

## The exhibitions of Pontus Hultén

Presented by Magnus af Petersens

26/10/2009 - Auditorium MACBA - 7 pm



**Pontus Hultén (1924, Stockholm-2006)** studied Art History in Copenhagen and Stockholm with a dissertation on *Vermeer and Spinoza*. Director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm (1957-72), one of the most vibrant art institutions in the 1960s, Hultén curated a series of pioneering thematic as well as monographic exhibitions that promoted the museum as an elastic and open space. This concept of the open museum led him to curate interdisciplinary exhibitions, especially at the Centre Pompidou, where he was appointed Director (1973-81). Hultén pruned the integration of art, literature, film, science, theater and music within what he called a ‘museum without walls’ embracing concerts, talks, debates, screenings etc. His use of transparent structures for display created a more direct confrontation between people and works. Through large-scale survey exhibitions, Hultén wanted to make shows both complex and accessible for a wide audience. Artistic Director of the Palazzo Grassi in Venice (1984-90) and Director of the Kunst-und Ausstellungshalle der BDR in Bonn (1990) and the Museum Jean Tinguely in Basel (1995), in 1985 Hultén also

created along with Daniel Buren, Serge Fauchereau and Sarkis, an ambitious laboratory for interdisciplinary knowledge, the Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques in Paris.

### A selected chronology of Pontus Hultén’s group exhibitions

1955: *Le Mouvement*, Galerie Denise René, Paris

1961-62: *Bewogen Beweging (Movement in Art)*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

1962: *4 Americans: Jasper Johns, Alfred Leslie, Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Stankiewicz*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm

1963-64: *The Museum of our wishes*, Moderna Museet

1964: *American Pop Art: 107 forms of Hope and Despair*, Moderna Museet

1965: *Inner and Outer Space; Sculpture for the Blind and the Seeing*, Moderna Museet

1966: *Dada; She- A Cathedral*, Moderna Museet

1968: *The Machine as seen at the end of the Mechanical Age*, MoMa, New York; *Andy Warhol*, Moderna Museet; *Pentacle*, Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Paris

1969: *Poetry must be made by all! Transform the world!*, Moderna Museet

1971: *Alternatives Suedoises*, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; *Utopians and Visionaries, 1871-1981*, Moderna Museet

1977-1981: *Paris-New York, Paris-Moscow : 1900-1930, Paris-Berlin, 1900-1933, Paris 1937-Paris 1957*, Centre Pompidou, Paris

