peaking about the display and collection of contemporary art within a museum context, the art historian Sir Ernst von Branca takes a sceptical view concerning the very existence of modern art museums. 'I think that a museum of modern art is a contradiction in terms. Museums used to exist to preserve the treasures of the past and to save them.' As much as museums might try to convey the sense of immediacy of the art they display, they are limited by their adherence to the nineteenth-century model which they evolved. By exhibiting works of art museums validate them as being worthy of preservation, conferring on them an 'official' seal of quality and authenticity. This practice of institutional validation naturally affects artists, who in turn drive and sustain the museum acquisition system which can lead to their works being preserved for posterity in the context of company of acknowledged masterpieces. The proliferation of new museums as led to an acceleration in the cycle from the completion of a work by an artist to its public display or acquisition. Museums continue to expand in order to display their growing collections of contemporary art, yet face the long-term consequences of acquiring works that are potentially problematic in terms of their scale or medium. It is important, however, to distinguish between those museums which also house historic collections and the newer ones such as Kunsthalle whose function is to serve as temporary exhibition spaces. In the case of established museums of modern art, a sense of power is conveyed through the fame of their holdings, whereas new museums often proclaim their status through their architecture.

There has been a growing tendency to view certain museum buildings as works of art in their own right which are as significant as the art they are intended to house. This idea has a worthy precedent in Frank Lloyd Wright's distinctive design for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (built 1956–59). Thomas Krens, who became its director in 1988, initiated a concept for a series of museums to be designed by world-famous architects which followed on from Peggy Guggenheim's original vision of a global network of museums controlled by the New York foundation. This idea, criticized by some as a form of cultural imperialism, has led in recent years to the construction of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, opened in 1997. The extravagant forms of Frank O. Gehry's design relate to his unusual choice of titanium for the cladding material, and his use of a computer software program intended for the aerospace industry. This approach enabled him to combine structural analysis with a fluid design to produce architecture as a sculptural form. Since the 1960s Gehry has used his designs for art installations as a means of experimenting with ideas that he later applied to architecture. His friendship and collaboration with many international artists have also influenced his museum designs, and he has acknowledged the significance that his conversations with them have had: 'They made me realize that the stature of a building in the community could make it equally as important as other buildings, therefore it should not be a neutral box.' The inaugural exhibition of the new museum in Bilbao, 'The Guggenheim and the Art of This Century', included three contemporary sculptures of colossal dimensions by Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg and Richard Serra respectively. Thus the dynamics and scale of some new museum architecture can offer a powerful catalyst for artists to produce impressive responses to site-specific commissions.
JEFFREY SHAW
THE VIRTUAL MUSEUM
1991
Installation at Ars Electronica, Brucknerhaus,
Linz, Austria, in 1992
The viewer interactively controls the journey through Shaw's Virtual Museum, which consists of five rooms, each having the same appearance as the real room in which the installation is located. Each virtual room contains its own specific exhibits composed of alphabetic and textual forms. A motorized rotating platform enables the chair to move in conjunction with the video monitor, thus establishing a link between the real and the virtual.
FRANK O. GEHRY & ASSOCIATES
THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, BILBAO
1997

Gehry’s design process involves the translation of his initial models, handcrafted in paper and wood, into a complex three-dimensional computer version. His architecture takes into account the surrounding natural and urban landscape, and the building’s thin titanium cladding is more durable than stone. This material also responds well to varying light conditions, thus helping to emphasize the building’s sculptural form.

In proposing different kinds of spaces for the exhibition of art, some artists have created their own architectural models. In 1992 and 1997, Frank Stella produced a number of distinctive models for museums in support of real proposals, none of which have so far been realized. Alternatively, artists may be inspired to create models of fictional utopian museums, such as Katharina Fritsch’s Museum Model 1:10, presented at the 1985 Venice Biennale. This work, with its sense of absurdity and irony, which appears in the surrounding space, is a model of sculpture as an architectural model.

According to Fritsch, “There is no ‘neutral’ arrangement of space (I think it is an illusion anyway); there is only a sculptural concept of a building. I want to make a space that is beyond ‘design’: which is the greatest weakness of most museums. I think that a subjective, specific choice of form is easier for an artist to respond to than a museum in which more or less disinterred, postmodern equations of style are lined up with ‘sophisticated anxiety.’”

This introductory text is provided to enhance the reader’s understanding of the architectural models and their significance in the context of Gehry’s work and the development of contemporary architecture.
to create their own alternative exhibition spaces. Frustrated by the impermanence of museum exhibitions and the insensitive handling and installation of his work, Donald Judd went on to realize his ideal museum in the small town of Marfa, Texas. He was disturbed by museums’ habit of divorcing art from life; it meant ‘having culture without culture having any effect’, which served ‘to make art fake’. Highly critical of museums, Judd resented the fact of a curator having control over the display of an artist’s work and maintained that the only way to ensure that his sculpture was exhibited to his satisfaction was to instal it personally. In 1973, he purchased aircraft hangars, barracks and other former military buildings in Marfa and by the late 1980s he had begun to buy up much of the town, where he established the Chinati Foundation. In addition to showing his own art and collection, he displayed works by other artists such as Dan Flavin, John Chamberlain, Claes Oldenburg and Ilya Kabakov. The overall aesthetic experience of visiting Marfa was aptly described by Kabakov in an interview in 1995: ‘When I first went to Marfa, my biggest impression was the unbelievable combination

