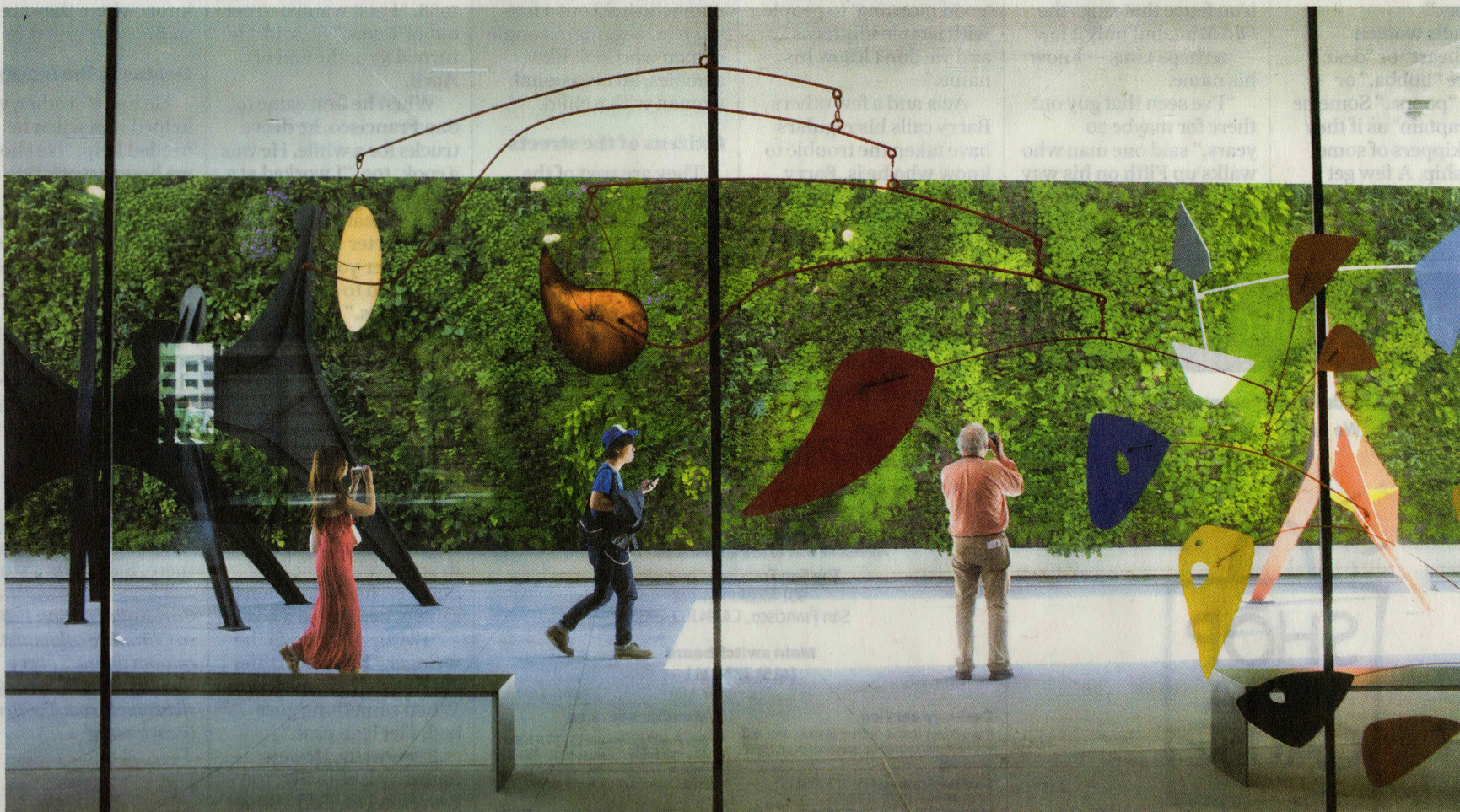


SFMOMA'S NEW ERA



Tim Hussin / The Chronicle

An Alexander Calder mobile hangs in front of the living wall sculpture terrace at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which reopens Saturday.

THE ART

By Charles Desmarais

Don't get me wrong. I may have questions about the focus on big donors — too often at the expense of deeper analysis — in the opening exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which opens to the public May 14. What matters is the art, the artists and the museum audience. And SFMOMA's leadership will need to recalibrate the center of its attention once the celebratory parties are over.

