

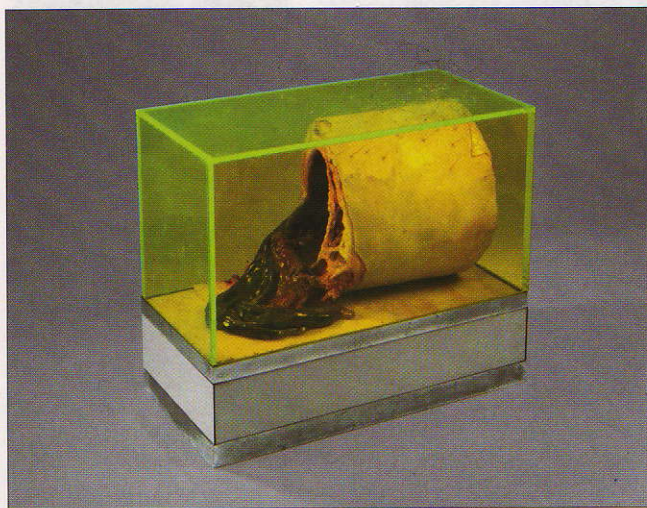
Paul Thek

Whitney Museum

"Diver" was Paul Thek's first major retrospective. Born in 1933, Thek was a painter, sculptor, and installation artist with a singular point of view. He wanted to inject a more visceral reality—"the ugly side of things"—into an art scene that to him was too Minimalist. Celebrated in the 1960s, he fled to Europe in 1967 for an itinerant life and was all but forgotten by the time he returned to New York in 1988, when he was dying of AIDS. He was never particularly sought after again, although in Europe his reputation remained high.

Early sculptures here included the series "Technological Reliquaries"—unsavory hyperreal wax and resin casts of meat and of the artist's body parts displayed in vitrines. These were followed by *The Tomb—Death of a Hippie* (1967), Thek's most notorious piece. The work, of which little is left except photos by Peter Hujar, is a pink, full-size cast of the artist lying naked inside a pink wood pyramid.

The influential, extravagant, ephemeral, process-driven environments-cum-performances of his European years have not aged well, and the curators did not try to re-create them, showing remnants instead. One complete installation, *The Personal Effects of the Pied Piper* (1975–76), featured several lovely small bronze sculptures that included a campfire, a bowl, and a loaf of bread resting on a carpet.



Paul Thek, *Untitled*, 1966, wax, paint, polyester resin, nylon monofilament, wire, plaster, plywood, melamine laminate, rhodium-plated bronze, and Plexiglas, 14" x 15¹/₁₆" x 7¹/₂". Whitney Museum.

Another magical object here was a luminous painted glass globe—an alternative, miniaturized world. Many of the paintings were small and childlike, including lyrical blue seascapes and the affecting divers of the show's title. A late painting of a clock with hands almost at 12, as if time were nearly up, was prophetic. Inexpressively poignant, a poetics of death, the show itself seemed to be a fragile, immersive environment, part reliquary, part magical thinking. —Lilly Wei

UP NOW

Katrín Sigurdardóttir

Metropolitan Museum of Art Through March 6

Icelandic artist Katrín Sigurdardóttir has always been preoccupied with scale and the way any variations in it set off a reverberating sequence of perceptual and cognitive shifts. Her latest project, *Boiseries*, part of the Met's notable exhibition series devoted to midcareer artists, is an elaborate, intensively worked (part handcrafted, part laser-cut), and extremely elegant take on two of the museum's famous period rooms. The south mezzanine gallery houses her almost-scale reprise in wood of a boudoir in the 18th-century Hôtel de Crillon, complete with detailed replications of the rich carvings, gilding,



Katrín Sigurdardóttir, *Boiserie*, 2010, mixed media, installation view. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

and furniture, including the chairs, cabinets, and chandelier.

It's an enclosed space that the viewer circumnavigates, peering in through a number of windows hung with one-way mirrors, suggesting voyeurism as a kind of surveillance. The presence of the viewer is never acknowledged; the interior mirrors reflect just the sealed room, ad infinitum, accessible to eyes only. To remind us of its fictive nature—which is its reality—everything inside is white, bleached. The raw particleboard exterior conjures packing crates and the back of stage sets.

The second room, in the north gallery, from the Hôtel de Cabris, is its opposite. An open construct, the piece, which consists of a series of unfolded panels, most resembles a theater set. However, it diminishes in size to dollhouse proportions as it spirals around, as if it were a perspectival drawing or something seen through a Lewis Carroll looking glass.

While Sigurdardóttir's installations force us to ponder the boundaries between reality and illusion, being and nothingness, they can also be appreciated for their obsessive formality, which is anything but cool, and, at their best, the works are visually irresistible.

—Lilly Wei

Luc Tuymans

David Zwirner

In his nondescript, subtly political canvases Belgian artist Luc Tuymans explores Europe's unsavory past—Belgium's colonial history in the Congo (King Leopold's exploitation, Lumumba's