**Katherine Fritsch**

**Museum Model 1:10**

Installation at the XLVI Venice Biennale 1995

Rather than being a conventional architectural model, this ‘museum’ is conceived as an idealized exhibition space. According to Fritsch, the contemporary art on view should consist of works designed specifically for the museum, with sculpture displayed on the lower level and paintings on the upper floor. There is no permanent collection and the work is intended to remain in place for a maximum of two years. As a sculptural form it embodies the geometric shapes of the octagon in the buildings and a star in the layout of the trees.
of estrangement, similar to a holy place, and at the same time of attention to the life of the works there. For me it was like some sort of Tibetan monastery; there were not material things at all, none of the hub-bub of our everyday lives. It was a world devoid of all trivial and banal existence — a world for art.6

Just as the role of the artist has sometimes become assimilated with that of the curator, broader collective definitions of ‘art’ and ‘museum’ are becoming increasingly interwoven. Following precedents created by artists like Marcel Broodthaers, a number of artists and art organizations have adopted the term ‘museum’ to refer to both their practice and activities. The Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles, created by David Wilson, is a hybrid institution which is simultaneously art and museum. It shares the early museum’s possibilities to cross the boundaries between art and science, to stimulate thought, wonder, astonishment and fascination. Its most significant feature is its refusal to be classified, slipping easily between each fixed definition. Wilson himself has noted: ‘The way people see it tends to reflect where their area of endeavor comes from. People in the museum world oftentimes will look at our museum as a critique of museums. People from the art world call it a performance art or Art. People from the scientific community will understand it as a critique of science, or some way a critique of scientific principles or scientific theory. And you know, we’re happy with that. It’s great that people think all of it’.7 Wilson has created a smaller site-specific version of his museum in Germany at the Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum, Hagen. Since 1988 this institution has undertaken an ongoing project called ‘Museum of Museums’, in which artists are commissioned by it to create permanent installations which relate specifically to museological concepts. The project includes Johan van Geluwe’s installation entitled Curator’s Gallery (1991) and the
JOHAN VAN GELUWE
CURATOR'S GALLERY

Installation at the Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum,
Hagen, Germany
1991

This work is an ironic commentary on the adminis-
trative role of the museum curator. It is part of a
series of permanent exhibits commissioned from
artists on the theme of museums. The numerous
items on the desk-top suggest the object feti-
chism and bourgeois complacency of an outdated
type of curator. On the wall opposite is hung a large
photograph of the museum’s founder, which
serves as a constant reminder of its adherence to
a tradition of experimental museology.

museum in Hagen also houses Geluwe’s
conceptual work also called Museum of
Museums, an ongoing archive that he
has been accumulating since 1975,
consisting mainly of artists’ books and
documents which relate to real and
imaginary museums.

Contemporary art has become too broad
a concept to be contained within the walls
of a museum, and there is a growing
interest in creating an alternative to the
static nature of an institution by linking a
wider network of urban sites. A number of
art organizations have deliberately appro-
priated the term ‘museum’ as a gesture of
defiance against the limitations imposed
by the framing and connoisseurship of
art within traditional institutions. The
Museum in Progress, Vienna, organizes
exhibitions that span a wide range of media
in unconventional sites such as bus-stops,
billboards, newspapers and television.

'It has defined its aims as the conquest
of the media as a vehicle for art (that is
the mass media in their most common
forms which are by far the most dominant
factor in social life today) and the devel-
opment of an adequate concept of the
museum appropriate to the age of mass
communication.'
Some museums have also recognized this need to develop off-site projects and reunite art with the everyday by distributing its collections and exhibitions from one centre to numerous peripheral sites. This practice was pioneered in Belgium as early as 1986 by the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent, with the exhibition 'Chambres d’Amis' (Guest rooms), in which fifty-eight local families agreed to allow fifty artists to create and exhibit work in their homes. This bid to engage a wider public audience more directly with the work of contemporary artists is also reflected in the Experimental Programs section of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, where the exhibition 'Uncommon Sense' (1997) included a number of unlikely museum events such as a live rodeo, drawing classes with nude models, theatre productions on a local bus, collaborations with the City Fire Department and sanitation workers, and even a link-up with a popular television soap opera.

In 1995, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, staged an exhibition called 'The Label Show' for which artists, visitors, critics and other staff members were invited to compose the descriptive labels and wall texts. In the accompanying leaflet, Trevor Fairbrother (then a curator at the museum) wrote: 'The world of contemporary art is a good place to examine the language of museums. This experimental exhibition addresses the complicated and sometimes paradoxical contributions of contemporary art to an encyclopaedic art museum.'

Effective models have emerged from collaborations between artists and curators, providing the opportunity to reflect and rethink what a museum is and how it best functions. This approach often involves artists being invited to reinterpret and rehang existing collections and to assist by acting as consultants and designers in planning museum architectural projects.

One of the most radical examples of this type of project was at the Museum für angewandte Kunst (Museum of Applied Arts) in Vienna where, in 1990, seven artists including Barbara Bloom, Jenny Holzer and Donald Judd were invited to collaborate with the collection curators in both the reinstallation of the permanent collection and the redesign of the gallery spaces. Collaborations between artists and museums displaying historical and non-art collections have frequently resulted from the personal initiative of individuals rather than being part of a premeditated overall museum strategy.

In the early 1990s, special exhibitions and interventions represented the fruits of a dialogue between artists and like-minded museum curators or of outside proposals put forward by practising artists or contemporary art institutions. Such exhibitions have subsequently become part of a wider range of official museum public programmes, with