

Eli Broad engineered a cultural legacy

By Hunter Drohojowska

When Eli Broad announced three weeks ago that he was stepping down after five years as board chairman of the Museum of Contemporary Art, suspicion rocked the art community. He had been succeeded by William Kieschnick, chief executive officer of the Atlantic Richfield Co. and former president of the MoCA board. One speculation occurred: Was this a power play within the museum board?

Broad has a far less paranoid explanation. "I'm tired," he says. "Five years and 1,500 fund-raisers later, MoCA is where it is at."

Broad, now "founding chairman," quickly adds that he's proud of his accomplishments of the last five years. From a vague concept, Broad engineered two museum buildings, 550 founding members, an endowment of \$14 million, a board of 32 trustees, a year's worth of impressive professional exhibi-

tions and 200 works in the permanent collection, 80 from the prestigious art collection of MoCA trustee Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo. Although many parties were involved, most agree that Broad deserves a large part of the credit.

It all began one fateful afternoon of Labor Day weekend in 1979, at the Trancas beach house of collector Marcia Weisman. William Norris, now MoCA founding president, remembers that peculiarly California moment, walking along the beach, when he asked Broad for support. "I didn't have to go into any great detail. Eli immediately understood the implications. We came back and I said, 'I can't believe this but we've got our first \$1 million.' That's a tribute to Eli. He had a vision, he understood the potential, and he has been totally committed without a break. And, he supports contemporary art in the most demonstrable way — he buys it."

Broad, 51, is sipping vodka,

trying to relax, but sitting quite erect in a soft chair. One senses that this impatient man never lets down. Edye, his wife of nearly 30 years, runs interference against an unrelenting barrage of visitors and phone calls.

Their Brentwood home, which he built 12 years ago, is fractured into wings where rooms double as offices. This self-made millionaire is never too far from his business — Kaufman and Broad, Inc., the largest home builder in California. Nor does he ever drift far from his passion for art. The paneled walls of the house are covered with fine examples of blue chip painting of this century. The offices of Kaufman and Broad are also lined with work by contemporary California artists (in part selected by Broad's curator Michelle De Angelus).

The Broad collection began with 1950s bronze sculptures by Henry Moore and Joan Miro — works now standing near his swimming pool —

and evolved through the '60s and '70s with purchases of contemporary masterworks by such artists as Ellsworth Kelly and Frank Stella. Today, Broad only collects current work, often by hot, young New Yorkers such as graffiti artists Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. An exception is a stunning Robert Rauschenberg, "The Red Painting," from the late '50s. Broad broke the record paid for that artist's work, paying \$462,000 at a Christie's auction last fall.

Broad's support for work by the most current, contemporary artists emerges from his museum involvement. Yet it is collecting that draws him away from that responsibility. And it is by a ruthless self-appraisal — a clear analysis similar to that which allowed him to push MoCA from dream to reality — that he gives his responsibility to another.

"MoCA, entering a new period of growth and maturity, needs a person like Bill Kieschnick," Broad says candidly. "By virtue of heading the largest company in Los Angeles, Kieschnick is one of the most powerful people in Southern California. He's also a person everyone respects and loves. I think he's going to have people working better together. I've had to be very tough at times, but MoCA is lacking one thing that most art institutions have after five years: a legacy of debt. When you start your own company, you call all the shots. When you join a company like Arco, you rise from a certain level and you don't do that by stepping on people's toes."

Indeed, the tension between Broad and MoCA director Richard Koshlek has often been palpable, with the one tightening the purse strings and the other fighting for freedom with the program schedule and budgets. It is a classic struggle: the clear logic of business trying to comprehend the murky creative requirements of art. But while some think of Broad as shrewd, single-minded and even abrasive, they now agree that those qualities may have been necessary to launch a project like MoCA. Agreeable manners and social connections produce much gloss but rarely substance.

"There were those who said L.A. wasn't big enough to have another art museum," continued Broad, "and there were those from other arts institutions who thought MoCA ought not be formed. There were those who ran around town talking, who were long on words, but could never put anything together. I saw it as a great opportunity."

Broad specifically points out the Pasadena Art Museum, which faced bankruptcy in 1974. The trustees

were forced to turn it over to Norton Simon, the millionaire art collector who covered the debts in exchange for the building to house his own old masters, and put the collection of contemporary art in storage in perpetuity. Several of PAM's trustees are now on the MoCA board, giving even more weight to Broad's argument for a balanced budget.

There are obvious parallels between the two primary commitments in Broad's life: "To start a new commercial or a new cultural enterprise," Broad declares, "one has to have a vision, a dream if you would. One has to be very driven. You have to believe you can do it, and have an ego that's large, so you're convinced you can do it. You've got to have an ability to get people together, and ability to raise a lot of money. You've got to be charming on occasions, even when you don't mean it — which is hard for me. Nelson Rockefeller once said he learned more about politics at the Museum of Modern Art than he ever did in Albany. I now know what he meant."

