

Met Director to Retire

It's the end of an era for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. On Jan. 8, longtime director Philippe de Montebello announced his intention to retire by Dec. 31, after more than 30 years as the head of one of the world's most prominent art museums. The eighth and longest-serving director in the Met's 138-year history, he oversaw the physical and programmatic transformation of the institution. The recent reopenings of the Greek and Roman Galleries, in a new 57,000-square-foot space, and of the expanded and revamped 25,000-square-foot Uris Center for Education cap off a num-

ber of expansions and renovations that over the years have doubled the museum's size.

Under de Montebello's leadership, the Met's endowment rose from \$1.36 million to \$2.9 billion. Though the museum has various business ventures, including online and retail stores and a thriving art-book publishing department, it has not jumped on the globalization bandwagon by opening an international branch, a trend that de Montebello has spoken against. Among the notable acquisitions made during his tenure are Duccio's tempera-and-gold-on-wood *Madonna and Child*, van Gogh's *Wheat Field with Cypresses*, Balthus's *The Mountain* and Jasper Johns's *White Flag*. In addition, he secured collections of work by Paul



Philippe de Montebello.

Klee and Clyfford Still, as well as the Annenberg Collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings and the Gelman Collection of modern paintings. Early this year, de Montebello also worked out a resolution with Italy in the widespread antiquities scandals also involving the Getty Museum, the Boston MFA and others. As part of the deal, the Met returned 21 disputed antiquities to Italy, including, in January, the prized Euphronios krater in exchange for the long-term loan of four works [see box].

De Montebello joined the museum staff as a curatorial assistant in 1963. From 1969 to 1974, he served as director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the only part of his professional life spent outside the Met. Three years after his return, he became director. In 1998 he also became CEO, reflecting the large role he played in the museum's business affairs. De Montebello plans to work on international museum projects after leaving the Met.

Over the years, heirs of the collectors have attempted to lay claim to works, usually while on view in other countries. Shchukin's and Morosov's holdings were nationalized by Lenin in 1918, after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

In response to Russia's concern, British officials rushed through legislation safeguarding the artworks against possible claims. The law was to have taken effect in February, after the show's opening, but was instead pushed up to Dec. 31. The move appeased Russian officials, and on Jan. 9 the Russian government gave its consent for the works to travel to England. The show opened as scheduled on Jan. 26 and will remain on view through Apr. 18.

"From Russia" explores the relationship between French and Russian art between 1870 and 1925 through 120 works by such artists as Matisse, Gauguin, van Gogh, Renoir, Kandinsky, Malevich and Goncharova. One section is devoted to 13 works collected by Morosov and 23 by Shchukin, including Matisse's *The Dance*, once owned by Shchukin. The works are gathered from the collections of four museums: the Pushkin Museum and the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and the Hermitage and State Russian Gallery in St. Petersburg.

Not to be deterred, before the show even opened to the public, André-Marc Delocque-Fourcaud, grandson of Shchukin, and Pierre Konowaloff, great-grandson of Morosov, who are both French citizens, issued a joint statement calling attention to "the extremely violent way in which these extraordinary collections, gathered over many years by our forefathers, were taken." Instead of restitution, they are seeking "an agreement [with Russia] . . . that reasonably compensates and pays a percentage of the material benefits that accrue from exploitation of the works." According to *Bloomberg.com*, the pair has tried, unsuccessfully, on the occasion of exhibitions in Paris, Rome and Los Angeles, to win a percentage of the proceeds garnered by the exhibitions.

—Stephanie Cash

Brits Scramble for Russian Show

Relations between Russia and Britain have been looking very Cold War these days, from a standoff related to the murder in London of former K.G.B. officer Alexander Litvinenko by another Russian agent to the near cancellation of an exhibition of Russian art at London's Royal Academy of Arts. Late last year, Moscow had threatened to pull the plug on "From Russia: French and Russian Master Paintings 1870-1925" unless guaranteed that the works would be protected from seizure and lawsuits by descendants of czarist-era collectors Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morosov.

