

# Art and alcohol unite

## It is called the Bar of Modern Art, not the Gallery of Modern Drinks

By Ann Starr

The bard of Columbus, Joe Ong, wrote a song recorded by Bop Du Fway, in which the singer, wishing to flee the local cowtown squares, "...went to a club/ That's disguised as a pub/ They were smug 'cause they had the latest/ and greatest fad/ And it was just like New York City!"

That's the **Bar of Modern Art** in a nutshell. Think of it as a bodybuilder among Columbus clubs—with fine art being the oil that makes its muscles glow.

And with BoMA still in its first phases, owners Pam Theodotou and Tom Starker have already done so much so right.

They have lovingly restored a church that might well have become another asphalt sward, and they have gone all out to provide more than 1,000 linear feet of hangable wall space and gallery lighting. No

art languishes behind potted palms as the place correctly highlights the art of its namesake.

Works by two continuing artists and one visiting artist are showing in the major gallery, dubbed the Great Room. (There are several galleries throughout BoMA.) The Great Room is an elegant—nay, swanky—cocktail bar that sits below the main stained-glass window.

Four huge paintings by figurative painter Drew Ernst hang high, along the sides of the balcony. And a fine show of owner Theodotou's black-and-white infrared photography hangs on the intimate balcony itself.

The visiting show this month is a moving series of photographs of actor James Dean taken by Dennis Stock, a member of the international photographic cooperative Magnum. Stock met Dean in 1955 on the set of *East of Eden*, and Dean allowed the photographer to travel with him for an extended shoot, including a visit home to his aunt and uncle's farm in Fairmont, Ind., after a New York City layover. And what a show this material makes.

In these candid images, we're surprised to see Dean in a bongo class, looking up

### You call that **ART**?

for approval like a schoolboy to his majestic teacher, Cyril Jackson. Dean concentrates with a young nephew as they build a model car; he poses with his uncle's sow, or sleeps obliviously with his feet on his accountant's desk as the tolerant accountant sorts through sheaves of papers. The photos are beautiful and the subject fascinating—

knowing what we do about a young man forced by admirers into the form of an icon.

So far so good.

But there are potential problems at BoMA to keep an eye on. Gallery director Chad Tooker, who had been part of the development from an

early stage, disappeared abruptly last week, just as things were getting up and running. This timing suggests more than a minor managerial setback at a critical point.

Theodotou and Starker mention in their gallery information that they want, among other things, to provide "an opportunity for cultural education." Since both are Ohioans who have returned after long stints in New York (Starker's drinks with Andy Warhol came up three times in a half-hour conversation), one shudders just a little at the possible subtexts.

Anyway, we're talking about cultural education—with martinis. Docents have been hired to show work to visitors in the evenings, and they also serve as guards since there are bound to be a few whoopies when patrons of the four full-service bars fall in love with the art.

But it is the *Bar* of Modern Art, after all, not the *Gallery* of Modern Drinks. Though art lovers and drinkers have always kept close company, just how close is good for the artists and their work may be decided in time.

Or maybe all this has been decided elsewhere; it may be more like New York City than I imagine.

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