

A FLYING START—PART ONE

The Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art

An Interview

with Pontus Hulten and Richard Rogers



Richard Rogers



Pontus Hulten

Pontus Hulten, the new director of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, speaks with Richard Rogers, who, with Renzo Piano, designed the controversial Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou in Paris.

Ruth Iskin

When MOCA's new director, Pontus Hulten, came to New York for the first time in 1959, he was struck by the sense that "everything was possible." That feeling has been reverberating through Los Angeles and the rest of the art world now that plans for the first museum of contemporary art in the country are fully underway.

MOCA sources anticipate that the new museum will attract more people than do the Dodgers' and Rams' games. Such optimistic predictions may even underestimate the potential number of museum visitors since Hulten's exhibitions at the Beaubourg drew 500,000 to 1,000,000 people for each one—far more than planners anticipated. (The Picasso show at MOMA drew a record attendance of 1,000,000 in this country.)

Hulten's exhibitions at the Beaubourg were tailored to the Parisian audience, and, likewise, plans for the Los Angeles museum—being made by Hulten and Richard Koshalek (MOCA's Deputy Director and Chief Curator)—will spotlight Southern California's distinct characteristics. For example, one cross-cultural exhibition being considered will feature the automobile and its role in contemporary culture. Custom cars and superior automotive designs,

along with about a hundred works of art (from Futurism to the present), will join pop culture and fine arts in an analysis of the automobile, properly examined in the city that has grown up around it. Another exhibition will present Hollywood and its role as the worldwide arbiter of style and taste. Balancing these topics will be a Barnett Newman exhibition and an emerging talent show (one occurring approximately every six months) which will include

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—Richard Rogers

architects, painters, sculptors, and other artists. There is even talk of a giant outdoor projection screen that could transmit things like the Olympic events. Such a screen was included in the original plan of the Beaubourg.

The Beaubourg Museum, Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers' daring architectural structure, represented a radical departure from the traditional notion of a museum as a remote shrine for art objects. Designing it as "a cultural warehouse," as Rogers likes to call it, has made it the kind of building in which the interaction between



Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, Paris. Photo Martin Charles

itself and the audience is a participatory event. Many MOCA organizers here feel that art is placed in a secondary position at the Beaubourg, and they feel that the environment fails to create the special interaction that much modern and contemporary art calls for.

Recently, Coy Howard (an architect representing the Artists Committee on the Architecture and Design Committee²) spoke for the artists, saying "The museum should be a religious building in the sense that it celebrates the unique cultural contribution of artists to society. It is not a commercial building; it is not a recreational building; it is a religious institution." A Trustee and Chair of the Architectural and Design Committee,³ Max Palevsky, feels that when you enter the museum, "You should have the feeling of

crossing a boundary into a space that is more magical, different, something special, rather than having the feeling that you have entered a factory." Howard explains that he is the only elitist (in the classical sense) participating on the committee: "I think that art, by definition, is only for those people who work to understand it; it's not for everybody." That opinion is not shared by directors Pontus Hulten and Richard Koshalek, both of whom have become widely known for their populist approach and their common feeling that museums should have a certain availability and openness that will enlarge art's audience.

Recognizing that any one concept imposed on the plans would be limiting, MOCA planners have adopted a pluralistic stance. They have rejected a purist position in favor of a "hybrid concept," ex-

plaining that to truly serve contemporary art, the building needs to welcome a full range of expression: painting and sculpture (demanding classical settings), environmental art, and performance and social-action art (demanding special accommodations).

In the design of the Beaubourg, Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano addressed the needs of modern and contemporary art, as well as the growing audience, by creating a highly flexible loft space that could be redefined for each exhibition. The idea of flexibility receives a different interpretation at MOCA, which is primarily a private museum operating with some supplementary public funding. As such, MOCA could not afford the enormous costs of building walls anew for each exhibition. Nor could it finance the high fire-insurance premiums that would result from an open plan with few firewalls. But beyond these practical considerations, many here feel that contemporary art can best be served by providing a variety of fixed spaces for various uses. Some artists may choose to display their art conventionally; some may mold and develop it by moving building elements around; and still others may choose to challenge the nature of the institution by using loading docks, roofs, stairs, elevators, archival space, or even the security system itself, thus pushing art's investigative mode to an extreme. Howard says that this approach is "based on the realization that art by definition challenges our notions and expectations of how things are in the world. And since that is the case, we have to be willing to accept the inevitability that the institution will be challenged. We must anticipate that challenge so that museum curators and directors will not have to say no to any artist."