The Price of Free Admission

Are the French becoming less cultured than their yogurt? *Quelle horreur!* In an attempt to bring in more visitors, France is currently experimenting with free admission to the permanent collections of 18 national museums. It's an idea that

Classical Antiquities Coming and Going

In an agreement with the Italian government, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in mid-January returned to Italy 21 antiquities whose provenance has been questioned in recent years. Most prominent among the works is the famous Euphronios krater (ca. 515 B.C.), a large red-figure vessel that was allegedly unearthed by tomb robbers in 1971. It was sold to the Met in 1972 for \$1 million by the American dealer Robert Hecht, who is on trial in Rome for trafficking in stolen antiquities. The Euphronios krater is currently on view at Rome's Quirinale Palace [through Mar. 2], along with a number of other recently repatriated antiquities from the Getty, the Princeton University Art Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and other institutions from around the globe.

To acknowledge the Met's cooperation, the Italian government has loaned the museum four antiquities for a four-year period. Included is a vase in the shape of a woman's head (500-490 B.C.) by the potter Charinos, believed to be a member of Euphronios's workshop. Also part of the loan is a kylix (drinking cup), 515-510 B.C., signed by Euxitheos as potter and Oltos as painter, bearing an elaborate scene of the gods on Mount Olympus, as well as a kylix with images of a man, a sea creature and snakes, attributed to the Typhon Painter (560-500 B.C.), plus a krater by an anonymous hand, depicting Oedipus (4th century B.C.).

The works are now on view in the Met's recently refurbished Greek and Roman Galleries. The renovation was funded to a significant degree by philanthropists and museum trustees Shelby White and her late husband Leon Levy. White's important private collection of Classical antiquities has also been the focus of investigations by Italian authorities over the past 18 months. She has not been accused of any wrongdoing, but the provenances of some works in her possession have been called into question. In an unprecedented transaction between the Italian government and a private collector, White, on Jan. 16, handed over to the Italian consulate on Park Avenue nine pieces from her collection. Among them are a red-figure vase signed by Euphronios, another signed by Eucharides (both ca. 500 B.C.), and a Roman fresco fragment (50-30 B.C.) showing a detail of what appears to be an elaborate architectural folly. A tenth object, a 5th-century B.C. vase, will be returned to Italy in 2010.

—David Ebony



Charinos, Head Vase, Attic, 500-490 B.C.



Euxitheos/Oltos, Kylix (drinking cup), Attic, 515-510 B.C.

conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy campaigned for as a way to democratize culture and invigorate interest in the arts, particularly in the younger generation. Through June 30, instead of the usual \$9-12, most visitors won't have to pay anything to get into such museums as the Guimet, which focuses on Asian art, the Cluny, a medieval collection, and the science museum Arts et Métiers. Other venues are offering free access only to visitors age 18 to 25 on certain evenings. In Paris those include the Centre Pompidou (Wednesdays), the Musée d'Orsay (Thursdays) and the Quai Branly (Saturdays). The Louvre already offers free access on Friday evenings to visitors age 25 and under, and all national museums (33 total) are free to all visitors on the first Sunday of each month.

In Britain, museum attendance has reportedly risen by 50 percent since fees were lifted in 2001, and the first year saw a 62-percent jump. (Since Sweden ended free admissions to 19 national museums last year, it has reported a decline in attendance of almost 20 percent—from 8 million to 6.5 million.) Museum officials note that the loss in revenue from ticket fees must be offset by an increase in funding. British museums, for example, receive VAT tax refunds when they offer free admission to the public. French culture ministry spokesperson Christine André told the press that to make up for lost ticket sales the initiative would require about \$320 million from the government and private donors. Critics have argued that many visitors already get in free on special evenings, and that the initiative will only benefit tourists who don't pay the taxes that help support the museums. —Stephanie Cash

Santa Fe Biennial Taking Chances

Organized by independent curator Lance Fung, this year's SITE Santa Fe Biennial, the seventh installment, on view June 22-Oct. 26, promises to be full of surprises. The list of the 27 participating artists from around the world, recently released to the press, has already raised eyebrows in the art world, as it is almost completely devoid of familiar names. In a departure from conventional biennial procedures that routinely tap art stars to move tickets, Fung, operating with an approximately \$800,000 budget, decided to focus exclusively on emerging artists. And, as with "The Snow Show," for which Fung

paired artists and architects to create collaborative projects in Finnish Lapland (2004) and at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy, the Santa Fe exhibition will be a team effort. Rather than selecting the artists directly, he asked numerous nonprofit, international contemporary art institutions to suggest one or two artists to be included in the show. From these candidates he chose 27 artists nominated by 18 institutions; these institutions will act as co-curatorial partners in the endeavor. Among those on board are Hiroshi Fuji, selected by Japan's Art Tower Mito; Bharti Kher, chosen by England's Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art; Piero Golia, proposed by Turin's Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo; and Fabien Giraud and Raphaël Sibony, submitted by Paris's Palais de Tokyo.

