PEGGY AND KIESLER: THE COLLECTOR AND THE VISIONARY
10 OCTOBER 2003 – 9 JANUARY 2005

Peggy and Kiesler: The Collector and The Visionary inaugurates a series of new exhibition spaces at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice. Organized in partnership with the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, the exhibition is co-curated by Susan Davidson (Curator, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum) and Dieter Bogner (Chairman, Kiesler Private Foundation).

Peggy Guggenheim’s New York museum-gallery Art of This Century is legendary as much for the extraordinarily innovative design of its exhibition spaces as for the groundbreaking collection and exhibitions of avant-garde European and American art that it hosted. Invited by Peggy Guggenheim in February 1942 to convert two 57th Street tailor shops into galleries for her already formidable collection of early modernist European art, visionary Austrian architect and artist Frederick Kiesler created what has come to be considered an architectural masterpiece, exploring radical new possibilities of exhibition design. Kiesler’s theory of unity between art and environment led him to design three distinct gallery spaces, Abstract, Surrealist and Kinetic, the interiors of which were conceived as extensions of the imaginary space and content of the works of art themselves.

Following the landmark inaugural show of October-November 1942, Peggy Guggenheim went on to organize more than 50 exhibitions in the Daylight gallery of Art of This Century. Their historical significance is unparalleled. She presented and introduced to a New York audience the work of established Europeans such as Jean Arp, Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, Jean Hélion, Hans Richter and Theo Van Doesburg, before discovering and promoting the work of a younger group of emerging New York-based artists who would shape the course of modern art. William Baziotes, David Hare, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still were each given début solo shows at Art of This Century. More often than not, their work would first appear in the gallery’s Salon exhibitions, a system Guggenheim introduced to America, inviting important artworld figures such as Alfred H. Barr, Jr., André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Piet Mondrian and James Johnson Sweeney to serve as jury members. The presence of her collection in New York in the environment created specifically for it by Kiesler was one of the determining factors in the development of New York painting in the mid-20th century.

Peggy and Kiesler: The Collector and The Visionary is the first exhibition to consider in depth the legacy of the collaboration between Peggy Guggenheim and Frederick Kiesler. Based on an exhibition of Kiesler’s designs for the Art of This Century gallery shown at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, 2002-2003, it presents extensive archival material including over 150 original architectural drawings, exhibition announcements and catalogues, letters, invoices, documents and photographs. Examples of Kiesler’s famous ‘correalistic’ furniture is shown in the exhibition galleries alongside a number of paintings and sculptures that made their first appearance at Art of This Century. Significantly, this exhibition is presented in the context of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, in the presence of the many masterpieces shown at Art of This Century, thereby representing a unique opportunity to study the unprecedented synthesis of architecture and art that the gallery created.

Continuing a collaboration that began with the Frankfurt presentation, the designers of casino.container (Uwe Wagner and Claudia Hoffmann) have adapted the gallery space of the

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museum into an “open archive”. They have devised an innovative special presentation method to facilitate and increase the visitor’s visual and interactive contact with the materials. Letters, estimates and preparatory sketches for the different Art of This Century galleries can be viewed alongside photographs of the same, realized spaces.

The exhibition will continue through January 2005 and is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication, including essays by renowned Pollock scholar Francis V. O’Connor, Susan Davidson, Dieter Bogner, Valentina Sonzogni, Jasper Sharp, Don Quaintance and Philip Rylands, Director of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection.

The Frederick Kiesler Center, Vienna, holds more than 3,000 sketches, drawings, plans and paintings, in addition to over 1,000 photographs, manuscripts, letters, documents, catalogues and books related to Kiesler’s projects from the 1920s to the 1960s. Its mission is to disseminate the work of Frederick Kiesler to a greater public by means of exhibitions and symposia, while making available its holdings for scholarly studies and publications.

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# 143, October 2004