

# Art: The New Museum Where Small Is Beautiful

By JOHN RUSSELL

**M**ANY a great museum has begun small. Oxford, England, can still see the stately little town house in which the Ashmolean Museum was founded more than 300 years ago. Many an invaluable museum has stayed small, moreover. The Frick in New York, the Phillips Gallery in Washington, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston—who would wish them larger? Small is beautiful, in their case, and even if it were possible for them to grow bigger we should dread the result. It is not at all to the discredit of Massia Tucker's new venture, The New Museum, that it is smaller than quite a few commercial galleries. Situated at 65 Fifth Avenue at 14th Street, in the building of the Graduate Center of the New School for Social Research, it is open from noon to 6 P.M. on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, from noon to 8 P.M. on Wednesday, and from noon to 5 P.M. on Saturday. It is closed on Sunday. Admission is free.

Miss Tucker's museum is concerned exclusively with work done during the previous 10 years. It has a twofold purpose. First, it will hold exhibitions of an inventive and house-room sort that English art museums elsewhere should seek direct contact with artists. To that end, an active program of visits to artists' studios both in New York and elsewhere is in preparation.

The first show is of early work by Ron Gorchov, Elizabeth Murray, Dennis Oppenheim, Dorothea Rockburne and Joel Shapiro. It makes an auspicious beginning. This is work that was not seen much at the time, was very difficult to come to terms with, and has since gone out of sight. We might well have been challenged to name the author of Dorothea Rockburne's big panel

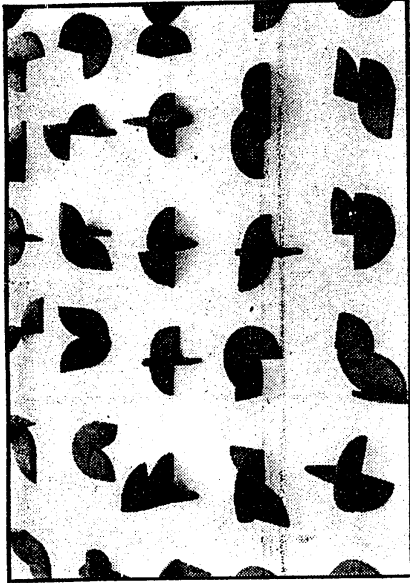
paintings on steel or aluminum, Elizabeth Murray's 36-part painting of Madame Cezanne falling out of her chair and vanishing through the window, or Ron Gorchov's huge concave painting, "Mine" (1967).

Time has made these paintings easier for us, but it has not made them less interesting. As for Dennis Oppenheim's family of small terra cotta sculptures (1971), they have kept their energy and made from the same shape—a flat circle divided into four equal parts—a very form up in around 60 different ways; and each one has its origins both in pure geometry and in the shaping pressure of the artist's hand. The show is there through Dec. 30.

Other exhibitions include:

Paintings by Eugene Rukhin (Terry Dintenfuss Gallery, 50 West 57th Street): One of the pleasures of Lenin-grad life in the earlier part of this decade was the company of Eugene Rukhin. Rukhin lived on the waterfront, quite some way from the center of the city, in an apartment at street level. Ships and shipbuilding has been incidental to that part of life. It is a nightfall a Vespertine light came flooding in through the windows and there was a regular drumming of engines as boat after boat slipped away down the Neva.

Rukhin did not work primarily in Leningrad, but commuted to Moscow for that purpose. In Moscow he found both customers and comradeship, though neither was in abundant supply. At home in Leningrad with his young family he was relaxed, larky, and ever avid for news of the art world outside the Soviet Union. His apartment was filled with Anglo-American cult objects; but like every other Russian worth talking about he loved his own try and thought a great deal about what he thought he did it and how he could make it a place that people



Joel Shapiro's "Untitled" (1971) at the New Museum in the Graduate Center of the New School; an auspicious beginning for a small museum.

them are among the most famous art objects of their day. Barnett Newman's "Broken Disk," for one. Some of the most interesting little drawings, like Claes Oldenburg's "Giant Baked Potato." Some of them, like the drawing by Alberto Giacometti, do not really qualify for the show, but are very good drawings nonetheless.

But some of the best artists in the show are represented by diagrams; and, no matter how much we respect the diagrammatist, diagrams are not much fun to look at. Sometimes the work depends too much on an idiosyncratic physical presence to look its best on paper. Sometimes the very implausibility of the notion gives it magic; witness the drawing by Saul Steinberg in which a downtown Manhattan street becomes a series of magnified, beyond-the-realm-of-Wurlitzer. This is an anthology in which everyone will find something to enjoy. Through Nov. 23.

**Larry Pooms** (Knessler Gallery, 21 East 70th Street): Larry Pooms's new show has at first glance the appearance of being down in vertical and much-enforced uniformity. In every case the paint hangs down in vertical and much-entwined strands, as if dragged earthward by its own weight. Sludge is sludge, no matter under whose name it comes, and it would be possible to walk out of the gallery with the feeling that this particular procedure had outlived its usefulness.

But if there are passages where the paint looks both greasy and congealed, others are marked by an animation elsewhere left latent. Purple, yellow and turquoise chatter like parakeets in a tropical rain forest. A patch of fat-grease hints at a readiness to fling that germ-hungry into the air. There are brief moments, but they raise our spirits before we are engulfed all over again in an esthetic of the glutinous. Through Nov. 9.

would be proud to live in and happy to visit.

In 1974 Rukhin became directly politicized at the time of the first and second open-air exhibitions in Moscow. Thereafter, he was on the shopping list of those people and institutions in the West who for one reason or another concern themselves with dissident art. Last year he died in a fire in his studio, and it is as a memorial to him that 26 of his paintings have been brought to this country.

**Drawings for Outdoor Sculpture 1946-77** (John Webb Gallery, 420 West Broadway): To Webbs might be brought together projects by 43 artists or sculpturers that may or may not have been erected but in any case were intended to go out of doors. Some of