

ARTnews

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Rediscovering Latin American Art



Liliana Porter,
'Red with Mirror'

PLUS

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Reaching Out

San Francisco's museums are expanding, while a surprising number of galleries have emerged—along with opportunities for smart buyers

BY ANNELI RUFUS

San Francisco's art scene is a microcosm of the city itself. World-class museums and blue-chip galleries share the hilly terrain with myriad emerging art dealers, alternative spaces, and ethnic art galleries, reflecting the city's balance of sophistication and diversity.

"A city known worldwide for diversity spawns an art scene characterized by its multiplicity, and by its adventuresome, highly curious art audience," says Harry Parker III, director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, a public institution that comprises the California Palace of the Legion of Honor and the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum. Parker spent ten years as director of the Dallas Museum of Art before coming to San Francisco more than ten years ago.

The past few years have been a waiting game for the city's art venues, but many are showing strong signs of life. "Some are feeling a little bruised right now, but the strong survive the bad times and often come out with a clearer and firmer approach," notes Parker. Rendered unstable by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, the de Young Museum's hundred-year-old Beaux Arts

Golden Gate Park home was closed in 2000 and marked for demolition. The oldest museum in the city, its collections include an eclectic array of American paintings, textiles, decorative arts, crafts, and ethnic arts from Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. It's set to reopen in 2005 on the original site, in a sleek \$190 million building designed by the architectural firm Herzog and de Meuron, which transformed London's Bankside power station into the Tate Modern. Half of the art displayed there will be new to the de Young's collection.

Also set to reopen in 2005 is the Jewish Museum San Francisco, whose collections of fine art and rare books will occupy a historic 60,000-square-foot former power substation expanded by architect Daniel Libeskind. Built by Willis Polk in 1907, the building will retain its imposing redbrick facade, skylights, and other original features, adding an interior redesign based on the Hebrew letters for *l'chaim* ("to life"). A merger between the Jewish Museum San Francisco and the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley was dissolved earlier this year after trustees disagreed on plans going forward.

The Mexican Museum's new home is scheduled to open in early 2006 next to the Jewish Museum. The planned 63,000-square-foot structure, designed by Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta, is more than six times the size of the museum's current location in the city's Fort Mason Center. Its collections include ancient through contemporary Mexican, Chicano, and Latino art.

Previously lodged in a wing of the de Young and closed since that building's demolition, the Asian Art Museum reopened this March in what was once the city's main library. Architect Gae Aulenti oversaw the \$160 million renovation of the 1917 Beaux Arts building, which now has 33 galleries with 40,000 feet of exhibition space. The building received skylights and courtyards to relieve the old library's gloom, and the museum can now show twice as much of its 15,000-object collection as it previously could. Director Emily Sano plans to include contemporary Asian and Asian American works in the new programming. "We want the public to know we are not just about the past," says Sano. "And we hope we can reach more peo-



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TOP Neal Benezra, director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. **ABOVE** Paul Paiement's painting *Hybrids E-Isoptera Lightbulbae*, 2002, is in a solo show of the artist's works at Heather Marx this month.