

Art in America

FEBRUARY 2007

REPORT FROM COLORADO

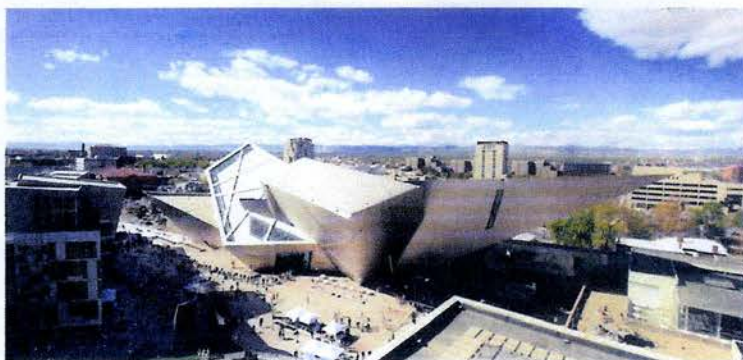
The Hills Are Alive

With the opening of the Denver Art Museum's new building, designed by Daniel Libeskind, Denver has staked its claim in the contemporary art world. Boulder and Aspen add to the mix.

BY STEPHANIE CASH

Quirky. That's the most common adjective I heard in Denver to describe the Denver Art Museum's exuberant new Daniel Libeskind-designed addition. Kind-hearted residents prefer "quirky" to other adjectives the critically panned building has received. Despite their trepidation, it's virtually impossible to find a person who doesn't recognize the impact the new building and its expanded collection will have on the local cultural scene. Close to 34,000 people attended the museum's 36-hour opening on the weekend of Oct. 7-8. With the Libeskind addition, in the works since 1999, museum officials expect annual attendance to double, from 450,000 to one million, in the first year.

The city has also signed on Libeskind to come up with a master plan for a cultural district around the museum, which will incorporate the adjacent public library designed by Michael Graves. Libeskind might here be given the freedom and control that was wrenched from him at Ground Zero in New York, where his master plan has been altered beyond recognition. Already open just across the museum's plaza is a privately developed condominium building (which contains a parking facility for museum guests), with a hotel still to come.



View of the Libeskind addition on opening weekend. Photo Kevin Hester. All photos this spread courtesy Denver Art Museum.

In profile, the Libeskind museum building resembles others the architect has designed for various projects, realized or not—the Jewish Museum in San Francisco, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London—though here he was able to attribute his inspiration for the craggy, tumbling forms to the Rocky Mountains to the west of the city, and the rock crystals found therein. The museum is otherwise spared the heavy-handed symbolic gestures that Libeskind is so fond of, such as the voids in Berlin's Jewish Museum that represent lost Jewish residents, and his design for the Freedom Tower at the World Trade Center site, with a patriotic height of 1,776 feet topped by a spire that echoes the Statue of Liberty's torch.

Ushered to realization by director Lewis Sharp, who has headed DAM since 1989, the insistently dynamic Libeskind building forces visitors and passersby to take notice, and to think about architecture as an art form instead of as just a container. Yet it is that very quality, here as elsewhere, that has art lovers bemoaning the current trend toward arrogant architecture that is more about aggressive sculptural form and less about practical function, and DAM is the current whipping post for the disgruntled.

With nary a right angle in sight, the Libeskind addition, called the Frederic C. Hamilton Building after DAM's board chairman, is asymmetrical and angular in the extreme and frankly, as has been widely reported, inhospitable to the art it was built to house. Yet, after the initial shock wears off, it starts to grow on you. It's certainly more compelling than the museum's glass-tile-clad Gio Ponti-designed fortress completed in 1971, now called the North Building, even though that structure's

