

Marriott's snarl becomes a grin

Artist **John Marriott**'s ongoing critique of public institutions, and art institutions in particular, has been savage enough that in 1996, he exhibited a deep-fried Grecian urn. But with his new interactive exhibition **Soft Spots**, now at the Koffler Gallery, Marriott has become so darned genial it's positively disarming.

You walk into the gallery, sit down on the black leather bench and the bench promptly utters a cheerful "Hello!" in Marriott's own voice. Glance up at the clock on the wall and you see that instead of numbers, it bears the word "Well," painted three times on its face. Perhaps you're supposed to give in to the idea that the time you spend meditating in a museum is a special time unto itself. Or maybe it's more sinister than that. Maybe time is a well-well-well of loneliness.

As you sit on the gregarious bench, musing on the wellness of time, you notice a sort of sixties-ish carpet on the floor in front of you. The carpet is made up of yellow discs on white backgrounds — very *Austin Powers*-esque. This is the piece called *Soft Spots*, and you're invited to walk on it (there are no Do Not Touch signs in this museum). When you do, you leave big deep moon-walk footprints on each yellow disc (which are made of a material memorably referred to as "memorapedic foam"). After a while, alas, your footprints disappear, along with the impression you have made. Museums can be so impersonal.

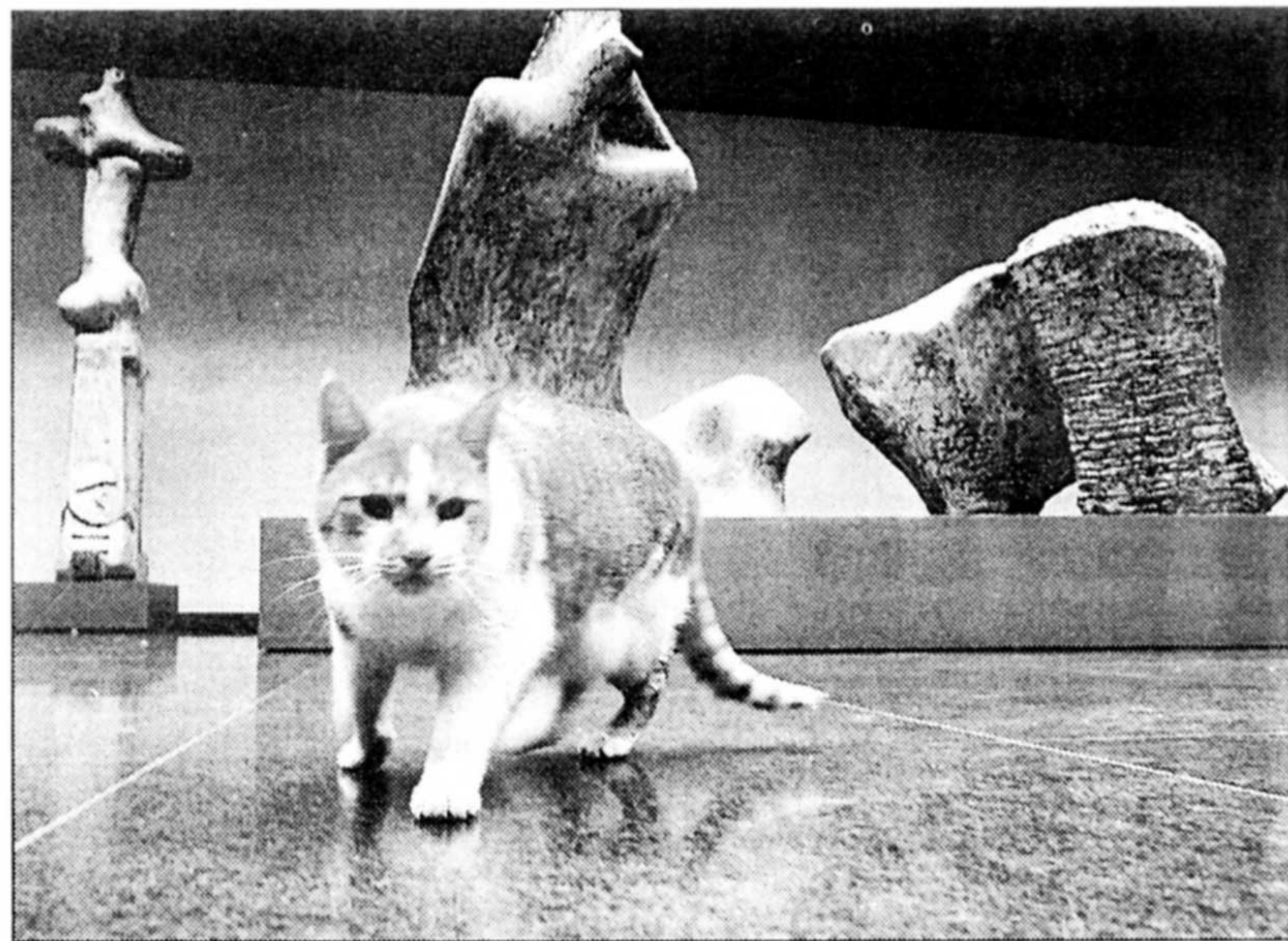
GALLERY GOING

GARY MICHAEL DAULT

No time to feel slighted, though, because there's a giant smile-shaped hole in the gallery wall, welcoming you to the next room. Pass through (now you know how Jonah felt) and there, at the core of Marriott's ingratiating exhibition, is a three-minute video projection. Entitled *Where The Cat's At*, the tape follows the progress of a large curmudgeonly orange and white cat as it inspects several of the AGO's halls of high culture.

This world-weary feline has clearly seen it all before, and (because of some deft and judicious editing) appears openly dismissive of a Picasso sculpture, is clearly bored by a roomful of 19th-century paintings, and finally shows a spark of interest in the Henry Moores — indeed at one point the creature actually blinks hard and gasps in amazement at one of the sculptures before moving on.

Prices not given. Until Aug. 8. Koffler Gallery, 4588 Bathurst St., 416-636-1800, ext. 268.



Where The Cat's At is a video display in John Marriott's latest exhibition