MOCA stresses its concern with perceptual flexibility over physical flexibility. Perceptual flexibility means two things, according to Howard: "One, a variety of spaces, and two, a type of architecture that allows perceptual projections. Artists should be able to call out the delicate, subtle qualities of the building, or focus on the bold qualities." Palevsky stresses the anonymous quality of the gallery spaces: "We want galleries that people won't remember. They will remember what is in them, we hope." He explained that the typical artist's working environment—the white loft space having no interfering colors or distractions of any kind—is a model for the galleries.

The Architectural and Design Committee has determined two important concerns for the museum: first, they desire a plan that will ensure the most efficient handling of artworks; second, they hope to bring the curatorial and directorial staff in regular and close confrontation with the art that is exhibited. The latter goal may be achieved by the location of administrative offices that could be placed in such a way as to cause administrators to pass through the exhibitions on their way to the office. Curators will not be isolated in a basement or in a separate wing. (This layout could cause unexpected snags: for example, assuming that attendance hits anticipated records, the staff could find itself trapped in the offices or even unable to pass through the galleries on their way to their offices.)

However, regardless of differing opinions, the point on which all admit to the Beaubourg's success is that of its interrelationship with its urban environment and audience, most apparently accomplished through its large and popular piazza. MOCA representatives stress the fact that they do not have control over the environment of the new museum under the overall plan of the Bunker Hill Associates. Howard has said, "We feel that there are some misunderstandings, for example, about the ethnic mix that exists in Los Angeles and the notions about how the citizens will use the

downtown area. We are in conversation with the Community Redevelopment Agency and architect Arthur Erickson's office to try to, perhaps, adjust their thinking about that. Palevsky has stated, "We are hoping, obviously, to get a lot of open space, for outdoor sculpture." Additionally, MOCA plans to schedule exhibition hours between noon and 5:00 p.m. (rather than from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., traditional hours), to serve people in downtown Los

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Angeles during the transitional time between working and entertainment hours.

In Los Angeles, where light has been the inspiration for an indigenous and widely acclaimed art, natural light may be a scarce commodity in MOCA's site as positioned by the CRA. According to Howard, MOCA's placement, in the midst of high-rise buildings, is "the worst possible location in terms of light." He estimates that the current site will afford the museum about one hour of natural light per day. Nevertheless, the site has been designated by the CRA and solidified in Erickson's overall design of the project. Howard: "There are a couple of locations within the Bunker Hill parcel which would be quite excellent. Unfortunately, Erickson's scheme does not allow the museum to move into those areas, and the developer is not interested in having Erickson change the scheme."

The most innovative factor in MOCA up to now, is evidenced in the collaborative process that has guided its development at every step. MOCA's Architectural and Design Committee—advised by both the Artists Advisory Committee and the Board of Trustees—is now working closely with architect Arata Isozaki. The Architecture and Design Committee is formalizing the architectural program and will continue to work in close contact with the architect until the building is completed. In contrast, the method of selecting the Beaubourg architect was an international competition having 681 entries and a final, winning design. A competition was avoided here in the interest of time and pluralism; input from the trustees, artists, director, and curators is the most important factor in planning all phases of this museum. The plan is growing slowly from the needs of the clients rather than from the desires of the architect.

Recently Pontus Hulten and Richard Rogers discussed museum architecture—specifically, the Beaubourg Museum and MOCA. The problems and needs that appear when art, architecture, and people meet in a common setting are detailed in the following interview.

Iskin: How does the Beaubourg Museum differ in concept from other museums—aside from its innovative architecture and exhibition program?

Hulten: I don't think it differs in structure, but it is a bit dif-

ferent in its way of functioning, because of its unique setup. That is, we live together with three other cultural institutions in the same building: the public library, the science center, and the music center. This proximity affects us because we have daily contact with people from other disciplines, such as design, literature, architecture, etc.

This situation did not originate with administrative thinking, but rather it stemmed from the development of art during the fifties and sixties: the breaking down of the separations between disciplines. The idea became administrative only later on, in the process of constructing the institution. At that time there was a great concern that it not be merely an administrative solution, and finally what we had hoped for became an actuality. We really did work together. I think it happened basically because of the four big exhibitions that forced us to cooperate. At first, co-working with the exhibition of "Paris/New York" was rather tentative. It became better with the "Paris/Berlin" show and better yet with the "Paris/Moscow" show. I think this was partly because we had to travel to Moscow to work together, and we saw each other daily outside of the institution.

Iskin: When I saw the Beaubourg Museum last April, I had the feeling that it was different from other museums, not only because it housed a broad spectrum of culture (in addition to the fine arts), but also because, in some ways, it democratized art. It didn't have the feeling of being a shrine or a temple like a traditional museum.

***We see ourselves as the museum
for Los Angeles art, Southern
California art, American art, and
international art, about in that
sequence, with different levels of
perfection.***

—Pontus Hulten

Hulten: Yes. That's very important, and I think it's basically due to the architecture. The architecture accomplished what we had hoped to do in the museum—namely, make our building open and inviting.