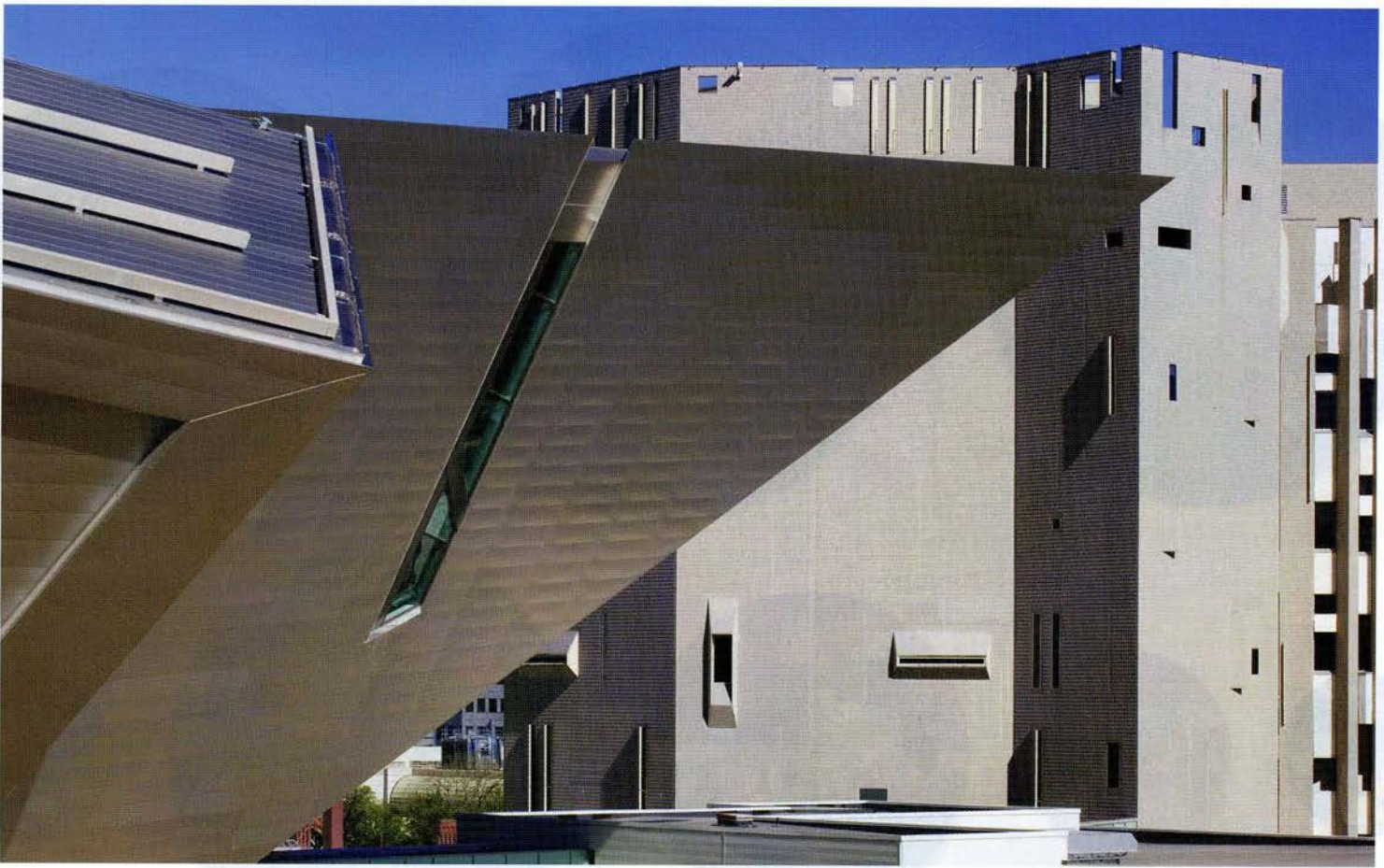
gallery spaces are at least conventionally proportioned. The fact that the Ponti building is his only one in the U.S., and that Libeskind's is the first he has completed in the U.S., is a testament to DAM's willingness to take architectural risks. The two buildings are linked by a pedestrian bridge, which provides an impressive view of the Libeskind building's prow jutting out over the street toward the Ponti. The crossing also features a café and rooftop garden, and the museum's popular restaurant just below, at street level, serving as a welcome rest stop and comfortable meeting place.

Almost doubling the museum's size, the 146,000-square-foot Hamilton Building adds 40,000 square feet of new gallery space for permanent collections, along with 20,000 square feet divided among three special-exhibition spaces, in addition to a museum shop and auditorium. The \$110-million project was partially funded by a \$62.5-million bond approved by voters and a \$28-million capital campaign; trustees have pledged another \$62.5 million for an endowment. The museum also receives \$5 million in annual support from the city's Scientific and Cultural Facilities District sales tax, which generates nearly \$40 million per year for some 300 cultural organizations.

Clearly, the architecture poses some challenges. Dan Kohl, director of design, was charged with making the building work, which included designing the gallery spaces. Temporary walls divide the irregular spaces to provide sweeping views that allow visitors to take in multiple perspectives at once. But some challenges were better met than others, and some seem insurmountable. So that



The new addition's four-story atrium, with Tatsuo Miyajima's permanent installation, ENGI, 2006, mirror medallions and LED numbers. Photo © Jeff Goldberg/Esto.



Above, the prow of the new Frederic C. Hamilton Building, 2006, designed by Daniel Libeskind, at the Denver Art Museum, with the 1971 Gio Ponti building behind. Photo © Jeff Goldberg/Esto. Below, view of the Denver Art Museum's new titanium-clad addition. Photo Jeff Wells.



The Denver Art Museum finally has a dedicated space for its 4,500-piece modern and contemporary collection, partially installed in the prow of the new building as if to emphasize the works' importance.

awestruck visitors or the visually impaired don't bonk their heads on the tilting walls or dynamic beams angling through galleries, small wooden barriers are bolted to the floor alongside any wall or around any corner that angles even slightly inward, severely compromising the building's esthetics (one wonders whether Libeskind or the museum staff or board ever considered that people would actually be walking around inside). But the architectural Band-Aids are a solution in progress. Since the opening the museum has experimented with strategically placed planters and sculpture to remedy the problem; a Kiki Smith bronze, for example, forces viewers around a triangular bit of wall that gratuitously thrusts into the gallery space.

DAM isn't the first museum whose interior spaces echo an unconventional external form, but at least the curving walls of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim rotunda or Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao don't threaten bodily harm to visitors. But just as museum-goers learned to live with the Guggenheim's curving rotunda and sloping floors, they'll likely come to accept the pointy, jagged, disorienting spaces of Libeskind. And who knows, maybe the building will force a reconsideration of how we look at art. In a decade or so, perpendicular walls might seem rather dull and archaic.

Amid the impracticalities, the building does have some highly practical and innovative features, some determined in conjunction with museum staff, such as freight elevators that open directly into the galleries and in-gallery storage areas for crates, both of which are concealed by temporary walls during a show's run.

To ease congestion inside the building, the ticket office is located on the outdoor plaza, a surprising design decision considering the city's frigid winter weather, though I was assured that Denverites are a hardy group. The plaza is populated by a Louise Bourgeois spider sculpture, an oversize dustpan and whisk broom by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen and a towering group of monoliths by Beverly Pepper. Once inside the museum, visitors encounter a soaring, four-story faceted atrium with a staircase angling up the perimeter, and an installation piece by Tatsuo Miyajima commissioned through the city's percent-for-art program. Scattered up the atrium walls are small circular mirrors, each inset with a blue or white LED counter, which twinkle like stars when it's dark outside. The numbers change at varying speeds determined by a four-digit sequence individually set by 80 Denver residents solicited by the artist for their diversity. Another Miyajima installation, *Floating Time*



Exhibition view of "RADAR," showing (left to right) works by Zhang Huan, Wang Guangyi, Luo Brothers, Fang Lijun, Zhang Dali and Yue Minjun. All photos this spread courtesy Denver Art Museum.