When all's said and done, though, those contributors made possible a fine new building and assured that it was filled with some of recent art history's most significant and visually rewarding objects. The expanded SFMOMA is a resource to which few other communities have anything comparable. It is a permanent legacy, prodigious in value (both monetary and cultural) and likely to appreciate.

SFMOMA continues on A12

The big reveal

Our critics say new wing is no masterpiece, but what's inside is timeless

THE ARCHITECTURE

By John King

When the architects at Snøhetta won the 2010 competition to design the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's immense new wing, museum Director Neal Benezra likened the firm's concept to "somewhere between an intellectual exercise and a practical proposal."

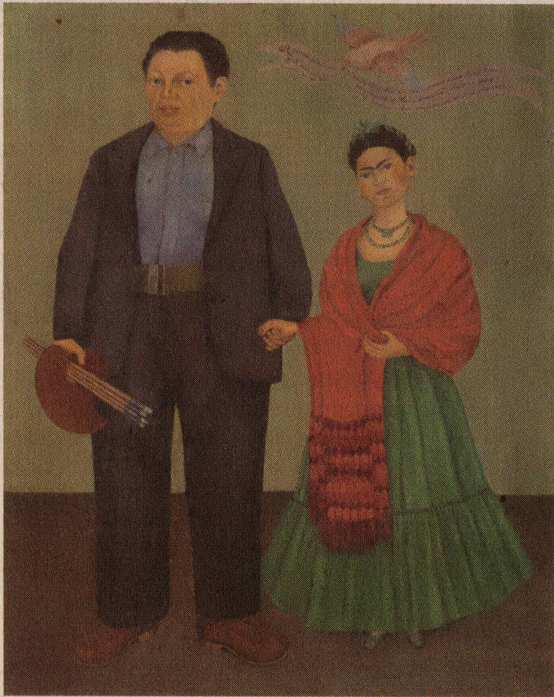
Six years later, the \$305 million makeover is complete — and that initial verdict still holds.

The building that opens to the public May 14 is an ambitious merger that seeks to engage the city both inside and out, while offering moments of serendipity amid a daunting 3-plus acres of indoor gallery space.

Inside and out, there are sublime smaller touches that show us why Snøhetta won the job, and why the firm is now on the short list to design President Obama's

