

GUEST COMMENTARY: La Jolla Historical Society endorses Museum of Contemporary Art, Music Society plans

La Jolla Historical Society Executive Director Heath Fox submitted the following statement by its board of directors last week:

The La Jolla Historical Society Board of Directors has recently been presented the concept plans for the expansion of the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and the construction of the La Jolla Music Society's Conrad Prebys Performing Arts Center, "The Conrad." This statement reflects our favorable response to these proposals.

From La Jolla's early beginnings to the present day, theater and music have played eminent roles in the growth of the cultural community. At Anna Held's Green Dragon Colony of the 1890s, the operatic singer and musician Max Heinrich serenaded at the front door. In the early 1900s, the Irving Gill-designed Wheeler Bailey House on Princess Street became a mecca for visiting musicians and thespians, including the great Shakespearean actress Ellen Terry.

In 1916, the La Jolla Woman's Club staged Shakespearean pageants. Later years witnessed the formation of organized theatrical and musical groups: the Musical Arts Society in 1941, the Summer Playhouse (later La Jolla Playhouse) in 1947, the Drury Lane Players in 1949 and the La Jolla Civic Symphony in 1954. Formed in the midcentury, these organizations became the foundations of La Jolla's cultural life of the present day.

The growth of the visual arts is significantly tied to La Jolla's most prominent early citizen, Ellen



Concept plans for La Jolla Music Society's Conrad Prebys Performing Arts Center (above) on Fay Avenue at Kline Street and the expansion of the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (below) at 700 Prospect St. COURTESY



Browning Scripps, whose home site at 700 Prospect St. now houses the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. Scripps endowed and supported many artists, including A.R. Valentien who she commissioned to paint California wildflowers.

The La Jolla Art Association was formed in 1919 with a membership that included plein air painters Alfred Mitchell, Charles Freis and Maurice Braun. The association held its first

exhibits at the Woman's Club and when a new La Jolla library was built in the 1920s, Scripps encouraged the inclusion of an art gallery. That building is now the renowned Athenaeum Music & Arts Library.

After Scripps' death in 1932, her home became the Art Center, which, renamed and enlarged several times, became the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. UC San Diego added to the visual arts, especially with the

development of the Stuart Collection on campus.

The proposals presented by the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and the La Jolla Music Society extend the rich tradition of arts and culture in La Jolla. Both of these proposals are in early design phases, there is much detailed planning and community review to be done, the city planners will have their say, but both have now published concepts that are extraordinarily elegant and impressive designs, sensitive to site and purpose.

Contemporary Art Museum

Architect Annabelle Selldorf's understated modernist design for the MCASD expansion integrates smoothly with the surrounding community in scale and form, with a re-orientation of the building towards the Pacific Ocean. New gallery space, increased by a factor of four from the current configuration, will allow for increased programming based on the museum's prestigious collection, an outcome good for residents and cultural tourists alike.

A museum expansion that directs philanthropic dollars toward capacity to serve, as these expanded gallery spaces will do, is a good investment for the cultural life of the community and the local economy. Retention of the Robert Venturi façade would compromise the unity of form created by the repositioning of the main entrance to align with the axis of Silverado Street and the flanking in-cut green spaces on either side, although the loss of such an iconic example of postmodernism is unfortunate and regrettable. Better visibility of Irving Gill's original design for the façade of Ellen Scripps's home is, however, an important consolation. The re-purposing of the existing parking lot as public space, with views of the sea, is a welcome change.

The Conrad

The La Jolla Music Society's plans for The Conrad Prebys Performing Arts Center, with a stunning new 500-seat concert hall and a 150-seat cabaret, more than trumps the loss of Sherwood Auditorium seating. The LJMS plan is noteworthy for the acoustics designed by Yasuhisa Toyota and the "performing arts village" concept, inspired by community history and architecture, designed by Epstein Joslin Architects.

The proposal for the LJMS village-inspired center is as equally sensitive to the community of La Jolla and the inspiration of San Diego as Selldorf's modernist expansion is for MCASD. We applaud the Music Society's decision to take advantage of existing parking facilities through contractual arrangements, a move that is both economically and environmentally efficient, and we encourage patrons to take advantage of these convenient parking opportunities. Most importantly, a performing arts home for the Music Society located in La Jolla is a tremendous benefit for both local culture and for the community's economy.

Both of these projects support the public service mission of the respective organizations with expanded, thoughtful, purpose-built, state-of-the-art facilities.

More gallery space for contemporary visual art at MCASD; more seating for the performing arts with better acoustics at The Conrad. In a few years, with both of these structures built and operating, a new chapter in history of art in La Jolla will be written, authored by the contemporary generation of La Jollans, and the thriving cultural life of the community will grow and strengthen exponentially.

La Jolla can celebrate these buildings as a credit to the foresight of these organizations and the generosity of their patrons — as no doubt Anna Held and Ellen Browning Scripps would have.

On behalf of the La Jolla Historical Society Board of Directors, we offer our support and congratulations to the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and the La Jolla Music Society.

Want to know more?

The La Jolla Light stories about these coming attractions can be read online at:

MCASD gallery expansion
bit.ly/mcasdexansion

Conrad Performing Arts Center plans
bit.ly/ljmscenter