

Birth of the Museum of Contemporary Art

It's not easy to build an institution on the cutting edge of art when there are 29 midwives to supervise

By Hunter Drohojowska

To live on the cutting edge of art, that's what Los Angeles' new Museum of Contemporary Art, set to open in temporary quarters next Sunday, proclaims as its goal and philosophy. Showcasing the art of the moment, exhibiting unknown but talented young artists, acting as patron in the creation of new art is the promise and the hope.

These are ambitious aims. But their success or failure does not simply depend on the talents of the museum staff. Although the director and curators are the most publicly visible members of any museum operation, to a significant degree it is the board of trustees that shapes the profile of the institution in the public's eye.

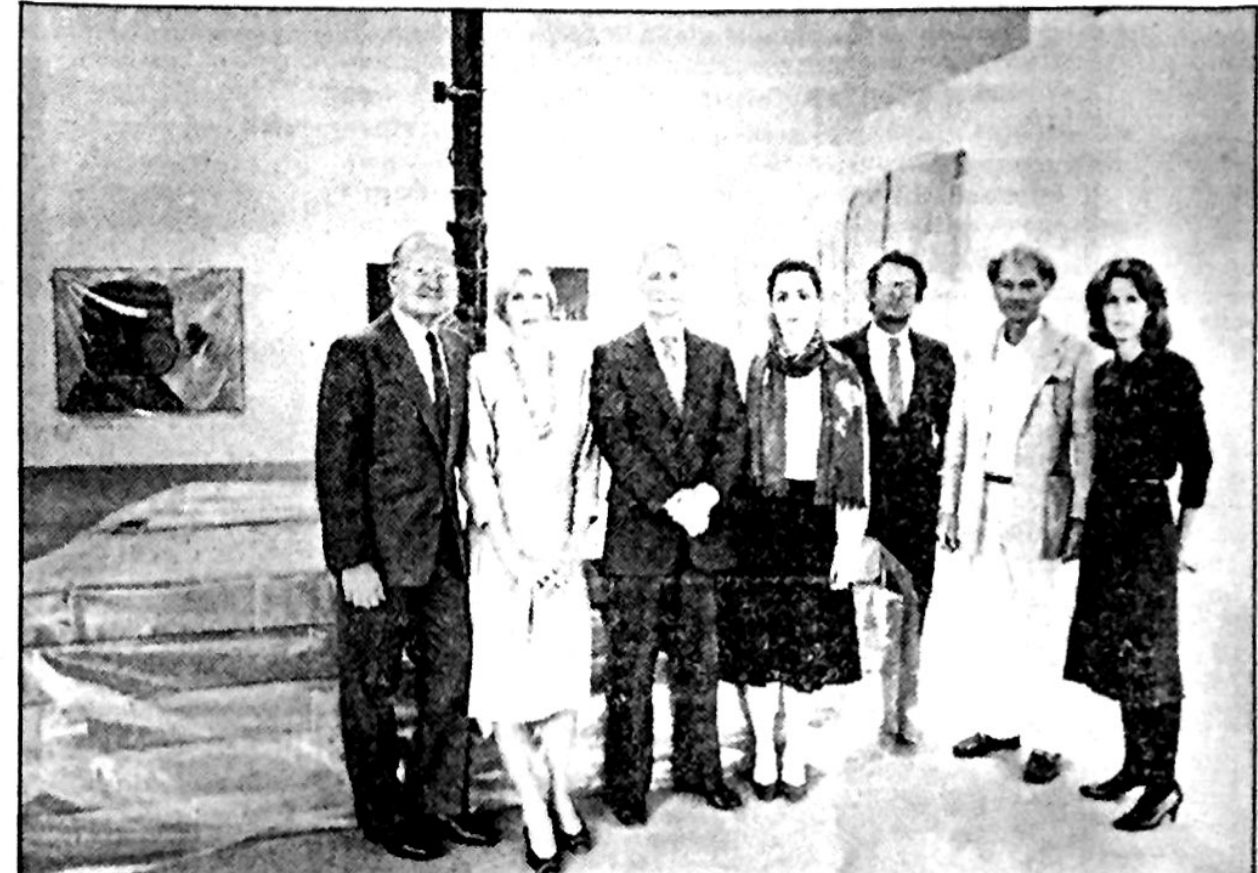
In theory, trustees hire a qualified staff and then raise the money needed to carry out its decisions. MoCA director Richard Koshalek, and curators Julia Brown and Julie Lazar, maintain they have a mandate from the board to encourage experimentation and inspire innovation among artists they intend to exhibit.