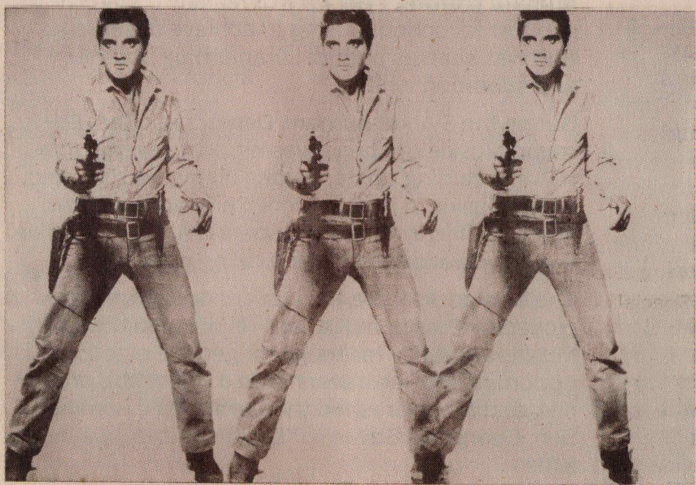
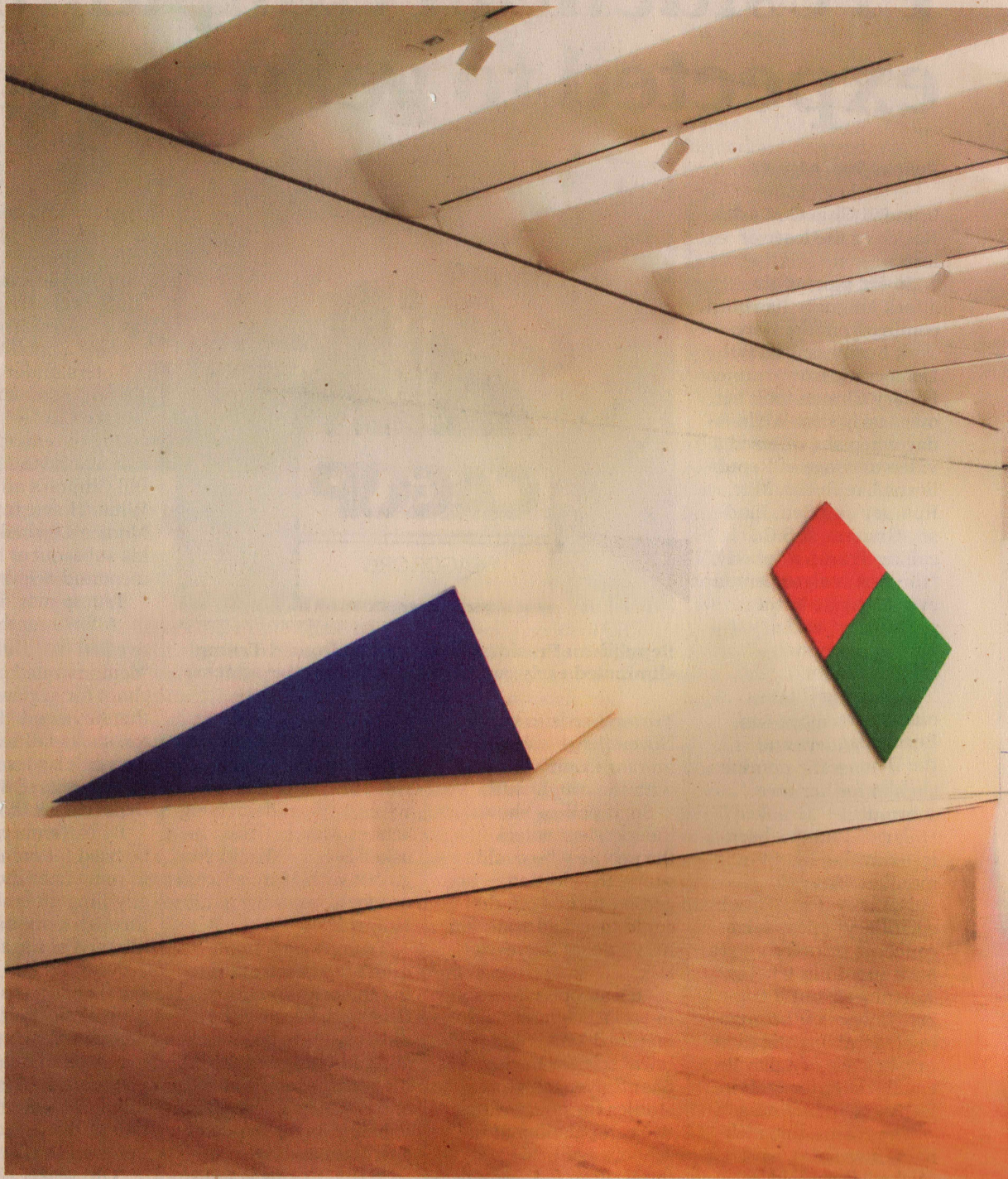
King continues on A14

SFMOMA'S NEW ERA: THE ART



Above: Frida Kahlo's "Frieda and Diego Rivera" (1931) is part of the "Open Ended" exhibit.

Right: Ellsworth Kelly's 14-foot-long works match even larger paintings by Anselm Kiefer.



Andy Warhol's homage to Elvis Presley is on a floor of "Pop, Minimal and Figurative Art."



"Two Candles," a 1982 work by German master Gerhard Richter, is in the Fisher Collection.



The third-floor terrace and living wall of the new wing is an outdoor space that is home to the famed "Chance Meeting" by George Segal. Habitat Horticulture created the living wall.

Best of recent art history

SFMOMA from page A1

The reopening exhibitions are of three basic types. The first is the thematic loan exhibition — ordinarily a museum's big draw but, at the moment, limited to a tight installation by the Portuguese artist Leonor Antunes. She takes a deep dive into San Francisco's relationship to modern art history that would merit more attention, if there were not so much else to see in the building.