Jennifer Steinkamp: *Rock Formation*, 2006, digital video projection, commissioned by the Denver Museum of Art.

View of the modern and contemporary gallery, showing works by (front to back) Kiki Smith, Andy Warhol (wall and column), Alexander Calder (ceiling), Claes Oldenburg and Ed Ruscha.





View of fourth-floor contemporary gallery in the new building's prow, showing works by Phil Bender (left foreground), Sol LeWitt (center), Robert Smithson (right) and Antony Gormley (right rear).



View of African gallery (left) and contemporary gallery (right), showing floor barriers for angled walls. Photo Stephanie Cash.

(2000), can be found in the Asian galleries in the North Building.

With the new addition, DAM finally has a dedicated space for its 4,500-piece collection of modern and contemporary art, overseen since 1978 by curator Dianne Vanderlip, who retired in January. The two-level, 20,000-square-foot gallery occupies the prow of the building as if to emphasize the collection's importance. The upper-level tip of the prow is installed with works by Antony Gormley, Sol LeWitt, Robert Smithson, Carl Andre and Louise Bourgeois. Elsewhere, a defiant wall-mounted, rolled steel Richard Serra hangs next to a perfectly polished, brilliant blue-laquered stainless-steel Anish Kapoor, each commanding in its own way. A wall-hung grid of hubcaps by local artist Phil Bender marks the entrance to a sectioned-off corner containing a yellow and green Dan Flavin, the glow of which can be seen from various points in the gallery.

Hanging paintings on pitched walls was no small feat for exhibition designers and installers. To their credit, there are some inventive solutions. A built-out surface mounted on a sloping wall creates a kinder support for works by Matisse, Modigliani, Soutine, Rouault, Léger and Chagall. Paintings by Ed Ruscha and Roy Lichtenstein are suspended from cables high above; only their bottom edges meet and are attached to the canted walls behind them. A large stripe painting by Gene Davis seems to hang from hinges at its top edge, but a

peek behind the "floating" canvas reveals that it is braced at the bottom. As with Eric Fischl's *Pretty Ladies* (1986), shadows cast by the canvases become part of the work. Ceramic objects by Betty Woodman, who once taught at the University of Colorado, are currently installed in a special focus gallery that will highlight regional artists; many of her pieces are attached to a tilting wall and appear to be sliding down it. And what of the Warhol soup cans installed on a column? High-brow art connoisseurs may grouse, but does the average museum-goer find offense? Probably not.

The layout of the galleries also creates some seemingly odd juxtapositions. The Oceanic and African galleries, on two separate floors, are located in wedges of space just off the modern and contemporary gallery. Mostly sculptural in nature, the non-Western works fare better than the canvases in the sparsely hung Impressionist gallery, which is dominated by a large blank angled wall that it shares with the Oceanic gallery. But the forced pairings of disparate cultures in fact reveals unexpected affinities, as does the hanging of works based on esthetic similarities instead of chronology or artistic movement. Looking across and into adjacent galleries, one notices, for example, that a painting by Philip Guston is stylistically similar to a Jean Dubuffet bust, which in turn relates to the Oceanic sculptures steps away, just as a Lucas Samaras box relates to nearby African nail fetish sculptures. Similarly, the fabric forms that seem to float down a sharply

video of the artist explaining his piece, along with other interactive video screens and a streaming text display that mostly seems contrived for the gee-whiz factor. Next to George Catlin's 1832 *The Cutting Scene, Mandan O-kee-pa Ceremony*, which depicts a tribal self-torture ritual involving hanging from flesh hooks, is a grid of removable Plexi-cubes with text explaining why the painting is the "most controversial" work in the collection (the tribe feels it's wrong for the sacred ceremony to be seen by outsiders). Duchamp's *Boite, Series D (green version)* of 1961 is the first example from the collection to be featured in a focus gallery off the atrium, in which aspects of the work and its making are presented on wall panels and in vitrines.

Accordingly, DAM is unusually kid-friendly for a major museum, providing various diversions for youngsters in many galleries. A large, faceted display case in the African gallery, intended to mimic the architecture, includes a cubbyhole that children can crawl into to see a cartoon about a mask on view nearby, or in the Oceanic gallery, they can build their own abstract sculpture. Until museums start providing childcare or playroom facilities as many gyms and stores such as Ikea do, parents have to juggle a grown-up need for cultural stimulation with their kids' attention spans and nap times, and DAM may have found a happy compromise.

The Scene Takes Off

While DAM is leading the way for Denver's contemporary art scene, other institutions are also making inroads. Founded in 1996 and currently housed in a temporary site across the street from its future home (scheduled to open in the fall), the



Chris Gilmour: *Ford*, 2006, cardboard and glue, 3½ by 7 by 11 feet; at the Dikeou Collection, Denver. Photo Stephanie Cash.



Nighttime rendering of the Museum of Contemporary Art's future home, designed by David Adjaye. Courtesy Studio Tony Yi-Savanto.

