To Al Thomas; and the women who build big muscle
One of the inadvertent compensations for the tribulations of parenthood is that we may learn from our offspring lessons at least as valuable as those we impart to them. Such was the case when one of my daughters, Amelia, became a photographer and conceived an abiding interest in bodybuilders. Showing my wife and me some of her work one day she described her subjects as body-sculptures, and my life was transformed. In that instant I realized that I had spent a large part of my professional career as an art historian blindly studying the representation of the human figure in the visual arts (particularly sculpture), without seeing the subjects who
were hidden within and behind the objects of my devotion. Visually speaking, the body is an agglomeration of muscles, each of which has the potential to become a kind of brush- or chisel-stroke, of which the self-artist must become self-conscious, learn to develop, and then work into an overall design. The body may thus become a living work of art, no less thoughtfully conceived and laboriously executed than the painting or sculpture or photograph that portrays it. Behind and within the history of the humanistic tradition in art there lies a prior and inner history of art, that of the artists' models—those largely anonymous and unsung people who preceded and provided the raw material of inspiration. Was the model for the Venus of Willendorf a "body-builder"? What were her designs? How did she achieve those extravagant shapes, and what did they mean to her? This last is a crucial point, for every human being comes equipped with a virtually infinite endowment of physical and psychological potentialities, which the individual develops in finite ways to create, willy-nilly or deliberately, a person, a style, and ultimately a message about the meaning of the world as we understand, or fail to understand, it.

Having later witnessed with Amelia a bodybuilding exhibition (Celebration of the Most Awesome Female Muscle in the World, organized in 1993 by Laurie Fierstein, who also participated), I further realized that I had an entirely mistaken preconception of the nature of the activity because it is grossly misrepresented in the medium of still photography through which it is best known. Bodybuilding's initiates call it a sport, whereas what I saw was a dramatic action, a performance, and inevitably so, when one thinks about it, because we cannot understand what the body-artist's muscle-strokes have achieved without seeing them in action. The artist/work-of-art is practically never at rest, and the quality of the movement is no less eloquent than the glistening, streamlined forms themselves—balletic is the only adequate word.

And I am convinced that evocations of the body beautiful such as Giambologna's flying figure of Mercury, the messenger of the Gods—familiar to everyone from the flower-telegraphy logo, and distinctly recalled in the volatile forms of Christina Franken and Laura Creavalle illustrated here—cannot be understood apart from contemporary developments of the ballet.

But the term bodybuilding, which we use faute de mieux, does have at least one virtue: it suggests the idea of structure, as if the physique were a kind of edifice. In fact, the bodybuilder's body is, I think, a shrine, erected by those who have the imagination and the courage to endure the agony of transforming the inward and outward self into a work of art. They make the supreme sacrifice to the Temple of Beauty, sacrifice of the self.

I have deliberately avoided the term "Amazon" adopted in the title of this book, for reasons that are steeped in irony or paradox. First, because unlike the modern female bodybuilder, the Greco-Roman Amazon, however formidable, never exceeds the classical norms of feminine nobility and pulchritude. Second, because bodybuilding, male as well as female, tends to blur the conventional distinctions between the sexes, diminishing breasts and magnifying thighs among the women, magnifying breasts and diminishing genitalia among the men (the penis being one "muscle" that is not durably enlarged through exercise, so far as I know—as witness the ancient type of the mountainous, muscle-bound Resting Hercules). Through bodybuilding the sexes tend to merge in a common vision of humanity. The only apt analogy for this ideal, anthropomorphic androgyny are the angels, those other heaven-sent messengers of superhuman beauty and strength, incorpo-real embodiments of the dream of human perfectibility.
the following publishers granted permissions for the catalogue:

Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
10956 SE Main Street
Milwaukie, OR 97222

DC Comics
1700 Broadway
New York, NY 10019

Eros Comix
PO Box 25070
Seattle, WA 98125

Kitchen Sink Press
76 Pleasant Street
Northampton, MA 01060

LH-ART
P.O. Box 129
Lawai, HI 96765

Marvel Comics
387 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016

Onli Studios
5121 S. Ellis Ave
Chicago, IL 60615

Bill Jenzt
Women’s Physique World
P.O. Box 443
Hohokus, NJ 07423

the new museum board of trustees

Saul Dennison, President
James C.A. McClennen, Vice President and Treasurer
Paul T. Schnell, Vice President
Robert J. Shiffier, Vice President
Laura Skoler, Vice President
Dieter Bogner
Jean Carey Bond
James – Keith Brown
Stephanie French
Allen A. Goldring
Manuel E. Gonzalez
Maren Hensler
Joan Lazarus
Toby Devan Lewis

Steven M. Pesner
Nancy Portnoy
Carole Rifkind
Herman Schwartzman, Esq.
Vera G. List, Emerita
Henry Luce III, Life Trustee
Marcia Tucker, Director Emerita

the new museum artist advisory board

Janine Antoni
Doug Ashford
Judith Barry
Nayland Blake
Barbara Bloom
Joanna Osburn Bigfeather
Tania Bruguera
Shu Lea Chang
Janine Cirincione
Renee Cox
Jimmie Durham
Amy Haft
Mary Heilmann
Kathy High
Deborah Kass
Byron Kim
Iriigo Mangianno-Ovalle
Paul Miller
Mariko Mori
Donald Odita
Pepon Osorio
Catalina Parra
Ernesto Pujol
Paul Ramirez-Jonas
Al Ruppersberg
Carolee Schneemann
Amy Stillman
Diana Thater
Rirkrit Tiravanija
Carmelita Tropicana
Nari Ward
Fred Wilson
Xu Bing
Lyne Yamamoto
Mel Ziegler

the new museum staff

Administrative Assistant, April Age
Security, Kimball Augustus
Curator of Education, Anne Barlow
Volunteer Coordinator, Richard Barr
Public Relations Coordinator, Meg Blackburn
Technical Systems Manager, Kim Boane
Executive Assistant, Director’s Office, Victoria Brown
Installation Coordinator, Tom Brumley
Senior Curator, Dan Cameron
Bookstore Clerk, Adam Dragon
Membership Coordinator, Suzanne Egeran
Curatorial Associate, Anne Ellegood
Education Coordinator, Sarah Farsad
Manager of Finance and Administration, Rika Yihua Feng

Education Coordinator—New Media, Donna Gesualdo
Registrar/Exhibitions Manager, John Hatfield
Bookstore Manager, Jennifer Hedlin
Maintainer, Wayne Holiday
Bookstore Assistant Manager, David Hunter
Director of Operations, Patricia Kirshner
Maintainer, Dwayne Langston
Special Events Manager, Vicki Latimer
Admissions Clerk, Naomi Lifschitz
Admissions Clerk, Desiree Lopez
Security, Beryl Markland
Bookstore Clerk, Zulema Mejias
Adjunct Curator, Gerardo Mosquera
Bookstore Clerk, Tracy Nakayama
Security, Meredith Parker
Senior Sales, Bookstore, Herbert Pfohl
Director, Lisa Phillips
Security, Michael Rechner
Assistant Registrar, Sela Saglam
Security, Robert Santiago
Grants Manager, Hasanthika Sirisena
Curatorial Administrator/Publications Manager, William Stover
Director of Marketing and Special Events, Maureen Sullivan
Deputy Director, Dennis Szakacs