The second kind of exhibition on view is what we might call the jewelry box: extraordinary gems, carefully laid out. These are the recent gifts of art and the first selections from the incomparable Fisher Collection, on loan for 100 years.

Finally, there are classic exhibitions of holdings in the permanent collection — the core of any great museum.

More than half of the museum's 145,000 square feet of gallery space is devoted to jewelry

box exhibits. That includes the seventh-floor "Campaign for Art: Contemporary," a selection of 90 works from recent gifts from collectors, dealers and artists. It's a miscellany that ranges from a sweetly pathetic, 5-inch-high ceramic sculpture by Ron Nagle to a room-size installation of a morphing, mercurial sculpture by Takeshi Murata — the fascinator that tops off the whole new museum outfit.

3 by Mark Bradford

Highlights include three new acquisitions of major works by Mark Bradford, the Los Angeles artist who will represent the United States at the next Venice Biennale; a somber drawing-cum-sculpture that seems to predict a stormy future, which David Hammons "drew" with a bouncing basketball and graphite; and a solid stainless steel "Sleeping Woman" by Charles Ray, all gleaming dead weight anchoring the gallery around it.

An installation of 20 classic works of the late 20th century, promised by Norah and Norman Stone, honors SFMOMA curator John Caldwell who, in less than four years before his untimely death in 1993, had a lasting influence on the collectors now shaping the museum's future.

Exhibitions on the second, third and fourth floors also lay out the new riches, from a bounty of drawings on two to a credibly complete historical survey of photographs of California and the West on three. A rather jumbled fourth-floor "Campaign for Art: Modern and Contemporary" has a number of individual highlights (Picasso, Pollock, Bacon et al), as well as important new subcollections: small works by the key German artist Joseph Beuys and a whole set of Diane Arbus photographs.

By far the most space on other floors is devoted to the Fisher Collection. Less than a quarter of its 1,100 works of art are

shown, but Don and Doris Fisher clearly valued the wow factor in their choices. Anselm Kiefer paintings up to 18 feet long on one level are matched by 14-foot-long Ellsworth Kellys on another.

