

"Acclaimed artist names VLM aircraft."  
*Easier.com*, April 30, 2009.

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**Acclaimed artist names VLM aircraft**  
30 April 2009



The acclaimed artist Panamarenko has lent his name to a VLM Airlines aircraft at a ceremony at the airline's headquarters at Antwerp International Airport. This follows a competition that VLM Airlines ran with leading aviation magazine, *Airliner World*, to invite readers to choose a name for one of its fleet of Fokker 50 aircraft.

Senior executives from VLM Airlines welcomed Panamarenko to the airport, where he named the aircraft with competition winner Koyan Goeree.

Johan Vanneste, Chief Executive Officer of VLM Airlines, said: "We are delighted to welcome Panamarenko to our home base, and are honoured that his name can be given to one of our aircraft."

The judges selected Panamarenko as the winning name because of his Antwerp origins, and as flying is an integral part of his work. Panamarenko is an exceptional artist in contemporary art. Artist, engineer, poet, physicist, inventor and visionary, he has pursued a singular course of exploration of space movements, flights energy and the force of gravity. His work is famous for its many forms; from aeroplanes to flying carpets, birds and flying saucers, the link with the aviation industry is definitely present.

This is the only occasion that Panamarenko has agreed to lend his name to an aircraft.

Richard Maslen, Deputy Editor of *Airliner World*, said: "Airliner World has reported on the dynamic and impressive growth of VLM Airlines over many years, and we're delighted to have made this competition possible."

The competition winner, Koyan Goeree, said: "It is a great privilege and a great honour to be naming an aircraft and adorn it with the name of a favourite artist. His art is a tribute to our common dream: the dream of flying.

"I'm very grateful to *Airliner World* and VLM Airlines for offering me this fantastic opportunity and to Panamarenko for sharing with us so many great and inspiring ideas."

Panamarenko at  
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts  
by Donald Goddard © 2005

A few days ago about 70,000 slum dwellings near the airport in Mumbai, India, were cleared to make way for less objectionable landscaping in an up-and-coming city. So horribly uprooted, presumably most people and families still managed to save their possessions, in bags and such, but the effect was stunning, something like that of war. The objective realities of personal histories were destroyed, if not the histories themselves.

Panamarenko seems to work from a similar place, where everything is devised from ideas and materials at hand, perhaps in constant awareness of displacement by clearance, by war as it is imposed in the name of a better world. That program is relentlessly pursued in various guises, through ideologies and scenarios of dominance and progress, but, of course, reality, or at least practicality, including Panamarenko, lies elsewhere. Everything is at hand, and it could be the task of any human being to know as much about everything, or something, as possible. In fact, we know a great deal, if only for the sake of survival. But beyond that promising start, we continue mostly by rote, making pictures of what we already know. The only pictures Panamarenko makes are drawings and prints of objects and devices he is planning or has already constructed to provide us, and him, with various means for moving through the air or across the earth or water. He commands the means for his own displacement.

The devices themselves are profoundly material, composed of tape, wood, plastic, glue, string, electronic chips, styrofoam, linen, wire, rubber bands, leather, fishing net, cellophane, copper, PVC, batteries, paint, and often motors of various kinds to get them to work. They are as profoundly ideational, meant to fulfill certain thoughts about movement and flight and to exploit certain physical forces, including magnetism, gravity, air and water movements, solar energy. They are also illusionary in their alluding to birds, insects, and fish, and in the expectation that they will actually work, which they do in theoretically, and at times in practice. And so they remain material but approach immateriality, a state of lightness and transparency, like the wings of *Flip the Fruitfly (A)*, on which strokes of green paint have the feeling of writing on water.

People are not designed to do many things that we have nonetheless figured out how to do, like flying and staying under water for long periods of time. Other animals do those things much better and are therefore exposed and adapted to parts of the world and the experience of life as we can never be, except as Panamarenko would take us there, sometimes as individuals with jets in our backpack (*Rucksack*, 1984-85) or propellers on our shoulders (*Pepto Bismo*, 1996-2002) to intimately explore the contours of the Alps, sometimes as two or more passengers wending our way through the world in constant contact with the medium through which we are passing. *Knikkebeen* shows something like an enormous chicken that walks us with giant steps into a landscape as old as itself, a landscape we have been in all along.

Most of the works in the exhibition appear to be almost weightless, or are about to become so, except for the two painted bronze life-size male figures in the North Gallery, which in the dance-like unease of their weight contradict the shoulder propellers (*Pepto Bismo*, 2002) and long, tapered wings (*Brazil*, 2004) that should lift them. The first, helmeted and off-balance, is like a skate-boarder. The latter, inspired by the avenging, yearning, loving angel in the futuristic movie *Brazil*, is like a caped superhero with wings. He is also compromised and unsteady, a contradictory combination of the two sides of America's Civil War, with his black great coat and the Confederate insignia on his cap. He seems to fall forward, as though either landing or taking off, but is too heavy to go anywhere, and his feet are bolted to the pedestal. Despite its costumed playfulness, the figure cannot rise above its inner conflicts. Early in his career, Panamarenko declared himself a multimillionaire and a competitor, with the Soviet Union and the United States, in the race into space, although his ambitions were grander than theirs. The sky is the place of superheroes, of Apollo and Zeus, of Vishnu and Siva, Quetzalcoatl, and Snoopy (imaginatively) in his goggles, of heaven and God almighty. It goes on forever and touches every place on earth, and so it must be attainable. The earth itself is an occupant of the sky, and the *Vliegend Eiland* (*Flying Island*) is another earth, beautifully formed and perhaps superfluous, like humankind itself, a flying saucer on which the passengers are exposed to the universe in a plastic bubble on top.

In his introduction to a recent book on Panamarenko's work, Jon Thompson cites the adage that a Belgian is born with a brick in his stomach. The artist was born in Antwerp in 1940, the year that Nazi Germany occupied his country, and he has lived there since. He is there, with the bricks, and he is everywhere else. It is the definition of an artist.

**PANAMARENKO**

Flight's place in the artist's imagination dates back to Leonardo and beyond, to Daedalus (the mythical sculptor) and Icarus. The Belgian artist Panamarenko picks up the thread with flying machines and whirligigs that mimic the aerodynamics of birds, bugs, and dinosaurs. "Rucksack" is a strap-on flight mechanism, while the wheeled "Hinky Pinky Prova" is propelled by steam and turbine. His devices are at their best when they're allowed to stand alone; "Brazil," based on a character in Terry Gilliam's delirious sci-fi film, includes a glossily painted bronze figure that detracts from the majestic winged apparatus attached to its shoulders. Through June 11. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 212-226-3232.)

## Panamarenko

KEWENIG

Cologne

Ever since he constructed his first "flying machine" in 1967, Belgian-born Panamarenko has remained a grand master of ambiguity. His anachronistically futuristic vehicles toy with high-tech clichés of progress and efficiency, yet they remain oddly stranded within the exhibition space, like beached whales.

*Super Paradox* (2002), a backpack equipped with a motor, a propeller, and a wicker basket that doubles as a cabin, sums up the artist's radically absurdist energy. This and other recent works by Panamarenko inaugurated Kewenig's handsome new gallery space. At the center was the full-scale racing car dubbed the *Thermo Photovoltaic Energy Convertor* (2001). Constructed of painted wood and Plexiglas, the vehicle, which boasts electric motors, solar cells, and lamps, can theoretically be propelled by photovoltaic processes of heat reflection. It may be energy-saving and environmentally friendly, but it defies a utopian reading by virtue of the militaristic camouflage pattern with which it is painted. The clumsy on-off switch that activates the machine is more likely to recall the infamously unsophisticated sets of B-movie director Ed Wood than *Star Wars*.

It is precisely these seeming contradictions that irritate and fascinate the viewer. Panamarenko's simulations hover somewhere (and nowhere) between the spheres of art, technology, science fiction, and burlesque.

The physical impact of *Thermo Photovoltaic Energy Convertor* is also surprising. Though small for a "real" car (less than five feet long), the vehicle took full command of its surroundings, as though powered by its own mysterious energy.

That same sense of presence was evident in the remarkable series of prints documenting the evolution of *Energy Convertor*. Playful, reflective, probing, and spontaneous, they suggest a surreal partnership between Lego and Leonardo.

—David Galloway

## Museums

Reviews by Kim Levin  
unless otherwise noted

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**Dia Center for the Arts**  
548 W 22nd, 989-5912

★ PANAMARENKO: The Belgian artist of aerodynamic machines finally shows his masterpiece—*The Aeromodeller* (1969–71)—here. With its silver wicker gondola, the humongous patched blimp is a glorious wreck of an object—a flimsy ghost of the modern spirit. "Orbit" also includes a featherweight mechanism with birdlike wings. Through 6/17.



# ART

## Review

### Come fly with me

Panamarenko's machines soar while barely getting off the ground at Dia

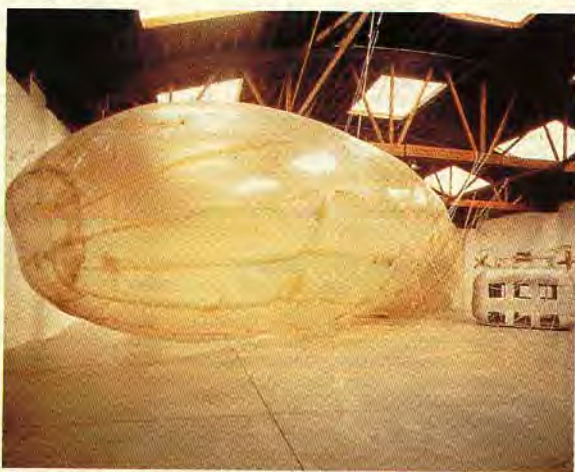
By **Howard Halle**

**Y**ou would expect flying and art to go together like peanuts and a seat-back tray table: Each can evoke a certain state of sublimity, of a transcendence that's worth the risks taken. And yet, once you factor out putti and the like, flight doesn't figure much as a subject in art. True, Leonardo conjured fabulous ornithopters, while Tatlin labored over a glider he christened *Letatlin*. Beuys's origin myth as an artist revolved around his rescue by Tatar herdsman from the burning wreckage of the Luftwaffe dive bomber he'd been piloting over the Eastern Front (though that story doesn't so much involve defying gravity as succumbing to it). But that's about it. The problem may simply be that flying, like the idea of a painting or sculpture that strives to slip the bounds of convention, is a relatively recent innovation.

