

L.A. Art Seen

The Panza Collection at MoCA

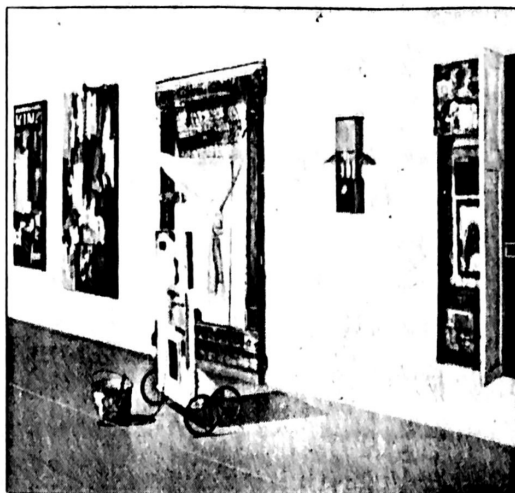
By now, the entire city is abuzz with talk about Count Panza di Biumo's collection, which has been purchased (on the lay-away plan) by our own MoCA. Any lover of contemporary art can only revel in the pleasure of such really fine stuff. Of the 11 paintings by Robert Rauschenberg from the '50s and '60s, *South Carolina Fall* alone could break your heart.

An old window frame frames a broad white cloth swagged to one side in a knot. This smart, singular piece refers to the brave gesture of Abstract Expressionism, but renders it with a found, common object — the roots of Pop Art. This work is strategically situated opposite a gallery hung with 11 of Franz Kline's monumental black-and-white compositions, along with one quixotic, brightly colored canvas — *Alva* (1958) — an exclamation mark punctuating the long dramatic sentence. The heroic gesture here is

thunderous, moving and convincing, a reaffirmation of the New York School ideals challenged by the Pop artists in the next gallery. Panza himself hung and lit the exhibition, fully conscious of this dialogue of art history, rarely seen in this city.

The seven glorious, luminescent canvases by Mark Rothko — the artist most able to convert aesthetic doubters to faith in the transcendent power of paint — generate the atmosphere of a chapel. The descriptive titles of his floating fields of hue — *Violet and Yellow on Rose* (1953), for example — belie their quivering, palpable (but still inexplicable) force. The last painting is dated 1960.

Most of the pieces by Claes Oldenburg are from 1961. Wrinkled painted plaster copies of common objects, such as *Blue and Pink Panties*, make for a tongue-in-cheek nod at the Rothkos across the way. There is also a mu-mu (remember those?), a Coca Cola sign, and a hamburger. Four paintings by Roy Lichtenstein, all from 1962, include a graphic red rib roast titled *Meat*, a *Desk Calendar*,



Rauschenberg works from the Panza Collection.

and a cartoon-like picture of Cezanne (a common "object" of art history).

You walk among these galleries and experience that churning period of upheaval that must have been felt by artists working in the early '60s. You can understand emotionally, as

well as intellectually, the forces leading Pop artists and those who followed to take one look at the legacy of Abstract Expressionism and, *volte face*, head in the opposite direction. If Ab Ex was "pure" and "extraordinary," Pop was common and ordinary.

In other galleries, there are a couple of plaster figures by George Segal, but the big surprise of the Pop artists turns out to be the eight early paintings by James Rosenquist. *Push Button* combines the truncated portions of a woman's ankles with a man's hand and a row of buttons from a car radio. An obvious erotic reference. (If these surreal juxtapositions of the popular and the abstract look familiar, think about David Salle.)

Fourteen paintings by Antoni Tàpies and six by Jean Fautrier hold their own dialogue about surviving in post-war Europe while America was growing into one big boomtown. They have less to offer than the others, but who's going to complain?

Not I. This slice of art history according to the taste of Panza is a magnificent addition to this burg, and I have my fingers crossed that the remaining 400-some pieces of Minimal and Conceptual art from his collection will find their way here as well. (At the Museum of Contemporary Art through September 29, 1985.)

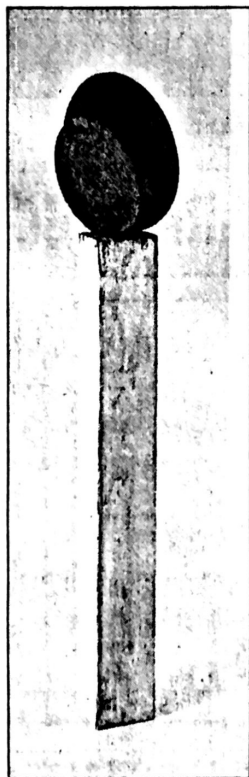
—Hunter Drohojowska

Therrien at Flow Ace

Robert Therrien makes art that is familiar. Even if you have never before seen these pieces, suspended so precisely between painting and sculpture, you will still be alert to a feeling of coming home. For me, Therrien's "poetic objects," as one writer called them, evoke the sweet smell of morning pancakes, the first snap of frost, a balmy summer breeze, oak floors that creak with each footstep, the clear peal of a church bell, the ferris wheel at a parking-lot carnival, silky muscles in a horse's neck, brass doorknobs with keyholes. These objects induce mnemonic vibrations that shake up our collective past, just as odors evoked memories for Proust.

