

← Back to Original Article

## Ann Goldstein takes her MOCA learning to Amsterdam

*She's now director of the Stedelijk Museum, where renovations remain unfinished. That reminded her of what happened back in L.A.*

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Reporting from Amsterdam — The Stedelijk Museum has a long-standing reputation in the art world for innovation. That spirit was underscored with the 2009 choice of an American as its new director: Ann Goldstein, who was then a senior curator at L.A.'s Museum of Contemporary Art.

Goldstein was excited by the notion of presiding over the reopening of the country's most important museum of modern and contemporary art, which had been closed for renovations since 2003. Because of delays due to governmental bureaucracy, funding issues and construction problems, the museum had presented exhibitions in satellite locations around Amsterdam between 2004 and 2008. The stately brick 19th century building in the city's museum quarter was missing out on the hordes of tourists lined up to visit its neighbors, the Van Gogh Museum and Rijksmuseum.

By the time Goldstein had moved her belongings to Amsterdam, it was clear that the museum was not going to open as planned in fall 2010. Rather than wait for a proper opening, Goldstein dipped into her experience at MOCA, where she started her career in 1985. Back then, delays in the construction of the Arata Isozaki-designed building on Grand Avenue led MOCA officials to hire architect Frank Gehry to create a temporary museum out of a Little Tokyo warehouse, what came to be known as the Temporary Contemporary. Now named the Geffen Contemporary, it has remained in use, the scale and informality of its space popular with artists and curators.

Goldstein decided to produce her own version of that operation to reintroduce the public to its long-shuttered museum. She had the old building reopened with a ticket kiosk and a cafe, and installed "temporary" art in the Stedelijk's partially renovated galleries. She calls the exhibition "Taking Place."

"It helped by doing something to learn how things get done," she says succinctly. "This has been the most important museum of contemporary art in the Netherlands. Closing it and putting the collection in storage threw the whole system off. It has been a catastrophe to have it closed for seven years, so I wanted to do anything to get it open."

After making the decision in August, Goldstein leaned on friends and professional alliances, as well as the museum staff, to put together a show in four months. "People here have strong emotional relationships with this institution," she adds. "I wanted to give the public a sense of the transition we are going through. We are between being a building and a museum. Usually, you don't see that. I wanted people to walk in and see art."

With shoulder-length raven hair and bright red lipstick, Goldstein was wrapped in layers of dark wool clothing on a chilly fall afternoon as she sat with a coffee at the museum's temporary cafe. There is a 1951 mural of primary colors and bold shapes by Dutch artist Karel Appel on one wall of what was the original Stedelijk restaurant, and a new work by conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner, whose retrospective Goldstein organized in 2007, graces the opposite wall and

seems to summarize her present challenge: "Scattered Matter Brought to a Known Density With the Weight of the World (cusped)."

The Stedelijk has an impressive permanent collection of 90,000 works that include European modern art and design, with many paintings by Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich as well as a large collection of contemporary art. It remains in storage since little of it could be shown without appropriate climate control. Goldstein turned that liability into an asset; she chose installations and works of art that draw attention to the architecture.

"The most beautiful museum architecture is Dutch: the Gemeentemuseum in the Hague, the Van Abbemuseum. Beautifully proportioned spaces with skylights — what are called cabinet rooms — make for a gorgeous relationship between art and architecture," she says.

The neo-Renaissance Stedelijk was designed by A.W. Weissman, Amsterdam's city architect, in 1895, but the renovated interior showcases pristine white galleries. A number of large windows, unusual in an art museum, have views of charming Amsterdam residences and canals. "They connect the museum to the world," Goldstein explains.

Once the Stedelijk's renovations are complete, translucent screens will permit the soft cool light for which Amsterdam is famous to illuminate the art. One window without a screen looks out to the construction of an adjacent contemporary building by Dutch architect Benthem Crouell. Not yet complete, it is shaped like a vessel and sheathed in a gray metallic skin. Locals call it the "bathtub." When completed, it will house contemporary art, temporary exhibitions, an extensive library, bookstore and restaurant.

