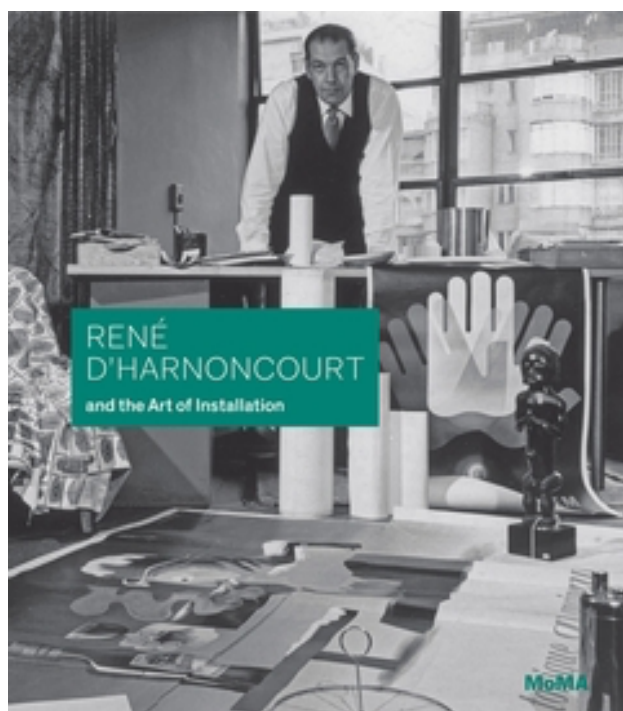


## René d'Harnoncourt and the Art of Installation

by Michelle Elligott. The Museum of Modern Art, distributed by D.A.P., November 2018. 176 p. ill. ISBN 9781633450509 (h/c), \$45.00.

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René d'Harnoncourt was a dynamic and creative force in the history of The Museum of Modern Art, and, as Michelle Elligott makes clear in her informative book, *René d'Harnoncourt and the Art of Installation*, in the history of the presentation of works of art to the public. D'Harnoncourt was a gifted artist and collector, and, from 1941 until his retirement in 1968, held numerous positions at MoMA including curator and then director for nearly twenty years. It was his role as exhibition designer that set him apart as an original and highly influential leader in MoMA's history, and in the more general history of museum exhibition design. His is one of the many stories of exceptional curators and museum directors that has been waiting to be told. Thanks to Elligott's artfully researched book we have a more informed understanding

and appreciation of this famously amiable museum director and pioneer in museum installations. The designers of the book have clearly been inspired by d'Harnoncourt's great talent for design, layout, placement, and use of color, and have produced a publication of striking originality and one worthy of its subject.

Michelle Elligott is Chief of Archives, Library, and Research Collections at MoMA. Her nearly twenty years in the archive have given her a profound knowledge of the collections, and she demonstrates admirable virtuosity in using MoMA's archive, which, as one would expect, is one of the richest collections of primary source material on not only the history of MoMA, but also a rich trove on the art of the last eighty years.

Supported with extensive quotations and illustrations, Elligott's long essay is a major contribution to the history of MoMA. More broadly, her discussion of d'Harnoncourt's presentation of works of art and their reception brings new and illuminating themes to the history of art. Exhibition design was a creative practice for d'Harnoncourt, and the many installation studies included in the book express the range of his imagination. While each of his more than two dozen installation designs was unique--and in some cases even revolutionary in the museum context--Elligott stresses that d'Harnoncourt's work was always in service to the art. She quotes his observation that "the only good installation is one where people forget the installation and remember the work of art."

Elligott's essay is informative and unabashedly admiring of its subject. Her narrative is followed by twelve "Portfolios," that offer a brief description of landmark exhibitions, along with numerous drawings and installation photographs. The book concludes with a useful chronology of d'Harnoncourt's life, and includes an increasingly neglected component of a scholarly publication, a useful index--all expressive of the great care MoMA staff have devoted to this inspiring publication.