Therrien has distilled certain visual forms that are classically, romantically American and, at the same time, exquisitely foreign. I think of Wallace Stevens' verse as much as any visual source of inspiration. A voluptuous stack of three shiny tin-plated spheres is a snowman. Atop a post of rough, white-washed wood is perched a jaunty, Astaire-style boater, made of bronze rather than straw, and painted lime green. An ordinary white box is mounted high on a white wall distinguished only by a hemline of silver sleigh bells that do not ring. This is a most remarkable work, a design as lean as a haiku yet right as an anvil.

All but two of the pieces have been created especially for this show, though all of them resemble works shown at MoCA last summer. There are paintings



No Title (Hat), by Robert Therrien.

of his trademark churches with their tall steeples, of a solid dusty red coffin-shaped relief in wood, and of a huge bronze dunce cap with its peak broken at the top. Each holds its place in the gallery like an ingenué, authentic and fresh, as though revealed to us in dawn's light after a long dark wait. (At Flow Ace Gallery through March 15.)

—Hunter Drohojowska

Nicaragua Media Project at LACPS

"Nicaragua." The word alone catalyzes an immediate political response. The Nicaragua Media Project attempts to demonstrate how media journalism is slanted, distorted and faked. Since much of the world knows so little first-hand about Nicaragua, the media coverage generated around the continuing crisis is prime material for this demonstration. The show consists of recent photographs by Nicaraguan and foreign journalists, historical images from our long-standing war against Nicaragua, along with various newspaper and magazine headlines and captions.

One image from the excellent photo-journalist Susan Meiselas (one of the original organizers of the exhibition) has her title "Distribution of free food and milk, Matagalpa, August, 1979." A news editor retitled it, "Nicaraguan citizens form lines outside government supermarkets awaiting food rations," thereby changing the meaning of the photograph.

A bolder alteration is of a photograph of a celebration in Masaya of the third anniversary of the Nicaraguan revolution. *Time* magazine moved the celebration to Moscow(!), and edited out the *guayaberas* (tropical shirts) in the foreground and the jungle in the background. The worst, however, is a "massacre of Miskito Indians" by the Sandinistas, reported in *Le Figaro* and illustrated by a grisly photograph of burning corpses. Our own Alexander Haig used this photo as evidence of Sandinista cruelty. In fact, the photograph shows Red Cross

volunteers burning the bodies of epidemic victims.

The show offers a lot of this kind of evidence: pictures of *contra* violence inflicted on Nicaraguan civilians that were expunged from the international press; candid shots of Sandinista politicians, juxtaposed with "femme fatale" and "devil" shots of them printed in U.S. newspapers; photos of U.S. Marines in Honduras, also absent from our press; a dead *contra*, arms splayed so that he



9:17 a.m. and the House is Clean, by Bill Stanton.

looks like a martyred Christ.

Don't walk around this exhibition without first picking up a list of captions and then following it closely; otherwise, you'll miss most of what I've just mentioned. Not posting the captions is the worst of several bad decisions made in re-mounting this exhibition (originally at the New Museum in New York) for traveling. Another regrettable decision is the opening section, which groups photographs of a more peaceful, mundane Nicaragua. The section serves as an amelioration of all the war-mongering done in the U.S.

press, but it is less convincing precisely because it, too, is slanted. Sanctified and sanitized, the Nicaraguans are presented as colorful local ethnic workers, hard working, happy, sincere, earnest, even naive (lots of religious icons-in-the-workplace shots). A farmer holds a land title like a Bible while he gazes up into the sky (and the future). But there's at least one great joke: a shot of men hoisting a telephone pole mimics the famous shot of the Marines

hoisting the American flag at Iwo Jima.

As evidenced in the news-magazine headlines collected here, the media war against Nicaragua heated up in 1982 and has continued since. Now that Reagan has presumably brought his audience to the point where they expect to find cigar-smoking Commies under every Nicaraguan roof, he apparently plans to invade the country.

If knowledge is power, then it's important to understand how information is controlled. (At the Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies.)

—Kathi Norklun