Rogers: I think the real question is, "What is a museum?" It has been many things throughout history. As Pontus says, the meaning of "a museum" became narrow and singular in the Victorian times and on. Now it is becoming wider and multi-functional again. I've just come from Venice in Los Angeles, and it's fantastic. In a sense it's like a museum. There are the visual aspects—color, water, movement. There is even a form of abstraction in the movement of the people. This, for me, is a form of art.

The museum serves different interests: the specialist and the nonspecialist. Obviously, we must try to broaden that spectrum. People watch each other and they watch the object. A museum is many things—different things to different people. It's fun. It's amusement. It's culture. It's life. It's art. It's conservation for the future. That experience broadens the groups of people who come to the museum. Finally, there is the issue of the building of the museum in relation to the rest of the buildings in the area.

In the terms I have talked about, a successful, multi-functioning city is a museum. The life, color, light, and shadow of the Jeddah el Fina Square in Marrakesh today make this great place and a great visual statement as much as the more permanent squares in Sienna or San Marco in Venice. Paul Valerie wrote, "The city is all of culture," but, especially in the States, the city is no longer the meeting place for people; it is a meeting place for cars and culture, and it is in danger of becoming a place of isolated, single-purpose institutions for the few. We have forgotten that man-scale space is architecturally more important than mass.

The major problem we've had in the twentieth century is that we haven't created places; there are no longer Siennas or San Marcos. In fact, up until recently, there was no area like Venice here. So you could only circulate and move around by car. There were no urban places created here that were equivalent to what you see in Mexico or Italy, North Africa, and so on. This last problem is the urban question. I think that there is a critical problem when each building speaks only to itself. It's closed. It's a monument on a site. It has streets around it—perhaps it even has twelve formal trees around it. But it has nothing to do with urban space and life and texture. There is no reason for anybody to go to it except to see specific works of art, and that's a very strange and specialist limitation.

I think that the Beaubourg *has* democratized or popularized culture. It gives all people of all classes and ages something to do on a Saturday afternoon. You, as a specialist, can go to the museum; your grandmother can go to the restaurant; and the kids can play in the square. It's a multiple-activity situation, and, instead of watching television or going away for the weekend, all people (not just the elite) have something to do in the city. I think this urban function is another purpose of the contemporary museum.

Iskin: Pontus, do you think the Los Angeles museum should fulfill that kind of social function—as the Beaubourg does?

Hulten: Yes, we have discussed that, or rather, we are beginning to discuss it. The climate here makes a fluid relationship between inside and outside much easier than in Paris. Of course, the museum here, one should not forget, is also more specialized. It is concerned only with contemporary art, whereas the Paris museum includes modern and contemporary art. Here the institution will obviously be more experimental, more aggressive, which I think suits the city and the climate.

Iskin: When you say "more experimental," what do you mean?

Hulten: Well, of course there is painting and sculpture, but we are also going to involve other media, including media systems, photography, performance. We have to find out about our scope, since we are not opening this year—we are opening in three years.

Iskin: What are the lessons to be learned from the Beaubourg in terms of the areas that have worked well and those that have not?

Hulten: That's a good question. Rich and I have discussed technical issues. One thing I would like to ask Rich (because, unfortunately, we don't see each other very often) is, would you build a museum of steel and glass again after the experiences with the fire department and the security issues?

Rogers: I would do it better.

Hulten: Yes, but would you still choose steel and glass as a possibility?

Rogers: I don't think the problem is the technology we used. Technology is only the choice of the appropriate technique to translate an idea or ideas. We chose lightweight, easily changeable, indefinite, colorful technology to translate an open-ended, multi-purpose, public-oriented philosophy: an erector set to build a

climbing frame that encloses a broad range of overlapping activities. We believe that exciting things will happen when many activities meet in a flexible environment.

One certainly has to have sophisticated approaches. In some areas of the building, the use of technology is very sophisticated; in

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other areas it is very primitive. The interiors, for example, were very simple, partly because of the rushed program. It was the fastest building being built—certainly in France, if not in Europe—and at that time we weren't the most experienced team. So speed, plus, in some sense, lack of experience (which one might say also gave us an advantage), created some tremendous technical problems. And, uniquely, we finished under cost.

Hulten: You remember, Richard, when you had to close off more and more of the glass with second-decision materials, like screens (which you were sorry about), and they were required because of the fire laws in France?

Rogers: Yes. I think what you really do all the time is, you have a new problem and you find a solution. Given the constraints, we haven't succeeded on all levels, but I believe we solved the key problems we set out to solve.

