



CHANGE OF ART

PHILIPPE VERGNE, MOCA'S NEW DIRECTOR, IS POISED TO BRING THE MUSEUM INTO THE FUTURE WHILE PERPETUATING L.A.'S STATUS AS A PREMIER CULTURAL CENTER.

By Abigail Stone | Portrait by Dustin Aksland

Underlying the festive atmosphere of this year's MOCA gala on March 29—celebrating the museum's 35th anniversary and the debut of its new director, Philippe Vergne—will be the quiet acknowledgment of its triumph over the past year's adversities. For the newly appointed Vergne, formerly the director of the Dia Art Foundation in New York, it's professionally and personally significant that the Louis Vuitton-sponsored gala coincides with the opening of the highly anticipated Mike Kelley exhibition. "Since I came to the United States," Vergne confides, in a French accent that reveals his Parisian upbringing,

"one of my dreams has been to organize a Mike Kelley retrospective." The artist, explains Vergne, was not only a friend, but someone who "changed the way we think about art. He paired art with music, performance, politics, history, literature. If you take him as an example, you can start to see where I stand." To a museum that was founded by contemporary artists, these sentiments offer hope for its future. In fact, the most celebrated moments of Vergne's career, like his masterminding of Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument" in New York's South Bronx in 2008, manifest this philosophy, and he's excited to discover

IN LIVING COLOR

From top: MOCA's new director, Philippe Vergne, contemplates Mike Kelley's commanding and thought-provoking "Pay for Your Pleasure," 1988, installed at MOMA PS1 in New York City; "Catholic Birdhouse," from 1978, is one of Kelley's earliest works. Made of painted wood and composite shingles, it was crafted for a graduate show during the artist's time at CalArts.





how MOCA's "multiplicity of sites" can "optimize the way we program and use them so that we can enter a dialogue with a large audience," he says. Though it was scheduled before Vergne was confirmed, Jacob Hashimoto's *Gas Giant* exhibition, opening March 1 at the museum's Pacific Design Center location bodes well for that plan. "It's not only putting an object in a gallery," Vergne explains, "It's bringing around this object, whatever it is, that will allow people to experience it, this festival of ideas that help constitute the substance that feeds the art." Vergne acknowledges that MOCA's location was part of his attraction to the position. "I've seen the way Los Angeles has changed over the last few years, what's happening downtown. It's booming, and I really want MOCA to be fully integrated into this movement and this neighborhood." Still, given Vergne's European and East Coast-based career—in addition to Dia, he has served as chief curator and deputy director of the Walker

Art Center in Minneapolis, director of the François Pinault Foundation in Paris and director of Le Musée d'Art Contemporain in Marseille, France—the tug of Los Angeles on him may not have been immediately apparent. But it turns out its roots are deep. "The way I think about art has been fed a lot by what MOCA stands for. Many of the artists that I was in touch with over the years—the people that have helped me constitute my understanding of art—are Los Angeles-based," he explains. "Maybe it's serendipity, but serendipity is always preceded by a lot of preparation. Plus, my wife is from Los Angeles, so I know where the door is." Though those last words are said in jest, they describe a willingness to acknowledge the importance of Los Angeles as part of the conversation, qualities that promote a cautious optimism for his tenure. "I'm excited to take this institution to this next chapter, and to bring in artists and dream with them. I think it will be a great marriage." **A**



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AMONG GIANTS Clockwise from left: MOCA's Pacific Design Center gallery will explore light and color in Jacob Hashimoto's *Gas Giant*, seen here during a run at Fondazione Querini Stampalia in Italy; Kelley's "John Glenn Memorial Detroit River Reclamation Project" encapsulates the breadth of the late artist's work; *Gas Giant* boasts 10,000 paper and bamboo kites.

