

VIEW

Ideas

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Contemporary Art Museum Opener Is a Work of Art

A Glittering Crowd Turns Out for the Gala Christening

By MARYLOUISE OATES, Times Staff Writer

MOCA's a hit.

A fusillade of favorable reviews proclaimed the new Museum of Contemporary Art a winner, even before Monday night's first blast in a weeklong series of sparkly opening evenings.

But, oh, there is nothing like the sweet look, taste and party fervor that accompanies success. Especially when such raging success was not always expected—and there were some who doubted that this innovative institution would ever get off the drawing boards.

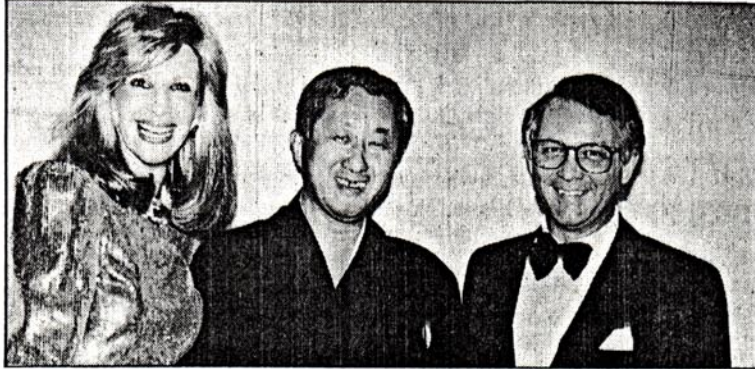
So how many early doubters were among the 1,500-plus partygoers cruising through the dramatic downtown building. "More than a few," estimated a beaming William Kieschnick, MOCA's chairman of the board.

'Unfinished Business'

But, Kieschnick said, once people got a look at the inside of the museum at the May 16 fund-raiser, doubting ceased. "There is unfinished business, though," he added, raising the \$10 million for the endowment and the \$5 million for the Giuseppe Panza di Biumo collection acquisition. "Then we'll take the day off."

"It's been a long seven years," trustee Eli Broad announced. Who didn't think MOCA could happen? "Just about everybody. That made it a great challenge."

Black tie this evening really meant black tie. Trustee Jane Nathanson in a drop-dead



At the entrance to MOCA, opening-night joy is shared by Trustee Jane Nathanson, from left, architect Aido Isozaki and MOCA Director Richard Koshalek.

Caroline Herrera—"festive, and it sparkles. Just like the museum." Joan Quinn in an of-course Zandra Rhodes. MOCA, according to Quinn, who serves on the California Arts Council, is "such a bonus for our California artists. A fabulous showplace."

Downtown activist Kathy Moret was in a dashing Murray Arheid strapless—he did Princess Di's first daring number. Bought not in London, Moret explained, but at Neiman-Marcus.

Marcia Weisman wore a modern-design looking Fabrice, which she announced she had worn to every MOCA occasion in the past few years. Sighting the dress in Bergdorf Goodman a few years back, she related, "I said, 'I'll take it. Don't tell me how much.'" Weisman is, of course, the multimillionaire art collector.

And, gowns and tuxes, they clambered on to the vast freight elevator for the ride down to the dining area, set up in the museum's basement storage rooms. A few scattered tables provided a momentary rest for the hungry, but Rococo had a year to plan a menu to pull even the most weary back to the buffets. Appetizers like California Golden Caviar Torte, entrees like Nouvelle Sausages of Chicken and Cilantro, "Spago Style" pizzas, duck salad, and desserts that could make a chocoholic cry.

Just as tasty was the conversation. "Here's our next governor. Maybe," quipped Fred Nicholas, MOCA vice chairman as he greeted Atty. Gen. John Van de Kamp. The A.G., along with Mayor Tom and Ethel Bradley and Sen. Pete and Gayle Wilson provided a full political range—



JOSE GALVEZ / Los Angeles Times

From left, MOCA Chairman William Kieschnick, President Lenore Greenberg, Vice Chairman Fred Nicholas.

from leading Democrats to top Republicans—at the party. And watching Gayle Wilson meet and greet, bright as her emerald green dress, is like watching "The Making of the Candidate's Wife." She could be California's top political wife.