Broad learned to be tough at an early age. He is a first generation American, of Lithuanian and Russian parents, born in New York City and raised in Detroit. His father worked as a house painter and later a merchant, and his mother worked as a seamstress, then helped with the family business. "I spent a lot of time without either parent at home during the day . . . I was kind of wild as a kid. I was not exactly a conformist. I would always question authority."

His stint at Michigan State University was better than his early childhood — there was "more freedom" — and he graduated *cum laude* in three years. He chose accounting as a pre-law major. "But I was a young person in a hurry." Instead of law school, he became the youngest CPA in the state. In just two years, already bored, he joined Don Kaufman in the home-building industry. "We started with \$25,000 of borrowed money in 1957, and became a public company in 1961. I was 28 years of age and something of a boy wonder. The company expanded very rapidly, and got listed on the American and New York stock exchanges. We moved west to Arizona and then California, where we've been for 22 years."

Broad has the reputation of being a loner, an insular and private person except with old friends and family. (He and Edye have two boys, Gary, 25, and Jeff, 28, both interested in finance but not in taking over their father's business.)

One of Broad's oldest friends is Sanford Levine, who used to double

date with Broad in college, and now is president of Kaufman and Broad, Home Systems Group. He recalls that Broad was investing small sums in the stock market by the age of 20. "He was completely dedicated and determined. His mind was always working 48 hours a day. He's a forward thinker."

Levine cited a few examples: In 1963, Kaufman and Broad built the first condominiums in Orange County, in Huntington Beach. As early as 1965, Broad hired Levine to do a study on cable TV. "I advised him not to get involved," Levine recalls, "but he went ahead, and was right. The cable system of Kaufman and Broad was No. 9 in the country six years later. We merged our company with Tele-Communications Inc. and became a major shareholder of the largest company in cable TV. We disposed of that stock in 1979," says Levine. "He was always ahead. You'd never know if the next day he wouldn't go right off the wall with some idea and he'd be right. His mind just can't miss."

By 1972, Broad decided that "it had been a great success, but all I had to show for it was a lot of work, pride and money. I decided to become interested in other things."

Broad had become an active supporter of the Democratic Party, and served as the state chairman for Alan Cranston's Senate race in 1968. Then he turned to education, serving four years as a trustee of the state university system, then seven years as a trustee of Pitzer College in Claremont. At the time, his good friend and mentor was the late Taft Schreiber, one of the founders of MCA, and a renowned art collector. (Selections from his collection appeared in MoCA's inaugural exhibition, and Schreiber's daughter Lenore Greenberg is a MoCA trustee and was recently named president of the board.) "Taft was a great help and he introduced me to his collector friends like Charles Laughton, and many dealers, curators, and museum directors throughout the world. He'd taken several years off and lived in the Sherry Netherland (Hotel in New York) to study and collect."

Following Schreiber's example, Broad took up collecting with the same intensity he had shown in business. "It was a real education for me away from the world of business and commerce. It's done great things for me. Art is an international activity. Wherever you go in the world, it's nice to be able to go to museums and meet the

head curator, director, the collectors, and it's wonderful when they visit Southern California to have them visit us. It's broadening educationally." He continues, "Arts are important to understand the world we live in, the worlds that existed before us, and that will exist in the future. The world of commerce has to be put in proper context. I love reaching out to other cultures. That's why we love unusual travel, going to places like the Galapagos Islands, China, East Africa and India. I'd be bored to death if all I did was go to the office with the sole purpose of making money."

Last month, further following Schreiber's example, Broad bought an apartment in the Sherry Netherland in order to spend some five days a month in New York, taking in the museums and galleries. Now that he is less involved with MoCA, he will devote even more time to collecting, as well as helping to build MoCA's permanent collection. "To be a good collector, one has to be a good student, one has to have the time to look, to think, to discern, to choose. Which I haven't had for the last five years. By stepping down from MoCA, I'll be spending more time." To facilitate his collecting pursuits, Broad recently created a non-profit foundation called the Broad Art Trust. "I

was depressed because in our home there are just so many walls, and there are size restrictions. I said I would never, ever buy works if we didn't have a place for them. But I started doing that, and now we have in our personal collection about 150 works, half of which are in storage or on loan." As Broad and his curator buy for the foundation, art will be loaned to universities or museums, with the eventual goal of donating the collection to a museum. MoCA is the most likely beneficiary. "I like to acquire work. I like the ability to look at it, possess it, and show it, whether it be at our home, or lent to a museum. We don't believe in owning works and putting them in an art warehouse where they can't be seen by us or others."

In this mercenary age, it seems unlikely that a self-made man would want to return so much of his gain. Broad said matter-of-factly, "I don't frankly feel good about people in the business community who are only interested in making money and on occasion will give to United Way, only if forced to. I guess I am socially conscious. Once you've done well in our free enterprise capitalist system, it's nice to rise above just making money, accept a social responsibility, and give something back."