupings of objects at a given moment, frozen in time. In each of these assemblages cutlery and crockery, together with plates and dishes, complete with meal leftovers, were fixed down to a table-top which was then mounted on the wall as a vertical display.

collected from the streets of Paris. This was the perfect foil to Yves Klein's 'Le Vide', held two years earlier in the same gallery, which involved an entirely empty interior painted white.⁵ These artists wanted to identify themselves with tangible objects in reaction to the Abstract Expressionism that had previously dominated the art scene, and what is significant here is the mode

of display adopted by both Arman and Spoerri. They frequently presented arrangements of objects either in see-through containers or mounted on a hard support. Arman showed his 'Poubelles' (dustbins) consisting of clear acrylic containers full of discarded waste items. He also set multiples of any type of object, from door-handles to watch parts, into clear resin. The containers had the effect of framing the subject, drawing the observer's attention to recognize the strange beauty of cast-off materials, which thus become endowed with a whole new aesthetic structure. A similar principle is employed by Daniel Spoerri in his 'snare pictures', which consist of table-tops with objects and

PIERO MANZONI
MERDA D'ARTISTA NO. 58

1961

Manzoni challenged many traditional notions of artistic value by designating what he chose to sign as a work of art, whether it be a person or a potentially worthless artifact derived from his own body. In 1959, Manzoni had proposed the idea of displaying living people as art and encapsulating human bodies in transparent plastic. In the same year he preserved a series of 45 'pneumatic sculptures', inflated by means of his own breath. Two years later, he went on to produce 90 sealed cans containing his own faeces; the contents weighed 30 grams and each can was individually signed and numbered.



meal leftovers fixed to the surface and then displayed vertically on the wall.

Since the late 1960s artists have increasingly made use of the display case or the vitrine to present their work, and this practice has become a familiar one in galleries devoted to contemporary art. The vitrine was originally adopted by the Church for preserving and venerating the relics of saints – a practice which helped to enhance the powerful presence of the holy and sacred. It embodies a very particular display aesthetic which has a singular ability to transform magically the most humble object into something special, unique and generally more attractive or fascinating. Once placed in a vitrine, an object is

TIMM ULRICHS ↻
**THE FIRST LIVING WORK
 OF ART**

[1961]

Ulrichs' work was probably the earliest example of an artist using a vitrine to exhibit himself; based on the principle of 'art is life and life is art', the performance was recorded in a photowork shown at the *juryfreie Kunstausstellung Berlin* in 1965. A later version was staged at the *Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum, Hagen, Germany*, in 1991.



↻ The *Auto-Icon* of Jeremy Bentham (1745–1832)
 University College, London

Bentham's *Auto-Icon* or self-image – his clothed skeleton with lifelike wax head displayed in a vitrine in the college entrance lobby – has parallels with the more recent notion of displaying live models as works of art. The presentation of Bentham's skeleton and mummified head (seen in the foreground) was in keeping with the wishes of this eccentric English philosopher and jurist. In 1974, Bentham's *Auto-Icon* was featured in a film entitled *Figures of Wax* made by the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers.

perceived in a completely different way by the viewer, as compared with when it is viewed in its original context. The vitrine functions as a means of protection both from the elements and the spectator, who is thus physically separated from its contents. Almost like a peep-show it seduces, concentrating, looking, staring at the untouchable and the unattainable. The



vitrine shares with the shop window and commercial display case the power to catch the attention of the passer-by. The albums of photographs of shopfronts and window displays in Paris, taken in the 1920s by Eugène Atget, who influenced the Surrealists, explore the possibilities of the vitrine without the mediation of authority inherent in the museum display.

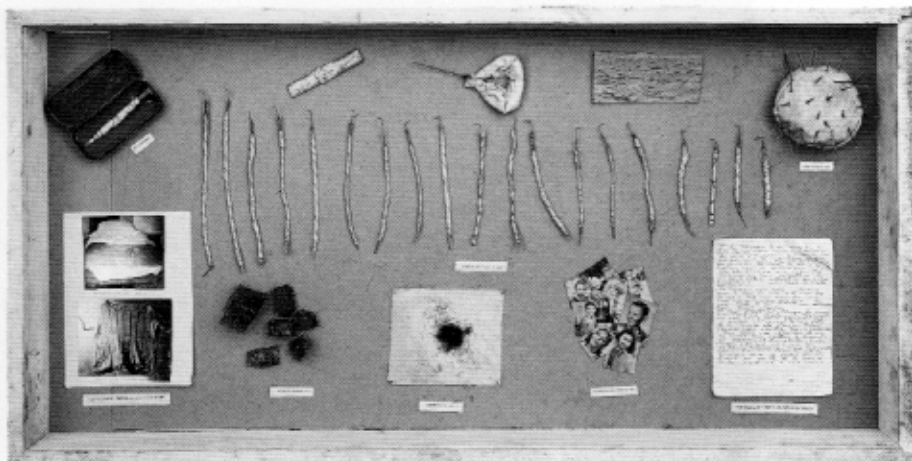
The use of the vitrine in science and medicine is linked to the need to keep a specimen in a still viewable, arrested state of being. The practice of preservation of museum exhibits by taxidermy, pickling, dehydration etc. illustrates the desire to suspend time and stabilize objects against decomposition. It also keeps the viewer at

a comfortable, voyeuristic distance, so avoiding direct contact with something perhaps distasteful yet fascinating, such as an anatomical dissection. The vitrine's associations with both science and the Church relate to its role as bodily container, and a number of artists have even exhibited living people or themselves in vitrines as part of a wider fascination with their exploration of the material self or the body. This idea has an intriguing precedent in the philosopher Jeremy Bentham's *Auto-Icon*, and in recent years living people have been exhibited in vitrines as a form of performance art.⁶ Artists might also create works from intimate personal possessions, keepsakes or even body fluids which, like both reliquaries

CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI
VITRINE DE RÉFÉRENCE

1971

Born in Paris, Boltanski visited museums there, such as the Musée de l'Homme, during his childhood; this is one of a series of works he produced in the early 1970s which relate to his earliest memories. The vitrines are used as containers in which to preserve found and fabricated objects, as well as personal keepsakes, and some of them include typed labels with explanatory texts. Displayed in this manner as subjects of anthropological study, such exhibits assume the role of contemporary relics – reminiscent of 'fossils' from some past, lost culture – seen in the context of modern civilization.



and museum artifacts, serve as tangible evidence of their existence. Thus Piero Manzoni's works c. 1960 are effectively personal relics which also relate to the authentication and value of art.⁷

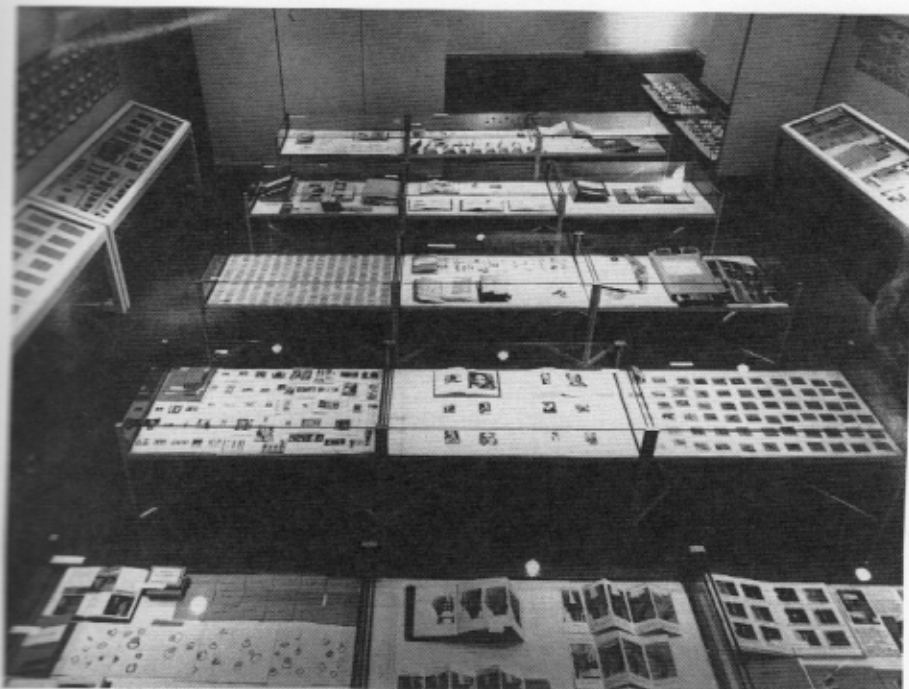
In some of the works of Christian Boltanski and Joseph Beuys the vitrine has connections with both the melancholic funereal quality of the church reliquary and the use of the glass-sided incubator for premature babies. Beuys often used vitrines to contain a diverse range of materials that have references to his own life and include relics of his 'actions' or performances. The vitrine came to form part of the language with which Beuys made his art works, providing a 'neutral' protected space for elements that otherwise might be seen as fugitive. This is, of course, the *raison d'être* of the museum showcase and, in this, Beuys's position in relation to the museum is made clear. He used the elements available as a vehicle for his ideas and so the museum and its component parts came to be another set of tools to be used in his argument. His use of this language is shown most clearly in the installation which he organized as a permanent suite of galleries at the

Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt in 1970. This is situated directly above the museum's old natural history displays, a fact which appropriately echoes Beuys's own emphasis on the link between art and science, past and future and the personal and universal. In terms of its presentation of curious objects in vitrines, the *Beuys Block* is, in effect, a museum created by the artist which stealthily usurps the conventional museum to his own ends. It is both a concentration of Beuys's work and his vision of his relationship with the world using personally symbolic collected objects.

The activities taking place behind the scenes in museums have been as important as the modes of display in public areas. There is the interesting contrast between revealing and concealing, as illustrated in the common museum process of choosing to exhibit one object while keeping others in reserve storage. The establishment of systems of organization is as instinctive to human nature as is the accumulation and collecting, and artists frequently imitate the institutional practice of creating inventories and archives as part of a working process. Joseph Cornell carefully

preserved all kinds of material that was surplus but related in some way to his main body of work, keeping it in shoe-boxes and other improvised archive boxes. In 1946 he presented an exhibition called 'Romantic Museum: Portraits of Women', which was derived from a body of his works that he referred to as 'dossiers'.⁸ These were unfinished works, housed inside document boxes which were intended to be added to and subtracted from as part of his working research process. The basement of the Cornell family home served as the storeroom for these dossiers and constructions, all carefully filed into the relevant categories. He had wanted his house to become a permanent museum after his death, but although the accumulated stores were kept together, they were transported to Washington to become an archive within the Smithsonian Institution. One of Cornell's archive boxes which recently came to light reveals that he assisted Marcel Duchamp in making the various elements of his portable museum, the *Boîte-en-valise*.⁹

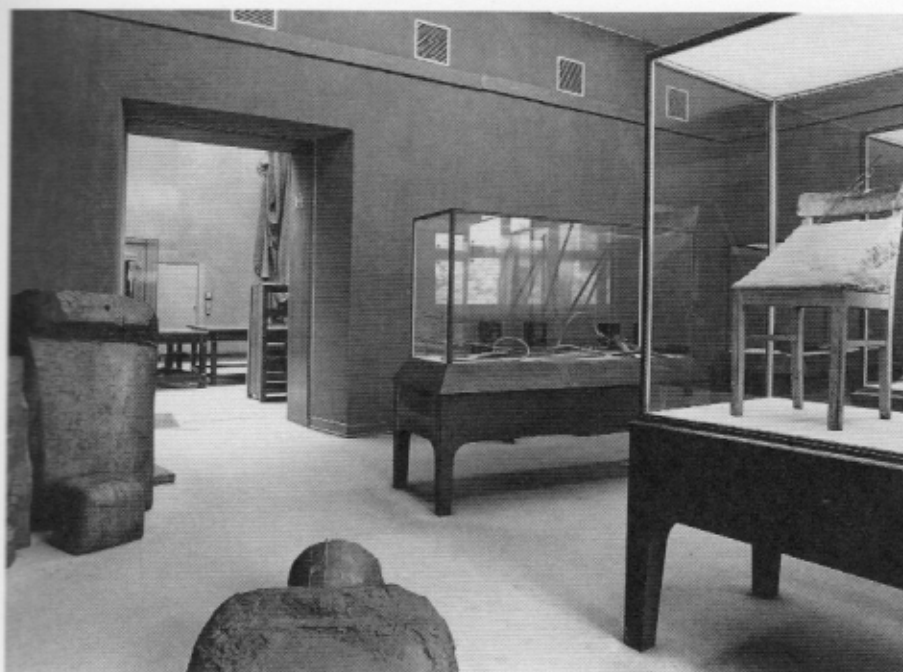
From 1974 Andy Warhol created 'Time Capsules', obsessively packing and storing



**ANNETTE MESSEGER
ALBUM COLLECTIONS**

Installation at the Städtische Galerie im
Lenbachhaus, Munich
1973

Assembling collections in the form of scrapbooks, Messenger compiled a numbered sequence of 56 albums between about 1971 and 1974. Her first collection was taken directly from the commemorative tradition of marriage albums, and she substituted her own face and name for those of the real brides. Subsequent albums chronicle fictional events in her life, frequently using illustrations from magazines. Her entire album collections have been displayed as a form of archive in vitrines at a number of contemporary art venues.



**JOSEPH BEUYS
BEUYS BLOCK:
VIEW OF ROOM 3**

Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt
1970

This, the largest group of Beuys's vitrine sculptures, is regarded as the most definitive example since the works were installed personally by the artist. He once suggested that his fascination with glass began at birth when as a premature baby he was placed in a glass-sided incubator. The vitrines serve as displays of relics of Beuys's life and contain a diverse selection of objects used in his Actions of the 1960s and early 1970s, brought together in what he called a 'constellation of ideas'.

all kinds of ordinary objects which he accumulated from day to day. These were standard-size cardboard cartons which, when full, were labelled, sealed and sent into storage in New Jersey. They were filled with everything that

passed across Warhol's desk, including magazines, invitations, photographs, unopened letters and, occasionally, clothes. The 'Time Capsules' now form the core of the archive housed at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. Warhol used

the 'Time Capsules' as a kind of repository for his own past; in his diary entry of 24 May 1984 the artist notes: 'I opened a Time Capsule and every time I do it's a mistake, because I drag it back and start looking through it ...'.¹⁰ Warhol expressed

and extended this fascination for things hidden and stored when, in 1969, he was invited by the Rhode Island School of Design to curate an exhibition of work selected from the collection of its own Museum of Art in Providence. Called 'Raid the Icebox', the show was part of a series conceived by John and Dominique de Menil, 'who wanted to bring out into the open some of the unfamiliar and often unsuspected treasures moldering in museum basements, inaccessible to the general public'.¹¹ Instead of selecting individual examples for display, Warhol chose to exhibit complete groups of related objects exactly as he had found them in the storeroom, for example by bringing all the chairs out of storage. When it came to the shoe collection, the Museum curator pointed out that this process

would result in duplication of some pairs or in showing inferior examples of particular types of shoe, but Warhol insisted on including the complete collection. 'There were exasperating moments when we felt that Andy Warhol was exhibiting "storage" rather than works of art, that a series of labels could mean as much to him as the paintings to which they refer. And perhaps they do, for in his vision, all things become part of the whole and we know what is being exhibited is Andy Warhol.'¹² This exhibition has become historically significant as having set a precedent for other museums to follow, by inviting artists to act as guest curators.

