

Peggy Guggenheim COLLECTION

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Press release

VENICE/VENEZIA: CALIFORNIA ART FROM THE PANZA COLLECTION AT THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

to open 2 September at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice

Dates: September 2, 2000 - January 7, 2001

Press Conference: Friday 1 September, 12 midday, followed by buffet;

Panel: Thomas Krens (Director, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation), Germano Celant (Curatore), Dott. Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, Dott. Thomas Rueschen (Vice-Director Deutsche Bank Milano).

A selection of masterworks drawn from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Panza Collection will be on view at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection September 2, 2000 through January 7, 2001. One of the preeminent collections of art from the 1960s and 1970s, the Panza Collection includes many of the best examples of Minimalist painting and sculpture, conceptual art, process and postminimal art, and perceptual environments from the postwar period. This presentation of eighteen works highlights the contribution of seven Californian artists whose work produces a heightened awareness of sensory experience.

In keeping with Venice's artistic legacy and the magical quality of luminous sky and water found there, this exhibition focuses on a group of artists who have worked and exhibited in Venice Beach and Santa Monica. The maritime light characteristic of the area inspired in local artists an interest in light effects and how they are perceived. The artists featured in the exhibition are Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, Bruce Nauman, Maria Nordman, Eric Orr, James Turrell and Doug Wheeler. They create environments which make palpable and recognizable sensory stimuli as simple as light and sound, challenging the isolated nature of the traditional art object by treating art as part of a larger architectural, urban, or natural environment.

This is a landmark exhibition which illuminates for Italian audiences the significant contribution of these Californian artists to the development of contemporary art as well as the profound impact the Panzas have had on the appreciation and understanding of this complex and awe-inspiring work. A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition, containing essays by Germano Celant and Giuseppe Panza and entries on each artist in the exhibition. The catalogue is published in English and Italian by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

Venice/Venezia: California Art from the Panza Collection at the Guggenheim Museum is sponsored by

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The acclaimed Italian collector Dr. Giuseppe Panza began forming his unique collection with his wife in 1956, and it has come to be regarded as one of the most ambitious collections of postwar American twentieth-century art in the world. In 1991 and 1992 the Guggenheim Foundation was fortunate to acquire through purchase, gift and loan a generous portion of this unparalleled collection. "The Panza Collection", stated Thomas Krens, director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, "is without a doubt the most significant single collection documenting the important artistic achievements of the 1960s and the 1970s. We are pleased to present a selection to Italian and international audiences and

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in doing so to honor the vision and generous patronage of Dr. and Mrs. Panza. This exhibition, together with the presentation of over 100 works from the collection at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao later this fall, offers an unprecedented opportunity to view such a substantial portion of the Collection, and is a long-awaited result of the ongoing relationship between the Guggenheim Museum and the Panzas which began over a decade ago.”

Venice/Venezia, curated by Germano Celant, Senior Curator of Contemporary Art, and Assistant Curator Susan Cross, will present to Guggenheim audiences Dr. Panza’s prescient vision as a collector through the exciting and innovative work of a generation of artists who changed the direction of twentieth century art and whose work Panza championed when they were not widely known or shown in the United States or Europe. In the mid ‘70s Panza expanded his support by commissioning several site-specific light installations by Irwin and Turrell, including an interperformative sculpture by Maria Nordman, for the family villa at Varese. These works are now on permanent loan from the Guggenheim Museum to the Fondo per l’Ambiente Italiano which maintains the Villa Menafoglio Litta Panza and its collection and opens to the public on 15 September 2000.

“Panza’s journey in search of art, from Italy to the United States, from one coast to the other, from New York to Los Angeles,” states Celant, “has always been inspired to seek the inner spirit of visual research. His aesthetic curiosity has always directed itself to the essence, where time and space dissolve and produce a primal energy that is at once breath and blinding light, ultra-bright and ultra-perceptible. The idea is to seek a mystical convergence of contrasting energies, something that might bring experience and sight into dialogue, where all that matters is the zero point of silence and luminous radiance: a union of diverse spaces spanning from coast to coast, from culture to culture, from Milan to New York, from the sky of Venice, California to the sky of Venice, Italy.”

The Panza Collection represents a watershed in the history of art. Amidst the changing political and cultural landscapes of the ‘60s, the art world also became a place of transformation as artists challenged the nature and content of art, its objecthood, and how we look at and experience it. In the wake of the Abstract Expressionists’ prominence, the Minimalists considered art in its most essential form, placing meaning in its actual physical and material qualities, and rejecting romantic notions of the original and the aura of the artist’s hand. Conceptual artists questioned further the value of a discrete object and began making works which emphasized the idea over the physical product. Perceptual, environmental and “light-and space” artists, whose work will be featured at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, also contributed to the dematerialization of the object, often using light and sound, or their absence, as a medium, first in conjunction with other materials and later as the content of the work itself. These works emphasize the viewer’s perceptual experience and provoke a heightened awareness of one’s self. Often the works focus on a specific experiential context, extending art into the experience of a room or space itself. Several sculptural objects will be on view and will demonstrate the artist’s interest in engaging the viewer and the surrounding space. Maria Nordman is constructing a work, from a drawing of 1968-1969, on the occasion of the exhibition. In addition, several large-scale, free-standing or site-specific light environments will be represented by artists’ drawings or plans.