Such art, however, is bound to generate controversy. MoCA's recent debut event, a dance performance called "Available Light," is a case in point. The collaboration

among New York choreographer Lucinda Childs, L.A. architect Frank Gehry (who designed the set), San Francisco composer John Adams and others was greeted with scathing reviews. MoCA was vindicated somewhat when the same piece drew critical praise in a later New York production. But until that imprimatur, did the MoCA trustees begin to feel a chill at their feet? Would the trustees stand by their commitments to MoCA's future and to the decisions of its staff, if reviews or popular response continued to be negative?

Of necessity, a museum on the "cutting edge" requires trustees committed to the same ideal. According to founding president and trustee Judge William Norris, that means giving the director "a lot of latitude to work." But their are limits, especially in L.A.

In the 1960s, both the Pasadena Museum of Art (now defunct, its building sold to the Norton Simon Museum of Art) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art had boards of trustees notorious for interfering in business usually best left to staff. The late Richard Brown, LACMA's director in 1964 who resigned in frustration after just one year, later wrote about the art of trustee politics: "The board's absolute power is logically, legally, morally, and practically justifiable.



From left: MoCA trustees Frederick Nicholas, Betsy Valentine and Lenore Greenberg. Says Koshalek, "I think the museum will be able to innovate, (but) it has director Richard Koshalek, and trustees DeWain to be a desire shared by the trustees."

But it must be constantly questioned to remain beneficial. Board members seldom engage seriously in such exercises, and directors hardly ever dare to do so. Thus, the unquestioned self-perpetuity of this power has led to a perva-

sive attitude of ownership—ownership as of private property. But the public owns the museum, even those supported entirely by a private foundation. That is what "trustee" means.

MoCA's current board of 29

trustees is a reflection of Norris' original mayoral advisory committee, composed of a healthy diversity of civic leaders, collectors, society figures, contributors and

MoCA/E-3, Col. 1

Trustees, says director Koshalek, 'must be open to the many difficulties of contemporary art'

MOCA

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even artists. Norris got involved at the urging of his wife, Merry, an art consultant. He acted as liaison between Mayor Tom Bradley's office, the city's Community Redevelopment Agency, which donated the land for the museum's permanent site, and the developers, Bunker Hill Associates, who agreed to construct the building.

After putting the legal package together, he approached Eli Broad, chief executive officer of the multinational Kaufman and Broad, Inc., and a self-made millionaire, and Max Palevsky, a mogul in the field of high technology, to donate money for the museum.

Norris, Palevsky and Broad became the original triumvirate that guided MoCA's infant stirrings. In terms of philosophy, Norris was a "hands-off" administrator, a firm believer that trustees should entrust artistic decisions to the museum's director and staff. Palevsky, however, took a more "hands on" stance, directly involving himself in judgments that affected the museum's architecture. Thus, there was no general agreement on what a "cutting edge" board should be or do.

Those contrasting views of trustee policy soon came to a head. When Frederick Nicholas, a lawyer and real-estate developer, was asked by Palevsky to facilitate the development of the Bunker Hill building, the power core of the board started to shift. He ended up negotiating some of the disagreements between Palevsky's architecture committee and Arata Isozaki, the architect chosen to design the Bunker Hill building. Ultimately, Palevsky resigned in a dispute over Isozaki's design for the museum interior. Norris resigned from his post as president in 1982, when he was appointed a judge of the federal Court of Appeals, a job that conflicts with the need to solicit museum funds. He remains a trustee.

William Krieschnick, president and chief executive officer of

common goals. It's not harder than at any other institution. People in senior-level jobs have to do this all the time."

As trustees, Nicholas and Krieschnick have emerged as adept facilitators in practical matters. So, too, has Eli Broad. What makes Broad unique, however, is that he has maintained his position of influence through all the permutations of the board of trustees. Thus, his voice clearly carries a good deal of weight in shaping museum procedure.