While the idea of the artist's museum is essentially a tendency in twentieth-century art, it has some parallels with the extra-

MARCEL DUCHAMP ↗
BOÎTE-EN-VALISE (PORTABLE MUSEUM)

1941

The year after Duchamp produced the first edition of his *Boîte-en-valise*, he was photographed for *Life* magazine demonstrating the contents of the box housed inside its purpose-made suitcase. The flaps of the box can be opened to reveal a compilation of his works reproduced in photographs, prints and diminutive models, thus creating a portable, rearrangeable museum. The 'Boîte' also has functional associations with the *Porte-Monnaie* (Purse), a pigskin attaché case for use by casino gamblers.

ANDY WARHOL
RAID THE ICEBOX I WITH ANDY WARHOL

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, R.I.
 1970

Rather than make a selection of his favourite or the 'best' pieces in the museum storeroom, Warhol chose to exhibit the complete collections of various types of object, regardless of provenance or condition. The items shown here include shoes and parasols. The exhibition was an early precursor of what has since become a more frequent tendency for museums to invite artists to curate shows. ↘





ordinary personal museums created in England, over a hundred years earlier, by the architect Sir John Soane and in America by the painter Charles Willson Peale. In his London house Sir John Soane designed a special rotunda, crammed from floor to ceiling with three storeys of sculptures and architectural fragments, at the centre of which he placed a bust of himself. On the other side of the Atlantic in Pennsylvania, Charles Willson Peale, the painter of Revolutionary heroes, created the first American Museum. This included vitrines containing his large collection of natural history specimens arranged in a hierarchical display which conformed to his knowledge of the Linnaean system.¹³ Artists are inevitably collectors of their own works in finished and preparatory form, which they might periodically reappraise and modify. By necessity their studios might even need

to be organized in a way similar to museum storerooms. Perhaps the most immediate artist's museum involves the presentation of an individual's own work: thus Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* is effectively a portable museum of his works in miniature enclosed in a custom-made suitcase. He decided to develop a retrospective of his existing art, which involved making miniature representations of paintings, graphics and Readymades to fit inside an attaché case. 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 1960s, he released an edition consisting of six different series in archive box form. Each box unfolds to reveal various works displayed on pull-out and standing frames. Since the content was rearrangeable, both the artist himself and the individual collector could assume the role of curator.

Duchamp's artistic use of the anonymous-looking attaché case was appropriated by the Fluxus artists for housing their numerous *Fluxkit* editions. These were described as 'miniature Fluxus museums' by the movement's founder, George Maciunas. Between 1975 and 1977, Maciunas assembled what was to be the last Fluxus anthology: the *Fluxcabinet*. This was a wooden cabinet with twenty drawers containing objects by fourteen Fluxus artists. For drawer 12 he contributed his *Excreta Fluxorum*, a taxonomic presentation of insect and mammalian faeces, arranged hierarchically according to their evolutionary order. Other participants created alternatives to the static museum,

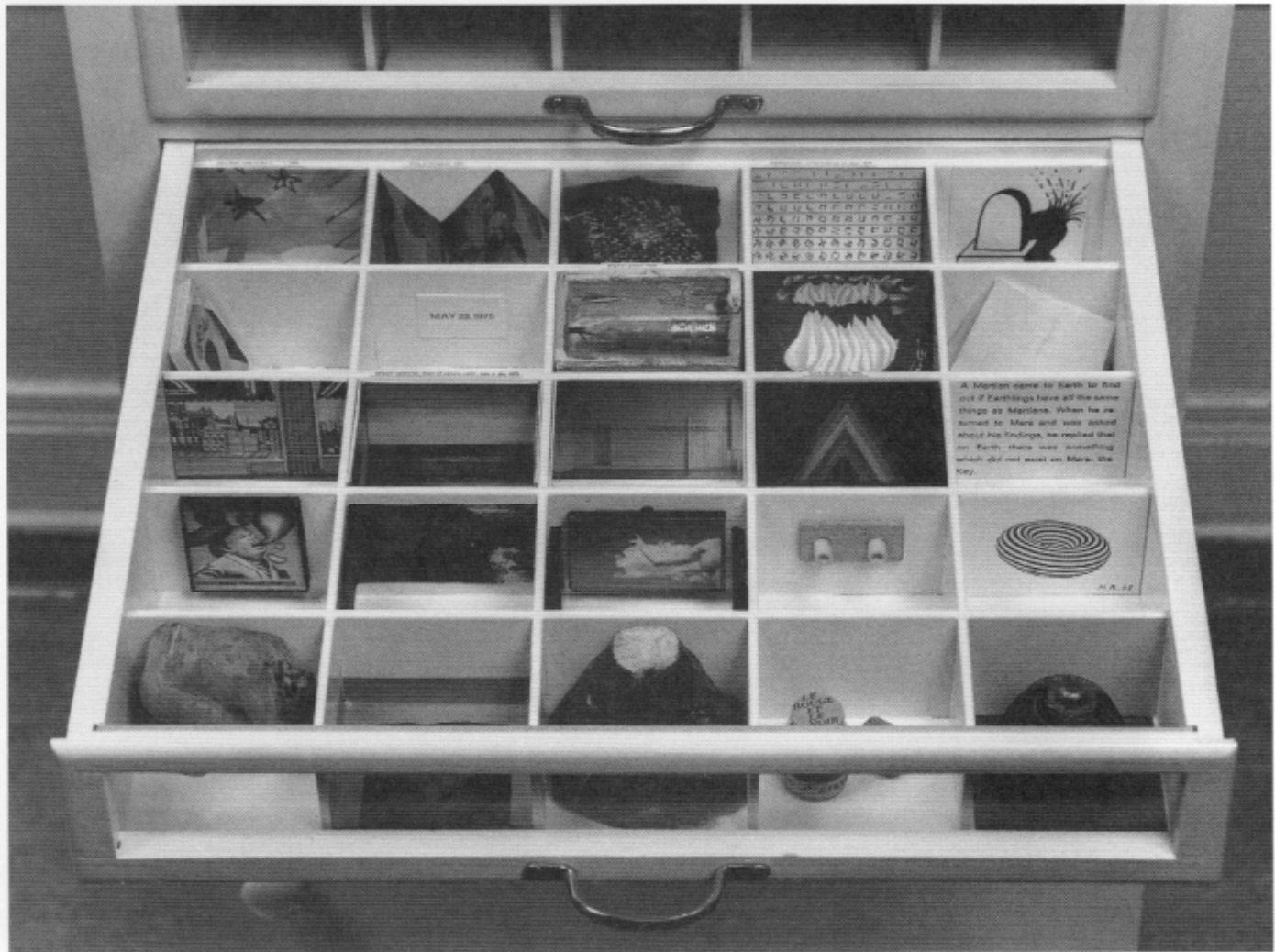
and Robert Filliou made what was, in effect, a museum in a hat (with the objects tucked into the band) which became *The Frozen Exhibition* (1972).

For his 'Museum of Drawers', Herbert Distel conceived the idea of creating an entire museum of modern art in a multi-drawer cabinet. He invited artists to contribute works in miniature scale mostly dating from the 1960s and 1970s. Each work was contained in one of the 500 compartments of a cotton-reel cabinet,

Sir John Soane's Museum, London
The rotunda, looking east, with the bust of Sir John Soane in the middle

In 1833, Sir John Soane directed that his house in Lincoln's Inn Fields should be bequeathed to the nation and preserved 'as nearly as possible in the state' in which it was left at the time of his death (which occurred four years later). Although Soane is noted mainly for major architectural projects such as the Bank of England, his house and museum have come to be widely regarded as being close to an art form.





in which each compartment represented a 'room' of the museum. In 1972, the 'Museum of Drawers' was included in the exhibition Documenta V in Kassel, an event which represented a watershed in the relationship between the institution of the museum and contemporary art. This exhibition attempted to show the strands in contemporary art, including land art, film as art and the artist's museum which, along with Distel's creation, included examples of works by Marcel Duchamp, Claes Oldenburg, Ben Vautier and Marcel Broodthaers. Though a relatively small proportion of a massive summary of

current practice, this exhibition marked an acknowledgment of a significant tendency. It provided the opportunity for Oldenburg to show his 'Mouse Museum', a collection of found and fabricated material which he had built up and displayed in his studios during the mid-1960s. The 385 miniature consumer objects and toys which were retrieved from Oldenburg's studio were displayed in linear form in a continuous vitrine, and the plan of this building within a building takes its shape from a distinctive cartoon mouse. Although this shape may be unreadable from the ground, the museum structure is used as a logo and thus

HERBERT DISTEL ⇨

MUSEUM OF DRAWERS

1970-77

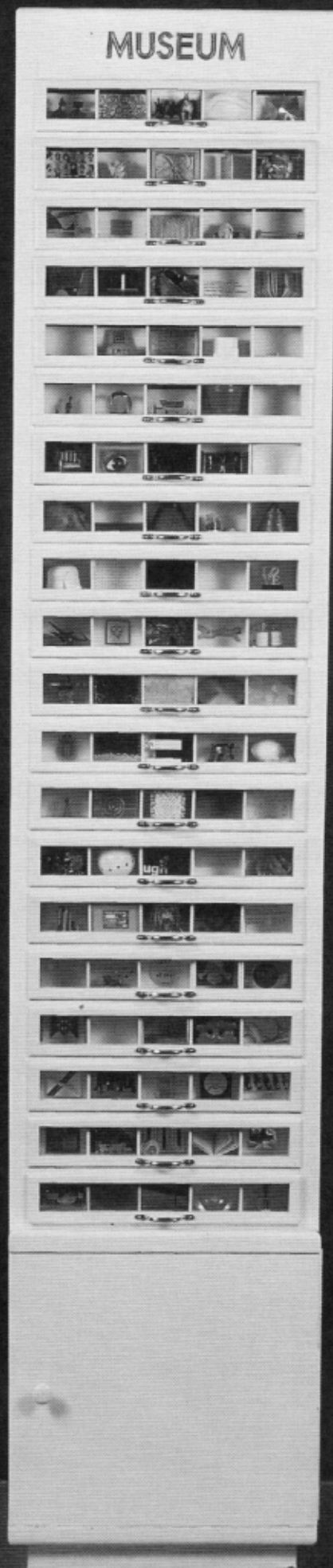
Distel invited artists to contribute a miniature work of art to the museum he was both creating and curating. This was housed in a former cotton-reel cabinet with a total of 500 compartments in twenty drawers set on a base made by Ed Kienholz. The artists represented included many well-known names, such as Picasso, but some of them have since sunk into relative obscurity.

⇨ DETAIL OF DRAWER NO. 8

An open drawer reveals 25 individual partitions, each containing a miniature work by a different artist. Those featured here are (from left to right): Paul Thek, Larry Rivers, Richard Estes, Peter Nagel, Alfred Hrdlicka; Billy Al Bengston, On Kawara, De Wain Valentain, Mark Tobey, Moshe Gershuni; Annette Messager, Stephen Posen, Giuseppe Penone, Christian Vogt, Philip King; Manfred Mohr, Jacques Hérold, Lucio Sel Pezzo, A.R. Penck, Eugenio Miccini; Dieter Roth, John Latham, Nam June Paik, Markus Raetz, Franz Eggenschwiler.

integrated with the collection, so becoming, in effect, another exhibit. There is no hierarchy to the display of found, bought or modified objects and maquettes, and they are all preserved just as if they were still in use as the artist's 'notebook' of forms. The installation, though by no means portable, refers back inevitably to the *Boîte-en-valise*. It was subsequently shown in its final form in Chicago in 1977 and then in Cologne and Otterlo in 1979. After Documenta V a second element was added to the ensemble: the *Ray Gun Wing*. Again the form of the structure is dictated by its contents and here the objects are selected for their similarity in form to that of a pistol. The *Ray Gun Wing* adds an ironic comment on the scholarly approach to museum making and to the expansion of museum buildings. Neither the objects on display in the 'Mouse Museum' nor the *Ray Gun Wing* are 'new' work made for exhibition; instead these installations are more properly seen as yet another view of Oldenburg's output.

'Fiction enables us to grasp reality and at the same time that which is veiled by reality', wrote Marcel Broodthaers, who in 1968 first developed his critical concept for the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* ('Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles').¹⁴ Using the device of the heraldic eagle to symbolize the authority of the museum and the tendency for it to be divided into various departments, he went on to make a series of twelve sections, in each of which he acted as its director, curator, designer and publicist. This earliest section of the museum was a kind of installation –





**CLAES OLDENBURG
MOUSE MUSEUM**

Installation; detail
1965–77

The artist's notebooks of 1965–66 contain plans to found a 'museum of popular objects'. The museum is housed within a series of display cases made from wood, corrugated aluminium and Plexiglas. This microcosm of objects, a few of which are shown here, is intended to reflect not only Oldenburg's working process, but also his perception of stereotypes in American society. Although somewhat diverse in their classification, the groups of objects exhibited are unified through their form, colour, texture and proportion.

which he staged at his own house in Brussels – consisting of empty packing crates, postcards of French nineteenth-century paintings fixed to the wall, a slide projection of prints by Grandville, and even a turtle living in his garden. On the opening and closing days of the nineteenth-century section, exactly one year apart, an empty transport container was parked outside the building, suggesting the recent arrival/imminent removal of the collection on display. On the night of the closure invited guests were taken by coach to Antwerp to attend the opening there of

the seventeenth-century section of the *Musée*. This new stage repeated the style of the first section, but contained a different set of reproductions, all but one being works by Rubens. These events marked the beginning of a continuous, itinerant project and along the way the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* covered various subjects: literature, folklore, cinema, finance, publicity and modern art.

