

*Untitled,
part of Dallas
Project by
Matt
Mullican,
currently on
loan from the
Robert Rowen
collection*

MOCA

Board member Marcia Weisman photographed at home with a Clifford Still painting



LOS ANGELES — When the Museum of Contemporary Art was getting started eight years ago and didn't have a building or an audience, Richard Koshalek, who was then associate director, sent his curators into the streets to create a "guerrilla" museum.

"It was like guerrilla warfare," Koshalek, now MOCA's director, recalls from his sleek office in the new museum. "We were going to show up in different parks, abandoned buildings, loading docks and closed-off streets to stage performance art to build a membership before this building was finished."

Now MOCA, from its headquarters atop Bunker Hill, courts corporate movers and social shakers, worries about acquisitions budgets and aims to be a big player in international contemporary art. But it hasn't lost its guerrilla roots. Its adventurous programming

Eli Broad, trustee, with Roger Hernan's "Mountain II" and "Mountain I"



PHOTOS BY ART STREIBER

The HIPPEST MUSEUM

Fred Nicholas, chairman, and Richard Koshalek, museum director, with MOCA's pyramids



has attracted the hippest audience of any major cultural institution in the city.

"I encourage my curators to spend a lot of time in studios," Koshalek, 46, says. "We get clues from the artists, and if MOCA can stay close to the working artists, MOCA will stay contemporary and in touch with what is happening in the world of art. This sensitivity to the artist makes MOCA more exciting than most institutions and makes it more original."

Artists had input on the design of MOCA's building, and today they have a say in how their work is going to be displayed and the layout and look of the catalogs accompanying their shows.

Several artists, including DeWain Valentine and Sam Francis, have been important MOCA board members. Valentine is credited with making the first overtures to ARCO, an early and generous supporter, and set up a meeting between then-chairman of ARCO Robert O. Anderson and Eli Broad, MOCA's first chairman.

Valentine recalls that artists had a strong say in shaping the Bunker Hill building. "We had two artists on the architectural committee, Sam Francis and Bob Irwin, and they mandated that simplicity be the key, with no extra architectural details. There were many meetings with [Japanese architect Arata] Isozaki, and over a period we came to an understanding. Bob Irwin was the one who hung tough and he should get the credit.

"MOCA has made contemporary art important in Los Angeles," Valentine says, "and made Los Angeles an important place for contemporary art. Before, the city didn't have an institution exhibiting contemporary art. The county museum was a general museum and could not focus on contemporary.

"Los Angeles was a bulging center for young artists and they needed to see and be seen. It's one of the few cases where what you dreamed has happened and



MOCA's main building; the barrel vault structure on stilts houses the library and board room

it has gotten better."

When MOCA's main building opened in December 1986 near the Music Center, its red sandstone facade, rooftop pyramids and barrel vault on stilts instantly became an architectural landmark on the steel and glass skyscraper landscape of downtown Los Angeles.

It was a hard-won triumph, capping a seven-year struggle that might be called the Battle of Bunker Hill, Los Angeles style.

Controversy flared when the architecture committee couldn't agree on a designer for the new building. Max Palevsky lobbied for Richard Meier, but then agreed with his colleagues to select Isozaki to design it. After Isozaki's early designs were submitted, Palevsky quit the board and reneged on his \$1 million pledge to MOCA. A lawsuit, a countersuit and settlement followed.

Even MOCA's first major acquisition, The Panza Collection, was the focus of a skirmish when the board considered selling off some of the paintings to help pay for the \$11 million acquisition. Those fears were never realized.

The museum's first director, Pontus Hulten, quit in 1982, returning to Paris long before the new headquarters were opened.

The Bunker Hill building was scheduled to open for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, but construction delays made that deadline unachievable. So a temporary MOCA — dubbed the Temporary Contemporary — was opened in 1983. A warehouse in Little Tokyo, renovated by architect Frank Gehry, the TC was so successful that it has become the permanent bohemian brother of MOCA.

The most recent tempest was in January when several large donors grew disaffected when they were left off the guest list for a social event held at MOCA, but sponsored by Giorgio Armani.