Broad never saw the controversial production of "Available Light," but seems relieved by the positive critical response in the East. "I felt proud as a citizen of L.A. when I picked up the New York Times to see that (review)," he said. "In the commercial world you keep score by how much money you make, (in the art world), you keep track by reviews that the art press writes."

The significance of the New York reception is not lost on Broad, who claims a hand in the guiding spirit of MoCA. "We wanted international primacy in contemporary art, museum-wise," he explained of the early stages of MoCA's development. "I came to the conclusion we had to overfly New York and get Pontus Hulten (the founding director recruited from Paris but who resigned in 1982)." Hulten brought in prestigious collector-trustees like Giuseppe Panza di Biumo from Italy and Dominique de Menil from Houston. "Then New York said 'Wow' and paid attention to us as more than a provincial museum."

International primacy entails raising large sums of money, and Broad feels his primary talents in finance and marketing have been indispensable in getting the museum off the ground. A trustee's role, he added, is to raise money and to monitor financial affairs with a "long-term view.... It isn't so much getting involved with the content (of the program) as being concerned with not burdening the museum (with debts) in future years."

As chairman of the policy-making executive committee, Broad

MOCA's Board of Trustees: A guide to the players

It's been said that art museums don't elect new trustees, they clone them. Profiles of different museum boards are often very much alike, in part because most museums have similar needs they wish trustees to fill: Art for their collections, money for their operations and social or practical leverage within the community to accomplish their aims. While the particulars may be unique, these are the very same needs the new Museum of Contemporary Art has been facing as it comes into being. It should come as no surprise, then, that the makeup of its board is not significantly different from other art institutions. Similarly, most are board members of other civic organizations in Los Angeles, and in some cases spouses sit on the board of the County Museum of Art. MoCA's board does boast

two artists among its ranks, an atypical if not unprecedented situation. (Rarely do museums select trustees solely on the basis of intellectual distinction; in more than 100 years of existence, for example, the Metropolitan Museum has made room for only one distinguished writer.) Finally, three ex-officio members are included: Mayor Tom Bradley, City Council President Pat Russell and the museum's director, Richard Koshalek. Since the museum's inception, four trustees have tendered resignations for various reasons: artist Robert Irwin, German industrialist and art collector Peter Ludwig and businessmen Gary Familian and Max Palevsky. Who are the members of the board as MoCA opens its temporary quarters?

By Tricia Crane and Christopher Knight
Herald staff writers

DR. LEON BANKS, 58, is a pediatrician who collects black American art. He was a founding member of the Inner City Cultural Center and is on the board at LACMA and also at the Municipal Art Gallery. Banks says he was invited to join the MoCA board "because of the shared belief that we should involve more people than just the downtown business community. I think it important for us to reach out to the barrios and black pockets. They aren't going to come to us."

DAISY BELIN, 45, is married to Daniel Belin, chairman of the acquisitions committee at LACMA. She calls herself a "philanthropist" and an advocate of contemporary art and is on the board's development and membership committee. Belin says, "A lot of trustees think they should give guidance regarding exhibitions; I personally think the decisions that have to be made about programs and art should be up to the director and the curators."

ELI BROAD, 50, chairman of the board's executive committee, is an art collector, entrepreneur and

chairman of the board and chief executive officer at Kaufman and Broad, Inc. Of his trusteeship he says, "The trustee's concern is more financial than aesthetic. Trustees don't get involved in aesthetic issues."

Broad was MoCA's first backer. When approached in 1979, he pledged \$1 million toward the effort in exchange Broad became chairman of the



Greenberg says, "I feel a trustee needs to give an offer of support rather than an imposition of support. Trustees should not be a hindrance."

JAMES C. GREENE, 68, is a partner with the law firm of O'Melveny & Myers. Greene says he was invited to become a trustee because "they wanted someone to represent the downtown business community." As Greene sees it, "the role of a trustee is to select the operating director, determine overall museum policy and to raise funds." His interest in contemporary art is "mild," he says. He describes his major contribution to the collective effort as "fiscal."

GORDON HAMPTON is a corporate litigation attorney with Sheppard, Muller, Richter & Hampton. He calls himself a "fairly substantial collector." In June Hampton hosted the first party for the newly formed group of MoCA investors, "about 25 guests from all sides of town and walks of life."