Museum of Contemporary Art has broken ground on its first new building project, a functional, luminescent white box designed by British architect David Adjaye. Squeezed onto a corner plot that was donated by museum trustee Marc Falcone, the 25,000-square-foot building, with a sandblasted, gray-tinted glass exterior, will contain five galleries on two levels and two educational spaces. The total project cost is \$15.5 million, plus \$3 million for an endowment. So far the museum has raised \$11.2 million from private donors and foundations. Sorely lacking at this point, however, is a parking facility. While the museum is seeking LEED certification

for its green architecture and admirably encourages visitors to walk, ride a bike or take public transportation to the new site, visitors may still have other, four-wheeled preferences.

The increased space and vastly improved facility will bolster the MCA's lively program of exhibitions overseen by director and curator Cydney Payton, who had her own gallery in Denver for six years before becoming director of the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art in 1991, and then the Denver MCA in 2001. The MCA's last show in its former leased space in a residential building was "Extended Remix," representing 30 established, midcareer and emerging local artists. Works by the older generation included a lifelike figurative sculpture by John DeAndrea, two marble forms shaped like infant pacifiers by Lawrence Argent, a large painting of a rattlesnake by Don Coen, and a tiny set of brass antlers resting on a pillow formed from rock salt by R. Edward Lowe. Sound artist Jim Green hung a red phone on the wall with instructions to pick it up and wait for the tone. Instead of getting the expected recording, visitors were patched through directly to Green's cell phone; he was walking in the park when I reached him. The disarming work provided an opportunity to hear the artist muse on his work, or to chat with him on any topic that came to mind.

Many of the younger artists in the show hail from the Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design (known as "rim-cad"). Matthew Larson's conceptual projects include various submissions he has made to Guinness World Records, such as "Best Painting," "Most Boring Artist Statement" and "Lightest Feather." Each example is displayed alongside rejection letters from officials at Guinness. Larson's *Sock*, made of lint mounted on Velcro and wood, was inconspicuously placed under a staircase like a dropped piece of laundry. Steven Read's *The Color Channel* consists of eight vintage televisions with rabbit-ear antennas tuned to pick up live broadcasts of Mondrian-like color patterns that Read has created with a software program.



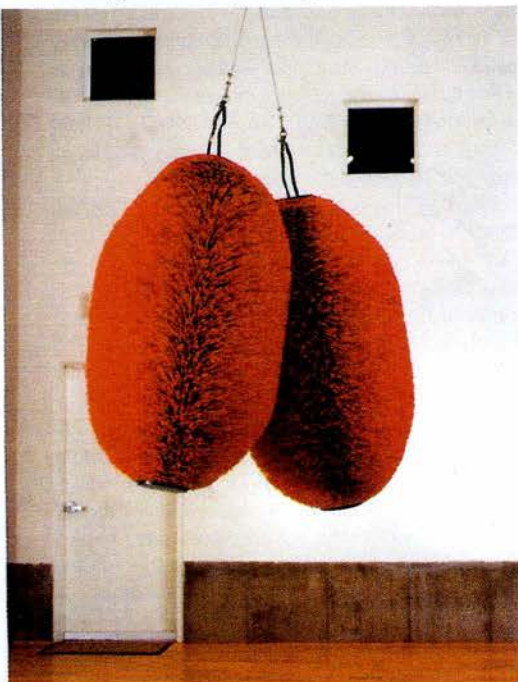
Lobby of the Laboratory of Art and Ideas at Belmar, Lakewood, interior design by Belzberg Architects. Photo Joel Eden.

Matthew Larson makes “paintings” with yarn on Velcro and conceptual submissions to Guinness World Records. Michael Brohman’s infant heads on chicken carcasses are fascinatingly unsettling.

“Remix” was a follow-up to Payton’s popular summer exhibition “Decades of Influence,” which was divided between the MCA and Metropolitan State College’s Center for Visual Art. The roster of 71 artists is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the Colorado scene. The show included Mark Amerika, Jack Balas & Wes Hempel, Phil Bender, Stan Brakhage, Terry Maker, Paola Ochoa, Clark Richert, Daniel Sprick, James Surls, Barbara Takenaga, John McEnroe, Dale Chisman, John DeAndrea, Mark Sink, Betty Woodman and Francesca Woodman.

Also enhancing Denver’s contemporary scene is the Laboratory of Art and Ideas at Belmar (the Lab, for short), which opened in September in a mixed-use, New Urbanist development in Lakewood, five miles from downtown Denver. Nestled among rows of shopping mall stores like Zales and Foot Locker, the 11,500-square-foot institution is unusual in its inception, its location and its programming. Belmar’s developer, Continuum Partners (headed by MCA trustee Marc Falcone), wanted to include a cultural institution and found its executive director, Adam Lerner, at the Denver Art Museum, where he had been working as an educator for modern and contemporary art. To develop the Lab, Lerner worked closely with DAM director Lewis Sharp, who also sits on the Lab’s board. The inaugural show featured *Fantôme*

Lawrence Argent: Cojones, 1999, street-sweeper brushes, steel and cable, 12 by 12 by 12 feet. Courtesy William Havu Gallery, Denver.



Afrique, a new film by Isaac Julien co-produced by the Lab, the Pompidou and the Lisbon-based Ellipse Foundation. Currently on view is an installation by Liam Gillick, for which the artist collaborated with professional American folklorists and ethnographers to gather material like home movies, oral histories, videos and other documentation of individual stories. Lerner has also implemented well-attended series of interactive performance/lectures, including “Mixed Taste: Tag Team Lectures on Unrelated Topics,” which pairs such unlikely subjects as Clyfford Still and Cajun cuisine, and punk rock and Zen Buddhism.

