



The New York Times (by Barton Silverman)

Stough Beers, a landscape architect, arranging baby Norway spruce trees for one of the exhibits in the experimental "Spaces" show at the Museum of Modern Art. The trees, planted in steel boxes, form a mini-vista of mountaintops.

Museum Beckoning Space Explorers

By GRACE GLUECK

"I'd like people to bring a terrific amount of innocence to this," said Michael Asher, padding around the floor of his bare white chamber in stocking feet. "They shouldn't have preconceived notions of what will happen, but simply experience what's here."

Viewers can experience Mr. Asher's utterly tranquil room, a dimly lit, 21-by-23-foot box whose walls, floor and ceiling are acoustically cushioned, and five other ambitious installations in "Spaces," an experimental show that opened this week at the Museum of Modern Art.

The show will be on view until March 8.

"Spaces" attempts to spot a new trend in art—one that moves away from the production of "collectible" objects engaging the viewer only visually, toward the use of "real" space that calls into play his entire perceptual equipment.

"This art doesn't give you very much of a handle," says Jennifer Licht, associate curator of painting and sculpture at the museum, who organized the show. "It doesn't offer you a finite object, but a set of conditions. The artists here are not isolating visual perception, but going into a larger, more encompassing art, whose interior space you can enter into and perceive with your body."

The show's exhibits certainly compel more than routine attention. In addition to Mr. Asher's "quiet" room, the viewer can enter a refrigerated chamber designed by

Robert Morris and contemplate, from a confining cruciform trench, a mini-vista of mountaintops created by perspectival plantings of baby spruce trees in steel boxes above his head. In Dan Flavin's room, dominated by two wall-length barriers of fluorescent bulbs, he can experience the illusion of spatial boundaries obliterated by color and light.

In a canvas-floored lobby area prepared by Franz Erhard Walther, the German-born artist, he can don or disport with 58 communal canvas objects designed to explore, among other things, how he relates spatially to people and objects.

Losing Perception

One piece, for example, has five body-sized pockets in which participants lie next to each other. And he can lose his spatial perception completely in a pitch-black tunnel created by Larry Bell, minimally illuminated by glass rods affixed to a wall at the far end.

The most spectacular activation of space occurs in the museum's garden, planted with microphones, TV monitors and other electronic devices by a collaborative group of artist-technicians known as Pulsa. Hooked into a complex monitor system, the device translates activity in the arer into a "sensuous environment" of sound and light patterns.

In effect, the show, whose installations are temporary, adds to the museum's traditional pursuits of collecting, curating and exhibiting, the

somewhat radical function as aesthetic laboratory. And Mrs. Licht, aware that museums and their interest in the "dead" past are increasingly called into question by younger artists, affirms that one of the show's primary purposes is to find out if a museum can be used as a situation for "live" experiments.

"I also tried to think about what we could offer artists that was different from the usual exhibiting situation," she said. "I decided to ask for proposals that would make unaccustomed demands on our staff and resources. So, in effect, we became responsible not only for exhibiting the artists' works, but for executing them."

Because the museum's exhibition budget could not meet the show's technical demands, Mrs. Licht, the staff and trustees turned to corporate sources for help. As a result, the catalogue boasts more credits than the playbill of a top Broadway production. Goods, services and equipment amounting to \$60,000 were contributed by more than 20 companies.

Owens-Corning Fiberglas, for instance, donated 2,000 square feet of acoustical paneling and 3,500 feet of fiberglas insulation for the triple-thick walls needed for Mr. Asher's room. The corporation also flew a sound expert from its Ohio headquarters to help install it. The Kimberly-Clark Corporation sent 144 Norway spruce trees from its nurseries in Loretto, Mich., for Mr. Morris's room. And Manhattan Gardener, Ltd.,

offered free horticultural advice and a gardener to plant them.

One gift, 20 fluorescent bulbs provided for Mr. Flavin by General Electric, has drawn fire from the Art Workers' Coalition, the anti-Establishment group, which has directed a number of salvos against museums during the last year.

"We question the use of art (and artists) by a corporation that is one of the largest Government contractors of war matériel," the group wrote to Mr. Flavin. The letter also asserted that, since workers of General Electric are on strike, Mr. Flavin's acceptance of the corporation's help constituted "a form of strikebreaking," and urged him to quit the show.

Allowance for Artists

Mr. Flavin had no comment on the letter. But he praised Mrs. Licht's efforts in pulling the experimental exhibition together and noted that, largely because of her persuasive powers, each artist had received from the museum a \$25 per diem allowance and a small honorarium, a rare practice on the part of American museums.

Most of the other artists seemed happy with the museum situation. "Generally, we like to work outdoors in large rural settings," commented Bill Crosby, a member of the Pulsa group. "We'd much rather do things that interact directly with the public," he said. "But this works for us—the museum has given us everything we want."