Calder gallery a favorite

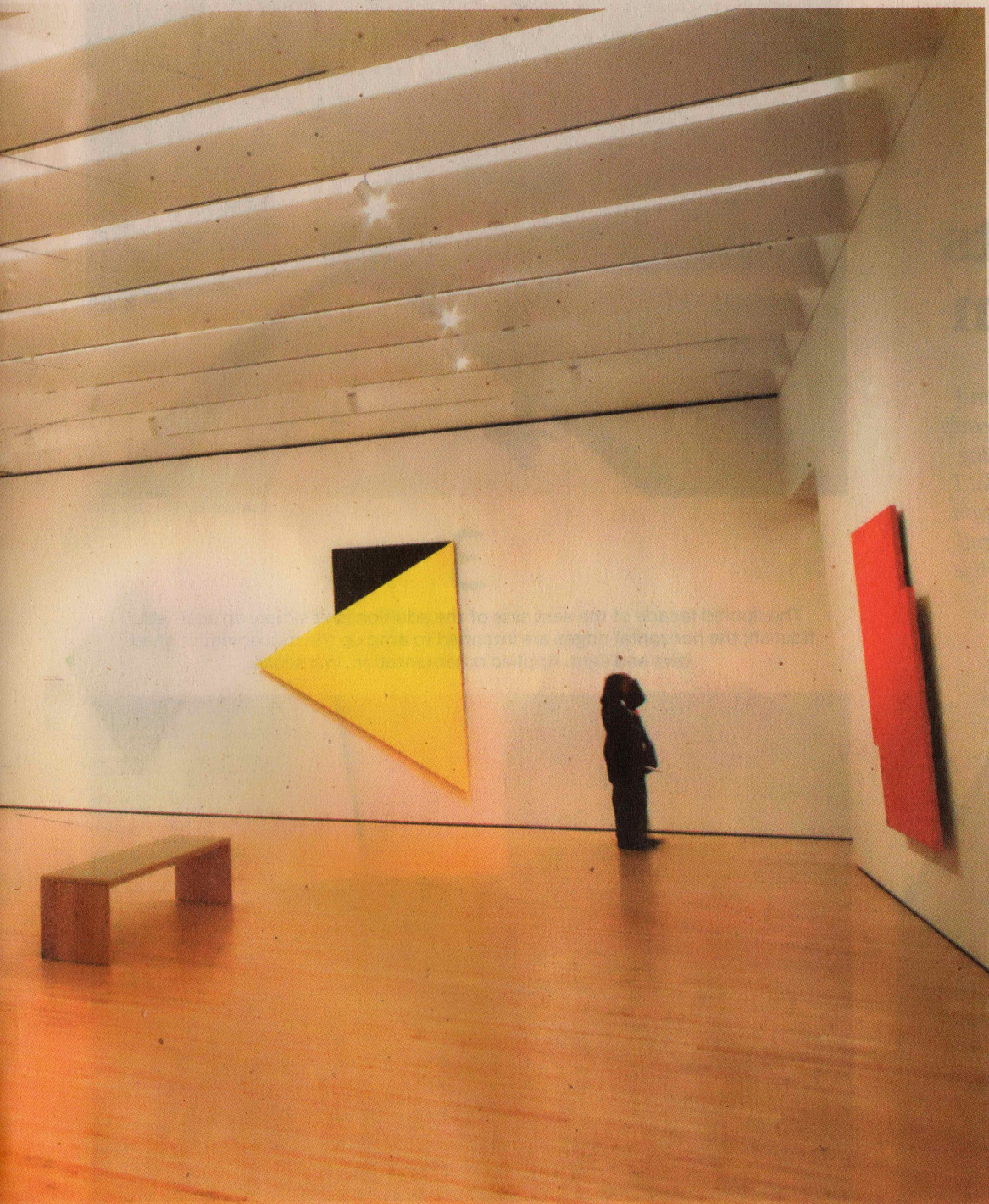
My favorite space in the museum, as currently hung, is the Alexander Calder gallery. Calder knew about scale — demonstrated here in a tiny wire-drawing-in-space from 1929, "Aquarium," that brings you near to wonder at its intricacy, and the slender grace of two 1953 works, "Double Gong" and "Eighteen Numbered Black," that stretch to almost 12 feet. These larger works are grand without straining for the spectacular. The Calder gallery opens through glass walls on two sides to outdoor sculpture terraces; the east terrace is one of the great spaces of the new building, with a gigantic living wall of local vegetation as backdrop and slitted

urban views.

A whole floor of "Pop, Minimal and Figurative Art" includes superb examples of Pop art. It is, at the same time, instructive in its perfection. Most large Pop collections in museums were built in the 1960s, when works were at least somewhat affordable. But if you are buying as the work is being made and the style is developing, you cannot know where it is headed; you take gambles. That is why older museum collections of Pop art are so tellingly quirky and charmingly flawed. Seeing the great in the context of the good and not-so-good teaches us a lot about the period.

The Chuck Close galleries are quite good for an immersion in Close's large-scale works, including portraits of artists whose work is found elsewhere in the museum. "Agnes" is Agnes Martin, "Roy" is Lichtenstein. Seven of Martin's softly radiant gridded and striped canvases get their own secluded

\$305 million cost of construction project	21 plant species native to Northern California planted in living wall	17,800 works of photography in collection	45,000 square feet of free, art-filled public space
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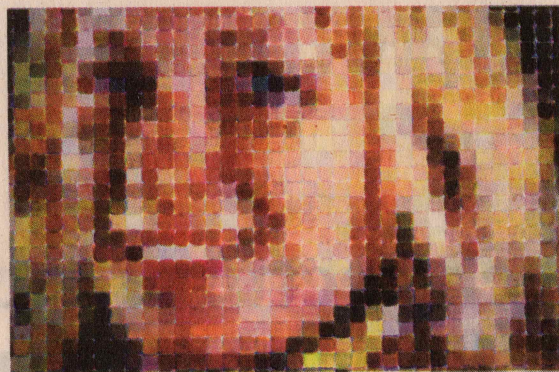


Michael Macor / The Chronicle



Tim Hussin / The Chronicle

Adrienne Young (front) and Elizabeth Gilmore (lying down) gaze at an Alexander Calder mobile. The Calder gallery opens through glass walls on two sides to outdoor terraces.