The Dikeou Collection, established in 1998 by Denver-born, New York-based artist Devon Dikeou and her brother Pany, is located in a commercial building in the heart of downtown Denver. Installed in a cozy warren of converted office spaces, most of the works in the collection have been featured in *Zing* magazine, a “curatorial crossing” published by Devon, copies of which are provided in some of the galleries to help shed light on each artist’s work, along with explanatory wall labels written by the artist and/or Devon. Highlights include giant pink inflatable bunnies by Momoyo Torimitsu, Chris Gilmour’s room-size cardboard construction of a vintage racing car, and Devon’s own room with embossed ceiling tin applied to the floor. Paul Ramirez Jonas is well represented by several works, including *His Truth Is Marching On* (1993), a suspended circular rack with 80 dangling, water-filled bottles that sound out notes from the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” when struck in succession. On a shelf wrapping around a wall in the same and adjacent galleries, Jonas’s *100* is an accordion book in which each page bears the image of a different individual in chronological order from infancy to 99.

The University of Denver’s Victoria H. Myhren Gallery, run by Dan Jacobs, is another place to catch interesting shows. The Logans have established an educational partnership with DU’s art and art history school, making works from their collection available for exhibitions, which are sometimes organized by students. “Negotiating Reality” coincided with DAM’s opening and featured such works as a large-scale abstract painting by Torben Giehler, architectural paintings by Brian Alfred and Eberhard Havekost, a figurative canvas by Kehinde Wiley, drawings by Brad Kahlhammer and Paul Noble, and fantastic sculptures suggesting rock formations carved from stacked cardboard by Tobias Putrih.

The Clyfford Still Museum is expected to join Denver’s cultural ranks in 2009. Ideally located next to DAM’s Libeskind building, the new museum is preparing to break ground for its 30,000-square-foot home in 2008. Its 18-member board, which includes Lewis Sharp and Kent Logan, recently selected Brad Cloepfil of Allied Works Architecture to design the facility, which will most likely be an understated structure in comparison to its rowdy neighbor. The museum was established in 2004, when Still’s widow bequeathed 2,400 paintings, sculptures and works on paper—a whopping 94 percent of his total output—to the city of Denver. Among Still’s stringent requirements: no other artist’s work may be shown in the museum, and the building must not have a café or auditorium. Dean Sobel, former head of the Aspen Art Museum, was named director in 2005.



Vance Kirkland: Blue Mysteries Near the Sun, No. 4, 1976, oil on linen, 75 by 100 inches. Denver Art Museum.



Karen Kitchel: Promontory 2, 2003, oil on wood, 12 inches square. Courtesy Robischon Gallery, Denver.



Matthew Larson: Candy Print, 2006, yarn on Velcro mounted on board, 48 inches square. Courtesy Rule Gallery, Denver.



Sarah McKenzie: *Aerial 69*, 2004, oil on canvas, 72 by 48 inches. Courtesy Sandy Carson Gallery, Denver.

Katie Taft: *Zoe (foreground)*, 2006, mixed mediums, and *The Bird*, 2004, color photo; at Capsule Gallery, Denver. Photo Stephanie Cash.



Denver has a hidden gem in the Vance Kirkland Museum, which is jam-packed with icons of modern design, expanded from the artist's personal collection. Credited for bringing modernism to Denver, Kirkland (1904-1981) served variously as a curator and board member at DAM from 1942 to '65. He worked in myriad styles over the years, but his cosmos-inspired dot paintings, two of which are prominently displayed outside the modern and contemporary gallery at DAM, are among his best and resonate with work being made today. Kirkland's paintings, running the gamut from representational to abstract, also hang throughout his museum's homey but cramped spaces, which more closely approximate a second-hand store than a museum. The museum's director is Hugh Grant, for whom the modern gallery at DAM is named (along with Merle Chambers).

Public art fares surprisingly well in Denver. On

the lawn at the public library near DAM is Donald Lipski's *The Yearling*, a small horse standing atop a monumental red chair, while inside the library is a Western-themed mural by Ed Ruscha that runs throughout the atrium. At the Colorado Convention Center, Denver-based Lawrence Argent's *I See What You Mean* is a 40-foot-tall blue bear that peers inside the front windows; an abstract sculpture by Bernar Venet is sited on the building's other side. Among other works are Jim Green's *Laughing Escalator*, with recorded laughter emanating from underneath visitors' feet. At the adjacent Denver Performing Arts Complex, outdoor sculptures by Jonathan Borofsky and Fernando Botero dot the perimeter. Green also has a piece under street vents along Curtis Street that sounds like a subway car passing underneath, except that there is no subway in Denver (the recordings were made in New York City). Nearby, a Sol LeWitt work graces the facade of the Federal Courthouse, and wrapping around the Hyatt Regency Hotel is a text piece by Joseph Kosuth quoting the John Ruskin essay that begins, "Mountains are the bones of the earth . . ." And not far from the MCA's future home is a piece by Chinese artist Zhang Huan. The cast-concrete sculpture replicates the artist lying face down in a shallow pool of water, which freezes in the winter to suggest the block of ice used in his P.S.1 performance, as seen in a photo in DAM's "RADAR" show.

Here and There: The Galleries

Denver's gallery scene is scattered, and it's as difficult to get a consensus on the important galleries as it is to find a decent gallery guide (look for the fold-out Denver Gallery Guide published by the city's Office of Cultural Affairs). At the top of most lists is Robischon Gallery, established in 1976. The gallery shows works by familiar artists like Judy Pfaff, Manuel Neri and Creighton Michael, along with such notable locals as Don Stinson, known for his sweeping painted landscapes, Karen Kitchel and Trine Bumiller, who both make nature-based paintings, and Terry Maker, who shreds, cuts or manipulates such materials as medical or church documents, photos and plastic trays, reconstituting them into large abstract wall sculptures. Cleverly tying in to "RADAR" (though not coinciding with DAM's opening), Robischon recently mounted "Under the Radar," which featured work by Chinese artists, many of them in the Logan Collection, including the Luo Brothers, Yue Minjun and Zhang Dali.