Hulten: Yes, but maybe we would have had fewer. I would say, after having lived in the building since it opened, that it has some enormous advantages. The flexibility you've always talked about in the meetings is a reality. The building is truly flexible. On the other hand, we are suffering with the energy problems already. We cannot cope with them. We cannot use the lighting to its full capacity, for example.

Rogers: That's a constraint which has come after. The problem is that Beaubourg was built on the theories and design of the early seventies, and the energy crisis happens to have come at the end of the seventies. Beaubourg is not tremendously energy-efficient. It certainly is nowhere near it. We are doing a building in London, a headquarters for Lloyd's of London, where the energy consumption of the large building—nearly as big as the Beaubourg—is a third of Beaubourg's. That fact is, in a sense, a direct response to something which we hardly knew about in 1970. Therefore, we would never build a building like that today, because new constraints have arrived. We now know how to handle many of the materials properly.

In fact, as Pontus knows, we didn't really know that the art museum was going to be there at all until about halfway through the program, and so no specific plan was included until very late.

Hulten: Well, that wasn't really a negative surprise for you.

Rogers: No, I was absolutely delighted.

Iskin: Aside from the energy problem, are there any other areas that you feel are important lessons for us here?

Hulten: Yes, certainly one problem is that we underestimated the

flow of the public. We counted 10,000 as the normal, maximum rate of visitors per day, and we now very often have over 50,000 per day. But I would say the building takes it up pretty well. I don't think people suffer from it. It's crowded, but that is partly what people go there for. It's not necessarily a negative point. It might become a bigger problem as our crowds get bigger, and that may be when we really test the building for its flexibility.

Rogers: That again is a very familiar and important point. You must not only be flexible internally, but you must also be able to accommodate all types of change. You create a framework, which is the building, but you should be able to play inside that framework. The elevations are not perfect, finite statements. We feel very strongly that if you create a "perfect" building, the problem is that you only have to put a red door on it instead of a black one and it is destroyed aesthetically. Architecture is not like a painting. You can't require that all doors will always be black. The fact that we were told by the government that there are 25,000 to 50,000 people coming per day means that the building must be capable of changing and adapting.

Iskin: To what do you attribute the fact that the number of visitors at the Beaubourg is so much larger than the original estimate?

Hulten: I think there are at least three, maybe more, reasons. One is that the center was needed. That is the basic reason. It was needed not only in Paris and France, but also in Europe. There was no focal point for modern and contemporary culture, and Paris was the obvious place. A center had been lacking for so many years. Another reason is that the architecture of the building made it very popular. Another factor is the current popularity of the particular place in Paris where the museum is located: the area had been rapidly deteriorating. Unlike other areas, it had no social character in the sense that it didn't belong to a particular social group. It is an anonymous part of the city, and it's within walking distance from a number of areas. It is also within subway distance for eleven million people. The area was a good choice.

To go back to your question of what we would have wanted to create differently at the Beaubourg—and I wasn't involved with Richard and Renzo from the beginning, so I feel free to discuss it—I would say that the daylight situation, in spite of the fact that there is much glass, is not good. That is due to the general orientation of the building, which is south and principally west. We get all the afternoon sunlight right into the building, and we had to blind out the light which we actually would love to have had, but in another version. Of course, we have to live with that situation. It's not tenable, but it also has a certain liveliness. Paris doesn't have a lot of sunlight. It's very difficult to handle, but it's not only negative.

I would say, in general, that Richard's and Renzo's building is a very difficult building. It's a building I like to live with, but it's difficult. It's hard work.

Rogers: You mean it's very objective; it's not passive.

Hulten: Yes. We have to fight it all the time.

Rogers: I would tend to agree. I think it's quite a tough building in that sense.

Hulten: But the flexibility exists, the crowd absorbance exists, the light is there, even if it's sometimes hard to handle. There is one thing that one tends to forget. It's the only museum which has the piazza in front. Most of the 680 other projects had no piazza. They were filling out the lot to the border lines, and that, of course, is a sensational difference. It makes *all* the difference.

Hulten: Yes, I would agree that the success of the building, as Pontus says, is in the numbers of people, and those numbers are created by the overlapping of activities. Usually a museum—the traditional museum—is just a museum. If you take the Tate in London, for example, I think there is a restaurant there, but that's about it. At the Beaubourg, you have a whole series of overlapping things to do, and therefore the area becomes much more active. It's more like a railway station. One of the theories which we tested out—and I think it did work—was the idea that if you have a series of activities, such as a library and children's areas, all placed in a flexible framework, then this mix will create a catalyst for more activities. But then too, the activities themselves change in this atmosphere. There was going to be a flower market, and then there wasn't a flower market. There wasn't going to be a bookstore, and now there is a vast bookstore. A square which was rather downgraded is now a very successful and lively square. So all this is beginning to change. It's the theory of the flexible magic box, which includes the piazza. Nothing is ever static, and nothing is ever perfect.