1980: *Les Réalismes 1919-1939*, Centre Pompidou

1982: *Sleeping Beauty*, Guggenheim museum

1984: *The Automobile and Culture*, MoCA, Los Angeles

1986: *Futurismo e futurismi*, Palazzo Grassi, Venice

1987: *Effet Arcimboldo*, Palazzo Grassi

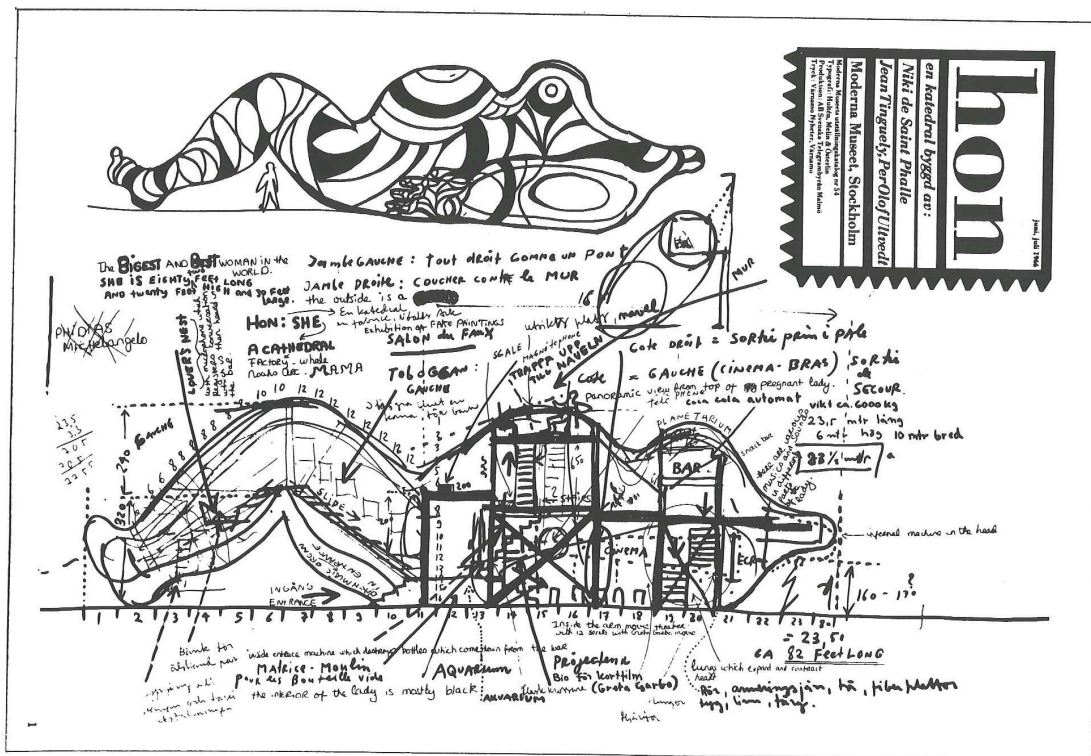
1989: *Arte Italiana (Presenze 1900-1945)*, Palazzo Grassi

1992: *Territorium Artis*, Kunst-und Ausstellungshalle der BDR, Bonn

2001: *The True Story of the Vandals*, Museum Vandalorum, Värnamo

#### Major monographic exhibitions include :

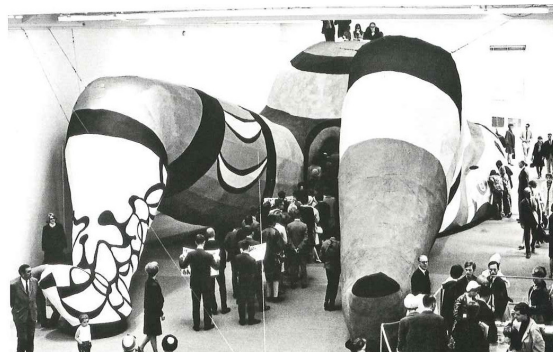
Salvador Dalí, Marcel Duchamp, Öyvind Fahlström, Sam Francis, On Kawara, Ellsworth Kelly, Paul Klee, Fernand Leger, Kazimir Malevitch, Claes Oldenburg, Jackson Pollock, Niki de Saint Phalle, Vladimir Tatlin, Jean Tinguely, Jacques Villon, Andy Warhol etc.



**SHE - A Cathedral, Moderna Museet, Stockholm  
June 4 to September 4, 1966**

Original title: HON - en katedral  
 Artists: Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, Per Olof Ultvedt  
 Curator: Pontus Hultén

In the early spring of '66, I finally managed to bring Jean Tinguely and Niki de St. Phalle to Stockholm to work with the Swedish artist Per Olof Ultvedt and myself. Martial Raysse withdrew at the last minute - he'd been selected for the French pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The idea was that there would be no preparation, nobody would have a particular project in mind. We spent the first day discussing how to put together a series of "stations," as in Stations of the Cross. The next day we started to build the station "Women Take Power." It didn't work. I was desperate. At lunch I suggested we build a woman lying on her back, inside of which would be several installations. You would enter through her sex. Everyone was very enthusiastic. We managed to finish her in five weeks, inside and outside. She was 28 meters long and about 8 meters high. Inside there was: a milk-bar, in the right breast; a planetarium showing the Milky Way, in the left breast; a mechanical man watching TV, in her heart; a movie-house showing a Greta Garbo film, in her arm; and an art gallery with fake old masters, in one leg. The day of the press preview, we were exhausted; the next day, there was nothing in the newspapers. Then Time wrote a favorable piece and everybody liked her. As Marshall McLuhan said "art is anything you can get away with." The piece seemed to correspond to something in the air, to the much-vaunted "sexual liberation" of that time. **Pontus Hultén**<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> The Hang of it - Museum Director Pontus Hultén - Interview by Hans-Ulrich Obrist, ArtForum, April, 1997