Broodthaers also created a more informed and ephemeral section of the museum on the beach at Le Coq in 1970, assisted by Herman Daled. Both men donned canvas hats daubed with the word 'Museum' and drew a notional museum plan in the sand. This was a form of archaeological invention and, when the dig was complete, bilingual (French and Flemish) signs were erected saying 'Touching the objects is absolutely forbidden'. A year later, at the Cologne Art Fair, he presented the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section Financière*, which was an announcement



**CLAES OLDENBURG
POSTER FOR THE MOUSE
MUSEUM**

1972

The floor-plan of Oldenburg's museum is based on both the form of an early movie camera and a cartoon mouse-head. The poster, measuring 78.4 x 55.9 cm (31 x 22 in.), was designed by Oldenburg himself and printed as a lithograph to advertise the first showing of the museum at Documenta V in Kassel, Germany. The artist decided to exhibit his collection in display cases after seeing Joseph Beuys's vitrines at Darmstadt Museum earlier in the same year. It consists of 385 found and modified everyday objects and toys which he had accumulated in his studio since the mid-1960s; 367 items were selected for display in 1972.

of the bankruptcy of this fictional museum. The museum was put up for sale and, in order to publicize the idea, he intended to offer for sale 'an unlimited edition' gold ingot, stamped with an eagle motif.

In 1972 Broodthaers was invited by the director of the Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf to make what was to be the most extensive manifestation of the museum. 'La Section des Figures' ('Figures Section') – *The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present*, comprised



**MARCEL
BROODTHAERS
MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE,
DÉPARTEMENT DES AIGLES,
SECTION XIXÈME SIÈCLE**

Detail of installation at 30 rue de la Pépinière,
Brussels
1969

The earliest version of Broodthaers' museum was staged at the artist's own home, where the words 'musée'/'museum' were displayed on the windows. This section included some thirty empty packing crates previously used to transport paintings; these had been borrowed for the occasion from a specialist art transport company and bore stencilled warning instructions such as 'Keep dry' and 'Handle with care'. A number of special performances took place during the year of the museum's existence.

over 300 objects in a wide variety of media, all representing eagles, borrowed from various museum and private collections. They were displayed in vitrines, each with an engraved plastic label declaring in French, German or English 'This is not a work of art!'. The installation looked like a 'normal' museum exhibition, but at the point of the visitor's encounter with each object, the arbitrarily placed eagle and its label revealed the subversive quality of the display. Like most thematic exhibitions, it

was didactic in content, although there was no explanation of development or origin. Formal links between objects, though established by the choice of the subject 'eagle', were not elaborated. This was an exhibition which existed in its own dialectical sphere, calling into question the museum processes of selection and ordering as applied to the presentation of contemporary art.

Language is an essential factor in all of Broodthaers' work, which is not surprising given his background as a poet, and he maintained that 'the language of forms must be united with that of words'.¹⁵ He recognized the significance of the relationship between the museum label and the object it describes and his work conveys an urge to free the written word from this traditional subordinate role. In the Düsseldorf exhibition he made particular play on the gulf that exists between word and image and the fact that the museum seeks to deny this reality in its attempt at a unification of word and object. A label which reads 'This



**MARCEL
BROODTHAERS
MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE,
DÉPARTEMENT DES AIGLES,
SECTION FINANCIÈRE**

Gold ingot stamped with an eagle
1971

Broodthaers proposed to issue an 'unlimited edition' gold ingot, weighing 1 kg, and bearing an impressed serial number and eagle motif. He proposed to offer the kilogram of gold for sale at twice the current market price of gold; half represented the value as bullion and half the added value as art. Broodthaers was effectively parodying the art market by treating the museum as a commodity and during the Cologne Art Fair he put the museum up for sale, 'due to bankruptcy'.

is not a work of art!' refers to the object, to the ensemble of label and object, to the exhibition and, in the manner of the joke enacted by children, to the label itself. There is, of course, also an in-built homage to René Magritte's labelled depiction of a pipe: 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe.' Magritte labelled objects in such a way that they were not described; his labels address the viewer, rather than describe the object, in terms such as 'here is ...' or 'this is ...'. Broodthaers draws attention to the complexity of the relationship between

DANIEL SPOERRI
MUSÉE SENTIMENTAL

When exhibited in 1979 at the Kunstverein, Cologne, Spoerri's museum contained a vast selection of diverse objects relating to the city. The exhibits, rather than being important by traditional museological precepts, were chosen and classified according to the artist's personal criteria, which are influenced more by memory and local myth. Thus, the football in one of the vitrines had been used in a significant league fixture in which the Cologne team defeated Düsseldorf.



object and label in three dimensions. As Duchamp's 'Readymades' made clear, the function of an art museum, as of the artist working within its discursive authority, is to declare, in regard to each of the objects housed there: 'This is a work of art.' Broodthaers' labels reverse this proposition through the application of Magritte's formula, and his museum thus becomes the location of the 'non-artwork'. In the Düsseldorf exhibition catalogue, he specifies that in fact the meaning of these labels is to be construed as 'Public, how blind you are', and that they 'illustrate an idea of Marcel Duchamp and of René Magritte'.¹⁶

In the same year, the final manifestation of his *Musée d'Art Moderne* was shown in Kassel in two parts at Documenta V. The 'Section Publicité' was installed on the ground floor of the Neue Galerie; this included catalogues and photographs from previous sections and a few vestigial, empty frames containing references to non-existent figures. In the upper gallery, the

'Section d'Art Moderne' ('Modern Art Section') now comprised only a series of signs and labels, with lettering and directional arrows applied to the walls, pointing the way to non-existent cloakrooms and offices. On the window, and visible from outside, was painted 'Museum/Musée', and on the inside 'Fig. 0'. On the floor, in the centre of the gallery, the words 'private property' (in German, English and French) appeared in gold on a black-painted square protected by stanchions. Halfway through the installation's life, Broodthaers replaced these words with 'to Write, to Paint, to Copy, to Represent, to Speak, to Form, to Dream, to Exchange, to Make, to Inform, to Be Able To' (in French). He also amended the lettering on the walls to read 'Museum of Ancient Art, Department of Eagles, 20th-century Gallery' (in French).

Daniel Spoerri's fictional museum, the 'Musée Sentimental', like that of Broodthaers, had no permanent collection or home and was staged in four different

permutations and locations between 1977 and 1989.¹⁷ Inspired by a museum of the same name he had discovered in Barcelona in the mid-1960s, Spoerri suggested that his idea of the 'Musée Sentimental' had most in common with the *Wunderkammer*. In Spoerri's museum the traditional categories and hierarchies were abolished and history, memory, science and myth are reunited. The exhibitions' significance lay not in their presentation, which conformed to a conservative museological style, but in the curator/artist's choice of objects, the criterion for which was their importance relative to their urban contexts; and while the objects did not constitute the most important historical or artistic artifacts from the various cities, their selection represented an attempt to compile an inventory of what was significant. 'Key words' were matched up to exhibits and the display was then arranged alphabetically using these words as the basic point of departure. The correspondences and relationships thus built up resemble

the interconnecting networks of the city. Like so much of significance, these items displayed aspects of the everyday or have a particular resonance by association.

Spoerri's museum was first presented in 1977 in Paris at the Centre Georges Pompidou, where he also created a museum shop called the 'aberrant boutique' within the frame of an enormous welded metal sculpture by Jean Tinguely. The shop offered for sale all manner of objects donated by artists at Spoerri's request; they included old tools, brushes, palettes and unfinished works, and all proceeds were used to benefit Amnesty International. The 'Musée Sentimental' itself was installed in a long dark corridor with different configurations of vitrines inset into the walls. Most of the objects on display related to French culture, and included relics like Vincent van Gogh's furniture, René Magritte's bowler hat, toy horses owned by Marcel Duchamp and Ingres' violin. The second 'Musée Sentimental' was designed on a much larger scale in the Kunstverein in Cologne in 1979. Since he had been invited to teach at the art school there, Spoerri involved his students in the project. They divided the museum into 120 sections, each containing several objects. These included items as diverse as a piece of lead from the roof of the cathedral damaged during World War II, a football used in an important league fixture and a pair of muddy boots found after the city's carnival weekend.

Beyond appropriating and applying museological principles to their work, artists have in practical terms become

increasingly interested in exploring the museum's wider institutional framework. This phenomenon needs to be examined against the historical background rooted in the avant-garde and in the prevailing social and political climate of the 1960s. Since the beginning of the twentieth century some artists have continued to question, deny or proclaim the ideas and values of art within museum culture. Each new movement and manifesto declared its opposition to the stultifying effect of the museum, which was seen as an outmoded institution to be swept away along with orthodoxy of the academy and the salons. The history of Modernism is strewn with the ruins of the museum, yet ironically while avant-garde artists criticized museums for collecting 'dead' art, their work has been continually acquired and displayed by them. Modernism emerged amid a complex political climate of continual reinvention, since its most significant feature has been rejection of the past and complete confidence in the process of change and belief in the supremacy of the new and novel. This trend naturally led artists to challenge the cosy illusion of the museum's cultural immortality and, as Marinetti proclaimed, 'We want no part of it, the past, we the young and strong Futurists!'¹⁸

The museum, with its custodial view of history, was seen as either irrelevant or destructive. The Suprematist painter Kasimir Malevich proclaimed that the art of the past should be burned to make way for the art of the present. In his short essay 'On the Museum', he challenged the role of the museum in acquiring the art and artifacts of the past: 'contemporary life-

needs nothing other than what belongs to it.'¹⁹ The Russian Constructivists, who had started as Futurists, did not concern themselves explicitly with the abolition of the museum. Their main priority was to by-pass the institutions of the imperial state and of wealth and to move their operations straight to the street. Museums and galleries were for them laboratories in which experiments could be carried out and there was also a belief that the artist should have an active role in their management. Alexander Rodchenko, in his 'Declaration on the Museum Management' (1919), maintained that 'artists, as the only people with a grasp of the problems of contemporary art and as the creators of artistic values, are the only ones capable of directing the acquisition of modern works of art and of establishing how a country should be educated in artistic matters'.²⁰ El Lissitzky applied his Constructivist principles to the organization of space with his *Prourns* (Projects for the affirmation of the new in art). These were seen as a hybrid between painting and architecture and took a number of forms, including exhibitions of large-scale photographic environments. He developed a theory for museum display which he was able to put into practice in two 'Demonstration Rooms', one in Dresden in 1926, the other in Hanover in 1928. These explored the possibility of creating a space which he believed was most suitable for presenting modern art – a space where the specifically designed surroundings were further controlled by colour and lighting. This was a museum environment which was in direct opposition to the still predominant belief in the 'neutral' space of the museum object.

The avant-garde artists in Paris during the same period also resented the museum's traditional conservatism. The work of Marcel Duchamp expressed both the Dadaists' and Surrealists' disregard of institutional authority. By adding a moustache and beard to a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*, in his provocative work *L.H.O.O.Q.* of 1919, he was also contesting the reverence usually accorded to this most celebrated museum masterpiece in the Louvre. The Dada artists made their most controversial statement against the art establishment in 1920 at the First International Dada Fair in Berlin. This employed an authoritative style of display by the juxtaposition of text and image, a style which was to be echoed by the Nazi regime's counterattack on avant-garde art at the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition held in Munich in 1937. The Surrealists were to make their own definitive exhibition statement with the International Exposition of Surrealism held in Paris in 1938 and the 'First Papers of Surrealism' in New York in 1942. Although he himself was neither a major exhibitor nor even a completely committed Surrealist, Marcel Duchamp cleverly orchestrated both these shows, and his ideas on the manipulation of space anticipate aspects of later museum interventions. For the Paris exhibition he created a special ambience with the aid of 1,200 coal-sacks suspended from the ceiling; and, because the lighting of the gallery was deliberately subdued, visitors were issued with torches in order to view exhibits. In the 'First Papers of Surrealism', after the works had been installed, Duchamp covered the room in a web of string extending across the walls and

ceilings and over the paintings. Rather than challenge museums directly, the Surrealists suggested that they imprisoned the fertile imagination. As André Breton stated in *Surrealism and Painting* in 1927: 'Now I confess that I have passed like a madman through the slippery halls of museums ... Passing by all those religious compositions, all those rustic allegories, I irresistibly lost the sense of my own role. Outside, the street prepared a thousand more real enchantments for me ...'.²¹ The first Surrealist challenge was that of looking at reality in very different terms, a battle continually fought against the banality of the everyday. The Surrealists wanted to disinter the unconscious workings of the mind and share with the early creators of the *Wunderkammer* a desire to construct a specific, personal order and anarchic juxtaposition of collected elements, thereby resisting the kind of separation imposed by the museum through specialized classification.

A line of continuity exists between the questioning of the museum's autonomous role undertaken by the early avant-garde movements and the activities of those artists who began to create work around a critique of the institutions of art in the 1960s. As Hal Foster wrote, 'First artists like Flavin, André, Judd and Morris in the early 1960s, and then artists like Broodthaers, Buren, Asher and Haacke in the late 1960s, develop the critique of the conventions of the traditional mediums, as performed by Dada, Constructivism, and other historical avant-gardes, into an investigation of the institution of art, its perceptual and

cognitive, structural and discursive parameters.'²² By the late 1960s, worldwide student unrest, anti-Vietnam War demonstrations and civil rights and peace movements gave rise to the questioning of many long-established values and the concept of institutional authority, which included museum administrations. In France there were the activities of the Situationists led by Guy Debord and influential new ideas expressed in the works of theorists like Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and, slightly later, Jean Baudrillard. Their writings stimulated a critical examination of existing cultural institutions and recognized art as being interwoven with a system of socio-economic exchange.

In 1967 Daniel Buren and other artists made a demonstration at the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, where each artist exhibited a painting in the form of a simple motif, as a 'signature' of their objection against the institution, and distributed a text on a flier.²³ During the following year Buren continued to paint the 'same' painting of vertical, alternating coloured and white stripes and posted 200 of these panels on hoardings around Paris, an action which suggested the idea that displays of art no longer needed to be restricted to the confines of the museum. Meanwhile, parallel protests to the celebrated Paris student demonstrations of 1968 included the temporary occupation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, in which Marcel Broodthaers took part and also acted as a negotiator. Among the objectives of the demonstrators was the need

to draw attention to the lack of provision for contemporary art exhibition spaces in Brussels, and such debates undoubtedly helped to stimulate Broodthaers' use of the museum as a focus for a wider critique of the art establishment. In common with a number of other artists at the time, he had become disillusioned with the legacy of Pop art since, while it had blurred the boundaries between mass culture and high culture, it had sold out to the very commercialism that it was seeking to ridicule. As a result art was in danger of losing its 'true' value, becoming a mere commodity or decoration, accumulated in museums without offering critical reflection. Artists therefore began to challenge the idea of art as an avant-garde invention, and there was a new awareness that despite Marcel Duchamp's earlier claim, via his creation of the Readymade, that it is the artist who accords an object its status as a work of

art, in reality power still rests with the framing institution.