Iskin: Are these some of the guiding principles for the Los Angeles museum as it is being thought of now?

Iskin: Well, we are not finished yet. I think here we will at least have a big chance to have studied the Beaubourg and also other museums that are architecturally important, and we will certainly analyze them. So we will learn from other people's mistakes.

Iskin: Could we talk about the Artists Committee and its function? It seems to be a rather unique case.

Hulten: One of the original things in the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art is that it has the Artists Committee and it has two artists (Sam Francis and Robert Irwin) on the Board—which, I understand is unique in the United States. I think this idea is both a very interesting and a very dangerous thing to fool around with. Personally, I've always tended to think that it can be murderous to mix consumption and production, meaning—to have the same people be consumers and producers. You can see it in socialist countries, where it is put into practice all over, and it's absolutely deadly for art there. Art is confined into a nice little monopoly. Of course this is theory, and practice is something else. The fact that two eminent artists are on the Board is a very interesting and unusual situation. It's also very positive that important people take time to work on the museum; that is actually the reason I came here when I was asked. The artists' involvement inspires confidence. It's a contradiction, but we have to live with that. It's a good contradiction.

Iskin: In this case, has it worked well so far? From your point of view?

Hulten: Oh, yes. The relationship between the staff, the project people, and the Board—we are in a honeymoon period. We will see how long that lasts. At the moment, everything is so smooth it's unbelievable.

Iskin: But the museum in Los Angeles would not really involve the broad kind of documentation of culture that the Beaubourg includes. It would focus on contemporary art.

Hulten: Well, it is involved in contemporary culture, but it focuses on contemporary art. We have discussed this a little bit—whether we will have departments. It may be that we won't have departments and that we will have project groups instead. It's possible that we will avoid the kind of classical structure that sets up a department of photography, prints and drawings, etc., and that we will try to find a more organic process.

Iskin: So people would work together in groups on particular

projects at a given time?

Hulten: Yes. It could be a long time. There could be a project group that stays together for several years, and they could include staff and freelance people.

***Perhaps in the long run we will be
what every museum dreams of
being—a place for contact among
capital, art, and science.***

—Pontus Hulten

Rogers: Even if the building is only doing one thing, being a museum or whatever it may be, it is still linked to a network. It still has a responsibility to stitch together a series of other activities.

I spent a month, when I was at UCLA, looking at culture in L.A. One of the things that came to me very strongly everywhere, but particularly in the States, was that we have to stop thinking of buildings as sitting on single plots or as being things that we can drop from airplanes like confetti. They are not just beautiful objects. There are actually a number of things that are happening at ground level and at skylight level. Buildings stitch together activities just by the positioning of the front door, or the parking lot, or the square—as in the Beaubourg. It seems to me that the architect's main job is to be a generalist, not a specialist. He has specialists to help to carry out the work, but the architect's major job is to question the program. For instance, at the Beaubourg we have quite a major group called the "non-program" activities area, and it deals with activities that were not written into the program by the Committee. These activities in a sense, were key; they were actually more important than the programmed areas, because the directors look after their own areas. But there is no one to look after the other activities which are not specifically defined, but which the architect can, in fact, link through. I think this craze we once had of dropping buildings on sites and making monuments out of them is a very serious problem. It's a misunderstanding about architecture—that is, the idea that mass is more important than void. Historically, it has been space that has been more important than mass. It's absolutely wrong to be so preoccupied with finite mass. *To be continued in summer issue.★*

¹ Artists Committee includes DeWaine Valentine (Chairman), Lita Albuquerque, Peter Alexander, Karen Carson, Vija Celmins, Guy Dill, Fred Eversley, Sam Francis, Robert Heineken, Robert Irwin, Gary Lloyd, Peter Lodato, Joe Ray, Roland Reiss, Alexis Smith, and Tom Wudl. Advisors are Stanley Grinstein, Coy Howard, Richard Armstrong, and Chuck Boxenbaum.

² The Architecture and Design Committee includes Board of Trustee members artists Robert Irwin and Sam Francis and donors Max Palevsky and Eli Broad. It also includes architect Coy Howard, the only non trustee member of the committee.

³ MOCA Trustees are William Norris, Max Palevsky, Eli Broad, Marcia Weisman, Robert Rowan, Leon Banks, Carl E. Hartnack, Robert Irwin, Sam Francis, Dr. Peter Ludwig, Dominique de Minil, Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, Seiji Tsutsumi, Betye Burton, Gary Familian, Martin Lipton, William F. Kieschnick, and Lenore S. Greenberg.

