

**San Jose Museum of Art:
An Historical Landmark With a Modern Touch**

**An Essay
Presented to
the California Pioneers
of Santa Clara County**

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Introduction

The San Jose Museum of Art may just be one of the most historically significant plazas in old San Jose. The Museum stands today on what was once the site of a historically known Spanish Pueblo in San Jose.¹ Also, it was known as the seat of the municipal government of 1779. The San Jose Museum of Art is located on the corner of Market Street and San Fernando Street next to the site of the first Statehouse (now a parking lot.) The San Jose Museum of Art has stood on this spot for over one hundred years.

Since the 1890's this building has been in San Jose to serve the people of the Bay Area; first as a post office, then a library, and now the San Jose Museum of Art. As with many organizations, the San Jose Museum of Art has had problems with employees and also the budget. But to every bad side there is the good side: the museum offers entertainment to art lovers and gives people of all ages the opportunity to widen their horizons in the field of art. Despite going through so many changes, the San Jose Museum of Art is still a productive, beneficial, and educational member of the Santa Clara County.

Post Office

In the Congressional campaign of 1888, the honorable T.J. Clunie promised the people of San Jose that if elected, he would secure an appropriation for a federal building. After being elected he was able to keep his promise. The building became the first federal building (Post Office) in the first State Capitol. T.J. Clunie was given aid and support by Senator Hearst and W.W. Markham. With the help of these two men Clunie received an appropriation of two-hundred thousand dollars.² No expense was spared in the construction of the post office. Everything put into the building of the post office was done in an articulate manner. The windows, doors, and the postal windows were made of the finest and heaviest glass found. The metalwork was all done in a beautiful embossed copper. Nels Johnson was commissioned for the clock tower he built. (Today the old "Tower Clock" is one of the five known clocks still in existence of its kind.) Security was different for this post office; the postal inspectors had a tunnel built with peep holes covered by ventilation covers outside of the postal room to observe ordinary business transactions.³ These vent-covered spy holes made it easy to keep an eye on the postmaster and his employees.⁴ The building was completed in 1894, and on February 1, 1895, the doors were opened for business.

In the earthquake of 1906, the steeple of the clock tower collapsed and crashed through the building. The post

office had to close because part of the interior was damaged; luckily, though, no one was injured. Postal duties were resumed in two hours. Its amazing that this building suffered so little damage in the big earthquake of 1906.⁵ The post office downtown was able to serve the people for thirty-eight years.

Library

The San Jose Public Library had its beginning in 1872 as a private membership institution, known as the San Jose Library Association.⁶ The Association turned over the organization to the city in 1879. The library then became tax-supported and was free to everyone. Early on, the books were kept in the city hall. In 1933, when the post office moved to a new location, the city of San Jose purchased the building from the federal government and remodeled it to house the city library, in 1937.⁷ During the remodeling, rooms were partitioned, archways were plastered over, book stacks were built, and a new floor was laid in the basement to keep books from being damaged in the event of flooding. Also included in the floor plans were a children's room in the basement, the main reading room and reference room on the first floor, and a reading room separate from the rest of the library. After all the remodeling was finished, a music room was created. It contained records, sheet music, books, and had five listening rooms. A Recordak newspaper was also acquired along with a storage file. The library had a collection of 96,493 books that were accession and cataloged volumes, 56,000 government volumes and miscellaneous unaccessioned material, 8,655 mounted pictures and approximately 8,000 phonograph records.⁸ Even at that early time, this building was a place to learn and enjoy what it has to offer.

The San Jose Museum of Art

When the library moved to its permanent home in 1970, the city council voted to remodel the building once again for use as a Civic Art Gallery.⁹ After organizing the museum the building was then renovated back to its original look of the Post Office building. When the building housed the library, the rooms were partitioned, archways were plastered over, and book stacks were built. Extra walls were taken out, the mezzanine came down, and the archways came back. In 1975, the gallery changed its name to the San Jose Museum of Art. The gallery is funded on a one third basis, with the city of San Jose footing one third and the Fine Arts Gallery Association supplying the rest.¹⁰ The cost to operate the museum is around 1.9 million dollars. Funding is crucial to the museum since the state has had so many cut backs. "It is also hard to compete with other leisure activities; such as TV, radio etc," said Vicky Clarke.¹¹ The San Jose Museum of Art completed the fiscal year of '91-92' with a balanced budget; this means it will reduce the museum's deficit by ten percent.¹² Kraft General Foods Foundation, Philip Morris, and the Lockheed Missiles & Space Company have all given grants to the museum. The monies from Kraft General Foods Foundation and Philip Morris, totaling \$23,334, are given in support of the museum's Family Sunday program.¹³ The Family Sunday program is on the first Sunday of every month.