In the USA the development of 'land art' presented a direct challenge to containing art in the museum. Robert Smithson, who created his famous *Spiral Jetty* (1970) in the Great Salt Lake in Utah, took a critical stance against museums in his writings. He reinvented place as a kind of post-industrial spectacle and attempted to shift the emphasis of art away from the institutions of the gallery and museum. In his 1987 article 'Some Void Thoughts on Museums' he wrote: '... Museums are tombs, and it looks like everything is turning into a museum. Art settles into stupendous inertia. Silence supplies the dominant chord. Bright colors conceal the abyss that holds the museum together. Every solid is a bit of clogged air or space. Things flatten and fade. The museum

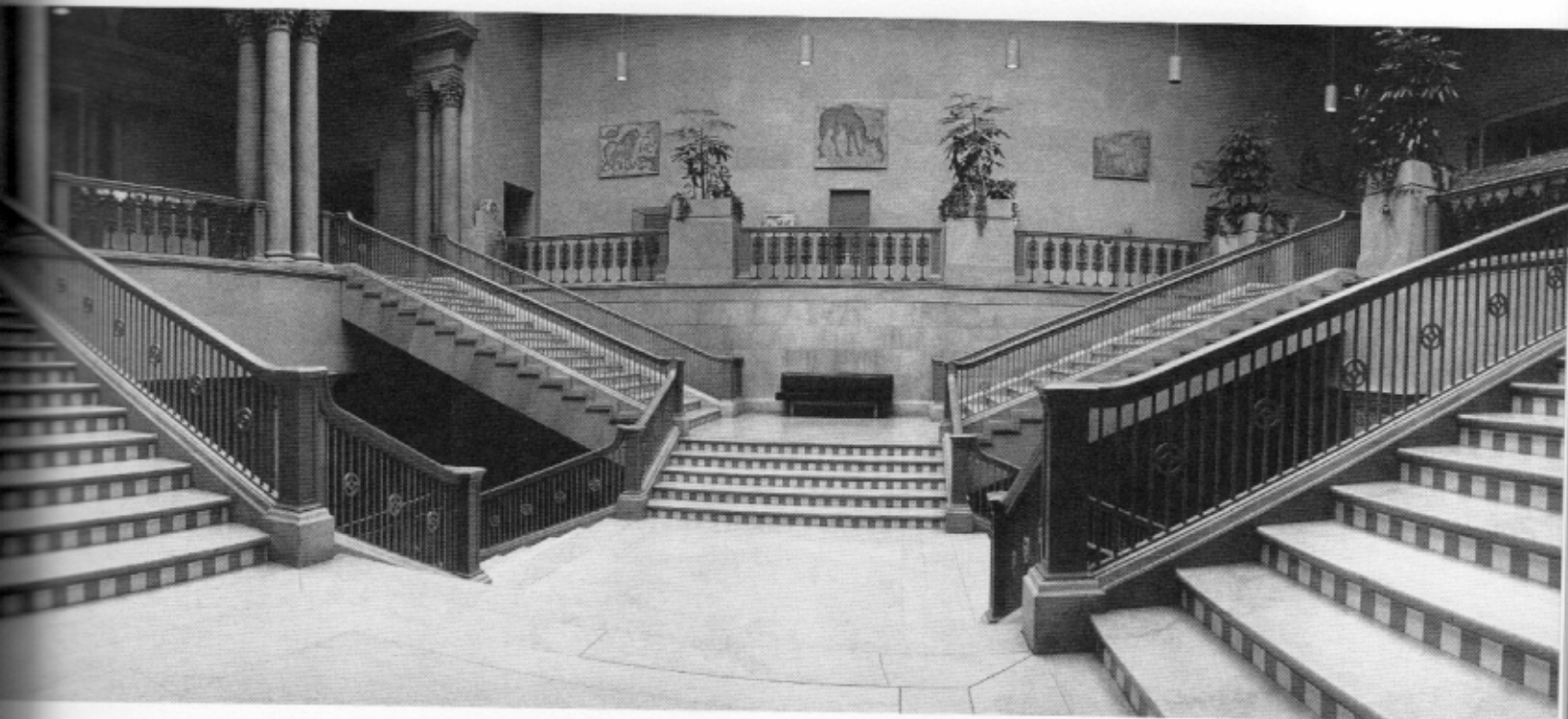
spreads its surfaces everywhere, and becomes an untitled collection of generalizations that immobilize the eye.'²⁴

In a pencil drawing of 1969 he proposed an alternative museum – *The Museum of the Void* – which was 'devoted to different kinds of emptiness'. Minimalism and Conceptual Art also presented a challenge to institutional conventions in what was described as 'The dematerialization of the

DANIEL BUREN
PHOTO-SOUVENIR: 'UP AND
DOWN, IN AND OUT, STEP BY
STEP', WORK IN SITU

The Art Institute of Chicago
 1977

Buren's characteristic striped works *in situ*, instead of being confined to the museum's galleries where paintings are conventionally hung, are displayed on the steps of the grand entrance staircase. The visitor could thus experience the work while using the stairway, which takes on a sculptural presence and serves to connect the inside and outside of the exhibition space. The work was subsequently acquired by the museum to form part of its permanent collection.



art object'.²⁵ Artists like Lawrence Weiner and Joseph Kosuth had by the 1970s reached the radical conclusion that words by themselves could serve as the very material out of which art is created. Their language-based work often takes the form of large wall texts which, just like museum labels, became authoritative statements, but instead of trying to be unfrontational they address the viewer more directly.

The growing acceptance of Conceptual and Installation Art was to provide the ideal climate to allow artists to critique the museum, both from the outside and from within, through site-specific interventions from the mid-1980s onwards.

The museum as the institution of art has of course changed almost beyond recognition since the time of the historical avant-garde, and the particular tendency for its critique by artists in the USA is linked with that country's role as the power base for the contemporary art market and the modern art museum. The twentieth century saw a rapid increase in museums of modern and contemporary art and, compared to the older-established art museums of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they are a fairly recent and growing phenomenon. Since the 1960s there has been a boom in museum building without precedent since the nineteenth century, while what were previously 'alternative' venues devoted to contemporary art have since become part of the mainstream. By 1999 half of the 1,240 art museums in the USA were less than 25 years old and many of them are devoted purely to modern and contemporary art.²⁶ The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA),

New York, founded in 1929, is regarded as the archetypal museum of its kind which became a model for others. Contrary to popular belief, it was not the first museum intended to display only contemporary art, since as early as 1815 the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris was organized to show only the work of living artists.²⁷ Nevertheless, when MoMA was founded, it was the first to be exclusively concerned with Modern art and it houses one of the most comprehensive collections. It was able to shape modernism into an ideology and its strategy was conceived on business lines in terms of 'Production' and 'Distribution'. Alfred Barr, MoMA's first Director, made this clear in an early confidential report to the trustees: 'Basically, the Museum "produces" art knowledge, criticism, scholarship, understanding, taste.... Once a product is made, the next job is distribution. An exhibition in the galleries is distribution. Circulation of exhibition catalogues, memberships, publicity, radio, are all distribution.'²⁸

Museums are naturally careful to play down such parallels with industry or any commercial affiliations, but some artists have become interested in examining the growing corporate involvement in the arts, both through direct collecting and through museum sponsorship. Hans Haacke has investigated the museum's complex interconnection with commerce and politics, as well as with the personalities who serve in the governing bodies of institutions. In his seminal writing on Museums he claimed: 'Every museum is perforce a political institution, no matter whether it is privately run or maintained and supervised by govern-

mental agencies'.²⁹ In 1970, as part of an exhibition at MoMA, entitled 'Information', he installed ballot-boxes for audience participation. Visitors were invited to vote in favour of or against the re-election of Nelson Rockefeller as Republican governor of New York in the light of the Nixon administration's Indochina (Vietnam) policy. Rockefeller had previously held posts as both president and chairman of MoMA's board of trustees, while members of the Rockefeller family had been instrumental in the original founding of the museum. A total of 37,129 visitors voted, and Haacke was thus able to link their views to external political issues that were indirectly connected to the museum's own administrative affairs. In a number of his projects, Haacke has carefully investigated a particular painting's provenance, tracing its unbroken line of ownership since it left the artist's studio. He adopts the procedure of an art historian but, instead of using his research to add to a painting's pedigree, he exposes the work's hidden financial and political background. This approach tends to present these works of art as mere symbols of corporate investment and institutional authority. His controversial *Manet - PROJECT '74* was excluded from an exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum and its Director referred to Haacke's work as an 'alien substance that had entered the art museum organism'.³⁰

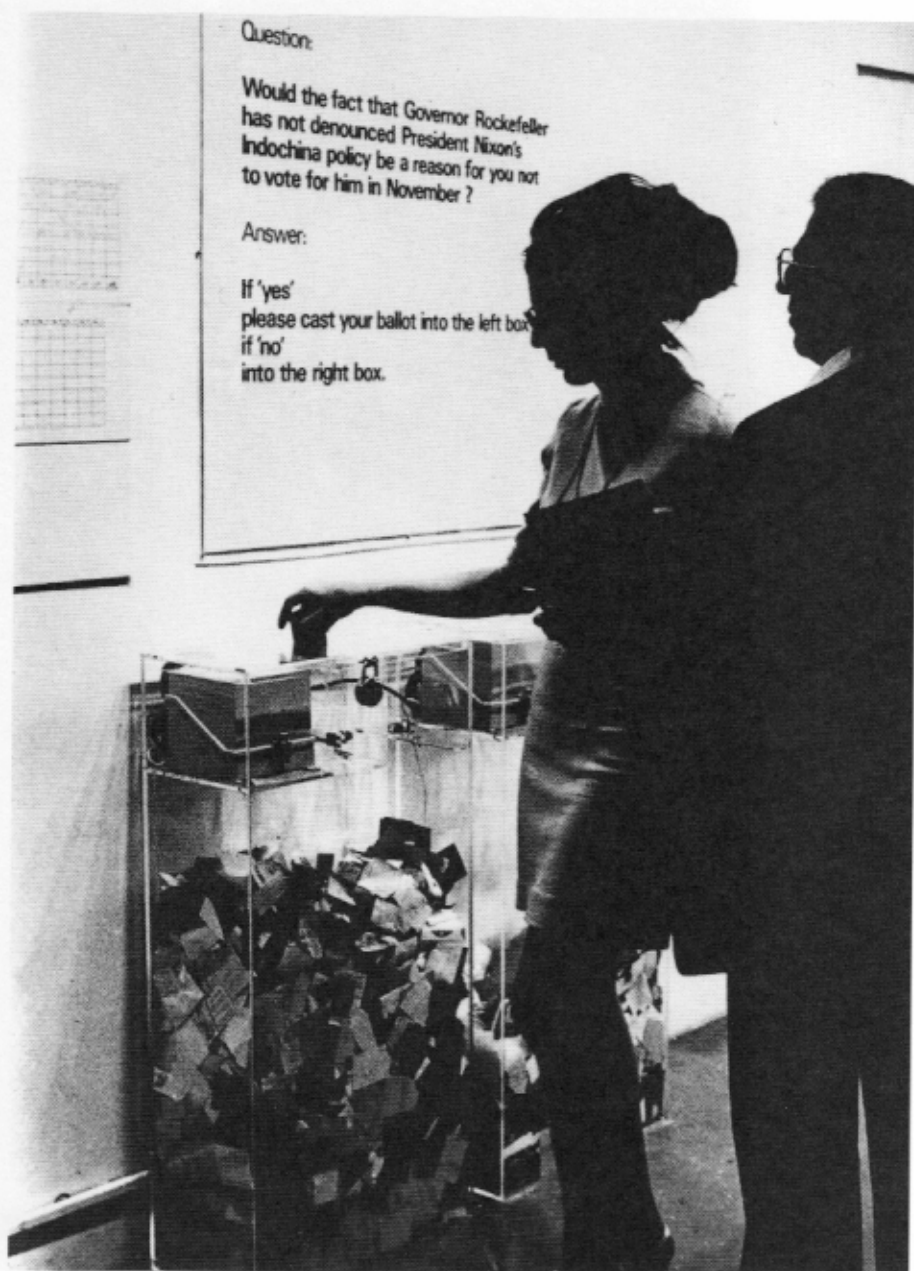
Daniel Buren first expressed his theory about the 'frame' the museum imposes on art in his 'Function of the Museum' written in 1970: 'The aesthetic role of the Museum is thus enhanced since it becomes a single viewpoint (cultural and visual) from which

works can be considered, an enclosure where art is born and buried, crushed by the very frame which presents and constitutes it.³¹ Buren asserted that the artist rather than the institution creates the frame, and he developed this concept further by actually deconstructing the museum space in a number of 'in-situ', site-specific works in the late 1970s and early 1980s. During the same period Michael Asher also created a number of subtle installations, all located within museum exhibition spaces, which critically contemplate the institutional framing of art and disrupt the museum's linear scheme of history. His best-known work of this nature was in the context of the Art Institute of Chicago's 73rd American Exhibition in 1979, when he removed the bronze replica of the life-size statue of George Washington by Houdon from its permanent site outside the main entrance and had it transferred to an internal museum gallery. Through this simple act of displacement he was able to draw attention to the different aspects of the museum's presentation of the sculpture. He showed how our aesthetic appreciation of the work changed according to its physical context, when transferred from its

familiar public decorative and commemorative role to an essentially art-historical situation. Once removed from its original site as a permanent feature of the museum façade, the statue now had to be viewed as part of an eighteenth-century collection. A historical interior thus became part of the present time-frame, since Asher effectively created his own installation by using the

other eighteenth-century works as part of the contemporary art exhibition in which he had been invited to participate.

Through being invited to create site-specific works for exhibitions in museums, artists have thus been able to intervene simultaneously in the day-to-day function and activities of institutions. In a perform-



HANS HAACKE
MOMA POLL

1970

As part of the group exhibition entitled 'Information' at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Haacke installed two transparent acrylic ballot-boxes. The museum visitor was invited to vote for or against the U.S. government's policy for involvement in the Vietnam War and the results were recorded by a photoelectrically triggered counting device. More specifically the work related to the impending election for the governorship of New York state, in which the incumbent, Nelson Rockefeller, was a candidate, since both he and his family had historic and ongoing links with MoMA.



MICHAEL ASHER
THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, GALLERY 219

Installation view
 1979

For the 73rd American Exhibition, Asher resited the bronze statue of George Washington, transferring it from its usual position outside the museum entrance to a low plinth on the floor of a gallery containing 18th-century paintings and furniture. By this action he was able to reconfigure the role of the statue from a monumental, commemorative piece to feature in an art historical context. His conceptual statement as a participant in an exhibition of contemporary art was to illustrate how museological presentation of sculpture could be varied according to different historical criteria.