As it turns out, the one major contemporary artist who has dealt consistently with the theme of flight was at one point a colleague of Beuys. Panamarenko (a nom de guerre assumed in 1964; his real name has never been published) hails from Antwerp. He was part of the same late-'60s conceptualist milieu that included Beuys and fellow Belgian Marcel Broodthaers. Now 61, Panamarenko is enjoying what is, remarkably, only his third show in New York; it's a beauty, so fly over to see it.

As ensconced in Dia's hangar-like garage at 545 West 22nd Street, Panamarenko's "Orbit" suggests a wrong turn into the UFO holding pen at Area 51. Here, however, the two crafts on display seem to have

wandered in from another point in time rather than space. The smaller piece, *Raven's Variable Matrix* (2000), is an elegant concatenation of spindly aluminum struts, covered by a skin of clear Mylar. It looks a little like the flyer Louis Blériot used to conquer the English Channel in 1909, except that it has



Panamarenko, *The Aeromodeller*, 1969-71.

no propeller. Instead, like one of Leonardo's brainstormers, *Raven* is meant to ascend by beating its wings, which are tipped with pieces of rigid black foam carved to resemble feathers.

A quick glance through the plane's transparent fuselage reveals a motor and a set of levers that are obviously there to flap the wings up and down, but whether they actually work is another matter. Certainly, this *Raven* is more likely to shake itself to pieces than to take off (the foam wingtips, for example, are glued on), but flying seems beside the point here—as it does with the show's main attraction, *The Aeromodeller* (1969-71).

The signature work of Panamarenko's oeuvre, *The Aeromodeller* resembles a dirigible as Spanky and Our Gang might have envisioned it. Its enormous envelope, which is kept inflated by an air blower that seems ridiculously

inadequate for the job, sags from the ceiling, held in place by the same sort of cables that are ordinarily used to prevent balloons from blowing away. The whole thing is cobbled out of sheets of yellowing plastic held together by packing tape. The airship's gondola, which sits off to the side, is made of silver-spray-painted rattan. Atop the cab, which is quite roomy, sit four wood-propeller engines, plus a rack of readymade gas cans to serve as fuel tanks.

The phallic connotations of *The Aeromodeller*—especially given its semitumescent state and the used-condom aspect of the material from which it is made—are unmistakable; still, they are no more apparent than in any other large, tapering object (Ahab's whale, for example). Sex, like flying, seems to be less important to Panamarenko than representing some broader notion of energy spent, though he

did once fill *The Aeromodeller* with helium with the idea of floating it across the Belgian-Dutch border to Arnheim in the Netherlands, where he was in a show. According to the photos that document this misadventure, the artist got only as far as plumping up his creation so that it sat glowing in the dusky Flemish countryside like a giant, luminous grub.

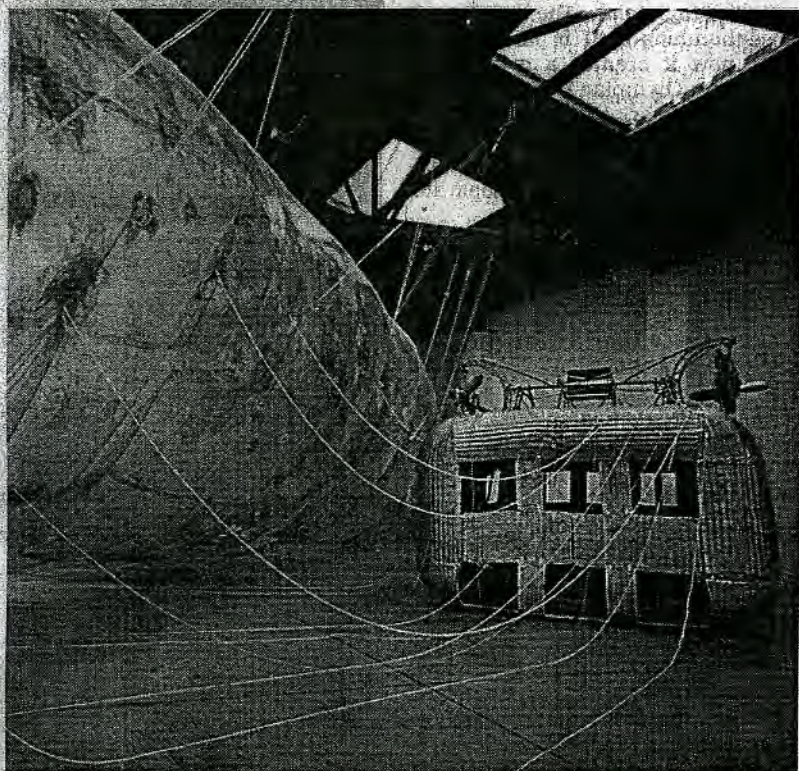
In the end, Panamarenko—who has also created submarines, rockets and jet engines, among other things—strikes one as an innocent, a tinkerer whose work strays outside the confines of art as much as it stays within them. In this respect, he recalls Calder, another child-man who placed a premium on innocence, except that for Panamarenko, purity of the heart is a sentiment shot through with Cold War dread. The vaguely sinister, Russified ring of his adopted name suggests as much, but so does the entire nature of his enterprise, which seems as fragile as it is ambitious. Panamarenko's work is rather like the Europe he grew up in: Caught between past and future, it struggles to shed the ballast of history and float free. And, of course, in a way, it does.

**Panamarenko, "Orbit" is on view at Dia Center for the Arts through June 17 (see Museums).**



ART REVIEW

# Zeppelin as Madeleine, Inspiring Vast Memories



Calby Carver/Dia Center for the Arts

A partial installation view of "The Aeromodeller" by Panamarenko.

Smith, Roberta. "Zeppelin as Madeleine, Inspiring Vast Memories." *The New York Times*, January 10, 2001, p. E40.

By ROBERTA SMITH

For one of the art season's stranger, more memorable sights, consider an excursion to the Dia Center for the Arts in Chelsea. Wedged beneath the beautiful wood-ribbed ceiling of the center's annex space on West 22nd Street is "The Aeromodeller," a giant translucent zeppelin that was constructed, mostly with plastic and tape, from 1969 to 1971 by the Belgian artist, scientist, poet, inventor and dreamer who calls himself Panamarenko.

Expect a complex rush of images and associations. One might feel transported back in time to the childhood excitement of happening upon a circus as it is being set up or the more historic anticipation of someone present at Kitty Hawk just before the Wright Brothers tried to fly.

Next to the zeppelin's balloon, and attached to it by thin strands of rope, rests its gondola, a boxlike hut of silver-painted wicker that suggests a cross between a giant picnic basket and an extra-roomy beach cabana. Nearby is "Raven's Variable Matrix" (2000), a small birdlike flying machine built for a single occupant with clear plastic wings that reveal its inner workings but are crazily tipped in big black feather shapes.

The Dia annex has been transformed into the airfield hangar it has always resembled. One almost expects to see mechanics with wrenches and coveralls scrambling about. Or somesuch. Given the beautifully distressed condition of the balloon, which is animated by aureoles of yellowing tape and extensive patching, and the presence of rickety-looking motors, exposed gas tanks and carved wood propellers, the improvised costumes of "Mad Max" would not be out of place. The work's straightforward, make-do physicality is one of its most powerful characteristics.



But it doesn't take much for this physicality to turn organic and primordial, for the zeppelin can also suggest the soft bulges and tender, shimmering skin of a huge chrysalis. A radically different sense of scale and architectural suggestion ensues. Suddenly we are the size of ants, and the wood ceiling is the underside of an old front porch. If the chrysalis were to produce a butterfly, its wings would probably reach to New Jersey. As for attendants: woodland sprites on the order of those that populate the paintings of the English fairy painter Richard Dadd could appear at any moment.

The easy passage from science to nature to fantasy without ever leaving the realm of art is the typical journey inspired by Panamarenko's slightly antiquated, beautifully built eccentricities, which include racing cars, a submarine and many, many flying machines. Since 1967 he has built numerous airplanes (including a human-powered one), rockets, gliders and a flying carpet, as well as prototypes for accelerator motors, magnetic fields and winged sculptures based on both bird and insect anatomies. Although these structures represent a great deal of effort and learning, functioning doesn't seem to be the issue.

They almost never work, and in fact Panamarenko contends that they're more perfect if they don't. But while this position has led many writers to conclude that one of his major themes is failure, if not the joy of failure, it may have been partly forced on him.

For example, on June 26, 1971, the artist filled "The Aeromodeller," with helium and tried to fly it from his hometown, Antwerp, across the border to Arnhem, the Netherlands, for an exhibition at the Sonsbeek Sculpture Park. To the relief of the local authorities on both sides of the border, it never got off the ground.