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A FLYING START—PART TWO

Museum of Contemporary Art

In Part One Ruth Iskin interviewed Pontus Hulten, Director of the Beaubourg Museum in Paris and currently Director of MOCA, along with Richard Rogers, architect of the Beaubourg Museum (in collaboration with Renzo Piano). They evaluated the success and problem areas of the architecture of the Beaubourg Museum and museums generally, as well as the interaction between architecture and the urban environment. Part Two focuses on Pontus Hulten's plans for MOCA while Rogers continues to comment on the points raised.

Ruth Iskin

Iskin: Since the museum is going to be downtown, what thoughts have you had about ways to relate the museum to the immediate neighborhood? And also to the ethnic communities in that area?

Hulten: Downtown is defined by three freeways, and we will occupy ourselves first with that area; later on, we will move outside of the downtown area. We are limited in staff at the beginning. We think we will find a place pretty soon where we can establish ourselves in a very primitive way, and we will start to make ourselves known—not as a project, but as a physical space. We are going to get involved with the business community in a very direct way, for example by offering our services so that if someone has an idea or project, we can offer our expertise.

We don't want to have a situation in which you build up to this magnificent opening evening. We want to avoid that at all costs. We have had that once, in the Beaubourg. We want to do what I'm calling a flying start so that we will have momentum, and on the night of the opening we will already have been there in the downtown area. We will already have done things. Maybe, if we can afford it, we will have a big show even before we open. It means that we are in a process, and the opening is just part of the process. It's not *the* historical moment. It will, of course, be a historical moment, but for us, it's just another thing.

Iskin: When do you foresee the museum beginning the program which you described?

Hulten: Right now. We are in the process of discussing these things. When we will have the space is uncertain. It's more a question of finding it than knowing what to do.

Iskin: What kind of requirements, roughly speaking, do you have for the temporary space?

Hulten: It should be capable of housing at least two, if not more, functions. I would love to have the same situation as we had in the Beaubourg—we were in the same building as the architect. Richard and Renzo were downstairs, and we saw each other every day without needing to set up meetings all the time and without running in and out of the building. That saves time and makes for a better product. Since I worked with Richard and Renzo on the Beaubourg, I have given a lot of thought to what it means to be a client for a building. I think we probably were not-so-very-good clients, and I want to be a better client now. To be a good client, I think, means to be there all the time. So the temporary building

should at least include an office for us and an office for the architect, and then we can expand: have an exhibition space and a storage space. Then we would have a four-function space, and that's pretty good. I think it should be on the ground—a factory-style space. We are looking at something, but we don't have the money. This working process would permit us to have a flying start.

Iskin: Are you thinking of utilizing other spaces in conjunction with the temporary space?

Hulten: Well, possibly we might be capable of doing many things, but I'm not sure that we will have enough capacity to do several shows before we open. That might be pretty difficult. We might have to concentrate.

Iskin: What kinds of shows do you think are particularly appropriate for Los Angeles at this time?

Los Angeles has the most sophisticated public in the world in terms of contemporary art. Compared to Paris, L.A. is about fifty years ahead in terms of the public's sensibility.

—Hulten

Hulten: We are finding the first program for ourselves right now. We will certainly do all kinds of shows. We will have very classical retrospectives of predominant interests and important masters in the classical style. We will have thematic shows, idea shows, emerging talent shows, and we will have the whole spectrum of painting, architecture, sculpture, other media, video, film, etc., even dance and theater if it's appropriate. We want to do shows in the contemporary field of the style that we have done in Paris with the Paris/Moscow show: an overall cut of the cultural stream. One of our first shows will be about the role of the city in modern culture. So we are going to be very concerned with California in different ways.

Iskin: You spoke earlier about the function the museum may have with the business community. Do you think of the museum as functioning on other levels of service for other communities too?

Hulten: Yes, but that's a very difficult question. I think we want to turn especially to minority art, ethnic groups, and women, but we are not specializing in only West Coast art either. We will be as broad as we can and create our own profile. Nothing is worse than cultural institutions which are repetitious. That has happened in some cities in Germany. You go from one museum to the next in a matter of a couple of hours, and you see approximately the same

art. That should be avoided. So we will definitely turn to what is original in our situation. And the ethnic groups constitute originality.

Iskin: Generally in art, particularly in performance, there has been a transition toward a more participatory kind of experience rather than mere spectatorship. How would that influence the museum?

Hulten: The museum itself is already such a step. Compared to the classical theater, cinema, or the concert situation, where you are in your seat, in the museum you are on your feet. So already the museum, as such, is more participatory.

Iskin: Do you think it might be appropriate to develop that area of participatory experience further in the museum?

Hulten: Yes—which is where art is going anyway. And this might suit Los Angeles, downtown, and Southern California. It might be very difficult to do it in other situations. You couldn't do it in Moscow. Even in Paris it's very difficult.