LOUISE LAWLER
ZEUS AND DAVID

1984

The less formal arrangements of objects in museum basements have proved fascination subject matter for artists to photograph. Lawler's intentionally cropped images capture an almost playful aspect of these *ad hoc* juxtapositions which would inevitably be absent in the consciously posed context of an exhibition gallery.



FRED WILSON
METALWORK 1793-1880

Installation from the exhibition 'Mining the Museum'
 Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore
 1992

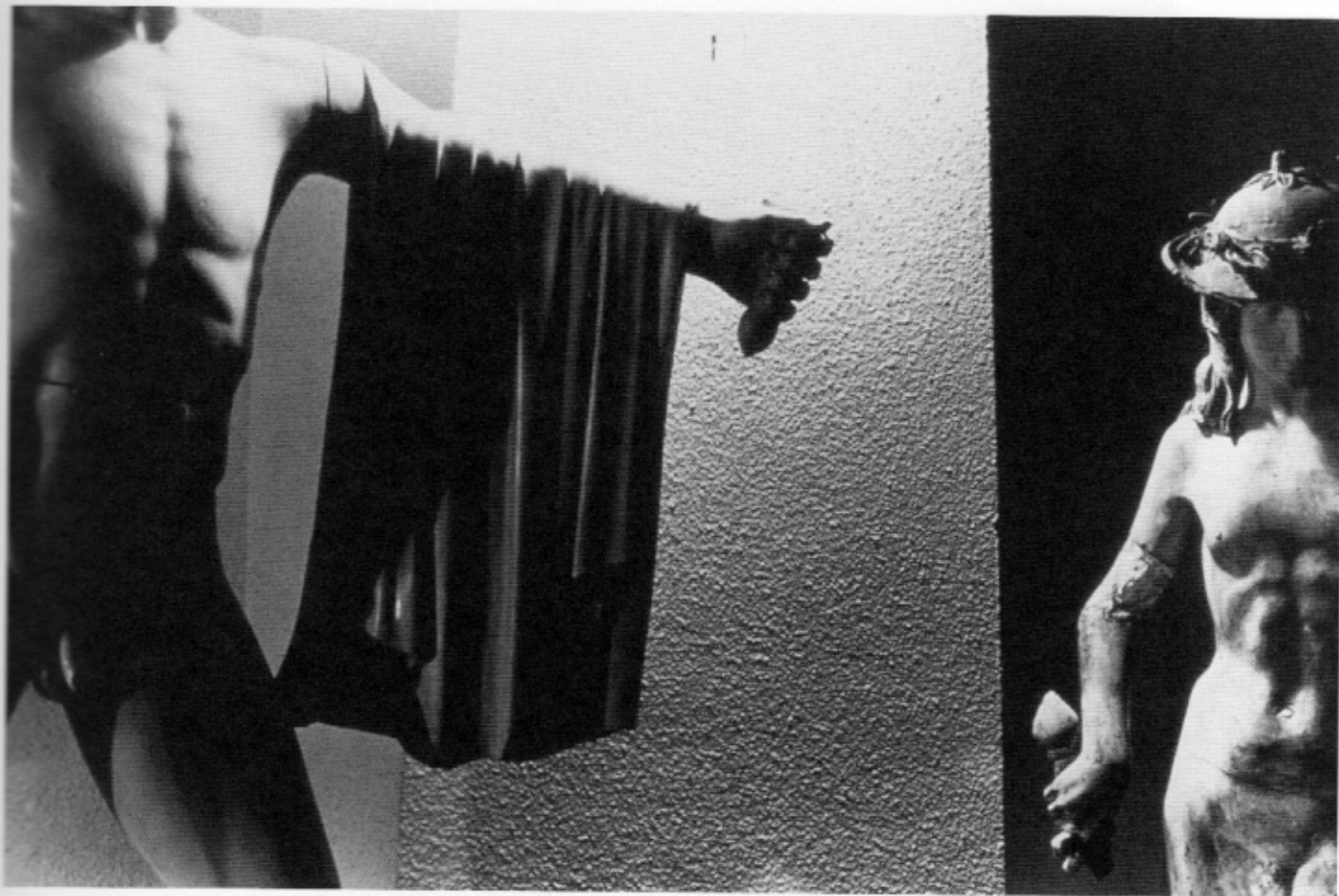
As part of his exhibition Wilson juxtaposed all kinds of unlikely objects in order to illustrate the 'hidden' history of the museum's collection. In this group the two labels read: 'Silver vessels in Baltimore repoussé style 1830' and 'Slave Shackles, maker unknown, made in Baltimore, c.1793-1872'. This combination was intended to make the point that the affluent 19th-century lifestyle of Baltimore high society had been built on slavery.

ance work called *Service Area*, Vito Acconci forwarded his mail to a display case situated in the exhibition 'Information' at MoMA in 1970. The museum and the postal service were both used by the artist, and the confines of the exhibition space were deconstructed or extended to include Acconci's daily

journey from home to the museum to collect his mail. His loft studio was thereby temporarily relocated to the museum.

The growth in museological studies has also been a significant catalyst in museums' investigations of their social and cultural

function. By the early 1990s a number of art museums were staging exhibitions in which artists were invited to create work that would interact with the permanent collections or be instrumental in examining aspects of the museum's institutional role. The Carnegie International, Pittsburgh

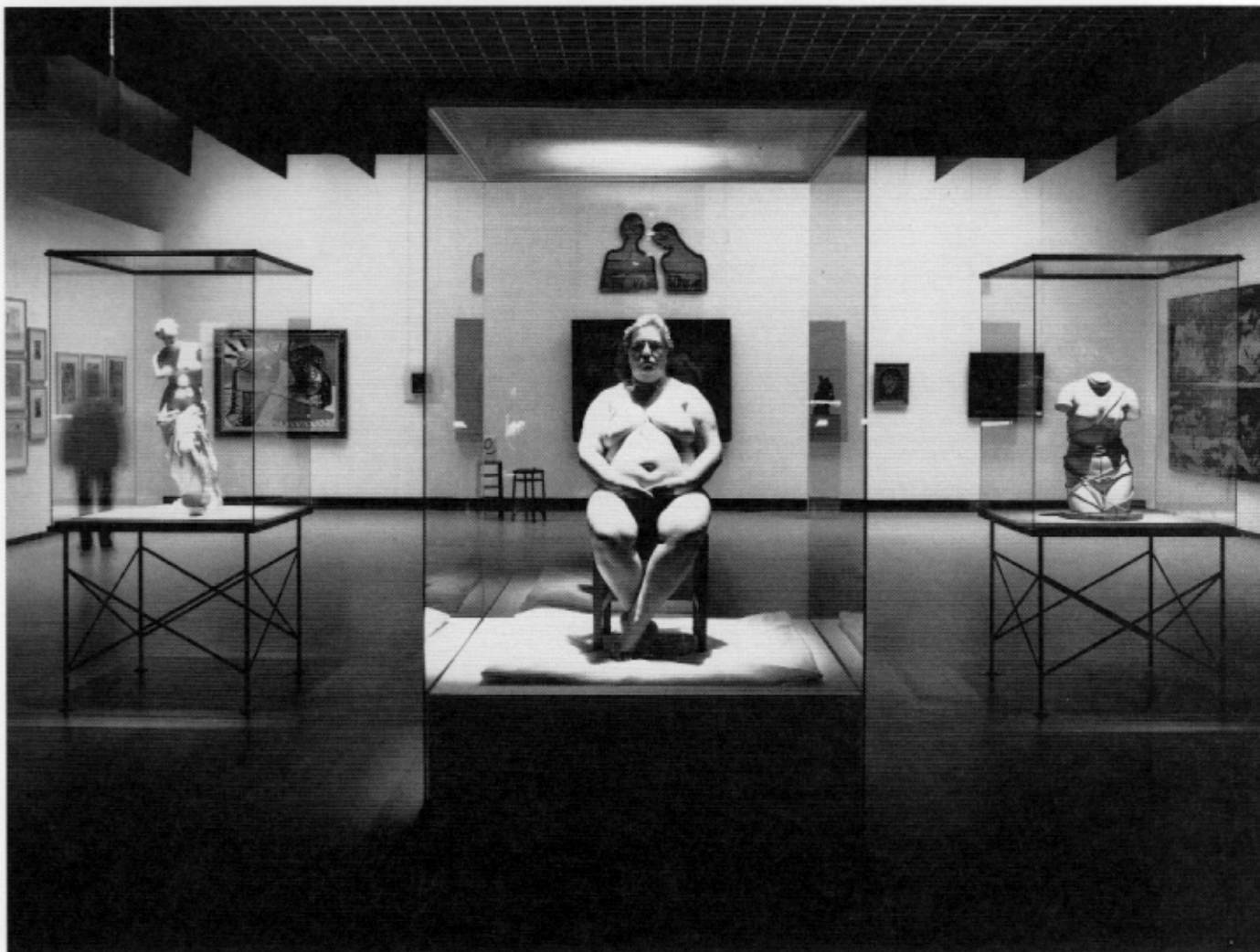


(1991), and 'The End(s) of the Museum' at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (1995), were among a number of significant exhibitions involving internationally known artists whose work addressed specific museum themes. Many artists have found a particular affinity with natural history, archaeology and ethnography collections, especially those with displays that have escaped refurbishment. They have continued to use the medium of photography and gone beyond documenting the museum collection to reveal the peculiarities of its space and visitor dialogue. In the mid-1980s, a number of artists, such as Fred Wilson, Louise Lawler and Mark Dion, were concerned with exploring the social and political agendas concealed behind the museum's supposedly neutral

façade. They have gone on to use the museum as a critical vantage point for reviewing questions of wealth, privilege, gender and cultural prejudices. Most significantly, artists have been given the opportunity to work directly with these 'non-art' collections, a phenomenon that is linked to the museum's growing tendency to self-evaluation in the wake of an increasing emphasis on considerations of political correctness.

This need for museums to review their conventional presentation and interpretation methods and to develop fresh initiatives has led to active collaborations where practising artists have been invited to curate exhibitions and advise on matters of display. A number of ground-breaking exhibitions

have resulted, such as Joseph Kosuth's 'The Play of the Unmentionable' at the Brooklyn Museum (1991) and Fred Wilson's 'Mining the Museum', held at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore (1992). In these exhibitions the artist acted both as guest curator and as creator of a site-specific installation. This approach is a two-way process in which museums offer contemporary artists challenging alternative venues and contexts to the 'white cube' environment, while artists provide museums with a means of reanimating their collections and attracting new audiences. The involvement of major public museums with living artists has evolved naturally from a tradition of the artist-in-residence, and artists might be commissioned to create a work inspired by



PETER GREENAWAY
THE PHYSICAL SELF

Installation view at the exhibition of the same name
 Museum Boijmans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam
 1991

As a guest curator Greenaway chose as his theme the human body, depicted at different stages from birth to old age, in an exhibition built around the museum's collection of old master paintings, drawings and prints. This historic material was interspersed with a number of vitrines in which nude models were exhibited standing, sitting or reclining in traditional studio poses, thus producing a striking juxtaposition of living people with inanimate museum objects.

a specific painting or invited to select and comment on their favourite works in a particular collection.³² The activities of artists and institutions are becoming increasingly interwoven with the development and expansion of museums of modern art which are having to reckon with the potential long-term outcome of this dialogue with the art of the present. Artists might be commissioned to make large works which become part of museums' rapidly growing collections, but are subject to the limitations of their storage facilities. Contemporary art forms, such as video, performance, site-specific installation and digital media have joined with photog-

raphy to challenge the very mission of the museum as collector and preserver of the unique and tangible. This has led to the growth of virtual museums with online collections of digital art.

It sometimes seems as if the container becomes more important than its contents as increasing priority is given to the museum building, through the appointment of high profile architects. These buildings often have vast spaces where impressive site-specific commissions illustrate a growing penchant for audience interaction and the spectacular, such as Carsten Höller's giant *Test Site* slides in



JOSEPH KOSUTH
THE PLAY OF
THE UNMENTIONABLE

Installation view, The Brooklyn Museum, New York
 1990

Kosuth's installation for the Grand Lobby comprised his selection and display of works from the Brooklyn Museum's collection. This was based largely around the theme of censorship as illustrated by works from various cultures throughout history. His large and prominent wall texts included many provocative quotations from well-known philosophers, writers and other historical figures, including Adolf Hitler.

Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in 2006–7. Adaptable concourse spaces can also be used for non-traditional museum evening activities, such as DJ performances, in a bid to attract a young adult audience.