In 1972, after submitting to more conventional means of transporta-

tion, and filled with air, "The Aeromodeller" made its debut at Documenta V in Kassel, Germany. Since then it has been exhibited about a half-dozen times in Europe and Japan, achieving something close to mythic status.

Although widely known in Europe Panamarenko is mostly a wonderful name associated with potentially vehicular sculpture in New York. This is only the artist's third solo exhibition here; the previous ones having been at the John Gibson Gallery in 1969 and at Ronald Feldman in 1986. It should raise his profile considerably.

He was born in Antwerp in 1940 and has lived there ever since. He seems to have had an innate passion for science and natural history, and his work may also reflect his having grown up with warplanes flying overhead. While attending the conservative Academy of Art in Antwerp from 1955 to 1960, he spent a great deal of time in the town's Science Library reading about subjects like engineering, aerodynamics, botany and military history.

Panamarenko, who has never disclosed his given name in print, adopted his pseudonym around 1964, at the beginning of his career. In the brochure that accompanies the exhibition, Lynne Cooke, curator at Dia, speculates that it may have been inspired by a Russian general named Panamarenko who was known in the 1950's for quelling riots in East Germany or that it is a made-up name combining Pan Am and a Russian suffix. Either way it successfully

## Panamarenko's abiding obsession with flight.

evokes both the historical situation of the cold war and the artist's obsession with flight.

Panamarenko emerged in the early 1960's as part of a loosely knit group of experimental Belgian and German artists, including Marcel Broodthaers and Josef Beuys, who helped set the stage for the fertile intersection of Conceptual, performance and Process Art that dominated the 1970's. His achievement confirms that Europeans often approached this intersection with a sense of license — of wildness, romance, grandiosity and play — that came more slowly to Americans, in the later work of Chris Burden, for example, or the recent efforts of Tim Hawkinson.

Panamarenko's work can also be viewed within the context of a particularly Belgian sense of the absurd (think Ensor, Magritte, Broodthaers and Wim Del Voe); as part of a Pop-inspired subversiveness (Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Oyvind Fahlstrom) or alongside machine builders like Rebecca Horn, Gilberto Zorio and Mario Merz.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Panamarenko's development is that his first works, from the mid-1960's, were Happenings, some of them performed at the Wide White Space, the legendary alternative gallery in Antwerp that also showed Broodthaers and Beuys. At first it does not seem to make sense that an artist who began with the collective, improvisatory and ephemeral medium of Happenings should devote himself to anything as exacting or obsessive as the invention and building of these familiar yet freakish quasi-functional sculptures.

But if "The Aeromodeller" and "Raven" are any indication, each of Panamarenko's works is itself a kind of Happening. Determinedly improvised, they imply a collective presence, if only of curious onlookers, while expressing in no uncertain terms the human desire, and ability, to make something that could, in effect, happen, even if it never does.

"Panamarenko: Orbit" remains at the Dia Center for the Arts, 548 West 22nd Street, Chelsea, (212) 989-5566, through June 17.



cue

ART MARK STEVENS

Stevens, Mark. "Space Cowboys." *New York* 34, no. 7 (February 19, 2001): 188-189.

# Space Cowboys

At the Dia Center for the Arts, two affecting takes on iconic imagery of the past; at MoMA, a narrow but deep Van Gogh show.

**P**OSTMODERN ARTISTS LIKE TO lampoon the heroic aspirations of the past. Often, their victory is too easily won. Their art looks like a setup, a rigged game in which smart graduate students hurl insults at old men—often their betters—who can no longer speak for themselves. I prefer a trickier contest, one in which the past is allowed a certain power and the artist almost resurrects what he buries, or at least respects what he betrays.

Two good examples of this more subtle relation to the past are now on view at the Dia Center for the Arts. As part of a larger exhibition called "... The Nearest Faraway Place ...," which confronts the mythical West in various ways, the artist **Rodney Graham** is showing a short and strangely disturbing film entitled *How I Became a Ramblin' Man* (1999). It depicts a cowboy slowly riding down a beautiful hillside to a stream bed, where he dismounts from his horse, sits on a log, and croons a lonesome song. Then he remounts and, with his guitar strapped to his back, rides off into the sunset until we

see him slowly riding down a beautiful hillside to a stream bed, where he dismounts, sits on a log, and croons a lonesome song. Then he remounts...

The tape replays the scene endlessly, just as the myths of the West are repeated so often that they have become clichés. The film is marinated in the grand old themes: the melancholy drifter, the cowboy and his horse, the Western landscape as Eden. And yet it does not simply arouse a smirk: The cowboy never just lights up a Marlboro. The parody of the lonesome song is a tad too corny—it's hard not to cringe at lines like "I'll be a drifter till the day I die" and "City life just got me down"—but the film otherwise has a vivid physical presence that cannot be easily shaken. The snorting of the horse, the plash of hooves in the stream, the light above a dark ridge line, the twitter of

## Rodney Graham; Panamarenko

At the Dia Center for the Arts;  
through 6/17.

## Van Gogh's Postman: The Portraits of Joseph Roulin

At the Museum of Modern  
Art; through 5/15.  
See Art listings for details.

Horse opera: Rodney Graham's *How I Became a Ramblin' Man* (1999).





birds and insects in the brush, almost (but not quite) transcend the Hollywood platitudes. And only terminal cynics will not feel a twinge of desire for that romantic landscape. Graham forces the viewer to experience, at one and the same time, two intensely contrary feelings—deadpan irony and keen longing.

In another exhibit, called "Orbit," the Belgian artist Panamarenko is displaying two flying machines that he built, *Aeromodeller* (1969–71) and a recent work called *Raven's Variable Matrix* (2000). Both evoke the heroic early dreams of flying, when the desire to escape from the bounds of gravity inspired visionary inventors. *Aeromodeller* is a large fantastical cocoon-blimp from which dangles a gondola. Laid out inside the gondola are some outlandish flight suits (designed, presumably, to protect human beings from the dangers of an elevated existence). Propellers are mounted on the gondola to push the ponderous bubble through the air. *Raven's Variable Matrix* is a smaller work, designed for one person who sits in a little seat in front; on each side, bird- or insectlike wings

sionary who still hopes the fact of flight will not disturb the dream of flying.

Both Panamarenko and Graham create a mood of desire—and of desire thwarted. A simpler, more heroic time is evoked yet remains beyond reach. A close relationship to nature is presented, but one that only reminds us of how alienated we actually are from the natural world. Who would really fly those machines? They're just metaphors. Who would go ramblin' on his horse? Only the Marlboro Man. Both the drifter in Eden and the dreamer who wants to fly today appear fixed behind glass, trapped in art's diorama. In our culture, work of this kind sometimes seems a form of diminishment, either a taking away of the illusions of the past or a hothouse re-creation of them. When carried out seriously, however, this diminishing can have a tough, bracing spirit: The truth is less than we would like it to be, so get used to it.

**Van Gogh's Postman: The Portraits of Joseph Roulin**, which recently opened at the Museum of Modern Art, includes five of the six paintings and two of the drawings that the artist made of this sto-

## "Panamarenko clearly longs for a time when men

identified flying with birds, and hobbyists like Icarus took their chances."

flare out from the pilot. It looks as though once the motor is turned on, the wings might actually flap.

There is a smart and knowing tone to these primitive flying machines. Panamarenko knows of the imaginary constructions of Leonardo da Vinci, and he is well aware of the early history of flying. His machines may look as if they were resting in a hangar, but their real habitat is a sophisticated gallery space. There is a comical note to the works, too, reminiscent of those early films in which a man goes running down a hill flapping outsize wings while trying to take off. And yet, much like *How I Became a Ramblin' Man*, the pieces seem less ironic than poignant. Panamarenko clearly longs for a time when men identified flying with birds, and hobbyists like Icarus took their chances—a time when technology was handmade and "machine dreams" was not an oxymoron or a description of what advertisers do. Panamarenko, a good engineer and scientifically competent, is not just a *faux-naïf*. He's a vi-

ried figure. Organized by Kirk Varne-doe, the show offers the sort of closely focused view of art that a wide-angle survey cannot provide. I wish museums did more exhibits like this—the narrow but deep apprehension of art is just as important as the Olympian view.

Toward the end of Van Gogh's life, Roulin served as a source of constant encouragement to the troubled painter, and Van Gogh became obsessed with capturing not just the character of his friend but also his spiritual force. "I have rarely seen a man of Roulin's temperament," Van Gogh wrote. "There is something in him tremendously like Socrates, ugly as a satyr, as Michelet called him, 'until on that last day a god appeared in him that illuminated the Parthenon.'" As the series of paintings progresses, their intensity increases, and Van Gogh imbues the head with a godlike presence. Flowers float in the background, making rhymes with the postman's beard. In the last picture, the astral blooms seem interspersed with stars. ■



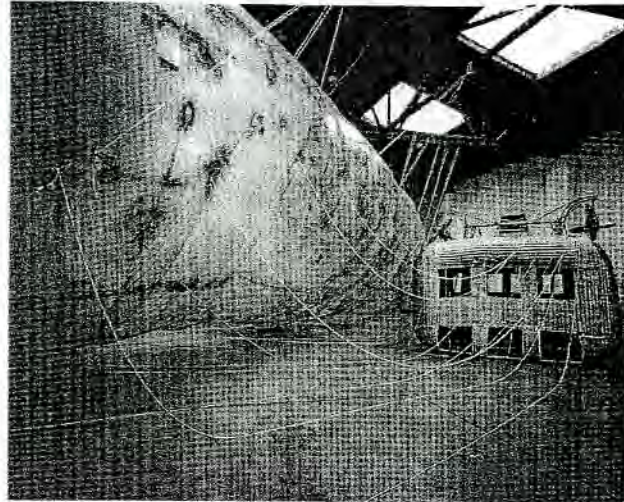
## PANAMARENKO

DIA CENTER FOR  
THE ARTS

The single most common theme in the critical literature on Panamarenko is his failure. This might seem strange, since the Belgian artist has had a long and fairly successful career (at least in Europe; this is his first major US exhibition). But the "f" word doesn't arise in discussions of his career—it relates to how his art objects *function*.

