

Di Rosa Center starts sale of art collection

By Charles Desmarais

When Napa's di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art announced in July that it would sell off most of its renowned collection of some 1,600 works of art, center officials would not say publicly which works would be first to go on the block. Now, The Chronicle has learned, a letter has been quietly circulated offering 18 key works for sale to art dealers and other prospective buyers.

"Timing is an important factor for the institution," the letter says, promising to respond to purchase offers "as soon as possible." The letter was signed by Robert Sain, executive director of di Rosa.

A spokesperson for the di Rosa confirmed the letter was sent out, and that the process would be slow and gradual.

In August, more than 125 prominent artists, gallerists and others sent a letter of protest to di Rosa leaders, urging them not to sell the artwork. The list of signatories had grown to 143 at last count.

The di Rosa collection is, in many respects, a quintessential overview of late 20th-century art by Northern California artists. Eclectic to a fault, it comprises acknowledged masterworks by the most influential Bay Area artists of the period, as well as early efforts by graduate stu-

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dents that appealed to center founder Rene di Rosa. Taken as a whole, the collection is an unmatched resource and record of the visual art scene in the Bay Area from the mid-1960s through the 1980s.

Among the works currently offered are sculptures by Mark di Suvero and Viola Frey that have long been identified with the center.

The red, 31-foot-high di Suvero was created in 1987 and is titled "For Veronica." Displayed high on a hill above the center, it was likely a tribute to Rene di Rosa's wife, also named Veronica, who took a deep interest in the collection before her death in 1991.

The Frey work, "Homage" (1987), is a monu-



Israel Valencia

The di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art in Napa has notified dealers and other prospective buyers that key works in its collection are up for sale.

mental reclining figure; Frey is the subject of a retrospective exhibition on view at the center through Dec. 29.

Also listed for sale are a rare 1958 painting and two other significant works by San Francisco icon Bruce Conner; three

paintings and a work on paper by Peter Saul, whose 50-year career will be marked by a retrospective exhibition at the New Museum in New York next year; and major works by Terry Allen, Roy De Forest, Sam Francis, Robert

Hudson, Manuel Neri and Nathan Oliveira.

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