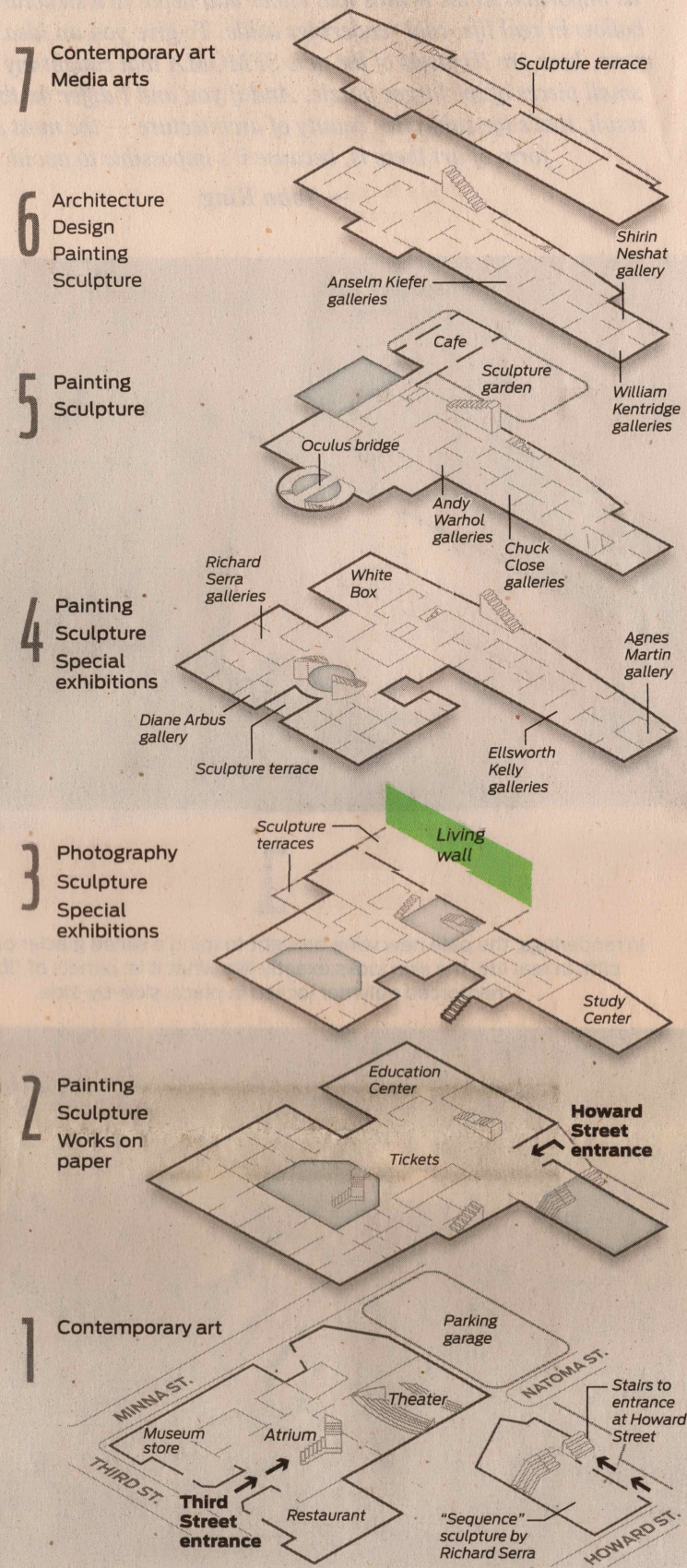


Michael Short / Special to The Chronicle

A detail of Chuck Close's painting of Cindy Sherman in the Close gallery. His Agnes Martin and Roy Lichtenstein works are also there.

A look inside the new SFMOMA

An overview of what visitors will find on each floor of the expanded museum:



Source: SFMOMA

Todd Trumbull / The Chronicle

SFMOMA

Hours and info: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily (Thursdays until 9 p.m.) beginning Saturday. \$19-\$25 (free, 18 years and under). 151 Third St., S.F. (415) 357-4000. www.sfmoma.org/tickets

Reopening: The museum officially opens to the public Saturday, but tickets for that day are already oversubscribed. Advance tickets (online only until Saturday) for later days are highly recommended.