Larry Bell’s Untitled (20 Inch Cube), 1968, a glass cube treated with a metallic coating has a faint brown sheen which maintains the glass’ transparency while differentiating it from the clear plexiglass stand it rests on. It appears at first to be floating in mid air. The solid cube fluctuates in appearance as visitors can see through it as well as see their own reflection. The play of light as it bounces off and penetrates the cube makes the surrounding space and light integral to the work.

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Robert Irwin's Plastic Disc, 1968-69, an acrylic rondel, further confounds the boundary between object and environment. Installed at a distance from the wall and lit with four incandescent lamps, the work appears to hover in the room; its edges blur into the four overlapping shadows formed by the light, and the viewer is unable to differentiate object from atmosphere.

Lighted Performance Box, 1969, by Bruce Nauman, is a vertical aluminum box standing six and a half feet high. Inside, hidden from view, a 1000 watt spotlight projects a square of light onto the ceiling above the sculpture. The viewer's attention moves back and forth between the light and the object and must recreate in his or her mind the concealed lamp in order to connect the visible with the invisible or "finish" the work. This action is the performance indicated in the title.

Eric Orr is represented both by a sculpture and drawings of his larger light environments, such as Zero Mass, an elliptical room made of paper or fabric. The only illumination in the room is filtered through translucent walls. Visitors first see nothing but darkness, but after a period of time the eyes adapt to darkness and slowly the space appears light, though a sense of depth is denied by a lack of corners. The artist has referred to the room as "the Void."

Installed at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Edge of Light, 1988 will illustrate Orr's interest in the transcendental effect of light. A 40 inch bronze panel painted with gold, this piece emits an intense sliver of light through a narrow slot in its center. The natural luminosity of the gilt juxtaposed with the fluorescent light behind the panel stems from the artist's fascination with the alchemist's attempts to turn base metals into gold.

Among the drawings by Maria Nordman on view is the plan for the room she made for the Villa Menafoglio Litta Panza. Once part of the villa stables, a room has been subdivided into three human-scaled sections, with two doors; cuts in the exterior wall permit both light and sound to enter it. Each door has a mirrored window that reflects both the visitors and their background prior their entry into the larger space. Each visitor experiences the room differently, depending on the sunlight, the time of day, the duration of the visit. The work is therefore an interperformative sculpture, solely illuminated by sunlight and touched by the sounds of the moment. Among the many questions the work raises is the definition of what is material and immaterial.

A new work for Venice: on the occasion of the present exhibition Nordman has produced a sculpture conceived more than thirty years ago, Untitled 1968-2000. Before being exhibited on the Peggy Guggenheim Collection's terrace on the Grand Canal, the work is placed in Campo San Barnaba, Venice, from 1pm on Friday September 1st to dawn on Monday September 4th, 2000, under the auspices of the Comune di Venezia, Assessorato alla Cultura. The work may be viewed in a museum, where visitors expect to encounter a work of art, or outdoors, where people come and go, live and work, such as Campo San Barnaba; Here work is presented 24 hours a day, a whole solar cycle. Nordman uses solely solar light in order to make the visitor focus on the relativity of perceptive conditions. Minute by minute therefore, its meaning, is being created by those who encounter it.

James Turrell's Afrum I, 1967, is the earliest work in the show. Consisting of a square of light projected into the corner of a dark room, the installation focuses on how light is perceived. Though the light is a flat projection, the viewer sees it as a three-dimensional cube. While Irwin's disc dematerializes the object, Turrell's piece makes light material.

Doug Wheeler's environments are too large to recreate in the small exhibition rooms, and thus are represented instead by his beautifully crafted drawings. Inspired in part by the desert and the dramatic

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sky in Arizona, Wheeler's PSAD Synthetic Desert III, 1971 creates the sense of a hovering solid of light in an interior environment. The artist has made clear that his work is not about illusion; he stages real light effects. Like Orr's Zero Mass, many of Wheeler's works, including Lumineferous Space, 1968-75, are based on the Ganzfeld effect - a blank visual field with no frame of reference for the eye. Walking into a work by Wheeler, visitors often feel as if they have entered an infinite space and may hesitate for fear of walking over some unseen edge.

The exhibition and catalogue introduce a series of exhibitions this fall featuring the Guggenheim Foundation holdings of works from the Panza Collection. A significant portion of the collection, whether purchased, given or loaned, will be presented in three spectacular settings. The first of these, 'Venice/Venezia: California Art from the Panza Collection at the Guggenheim Museum' at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, is the Grand Canal of Venice. The second is the former Panza home, Villa Menafoglio Litta Panza in Varese, now the property of FAI (the Italian heritage preservation society), where several site-specific works (including installations by Robert Irwin, Maria Nordman, and James Turrell, all represented in the present exhibition) are on permanent loan from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Thirdly, and perhaps most sensationally, "Changing Perceptions: The Panza Collection at the Guggenheim Museum," including over 100 works by 22 artists, opens in the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao in October. The catalogues that accompany these three exhibitions reach beyond the souvenir of single events, and are instead the most exhaustive scholarship to date on the Panza Collection at the Guggenheim Foundation.

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