

Modernism in market for new space

Martin Muller, founder and impresario of the gallery Modernism, which has carried the banner of its eponymous mission in San Francisco for 37 years, confirms that he will enter the fray of gallery relocation and redefinition later this year.

"We are exploring a few good options with our architects," Muller says. Ongoing construction and other changes at the Monadnock Building, the gallery's current home, make it time to move on. One location being considered is at "the edge of the Tenderloin," he says, "close to Van Ness and the new California Pacific Medical Center hospital."

"This neighborhood," he adds, "is flourishing, with new restaurants run by hip young chefs, trendy boutiques and already a few progressive galleries." That, to me, means near the indefatigable Jessica Silverman Gallery, which is as progressive, and newly influential, as they come.

YBCA announces 'pay what you wish' membership: In news sure to be welcomed by cash-strapped art lovers, San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts will announce that the price of individual membership will be set by the member. Currently \$40-\$65, membership includes free admission (but only for one person, as opposed to the current policy of two) to exhibitions and opening receptions, discounts on events and other perks.

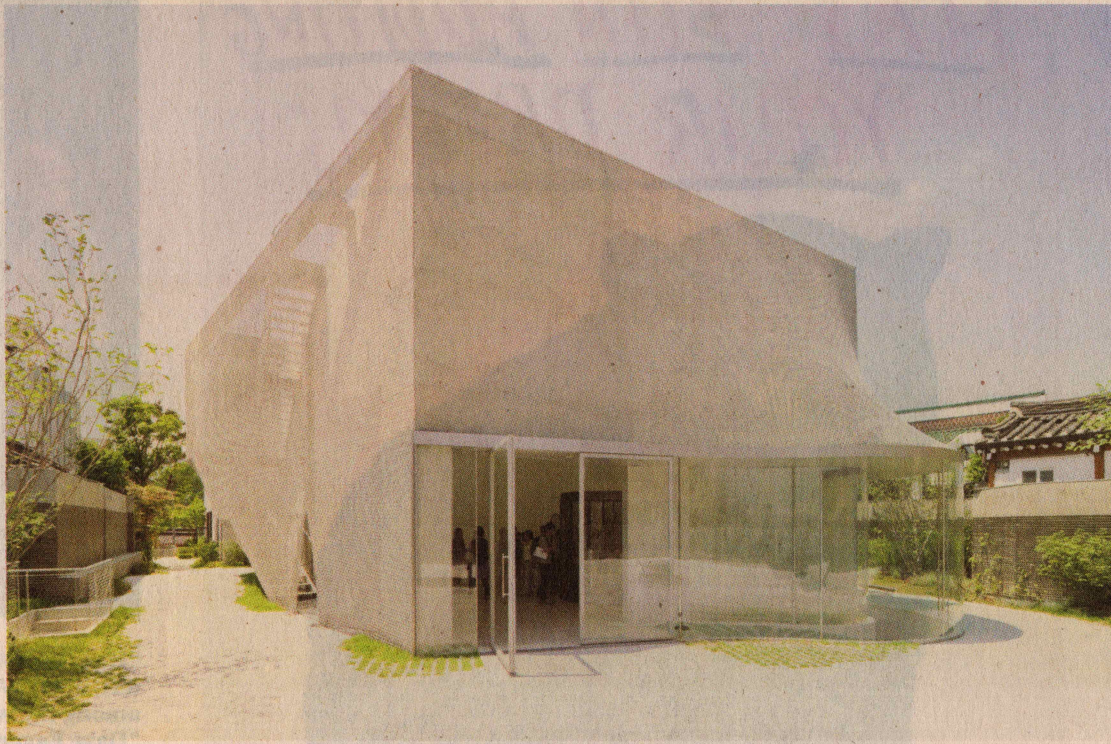
A spokeswoman tells me, in nervous-making language, that the center has been looking for ways to "help it explode out of the 'art' discourse and into the action of truly generating culture." Whatever that means, it's part of a larger effort by CEO Deborah Cullinan, who took over in 2013, to "return YBCA to its founding mandate: to be a citizen institution."

That certainly sounds laudable. And who among us isn't dying to see the answers generated by one new program, which will have 90 YBCA Fellows tackle the question: Can we design freedom?

Windfall for new director at Sonoma Valley Museum: Linda Cano assumed her new role as executive director of Sonoma Valley Museum of Art on Feb. 16. Her first order of business? Spend \$850,000.

That is the amount of a check received in December, but unannounced until now, from the estate of Calvin Vander Woude. A longtime supporter and member of the museum's Board of Directors, Vander Woude died Sept. 7.