"I was successful in bringing in a substantial amount of money," he says. Of his role as a new trustee Hampton says, "I'm a realist. There is no question that you need substantial amounts of money to fund a museum like this."

CARL E. HARTNACK, chairman of the board at Security Pacific National Bank, is on the executive committee at MoCA. He established the Security Pacific arts program in 1971. In the years since its inception, the bank has acquired a permanent collection of thousands of works.

Says Hartnack of his trusteeship at MoCA, "My primary motivation was that MoCA was to be built on Bunker Hill which is where our world headquarters building is. It's good for our employees to have those kinds of things available within walking distance. I think you will find more and more that corporations take a real interest in the community and feel a real responsibility for its health."

WILLIAM F. KIESCHNICK, president and chief executive officer of the Atlantic Rich-

Bruce Nauman, Robert Irwin, James Turrell and Maria Nordman are among the latter. Much of Panza's collection is destined for the city of Turin, where two palaces are currently being renovated as museums.

ROBERT A. ROWAN, 73, is an art collector who for seven years was president of the board of trustees at the

Pasadena Museum of Modern Art. Rowan says he sees little difference between his role as a trustee at the now-defunct Pasadena museum and at MoCA. And he does not, he says, feel tainted by having been a trustee of a failed arts institution. "In MoCA we have a second chance to provide Los Angeles with a first-class museum. We were just ahead of our time in Pasadena."



Robert Rowan

ROCCO CARMINE SICILIANO, 60, is chairman of the board and chief executive officer of TTCOR, a financial services company. A member of the board at the Getty Museum, Siciliano says he became a trustee at MoCA two years ago "because my wife Marion is a modern artist." He says his role as a trustee is "to infuse the community with an interest in modern art. There is a lot of educating of people to be done."

SEIJI TSUTSUMI, 52, is an international businessman, poet, and novelist. He is director of the Japan PEN Club and has published several novels, including "In The Roaming Season," under the pen name Takashi Tsujun.

Tsutsumi makes his home in Tokyo where he serves as chairman of the Seibu Group, a chain of department stores.

DEWAIN VALENTINE, 47, is a well-known

William Krieschnick, president and chief executive officer of ARCO, was named to replace Norris, and Nicholas became vice chairman of the board. Along with Broad, who remained as chairman, this new group of powerbrokers would oversee the building of a museum and the presenting of exhibitions.

Nicholas is considered by many to be something of a white knight. Not only did he accommodate Isoraki and get the development of the Bunker Hill building on track after numerous delays caused by the recession, he also negotiated the evolution of the Temporary Contemporary. "I've been the person in charge of the architect, the contractors, the city building department, seeing that the building gets finished on time," he explained. He helped convince the city to lease the two warehouse spaces for \$1 per annum for five years, and organized the distribution of a print portfolio being sold at \$10,000 a copy to raise operating funds for the temporary facility.

Nicholas has given MoCA \$100,000, but his real investment has been working almost full time to get the two museum buildings completed. He convinced H.C. Beck contractors, who are constructing the Bunker Hill building, to renovate the Temporary Contemporary in record time and contribute their service fee. He admits that his long personal and business relationship with the company was invaluable. Krieschnick became involved with MoCA in part because his corporation pledged \$1 million as one of the original founders. His personal interest, however, runs deep.

He was asked to be a trustee in part to raise funds, the led the United Way campaign and raised \$7 million last year and he is co-chairman of the committee seeking "special gifts" of over \$10,000. His gift, however, is what he calls "group skulls." They have looked to me for my management skills in helping them resolve complex problems, helping them develop plans.

"A common thread among the trustees is that they all believe in what they're doing. You have to be careful saying that people are on ego trips because everybody has an ego to protect. Which makes it all the more exciting when they find

years.

As chairman of the policy-making executive committee, Broad stresses that the museum staff should be free to make artistic decisions, while staying within the limits of the available budget set forth by the full board. Rarely, however, are the boundaries between artistic decisions and their financial ramifications so clear-cut.