Duchamp has already theoretically outmanoeuvred the traditional concept of the museum, since to accept unquestioningly one of his Readymades as a work of art is to enjoy the very irony of its preservation by an institution; his concept of the *Boîte-en-valise* also represents a challenge to the confinement of art within the walls of a museum. Although the rigid and autonomous

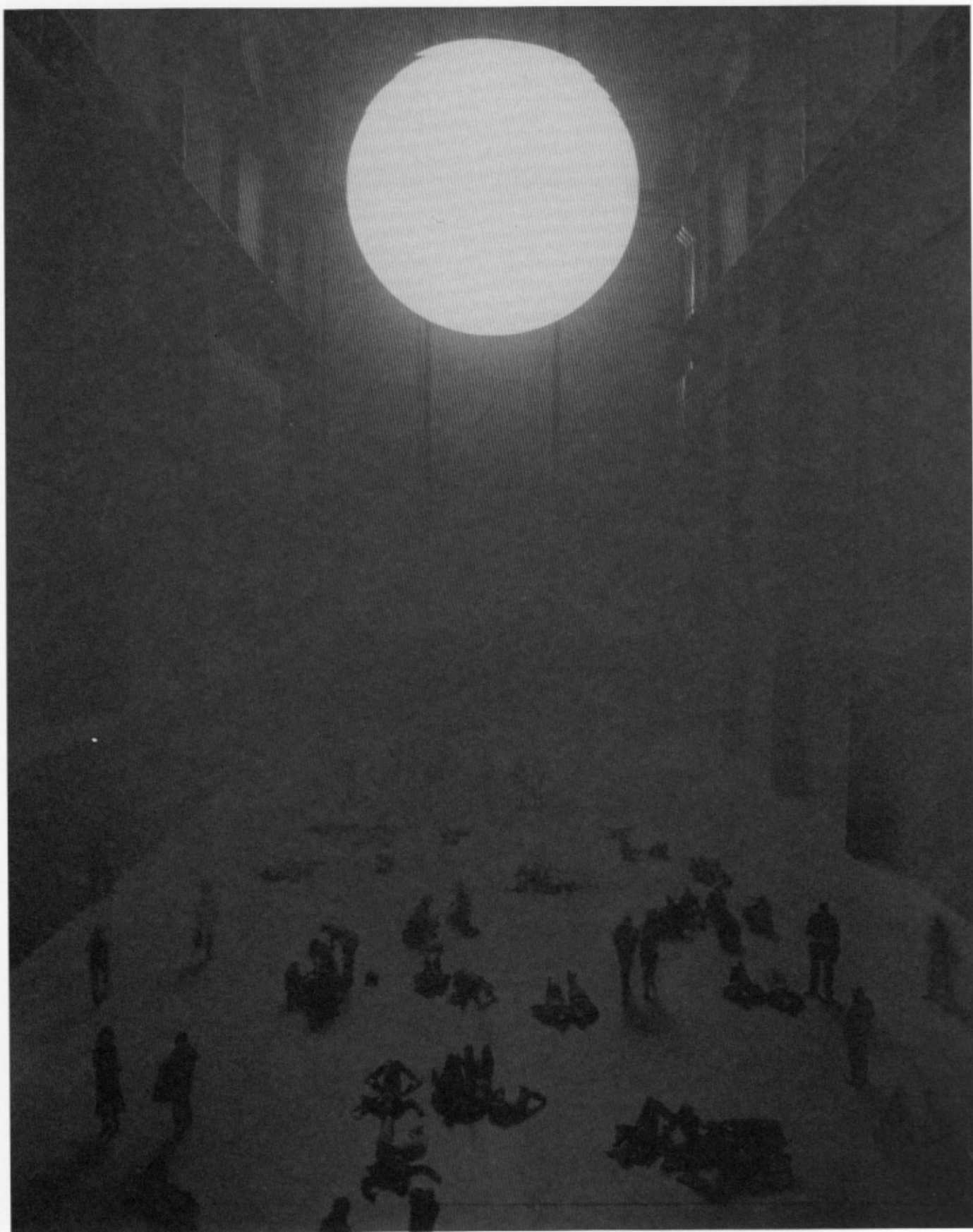
nature of the museum was criticized by the early avant-garde movements and their successors, by the 1990s many artists recognized the more positive evolutionary role that some museums can play when their curators are more receptive to new ideas. Criticized for having a rigid structure and for being out of touch with the real world, traditional museums can, by adopting an enlightened approach, become more of a laboratory for experimentation. Using its institutional power, the museum forms the ultimate arena for artistic discourse with the recognition that art is a dynamic force, continually in a state of flux.

CHAPTER

VII

without walls

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the contemporary art market, with its proliferation of art fairs and auctions, has blurred the boundaries between the public and private sectors, with a knock-on effect for the relationship between artists and museums. High profile or so-called 'blue chip' artists are now able to exert a powerful influence on the museum in ways they never could before. They may be invited to sit on acquisition and exhibition committees, act as consultants on building projects or become major patrons and trustees. The museum's original mission to generate research and disseminate knowledge has become increasingly supplanted by entrepreneurial strategies and a need to create a sense of spectacle through exhibitions, events and architecture. The grand dimensions of many museums' new atriums and exhibition spaces offer the opportunity to stage spectacular artists' projects aimed at attracting media attention and capturing public imagination. Such works are usually temporary commissions too vast to be acquired. More broadly, collecting certain contemporary works is becoming more complicated due to the diversity of new techniques and media. The facility to transmit art images globally via the Internet and the growing trend for institutions to create off-site projects proposes the idea of a museum without walls.



(preceding page)

**OLAFUR ELIASSON
THE WEATHER PROJECT**

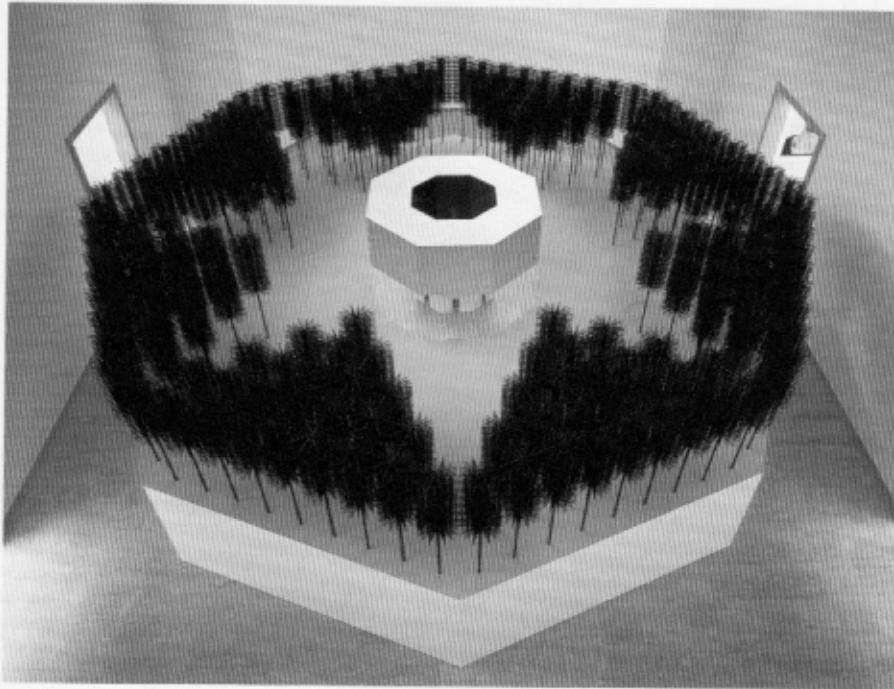
Installation in the Turbine Hall, Tate Modern,
London
2003

To create the effect of the sun, Eliasson installed hundreds of mono-frequency lamps in a giant semi-circular form at the far end of the massive Turbine Hall. These emitted light at such a narrow frequency that colours other than yellow and black were invisible, which transformed the visual field around the 'sun' into a vast duotone landscape. The arc repeated in an overhead mirror produced a sphere of dazzling radiance linking the real space with the reflection. Throughout each day, a fine mist distributed from smoke machines accumulated into faint, cloud-like formations, before dissipating across the space.

Established museums of modern art have traditionally conveyed a sense of power through the distinction of their holdings. Many of the more recent museums proclaim their status instead through their architecture. Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers's groundbreaking Centre Pompidou, Paris (1977) anticipated many subsequent spectacular museum designs and the growing tendency to view certain museum buildings as works of art in their own right, as significant as the art they are intended to house. This idea has a worthy precedent in Frank Lloyd Wright's distinctive design for

the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (built 1956–59). Thomas Krens, the Guggenheim's director from 1988–2008, initiated a concept for a series of museums to be designed by world-famous architects which followed on from Peggy Guggenheim's original vision of a global network of museums controlled by the New York foundation. This idea, criticized by some as a form of cultural imperialism, led to the creation of museum satellites in Bilbao, Berlin, Las Vegas (closed in 2008), and Frank O. Gehry's concept for the largest Guggenheim Museum due to be





↳ **KATHARINA
FRITSCH**
MUSEUM MODEL 1:10

Installation at the XLVI Venice Biennale
1995

Rather than being a conventional architectural model, this 'Museum' is conceived as an idealized exhibition space. According to Fritsch, the contemporary art on view should consist of works designed specifically for the museum, with sculpture displayed on the lower level and paintings on the upper floor. There is no permanent collection and the work is intended to remain in place for a maximum of two years. As a sculptural form it embodies the geometric shapes of the octagon in the buildings and a star in the layout of the trees.

completed in Abu Dhabi in 2012. When it opened in 1997, the innovative Gehry-designed Bilbao Guggenheim was hailed as the most important building of its time. The extravagant forms of Gehry's design relate to his unusual choice of titanium for the cladding material, and his use of a computer software programme intended for the aerospace industry. This approach enabled him to combine structural analysis with a fluid design to produce architecture as a sculptural form. It spawned the term

↳ **FRANK O. GEHRY
& ASSOCIATES**
**THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM,
BILBAO**
1997

Gehry's design process involves the translation of his initial models, handcrafted in paper and wood, into a complex three-dimensional computer version. His architecture takes into account the surrounding natural and urban landscape, and the building's thin titanium cladding is more durable than stone. This material also responds well to varying light conditions, thus helping to emphasize the building's sculptural form.

'Bilbao Effect' because it became synonymous with urban regeneration, since the building proved instrumental in transforming a relatively unknown Spanish city in economic decline into a major tourist attraction. The appeal of exciting contemporary architecture relies greatly, of course, on sustained media attention and the public's penchant for the new. A decade after its opening, however, the museum celebrated impressively with an array of ninety exhibitions that drew over ten million visitors, suggesting something of its continued success.

Frank Gehry provides a striking example of the multifarious nature of the dialogue between architects, designers, artists and the museum. Since the 1960s Gehry has used his designs for art installations as a means of experimenting with ideas that he applies to architecture. His friendship and collaboration with many artists have also

influenced his museum designs, and he has acknowledged the significance that his conversations with them have had: "They made me realize that the stature of a building in the community could make it equally as important as other buildings, therefore it should not be a neutral box."¹ In proposing different kinds of spaces for the exhibition of art, some artists have created their own architectural models. In 1992 and 1997, Frank Stella produced a number of distinctive models for museums in support of real proposals, none of which have so far been realized.² Alternatively, artists may be inspired to create models of fictional, utopian museums, such as Katharina Fritsch's *Museum Model 1:10*, presented at the 1995 Venice Biennale. This work, with its sense of absolute uniformity which extends to the surrounding trees, is as much a sculpture as an architectural model. According to Fritsch, "There is no "neutral" arrangement



of space (I think it is an illusion anyway); there is only a sculptural concept of a building. I want to make a stand that is beyond "design", which is the greatest weakness of most museums. I think that a subjective, specific choice of form is easier for an artist to respond to than a museum in which more or less disinterested postmodern quotations of style are lined up with "sophisticated artistry".³

Dissatisfaction with the way museums display work has prompted some artists to create their own alternative exhibition spaces. Frustrated by the impermanence of museum exhibitions and the insensitive handling and installation of his work, Donald Judd went on to realize his ideal museum in the small town of Marfa, Texas. He was disturbed by the museums' habit of divorcing art from life; it meant

'having culture without culture having any effect', which served 'to make art fake'.⁴ Highly critical of museums, Judd resented the fact of a curator having control over the display of an artist's work and maintained that the only way to ensure that his sculpture was exhibited to his satisfaction was to install it personally. In 1973, he purchased aircraft hangars, barracks and other former military



☞ **DONALD JUDD**
100 UNTITLED WORKS IN
MILL ALUMINUM

Detail of a permanent installation at the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas
 1982–86

Judd's dissatisfaction with museum displays of his work led him to create his own exhibition space for his finely crafted aluminium sculptures, which are particularly sensitive to placement, light and handling. He adapted two former military sheds for the installation of this work (48 sculptures are in one shed, 52 in the other). The effect of opening up the sides of each building with continuous, square windows from floor to ceiling, is to make the sculptures equally visible from the outside.

buildings in Marfa and by the late 1980s he had begun to buy up much of the town, where he established the Chinati Foundation. In addition to showing his own art and collection, he displayed works by other artists such as Dan Flavin, John Chamberlain, Claes Oldenburg and Ilya Kabakov. The overall aesthetic experience of visiting Marfa was aptly described by Kabakov in an interview in 1995: 'When I first went to Marfa, my biggest impression

was the unbelievable combination of estrangement, similar to a holy place, and at the same time of attention to the life of the works there. For me it was like some sort of Tibetan monastery; there were not material things at all, none of the hub-bub of our everyday lives. It was a world devoid of all trivial and banal existence – a world for art.⁵

Just as the role of the artist has sometimes become assimilated with that of the curator, broader collective definitions of 'art' and 'museum' are becoming increasingly interwoven. Following precedents created by artists like Marcel Broodthaers, a number of artists and art organizations have adopted the term 'museum' to refer to both their practice and activities. The Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles, created by David Wilson, is a hybrid institution which is simultaneously art and museum. It shares the early

☞ **MUSEUM**
OF JURASSIC
TECHNOLOGY
THE HORN OF MARY DAVIS
OF SAUGHALL

1989

Founded in Los Angeles by the artist and filmmaker David Wilson, this institution exemplifies the notion of the museum as an art form in its own right. It includes a series of evocative, dimly lit installations with finely crafted vitrines, dioramas, optical devices and complex slide projections accompanied by audio narratives. Wilson's unique form of presentation, involving a mix of fact with myth and art with science, creates an aura of wonder in the same way as early cabinets of curiosity did. This permanent installation relates to a 17th-century legend about a woman who grew a horn.

museum's possibilities to cross the boundaries between art and science, to stimulate thought, wonder, astonishment and fascination. Its most significant feature is its refusal to be classified, slipping easily between each fixed definition. Wilson himself has noted: 'The way people see it tends to reflect where their area of endeavor comes from. People in the museum world oftentimes will look at our museum as a critique of museums. People from the art world call it a performance art or Art. People from the scientific community will understand it as a critique of science, or in some way a critique of scientific principles or scientific theory. And you know, we're happy with that. It's great that people think all of it'.⁶ Wilson has created a smaller site-specific version of his museum in Germany at the Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum, Hagen. Since 1988 this institution has undertaken an ongoing project called 'Museum of Museums', in

CAI GUO-QIANG &
WANG WEN-CHIH
EVERYTHING IS MUSEUM
SERIES

Bunker No. 2, Kinmen Island, Taiwan
2004

Cai grew up on the Chinese mainland near Kinmen Island. Wang was one of eighteen artists he invited to create site-specific works for the Bunker Museum of Contemporary Art, a project to transform the island's former military bunkers into a place for community art programs. The bamboo and rattan installation 'Dragon Dares Tiger Lair' is a massive shell-shaped artillery tower with a network of tunnels that invite climbing, resting and meditation.



which artists are commissioned to create permanent installations which relate specifically to museological concepts.

The project includes Johan van Geluwe's installation entitled *Curator's Gallery* (1991) and the museum in Hagen also houses Geluwe's conceptual work *Museum of Museums*, an ongoing archive that he has been accumulating since 1975, consisting mainly of artists' books and

documents which relate to real and imaginary museums.

