

ARTS ROUNDUP '84

ART SNOOZE

This was a banner year for exhibitions in L.A. — Laurie Anderson, John Alton, Robert Therrien, Michael Heizer, John Baldessari, Michael Kelley, Lari Pittman, "A Day in the Country," the Newport Biennial, "Neo York," and now Max Beckmann. But exhibitions come and go. Most significant to 1984 was the art that came and stayed.

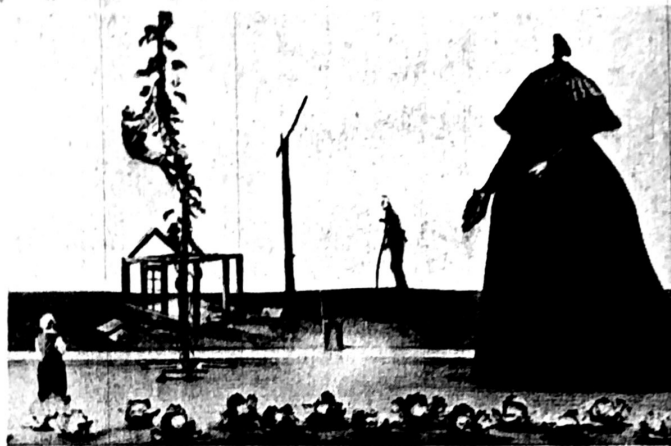
Last February, the Museum of Contemporary Art acquired 80 works of Abstract Expressionist and Pop art from the internationally renowned collection of Count and Countess Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, for \$11 million.

The first of Panza's three collections, it includes six paintings by Jean Fautrier, 12 by Franz Kline, seven by Mark Rothko, 11 by Robert Rauschenberg, 14 by Antonio Tapies — all from the 1950s — as well as four paintings by Roy Lichtenstein, eight by James Rosenquist, and 16 sculptures by George Segal, all from the 1960s. It's a stunning core for a permanent collection of modern and contemporary art, and a coup for L.A. The collection will go on view at the Temporary Contemporary next February.

The art world had barely recovered by June, when the J. Paul Getty Museum bought 18,000 photographs, spanning 1839 to the 1930s, for a rumored \$20 million. They also hired a curator of photographs, Weston Naef, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The respected photography collections of Arnold Crane and Samuel Wagstaff were included in the massive purchase, instantly making L.A. a center for photography in this country.

The Getty Trust also began giving grants to other institutions, such as the L.A. County Museum of Art (\$3 million), UCLA's Museum of Cultural History (\$2 million), Plaza de la Raza (\$500,000), and MoCA (\$3 million).

Since Count Panza has made clear that



A scene from Robert Wilson's *the CIVIL warS*, the one that got away.

he now wants to sell his remaining collection of 440 works — primarily conceptual, minimal and environmental art — for \$22 million, and since a large proportion of that collection is by So Cal phenomenological artists such as Robert Irwin, James Turrell, Doug Wheeler and Maria Nordman, let's hope that next Christmas we'll be able to crow about another miracle: that the entire Panza collection belongs to L.A., a present to MoCA from whomever the powers may be.

—Hunter Drohojowska

THEATER TAKES A DIVE

After the Olympic Arts Festival, the L.A. critical community was holding its breath — and some of us our noses. Would theater in L.A. ever be the same? Having been exposed to the glories of Pina Bausch's Wuppertaler Tanztheater, Ariane Mnouchkine's Theatre du Soleil and Giorgio Strehler's Teatro di Milano, could the perpetrators of L.A. theater continue to have the gall to produce yet

another revival starring a cast of actors hoping to be noticed by casting agents for TV commercials? And the answer — the envelope please — was a resounding yes! You bet your Olympic stubs they could! And we could hardly bring ourselves to attend.

Neither could the public. Not only was attendance off for the bad stuff, it was off for the good stuff. The arts festival had a remarkable effect on this town. It was nearly 100 percent sold out. And then L.A. audiences seemed to have assumed they'd done theater for this year. Good shows such as Randy Newman's *Maybe I'm Doing It Wrong*, Anne Commire's *Melody Sisters* and Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* got splendid reviews, but no audiences. Even *La Cage Aux Folles* is doing disappointing box office. The only major hits in town are Wendy Wasserstein's *Isn't It Romantic?* at the L.A. Stage Company West and Mark Medoff's *Hands of Its Enemy*, which managed to move from the Mark Taper Forum to the Huntington Hartford and is headed for Broadway. But one show features a movie star (Richard Dreyfuss) and the other is pure wonderful entertainment.

Meanwhile in '84, the Broadway transplant *Cats* was rumored to be nearly sold

out until July at the Shubert, where it has yet to open. And producers of serious theater like L.A. Theater Works' Susan Lowenberg were discouraged to the point of distraction by a lack of support from the funding community, despite audiences who pack the house at her tiny downtown storefront.

—Joie Davidow

the DRIVEL bores

After the entire epic was pulled from the Olympic Arts Festival at the final hour because the U.S. wouldn't kick in its \$1 million share of the funding, a much-awaited fifth act of the Robert Wilson/Phillip Glass multinational, multimillion-dollar opera *the CIVIL warS* finally premiered at the Music Center in November. The experience was . . . uh, memorable.

As the venerable L.A. Philharmonic sawed a couple of hours away repeating Glass' five chords — count 'em — five sturdy soloists representing a Snow Owl, an Earth Mother, Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, and Giuseppe Garibaldi (great guest list) tackled mouthfuls of Glass arpeggios and an utterly incomprehensible libretto perpetrated by one Maita di Niscemi.

After intermission, matters really got dramatic. Two actors appeared onstage to read, in eloquent monotone, Ms. di Niscemi's elaborations on Robert E. Lee and "La Signora Lincoln Bambina," accompanied by the same five chords we'd all grown to know and hold dear to our hearts. "There is nothing in this ne a see a mama a pas la a cor don a orange . . ." Robert E. Lee intoned. Our sentiments exactly. Anyway, we're glad we went, because we miraculously managed to memorize enough of the score (you might say it had been impressed upon our minds) to entertain our friends at several parties. Needless to say, we was a big hit.

—Mary Beth Crain

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