Cano comes to Sonoma from Fresno, where she was executive director and chief curator of the Fresno Art Museum from 2010 to 2014. She called the sum "a very generous lega-



Iwan Baan / SO-IL

SO-IL (formerly Solid Objectives-Idenburg Liu), whose first U.S. building is the soon-to-open Manetti Shrem Museum at UC Davis, designed the Kukje Gallery in Seoul (pictured).



Haines Gallery

"The Fall (Borox 2)" is in a David Maisel photography show closing March 12.



Gallery 16

"Bay Salt 5826" and other Thomas Heinser photographs are up through March 18.

cy gift" and only part of a total bequest that will likely amount to "well over a million dollars." It falls to her to recommend to the museum's board how to use the unrestricted funds, the largest gift the museum has received. "Cal was very interested in art education and public programs, and we will want to respect that interest as we expand our offerings to our public."

Do-over No. 1: With my piece last week on the new Manetti Shrem Museum at UC Davis, which announced an opening date of Nov. 13, I included some gorgeous renderings of the new building. But, though I credited the images to the architects, I did not mention them in the column, and several readers called me on it.

The designer is the Brooklyn firm SO-IL (formerly Solid Objectives-Idenburg Liu), founded by the husband-and-wife team of Florian Idenburg, 40, and Jing Liu, 35. It is the young firm's first U.S. building, though they have received attention for some high-profile

competition entries and small projects (a tent at the Frieze Art Fair in New York, a courtyard summer pavilion at MoMA PS1), and completed a striking, chain-link-clad art gallery in Seoul. Idenburg was previously project manager for the Japanese firm SANAA on two important American art projects, the Glass Pavilion for the Toledo Museum of Art and New York's New Museum.

SO-IL is working in association with Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, a 50-year-old San Francisco firm. Known for its work on college campuses (Williams, Dartmouth, the California Institute of Technology, et al.), the company has also completed several of those snazzy Apple stores — including the iconic glass box on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan.

Do-over No. 2: My review last Saturday of Hank Willis Thomas' exceptional exhibition at Kadist Art Foundation briefly described his five-channel video work, "A Person Is More Important Than Anything Else" (2014). But I'm not

satisfied that I gave sufficient attention to what I called "the art part" of the 29-minute installation — its speculative embellishments. (The piece is utterly unreproducible in print — you will have to see it personally.)

The work is a tribute to author James Baldwin: part biography, part visual poetry. Asked, in one segment, by 1960s TV host David Frost about the disadvantages of "starting out as a writer ... black, impoverished, homosexual," Baldwin claims: "I thought I hit the jackpot."

That original exchange took place in a studio, the two men sitting at a conventionally polite distance. But Thomas juggles the images between the five, aligned monitors, using the space across them to play with the very idea of conversation: doubling the power of Baldwin's visage by presenting it on two monitors; making him the center of attention by moving his talking head to the center; emphasizing the cultural gap between British personality and American author

by separating them physically.

Such techniques are employed throughout the work, mirroring, weaving, sewing together and tearing apart. Bringing in voices from the past — including Baldwin's own, with clips from various points in his life, in a variety of tones and paces — and present. The artist includes a poignant reading by Angela Davis of a letter Baldwin wrote her during her infamous trial, before she was cleared of conspiracy charges in a shooting incident.

Bessie Smith's "Backwater Blues" floats above one segment as Baldwin walks alone, or addresses the camera plaintively from a solitary video frame. Faux-African drums and movie-native gibberish follow elegant spoken passages. All the images disappear, and we hear his voice in the dark. The role of leader is thrust upon him by interviewers, and then he is assaulted by questions: What is the role of the Negro? Are Negro leaders encouraging conditions of violence? Are you a communist? A revolutionary? An American?

It's a bracingly complex work, with implications firing off in all directions at once. Central to these are intractable questions and challenges regarding race, in America and beyond. And yet I can't get the first words of the piece out my head — the words that transcend difference, that explain how the work, its subject (Baldwin), and the artist (Thomas) succeed so thoroughly in embracing us all.

"It seems to me," Baldwin says, as a fragmented picture emerges from initial blackness, "that the artist's struggle for his integrity must be considered as a metaphor for the struggle which is universal, and daily, of all human beings on the face of this terrifying globe to get to become human beings."

Last chances

The Leo Vallador exhibition "Color Space," closing Saturday, March 5, at Brian Gross Fine Art, gives us a view of the late artist as an abstractionist so inventive, he seems to be concocting his own definition of geometry ... Also closing Saturday, Fraenkel Gallery's quietly intense "21 Pictures" by Peter Hujar ... and there must be something in the air: David Maisel's show "The Fall" at Haines Gallery (closing March 12) and Thomas Heinser's "Reduziert" at Gallery 16 (through March 18) both present aerial photographs, pleasantly disorienting, if a bit designy.

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