**Andy Warhol retrospective  
Moderna Museet, Stockholm  
February 10 to March 17, 1968**

Curator: Pontus Hultén



The Warhol exhibition in Stockholm 1968 was, I think, Andy's first one-man show in a museum. It was a rather complex affair consisting of several parts.

1. The exhibition started outside the museum where the entire facade of the building was covered with a structure, itself covered with masonite whereupon was glued the cow-wallpaper in yellow and shocking-pink.

2. In the main gallery of the museum was an installation where an effort had been made to show certain films parallel with paintings. The films were projected on ultra reflective screens and the paintings were spotlighted so that the light would hit only the paintings' surface. There were only three themes, Flowers, Electric chairs and Marilyns. The films were loops from Empire State Building and other similar films. Andy decided at the last minute to use loops instead of the film reels that had been prepared.

3. The Brillos were stacked in front of the entrance rather high. There were some 100 wooden brillo-boxes made in Sweden according to Andy's instructions ("why don't you make them there?"). As the hundred did not seem enough in the rather big space some cardboard Brillo-boxes were added to the upper part of the stack and at the back. These came from the Factory. I still have one such cardboard box.

4. Bill Klüver worked on the pillows. They were very large, much bigger than those that I have seen later. The problem with the pillows was that helium, the only suitable gas to fill them with, does not exist as a natural product in Europe and is therefore quite expensive in Sweden. Finally, the pillows ended up lying on the floor as gigantic animals that slowly moved with the currents of the air. I enclose a polaroid of the sign concerning the clouds. It says 'Do not touch the clouds. They might burst.' There was a

book, the one you know, which is not to be considered as a catalogue, but as part of the exhibition. It was sold for the equivalent of one dollar. The book is a story in itself, which I can tell later if you are interested.

5. The last part of the exhibition consisted of the showing of all the major films, including *Chelsea Girls*.

Andy was very pleased with the show and donated the copy of *Chelsea Girls*, a big *Flowers* and an *Electric Chair* to the museum. As far as I remember the show did not travel. Andy gave the Brillo-boxes to me. They were stored for many years at the museum. I retrieved them when I moved to Los Angeles. I don't think that the museum today owns any Brillo-boxes. The two paintings that Andy gave to the museum are still in the collection and some other paintings were given and bought later.

**Pontus Hultén**<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *The Pontus Hultén Collection*, Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 2004, p.360.

## Magnus af Petersens

Magnus af Petersens is Curator of Contemporary Art and Team Leader at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden since 2002. He is responsible for the museum's collection of international art from 1965. Prior to this, he was curator at Färgfabriken, Center for Contemporary Art and Architecture and curator at Riksställningar, Swedish Travelling Exhibitions as well as President of Xposeptember, Stockholms Photo festival, and editor of the cultural magazine Hjärnstorm. The exhibitions he has curated include Paul McCarthy. Head Shop/Shop Head (2006), Eclipse - Art in a Dark Age (2008), Clay Ketter (2009), and several smaller art shows, projects and group exhibitions.

'Apart from working at Moderna Museet where Pontus Hultén's legacy is held high, I have a special interest in his ideas of movement in art. From early on, Pontus Hultén had a strong interest in film – the moving image – he also made two films. I think this is relevant when considering some of his exhibitions, like *Movement in Art* (1962) and *She – A Cathedral* (1966) and the *Andy Warhol* retrospective (1968) – where movement, happenings and interactivity played an important part. His way of working very close to the artists is also an inspiration.' **Magnus af Petersens**

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