In another unusual move, at a time when many artists have their works fabricated, Fung requires that all the artists create their pieces by hand in Santa Fe. Working in a variety of mediums, and each allotted a \$7,500 budget, the artists are obliged to come to New Mexico at least three weeks in advance of the exhibition and produce works either within the SITE Santa Fe building or off-site. For that purpose, Fung has enlisted the architecture team Tod Williams and Billie Tsien to redesign SITE's interior especially for the biennial. The model for their distinctive scheme, featuring a series of ramps and zigzagging galleries, was recently unveiled in Santa Fe.

In a move to counter the hyper-commercialism of today's art world, Fung requires that no artist accept funding from a commercial gallery for the SITE work. He underscores the specificity of the event by also stipulating that none of the works can be sold after the exhibition, and all are to be destroyed.

His unorthodox approach to the biennial has raised some concerns among SITE's board members. However, Laura Steward Heon, SITE's director and chief curator, who chose Fung as the organizer, told *A.i.A.* that part of SITE's mission is to take risks, and that the biennial, relatively modest in scale, presents the opportunity to innovate. Although the format might seem to invite chaos, much about the work the artists will produce in Santa Fe is known from their proposals. Still, it seems that more than a little positive musing on the laws of chance will be part of the event, and it's not for nothing that Fung has titled the show "Lucky Number Seven." —David Ebony

East River Waterfalls

It is surprisingly easy for New Yorkers to forget that they live on the coast, and never more than a few miles from a body of water. Danish artist Olafur Eliasson intends to change that, at least for four months this summer and fall, by drawing attention to the East River. Commissioned by the Public Art Fund, his new \$10-15-million project, *The New York City Waterfalls*, consists of four temporary man-made waterfalls installed along New York City shores: off Pier 35 on Manhattan's Lower East Side; at the base of the Brooklyn Bridge and between Piers 4 and 5, both in Brooklyn Heights; and just west of the ferry landing on Governors Island.

Ranging from 90 to 120 feet tall, the waterfalls will be operational from mid-July through mid-October, from 7 A.M. to 10 P.M., and spotlighted at night. River water will be pumped, using renewable energy, from submerged pools covered in fine mesh (so as not to disturb aquatic life) and will flow at 35,000 gallons per minute over an aluminum scaffolding. According to his artist's statement, Eliasson aims "to make nature tangible and relevant," a recurring objective in many of his light- and weather-themed installations. *The New York City Waterfalls* will be visible from parks and bikeways that run along the river, as well as from the free ferries that travel between Lower Manhattan and Staten Island and Governors Island. The sightseeing Circle Line Downtown boats will also offer daily trips that pass by the waterfalls.

—Leigh Anne Miller



Rendering of Olafur Eliasson's project at the Brooklyn Bridge and (below) Piers 4 and 5.



New Chief for Venice Biennale

Emerging from their first meeting on Jan. 16, 2008, the board of the Venice Biennale, led by newly appointed president Paolo Baratta, announced the names of four of the six artistic directors who will guide the institution's upcoming exhibitions and festivals. Baratta attributed the board's unusually productive deliberations to a desire to avoid "transitory situations." Nine days later, as many had predicted, the 20-month-old center-left government of Prime Minister Romano Prodi fell. What's the connection? The collapse of Prodi's coalition opens the door to parliamentary elections and the likely return to power of Silvio Berlusconi, who is leading in Italian polls. It was during Berlusconi's 2001-06 administration that Baratta was forced to step down before the conclusion of his first stint as the Biennale president, following a series of bitter clashes with the conservative ministry of cul-

ture, among them a conflict over the naming of the 2003 visual arts director [see "Front Page," Feb. '02].

