



By continuing to use this site you consent to the use of cookies on your device as described in our [cookie policy](#) unless you have disabled them. You can change your [cookie settings](#) at any time but parts of our site will not function correctly without them.



VACHERON CONSTANTIN
Manufacture Horlogère, Genève, depuis 1755

PATRIMONY CONTEMPORAINE

CLICK HERE TO DISCOVER

FINANCIAL TIMES

Subscribe to the FT Today ▶

FINANCIAL TIMES

ft.com > life&arts > arts >

Visual Arts

[Sign in](#) [Site tour](#) [Register](#) [Subscribe](#)

[Advanced search](#)

- Home
- UK
- World
- Companies
- Markets
- Global Economy
- Lex
- Comment
- Management
- Personal Finance
- Life & Arts

May 21, 2013 5:36 pm

- Share
- Clip
- Reprints
- Print
- Email

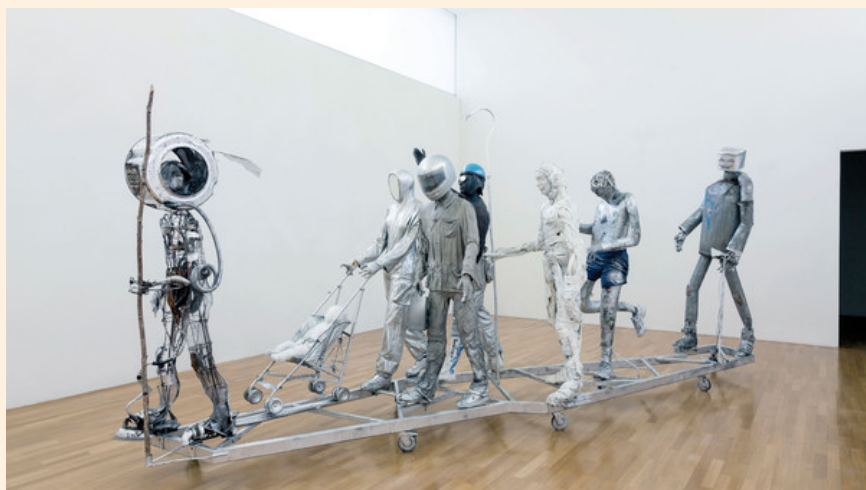
Expo 1: New York, MoMA PS1, New York – review

By Ariella Budick

Fragments of this explosion of ideas are scattered across the city

FT.com/Arts

Supported by
VACHERON CONSTANTIN
Manufacture Horlogère, Genève, depuis 1755



Pawel Althamer's 'Bródno People' (2010)

Expo 1: New York is more an intellectual explosion than a conventional exhibition. It burst from the mind of Klaus Biesenbach, the Museum of Modern Art's chief visionary and curator-at-large, and deposited buzzing fragments all over New York. A geodesic dome has landed at the city's edge in Rockaway Beach, functioning as a sort of salon-cum-community centre. In the empty lot next to MoMA, "Rain Room", an indoor downpour senses the movements of visitors, letting them walk through the storm and emerge completely dry.

But the heart of this multi-tentacled extravaganza is the spectacle, subtitled *Dark Optimism*, that overwhelms PS1 with visual energy. Had it consisted of nothing more than Adrián Villar Rojas's great clay fragments erupting out of a darkened cavern, the show would grab our attention and shake it. Yet there's much more: Meg Webster's giant homemade waterfall, perpetually threatening to flood the basement; Olafur Eliasson's reunion of 800-year-old ice fragments scattered around a frigid gallery, as if at a glacier cocktail party; a mini-show of Ansel Adams' nature photographs; and gallery after gallery filled with mysteriously flamboyant objects. *Dark Optimism* may be murky and difficult to explain, but it is a curatorial tour de force.

VACHERON CONSTANTIN
Manufacture Horlogère, Genève, depuis 1755

PATRIMONY CONTEMPORAINE

CLICK HERE TO DISCOVER



What ties this unwieldy mess of stuff together is not its rambling premise – which is, more or less, that economic collapse and ecological catastrophe can be mitigated by technology and

[More](#)

Life & Arts on Twitter

[Follow @FTlifeandarts](#)

More [FT Twitter](#) accounts

MOST RECENT FROM LIFE & ARTS

- Nancy Pelosi
- Wrinkle-free zone
- Berlin or bust
- All change at Tate Britain
- Iraq: A Kurd's eye view

IN VISUAL ARTS

[Houghton Revisited, Houghton Hall, King's Lynn, UK – review](#)

[Snapshot 'Nanchong, Sichuan' \(2006\), by Luo Dan](#)

[Curiosity didn't really kill the cat](#)

[A revolution on Millbank](#)

art. Instead, the unifying force is Biesenbach's sensibility. The wizardly engineer in charge of this great, sprawling contraption may be the only one who fully understands what he has wrought – museum staff even seem unsure of what artworks, precisely, are included in the show. Out of the free-associative thread unfurling from his brain, he has woven an opaque epic, a pageant intimating the existence of terrible forces and invoking the redemptive powers of beauty.