Iskin: You mentioned the issue of women. Feminists have, of course, documented the poor ratio of women's art in museums in the United States, particularly in permanent collections but also in the exhibition record. I take it that the new museum could have a real chance to establish a precedent. Is that a serious concern for the new museum?

Hulten: Yes, I suppose it's a serious concern for modern times, but there are no easy solutions. You don't want to show art made by women just because it is made by women; rather, you want to show it because it's good art. It is something one has to keep in mind.

Iskin: The Children's Museum downtown seems to have initiated a variety of innovative programs for children. Would the

and art. One of the key positive elements in eliminating that resistance is children. They are much more open; they understand things easily. If you attract children to a place, it's more likely that their parents will accept going there. Actually, what we tend to have instead is the reverse situation: parents have to drag their children [to museums]—speaking from my own experience.

Iskin: Given the particular nature of Los Angeles as a city—geography, climate, etc.—how do these factors influence museum planning?

Hulten: Los Angeles probably has the most sophisticated public in the world in terms of contemporary art. There is a great media awareness here. The museum, therefore, has to be highly sophisticated to cope with an extremely advanced public. It has to be very special, and I think it has to have a sharp profile. It has to go far in its originality. This forward-looking nature can be created in several ways, but it must exist first of all in the museum's structure—in the way in which it functions and presents itself, and in its content. The challenge will be difficult here because of the advancement of the public. Compared to Paris, Los Angeles is about fifty years ahead in terms of the public's sensibility. You can still shock people in Paris with things that people in L.A. wouldn't even care to go and see.

Iskin: What are your thoughts about the ideal permanent collection for the museum in Los Angeles?

Hulten: We will see ourselves as the museum for Los Angeles art, Southern California art, American art, and international art, about in that sequence, with different levels of perfection. We would definitely want to be a museum for the art of the city, and we would try to be complete in that area, as any museum in a city normally would. Then we would be concerned with American art, and we would have to be very good there too. We also have to be international, and we must be a good example.

We cannot pretend to cover what is going on all over the world, but we can show the best examples. Then we might specialize. I think we will go to other parts of the world, like Japan, Korea maybe, China. Maybe some of the Eastern European countries.

Iskin: I know it would be very difficult—actually impossible—to collect performance art, but do you have any thoughts about creating an archive of documentation through photographs, writing, etc.?

Hulten: Yes, that idea is very compelling. You know that it has been done in the MOMA in New York very successfully. It's something we should do. The whole question of library and archives is something we haven't gone into yet. It's too early. It's very important to the contemporary sensibility, so we would have to get into it. Video too. Maybe the two can be combined.

Iskin: Would you also be thinking about generating the museum's own video series?

Hulten: Yes. We hope to become an institution that initiates creativity to a large extent. In the long term, perhaps we would be what every museum dreams of being—that is, a place for contact among capital, art, and science. All museums dream of that, but it's very, very difficult. Perhaps Los Angeles and Southern California have the first climate where that could be possible. The problems that come up among art, science, and capital are mostly language problems. The museum can act as a translator in those language problems.

Rogers: I think that's very important. It's key.

Hulten: But that is nothing we can start out with. It will grow from our being here.

**You can still shock people in Paris
with things that people in L.A.
wouldn't even care to go and see.
—Hulten**

museum consider forming a link with the Children's Museum, or would it have its own facility?

Hulten: We would probably have our own children's area. If it's going to be so ambitious as to call it a museum, I don't know. Probably it would not be a place where you just drop your child. It would be more interesting to have other kinds of things for the children to do which they cannot do at home on their own.

Iskin: Couldn't those two functions go together?

Hulten: Yes. There are lots of arrangements in Paris and the Scandinavian countries like that. The children's issue could also be taken care of by establishing children's tours. Or they could see films. We have a very successful children's film program at the Beaubourg, and I did one earlier in Stockholm. It has great potential because most of the movies that kids see are not what we would like, ideally.

Rogers: What we are trying to do, and what I think Pontus has done very successfully, is to break down barriers between the public

THE TRANSITIONAL MUSEUM

An interview with Richard Koshalek, Deputy Director and
Chief Curator of The Museum of Contemporary Art

Ruth Iskin

Iskin: What is your reaction to the L.A. art scene?

Koshalek: I think it's important and exciting. I agree with Count Giuseppe Panza de Biumo, who has one of the largest collections of California art and believes that the artists in California have been extremely influential in the area of contemporary art.

Iskin: How will L.A.'s MOCA differ from New York's MOMA?

