

Art

**A**fter four years of promises, our Museum of Contemporary Art premieres its first event next Friday night in an interim space aptly designated the Temporary Contemporary. The T.C., as I shall call it, is comprised of two warehouses (at 134 and 152 North Central Avenue) in Little Tokyo. They are leased from the city for five years, or until the Bunker Hill facility is completed in 1985 or 1986. (The developers have suffered some economic setbacks, and they and the general recession are being blamed for the delays.)

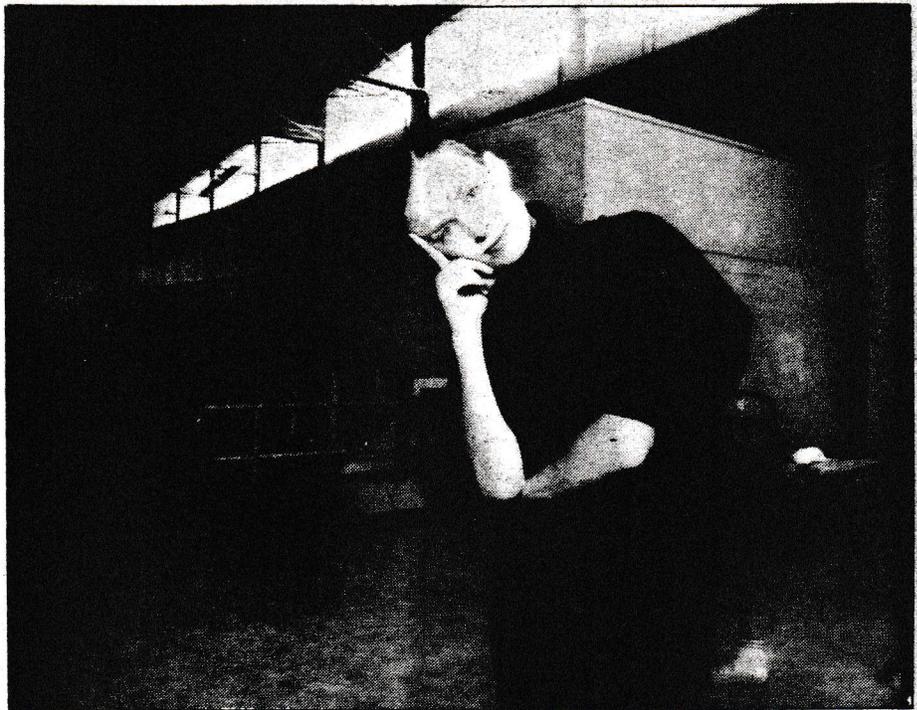
The warehouses are being renovated for \$1 million by local architect Frank O. Gehry, the master of industrial chic. A raw, unfinished look is Gehry's signature in style. Commendably, Gehry has barely altered the place, which was used in the past as a repair station for the city's police cars. He has just cleaned and painted, and extended a chain-link canopy out in front of the building's entrance so that Central Avenue itself serves as the museum lobby.

The T.C. officially opens its big glass doors on November 20. While still under construction, it will be the site of *Available Light*, a collaborative performance staged from September 29 to October 2. The artists in this show were selected from around the country. From New York there will be Lucinda Childs with her dance company, Ronaldus Shamask, who'll design the costumes, and Beverly Emmons, who will do the lighting. New music composer John Adams of San Francisco did the score, and the sets are by Gehry. The idea, conceived by curator Julie Lazar, was to match artists and composers to work with architects.

Childs began her dance career in the early 1960s as an original member of the seminal Judson Dance Theater in New York. She has been a proponent of collaborative events since 1976, when she worked on Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach*. Lazar saw Childs' collaboration with Sol Lewitt and Philip Glass on *Dance* in 1979 and thought it

# MOCA And Available Light

by Hunter Drohojowska



Lucinda Childs

remarkable. Says Lazar, "She's almost a sculptor. She illustrates volumes of space with her choreography."

All of the participants were accustomed to some sort of collaboration, but not with each other (though Emmons also worked on Wilson's *Einstein*). They all had to react to one another's instincts, aesthetics and interests for the first time. Gehry, who had not been involved with such a performance

before, was enthralled. He said, "I had a lot of trepidation and felt like I didn't know what I was doing. (Still) I'm not sure what I've done. I used free association until I ran into the right thing to do. The first decision for me was to use the space totally since it wasn't a theater."