Goldstein organized groundbreaking exhibitions of Minimal and Conceptual art at MOCA, so she was able to quickly compile a list of candidates for her show. In some ways, this is about looking at a museum building through the eyes of an artist," Goldstein says. French Conceptual artist Daniel Buren had colored stripes painted over the white brick arches near the museum entrance. Another gallery features only Hans Haacke's 1965 Condensation Cube, a clear plastic box containing a faint mist of moisture from the climate. Goldstein purchased a similar piece for the Stedelijk's permanent collection.

The vast hall that once housed the museum's Barnett Newman paintings has been wallpapered in giant type by Barbara Kruger with black and white quotations from George Orwell and Roland Barthes dealing with "modes of address."

The framed piece of wall with draped windows looking out to patio and artificial plants is by Los Angeles artist William Leavitt. Goldstein organized a retrospective of his work at MOCA, which will open in March 2011. Leavitt had exhibited at the Art and Project Gallery in Amsterdam in the 1960s and grew close to Dutch Conceptual artist Ger van Elk, whose installation in the show consists of a gallery floor being partly polished to a gleaming finish.

Diana Thater, also from L.A., added colored gels to windows to change the light coming into a series of galleries leading to a large room with a projection of giant thunderheads floating slowly across the wall, a piece as dramatic as the constantly shifting sky above Amsterdam.

Goldstein knew that she would undergo considerable scrutiny as an outsider and felt that reverting to her role as curator might be her best introduction to the public. "My preferred way of people knowing who I am is through my work," Goldstein says.

Joel Wachs, former L.A. city councilman and now president of the Andy Warhol Foundation, said: "She is the perfect choice for this museum at this time. In the 1960s and '70s, people viewed the Stedelijk as one of two or three museums showing contemporary art. Over the last 20 years, that reputation was in decline. Ann is the perfect choice as someone who will restore its reputation as a great museum. They are fortunate to have her."

Not everyone has been thrilled by the Goldstein's new regime; she has made changes that ruffled some feathers. In November, she scrapped a year's worth of work by Pierre di Sciullo, a designer who had created new graphics for the museum. She found them "too complicated." She was criticized by one source as being a Modernist. Nonetheless, the Temporary Stedelijk has had a steady stream of visitors who appear grateful to see that the museum is on its way to an opening date still to be determined.

Goldstein, 53, is an L.A. native, as is her husband, artist Christopher Williams, professor of photography at the Kunstakademie Dusseldorf, a position originally established by Bernd and Hilla Becher. To avoid feeling homesick in Amsterdam, they rented lodgings in a Rem Koolhaas-designed building that looks, she says with a laugh, "like a '60s modern apartment building in L.A."

Goldstein is known for being unusually sympathetic to the needs of artists, doubtless because she was an artist herself before going into museum work. After receiving her bachelor of fine arts degree at UCLA, she got the part-time job of organizing Pontus Hulten's library after he had moved to L.A. to become the first director of MOCA. She went on to work for Hulten at MOCA when the museum was in its infancy and, in her 25 years there, rose from research associate to senior curator.

There are historic ties between Los Angeles and the Stedelijk. In the 1960s, Stedelijk director Edy de Wilde recognized the value of unconventional contemporary art made in L.A. and purchased work for the museum by Ken Price and Larry Bell as well as "The Beanery," Ed Kienholz's 1968 tableau recreation of his favorite bar, Barney's Beanery. The museum supported the Conceptual artists from L.A. and Allen Ruppersberg, William Leavitt and John Baldessari showed at the Art and Project, a Conceptual art gallery located close to the Stedelijk. In keeping with those ties, when the Stedelijk does reopen, the first show will be a retrospective of L.A.-based artist Mike Kelley.

"Taking Place" continues through Jan. 11.

*calendar@latimes.com*