What MoMA's Missing

"Red-Hot MoMA" by Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, in *The New York Review of Books* (Jan. 13, 2005), 1755 Broadway, 5th fl., New York, N.Y. 10019–3780.

The "grand and elegant" new home that architect Yoshio Taniguchi has created for the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan is an "extraordinary accomplishment." But there's a major shortcoming in the design: not enough space.

That didn't happen by accident. It's the unfortunate result of the curators' efforts to grapple with the many difficult questions and tradeoffs faced by all museums of modern art, write pianist Rosen and art historian Zerner, coauthors of *Romanticism and Realism* (1984). Should works of art be grouped chronologically, by national school, by artistic movement, or according to some other scheme? Should pictures be displayed in profusion, virtually frame to frame, as they were in the past, or should each reside in splendid isolation for "the ecstatic pleasure of the lone admirer"? MoMA director Glenn Lowry gave an answer to the last question in 2002 when he declared that the objective was to have "twice the space and half the amount of art."

From its founding in 1929, MoMA has had two related aims: "to represent the history of modern art and to stay in touch with the most recent contemporary work." The two missions soon began to compete for the museum's limited space. At first, older works were sold in order to bring in money to buy new ones, but this raised some of the same practical and aesthetic questions that plague today's curators: Doesn't a museum have an obligation to keep older works that museumgoers know and love? In 1953, MoMA decided to have it both ways. It would house a comprehensive collection of modern art while continuing to respond to the new trends in art.

Even as MoMA was embracing the new, those trends were complicating its existence. Works of art had literally shrunk in the past, after the impressionists of the late 19th century reacted against the grand scale of estab-

Yoshio Taniguchi's revamped Museum of Modern Art features vast open spaces that dramatically emphasize larger works but leave no room for some of the museum's more familiar objets d'art.

lishment painting by creating smaller canvasses for private settings. By the 1950s, artists were beginning to reject what they viewed as "the domestication of avant-garde art." They began working on a much larger scale—a scale that created new demands for museum real estate. (It also led to the development of New York's Soho art district, where galleries could acquire big, relatively inexpensive buildings.) Taniguchi's MoMA is partly a delayed response to that pressure for more space.

Thanks largely to founder Alfred Barr's vision of modern art, the museum's basic permanent collection has an unusual aesthetic coherence, revealing the complex interrelationships of, among others, cubists, futurists, German expressionists, surrealists, and abstract expressionists. This coherence gives MoMA "a personality of its own that only a few other great museums can claim," the authors write. Yet MoMA's expansion "allows little, if any, more space" than before to display the collection. Important paintings have disappeared from its walls, and groupings of works that gave a full vision of an artist's achievement have been broken up.

What is to be done? "Perhaps the museum could install somewhere a study collection, in which the finest works that are invisible in the main part of the museum are simply stacked on the walls in rows for anyone interested to come and gaze at them." Or, more radically, the authors suggest, "perhaps MoMA should consider leaving the business of promoting new art to commercial galleries, and renounce the virtuous satisfaction of aiding the as yet unrecognized genius or the more guilty pleasure of showing it has the power to influence the future of art."

Conrad as Prophet

"Conrad's Latin America" by Mark Falcoff, in *The New Criterion* (Jan. 2005), 900 Broadway, Ste. 602, New York, N.Y. 10003.

Although Latin American literature is full of novels dealing with the region's chronic political disorder, it was left to a Ukrainian-born Pole to write (in English) "the best political—the most enduring—novel ever written about Latin America." That book, says Falcoff, a Latin American specialist and former scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, was published just over 100 years ago: Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo: A Tale of the Seaboard* (1904).

The San Tomé silver mine in the fictional country of Costaguana is "in some ways the principal character of the novel." Both the mine and the country have languished for decades under the rule of a brutal dictator, but now, under civilian rule, Costaguana looks abroad for the money and manpower it needs to rebuild itself. Charles Gould, a high-minded

EXCERPT

Recipes for the Imagination

And surely this is part of the appeal of cookbooks—the exercise of imagination involved. For part of what it is to read a recipe, and the bits of prose before and sometimes afterward, is to conjure up mentally what the cookbook instructs for reality. This is why primary school teachers tell us reading is better for children than, say, watching television. Reading makes every child into a producer. If this is right, cookbooks transform imagination into a high-stakes game: our satisfaction depends on our success.

—Stephanie Frank, a University of Chicago graduate student, in *Topic* (6: Food)