



AN ART MUSEUM IN DOWNTOWN LAS VEGAS IS CLOSER TO BECOMING A REALITY

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Fri, Nov 20, 2015 (4:14 p.m.)

A contemporary art museum in Downtown Las Vegas seems closer to becoming a reality after the Modern's community briefing last night in Smith Center's Troesh Studio Theater. The event, presented as an informal, friendly conversation, spotlighted the board's new steps and solid footing, along with support from the city and other entities, including the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno.

Chair Katie O'Neill said the board wanted to keep open a dialogue with the community, as she discussed recent strides and fundraising goals—\$1 million by August—that if met will lead to the city's designation of a parcel of land in Symphony Park, home to the Smith Center, Discovery Children's Museum and Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health.

"We feel very strongly that we're going to hit that number," O'Neill said, adding that the board has been raising funds privately between family and friends. The number comes from the Memorandum of Understanding made with the City of Las Vegas last summer. The board won't commit to any architectural plans until the parcel is determined. Once determined, the city will offer another \$1 million matching grant the next year.

Additionally, O'Neill said that neither curator nor staff has been hired yet, and that the museum's ultimate goal is to be a collecting educational art institution.

Among those in attendance were cultural leaders Myron Martin and Don Snyder, who led the efforts to develop the Smith Center; Scott Adams, deputy city manager for the City of Las Vegas; Nancy Deaner, director of the city's Office of Cultural Affairs; and artists and representatives from the arts community, including Tarissa Tiberti from the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art and Aurore Giguet from the Barrick Museum. Also showing support and interest was David Walker, executive director and CEO of the Nevada Museum of Art, who spoke to the audience of about 60 community members. "We have a great interest in being a museum engaged with the entire state," he said. "We would very much like to be a part of this project here. These art museums aren't just temples to contemporary art. We are educational institutions; that's what we do." In reference to the Modern, he said, "We are here to do what we can to make this dream happen."

When asked to comment further on what that partnership might be, both sides said they were simply in dialogue and had been for some time. The museum is working with New York's Art Production Fund on Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone's "Seven Magic Mountains," to be installed on the side of I-15 near the Jean Dry Lake Bed. Michele Quinn, a Las Vegas-based adviser on the project, is also on the board of the

Modern and is co-curating an exhibit of work by Nevada artists with Joanne Northrup, director of contemporary art initiatives at Nevada Museum of Art.

The Modern, a name that could change as the project evolves, was conceived and initiated in 2011 by developer and gallery owner Brett Sperry. A public announcement followed in 2013 about plans to build a \$35 million museum and education center on a small parcel of land in the Arts District, with an unveiling of architectural renderings.

O'Neill, a native Las Vegas (and great-granddaughter of Benny Binion) who studied art history at the University of Pennsylvania, spent 10 years in the gallery world in New York before moving back, says she has been involved with the Modern for four years, beginning on its advisory committee. She has served as its chair for about a year and previously served on the Neon Museum's board of directors.

In addition to O'Neill and Quinn, the current board includes Sperry, Uri Vaknin, Sam Cherry, Alex Epstein-Gudai, Quentin Abramo, Beth Campbell, Daniel Hamilton, Adam Horowitz, Kelley Nyquist-Goldberg and Willis Walker. It was a year ago this month that the Modern announced board changes, a possible relocation to Symphony Park and more transparency in terms of vision.

"It's time to refresh the project, look at options of location and ensure that our communication about the project is more clear than it has been in the past," Julie Murray said last November. The CEO and principle of the Moonridge Group, and a key advisor to the Modern's board, has since moved on, but she was acknowledged for her work and spoke affectionately about the new leadership to the audience at last night's event.

The group, which is still operating under the Luminous Park 501c3 and working out of offices at Co-Operate on Main Street Downtown, seems to have gained the confidence of the community. Some of those attending the event said they're feeling inspired and hopeful. More importantly, they expressed confidence in the board's knowledge, as well as its dedication to serving the needs of the community.

"We are a very active board," O'Neill said. "We're busy. We're rolling up our sleeves. We're looking at other museums, models we can follow."