Panamarenko skirts a long tradition of Belgian invention: Attributed to his countrymen are innovations from French fries to modern plastics, from the saxophone to the internal combustion engine. But perhaps his true ancestor is an Italian: Like Leonardo da Vinci with his sepia-drawn flying machines, Panamarenko has spent decades devising contraptions for flying that appropriate natural elements, including the design of a bird's wing and the motions of insects in midair. And yet nobody calls Leonardo a failure. His drawings of helicopters, for instance, which predate the existence of airplanes by centuries, earn him visionary points for the mere conception of such objects. What makes Panamarenko different, of course, is his timing. When he started building his "projects" in the late '60s, real-life airplanes, zeppelins, blimps, gliders, even rockets were coursing through the atmosphere with varying degrees of success. His own flying machines have rarely left the ground. What does it mean, then, to work *in theory* (like Leonardo) in an age when flying machines actually exist and function, not just in theory, but in everyday life?

This show features two Panamarenko objects: *Aeromodeller*, 1969–71, a helium blimp (now filled with air) that the artist attempted to launch in Antwerp in June 1971, and *Raven's Variable Matrix*, 2000, a small solo flyer that crosses a glider with an ergonomic bike. Neither of Panamarenko's objects can actually fly, and today no one expects them to. Like those of his early associates, Marcel Broodthaers and Joseph Beuys, Panamarenko's works function differently in different settings: as performance objects (or, in the '60s,



Panamarenko, *Aeromodeller*, 1969–71,  
mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation view, 2000.

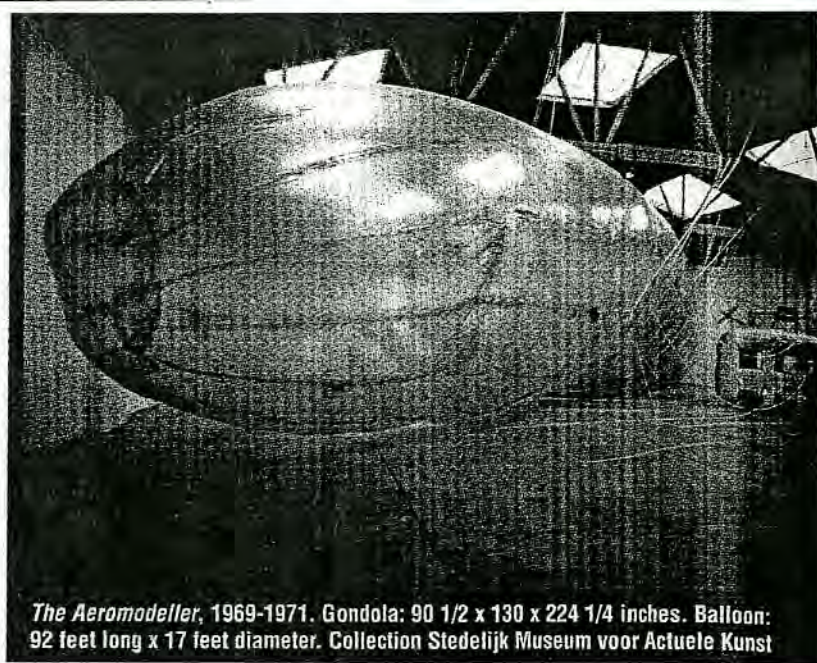
as the centerpieces of Happenings), performance relics, or simply sculpture. Here they function as both relics and sculpture; they sit quietly in Dia's annex, which itself resembles a hangar, where one can marvel at their design—the huge, translucent sac of *Aeromodeller*, a cocoon held together by strips and patches of clear plastic and attached with rope to a silver-painted wicker gondola (two asbestos suits are laid out inside), and the see-through body and wings of *Matrix*, with black styrofoam wing tips that simulate feathers.

The success or failure of Panamarenko's objects depends on whether they live up to what the viewer expects of them, which in turn depends on their context. The only constant for the artist is that his works are "ideal" and based on "the ideal nature of form," while for many viewers, the "ideal" nature of a flying machine is that it flies. But to understand Panamarenko's work, you have to understand that liftoff is only one of many possible measures of success.

—MS



Sondheim, Alan.  
 "Panamarenko's Craft  
 Hold Promises Of  
 Separate Eras." *Artbyte* 3,  
 no. 6 (March-April 2001):  
 70-71.



*The Aeromodeller*, 1969-1971. Gondola: 90 1/2 x 130 x 224 1/4 inches. Balloon: 92 feet long x 17 feet diameter. Collection Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst

## PANAMARENKO'S CRAFT HOLD PROMISES OF SEPARATE ERAS

ORBIT: DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

by alan sontheim

Panamarenko's flying machines and other craft have been exhibited internationally for the past four decades, but they have rarely been shown in the United States. The current Dia Center for the Arts show in New York City (up until June) gives us his masterpiece, the 1969-71 *Aeromodeller*, as well as a new work from 2000, *Raven's Variable Matrix*.

Panamarenko is based in Antwerp; early on, he was associated with Joseph Beuys and Marcel Broodthaers. His work seems related to the largely Italian *arte povera* movement as well; his materials are odd, simultaneously industrial and biological. Although the works themselves often appear worn, almost exhausted, the artist's explorations of technology, nature, function, and imagination are energetic; he has always been cutting-edge.

From the 1960s on, Panamarenko has produced an astonishing oeuvre: models, drawings, and full-scale craft. In 1996 he created *Panama, Spitsbergen, Nova Zembla*, a steel U-boat on casters. Other pieces include aerodynamic cars, models of flying saucers, and machines that seem to skim the surface of the sea. Much of the artist's work has centered on engines and engineering—often appearing as "early" tech—and on dreams of mobility and mobilization.

The works on display at Dia inspire the kind of wonder that James Ellroy describes in his novels—something driving the viewer obsessively. The

exhibit shows the body half-present, half-ephemeral, even in the real world. I think of Drew Leder's book

*The Absent Body*, where he shows how, for most of our conscious life, we ignore our own physicality. One can soar—not through, but in spite of, technology. Things need not work in the world, but can simply "be," and that is enough. Technology lives easily with, and even in, the meditative quality of a world on the move.

The *Aeromodeller* is huge, consisting of a blimp/cocoon hybrid balloon 92 feet long by 17 feet in diameter attached to an 8-foot-by-11-foot-by-19-foot gondola. There's an aura about it—as if the whole thing had recently collapsed without a struggle, an antiquity and a future all in one. The inflated sac—part airborne, part grounded—looks like an organic membrane, ribbed at each end. It is bul-

**Sign systems throughout the *Aeromodeller* question its potential for flight—a central enigma underlying all of Panamarenko's odd aircraft.**

bous, aging, half-suspended, half-crawling into the air. Beneath the sac is a tube carrying air into it from a compressor plugged into the wall, a kind of double umbilical cord: the tube leads to the compressor, and the wire from the compressor to the wall socket.





Nylon cables connect the sac to its wicker gondola with tape and homemade grommets that offer little possibility of "real" strength, adding an odd delicacy to the work. The silver-painted gondola is home to two empty suits (for high altitude?), left inside as if their bodies had fled, as in a Rapture painting, exalted, exhaling. (Rapture paintings are a subgenre of folk art—paintings of bodies ascending to heaven during the Rapture. There are often planes nose-diving to the ground, trains crashing, as pilots and engineers are taken bodily upward.) The suits are overly soft, gray; the headgear fits loosely on the body. And there are plasticine windows in the soft helmet, evoking Beuys' use of felt as an inert, abject material.

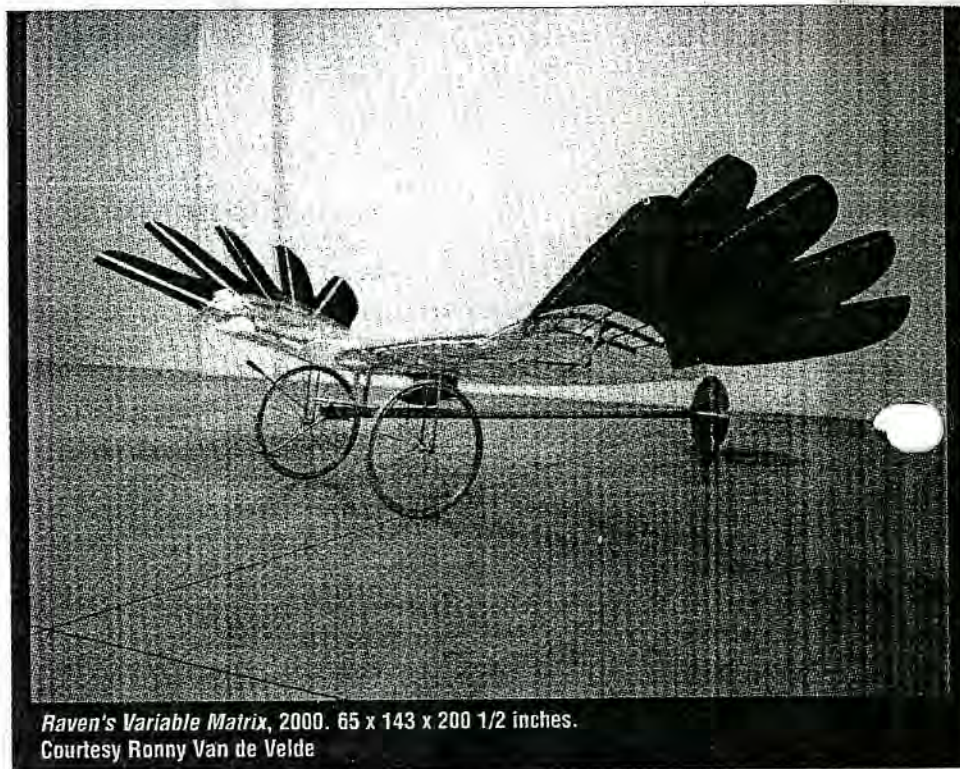
Attached atop the gondola are silver-painted motors—fake motors, I think, and inexplicable. The four engines have propellers at right angles to each other. On the front, gas cans with broken tubing. All of these are sign systems that question the *Aeromodeller's* potential for flight—a central enigma underlying all of Panamarenko's aircraft.