Dark Optimism teems with animals both stuffed and living. Giant insects, long legs akimbo, patrol Pierre Huyghe's watery ecosystem, "Zoodram 5". At first, the piece – a version of which was [a hit at London's Frieze Art Fair](#) in 2011 – looks like an ordinary aquarium, but peer in more closely and you notice a hermit crab curling cosily into a stylised human head, instead of its usual whorled shell. After a few moments, the head resolves into a miniature version of Brancusi's "Sleeping Muse". Perhaps Huyghe is equating the radically artificial environment of the zoo with museums, where art is caged, labelled, and made safe. Viewers who identify especially strongly with the crab in a box might feel that they, too, grope through their manufactured habitat, trying to adapt to a world that is awkward, confining and strange.

Mark Dion ups unease to the level of horror in "Killers Killed". Blackened, taxidermied animals hang from the branches of a real tree, victims of some interspecies lynching. Cats, squirrels and starlings may seem adorable enough in the abstract, but all are invasive species, imported by humans and wreaking havoc on ecosystems worldwide. It's not their fault they're killers; they are simply acting on a set of instincts at odds with their habitats. Biology has no inherent moral imperatives. The same adaptations that help a creature survive can turn it into a sinister machine of death.

Take the cat that João Maria Gusmão and Pedro Paiva photographed in mid-fall, twisting to land on all four paws. We don't know if the cat will touch down safely and slink away or splatter on the sidewalk. In the slyly didactic atmosphere of PS1, where nearly every image represents a teachable moment, it's easy to pivot from the tumbling cat to humanity in free fall, plunging towards possible cataclysm and trusting in a collective survival instinct that may not necessarily work.

Expo 1 recalls *After Nature*, which in 2008 also commandeered a whole building, the New Museum, for portents of extinction and ruin. That show, too, imagined that doom had already descended, and treated the present elegiacally, with haunted ruins, ghostly presences and toxic scars. Both shows spotlighted many of the same artists – Zoe Leonard, for instance. In *After Nature* her spindly "Tree", held by steel cables and pathetic crutches, barely managed to remain upright. Here, photos of trees warped by the fences that enclose them buzz with human pathos. These patches of domesticated wilderness bear the melancholy imprints of their confinement, yet they also endure, gnarled but strong.

The sculptor Pawel Althamer, who had a cameo in *After Nature* with a pair of flayed bodies, has brought an entire parade of the undead to *Expo 1*. He and neighbours from his apartment block in Bródno, Poland, each created a life-sized alter ego, modelled out of scrap metal and technological trash. Like zombies from an apocalyptic nightmare, the figures in "Bródno People" march sightlessly through a huge gallery, an ungainly procession of solid ghosts that recalls Rodin's "Burghers of Calais". Nearly everything in this show toggles between holiness and creepiness. In "A Refusal to Set Limits", John Miller creates a gilded archaeological site of broken arches and splintered columns, adorned with the paraphernalia of killing – skulls, grenades, machine guns. The glistening ruins are strewn across the floor like a diorama of a destroyed empire.

If the show has a conceptual nerve centre, it's the frightening, exhilarating cornucopia by Villar Rojas, which simultaneously blocks viewers from entering the several rooms it occupies and invites them to crawl into

TOOLS & SERVICES

Multimedia

[Video](#)

[Blogs](#)

[Podcasts](#)

[Interactive graphics](#)

[Audio slideshows](#)

[Picture slideshows](#)

Tools

[Portfolio](#)

[FT Lexicon](#)

[FT clippings](#)

[Currency converter](#)

[MBA rankings](#)

[Newslines](#)

[Today's newspaper](#)

[FT press cuttings](#)

[FT ebooks](#)

[FT ePaper](#)

[Economic calendar](#)

Updates

[Alerts Hub](#)

[Daily briefings](#)

[FT on Facebook](#)

[FT on Twitter](#)

[FT on your mobile](#)

[Share prices on your phone](#)

[RSS feeds](#)

Quick links

[Mergermarket](#)

[How to spend it](#)

[Social Media hub](#)

[The Banker](#)

[The Banker Database](#)

[fDi Intelligence](#)

[fDi Markets](#)

[Professional Wealth Management](#)

[This is Africa](#)

[Investors Chronicle](#)

[MandateWire](#)

[FTChinese.com](#)

[Pensions Week](#)

Services

[Subscriptions](#)

[Corporate subscriptions](#)

[Education subscriptions](#)

[Syndication](#)

[FT Fine Wine Plan](#)

[Conferences](#)

[Annual reports](#)

[Executive job search](#)

[Non-Executive](#)

[Directors' Club](#)

[Businesses for sale](#)

[Contracts & tenders](#)

[Analyst research](#)

[Commercial Property listings](#)

[Company announcements](#)

[FT Collection](#)

shadowy recesses. “La inocencia de los animales” (“The Innocence of Animals”) hums with energy but intimates decay. The shapes are broken and brittle, as if this made-to-order work had aged millennia in a matter of days. One large space consists of a giant set of bleachers, moulded out of unfired clay, which doubles as a classroom. There, children will sit on the cool, fragile steps, tracing cracks and scraping corners with their fingernails, perhaps noticing how novelty and antiquity merge, and how earth can disintegrate as efficiently as flesh.

Continues until September 2, www.momaps1.org

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2013. You may share using our article tools. Please don't cut articles from FT.com and redistribute by email or post to the web.

[Share](#) [Clip](#) [Reprints](#) [Print](#) [Email](#)

Post your own comment

To comment, you must sign in or register [Sign in](#) [Register](#)

Comments



No comments yet