Gehry split the stage into two levels, side by side. He also lit the clerestory windows along one side of the building so the distant

wall would relate to the stage. "I extended the boundaries of the stage out to the walls. I wanted to make the whole piece part of the set." The audience will watch from bleachers atop a bunker above the stage. "In a way, it horizontally spaces the dancers so when you're looking at them, you'll have to push to see them all at once. I'm playing with peripheral vision." According to Lazar, Gehry has worked away from the grid, while Childs normally works within the structure of the grid. Adams composed 55 minutes of uninterrupted music after seeing Childs dance in his studio. It is quite different from the music of Glass.

*Available Light* will travel to New York, Paris and San Francisco from here. A catalogue, a regular potpourri of big names, will be published with an album of the score, essays by Lazar, Susan Sontag, Ingram Marshall, and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, and documentary photos of the performance and building by Grant Mudford and Garry Winogrand. MOCA is conscious that this is a debut of Gehry's building renovation as well as the performance.

Childs' experimental dance company has never performed in California. In fact, the whole package is unprecedented in scope and apparently in quality for L.A. Gehry noted, "It says something important, I think, that they're willing to take this kind of risk." I think he's right, and it portends well for the museum's reputation. Choosing *Available Light* as the very first MOCA-sponsored event implies that here lies the heart of the museum.

**A** *available Light* is an example of the claim by Richard Koshalek, director of the museum, that MOCA will be active in commissioning work by artists. Childs said that without MOCA's support, "My group couldn't handle this. To a certain point, they've produced the whole production. It's unusual. It enabled us to concentrate on the work and not spend time talking about getting it produced."

*Available Light* is the first in a series called *Stages of Performance*, collaborations between artists and architects to be commissioned by the museum. Lazar, as well as senior curator Julia Brown, came to MOCA from the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers,

where Koshalek was director. According to Lazar, collaborative, commissioned events were an important part of the program there. Says Lazar, "There I saw things that could come out of giving people the opportunity to work together where they had a lot of rope and we'd provide the support." She sees the tradition continuing at MOCA. "This is going to be more an art center than a museum of just visual art. Our primary goal is to help artists make new work. We want this to be inclusive as a museum, and to do that it has to think of itself in broader terms. We want this museum to reflect the concerns of the artists. We have to be willing to take risks, like the artists."

MOCA is involved with its own collaboration with Cal Arts this fall. *Explorations* is a series of performances in a variety of media by some prominent and promising artists. It begins October 13 with Jo Harvey Allen, and will include Hirokazu Kosaka, Linda Nishio, Mike Kelley, Michael Smith, Meredith Monk, and others. Most will take place downtown at the Japanese American Cultural Community Center. MOCA is also producing a series of radio programs, *The Territory of Art*, to be broadcast this winter on NPR. They are also commissioning playwrights and visual artists to work together on *Carplays*, which are exactly what the title implies, short plays relating to the automobile, to take place *within* cars. (Seating will be very limited.) These will be held during the 1984 Olympics Automobile and Culture exhibition.

What does all this say about MOCA? It seems they are willing to stick their necks out a bit, which is a comforting antidote to some skepticism about the rest of their line-up. *The First Show*, opening November 20, will be a staid, if handsome, survey of modern art from 1940-1980 culled from the collections of eight prominent collectors, among them four MOCA trustees. If that appears to be an appeal to an audience of monied collectors, *Automobile and Culture* is a grab for the popular audience. There is nothing wrong with either show per se, if MOCA remembers its self-proclaimed mandate to take risks.

Tickets for *Available Light* performances, September 29 to October 2, are \$15 for the public, and \$12 for founding members. Call 621-2766 for ticket information and reservations.

*Explorations* tickets are available for the fall or spring series, or both. There are ten performances and tickets range in price. Tickets are available at all Ticketmaster outlets, including Music Plus, Sportmart, and May Company, as well as the Japan America Theater box office. To charge on Visa or Mastercard, call 480-3232. Individual tickets at the door are \$6 and \$8. ■