The *Raven's Variable Matrix* is smaller—an insect/plane measuring 5 feet by 10 feet by 17 feet. It rests in the shadow of the *Aeromodeller*. Each of the *RVM's* transparent wings is tipped with heavy, black rubber feathers, which look as if they might oar the air. The *RVM* pilot would sit untethered, without belts, at the front, her feet resting on a support. With a control to move the speed or slow the aircraft, she would turn by leaning. But the *RVM* looks too heavy to fly. One imagines its wings beating at a furious pace to no avail. The *RVM* is more "of matter," less "of air"—more of Panamarenko's thinking through matter, air, machine, less of practical travel.

Still, in the gallery, the *RVM* seems like an appendage of the *Aeromodeller*, the smaller accompanying the larger, both flying above a Lebbeus Woods landscape, which is also dreamlike, exoskeletal, slowed, fierce, and meditative, all at the same time. This is the conundrum: the almost certainty that they will or won't fly; that they are actually capable of leaving the ground; that they are permanently grounded; that they might blow away in the slightest wind. While this creates a palpable tension for the viewer, both works are also visions of personal freedom, personal flight. The human body seems to inhabit these craft easily, moving freely within the *Aeromodeller*, sitting comfortably on *Raven's Variable Matrix*.

The *Aeromodeller* holds the promise of its era. You can feel the rise of the social in it. There were balloons everywhere then, it seemed. And balloons

are vulnerable, slow, good for meditating, looking around. There is something optimistic about a balloon. And then there is the *Raven's Variable Matrix*. Its compactness turns the pneumosphere into a product, a package. The *RVM* is more of an object than the *Aeromodeller*; one imagines it shipped from gallery to gallery, for example. It's nothing like the Gossamer Albatross almost gliding across the Channel; it's an artifact for some unknown extreme sport, carrying pilot and machine into enormously fragile and dangerous spaces. It's late-20th-century, unnerving.



*Raven's Variable Matrix*, 2000. 65 x 143 x 200 1/2 inches.  
Courtesy Ronny Van de Velde

But do these craft fly at all? (And why do we keep coming back to this question?) It's not as if they feel grounded. They're neither land- nor air-bound; they're amphibian among elements of fantasy, worn artifacts, imaginary ghosts. They embody the history of floating, gliding, the development of skins, limbs—moving on. (There's an exhausted architecture at play here as well: depleted landforms, air bases, slow sweepings of wind across J. G. Ballard's half-deserted worlds.)

One can think of Panamarenko's works as both immersions and insertions—glidings, enginings, engineerings. The *Dia* show charts the unintended voyages. The two craft—separated by 30 years—represent not only journeys from one place to another, but slow orbits, suffused with pure mobility.

*Orbit*. *Dia* Center for the Arts, New York. November 29, 2000–June 17, 2001.  
<[www.diacenter.org](http://www.diacenter.org)>



## Chronology Dethroned

*Now that the Museum of Modern Art has concluded its unprecedented 17-month-long curatorial experiment, we can assess the results of "MOMA 2000."*

BY ELEANOR HEARTNEY

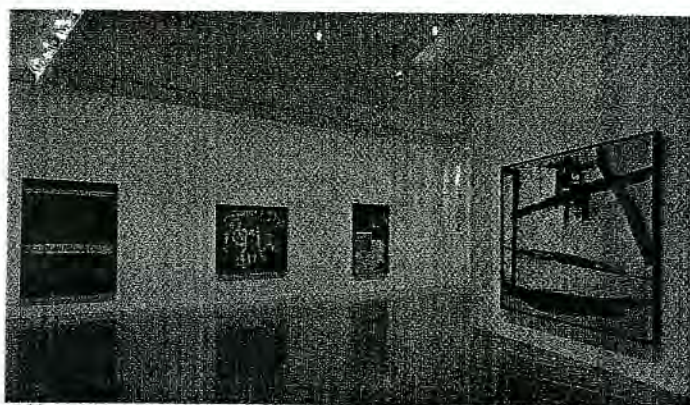
**A**rt history according to New York's Museum of Modern Art long resembled the genealogical narratives that dominate the book of Genesis: Impressionism begat Cézanne, Cézanne begat Picasso and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, and Picasso begat Cubism and virtually everything else we know as early modernism. This genealogy, which was taught to generations of visitors to 11 West 53rd Street, continues until one reaches the Abstract Expressionists, at which point the narrative morphs into a kind of military history crowned by the New York School's triumphant dethroning of the rival School of Paris. This victorious moment is followed by a series of challenges by upstart movements like Pop, Minimalism and Conceptual art before finally devolving into the chaos of contemporary art.

However, from Oct. 7, 1999, to Mar. 4, 2001, MOMA's public was confronted with a radically different version of modern art history. Maillol occupied the same gallery as Barnett Newman, Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* sat next to a Thonet side chair, *Les Demoiselles* was dethroned and placed among a selection of other early modernist canvases devoted to the figure, paintings by long-overlooked artists like Peter Blume and Richard Lindner were liberated from the basement and hung in glory next to perennial favorites like Mark Rothko and Giorgio de Chirico, mini-exhibitions were devoted to single artists or even single art works and, most significantly, the familiar, sequential history of modernism was nowhere to be found.

"MOMA 2000," as the museum dubbed this 17-month-long event, consisted of three "cycles," each overseen by a different curatorial team and each covering roughly a 40-year period. These broke down thus: "Modern Starts" covered the years 1880-1920 and was organized by a team composed of John Elderfield, Peter Reed, Mary Chan, Maria del Carmen Gonzalez and George Bareford. "Making Choices" covered 1920-1960, with a team composed of Robert Storr, Peter Galassi, Anne Imhof, Beth Handler, Josiana Bianchi and Carina Evangelista. "Open Ends," covering 1960 to the present, was put together by Kirk Varnedoe, Paola Antonelli and Joshua Siegel. Within each



Foreground, left to right, Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World*, 1948, a grouping of lithographs and drawings by various artists, and John Graham's *Two Sisters*, 1944. In background, Alex Katz's *Upside Down Ada* (left), 1965, and Philip Pearlstein's *Two Female Models in the Studio* (right), 1967; in "Making Choices: Modern Art despite Modernism." All "Making Choices" photos James Dee.



Left to right, Mark Rothko's *Magenta, Black, Green on Orange*, 1949, Richard Lindner's *The Meeting*, 1953, Hans Hofmann's *Cathedral*, 1959, and Franz Kline's *Painting Number 2*, 1954; part of "Making Choices: New York Salon."

cycle, a series of small exhibitions illuminated various themes, artists, moments or influences. By the time the last cycle was fully installed, "MOMA 2000" had produced over 50 separate exhibitions and made use of 195,000 square feet of exhibition space.

"MOMA 2000" was described at the outset as an effort to rethink the presentation of the permanent collection in anticipation of the museum's expansion and reinstallation in 2004. At a panel discussion on "The Future of the Modern Art Museum" in January 2000, MOMA director Glenn Lowry opened his discussion of the forthcoming

project with the remark, "We know that every narrative is an interpretation." While such a comment would be unexceptional, and even boringly conventional, coming from a professor of history or a proponent of cultural studies, it was rather startling to hear from the director of the museum most identified with a canonical reading of modern art history. Lowry's avowal of relativism suggested that the citadel of modernism had lowered its gates to the postmodern invaders, trading in the orderly march of universally recognized masterpieces for a more kaleidoscopic, less hierarchical presentation.

A year and a half later, the Museum of Modern Art has finished its grand experiment in "thinking in public," as Cycle 2 curator Robert Storr calls it. What have we learned about the Modern? And perhaps more importantly, what has the museum learned about itself, and how will its discoveries affect its future treatment of modern art and modern art history?

**A**s it turns out, the issues raised are both philosophical and practical. They range from the grandly abstract—what is history? what is art? what is modernism?—to the naggingly concrete—how can you hang a photograph next to a painting and make them both look good? How do you create an effective installation when you know that viewers may be arriving at the exhibition from multiple entry points? When one of the museum's signature masterpieces fits into more than one category, how do you decide where to put it?

Each of the cycles dealt with such questions in different ways, dictated in part by the nature of the work in the 40-year period under review, and in part by the personalities and predilections of the assembled curators. The first installment, "Modern Starts," represented the most familiar part of MOMA's permanent collection, and in some ways the most sacrosanct. For this cycle, the curatorial team decided to place the works within a scheme dictated by the traditional genres of landscape (renamed "Places" for this exhibition), the figure ("People") and still life ("Things").

