

RSVP

The Not-So-Temporary Museum

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Paul Schimmel, chief curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art, headed into the 55,000-square-foot space that is MOCA at the Temporary Contemporary in Little Tokyo. "People are energized by this building. This building is about possibility," he enthused.

Around him collectors, museum trustees, donors, staff, artists and some just plain gawkers who had gathered to celebrate Thursday's reopening of the facility after three years echoed his satisfaction that the Temporary is now permanent.

"We have a 99-year lease on this place. I intend to be here when the lease expires and I hope you will too," joked MOCA Director Richard Koshalek as he introduced a trio of fund-raising chairs to talk about the \$25-million "Campaign for MOCA: The Museum of the Future in the City of the Future."

He said they'd speak for about five minutes each. The first speaker, David Laventhol, MOCA chairman and Times Mirror Co. editor at large, quickly noted, "It will be two minutes, not five." Fred Nicholas and Audrey Irmas stuck to that plan, Irmas concluding by urging the guests to "use their champagne for a round of toasts to the wonderful years, times and exhibitions that we're about."

The toast came halfway through the cocktail reception catered outdoors by Patina. Double fudge pecan brownies and chocolate hazelnut bars were among the desserts, both smelling somewhat more mouthwatering than Ed Ruscha's "Chocolate Room," a re-creation of his 1970 room shingled with sheets of paper silk-screened with chocolate, one of the works in the exhibition marking the reopening.

There's plenty of room for such large-scale work in this converted warehouse. "I remember bringing Mayor Tom Bradley here when we were first planning to use it, and he said he couldn't believe we were going to make a museum out of this piece of junk," said former MOCA Chairman Eli Broad, praising the renovation work of architect Frank Gehry. "I know Frank claims that he just cleaned it up, but of course he did more," Broad said.

Hanging some of these works at home is more of a challenge, but some people take it on--such as Stuart and Judy Spence, who own several Allen Ruppersberg works, including the 20 six-foot canvases inscribed with Oscar Wilde's entire novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray," which they had loaned for the exhibit.

"At home we can hang four panels and stack three or four and then rotate the others from what used to be a very nice closet," Stuart Spence said. At the museum, all the canvases were displayed, some stacked "in browsing style."

Exhibited artists present included Ruppersberg, Ruscha, John Baldessari, Christine Kozlov, Joseph Kosuth and Maria Nordman. Also gazing and grazing were Margot and Henry Bamberger, Gordon Davidson with daughter Rachel, Robert Graham, Ed Moses, Jane and Marc Nathanson, Lenore and Bernard Greenberg and many, many more, because, after all, there was plenty of space.

PHOTO: Allen Ruppersberg's canvases inscribed with "The Picture of Dorian Gray" serve as the backdrop for the artist's chat with Audrey Irmas.;
PHOTOGRAPHER: LEE SALEM / For The Times

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