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CityCenter: The New Cultural Center of Las Vegas

BY JENNIFER HENRY

Famous for exceeding even the most elaborate expectations, Las Vegas welcomes yet another awe-inspiring attraction: the \$40 million CityCenter Fine Art Program, which promises to impress even the savviest art lovers. CityCenter is poised to offer The Strip's most spectacular architecture, ambience and amenities when the boutique hotels, luxury residences and resort casino open in late 2009.

"Each piece definitely has a 'wow' factor," said curatorial advisor Michele C. Quinn. "The scale, significance and quality of the individual pieces and the collection as a whole will astound everyone." She has been working with CityCenter's Fine Art Committee and prominent contemporary artists for nearly two years to develop several signature works for the extensive program, which includes a variety of sculptures, paintings and installations from such famous names as Maya Lin, Jenny Holzer, Frank Stella, Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen.

Since scale was a very important factor, the Fine Art Committee had to find artists who could create for large, open spaces and take a big installation to the next level. Sculptor Nancy Rubins, commissioned by CityCenter to create a super-sized version of her legendary *Big Pleasure Point* installation, is just such a visionary. Measuring approximately 50 feet tall and 80 feet long, Rubins' cluster of countless salvaged water vessels such as rowboats, canoes and jet skis will take on a flower-like appearance from a distance, slowly revealing its intricate composition as one approaches Vdara Condo Hotel.

Typewriter Eraser, Scale X, 1998-1999
by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen

Artists Maya Lin, Jenny Holzer and Richard Long also are creating works to suit CityCenter's unique architecture and grand expanses. The artists were asked to approach the space in the way they wanted to, resulting in pieces that not only complemented the setting, but also stood on their own as great works. What's more, many of the artists' media draw from the very foundations of Las Vegas, including Holzer's iconic LED signs, the raw, earth-inspired *Circle of Life* and *Earth* by Long and Lin's massive silver cast of the Colorado River, a nod to Nevada's distinction as the Silver State.

However, the Fine Art Program's connection to the greater Las Vegas community is far more significant than material references. This collection will not be hidden away for the exclusive enjoyment of a privileged few but will be available for public viewing 24 hours a day, seven days a week. "It's quite a deviation from what has been done in the past with collections hung inside corporate offices or galleries that charge for admittance," Quinn explained. "This installation will offer unprecedented accessibility to the public."

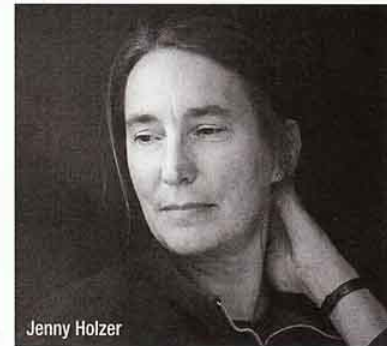
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This sensibility elevates the program above the status of other Las Vegas art attractions and will draw interest from cultural tourists, an important consideration for CityCenter. "People who travel to see art have not been drawn to Las Vegas in the past," Quinn said. "This program will change that." This will impact more than Las Vegas' cultural cache, it will transform the city's creative community as a whole. She added, "The city doesn't yet have a true cultural center but I think this program will become an important focal point."

Strategically positioned throughout the property, these installations will create a diverse cultural dialogue within CityCenter, both beautifying the environment and enriching residents, visitors and the community at large. "We're hoping to include an educational aspect to the program once construction and installation are complete," detailed Quinn. "As a major collection by any standard and the only one of its kind here in Las Vegas, we have a responsibility to teach people about it." But the independent enthusiast won't be left out, as CityCenter is planning to offer various viewing options, including self-guided walking tours, informative brochures and educational amenities one might expect from a public museum.



Photo: Walter Smith



The collection's value isn't only in its academic and architectural merit but also in the simple pleasures of aesthetics. "There is an intellectual aspect to all of the pieces we've chosen but they are first visual works," Quinn said. "While we incorporated CityCenter's environmental concerns, addressed lighting and visibility issues and refined designs to best suit the location, the most important aspect is the visual impact each work will have within its space." With such careful attention to detail and CityCenter's altruistic agenda to share the works with all of Las Vegas, the collection is certain to be a source of pride. ■

Reclining Connected Forms, 1969-1974 by Henry Moore



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