More talk. Two people who keep Hollywood looking picture-pretty—Dr. Arnold Klein, the dermatologist, and Dr. Frank Kamer, the plastic surgeon—stood chatting beside the Founder's Wall at the entrance to MOCA. With them was Judy Gee, whom both doctors credit with bringing collagen to Los Angeles. But wait—wasn't the still-incomplete wall itself the product of some quickie face-lifting? Not stone, but plywood, and with the names not engraved, but painted. Just so everything would be

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Gathering for art are, from left, Craig Johnson; Judy Ovitz; her husband, MOCA trustee and agent Mike Ovitz, and Douglas Cramer, another museum trustee.



Outside front door of the Museum of Contemporary Art, collector Marcia Weisman meets up with two works by Robert Graham, "Spy" and "Stephanie."

MOCA

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least looking right for opening night.

Still more talk—and this time from important young movers-and-shakers on the entertainment side. Superagent Mike Ovitz and his wife Judy took their guest, Jane Eisner, home a little early since Mrs. Ovitz is expecting shortly. Ovitz said he was pleased that with the opening of MOCA and the opening last month of the County Museum of Art's Robert O. Anderson Building, there are two major spaces for contemporary art in L.A.. He was joined by producer Steve Tisch. Talking about the upcoming gala marking Lew Wasserman's 50th year with MCA, Tisch joked he was trying to figure out some way to get himself honored for "my 15 years in this business."

Mega-collector Douglas Cramer, whose dialogue is frequently much more clever than what is heard on his successful TV shows, pointed out that there was a roped-off area in front of one large painting—Barnett Newman's "Onenent IV"—and that it had apparently been put there at the request of Marcia Weisman. "What has this done to deserve the rope?" Cramer asked kiddingly. He looked at the card crediting the painting's owner and said, "Oh. It's her son, Richard's. Now that's a good mother."

Some political talk. Like from Steve and Kitty Moses, heading back to their D.C. home this week to coordinate both the Gary Hart



JOSE GALVEZ / Los Angeles Times

Edythe and Eli Broad, Paige Rense and Rose Tarlow, from left, at opening gala for the new Museum of Contemporary Art.

Tribute and the Center for National Policy dinner honoring House Majority Leader Jim Wright. And some politics from Deputy Mayor Tom Houston, back from his hot-air balloon wedding and chatting with the zoo's Marcia Hobbs. On the gubernatorial defeat of Mayor Bradley, there was a silver lining—as Hobbs said: "I'd have to break in a new mayor."

The crowd in the downstairs dining area got more and more crushed. Judy Henning flashed her electronic necklace as she passed Appellate Justice William and Merrie Norris. "This is unreal," said Norris, looking around the crowd, "really unreal. A tribute to L.A."

Some expected faces were missing—they were at the NOW 20th anniversary celebration down the street at the Music Center.

Still, almost everybody who was expected was indeed at MOCA.

This was an especially great night for MOCA's trustees. Like George Moss with wife Ruth, joined

for a little nouvelle pizza by Leopold Wyler and his wife Pamela. Bea Gersh chatted with MOCA Director Richard Koshalek, while Fred Nicholas, with his wife Joan, was the happy recipient of a seemingly unending line of thank-yous. Happy trustees were everywhere—like William Hatch, Elizabeth Keck and Councilman Joel Wachs. And those from other cultural communities—attorney Richard and Dee Sherwood, the Mark Taper's Gordon and Judi Davidson, CalArt's Bob Fitzpatrick, Fire Commissioner Aileen Adams and husband Geoff Cowan, and Marjorie and Michael Fasman.

"How do I feel?" repeated MOCA board president Lenore Greenberg. "Elated—because everybody loves MOCA. And what could be better?"

Arriving late to dine was Wallis Annenberg, who had spent, she said, an hour with the paintings. And was planning to come back again the next night. "And for me to drive downtown twice in a week really shows you . . ."