

WHAT'S NEXT FOR ART?

CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM SHIFTS TO A LOCAL ARTIST, PUT WITHIN A GLOBAL CONTEXT.

By Kyle MacMillan

After presenting primarily thematic exhibitions for most of its 11-year history, the Museum of Contemporary Art/Denver will focus almost exclusively on solo exhibitions in the five primary galleries and two subsidiary spaces in its new \$15.9 million building.

The emphasis will be on vanguard art produced within the past 10 years, with a particular emphasis on work not previously exhibited and installations created specifically for the light-infused structure at 15th and Delgany streets.

"It's a global program," said Cydney Payton, pictured at right, the museum's executive director and chief curator. "It's no longer local, national and international. I think we have converted the language of the art world into this idea of migratory intellectual exchanges between artists and curators and museums."

With the Oct. 28 opening behind them and already about 7,000 visitors logged as of last week, museum leaders have shifted their attention to the future and the activation of a multifaceted series of activities and offerings designed to reach people of all ages and backgrounds.

"We looked at our audience from the very beginning," Payton said, "and everything has been engineered, both the physical plant of the museum and its program, towards exciting and challenging our myriad of audiences, not just one kind of audience."



CYDNEY PAYTON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART DENVER, STANDS OUTSIDE THE NEW BUILDING IN THE CENTRAL PLATTE VALLEY. PHOTO BY HELEN H. RICHARDSON, THE DENVER POST.

Because the museum is not a collecting institution, exhibitions will remain its prime focus. Its ever-rotating cycle of offerings will begin in February, as the components of the opening show are replaced on a segmented basis.

Payton is not ready to name the artists who will be shown, but she did say the museum plans to put an increased emphasis on Colorado artists, presenting them in in-depth solo exhibitions within the overarching global context.

"I've done a lot of thematic shows that have included Colorado artists and, now, I'm very excited to be able to offer really master exhibitions of some of these premier talents," she said.

Although she declined to give specifics, Payton said the next artist featured in the museum's second-floor projects gallery, will be a local artist. And it is possible that he or she will live in the space for several weeks.

Virtually all the exhibitions will be organized in-house, meaning that the museum will rarely if ever be a stop on touring shows organized by other institutions.

Asked where the much-publicized, still-traveling contemporary exhibition, "Life After Death: New Leipzig Paintings from the Rubell Family Collection," might be shown if it were to come to Denver, Payton pointed to the Denver Art Museum as the logical venue.

In conjunction with such a presentation, she said, MCA/Denver could present a solo show by an artist related to those artists, such as German painter Suzanne Kuhn, who will be showcased next year in the large-works gallery.



THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART DENVER'S EVER-ROTATING CYCLE OF OFFERINGS WILL BEGIN IN FEBRUARY, AS THE COMPONENTS OF THE OPENING SHOW ARE REPLACED ON A SEGMENTED BASIS. PHOTO BY GRANT LEIGHTON.

“That would be incredibly dynamic, because what an opportunity for the audience,” Payton said.

To accompany most of the displays, Payton plans an aggressive program of publications. She foresees catalogs of some 50 pages, which will put the emphasis on images and comments by the artists themselves.

“What’s exciting is to have the dialogue — the discourse coming directly from the artist,” she said. “That’s the whole premise — that I’m trying to reclaim the voice of the artist back into museum curatorial practice.”

The publications will be part of the Logan Conversations, Correspondences and Collaborations Series, which is funded with a \$150,000 gift from nationally known art collectors Kent and Vicki Logan of Vail.

The three-year program will also involve discussions between artists and curators and collaborations involving the museum’s three artists-in-residence each year, who will typically be at the museum from three to six weeks.

Another key program will be the museum’s two-track educational outreach for adults and K-12 students. For the next five years, those efforts will be organized under a kind of research project titled MI5, which relates to the multiple intelligences theory of Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at Harvard University.

The museum plans to explore ways that museumgoers can relate to the art on view using five of Gardner’s eight intelligences — linguistic, mathematical, musical, spatial and kinesthetic.

“I think people need to hear about the level of experimentation that the museum’s interested in,” Payton said.

Among the museum’s varied other offerings will be the Open Shelf program. Presenting a contemporary approach to a museum library, exhibited artists will assemble a shelf of books, DVDs and other objects that speak in some way to their inspiration.

“When (architect) David (Adjaye) and I were thinking about the building, it was always envisioned as a city,” Payton said. “And I think it will feel like it’s an explosion of city life that is defined by creativity — visual and intellectual stimulus.”