"It would concern me if MOCA's programs are consistently controversial," Broad said. "Not the controversy as such. But I, together with a number of trustees, have a continuing concern that we have to get the fuel to have the place run—and that fuel is dollars. If we did things that cut off interest in founders and members, then I'd be concerned."

While acknowledging that controversy is often inseparable from contemporary art, Broad insists that, in the final analysis, MoCA exists not for the trustees or the staff, but for the public; interested in high attendance, he sees the museum as populist rather than elitist.

MoCA's director readily gives credit to the trustees' efforts. Koshalek acknowledges that involvement with an adventurous museum devoted to contemporary art presents unique difficulties that require a "different sensibility" than trusteeship at the Music Center or the County Museum of Art. "They have to be builders, doers," he said. "To have the desire to accomplish and to be open and flexible to the many difficulties of contemporary art. Fortunately, we have some people with that understanding." He says he likes to work collaboratively with trustees. "I need their advice. I'm the first to admit there are skills I don't have."

But does Koshalek think that the board itself is a "cutting edge," able to go the distance with the vagaries of contemporary art? "I think the museum will be able to innovate, but it has to be a desire shared by the trustees. There can't be any bias against doing things differently and in new ways. I sense that's possible with these people." That's a crucial concern as MoCA, after four years of planning, finally opens its doors. For the museum will only be fully defined as its programs unfold during the next five or 10 years.

"It's important for the trustees to know that," Koshalek said.

This week in Style: On Wednesday, Hunter Drohojowska profiles the man who must carry out the decisions of the MoCA trustees: director Richard Koshalek. Next Sunday, art critic Christopher Knight analyzes what the museum means to Los Angeles and contemporary art.

bucket. When Krieschnick

pledged \$1 million toward the effort. In exchange, Broad became chairman of the board. He has been a driving force at MoCA, active in raising funds and recruiting corporate trustees.

BETTY BURTON, is a trustee on the executive committee and chairman of the community and volunteer affairs committee. She says she sees "the museum as an educational tool rather than just as a repository for art. People learn to see by going to a museum. They learn aesthetic values."

Burton says she has been involved with MoCA from the beginning because "I worked for the Pasadena Art Museum. I never felt I needed to be vindicated because I worked hard to keep the Pasadena museum afloat and the circumstances that caused its demise were beyond my control."



Douglas Cramer

DOUGLAS CRAMER, 50, is executive vice president of Aaron Spelling Productions and was on the board at Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design. He says, "I'll do anything to help get the museum promoted, to raise public consciousness and to organize

DOMINIQUE DE MENIL, 75, is a French-born art collector with a passion for modern art and a collection of 20th-century works that has been called one of the most significant in this country. During the 1940s de Menil was ignored when she tried to get the only public art institution in Houston to acknowledge the existence of modern art. Today she is planning to build her own museum in Houston.

De Menil's generosity with money has been called "astounding," but she also has a long reputation for wanting control over the art objects she has given away.

SAM FRANCIS, the widely acclaimed painter and printmaker, has been involved with the evolution of the museum almost since its inception. A California native the now lives in Santa Monica, his work was the subject of exhibitions at LACMA in 1970 and 1980, and is represented in most major museums internationally.

Francis is generally regarded as having been instrumental in bringing Pontus Hulten to MoCA as its founding director.

BEATRICE GERSH is a collector and "art activist" who has been a founding member of a number of arts institutions, including the County Museum of Art and the Music Center. Gersh lives in Beverly Hills and is married to Philip Gersh, president of the Phil Gersh (talent) Agency. Gersh is a founding member of the Music Center's Amazing Blue Ribbon and also of the LACMA President's Circle and its Modern and Contemporary Arts Council.

LENORE GREENBERG is an art collector and, as a MoCA trustee, is chairman of the committee on programs and exhibitions. Greenberg is the daughter of Rita and the late Taft Schreiber, whose collection of contemporary art, the Schreiber Collection, is represented in the first MoCA exhibition.

a real interest in the community and feel a real responsibility for its health.

WILLIAM F. KRIESCHNICK, president and chief executive officer of the Atlantic Richfield Corp., is on the executive committee at MoCA. Krieschnick says he seeks in his work as a trustee to "find solutions to complex circumstances. And that's my job at ARCO so I can do it. 'I have a very strong interest in creative processes in my life about how you organize people for results,' he says. 'I have been sort of taken for a long time by creative expression in modern art.' The trustees, he says, 'form an allegiance. You are in the trenches together.'"