Curiously, this was the same organizational principle adopted for the inaugural exhibition of



**"We know that every narrative is an interpretation"—it was startling to hear this avowal of relativism from MOMA director Glenn Lowry.**

the Tate Modern, which opened some eight months after the debut of "Modern Starts." The curators at the Tate Modern also threw in a category called History/Memory/Society to represent the tradition of history painting [see *A.i.A.*, Sept. 2000]. The Tate's genre-based installation was, perhaps, more radical than MOMA's in that each of its categories encompassed the entire modern-art era from the late 19th century to the present, rather than the more limited periods represented in each phase of "Modern Starts." (Apart from the occasional inclusion of an example of contemporary art in the show, the period restrictions at MOMA were breached by the commissioned contemporary works that introduced each section of "Modern Starts": for "People," a Sol LeWitt wall drawing; for "Places," an installation of artificial flowers by Maria Fernanda Cardoso; for "Things," colorful graphic wall paintings of everyday objects and works from MOMA's collection by Michael Craig-Martin.)

Like other MOMA curators interviewed for this article, "Modern Starts" co-organizer John Elderfield was critical of the Tate's total elimination of chronology. He defends the genre hanging in "Modern Starts," however, by noting that in its more restricted time period, genre still held considerable sway over the way people thought about art. At the same time, he admits that in the latter part of the 1880-1920 period, the categories began to become rather nebulous: "The most problematic area was 'Things.' In a way, everything was a 'thing.' We presented abstraction coming out of still life, but by 1920 and the emergence of nonreferential abstraction, it became a bit difficult to justify."

In fact, one of the curious aspects of "Modern Starts" was the diminished stature of abstraction, which was of course the triumphant endpoint of the progress-minded narrative explicated by the old MOMA hanging. Elderfield notes that at one stage, the curators considered having an abstraction component but quickly realized that genre and abstraction were incompatible organizational principles. Though he admits being a bit troubled by the minimized status of nonobjective art, he remarks, "I could justify abstraction being less prominent because it is usually so prominent. And, after all, it [the unplaying of abstraction] is also true to the historical situation." In a review of "Modern Starts" in these pages [see *A.i.A.*, May '00], Charles Stuckey noted the near total emphasis on works by male European

artists in "Modern Starts," a result, he observed, of the "Eurocentric, sexist and racist assumptions that prevailed throughout the early years of MOMA's collecting." Overall, however, Stuckey approved of the show's "stunning juxtapositions" and embrace of nonlinearity. Other critics suggested that the exhibition perpetuated MOMA's traditional Francophilia, signified by the near ubiquity of Cézanne, Matisse and that longtime resident of France, Picasso, in nearly every component show.

Elderfield concedes that MOMA's conventional hanging has tended to be a chronology of French painting followed by a chronology of American painting. Because the pre-1920s collection is heavily French, the museum is ill equipped to chart the emergence of modernism in Latin America, Germany, Russia and North America. But, Elderfield argues, not everything done during this

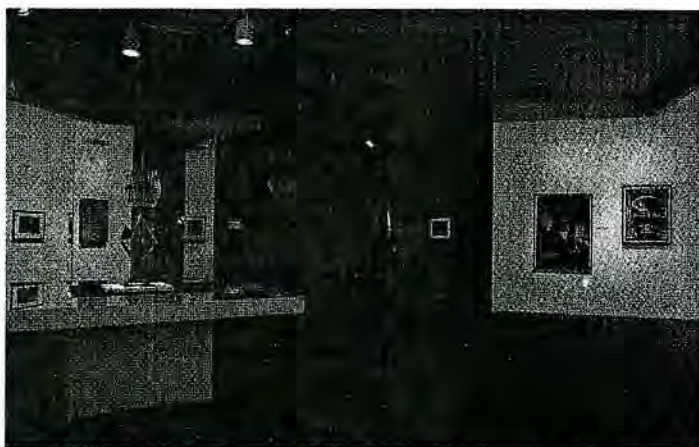
period needs to be in the MOMA collection. "This is the Museum of Modern Art," he maintains. "It is not meant to be a history of everything everywhere. It's about an idea. Certain things belong to modern art and certain things don't."

**T**he question of what it means to be the Museum of Modern Art reverberated throughout the three cycles of "MOMA 2000," and the answers proposed were many. "Making Choices" curator Robert Storr drew inspiration from the MOMA of Alfred Barr, director of the museum from its 1929 inception until 1944. At the same time, he distanced himself from the esthetic orientation of William Rubin, who served as director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture from 1973 to 1988. Storr remarks, "In 'Making Choices,' my overarching philosophy was not to have one. I felt we needed to break out of the Bill Rubin program. I believed that certain things which had never been seen together should be. My shows in this cycle were based on what Alfred Barr did. His museum was more open than Rubin's. The original MOMA tradition was to cut across media, and be more truly international."

Storr argues that, contrary to what many people believe, Barr did not advocate a rigid, monolithic reading of modern art. The source of this misconception is a flowchart Barr created in 1936 to show how modernism developed. Replete with intersecting networks of arrows and boxes, this diagram of avant-garde movements became the model for a quasi-scientific view of modern art, which subsequent interpreters have ridiculed as absurdly mechanical. In fact, the chart itself is anything but the simple procession of formal styles with which the Modern later became identified. Rather, a close reading suggests a complex historical interpretation of modernism.

Similarly, Barr's museum was far more experimental and multimedia than hindsight has suggested. A recent book by Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*, charts the changing installation philosophies at the Museum of Modern Art. Staniszewski reminds her readers that in its formative years, MOMA presented shows on subjects as far afield as American Indian art, product design and wartime propaganda, and that exhibitions merrily mixed photographs, paintings, furniture, sculpture and architectural models in galleries that were painted a variety of vivid colors.

Reflecting this history, "Making



*View of works by Russian Constructivist, De Stijl and Bauhaus artists, including Gustav Klutsis's sculpture Maquette for Radio Announcer (left, on tabletop), 1922, Aleksandr Rodchenko's Spatial Construction no. 12 (suspended at center), ca. 1920, with posters by El Lissitzky and Rodchenko (on wall, at right); in "Making Choices: The Dream of Utopia / Utopia of the Dream."*



*Foreground, Alberto Giacometti's bronze Woman with Her Throat Cut, 1932, shown with (in background, left to right) Pablo Picasso's Seated Bather, 1930, Hans Bellmer's painted aluminum Doll, 1936, photos by Man Ray and Edward Weston, Cindy Sherman's photo Untitled #250, 1992, and Lucas Samaras's Polaroid Photo-Transformation, 1973; in "Making Choices: Anatomically Incorrect."*



# MOMA's collection is "not meant to be a history of everything everywhere," says curator John Elderfield. "It's about an idea."

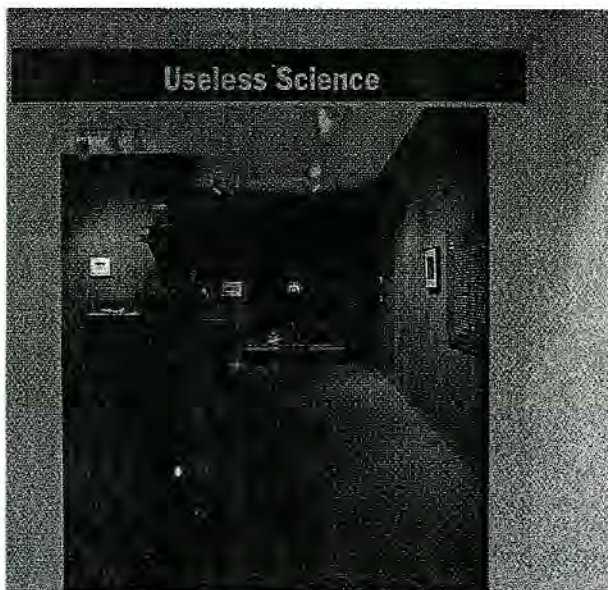
Choices" dispensed with the genre principle in favor of a series of smaller exhibitions which explored the art of the period 1920-1960 from a variety of sometimes conflicting perspectives. There were pocket shows of individual artists that highlighted the sculptures of Jean Arp, the photographs of Henri Cartier-Bresson, the photographs of Man Ray, the etchings of Giorgio Morandi and the late '50s and '60s architectural designs of Louis Kahn.

Some shows looked at the period in terms of particular disciplines and mediums. In this category were "Modern Living I" and "Modern Living II," which showcased furniture makers and interior designers adopting new materials and new approaches to domestic life. "Ideal Motif: Photographs by Stieglitz, Weston, Adams and Callahan" explored the anti-Pictorialist esthetic, and "Graphic/Photographic" examined the overlap of avant-garde photography and graphic design in the 1920s.

Thematic shows brought out artistic responses to the tumultuous political events of the period. "The Dream of Utopia, Utopia of the Dream," curated by Storr, which dealt with the 20th century's attempts at social engineering, encompassed both idealists like the Russian Constructivists, the De Stijl movement and the Bauhaus, and the anti-idealist Dadaists and Surrealists, who probed the dark underside of the era's faith in progress. "War," also curated by Storr, looked at the failure of utopia through the eyes of artists responding to the horrors of conflicts from World War I to the Vietnam War. "The Rhetoric of Persuasion," curated by Galassi and Wendy Weitman, was an exploration of art in the service of political ideals, which pointed out unsettling similarities in the visual strategies of apparently antithetical artists like the Mexican muralists and the Nazi propagandists. Together these three shows supplied a valuable historical context for art works that, in the old Modern, were often presented in more strictly formal terms.