Koshalek: We're going to be different. Alfred Barr was one of the great geniuses. Back in 1932 he did an exhibit titled "Can New Yorkers have good housing?" and he did his first hidden talent show in the early 1930s; so he was way ahead of museums in this country, and we've got a lot to look up to. I think our museum is going to be a bit more aggressive. It's going to be more adventuresome, and I think L.A. is ready for it. L.A. is a really open situation where anything is possible. That's what people tell me.

Iskin: How will MOCA involve itself with its immediate downtown community?

Koshalek: The museum will be involved in the downtown area by presenting programs in all the arts, architecture, urban planning, and performance. We are considering the possibilities of programming the downtown area that is outlined by the major freeways. One idea we are talking about is "The Stages of Performance," which was proposed to us by Judy Lazar. In a program of this kind, an artist, designer, or architect would design a performance space that utilizes specific downtown architecture in conjunction with a contemporary composer, theater director, or dance choreographer. These would be original performances presented directly within the community—not in a formal theater—and performed before a neighborhood audience, in a space that incorporates existing elements of that neighborhood.

Iskin: Is that similar to what you did at the Walker Art Center in the late 1960s?

Koshalek: It was the idea of Martin Friedman, the Director of The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. For several years, the Walker Art Center did not have exhibition or auditorium space: they were constructing the new building (designed by Edward Larabee Barnes) on the site of the old building. The center rented an office in downtown Minneapolis and presented exhibitions in fire stations, vacant lots, parking lots, department stores, and auditoriums throughout the city.

Iskin: Is the concept of MOCA (before it locates in the permanent building) similar?

Koshalek: We will be very active in the city. We are calling this phase The Transitional Museum as opposed to the Guerilla Museum, which was sometimes confused with "Gorilla" Museum.

Iskin: How will MOCA affect art on the West Coast, particularly in Los Angeles?

Koshalek: By providing consistent exposure of the high-quality work being produced by California artists. To begin this program, we are proposing a unique research project titled "The California Chronology." The majority of the exhibitions will be originated by the curatorial staff of The Museum of Contemporary Art, with assistance from guest curators, writers, and scholars.

Iskin: Do you think people are sensing that L.A. is becoming a new energy center for the eighties?

Koshalek: Absolutely; it's a center for business, science, and the

arts. The city is changing, and very rapidly.

Iskin: Aside from the obvious differences between the art scenes in New York and in L.A.—in the numbers of museums, galleries, and artists—is there a special character to Los Angeles art?

Koshalek: There are considerable differences between the work of California artists and that of New York artists. This museum, to a certain extent, has no models. L.A. must develop its own unique institution, and it must have confidence in that institution. It's the right time for it. L.A. has to stop looking to places like New York for its artists to gain international recognition. Artists should be able to stay in L.A. and not have to go to New York to get a stamp of approval. It's not going to happen overnight.

Iskin: Is the kind of broad collaborative process of artists, collectors, and business community that characterizes the founding of MOCA unique to L.A.? Could it happen in New York?

Koshalek: It couldn't happen in New York. I think in L.A. people are more accepting of each other. They are more open to other people's ideas. In New York it's a constant struggle for your own identity, your own personality, your own world, your own picture in the *New York Times*. In L.A. it's a different attitude. People are more willing to have a group shot here.

Iskin: Do you think most New Yorkers don't have a frame of reference with which to understand West Coast art?

Koshalek: When I was at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, I was interested in work produced throughout the United States. I traveled frequently to California, Texas, and New York. When I was living in New York, I found that I traveled less (only twice in four years to California). There is so much activity in New York. New York has a way of absorbing all one's attention. One becomes extremely busy just being involved in what is there.

Iskin: Are West Coast art and L.A. art, to some extent, becoming more popular in New York?

Koshalek: I think L.A. is becoming more interesting to people in New York. I think they are watching. Some people in New York probably would like to see L.A. fall flat on its face so they could say, "See, New York has got it all, L.A. doesn't. They get all excited in L.A., but they can't turn it over." I think the fact that there has been so much coverage of MOCA in the *New York Times* is significant. They know something new is starting in California, but some of the articles have an undertone of skepticism. They are not convinced yet that MOCA is going to succeed.

Iskin: Well, there is a certain amount of skepticism even in this community, although the enthusiasm overrides it.

Koshalek: Yes. We are always confronted with the fact that the Pasadena Museum closed for lack of a million dollars. It's going to take a lot of dedication and imagination on everyone's part for MOCA to succeed. We still have a lot of bridges to cross. Pontus and I haven't yet done a single program, and MOCA has gotten a great deal of publicity. A writer from a European art magazine was here recently and—at the end of a long discussion on the museum—said, "You've got to be kidding. Why would Pontus Hulten and yourself take over a new institution which doesn't have a collection, a building, the funds, or a program?"

Iskin: That's L.A. . . .

Koshalek: It's all process—so far.

Iskin: And all media. ★