Contemporary art has become too broad a concept to be contained within the walls of a museum, and there is a growing interest in creating an alternative to the static nature of an institution by linking art to a wider network of urban sites. A number of art organizations have deliberately appropriated the term 'museum' as a gesture of defiance against the limitations imposed by the framing and connoisseurship of art within traditional institutions. The Museum in Progress, Vienna, organizes exhibitions that make use of a wide range of media in unconventional sites such as bus stops, billboards, newspapers and television. 'It has defined its aims as the conquest of the media as a vehicle for art (that is the mass media in their most common forms which are by far the most dominant factor in social life today) and the development of an adequate concept of the museum appropriate to the age of mass communication.'⁷ In 2000 Cai Guo-Qiang inaugurated 'Everything Is Museum', his ongoing series of site-specific, community-

JOHAN VAN GELUWE
CURATOR'S GALLERY

Installation at the Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum,
Hagen, Germany
1991

This work is an ironic commentary on the administrative role of the museum curator. It is part of a series of permanent exhibits commissioned from artists on the theme of museums. The numerous items on the desktop suggest the object fetishism and bourgeois complacency of an outdated type of curator. On the wall opposite is hung a large photograph of the museum's founder, which serves as a constant reminder of its adherence to a tradition of experimental museology.



↳ **HANS-PETER
FELDMANN**
FAMILY PHOTOS

1994/95

Organized by the Museum in Progress, which stages exhibitions using unconventional sites, this project involved the display of Feldmann's work on 3,000 billboards in Vienna. He presented his own family photographs in the six different types of print media which have been used over the last 50 years. The blue background is intended to correspond to old photo albums and was a way of drawing attention to the cultural importance of this supposedly insignificant historical material.



LUCY & JORGE ORTA**FALLUJAH**

Performance at the Victoria and Albert Museum,
London

2004

The Ortas create socially attuned projects that blur the boundaries between fashion, architecture and performance art. Their work is often staged outside in an urban context, but this performance was set amidst the V&A's famous Cast Court Collection. It was a response to the allied invasion of Iraq and involved some fifty participants wearing 'futuristic' costumes designed by the artists. The costumes were later used in the play *Fallujah* by Jonathan Holmes at the ICA, London in May 2007.



based museums of contemporary art that appropriate non-art structures in out of the way places. As the architect/director of these 'museum' projects, and the curator of the exhibitions presented in them, he aims to demonstrate his commitment to the democratic empowerment of art and to reinventing the role of the artist in society. Inspired by Joseph Beuys's philosophy that anyone can be an artist, Cai shifted the idea to propose that any place can be a museum. His museum projects have included the Dragon Museum of Contemporary Art in Niigata, Japan, constructed of 10,000 bricks of a disused kiln imported from China; the Under Museum of Contemporary Art beneath a medieval bridge in Tuscany; and the Bunker Museum of Contemporary Art on the Taiwanese island of Kinmen – a strategic location in the political struggles between China and Taiwan that was heavily bombarded in 1958 – where eighteen artists were invited to create work around a network of derelict military bunkers. Some museums have also recognized

this need to develop off-site projects and reunite art with the everyday by distributing their collections and exhibitions from one centre to numerous peripheral sites. This practice was pioneered in Belgium as early as 1986 by the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent with the exhibition '*Chambres d'Amis*' (Guest rooms), in which fifty-eight local families agreed to allow fifty artists to create and exhibit work in their homes. This bid to engage a wider public audience more directly with the work of contemporary artists was also reflected in the Experimental Programs section of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, where the exhibition '*Uncommon Sense*' (1997) included a number of unlikely museum events such as a live rodeo, drawing classes with nude models, theatre productions on a local bus, collaborations with the City Fire Department and sanitation workers, and even a link-up with a popular television soap opera. In 1995, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, staged an exhibition called

'The Label Show' for which artists, visitors, critics and other staff members were invited to compose the descriptive labels and wall texts. In the accompanying leaflet, Trevor Fairbrother (then a curator at the museum) wrote: 'The world of contemporary art is a good place to examine the language of museums. This experimental exhibition addresses the complicated and sometimes paradoxical contributions of contemporary art to an encyclopedic art museum.'⁸

Effective models have emerged from collaborations between artists and curators, providing the opportunity to reflect and rethink what a museum is and how it best functions. This approach often involves artists being invited to reinterpret and rehang existing collections and to assist by acting as consultants and designers in planning museum architectural projects. One of the most radical examples of this type of project was at the Museum für angewandte Kunst (Museum of Applied Arts) in Vienna where, in 1990, seven artists



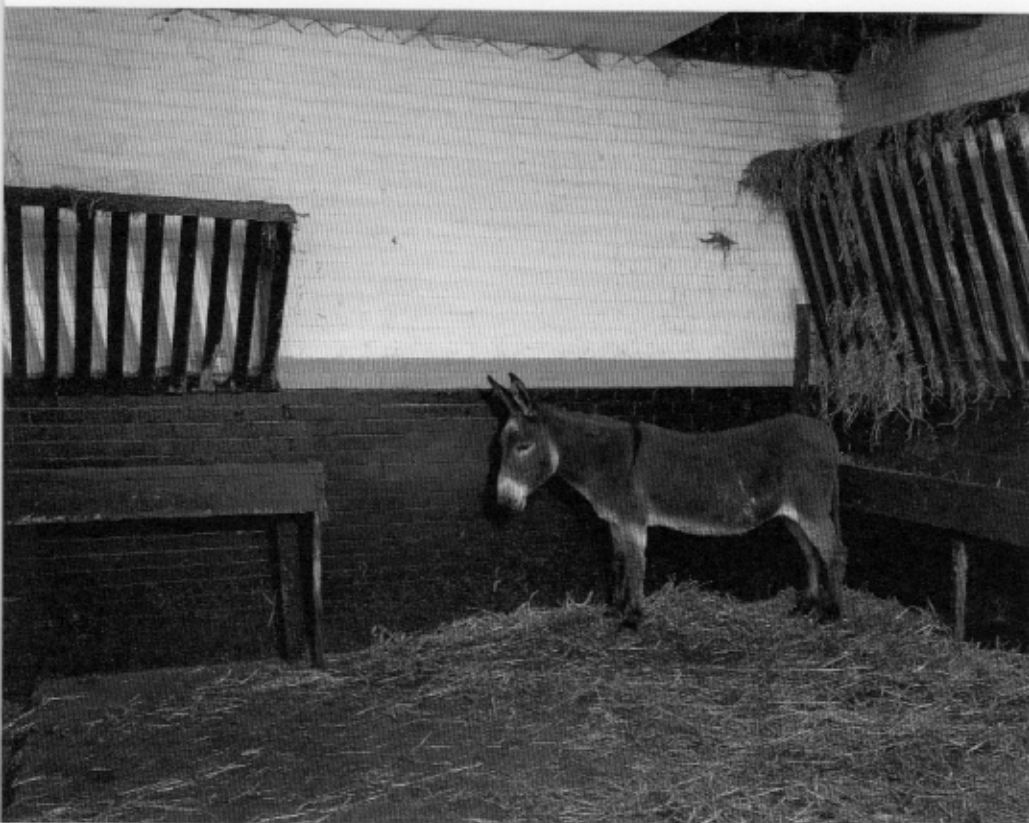
including Barbara Bloom, Jenny Holzer and Donald Judd were invited to collaborate with the collection curators in both the reinstallation of the permanent collection and the redesign of the gallery spaces. Collaborations between artists and museums displaying historical and non-art collections have frequently resulted from the personal initiative of individuals rather than being part of a premeditated overall museum strategy. Before the 1990s, special

exhibitions and interventions by artists in traditional museums represented the fruits of a dialogue between artists and a few like-minded museum curators, or came from outside proposals submitted by practising artists or contemporary art institutions. Much of the pioneering work since the early 2000s has come not from curators but from museum education departments, which usually have more freedom as they are less closely scrutinized

**BARBARA BLOOM
HISTORICISM ART NOUVEAU**

Collection arranged by Barbara Bloom
Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna
1993

Bloom's special arrangement of the museum's Art Nouveau furniture was part of a programme in which contemporary artists were invited to redesign its permanent displays. She created an installation consisting of an 'avenue' of chairs behind fabric screens where their silhouettes emphasize their linear elegance. This method of presentation enables the visitor to view and appreciate the chairs in terms of their design, while the frieze above the gallery places the exhibits in a historical context.

**JEFF WALL****A DONKEY IN BLACKPOOL**

Transparency in light-box

From the exhibition 'Encounters' at the National Gallery, London

2000

Each of the artists invited to contribute to 'Encounters' was asked to create a new work inspired by an existing painting of their own choosing. A small reproduction of the source of inspiration was placed next to each new work. The painting chosen by Wall was *Whistlejacket* (1762), a life-size, dynamic depiction by George Stubbs of a famous racehorse owned by the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham; his response to this aristocratic equestrian portrait was to show an image of a humble yet dignified donkey used for children's seaside rides, presented as a large back-lit transparency viewed in a wall-mounted lightbox.

by the museum's official agenda and assumed to have a 'lower ranking' in the institutional hierarchy. They may therefore facilitate the dialogue between artists and the museum's specialist resources, and arrange artist research-based residencies, workshops, talks and performances. The British Museum's Education Department began a series of contemporary art projects in 1999, including *Knitwork* (2002) by Germaine Koh, and the performance and film *Monkey King Creates Havoc in the Heavenly Palace* (2004) by controversial artists Cai Yuan and JJ Xi.⁹ The Education Department of The National Gallery, London organizes the Associate Artist Scheme that provides an invited artist with studio facilities for two years in order to make and exhibit new work that relates to the museum's collection of pre-1900

paintings. In 2000, the National Gallery extended this idea to produce a major exhibition called 'Encounters' which included works by twenty-four well-established contemporary artists, each of whom was invited to create a new work inspired by a specific painting in the museum's collection.

Many major museums now work with artists as part of a wider range of more official public programmes, with new departments being set up with specialist contemporary art curators in order to plan and co-ordinate projects. In 2003 the Louvre began its Contemporary Programme 'Counterpoints', which has commissioned projects by major international artists. In 2007, Anish Kapoor's sculpture *C-Curve*, a large curved stainless steel mirror, was installed in the Louvre's Cour Khorsabad where it reflected massive sculptural reliefs from a palace built in the eighth century BC in what is now Iraq, a highlight of the museum's collection of Near Eastern antiquities. Also in 2007, Anselm Kiefer installed a monumental painting and two sculptures within the museum, becoming the first artist to create a permanent addition to the Louvre's interior since Georges Braque was commissioned to paint a ceiling in the museum in 1953. As part of an ongoing contemporary art programme, the Science Museum, London, has incorporated a series of commissioned works into the permanent displays of the Wellcome Wing galleries which opened in 2000. The works, executed in various media, are integral with the overall exhibition design and relate to some of its themes. In the introductory

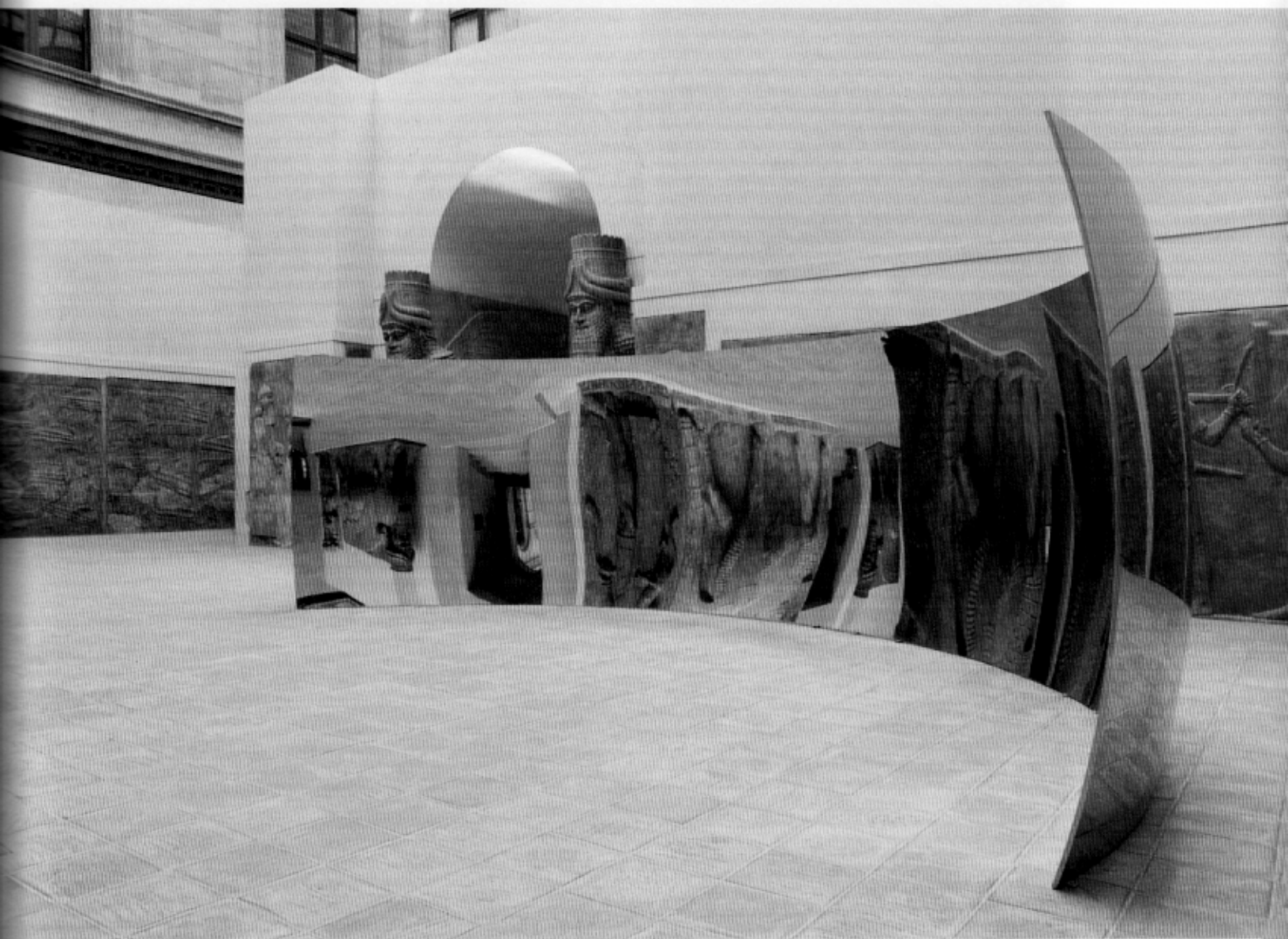
leaflet to the contemporary art programme the Museum states: 'The works gently challenge any notions we may have that scientific or technological facts can be looked at from only one point of view. They also reinforce the fact that scientific and artistic activities do not exist in isolation from one another. Both transform and shape the culture and society we live in.'