This contextual approach vied for attention with myriad other organizational principles. Challenging the tendency to boil down a period to a single style, "New York Salon" and "Paris Salon" sought to encompass the esthetic diversity that existed in these art capitals. "Anatomically Incorrect," curated by Anne Umland and Darsie Alexander, drew connections between the depiction of the human figure in European Surrealism and the body-related art of the present. A particularly charming show, "Useless Science," organized by Laura Hoptman and Michael Carter, looked at the way artists have been attracted by pseudo-science. The show included an in-depth examination of the *Collegé de 'Pataphysique* and culminated in a giant paper rocket ship by the Belgian artist Panamarenko.

Storr's "How Simple Can You Get" celebrated the reductive tendency in European and American art through the monochrome works of artists such as Fontana, Newman, Kelly, Klein and Ryman, while his "Raw and Cooked" explored the influence of outsider art from early in the century to the present. "Seeing Double," curated by Galassi, attempted somewhat unconvincingly to draw parallels between transparency in architecture, the open structures of artists like LeWitt and Anthony Caro, Pollock's overlays and Harry Callahan's multiple exposures.



Marcel Duchamp's *Rotary Demisphere (Precision Optics)*, 1925 (center), and *To Be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour (left, on ledge)*, 1918, among other artists' works exploring "pseudo-science"; in "Making Choices: Useless Science."

These diverse experiments were anchored by the two largest shows in this cycle—Storr's "Modern Art despite Modernism" and Galassi's "Walker Evans & Company." The former quietly declared war on conventional art history's vision of modernism as a steady progress toward purity and abstraction. Here all the messy, antimodern tendencies that had for decades been literally relegated to the museum's storeroom were dusted off and hung next to their more familiar brethren. Viewers found neoclassical Picasso, late Philip Guston, Francis Bacon and Balthus in the same galleries as artists like Ivan Albright, Pavel Tchelitchew and Andrew Wyeth (whose *Christina's World* was finally given a museum presentation to match its hold on the popular imagination). Also on view were figurative works by more recent artists like Jim Nutt, Troy Brauntuch and Gerhard Richter. The thesis behind the show was that modernism has always been a dance between formal innovation and a

more or less ironic rejection of such developments and the teleological mind-set they represent.

"Walker Evans & Company," meanwhile, argued for the central position of photography in modern art by presenting Evans as a kind of ur-artist. The show was divided into eight sections, each of which used a different aspect of Evans's work as the basis for a selection of photographs, paintings and, in several cases, sculpture and architecture that reflected similar thinking. Thus, for example, Evans's sign-plastered storefront images were grouped with collage-based works by Kurt Schwitters, Andy Warhol, Harry Callahan and Lee Friedlander, while Evans's images of America's automobile culture were joined by works with similar themes by Edward Hopper, Robert Rauschenberg, Ed Ruscha and Robert Frank.

"Walker Evans & Company" and "Modern Art despite Modernism" were the only shows accompanied by their own catalogues. The other major publication for "Making Choices" was a large volume which presented, in effect, core samples of the diverse works by artists in each of four pivotal years (1929, 1939, 1948 and 1955) during the assigned period. While it was somewhat interesting to page through this tome and realize that, for instance, *Christina's World* was created in 1948, the same year as Pollock's *Number 1, 1948*, or that 1929 was the year of origin for Mies van der Rohe's *Barcelona Chair*, G.W. Pabst's silent film *Pandora's Box* and Dalí's painting *Illuminated Pleasures*, one couldn't help feeling that the money that went into this publication might have been better spent making catalogues for some of the more intriguing smaller exhibitions like "Useless Science" or "The Art of Persuasion."

Storr notes that one of the purposes of the near-bewildering variety of approaches in "Making Choices" was, basically, to level the playing field by demonstrating that modernism was actually the effort of hundreds of people working in a wide range of styles and mediums. While chaotic and even confusing at times, this grab bag of shows was quite exhilarating in its final effect. By exploding the old triumphalist narrative which presents this phase of modernism as an inexorable progression toward abstraction and the achievements of the New York School, "Making Choices" pointed to the possibility of a permanent collection hanging that presents a variety of narratives. It also revealed how stylistically unmonolithic the Modern's collecting practices have been. One suspects that even the curators were surprised by the collection's richness and diversity.

The third and final segment, "Open Ends," which dealt with the 1960s to the present, offered a different set of challenges. Kirk Varnedoe,



**"Admitting that you believe in chronology is like saying you believe in imperialism," remarked the Modern's chief curator Kirk Varnedoe.**

chief curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, commented at the press preview that one of the problems his team faced was dealing with a period whose history has not yet been written. This, said Varnedoe, eliminated the possibility of a revisionist reading like Storr's "Modern Art despite Modernism." The exhibitions in this section made it clear, however, that there is a standard narrative for at least the first few decades of this period. It also seemed obvious that an understanding of the work that emerged from the 1960s and '70s requires some sense of the larger political and social tumult of that era, a context that was largely missing from "Open Ends." Instead, the exhibitions seemed grounded more in a recognition of formal, material or thematic resemblances between works within the period. (And unlike the first two segments, there was no effort to bend the boundaries and bring in works from different eras.)

The shows that resulted were filled with pleasurable moments in which juxtapositions made clear the similarities of works created decades apart. However, little effort was made to explain how such works also were different. Thus, Varnedoe's "Pop and After" made the case for a continuity of concerns between artists of the '60s and those of the '80s and '90s. For example, he brought together Jasper Johns's canonical *Flag* (1954-55), David Hammons's *African American Flag* (1990), which trades red, white and blue for the colors of the African National Congress, and one of Alighiero e Boetti's embroidered world maps in which each country is represented by a portion of its national flag. The juxtaposition of Johns, Hammons and Boetti may be a clever one, but it tells us little about the very distinct intentions of each artist. Minimalism comes in for similar treatment in "Minimalism and After," also curated by Varnedoe. This show contained an extended essay on the cube in contemporary art which ran the gamut from Serra's *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)* of 1968 and Tony Smith's *Die* (1962) to Jackie Winsor's charred *Burnt Piece* (1977-78) and Janine Antoni's chocolate *Gnaw* (1992), without suggesting how the debate over feminism may have contributed to the very different motivations behind these last two works.

In fact, the more political isms of this period—multiculturalism, feminism, globalism—were largely unacknowledged here, as were the efforts of artists to break out of the confines of the art context. Fluxus was absent, video art was largely

confined to a corner of the entry area of the third floor, and public art was treated as a function of the memorial impulse in Roxana Marcoci's "Counter-Monuments and Memory," albeit one of the more intellectually ambitious exhibitions. It examined how some artists have dealt with thorny political issues and expressed their preoccupations with painful historical memories. The horrors of the Second World War and the Holocaust haunted works by Anselm Kiefer, Christian Boltanski, Art Spiegelman and Marcel Odenbach, while the Cold War served as the underlying context for works by artists like Claes Oldenburg and the Cuban artist Kcho.

The only other politically oriented show was "The Path of Resistance," curated by Joshua Siegel and Susan Kismaric. A stairwell hung salon-style with political posters served as an introduction to an eclectic show that made up in

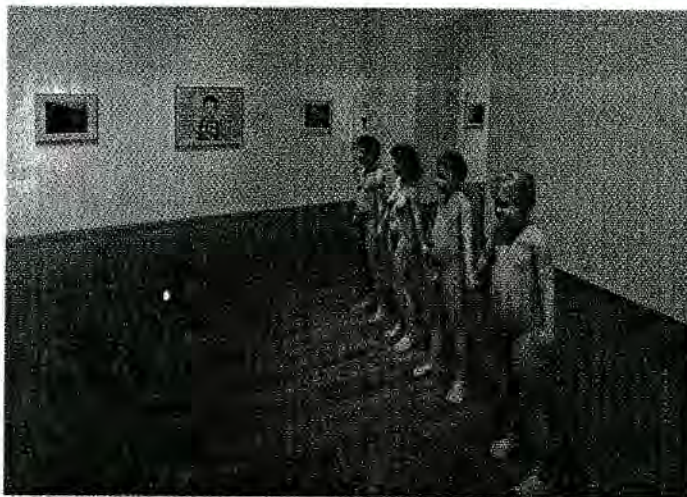
breadth for what it lacked in depth. The show skipped quickly over the diverse activist tendencies of the last four decades in a display that encompassed everything from Warhol's social political poster, for George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign, and Philip Guston's Kluge paintings to Sue Coe's horrific *Woman Walked into Bar—Is Raped by Four Men on the Pot Table—While Twenty Watch* (1983) and Kara Walker's racially and sexually charged antebellum silhouettes.

More typical of "Open Ends" were shows like "Matter," a display of paintings, sculptures and design objects united by their unusual and often bizarre materials; "One Thing after Another," an essay on serial imagery, the highlight of which was Dennis Adams's *Patricia Hearst A thru Z*; and "White Spectrum," a collection of works by artists like Ryman, Agnes Martin, Rachel Whiteread and Hiroshi Sugimoto which shared the characteristic of being essentially white.

