

# MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

By John Wren

The Museum of Contemporary Art proudly calls itself the "Museum Without a Front Door." Very cool—unless you're trying to find the front door. Not being familiar with the edgy building design, my friend and I looked down an ominous looking corridor on the Delgany side of the building trying to find the entrance. Since this looked a weird dead end, we got help from a couple on the street who had the same problem and steered us back to the end of the corridor where there is an automatic door. Actually, it's a moving wall—a massive, black, steel panel which automatically slides open.

Once inside, we were cheerfully greeted by two employees at the front desk. They graciously mentioned student discounts (\$5 admission instead of \$10), which my friend was able to use. They also offered the use of museum guides and iPod Shuffles which have music to accompany viewing the exhibits. Upon mentioning that I was there to write about MCA, one of the clerks quickly hooked me up with the Communications Manager, Daniele Robson, who was passing by.

Daniele explained MCA's philosophy of encouraging visitors to draw their own conclusions from the exhibits. Missing are the lengthy curatorial statements about what the piece "means." Instead, visitors are invited to visit the artists' Open Shelves (discussed below) in the Library. The museum philosophy also facilitates multiple points of entry to appreciating and understanding the art. MCA utilizes elements from Howard Gardner's "Multiple Intelligence Theory", which outlines the various ways that different people process information: Musical, Mathematical, Verbal, Visual, and Kinesthetic.

MCA's commitment to education is highly admirable, as it dedicates three spaces in the museum to education: The Whole Room, The Library, and the Idea Box. The Whole Room functions as a meeting space for lectures, presentations, professional development and training. It also has a reinforced floor which may be used for dancing and MCA hopes to offer dance classes in the future.

The Library is warm, beautifully paneled space which functions as an extension of the exhibits. There are Macs available to visitors to view videos and will eventually contain a database that MCA is developing which will contain all exhibits. As part of its curatorial position which states that MCA create dynamic points of entry into the ideas within contemporary art, every artist who exhibits at the museum is offered a shelf in the library to give us more information about the ideas behind their work. Open Shelf includes books, movies, music, and pop-culture memorabilia as well as architectural references from David Adjaye. Mindful of the younger art connoisseurs, MCA built a great educational space called the Idea Box. The multilevel area is divided into two rooms. The first contains junior-size work tables and chairs where the kids

can engage in activities related to current exhibits. Nose flutes from New Zealand, stencils to create Maori designs, and complex math problems that will leave the parents stumped.

The next room in the Idea Box is a beautiful lounge which is a cantilevered space that hangs over the street below. The room is outfitted with cushy bean bags and has a child-size lookout window with views of downtown. The Idea Box is available for children's birthday parties.

The 27,000 square foot MCA is a beautiful addition to Denver's changing architectural landscape. Architect David Adjaye has created the Nation's first contemporary art museum that is Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified. Its four floors house five galleries, a promenade, three educational spaces, creative offices, and a gift shop. The Penthouse level has a garden, café, and deck with fabulous downtown views where visions of killer cocktail parties will dance in your head.

MCA's current exhibition is titled STAR POWER: Museum as Body Electric and features the work of David Altmejd, Carlos Amoroles, Candice Breitz, Rangí Kipa, Wangechi Mutu, Chris Ofili, and Collier Schorr. These exhibits/galleries all have different end dates, so the next round of exhibits will be going up from the end of February until mid-May. Exhibits will rotate an average of 3-6 months.

The first two galleries to change out will be the New Media Gallery and the Project Gallery. Recently installed is Tim Noble and Sue Webster's Toxic Schizophrenia – Hyper Version. The New Media Gallery will feature Yu-Cheng Chou. The Project Gallery will feature the next Artist-In-Residence, Jeff Starr, who is a Denver resident. Through the Residency program, artist talks, workshops and Open Studios by Jeff Starr are available to all audiences beginning in late February and continuing through March.

MCA offers several interesting programs and special events. OPEN SHELF is a series of programs that allows visitors to learn more about contemporary art.

## OPEN SHELF BOOK CLUB

Members are invited to join the Book Club. The first book will be selected from those chosen by Colorado artist Kim Dickey, whose sculpture commission for MCA DENVER is on view in the Café. Dickey is a professor in the Fine Arts Department at CU. Her Open Shelf ranges from the writings of George Perec to music by Lucinda Williams. Dickey will be present to discuss her OPEN SHELF and Book Club selection with the group. The Book Club's first meeting is Thursday, January 24th at 6 PM in the Library. Members may contact Daniele at [danieler@mcadenver.org](mailto:danieler@mcadenver.org) to sign-up. Space is limited.

MCA DENVER is open until 10 PM on Fridays, and visitors can watch films in the Idea Box on Film Fridays. The first series will compliment the Book Club and feature Open Shelf selections from Kim Dickey. Each month, films will be selected from the Open Shelf of an exhibiting artist or selected by a guest curator. Films are shown every Friday night at 8:00 pm in the Fox Family Idea Box. Free with museum admission.