Member Preview Days through May 9. Membership is available online (\$100 individual, \$150 dual), simultaneously allowing members to reserve timed preview day tickets for themselves plus one guest.

space. Philip Guston, Sol Lewitt and Richard Serra show up at several points in such appropriate settings that to track their appearances is to get a firm grounding in their concerns and the arcs of their careers.

The largest amount of space in the Fisher galleries is devoted to German art after 1960, a particularly fertile time in that country. The elegiac monotone of

Anselm Kiefer may be wearing a little thin these days, but one still admires the ambition and confidence that can elevate work made in base metals, straw and tar. At the same time, Gerhard Richter, master painter in a dizzying range of techniques, and the influential photographer team of Bernd and Hilla Becher have never looked better than here.

Art history narrative

The last type of exhibition on view is the most traditional for museums. It is the art historical narrative based on the permanent collection — and here I mean the collection as it exists before the much-needed integration of the new gifts.

An excellent survey from the photography vaults, "About Time: Photography in a Moment of Change," is a large show — 165 works — with almost as many ways of looking at the topic. Similarly, the Architecture + Design Department drilled deeper into collections to produce "Typeface to Interface: Graphic Design From the Collection."

The classic of this form of exhibition, though, is "Open Ended: Painting and Sculpture

Since 1900," on the second floor. It is an excellent survey drawn from SFMOMA's best works, the entry flanked by two examples of Henri Matisse's portraits from the first decade of the 20th century. They are works of such intensely savage color that the artist was included by critics among "les Fauves" — the wild beasts — of the period, and they are pictures as ferocious today as they were 100 years ago.

The highlights of "Open Ended" are many, including such other familiar masterpieces as Frida Kahlo's beloved "Frieda and Diego Rivera" (1931); Rivera's own "Indian Girl with Coral Necklace" (1926); Mark Rothko's smoldering "No. 14, 1960"; and Jay DeFeo's "The Verónica" (1957), a sheer cliff of a painting twice the height of most mortals.

A minute retrospective of 16 paintings and drawings in color is selected from the museum's large Paul Klee collection. Another selection (12 pieces) gives a good sense of the intimate worlds crafted by Joseph Cornell. There's a roomful of SFMOMA's rare Clyfford Still paintings and, almost in answer to Still, a grouping of seven works by Robert Rauschenberg, in-

cluding fragile works on paper that cannot always be shown.

One is tempted to rattle off artist names from the checklist, all represented by top examples, from Romare Bearden to O'Keeffe, Picasso, Pollock and Warhol — 160 works, a museum in itself. The exhibition has its gaps, but it is the kind of effort that we depend on the best museums to provide: juxtapositions that show rather than tell.

Permanent collection's role

Permanent collection displays are not the popular parts of most museums. But for the local visitor, a good permanent collection is an artistic home of sorts, providing a foundation upon which to build new understanding. It can also be a safe place to return when the rest of art — or the world — seems adrift.

Home. For all the glamour of the new building and the welcome new collection objects, that is what we in the Bay Area expect our museum to be. If it can achieve that status for us, its value to the thousands of visitors it will attract each week will also increase.

Since its founding, San Francisco has been constantly re-

made by the cultures and the ideas we adopt. The "new" SFMOMA has yet to appear, and it won't until it shakes off the wrappings of all that new art and the glitter of the parties celebrating its arrival.

But one small corner of the inaugural exhibition, on the second floor, is a place from which to contemplate the future. A handsome show, "Art of Northern California: Three Views," looks briefly at the histories of art at UC Davis (Robert Arneson, Wayne Thiebaud and William T. Wiley); the so-called "personal visions" of Joan Brown, Bruce Conner, Lee Mulligan and Jess; and conceptual art as practiced by David Ireland, Paul Kos, Tom Marioni et al.

This is not the only place where California artists show up in the museum. The number of artists included is so distressingly small that one is certain it's meant to be just a nod. But it is one of the few places that, at this early point, feels authentically ours. It feels like home.

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10 floors in new expansion

170,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor gallery space

45 GALLONS of water needed to display Jeff Koons' Two-Ball Equilibrium Tank (Spalding Dr. J Silver Series, Wilson Aggressor) on Floor 7

213 tons of Corten steel comprising Richard Serra's sculpture "Sequence," the heaviest work on display in the museum