Another must-see is Rule Gallery, founded 20 years ago by Robin Rule. She recently moved to a new space a block from her former location, and kicked off the season with a group show of prints from Universal Limited Art Editions, followed by minimalist photo-works by Santa Fe-based Erika Blumenfeld, who captures moon- and sunlight exposures on photo-sensitive paper. Among Rule's local artists are Phil Bender, whose wall installations are made from found objects such as board games or hubcaps; Clark Richert, painter of large-scale geometric configurations of dots; Dale Chisman, known for his paintings of looping, linear patterns on atmospheric grounds; and Matthew Larson, who makes conceptually based works as

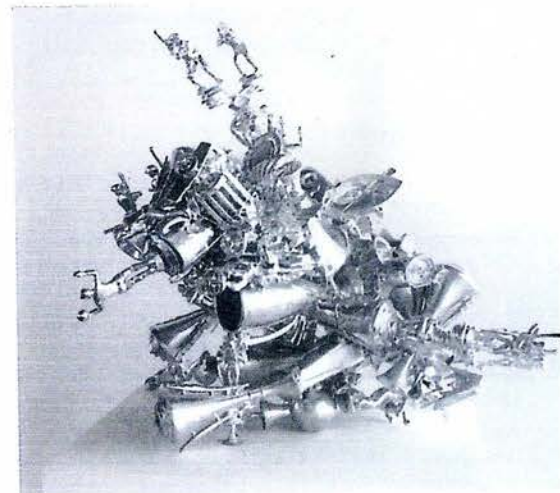
well as Op-inspired "paintings" using yarn on Velcro (and who just moved to New York). Devon Dikeou also shows with Rule.

Other spaces I was directed to, some among the city's older venues, seem to have hit-or-miss shows, though there are finds among them. Near DAM, William Havu represents Lawrence Argent, whose works range from semi-abstract sculptures in marble, bronze or cast iron to evocative pieces using street-sweeper or floor brushes, such as *Cojones* (1999), two large red brushes suspended from the ceiling. Don Coen, maker of realistic paintings and drawings of livestock and Western scenes, also shows with Havu. On Santa Fe Drive, where a cluster of art venues (not all of interest) is located, is Sandy Carson Gallery. Established in 1975, the gallery features formally driven works by such artists as Nancy Lovendahl and Larry Kirkland, both known for large-scale public commissions. Among the less conventional artists are painters Sarah McKenzie, whose canvases depict aerial views of suburban subdivisions reduced to geometric patterns and forms, and Bob Koons, who digitizes

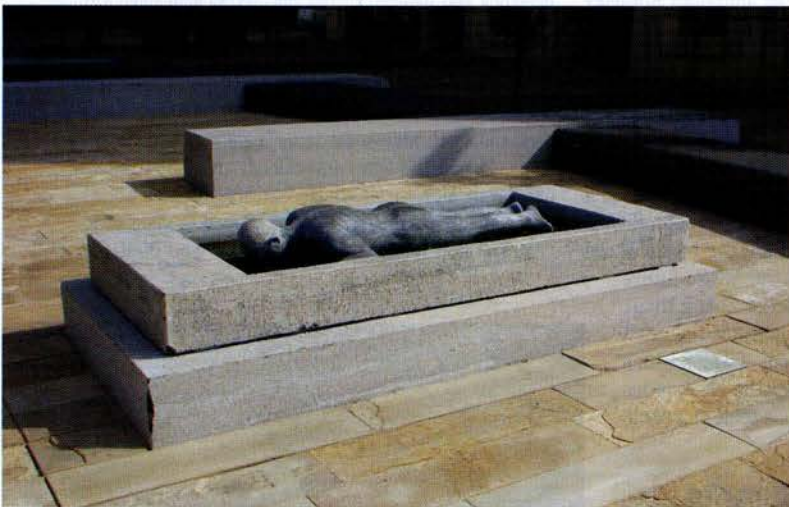


Michael Brohman: *Chickababies*, 2005, cast bronze, 13 by 97 by 80 inches. Photo Theo Mullen, courtesy the artist.

John McEnroe: *Second Place*, 2006, plastic, 24 by 24 by 24 inches. Courtesy Plus Gallery, Denver.



A mountain town as rich in beauty as it is in per capita net worth, Aspen has a small but important art scene. Its main venues for contemporary art are the Aspen Art Museum and Baldwin Gallery.



Zhang Huan's *Pilgrimage*, 2001, cast concrete; at Millennium Bridge Plaza, Denver. Photo Rudi Cerri, Denver Office of Cultural Affairs. Denver Art Museum.

details of historic paintings on his computer to create brightly colored, fuzzy images that look like thermal-vision landscapes.

