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## THE BLOG

# No Getty Basher

 11/17/2011 09:02 am ETLike 0[Hunter Drohojowska-Philp](#)

No Getty basher, I.

In the black-clad gatherings of contemporary art personalities, it is fashionable to indulge in Getty-bashing. People like to say that the location is too precious, the building too big, the collection too small. And then there is the tram.

I, too, dislike the tram but find other gripes trivial. On a Friday or Saturday evening, I can wander through galleries taking in beautiful works of art, whether Pontormo or Poussin from the collection or out-of-town visitors like the menagerie of animal paintings by Oudry. At this time of year, I can walk out of the galleries to stroll

plazas in the fading warmth, watching the sky shift from blues to pinks as the sun sinks. The light show concludes as I am having marvelous meal in the glassed dining room with 180 degree views. The whole experience may not be cutting edge but it is refreshingly civilized.

There is a cutting edge at the Getty and it is not confined to their occasional outdoor rock concerts. It is housed at the Getty Research Institute. Over the past year, their work as come to my attention in myriad ways under the radar but growing in significance. GRI, as it is known, has been amassing a vast body of resource material that is valuable, even essential, to anyone interested in the visual culture of Southern California. They acquired Charles Britten's photographs of the L.A. arts scene in the 1950s and 1960s. Henry Hopkins, former curator and museum director, now eminence gris of L.A.'s contemporary art scene, has brought them his papers. Long before the digital age, the Long Beach Museum of Art compiled an extensive collection of video art. Costly to store, maintain and conserve, it is now at GRI, which has the resources to care for it. GRI also acquired the records of the magazine High Performance, which chronicled the rise of performance and video art between 1977-1998. I happen to write about contemporary art, architecture and design and can tell you that these materials are crucial.

Julius Shulman's enormous archive of photographs of modern architecture now reside there along with the archives of case study architect Pierre Koenig. (Only fitting since Shulman's photograph of his case study house, a nocturnal study of a glass box cantilevered over the city lights, is one of the most frequently reproduced images of L.A.) Now they have also acquired the archives of modern architects John Lautner and Ray Kappe.

Much of this was accomplished over the past eight years while Thomas Crow was director of GRI. In a recent lecture at the Getty, Crow talked about the history of surfing, showing some images of an idyllic Southern California and admitting that he had spent his adolescent years in San Diego. Quite likely, his personal history enabled him to value documents that could have been over-looked or discarded in a city that has a history of not valuing its own history.

Crow, however, is leaving GRI to return to New York and a post at NYU's Institute of Fine Arts. Andrew Perchuk and others will attempt to carry on this good work but I truly hope that Crow's yet-unnamed successor, and the new president and CEO of the Getty Trust James N. Wood, will continue to embrace the rag-tag, funky history of L.A. with similar fervor. In fact, I hope the successor throws even more funding and staff the way of GRI because a history is a terrible thing to waste. The venerable history of art that I can visit in the museum needs its counterpart at GRI.

*Hunter Drohojowska-Philp is author of Full Bloom: The Art and Life of Georgia O'Keeffe. At present, she is writing a book about the Los Angeles art scene of the 1960s and conducting some of her research at GRI.*

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