Apparently prizing continuity as well as efficiency, the board determined that incumbent directors Marco Müller (cinema), Maurizio Scaparro (theater) and Ismael Ivo (dance) will retain their positions for terms of varying lengths. Aaron Betsky (the director of the Cincinnati Art Museum and, before that, of the Netherlands Architecture Institute in Rotterdam) will direct the 2008 Architecture Biennale, which opens to the public on Sept. 14 under the title "Out There: Architecture Beyond Building." While new to the directors' circle, Betsky, like Baratta, is a Biennale veteran: he curated the Dutch architecture pavilion on three occasions, winning the Golden Lion for best national participation in 2002. As we go to press, there is no word on when the directors of music and visual arts will be named. Robert Storr, the 2007 visual arts director, has made his disinclination to return more than clear in an interview in January's *Art Newspaper*.

The Biennale administration's smooth launch validated the

► widespread relief that greeted the announcement of Baratta's return to the presidency. During his 1998-2002 tenure, the Cambridge-trained economist successfully guided the Biennale's initial transformation from a government agency wholly dependent on public funding to a semi-private foundation. Harald Szeemann's two well received visual arts Biennali, 1999 and 2001, took place during Baratta's tenure, which also saw the rehabilitation of derelict sections of the Arsenale for use as exhibition and performance spaces. Among the returning president's projects is the long-delayed initiation of year-round programming in the Arsenale (which will require heating the vast structure—no mean undertaking). Asked by a reporter for the *Corriere del Veneto* if he foresaw the Biennale collaborating with the ambitious contemporary art center planned for the Punta della Dogana by François Pinault, Baratta slyly replied that he had no objection to the word "competition." In the event, when he looks over his shoulder, it may be Berlusconi, not Pinault, whom Baratta sees looming. —Marcia E. Vetrocq

NEA Budget Boost for '08

On Dec. 26, 2007, President Bush signed the fiscal year 2008 Omnibus appropriations bill allocating \$144.7 million for the National Endowment for the Arts, an increase of \$20.3 million over last year's funding. Representing a 16-percent increase, it is the largest boost for the NEA since 1979 and the highest level of funding in 13 years. The agency's highest appropriation level was \$175.9 million in 1992. The first round of grants for FY 2008 will be announced in late spring.

The bill also includes changes in the NEA-administered Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Program of the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, which authorizes a large increase in federal indemnity. The program was created in 1975 to facilitate international exhibitions. The recent increase is for a domestic component to help defray skyrocketing insurance costs for U.S. museums that loan works to one another.

NYC Art Fairs: Ready, Set, Go...

On Mar. 27, the Armory Show kicks off its tenth presentation on Manhattan's West Side. This year, 160 galleries will set up on

Pier 94 [through Mar. 30], the same venue that brought the fair together under a single roof last year. To celebrate its decade mark, the Armory has commissioned John Waters and Mary Heilmann to create limited edition commemorative prints. Waters and Heilmann were once represented by, respectively, Colin de Land and Pat Hearn, the Armory's late co-founders, and the sale of these prints will benefit the cancer foundation and the MoMA acquisition fund established in the dealers' names.

As usual, a number of satellite events will also take place, with three new fairs joining the roster. Partnering with the Armory, the Swiss-based invitational fair Volta [Mar. 27-30] makes its New York debut, after three years at Art Basel, at 7 W. 34th Street, opposite the Empire State Building. Unlike previous editions, Volta in New York will

be organized as a curated exhibition by the directorial team of Amanda Coulson and Christian Viveros-Fauné, with each of its estimated 50 exhibitors featuring a single artist. The Chicago-based Bridge Art Fair [Mar. 27-30], having previously appeared in Miami and London, will occupy the Tunnel, a converted railroad tunnel and former nightclub on West 27th Street in Chelsea. Art Fair Now [Mar. 27-30], which premiered in Miami last December, will be at Hotel 30/30 on 30th Street between Madison and Park.

Returning fairs include DiVA [Mar. 22-30], this year dispersed throughout Chelsea in shipping containers [for info go to divafair.com/ny_08/]; an invitation-only edition of Scope [Mar. 26-30] hosted again in a glass pavilion in Lincoln Center's Damrosch Park; Pulse [Mar. 27-30] in a new location on Pier 40 on the Hudson; Red Dot [Mar. 27-30] at

the Park South Hotel on East 28th Street between Park and Lexington; and Fountain [Mar. 27-31] just south of the Armory at 660 12th Ave. (L.A. Art in NY will not return this year.)