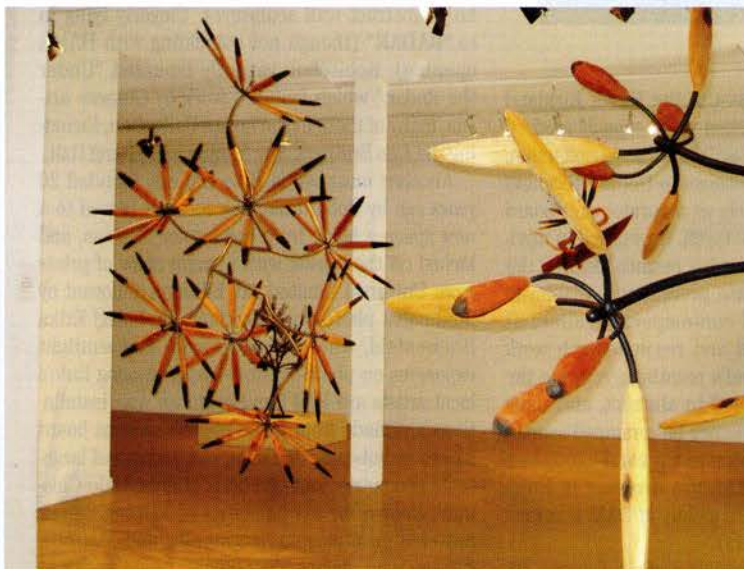
Plus Gallery is a newer space featuring a number of interesting artists. John McEnroe's disparate work includes wall-hung latex forms that seem to drip from their supports and topsy-turvy sculptures made of plastic trophy figurines or colorful toys. As laid out in a graphic brochure, Colin Livingston's conceptual project allows collectors to choose their own palette, pattern, logo and slogan to create an "original" work by the artist. Jon Rietfors prints single images of contemporary consumer goods or vintage ads on groupings of such materials as cigarette packs, cola bottles and gum packages. And painters Dave Yust and Karen McClanahan both paint spare abstractions.

It's not uncommon to find gallery/studio spaces run by artists who show their own work—which doesn't always smack of "vanity gallery" as it might elsewhere—as well as that of other artists. Artist Lauri Lynnx Murphy, whose shaped plastic and mixed-medium, wall-mounted forms can be seen at Plus Gallery, also ran Capsule gallery for three years but turned the space over to the Sliding Door artists' cooperative last month. For now, she continues to operate a larger adjacent space, which is used for special art events, performances and exhibitions. Last October, Capsule hosted a group show, including works by Katie Taft, who fashions small, forlorn "imaginary friend" statues out of an epoxy putty

and photographs them in various locales. Ceramic sculptures by Steve Gordon included *Babylon Teeters*, a Seuss-like serving vessel that appeared to be made of tarnished silver, and *With Us/Against Us*, comprising a rusty-metal-looking tower and a squat platform, each topped by a snowbaby figure—a work intended to address global economic disparity. The larger space was dedicated to a group show of artists from the Pirate cooperative. They include Michael Brohman, whose floor-bound group of cast bronze *Chickababies*—infant heads with chicken carcass bodies—are fascinatingly unsettling; some remain in a fetal position while others are perched on their leg stumps helplessly waving their defeathered wings or tiny arms. Matthew Doudek's humorous paintings on wood panel are cheerfully colored homages to the likes of farmers, lawn-mower-riding Average Joes and religious figures from the Virgin Mary to Ganesh. Ranging in height from 10 inches to 6 feet, the works have gloppy surfaces that incorporate such materials as ink, collage, garbage, motor oil, coffee stains, insect parts and vinyl stickers. Louis Recchia also showed festive works that

layer vintage and contemporary ad images and illustrations, cartoon characters and art-historical figures. Another artist-run space is Weilworks, located in the River North arts district (RiNo) in the home of painter Tracy Weil, whose own colorful and whimsical scenes were up during my visit. Not far away, tucked in among a row of car-repair shops, is the

View of James Surls's exhibition "A Cut Above," 2006; at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art. Photo Stephanie Cash.



Partial view of Oscar Muñoz's video installation *Biografias*, 2002; in "Vestige/Vestigio" at the CU Art Museum, University of Colorado, Boulder. Photo Howard Ursuliak.

very new Stay, a scrappy young space with a still unproven track record, though it has managed to garner attention with exhibitions by, for example, Paola Ochoa, whose exhibition of a video and drawings coincided with a group show at the MCA that included her work.

Denver boasts a proud group of cooperative galleries, and many artists are affiliated with both a cooperative and a commercial gallery. A handful of co-ops are located at the same intersection on Navajo Street in a mostly residential area. Preeminent among them is Pirate, co-founded in 1980 by seven artists, including Phil Bender, who remains as co-director. Their neighbors are Edge, Next, and Zip 37, where Weil shows.

Beyond Denver

In Boulder, the CU Art Museum of the University of Colorado is a midsize space in the school's fine arts building. In between the student and faculty shows, director Lisa Tamiris Becker has mounted such exhibitions as a survey of Cuban artist Enrique Martínez Celaya, whose works also appear in the Logan Collection; "Techno/Sublime," which featured Jeremy Blake,

Jim Campbell and Mary Lucier, among others; and the recent "Vestige/Vestigio," including works by Latin American artists Laura Anderson Barbata, Oscar Muñoz and Betsabeé Romero. Particularly engaging was Muñoz's video installation *Biografias*, in which three faces projected down from the ceiling onto low-lying pedestals become distorted and then seem to slowly disappear down a drain in the center. The faces are from three anonymous documentary portraits taken decades ago in Muñoz's hometown of

Cali, Colombia. He silkscreened the images in charcoal and floated them in a water-filled sink, filming the subjects' dissolution, real and metaphorical, as he let the water drain. His work *Pixels* similarly touches on the history of Cali, known for its sugarcane, coffee and political violence. The piece consists of a series of highly abstract portraits made with "pixels" of coffee-stained sugar cubes that depict murdered individuals, who are more legible from a distance or in reproduction, dissolving into abstraction at close range.