MARTIN LIPTON, a partner in the New York law firm Wachell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz, was invited to join the board because of what chairman Eli Broad called, "his professional expertise in dealing with the corporate sector."



William Krieschnick

IGNACIO E. LOZANO JR., 56, is publisher and editor of La Opinion, a Spanish-language newspaper. Lozano was American ambassador to El Salvador in 1976 and is currently an executive board member of the Boy Scouts of America, Los Angeles.

FREDERICK M. NICHOLAS, an attorney, developer and arts enthusiast, is on the board's executive committee and played a major role in the development of the permanent building. "Basically, I try not to have my aesthetic feelings interfere with the director and the staff. That's what they're there for. I'm the person who is doing all the work to get the museum built."

WILLIAM A. NORRIS, a judge in the federal court of appeals, is founding president of MoCA as well as a trustee. Norris is credited with having acted as the initial liaison between the Community Redevelopment Agency, the developers and the mayor's office to make the museum a reality. (He resigned the presidency in 1982 because he was appointed to the bench.)

Norris says he got involved with the museum's organization, "because of my wife Merry's passion for contemporary art and the vision that L.A. was ready for a museum of contemporary art." He supports the "trustees' general policy to be bold and innovative."

"We are going to do more than exhibit art," he says, "we are going to be patrons of artists." COUNT GIUSEPPE PANZA DI BUIO is among the most highly respected collectors of contemporary art in the world. Portions of his collection—which numbers more than 600 works by European and, especially, American artists—are housed in the family villa in Varese, just north of Milan, Italy, and in the villa's 18th-century stables which have been refurbished as galleries.

One of the unique aspects of Panza's collection is its inclusion of seemingly "uncollectible" art—room-size installations, often made on commission and often by California artists. Sound, video and light installations by

serves as chairman of the Seibu Group, a chain of department stores.

DEWAIN VALENTINE, 47, is a well-known Los Angeles artist whose work is in the collections of LACMA and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Valentine has served on the boards of advisory councils of the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, ARCO Center for Visual Art, the Music Center and the Children's Museum.

Valentine served as chairman of an Artists Advisory Council to MoCA and later assisted in fund-raising. When artist Robert Rauschenberg stepped down from MoCA's board, Valentine was selected to fill the vacancy.

JOEL WACHS, L.A. city councilman, is perhaps the most outspoken civic supporter of the arts in Los Angeles. He first became a member of the board because he was president of the City Council and the president automatically becomes an ex-officio member. Now that he is serving on the financial planning committee and the development and membership committee, Wachs views his role as a trustee from two different perspectives. "As a public official, I used my position to make sure the city gave the building for the Temporary Contemporary. While in a public capacity I support a lot of efforts in a small way, this is perhaps my biggest commitment to an institution in terms of a personal involvement. I am also someone who loves contemporary art and it is very important that MoCA succeed. I intend to be sure the museum succeeds."

MARCIA WEISMAN, a well-known collector, is the sister of Norton Simon who took over the Pasadena Art Museum. After the Pasadena museum became the Norton Simon, Weisman tried to create something in its place for the exhibition of contemporary art.

"My role as a trustee is like everyone else's. We all have something to give. My contribution was in originating the idea and getting it approved by the mayor. Others are great fund-raisers. I remain involved, only now my emphasis is on the visual arts."

MORTON WINSTON, 52, is an English teacher turned lawyer, and chairman of the



Morton Winston

board at the Tosco Corp., a large independent refining company and the principal company in development of new hydrocarbon resources. He is also chairman of the board of trustees at the Craft and Folk Art Museum. Winston says, "Trustees are directors." He sees his primary role as "being sure the money is spent in the public interest."

LEOPOLD S. WYLER Jr., 44, is chairman of the Board of TRE Corp., formerly Tool Research and Engineering Corp. Wyler has been active in numerous political and energy-related groups. Board chairman Eli Broad says, "Leo has long been interested in the revitalization of downtown. As a leading business figure, he will play a vital role in developing additional support for the museum from the private sector."