

Artists protest di Rosa sell-off

By Charles Desmarais

More than 125 prominent artists, gallerists and others have signed an open letter to leaders of the di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, protesting a plan to sell most of the center's famed collection.

The letter states that the signatories "express our opposition to the dismantling and commercial sale of the di Rosa Collection." It asks that the center's board and director identify "an alternative institution to house, preserve, and appropriately utilize this unique collection."

Among those who had signed the letter as of noon Tuesday are more than 60 artists whose work is included in the collection, a unique repository of late-20th century Northern California art. They include many of the most celebrated figures associated

with the region, among them Terry Allen, Luis Cruz Azaceta, Deborah Butterfield, Squeak Carnwath, Enrique Chagoya, Mark di Suvero, Mildred Howard, Robert Hudson, Paul Kos, Lynn Hershman Leeson, James Melchert, Richard Misrach, Ron Nagle, Richard Shaw and William T. Wiley. Representatives of the estates of Robert Arneson, Wallace Berman, Joan Brown, Jay DeFeo and Mel Ramos also signed.

The letter expresses concern for what it calls "the only collection in the world dedicated exclusively to the history of post-World War II art in Northern California in all its diversity of media, gender, race, and philosophy," and it pointedly makes the point that artists helped to build it.

"The collection was borne from the relationships Rene and Veronica di Rosa had with the



Johnna Arnold / di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, Napa

View of "Assembling the Choreography of Protest," an installation of works from the di Rosa Center's collection.

artists and curators of the Bay Area," it states. "The collection benefited from those relationships in the form of gifts of work or substantially discounted purchases made with all participants in agreement that the acquisitions were to be part of a museum collection, meaning that they would be properly stored, conserved, made available for viewing, loans, and exhibition."

On Wednesday Robert Sain, the director of the di Rosa center, responded with a letter that repeated claims that the center did not have sufficient funds to maintain

the collection. "It would ... have been wonderful if additional donors beyond our board, membership, and strong base of supporters had responded to our fundraising efforts," he wrote.

The letter cites what it calls an "unfortunate" circumstance, "that we finally had to face the reckoning ... or close our doors forever."

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