Although MOCA had 10 consecutive nights of parties when its main building opened, it was the Armani event that pushed MOCA into the city's social spotlight and put it on an even footing with the Music Center and The Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Armani made a donation of close to \$100,000 to the museum and held a fashion show and black-tie dinner at MOCA to kick off his new Rodeo Drive store. The guest list was skewed to Hollywood celebrities. Since members of the film industry are not generally large contributors to the city's visual arts, the limited guest

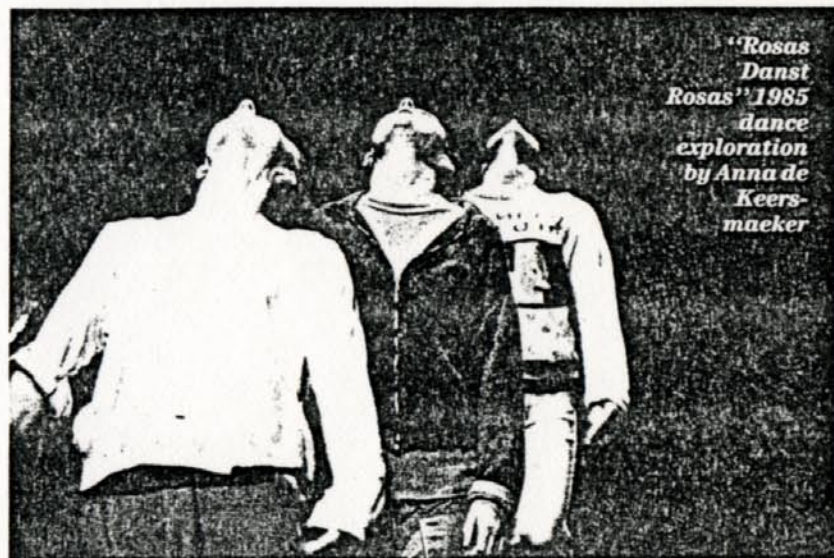
list of 300 didn't include a lot of MOCA contributors, who found they couldn't even buy tickets at scalper's prices.

The party turned out to be a major social event, but one that made the museum enemies as well as friends.

Koshalek embraces the controversy. "If you slow down and hold back on activities such as the Armani event, then the institution isn't going to grow. We have to reach for the future. You can be careful and con-

siderate, but to a large extent you have to move forward and always say what's next; otherwise, an institution develops hardening of the arteries.

"There may have been certain people who didn't get an invitation," he says, "but that happens every time you have an event like this and they are not happy. But that's a positive thing — that means they are interested and they will come back.



*"Rosas
Danst
Rosas" 1985
dance
exploration
by Anna de
Keers-
maeker*

MOCA PHOTO

Douglas Cramer, a major art collector and vice chairman of Aaron Spelling Productions, was named head of the acquisition committee in April.

When MOCA decides it wants a work of art, the museum uses its powerful board members to cajole and solicit dollars. An Anselm Kiefer valued at \$145,000 was acquired recently by a quick and concerted fund-raising effort.

"We still don't have a budget, and it's called acquisitions by ingenuity," Cramer says. "Right now the operating expenses and endowment come first."

Unlike many new museums, MOCA isn't burdened with heavy debt.

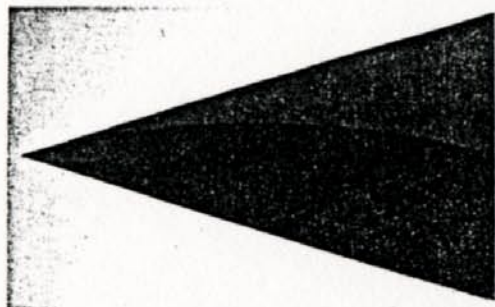
It got the \$23 million it needed for its Bunker Hill building from the developer of Bunker Hill's California Plaza office residential complex, who had to meet a Community Redevelopment Agency requirement that 1.5 percent of his project's budget be devoted to public art. When the CRA insisted that MOCA founders qualify by raising \$10 million on their own, they exceeded the goal. Operating the museum has been the founders' responsibility, and they have been able to amass a \$25 million endowment. The museum's annual operating budget is \$7 million.

To insure MOCA's future, Koshalek and Nicholas blitzed downtown Los Angeles' corporate chieftains this summer, soliciting about 25 companies and getting pledges of about \$160,000 for a new annual fund campaign. Among the new contributors were David Murdoch, Warner Bros., Chevron and City National Bank. Atlantic Richfield (ARCO) has been the museum's sugar daddy, donating \$6 million over the last eight years.

Nicholas wants to geographically broaden MOCA's support base, which has been primarily the Westside and Orange County.

Affluent Westsiders (Beverly Hills, Santa Monica) represent over 50 percent of MOCA's membership and also dominate the board. These members include Eli Broad and Marcia Weisman, who were instrumental in getting MOCA established. Broad operates one of the largest home builders in America, Kaufman & Broad, whose corporate offices have an extensive collection of contemporary California artists.

As the first chairman, Broad guided the museum through its turbulent era and isn't bashful about taking credit for being the museum's entrepreneurial driving



Ellsworth Kelly at MOCA

That event had people from Bob Dylan to Steven Spielberg to Betsy Bloomingdale. It was an incredible collection in this building and it had a much more positive than negative impact on us."

