

## SCENE &amp; HEARD Robert Atkins

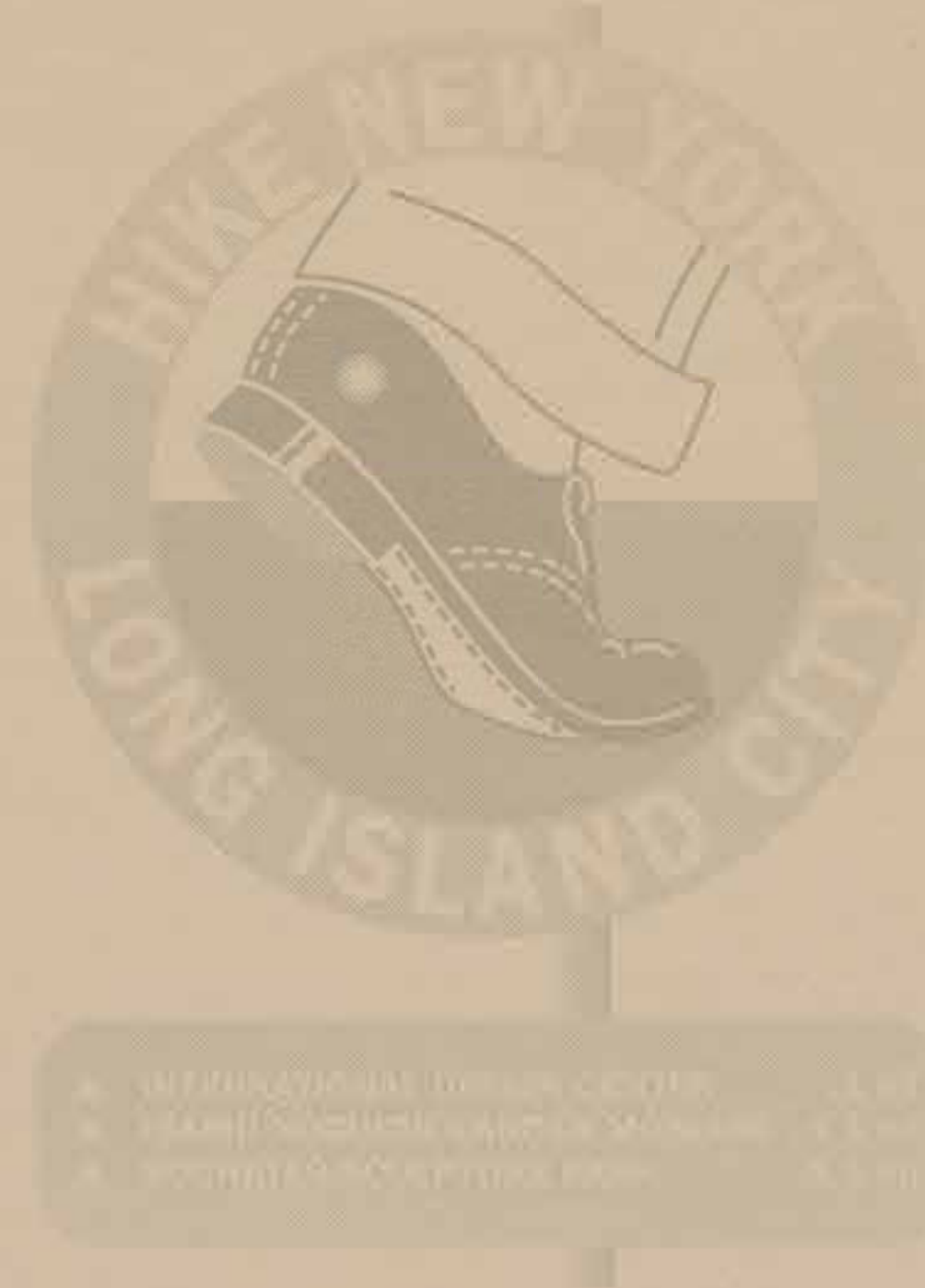
## MUSEUMS: IN &amp; OUT

The **Museum of Modern Art's** just-extended **Matisse** retrospective is likely to linger in the memory as *the* art event of the fall season. Both a commercial and critical success, it's made money and garnered euphoric reviews. But the cost of success—the disadvantages of devoting virtually an entire institution's energy to one show for six months—is also steep.

Financially, "Henri Matisse: A Retrospective" has been a boon for a museum that's been running an annual \$2 million to \$2.5 million deficit since 1990. Tight lips at the museum are beginning to loosen now that the sold-out show's in the black. Extrapolating from figures supplied by **James Snyder**, deputy director for planning and programming, the exhibition will have been seen by around 700,000 viewers when it closes on January 19. For comparison's sake, the smaller **Magritte** show at the largely publicly funded **Metropolitan Museum** drew nearly 500,000 viewers during a run slightly more than half as long as the Matisse show's.