Taking advantage of the influx of visitors (and, more important, collectors), galleries in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn hope to lure fairgoers over the bridge on Saturday, Mar. 29, when they will stay open until 11 P.M. (For info see the RAW gallery guide published by the Williamsburg Gallery Association, available at Armory, Scope, Pulse and Fountain.) Additionally, and in conjunction with the final weekend of "Unmonumental," the New Museum's inaugural exhibition, over a dozen Lower East Side galleries will be open Sunday, Mar. 30, from noon to 6 P.M. Maps are available at the New Museum and participating galleries.

—Stephanie Gonzalez-Turner

Close Ready for His Close-up

This has been an exceptionally fruitful season for Chuck Close. His name has appeared recently on everything from theater marquees to wine labels. A version of his exhibition of paintings and tapestries, "Family and Others," which appeared last fall at London's White Cube, is currently on view at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg [though Apr. 13]. A comprehensive monograph by Christopher Finch, *Chuck Close: Work*, was recently published by Prestel. Close also created the label for *Musée*, an inaugural Merlot blend from New York's Bedell Cellars, in a design that features one of his daguerreotypes of grapes.

Perhaps the most revealing look at Close and his work is *Chuck Close*, a feature-length documentary produced and directed by Marion Cajori that screened in art houses across the country this winter. Cajori spent four years filming Close at work and at home, but she died in 2006 of cancer, at age 56, during the picture's postproduction phase. Ken Kobland, Cajori's longtime collaborating cinematographer, completed the project.

An insightful study, the movie centers on Close's working process. It chronicles his method as he completes a large self-portrait over the course of 82 days. Close and his assistants grid up a large color Polaroid image. Close then transposes onto the corresponding squares of the canvas grid the tones in the photo, using multicolor circles, ovals and polygonal shapes. In many scenes, the artist appears in his New York City studio seated in a wheelchair before an enormous canvas hung on a movable easel. With a special contraption affixed to his nearly paralyzed arm and hand, Close executes dazzling, evocative brushwork as the image comes ever closer to fruition, stage by stage. Listening to Nina Simone and other jazz vocalists while he works, he exudes a youthful exuberance and energy.

Interspersed with scenes of the artist at work are interviews with his friends and colleagues, including Philip Glass, Janet Fish, Kirk Varnedoe, Mark Greenwald, Elizabeth Murray, Arne Glimcher, Dorothea Rockburne, Lucas Samaras, Brice Marden and Robert Storr. A number of the artists interviewed offer rare glimpses into their own studios and working methods. Some of them, as well as Close himself, recall his early years, when he was one of the few figurative painters to make an impact on Man-

hattan's avant-garde scene in the 1960s and '70s. He made his solo debut in 1970 at Bykert, a gallery with a stable of almost exclusively abstract artists. The meticulous, large-scale, black-and-white portraits he showed early on were unlike anything being done at the time. Some of the talking heads in this film are rather redundant in their gushing praise of the artist and insistence on the importance of his unique path and singular achievement. Accolades from friends are hardly necessary when the many works by Close that appear throughout the film make these points stunningly clear.

Close's wife, Leslie, provides some personal details about the artist and offers a few private glimpses into their many years together. These are among the best and most moving scenes in the film. She gives a vivid account of Close's health crisis in 1988, when a spinal-column blood clot suddenly left him partially paralyzed and permanently wheelchair-bound. She insisted to the doctors and nurses that the way to set him on the road to recovery was by means of a paintbrush. Recent scenes of the couple in their Hamptons summer home and studio impart a kind of idyllic gloss to the film. One of the most memorable images, with Philip Glass's luscious score wafting in the background, shows the artist's barnlike studio from across a field of sunflowers, with a giant, half-finished portrait of Paul Cadmus visible through the open door.

—David Ebony

[Chuck Close (2007), an Art Kaleidoscope Foundation production, was produced and directed by Marion Cajori. Directors of photography: Mead Hunt, Ken Kobland and David Leitner. Music by Philip Glass performed by Bruce Levingston.]



The artist at work, from the film *Chuck Close*.