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MoMA PS1
Archive

News from the US: Museum acquisitions and sales, refurbishment highs and lows, and fabulous manuscript donations

Nine Modern paintings from the MoMA collection go on sale at Christie's this month - is it to fund the purchase of the Hirsts at Tate?

**Jason Edward Kaufman and
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New York. This month the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) is selling nine Modern paintings which could make as much as \$27.8 million at Christie's New York (The Art Newspaper, No.146, April 2004, p.18). At the same time a London source close to the contemporary art market told The Art Newspaper that the museum is considering the purchase of the 13 Damien Hirsts now on show at Tate Britain in the exhibition "In-a-Gadda-da-Vida" (until 31 May). Could MoMA be trading its Picassos, Légers, and Pollocks for a flock of butterfly paintings and vitrines by Mr Hirst?

We put this question to John Elderfield, MoMA's chief curator of painting and sculpture, but he

could neither confirm nor deny the museum's interest in the works by Hirst, an artist not currently represented in MoMA's collections. "It is impossible for us to talk about things we are considering," Mr Elderfield said. "To do so just creates expectation, and if we were interested it would make it more difficult to pursue the kind of negotiation one has to pursue in order to acquire anything where the value is not absolutely fixed. That doesn't mean there are any negotiations," he said, but he emphasised: "There is no possibility that the funds realised from sale of the modern masters would pay for contemporary art". Is it possible that any of the recent deaccessions will raise money for contemporary art? "No, and none ever will," he replied. "I don't think you can sell classical modernism to buy contemporary art. I just think it's wrong."

Mr Elderfield explained that MoMA deaccessions regularly as a way of refining the collection. "The museum was established in 1929 with the notion that it would not have a permanent collection."

MoMA's deaccessioning policy has one fixed rule: "We don't sell contemporary art. I think it would be grossly unfair to an artist to do it. We will never sell a work by a living artist, except with that artist's agreement," says Mr Elderfield.

MoMA to re-open in November

New York. MoMA has announced that after three and a half years of construction, its expanded midtown home will open on 20 November, coinciding with the museum's 75th anniversary. The six-storey building will occupy 630,000 square feet, nearly double the size of the former facility. The capital campaign—which includes the cost of land and construction, renovation, moving back and forth to temporary quarters in Queens, additional funds for endowment, and related expenses—began at \$650 million in 1998, and was later increased to \$858 million, an unprecedented target for an art museum. MoMA says it has \$675 million, with 50 of its 59 active trustees having contributed \$5 million or more, an astonishing demonstration of the collective determination and financial power of the institution's patrons. Their largesse will be recognised with named spaces: Peggy and David Rockefeller for the new gallery building, Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder for renovation of the original 11 West 53rd Street building, Catie and Donald Marron for the atrium, Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman for the Education and Research Building, the Edward John Noble Foundation for the Education Center, and Celeste Bartos for the new theatre.

"Trees not cars" delays museum construction

San Francisco. A lawsuit by environmentalists threatens to delay the 2005 reopening of the new \$202 million DeYoung Museum in Golden Gate Park designed by Herzog and de Meuron, which replaces the original building damaged by an earthquake in 1998. The activists, who object to the construction of an underground car park to serve the museum, are exploiting a legal nicety by arguing that the proposed financing for the garage would violate original legislation which authorised it to be built entirely with philanthropic funds. Katherine Roberts, head of “Trees not cars”, one of several groups who have joined in the lawsuit, insists that “the final plan has almost nothing in common with the text of the original initiative.” A hearing in the State Superior Court is set for 10 May.

Library of Congress gets the Kislak Collection

Washington, DC. The Library of Congress has been given the Kislak Collection of rare books, manuscripts, maps and art from Mesoamerica, the Caribbean and the Southeastern US by the Jay I. Kislak Foundation. The gift includes more than 4,000 items worth an estimated \$100 million, and contains some of the earliest records of indigenous peoples, European travel in the Americas and colonial life. The collection includes manuscripts by explorers Hernán Cortes and Francisco Pizarro, and a 1762 farm diary by the first president of the US, George Washington. It also includes two historically significant 16th-century maps: one by the cartographer and cosmographer Martin Waldseemüller, and the other, the Carta Marina of 1516, the first printed navigational chart of the entire world. The collection was assembled over 40 years by American real estate investor and philanthropist Jay I. Kislak.

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