Also recently on view was "Waves on the Turquoise Lake," featuring contemporary Tibetan art. The show, organized in conjunction with Boulder's Mechak Center for Contemporary Tibetan Art, was expectedly rife with images of Buddha, such as Gonkar Gyatso's *Buddha@hotmail-1*, a silhouette of the deity's head composed of hundreds of glittery cartoon stickers.

The Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, presenting a roster of international and local artists, inhabits a 1903 landmark building, originally a two-

story warehouse. Featured last fall were elegant hanging wood-and-metal sculptures resembling cosmic bodies or flowers by Texas transplant James Surls. That was followed by shows of wall sculptures by Terry Maker and photos by Brooklyn artist Jimi Billingsley, whose "Transit Glyphs" capture views of the city through graffiti-etched New York subway windows.

The Sky's the Limit

A mountain town as rich in beauty as it is in per capita net worth, Aspen offers a small but important art scene about a four-hour drive from Denver. However, its art venues and collectors tend to be more closely tied to L.A. or San Francisco, which are a short flight away, or even Chicago or New York, than to Denver. In fact, unlike Vail residents, most people who own second homes in the town don't have a base in Denver, making Aspen an island unto itself in the Rockies art world.

Founded in 1979, the Aspen Art Museum is the main venue for contemporary art, along with Baldwin Gallery. Under the direction of Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson since 2005, the museum shows nationally known artists like Amy Adler, Pedro Reyes, Doug Aitken and Javier Tellez, as well as regional artists. In favor of bringing in such high-profile figures, Jacobson did away with some programming that was a little too community-centered, such as shows of local Aspen artists or kids' art. The tireless Jacobson, formerly curator of the Matrix program at the Berkeley Art Museum, also airs a weekly cable TV program for which she interviews artists, and has drawn in the local community and visitors by commissioning artists to design the mountain's ski-lift ticket, which bearers can bring to the museum for a 50-percent discount on admission. The incentive has resulted in a 20-percent boost in attendance. Last year Yutaka Sone designed the ticket; this year it's by Peter Doig.

Not entirely abandoning its roots, the museum recently mounted the first Colorado Biennial. Selected by curator

Matthew Thompson in consultation with Jacobson, it was shown in two installments with a total of 12 artists. Among the standouts was Ben Koch, who contributed a minimalist wall grid comprising small dots, which were city and town markers cut out of a world atlas. Koch also showed two T-shirts. One features stitched dots and lines that replicate marks—freckles, moles, scars, veins—on the artist's body. His World Flag shirt, which was on sale for \$20 in the museum's shop, is a linear abstract design achieved by overlaying hundreds of national flags. Jack Balas presented a series of his watercolor versions of ads or editorial pages in art magazines, to which he gives a homoerotic twist.

Founded by the late Harley Baldwin, Baldwin Gallery is the "serious" commercial gallery in town. Even though collectors could easily buy artists' works from major galleries in other cities and have them shipped to Aspen, residents have been loyal to the gallery and its vivacious founder.

Now under the direction of Baldwin's partner, Richard Edwards, the gallery focuses on internationally known artists, including Peter Halley, Jennifer Bartlett, Marilyn Minter, David Salle, Alexis Rockman, Toland Grinnell and Tom Sachs, as well as lesser known talents such as Dirk Westphal and Isca Greenfield-Sanders. Upcoming shows will feature works by Stephen Dean, David Salle, Enrique Martinez Celaya and Bryan Hunt.

The Aspen Institute, a think tank for humanistic studies, resides in a campus of humble blue buildings designed by Bauhaus master Herbert Bayer, who spent 28 years in Colorado (DAM owns the 8,000-piece repository of the Herbert Bayer Collection and Archive). On the campus is Adelson Gallery, a small exhibition space that has featured shows of such artists as Robert Longo, Andy Warhol, James Surls, Julian Lethbridge and Nancy Lovendahl. On view last fall were works by Latin American modernists Alejandro Otero and Willys de Castro from the collection of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros. A retrospective of Bayer's work is planned for this summer.

Lastly, just down the highway, in Snowmass Village, is the Anderson Ranch Arts Center, a nonprofit artists' collective in a rustic setting. Founded in 1966 on a former sheep ranch, the center hosts artist residencies, and offers classes and workshops to adults and children in such areas as printmaking, woodworking, ceramics, photography, painting and sculpture, and operates a small exhibition space. Among the figures who have been affiliated with the ranch are Peter Voukos, Enrique Martinez Celaya, Eric Fischl, Ed Paschke, Luis Jimenez and Ben Koch. □



View of mixed-style houses in Prospect New Town, Longmont, Colo., overseen by town designer Mark Sofield. Photo Stephanie Cash.

For architecture and urban planning buffs, the Boulder area has an intriguing experiment in Prospect New Town in Longmont, about a 10-minute drive east of the city and a 30-minute drive north of Denver. Prospect is a colorful, anti-sprawl New Urbanist development. Overseen by town designer and resident Mark Sofield, who is responsible for its appearance, Prospect mixes architectural styles as diverse as Sears Craftsman bungalows, Victorian homes and contemporary lofts and apartments, and brings them together with an intimate area of shops and parks in a dense layout that kindles a pedestrian-friendly, small-town feeling. Developed

by Kiki Wallace on farmland he bought from his family, and conceived by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, who also planned Seaside, Fla., the project was included in the 2003 Design Triennial at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York.



Above, Ben Koch: *Untitled (My body marks—scars, moles, blemishes and veins hand-embroidered onto a t-shirt)*, 2001-02, 32½ by 31¼ inches; at the Aspen Art Museum.



Left, Aspen/Snowmass ski-lift ticket with an image from a painting by Peter Doig. Courtesy Aspen Art Museum.