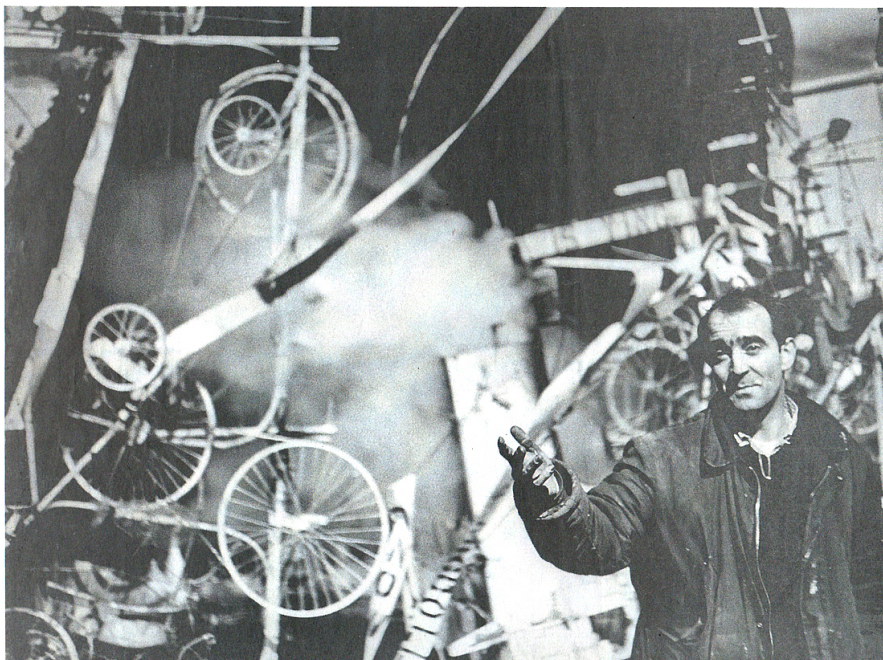


## ART



## The Inspiration

Jean Tinguely

By 1960 Mr. Tinguely was gaining world renown for his kinetic sculptures, absurdist machines that served no practical function and furthered the Futurist concept of celebrating movement through art. With "Homage to New York," he took his Dada engineering to the next level in both scale and conceit, using the structure to illustrate the city's power and fragility all at once. "In New York Tinguely finds a maximum concentration of human life and energy, a virility which accelerates its own dissolution," Peter Selz, who was then MoMA's curator of painting and sculpture, wrote in a broadside that was distributed before the event. "He believes that the idea of a self-constructing and self-destroying mechanized sculpture would never have occurred to him in the ancient ambience of the Mediterranean coast. Its dynamic energy as well as its final self-destruction — are they not artistic equivalents for our own culture?" Selz continued: "He has conceived and built this sculpture and is eager to witness its loss so that we may witness its choreography."

## 'Bubble Machine,' 2006

Ariel Schlesinger

In a work reminiscent of Mr. Tinguely's original, Ariel Schlesinger, an Israeli artist, has built a somewhat dubious machine, to appear in Chapter 2,

that generates propane-filled soap bubbles that float down from the top of a ladder, one by one, onto an electric grill, where they burst into little balls of fire. "It was a lot of trial and error," Mr. Schlesinger said. The apparatus took him nearly three months to perfect, but he had no interest in turning it into something sturdier or more finished looking. "I wanted it to stay as this fixed prototype," he explained, "so when viewers look at it, they get the sense that it may be the last moment that it is going to make that bubble, as if the machine is dying before their eyes."

## A Homage to a Homage, Destruction at Its Core

JEAN TINGUELY'S "Homage to New York" was billed as the ultimate homemade gadget — a towering contraption composed of found junk, dismembered bicycles, dismantled musical instruments, glass bottles, a meteorological balloon and electric motors in questionable condition. It was slated to come to life and spectacularly self-destruct in a one-night-only performance for some 250 patrons and reporters in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden at the Museum of Modern Art on March 17, 1960. And self-destruct it did, but not quite according to plan. Bottles shattered, wheels spun, colored smoke plumed up into the air, and the machine's various metal components crashed and clinked atop a piano, creating an arrhythmic soundtrack. But when sparks escalated into flames, and a portion of the machine broke away, crashing into an NBC camera crew, a nervous firefighter intervened and doused the machine with water, sealing its fate.

Mr. Tinguely's self-destructive sculpture had failed — and thereby, in a sense, succeeded. Mr. Tinguely, a Swiss artist who died in 1991, was by 1960 well known for such Dada-inflected works; he posed with the wreckage after the performance and took a bow.

Fifty years later artists are still grappling with the idea of creation about destruction, a topic that remains starkly relevant in an age of perpetual war, terrorism and now radiation scares. A new three-part exhibition at the Swiss Institute in New York will present a progression of artworks tackling this theme, using the 50th anniversary of Mr. Tinguely's performance as its jumping-off point. (A broader version of the show was on view at the Museum Tinguely in Basel, Switzerland, last fall.)

"We wanted to show a very distinctive part of destruction — not just destroying, but how destruction itself can be a means of expression for artists," said Gianni Jetzer, curator with Chris Sharp of the exhibition, "Under Destruction," the first chapter of which opened on Wednesday.

The installation will unfold thematically over the coming months. Chapter 1 will focus on the moments before destruction occurs, Chapter 2 (opening May 18) revolves around destruction itself, and Chapter 3 (opening June 29) will muse on its aftermath. But it's not all gloom and doom; here is a selection of what to expect throughout.

RACHEL WOLFF

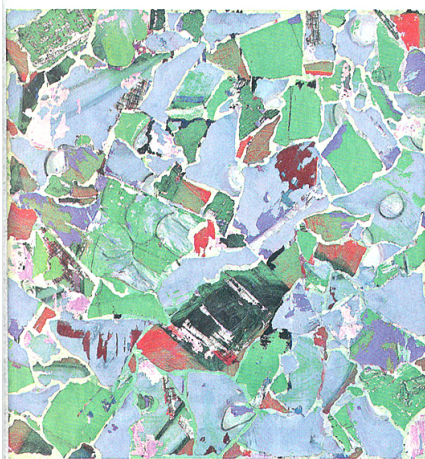


AURELIAN MOLE

## '100 Years,' 2004

Kris Martin

Kris Martin's spherical lead sculpture is more potent than it looks. The piece, which will be seen in Chapter 3, has been rigged with a mechanism that will — if all goes as planned — cause it to disintegrate from the inside out by 2104. "It's all about the fight against mortality, which everybody knows they will lose," Mr. Martin said. "So instead of getting cynical, you can do something. A cook can make an incredible recipe, you can have children, or, in my case, you can make art — something pointing out that you had been there for a little while. My intention was to make something that would expire after my own expiration date."



HANS-GEORG GAUL

## 'Modern Paintings,' 1999-2000

Pavel Buchler

In Chapter 1 the Czech-born conceptual artist Pavel Buchler will show a series of collages made from bits and pieces of paintings that have been discarded by their makers. "The most important thing is that these are rejected paintings," Mr. Buchler said. "Every first brush stroke is an ambitious gesture, then at some point something goes wrong, and the thing ends up in the trash. This is both an exercise and a recovery of that original ambition."

