

London-based Mexican curator **Pablo León de la Barra** has been appointed Guggenheim UBS MAP Curator, Latin America, a post that takes him to New York, initially, in order to strengthen the museum's holdings of Latin American art. Although he has been curating exhibitions in Latin America for the past few years, UK gallery-goers may remember the Blow de la Barra Gallery, his short-lived collaboration with Detmar Blow which during the mid 2000s was to be found in the same building as Sadie Coles HQ on London's Heddon Street.

Roving biennale curator **Hou Hanru**, born in Guangzhou, China but now nominally based in both

Paris and San Francisco, has taken over the reins of the troubled MAXXI in Rome, the Zaha Hadid-designed museum which last year was taken over by government administrators following devastating cuts to the Italian state culture budget (Artnotes AM357).

To nobody's great surprise (Artnotes AM359&366), LA MOCA director **Jeffrey Deitch** has resigned after only three years. Although the organisation was in deep financial trouble when Deitch arrived, the former commercial gallerist and investment adviser was described as a 'controversial' appointment and his actions when in post ensured that the adjective became his permanent prefix. While the museum is well

under way with a \$100m fundraising drive, the loss of prestige and direction under Deitch – not to mention well-respected senior curatorial staff and artist board members – has left it with a problem that may yet prove more damaging than its financial woes.

Henri Loyrette, from 2001 until April this year the director of the Louvre, will next month take up the role of president of Admical, an association representing corporate sponsors and private philanthropists of the arts that champions, among other things, tax breaks for philanthropic gifts – making it the French equivalent of A&B, the UK's Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts. ■

WALTER DE MARIA 1935-2013

Neither a minimalist, a conceptual artist nor even a land artist, Walter De Maria's work incorporated aspects of all three approaches to making art. This is particularly true of his most famous installation, *The Lightning Field*, a Jeffersonian harnessing of the forces of nature. Comprising 400 polished stainless steel rods with pointed tips, each one two inches in diameter and about 22.7ft high, placed 220 feet apart and deployed in what else but a grid measuring one mile by one kilometer, the work spans a vast area of the flat table lands of southern New Mexico. Commissioned by Dia in 1977, De Maria gave precise instructions about how the work should be experienced – only six people at a time may visit the work and each visit includes an overnight stay – and, whereas land artists like Michael Heiser and even Robert Smithson in the case of *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, allowed nature to take its course, De Maria left further instructions for the conservation of the work.

For those unable to make the trek to New Mexico, the description alone conjures a powerful image of the work's measure and grandeur, and of course there are all those wonderful photographs that the work has generated of lightning striking the field. In the case of *The Vertical Earth Kilometer*, 1977, Friedrichsplatz Park in Kassel, Germany, however, the visitor must take much on trust since all that is visible of the two-inch diameter, one-kilometer long brass rod inserted into the ground through six geological layers is a flat brass disk flush with the ground. This work recalls both his earliest work, the site-specific *Mile Long Drawing* in California's Mojave Desert in 1968, and the later companion piece to the Kassel work, *The Broken Kilometer* of 1979. This latter is a permanent installation at Dia, as is *The New York Earth Room* (an earlier temporary installation was created in Munich in 1968) which, with a certain satisfying circularity, literally brought earth art to the city.

Though in the 1960s he had once played the drums in a band – The Primitives – with Lou Reed and John Cale in the days before they formed The Velvet Underground, De Maria shunned the limelight and preferred creating installations to exhibitions. Just before his death, De Maria completed *The 2000 Sculpture*, a floor-based tessellated arrangement of 2,000 white rods, for the Resnick Pavilion of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, under the aegis of its director, Michael Govan, with whom he had worked at Dia. This was something of a homecoming for the California-born but New York-based artist who, like many of his generation, was hugely respected abroad, especially in Europe where, in his later career, he showed more than in his home country. PB

ALLAN SEKULA 1951-2013

In the 1970s and 1980s it was practising photographers who profoundly enriched and transformed photographic history and theory through their writing. Allan Sekula, who died on 10 August aged 62, was among the most important of them. His remarkable essays, including 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary', 'The Traffic in Photographs'

and 'The Body and the Archive', opened up new realms in thinking about photography, especially its circulation, its uses for power, and its descriptions of colonial and class relations. Much of what had seemed natural about photography was revealed as contingent, ideological and governed by the operations of power.

For those who did not live through them, and given the current acceptability of art that deals with overtly political issues, it may be hard to recover the bleakness of the long years during which neoliberalism came to be in the ascendant, and when it was mere common sense to assume that the working class had vanished, radical politics was finished, resistance was impossible and that to incorporate politics into art was at best foolish. Sekula, both in his writing and in his artistic practice, which dealt with labour and the military-industrial complex, provided a crucial resource and inspiration to those who would oppose such thinking. *Fish Story*, 1989-95, a work that took various forms – installation, slide display, book and most recently, in collaboration with Noël Burch, as a film called *The Forgotten Space*, 2010 – was in part designed as a programmatic rebuttal of neoliberal ideology. It dealt with '100,000 invisible ships, 1.5 million invisible seafarers, binding the world together through trade', engaging in a drudgery that few see directly or through depictions in the media. It was also a model for how photography and text could work together to create a sophisticated, self-critical documentary that could productively and radically reflect on itself, the world, and their interaction.

Sekula benefited from the revival of political documentary on the biennale scene, and on the breaks in the political armour of neoliberalism as it fell into deepening contradiction and dysfunction. Okwui Enwezor showed *Fish Story* in his remarkable Documenta 11 in 2002, where it was rightly recognised as a pioneer of new documentary practices. Sekula's work became regularly and prominently shown throughout the global art world. Few who saw his remarkable photographic installation at Documenta 12 in 2007 will forget the parade of portraits of workers ascending the cascade to the Hercules monument.

Two straws in the wind that might have amused but not surprised Sekula: first, that despite his prominence as an artist and writer, few obituaries have appeared in major newspapers, with the exception of a couple in California which focus on his long and dedicated service as a teacher at CalArts. This is the traditional price paid for radical political engagement. Second, that his now rare book of essays and photographic works, *Photography Against the Grain*, is worth many hundreds of pounds, if you can find a copy at all: so here the market mechanically values what the prejudice of media gatekeepers denigrates. JULIAN STALLABRASS

Allan Sekula's *Fish Story* – Chapter 8: *Dismal Science* 1989-92 is on display at Tate Britain 16 September to 23 March.