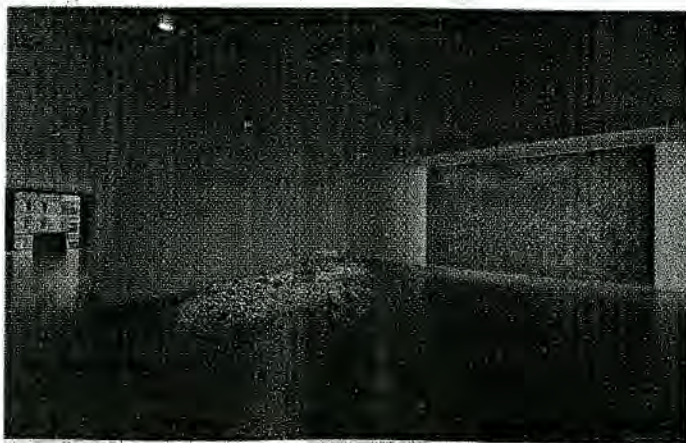
There were, as well, several thematic shows with cohesive if not particularly earth-shaking themes. "Sets and Situations," curated by Varnedoe, gathered staged photographic works, and "Innocence and Experience," by Varnedoe and Joshua Siegel, focused on the dark vision of childhood that underlies works by artists like Robert Gober, Paul McCarthy, Diane Arbus and Charles Ray. More thought-provoking was Lilian Tone's "Actual Size," which tried to get at the peculiar relation between the "real" and the "simulacrum" in contemporary art by presenting work that re-create ordinary objects or preserve traces of "reality" through imprints and casts.

Along with this array of group shows, "Open Ends" also featured a number of what Varnedoe refers to as "singular works"—major pieces that were displayed by themselves. These included James Rosenquist's mural *F111*, Chris Burden's monumental hanging sculpture *Medusa's Head* and Richter's painting cycle *October 18, 1977*. This latter suite of paintings, which reworks news photos documenting the controversial prison deaths of a group of German terrorists, was one of the show's highlights and is, arguably, Richter's greatest achievement.

In explaining the rationale for "Open Ends," Varnedoe acknowledged that his approach continues to privilege chronology over context. "Admitting that you believe in chronology," he remarked, "is like saying you believe in imperialism. I v



*Foreground, Charles Ray's sculpture Family Romance, 1993, with (on wall, from left to right) Chris Killip's photo Helen and Her Hoop, 1984, an untitled David Wojnarowicz print, 1990-91, and David Graham's Shirley Temple, Mummer's Parade, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1983, C-print; in "Open Ends: Innocence and Experience." All "Open Ends" photos Content Arts.*



*An untitled Robert Morris sculpture (left), 1968, and an untitled Cy Twombly painting, 1970; in "Open Ends: Minimalism and After."*



**"The public can come to see the collection as an evolving set of ideas rather than a general summation"—MOMA curator Robert Storr.**

reveal myself as being closer to modernism than to postmodernism by asserting that I believe there are some things that are true. I believe there is something more neutral about choosing history as guideline, than some of the other alternatives." Looking askance at the Tate's experiment with the substitution of genre for chronology, he says, "When you put a Richard Long next to Monet, you are forcing viewers to be bound by the curator's vision. I would prefer to have curators try to correspond to some external sense of reality."

This remark is in subtle contrast to Storr's conviction that "art history does exist, but in fact there are several different art histories, some more teleological, and some less so." It also seems to diverge significantly from Elderfield's views. Commenting on the barrage of critical mail his segment engendered, Elderfield reflects, "When people said the art works were diminished by the genre arrangement, it was because they noticed that things had been arranged. This was something they hadn't noticed before. Some of the letters implied there was a natural order, and reacted as if we were cutting trees down. But of course everything's always been arranged. My hope is that now when you see a chronological hang, you realize that it has also been constructed."

Such contrasting perspectives will no doubt foster a healthy debate when it comes time for MOMA to reinstall its permanent collection in its expanded building. All the curators I spoke with admitted that the kaleidoscopic approach taken in "MOMA 2000" is impractical for a permanent collection display. Nonetheless, the experiment may have an effect on the new hanging. While nothing is set as of this writing, MOMA director Lowry reports that what is now being discussed is some sort of more or less fixed primary narrative with variable side galleries that will highlight

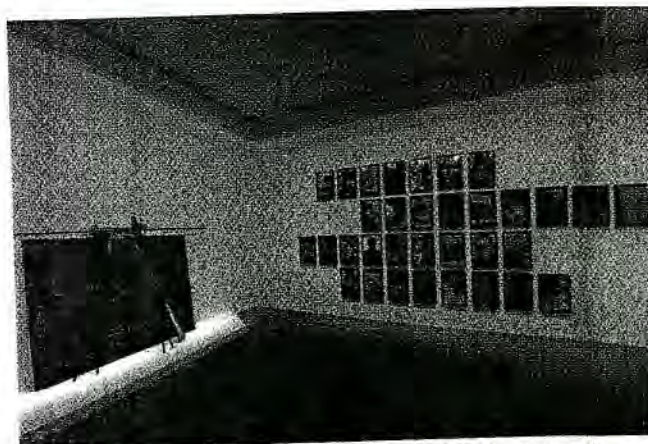
what he refers to as "offshoots to the main narrative." This will be made possible in part by a new architectural schema that breaks down the linearity dictated by the existing gallery arrangement.

Lowry also promises more mixing of mediums and a larger role for contemporary art. And he, like Elderfield, Storr and Varnedoe, conjectures that the biggest effect of the "MOMA 2000" experiment may be the lines of communication that were opened up between curators in previously sharply balkanized departments.

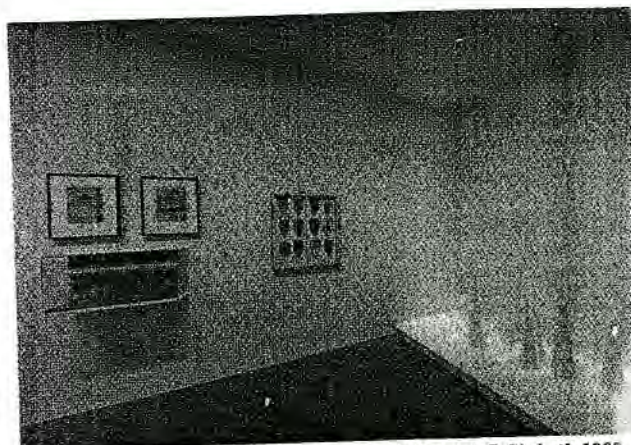
In looking for new ways to present its permanent collection, MOMA joins other institutions that have begun to relinquish strict chronology for a somewhat more chaotic view. Along with the Tate, museums adopting thematic strategies include the Pompidou Center in Paris, the Denver Art Museum, the High Museum in Atlanta and the Brooklyn Museum, which recently announced it will rehang its American collection thematically. One could also argue that the Guggenheim's recent "1900," while a temporary exhibition, shared this experimental mentality by rescuing long-neglected artists and thus deepening and complicating our view of the origins of modernism. The Whitney Museum's "American Century" show was also, at least in part, thematic.

What will audiences make of these new approaches? While they may not be familiar with the attack on master narratives and objective truth, which have become a staple of academic debates, mass culture already has been reshaped by a skepticism toward strict notions of history. Indeed, audiences may be ahead of museums on some of these issues. Elderfield notes that some observers maintained that the nonlinear thinking embedded in "Modern Starts" was influenced by the Internet, something that could not have been further from his mind. Storr sees a generational difference, asserting, "The older audience was raised on narrative, but the younger audience was not." As a result, he conjectures, younger viewers may be much more open to new approaches.

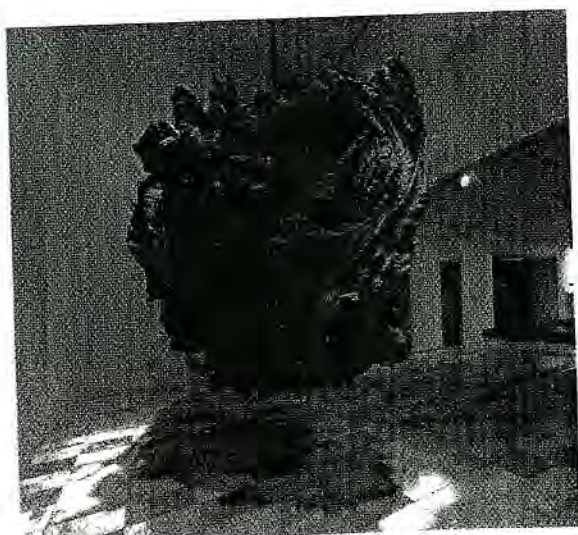
In the end, Storr anticipates that "the public can come to see the collec-



Joseph Beuys's *Eurasia Siberian Symphony* 1963 (left), 1966, mixed mediums, shown with Michael Schmidt's *U-N-I-T-Y (EIN-HEIT)*, 1991-94 (right), gelatin silver prints; in "Open Ends: Counter-Monuments and Memory."



View of Kara Walker's prints *Cotton and Vanishing Act* (left), both 1997, displayed above her untitled 1997 work of six etched glass canisters, with Willie Cole's print *Domestic I.D., IV* (center), 1992, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres's sculpture *Untitled (Supreme Majority)*, 1991; in "The Path of Resistance" section of "Open Ends."



Joris Burden's *Medusa's Head*, 1989-92, plywood, steel, cement, rock, paint, carbon, wood, 5-gauge model railroad track, 7 scale-model trains, 14 feet in diameter. Photos this article courtesy Museum of Modern Art, New York.

tion as an evolving set of ideas rather than a general summation. Over time, the hope is that the public will figure out how the game is played and want to come back." If the museum can pull that off, the biggest winners will be the members of its audience. □

"Making Choices," the second part of "MOMA 2000," consisted of a cycle of 24 exhibitions seen at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (Mar. 16-Sept. 26, 2000). It was accompanied by three catalogues, *Making Choices*, *Walker Evans & Company* and *Modern Art despite Modernism*. "Open Ends," the third and final part of "MOMA 2000," involved 11 exhibitions (Sept. 28 2000-Mar. 4, 2001). The accompanying catalogue *Modern Contemporary: Art at MOMA Since 1980*, was supplemented by a separate volume on Gerhart Richter's October 18, 1977 paintings.

Author: Eleanor Heartney is a freelance critic based in New York.