

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

The New York Times

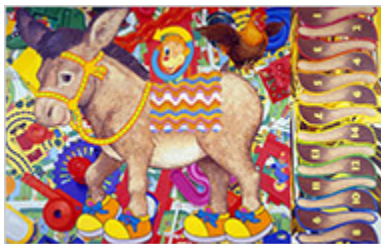
Inside Art

Jeff Koons Tries Hand as Guest Curator

By CAROL VOGEL

Published: September 24, 2009

A white foam-core model of the New Museum's gallery spaces arrived at Jeff Koons's Chelsea studio on Wednesday morning. Its appearance there doesn't mean that Mr. Koons is creating a painting or sculpture for the building, on the Bowery on the Lower East Side. The model is a visual aid — a kind of blank canvas — to help him start thinking beyond his own work.



Dakis Joannou Foundation

Jeff Koons's "Donkey" (1996), in Dakis Joannou's collection.

For an artist who seems to have been everywhere and done everything for nearly three decades, Mr. Koons is taking a new direction. He is trying his hand as a curator, agreeing to organize an exhibition of the Greek industrialist Dakis Joannou's contemporary-art collection when it comes to the New Museum in February.

Mr. Koons is no stranger to Mr. Joannou's holdings: they just happen to include seminal examples of Koons pieces from every period, like the sculptures "Balloon Dog,"

“Michael Jackson and Bubbles” and one of his first “Equilibrium Tanks” (a basketball suspended in a container filled with water).

But the Joannou collection, which contains thousands of artworks, also includes in-depth holdings of paintings, sculptures, drawings and installations by other celebrated artists like Maurizio Cattelan, Urs Fischer, Robert Gober, Chris Ofili, Charles Ray and Kiki Smith.

The show will take up the entire museum, something that is becoming a trend at the New Museum. Its show “The Generational: Younger Than Jesus,” which ended in July, occupied the whole building, as will a show opening in October dedicated to work by Mr. Fischer. Like Mr. Koons, Mr. Fischer, who used a jackhammer to pummel a Chelsea gallery floor to smithereens awhile back, will double as curator and creator, installing giant sculptures made of unusual materials like bread or giant teddy bears.

Lisa Phillips, director of the New Museum, said she had been talking to Mr. Joannou, a trustee there, about the possibility of an exhibition of his holdings since 2000. “He especially wanted artists to be involved,” she added.

Mr. Joannou has been showing his collection since the 1980s at the Deste Foundation, his public space in Athens. “It’s been seen in Paris and Vienna,” he said. “This will be the first time it has been shown in the United States.”

The New Museum project will inaugurate an exhibition series called “The Imaginary Museum,” which will showcase the best private collections of contemporary art from around the world that are rarely seen by the public.

That Mr. Koons should be an integral part of this exhibition is not surprising. He and Mr. Joannou have been close friends since 1985, when Mr. Joannou first saw “Equilibrium,” a show of Mr. Koons’s work at the International With Monument gallery on the Lower East Side. Since then Mr. Joannou has been a passionate Koons collector. He even asked Mr. Koons to decorate the exterior of Guilty, his 114-foot yacht.

“In the summer my family and I spent 10 days with Dakis in Corfu,” Mr. Koons said. “And in the afternoons we would go through the collection. He has books with printouts of everything, so I’m pretty familiar with it.”

“I plan to work on the project for a few hours every day,” Mr. Koons added. “I’m curious to see what it will look like at the New Museum.”

Just how many examples of his own work — and how prominently they will be displayed — is likely to be a challenge. “I’m sure there are going to be artworks that I will become engaged with and learn from,” Mr. Koons said of his colleagues’ creations. “I can assure you, the show will not revolve around my work.”