At the Met, admission to "Magritte" was included in the museum's pay-as-you-choose entrance fee. MOMA's "Matisse" \$12.50 ticket price likely set a record for the highest special exhibition fee charged by a U.S. museum. (Outside the museum's entrance, scalpers are hawking tickets for \$30 apiece.) Allowing for senior, student, and member discounts, a \$10 average view yields gross revenues of about \$7 million. Snyder confirms that the show cost the museum \$4 million to \$5 million, and that corporate sponsor **Philip Morris** contributed about half this amount. Add up the figures and you get a multimillion-dollar profit. Perhaps equally important for MOMA's long-term well-being, the museum's recently diminishing membership rolls have also been expanded by 5000 new members since July, to nearly 50,000.

What about the negatives? A larger-than-usual portion of the permanent collection is out of sight. Any blockbuster show encourages visitors to value museums as the site of glamorous and infrequent special exhibitions—and ensures a postblockbuster attendance slump. For Matisse, a large portion of MOMA's staff has been forced to focus on exhibition logistics and endure what MOMA director **Richard Oldenburg** terms "psychological wear and tear." Is it worth it, I asked Oldenburg? "A show that contributes to the state of art scholarship or affects people deeply is



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#### A gift for Long Island City: One of artist Richard Deon's 14 permanent signs sponsored by the Public Art Fund and the Department of Transportation

always worth doing."

I was in Los Angeles last week for a cousin's third gala wedding (don't even ask). During nuptial down-time I managed to avoid the **7th International Los Angeles Art Fair** by visiting "Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art" at the **Los Angeles County Museum of Art**. The show's oddly formalist point is that 20th century artists appropriated the look of schizophrenic or unschooled artists in their quest for emotional conviction. Curator **Maurice Tuchman's** ineffectual attempt to validate the insiders—expressionists such as **Jean Dubuffet** or **Arnulf Rainer**—is subverted by his insider-outsider pairings. When you compare a **Julian Schnabel** broken-dish work with photo-documents of **Simon Rodia's** sublimely crackpot **Watts Towers** you realize that there's no comparison: the insiders ape emotional authenticity, the outsiders feel it.

Soho dealer **Phyllis Kind** represents some of the insiders and outsiders featured in "Parallel Visions." She's currently exhibiting two- and three-dimensional works from **San Salvi Psychiatric Hospital** in Florence and from

U.S. prisons. Showing prison art—soap carvings and cigarette-pack constructions, as well as paintings and drawings—may be some kind of marketing coup, but I'm more intrigued by the gallery's romanticized press release about the slammer as support system: "In the prison environment artistic ability is respected. Artists are committed to high standards which are motivated by the opportunity for severe criticism from literally thousands of incarcerated peers." And the tuition's cheaper than **Cal Arts**, too.

It continues to take a lot of pushing and shoving to make room for lesbians and gay men under New York museums' multicultural umbrella. Congratulations to **Brooklyn Museum** curator **Elizabeth Easton** for positively responding to a postopening complaint by rewriting a wall label in her intriguing **Frederic Bazille** exhibition. The original text discusses a painting of eight male bathers that's absolutely queer—without raising the biographical issue of the artist's sexuality, which informs the work. In the show's catalogue, Bazille scholar **Dianne Pitman** quotes art historian **Kermit Champa's** observation that "the bathers' comportment reveals the artist's homosexual tendencies," and a **New York Times** reviewer observed that "there's a sensuality to... [Bazille's] images of the male form entirely unlike his renditions of women." Now the wall labels make sense... Speaking of texts, for the free, 140-page **Access for All: A Guide for People With Disabilities to New York Cultural Institutions**, write to WCBS, 51 West 52nd Street, New York, N.Y. 10019.

#### XMAS/HANUKKAH

A few last-minute gift suggestions for the art buffs on your list: **Special Issue** is a 50-artist, shrink-wrapped portfolio of photocopy art with a Fluxus/neo-Conceptual flair. This is a yummy compendium of recipes that have almost nothing to do with food (\$20 from publisher Robin Kahn, who can be contacted at 212-431-4571)... **Publicsfear**, an elegant and engrossing new art mag (sort of), is my idea of what Tina Brown's **New Yorker** should be. **Ed Gallagher's** response to **Matthew Barney** and **Sean Landers's** endearingly pathetic reverie on fame could relieve the postholiday blahs (\$6.50 per issue at better bookstores)... Read artist **Brian D'Amato's** novel **Beauty** (Delacorte, \$20) for a nifty, nightmarish yarn about a painter/unlicensed plastic surgeon with a philosophical bent. Send this one to any film producers you know. ■