Since the 1960s museums of modern art have struggled with collecting interdisciplinary art, such as digital, video, performance and site-specific installation, that could no longer be classified within the traditional categories of painting, sculpture or photography. Many of these newer works can be continuously copied or are ephemeral by nature, and therefore challenge the traditional role of the museum as collector, appraiser and

**ANISH KAPOOR
C-CURVE, PROJECT FOR
THE COUR KHORSABAD**

Installation with curved mirror, Louvre, Paris
2007

Kapoor installed a curved stainless steel mirror, two meters high and eight meters wide in the Louvre's Cour Khorsabad. Within these prestigious surroundings housing sculpted reliefs from eighth century BC Mesopotamia, Kapoor's intervention at once absorbed space, light and volume, thus renewing our perception of the place and the works displayed, as well as the figures depicted.



JEFFREY SHAW
THE VIRTUAL MUSEUM
 1991

Installation at Ars Electronica, Brucknerhaus,
 Linz, Austria, in 1992

The viewer interactively controls the journey through Shaw's *Virtual Museum*, which consists of five rooms, each having the same appearance as the real room in which the installation is located. Each virtual room contains its own specific exhibits composed of alphabetic and textual forms. A motorized rotating platform enables the chair to move in conjunction with the video monitor, thus establishing a link between the real and the virtual.

preserver of significant and valuable objects. Jeffrey Shaw was one of the first artists to explore notions of interactivity and virtuality in his installations. Shaw's *Virtual Museum* (1991) demonstrates a method of presenting a three-dimensional computer-generated museum constituted by immaterial rooms and exhibits.

According to Shaw, '... a virtual museum should be more broadly understood as any shared device or environment, real and/or virtual, that enables a digitally structured organization of audiovisual data to be

locally and/or remotely engaged by a large public.'¹⁰ Artists' own websites have in recent times extended this challenge to the authority of the art museum, since they offer Internet users art that cannot be confined in one place. Artists using the internet have created works exclusively for digital media so as to allow digital collecting, saving and archiving; in this way the works can never be exclusively possessed by any individual or institution.¹¹ Some of the major modern art museums have special programmes for online



projects accessible via their websites and a number of non-profit specialist digital art museums now exist whose mission is to engage the public and artists in the creation, understanding and appreciation of digital art.¹² The Internet can convey 'original' art in the medium for which it was created and with the use of special software, viewers can even alter and adopt a work of art. This freedom challenges both the authority and the limitations of the traditional art museum and embraces André Malraux's visionary idea of a 'Museum without Walls' – a museum of endless possibilities.¹³

Speaking about the display and collection of contemporary art within a museum context, the celebrated art historian Sir Ernst Gombrich (1909–2001) took a sceptical view concerning the very existence of modern art museums: 'I think that a museum of modern art is a contradiction in terms. Museums used to exist to preserve the treasures of the past and to save them.'¹⁴ As much as museums might try to convey some of the sense of immediacy of the art they display, they are limited by their adherence to the nineteenth-century model from which they evolved. By exhibiting works of art museums validate them as being worthy of preservation, conferring on them an 'official' seal of quality and authenticity. This practice of institutional validation naturally affects many artists, who in turn drive and sustain the museum acquisition system which can lead to their works being preserved for posterity in the context and company of acknowledged masterpieces. And, ironically, while many artists are



highly critical of the museum system, and their work is often radical and anti-establishment, much of it ends up in the museum, an essentially conservative institution that partly neutralizes such work's revolutionary aspirations. In 2005 the self-described 'art terrorist' Banksy unofficially inserted his work in a gallery in the British Museum. In an attempt to pass off a fake prehistoric rock depicting a caveman pushing a supermarket trolley as a genuine artifact, he accompanied the rock with a carefully worded descriptive label remarkably similar to the museum's own, crediting it to 'Banksymus Maximus'. It is significant that when the museum discovered it two days later, instead of throwing it away, they decided to accession the piece into their collection, and subsequently loaned it to the artist for a temporary exhibition with the acknowledgment 'on loan from the British Museum'.

CHRISTIAN MÖLLER PARTICLES

Interactive media installation from the Sounds Digital section at the Science Museum, London (Wellcome Wing)
2000

Using specially written software combined with technology originally developed for cinematic special effects, Möller created an interactive work as part of the museum's permanent display called 'Digitopolis'. The visitor's image on the screen appears as a swarm of glowing, animated particles generated in response to their movement which is synchronized with an audio soundtrack of digitally generated acoustic effects.

The proliferation of new museums has led to an acceleration in the cycle from the completion of a work by an artist to its public display or acquisition. Museums continue to expand in order to display their growing collections of contemporary art, but face the long-term consequences of acquiring works that are potentially problematic in terms of their fragile or unstable medium or unmanageable scale. Some museums are in possession of such

**GERMAINE KOH****KNITWORK**

Performance at the British Museum, London
2002

Large museum concourse spaces like the Great Court of the British Museum designed by Norman Foster can provide an effective site for artist projects. *Knitwork* comprises an installation/performance with the artist knitting a vast continuous 'blanket' from unravelled used garments. The work was begun in 1992 as a two metre length of knitting, and Koh has a life-long commitment to carry on adding to the work. Acquired by the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, it is unusual in that it is of no fixed dimensions and resists traditional collection constraints since the artist is allowed continued access to it.

a multitude of artworks that significant proportions of their collections need to be kept off-site in climate controlled storage facilities. It is important, however, to distinguish between those museums that house historic collections and some of the newer ones, which although often called 'museums' are essentially *Kunsthallen* whose function is to serve as temporary exhibition spaces. The Palais de Tokyo, Paris, re-launched in 2002, proclaims itself to be an 'arts laboratory' that has no permanent collection but instead has a series of dynamic temporary exhibits spread over a vast, open space somewhat reminiscent of a construction site. Similarly, the New Museum, New York, designed by Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, opened in 2007 with no permanent collection, and its mission is to show only contemporary works primarily by young emerging artists.

The vast scale of the exhibition spaces in some of the newer museums offer a powerful catalyst for artists to produce impressive responses to site-specific commissions. The inaugural exhibition

of the Bilbao museum, 'The Guggenheim and the Art of this Century', included three contemporary sculptures of colossal dimensions by Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg and Richard Serra. Yet these awesome sculptures seem to become more about spectacle and size than the aesthetics

**MARINA ROSENFELD
SHEER FROST ORCHESTRA**

Performance at Tate Modern, London
2006

Rosenfeld is a New York based composer and artist whose work consists of both musical and visual media, including a noted series of large-scale performance works. Her *Sheer Frost Orchestra*, first conceived in 1994 while she was still a student, has been performed internationally at a number of major art museums. It comprises 17 women using nail polish bottles to play on floor-bound electric guitars, producing sensitive, atmospheric sounds.

of relational scale. As art historian Hal Foster commented in 2001 'to make a big splash in the global pond of spectacle culture today, you need to have a big rock to drop'.¹⁵ The Turbine Hall of London's Tate Modern, measuring a staggering 500 ft (155 m) long, 75ft (23 m) wide and 115 ft (35 m) high, offers one such site for artists to create projects on a gargantuan scale. Since the museum opened in 2000, it has commissioned a new work by a major international artist each year, with the assistance of a corporate sponsor. The most critically acclaimed to date has been Olafur Eliasson's *The weather project* (2003) which drew a remarkable 2.3 million visitors in six months, more than many of the institution's exhibitions. Eliasson was

able to transform the vast space into a mesmerizing environment with a mirrored ceiling and a semicircular screen backlit by monofrequency lights that created the illusion of a sun and artificial mist.

The Tate's Turbine Hall has been used for performance and audio art, experimental music, and even live bands and DJ nights, marking a significant move towards institutional engagement with these areas of artistic production. They have included projects such as Christian Marclay's *Sounds of Christmas* (2004), Marina Rosenfeld's *Sheer Frost Orchestra* (2006) and Surasi Kusolwong's *One Pound Turbo Market (You'll Have a Good Time)* performance (2006). Museums are increasingly using





♯ **TAKASHI MURAKAMI**
©MURAKAMI

Installation view of the Louis Vuitton shop at
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
2007

At the centre of his retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Murakami created a fully functioning reinterpretation of a Louis Vuitton store. Instead of the traditional leather and wood elements, the furnishings were painted white and the walls fitted with screens playing videos created for the exhibit. Visitors were able to purchase the limited edition Louis Vuitton Neverfull handbag, not available at other Louis Vuitton boutiques. Murakami controversially placed expensive luxury consumer goods at the same level as expensive artworks, arguing that in Japanese art, unlike in the West, there is no distinction between 'high' and 'low' art.

their grand galleries, atriums and lobbies to stage evening events in their quest to attract new – and often younger – audiences. In 2005 the Guggenheim Museum, New York began its 'Art After Dark' initiative when on the first Friday of each month the museum hosts an evening of DJs playing the latest club music. The monthly events attract an average of 2,000 people a night, often reaching capacity by the first hour and a half. As another means of generating earned income, museums are collaborating with artists to produce limited editions of their works and products for sale in their shops.

Artists have addressed the intersection of the museum with commerce in projects

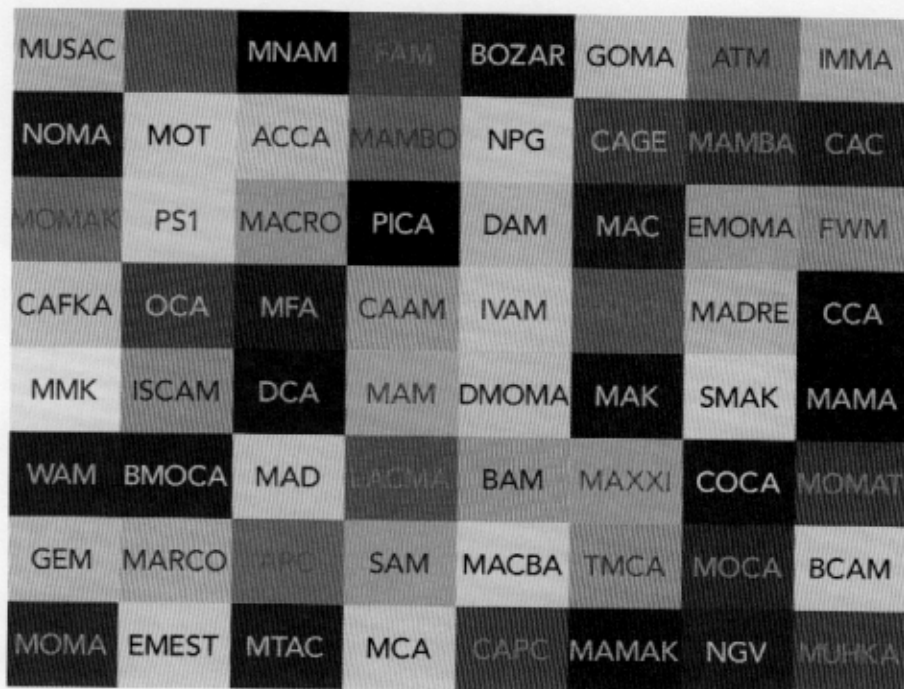
that utilize exhibition space for unexpected purposes. Takashi Murakami's touring retrospective exhibition '©MURAKAMI' involved the artist creating a temporary fully functioning Louis Vuitton boutique stocked with his limited edition designs – some of which were available only at the museum – within galleries of the Museum

ART AFTER DARK ↗
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM,
NEW YORK

2008

The Guggenheim's programme of live music, DJ sets and drinks, on the first Friday evening of each month, is aimed at attracting a new, younger audience to the museum. This allows the public to wander around the galleries and view the collection while music permeates the museum's traditionally silent hallowed halls.





LANGLANDS & BELL
A MUSE UM

Computer animation and data projection
 2007

In this series of digital animations, Ben Langlands and Nikki Bell juxtapose museum abbreviations and acronyms with photographs of the buildings themselves. This examines how the art museum's new de-personalized language of formulaic codes follows the model of corporate branding and identity in order to position these institutions in terms of the global market.

of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and the Brooklyn Museum in 2007 and 2008. (Although the shop was part of the exhibition, profits from sales were not shared by the museums.) Also in 2008, Carsten Höller's installation *Revolving Hotel Room* comprised a chic, operational hotel room located at the top of the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum, New York. The museum randomly chose some ninety people from thousands of applicants who were eager to pay as much as \$799 for the privilege of spending the night amongst the collection. Such artist collaborations with museums reflect the increased interweaving of high art, popular culture, fashion and commerce. Museums have become very concerned with presenting a slick, homogenous public image using the marketing strategies of branding and corporate identity for their signage, printed matter and merchandise. This emergence of museums in the global

marketplace is directly examined and critiqued in Ben Langlands and Nikki Bell's digital animation *A Muse UM*, which presents a continuous, almost hypnotic sequence of colourful images of museum acronyms from around the world.

The dialogue between artists and museums provides a simultaneous engagement with and reflection on present day society and culture. Yet the museum and the art that it houses still depends on an audience, without which an institution's true cultural significance is lost. This idea was expressed by Georges Bataille in 1930 in *Museum*: 'We must realize that the halls and art objects are but the container, whose content is formed by visitors. It is the content that distinguishes a museum from a private collection.'¹⁶ Collaborations with artists have offered individual museums an opportunity to take an objective look at their traditional approaches to the display

and presentation of their collections and thus to learn more about themselves and their audiences. Institutions increasingly respond to the flexibility provided by working with living artists, allowing them to adopt procedures which would never be possible within the confines of an inflexible system. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has embarked on a series of experimental projects with artists collaborating with museum curators to create innovative temporary displays. These have included John Baldessari's installation design for the exhibition 'Magritte and Contemporary Art: The Treachery of Images' (2006–7), which brought together iconic images by René Magritte juxtaposed with works by thirty-one contemporary artists. To reference Magritte's paintings, Baldessari carpeted the museum floors with a design of blue skies and puffy white clouds and



**JORGE PARDO
PRE-COLUMBIAN ART
INSTALLATION
LOS ANGELES COUNTY
MUSEUM OF ART
2008**

This is an experimental re-installation of the Pre-Columbian collection over three galleries. Unlike traditional rectangular display cases, Pardo's innovative design utilizes organic forms built from laser-cut, stacked sheets of MDF. They undulate and swell out from the walls like rock formations and flatten out in places to form benches or hold explanatory wall texts, and even a Diego Rivera painting at the entrance. The continuity of the colours of the display case interiors, pedestal tops, taffeta curtains and suspended lamps evokes a tropical, festive environment.

had the security guards wear bowler hats. In 2008 Jorge Pardo was invited to work with LACMA's senior curator Virginia Fields to create a thematic presentation and sculptural environment to re-display the museum's Pre-Columbian collection. The ongoing relationship between artists and museums is a classic relationship in that it is dependent on two very opposite forces interacting with and feeding off each other. It provides a mechanism for counter-balancing the traditional museum's sense of constancy and

institutional rigidity with the artist's free spirit and enquiring mind – a dialogue which effects a vital link in mankind's ever-evolving cultural history.