Fred Nicholas, MOCA's chairman, wants the museum to move forward with fewer histrionics and more maturity. He succeeded William Kieschnick as chairman in May and is quick to acknowledge MOCA's growing pains.

"We have made mistakes in our energy and our desire to survive and grow and we are trying to bring people back into the fold. We are trying to make the museum more personal than we have before.

"We haven't lost key people," Nicholas says, "but we have lost some founders who want more activity and more focus on themselves. We have been young and brash and now we are trying to be a little older and more mature in our judgments, and, hopefully, over the next five years, we can institutionalize our structure and get the founders on the lists, make them happy."

The largest fund-raiser MOCA holds has been the biennial art auction, which raised over \$1 million in February. The evening, for \$400 a ticket, included dinner in one of the best art-filled homes in Los Angeles.

The MOCA Contemporaries, a support group of young business professionals, stages the liveliest events. Its second annual Grand Splash Party at the museum's Temporary Contemporary building was held in August, drawing over 1,000 people, including many young Hollywood actors.

Mark Esh-

man, a vice president at Drexel Burnham Lambert, started the group with a kickoff party at Helena's in 1986 after he grew concerned about the values of his peers.

"I took art history as a minor at Duke, and when I returned to Los Angeles my friends were interested only in their careers and making a lot of money. There was a severe lack of altruistic interest and an overemphasis on consumption. I was reading about this hot young museum and proposed to form a group that would act as the social liaison between our age group and the museum. If people 25 to 40 get started now with the museum they will be inexorably tied to the museum."

The Grand Splash raised more than \$40,000, which will help the several key areas where funds are needed at MOCA, especially beefing up the permanent collection and starting an adult art-education program.

The museum doesn't have a budget for acquisitions, and the permanent collection is thin, which is to be expected of a young museum. The Panza acquisition provided 80 works and gave MOCA a strong representation of Mark Rothko and Robert Rauschenberg. The Barry Lowen Collection, a gift of 67 works, included samplings of Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly. Norton Simon is loaning MOCA 13 pieces, including "Brillo Boxes" by Andy Warhol, which will be displayed in the South Gallery later this month.

force. Some board members think Broad inflates his importance, but he has put his money where his mouth is and gave MOCA its first \$1 million donation.

The museum has been able to attract 30,000 dues-paying members, a considerable number for a contemporary art museum, especially a new one. The Museum of Modern Art in New York, which opened in 1929, has about 54,000 members. Attendance at MOCA is growing and reached 600,000 last year, whereas MOMA drew over 1,500,000.

The current Anselm Kiefer show is expected to draw 200,000 during its three-month run, which would make it the second largest draw at MOCA since the inaugural show in 1986. Kiefer's paintings investigate Germany's World War II atrocities and mock his country's pretensions.

The TC's 50,000 square feet allow MOCA's curators freedom to experiment in a way that's impossible at the Isozaki main building. Sherry Geldin, assistant director, said, "When we first saw that warehouse it was dirty and grimy and it had magnificent potential. With its soaring loft light, it's the kind of space artists seek out. The TC



"Small Monument to a Swiss Monument,"
from a 1986 John Chamberlain exhibit

PHOTO BY SOURDIS & HUNKS

has a raw informality and allowed us to install Richard Serra's 60-foot double arch pieces of steel, and we had to tear out the loading docks to do it.

"That informality let Chris Burden dig up the floor and burrow into the foundations of the building. One simply couldn't have done that in our new building, which sits on top of seven levels of parking." Burden's piece, entitled "Exposing the Foundations of the Museum," asked whether the museum's foundation was its structure or the money and power behind it.

Visiting curators have been impressed by MOCA's versatility. Neal Benezra, curator of 20th-century art and paintings at the Art Institute of Chicago, said MOCA is building its reputation with its ambitious programming and in time will also have a strong collection.

It was feared that with MOCA's arrival there wouldn't be enough donations to allow both MOCA and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to thrive. LACMA, which opened its own modern art wing, the Anderson Building, about the same time as MOCA's Bunker Hill building, scored a contemporary art coup with its David Hockney show earlier this year; it drew 220,000 viewers.

The competition between the two museums has been played down by both Koshalek and Rusty Powell, LACMA's director. Powell said, "The art scene has grown so dramatically in Los Angeles that there is always room for one more. In museum terms, we and MOCA complement each other. We currently are working with the Getty on a project and we would like to do that with MOCA also. We have been discussing a collaborative education program with Richard, and we both agree that those kinds of things are clearly good for the future of both museums."

— STEVE GINSBERG

IN TOWN