Children and their families are admitted free. It starts at noon and ends at four. Activities can include performing artists, puppet shows, art-making projects based on the current museum exhibitions, storytelling, and museum tours.¹⁴ This day is designed to introduce kids and adults to the dynamic world of contemporary art. "Family Sundays foster a better understanding of our culture, promote the unity of the family, and offer an enjoyable way for children to learn about the arts," says Mark Johnson, chairperson of Kraft's contributions committee.¹⁵ Lockheed's grant will support tuition-free classes supplementing arts education programs in area schools. This program is entirely funded by corporation and foundation grants, and is administered by the museum's Art School.¹⁶ Lockheed's past contributions that supported the San Jose Museum of Museum of Art include the museum's venture fund, the development campaign, and funding for the Let's Look at Art brochure. There is no real emphasis on any particular art in the museum. The museum offers paintings, sculptures, photography, and mix media. "Art can be anything!"¹⁷ The Book Store in the historical building, the new wing, the Jazz series, and ornate art work are just some of the things that stand out at the art museum.¹⁸ The David Best Show which just ended was also very popular. Arts Alive is on every Wednesday from five to eight o'clock. It is an after work delight. There are concerts and refreshments and lots of art to look at and listen to. The museum has a very dedicated staff and a great program.¹⁹ The Whitney Museum of

American Art and the San Jose Museum of Art have established a collaboration in which the Whitney Museum will provide the SJMA with four successive large-scale survey exhibitions.²⁰ An exhibition will be installed for an eighteen month period. The relationship also encompasses the joint development of extensive educational and community outreach programs based on these installations, specifically designed for the San Jose's diverse community.²¹ It is hoped that the partnership will help gain more members of the museum. The first long-term loan installation is scheduled to open in early 1994, it will be presenting a major survey of American art from 1900 to 1950. The installations will provide the SJMA with an environment for the implements of ongoing public and educational programs as well as meaningful context for its temporary exhibitions.²² The staff will be provided with the access to the resources of the Whitney Museum. Subsequently, the San Jose Museum has such a limited number of art works that the partnership will help expand the programming and accelerate the growth of the SJMA. The Whitney Museum installations will occupy one third of available gallery space while the museum will continue to present exhibitions itself. The program is funded by a variety of sources including grants from the Redevelopment Agency of the City of San Jose and corporate, foundation and individual sources, as well as through the revenues generated by increased museum attendance.²³ The museum has the average of 200 hundred people a day. The Executive Director of the San Jose Museum of Art,

Josi Callan, would like to get the community more involved. She would like all ethnic groups to enjoy the exhibits. To see this happen upcoming exhibitions deal with different cultures. "Rural Japan: Radiance of the ordinary;" Photographs by Linda Butler, this exhibit reveals the beauty and rich textures of life in the farmlands, mountain communities and fishing villages of Japan.²⁴ Another is A "Shadow Born of Earth:" New Photography in Mexico, this exhibit features eighteen young Mexican photographers who have recast their predecessor's predominantly documentary style through widely diverse and innovative techniques.²⁵ Those are just a few. One exhibit that really stands out is the Japanese American Art from the Interment Camps, there are 135 paintings, drawings, and sculptures created by 35 Japanese artists who were incarcerated in the camps during World War II. The San Jose Art Museum is not a place just for enjoyment, but it is there to educate the community in the understanding of art.

Directors

Being the director of a museum requires a tremendous amount of dedication and hard work. At one time all things seemed possible. Budgets may have been low, but hopes were high in the creation of the San Jose Museum of Art. Unfortunately, the museum has had six directors in just a few years.

In 1971, Delmar Kolb was the museum's first director. During his time trying to make the museum a better place, one of his thoughts was to introduce a farming community to contemporary American art. He helped the museum get on to its feet and started on the way to becoming a wonderful organization. In 1973 Kolb retired from his position.

In 1976, Albert Dixon, the museum's second director had said that "The art comes first."^{2b} Hearing him say that must have shown what his true love really was. He looked at the museum as part of the major museum network that existed nationwide, not as a single unit. Albert Dixon worked at the museum from 1973 until he quit in 1982.

Albert Dixon was then succeeded by Russell Moore in 1983. At the time as he was going in as director the board had already been thinking about remodeling and adding to the museum. Moore graduated from the University of California at Davis with a degree in art history. He later earned his master's degree in ancient Greek and Roman art and architecture at the University of California at Los Angeles.

In 1972, he was appointed the assistant curator at the Utah Museum of Fine Art in Salt Lake City.²⁷ After completing his job in Utah, Moore became the director of the Long Beach Museum of Art. He was the director for four years before moving out to San Jose. In 1983, Russell Moore was offered a forty thousand dollar director job at the San Jose Museum of Art. He had come here with great expectations in the summer of 1983, but he soon found himself buried in a job that he could not conquer.²⁸ Moore's thoughts to this were, "Sure, at the start it was exciting and hectic, but the museum was under a lot of pressure to meet deadlines to participate in the city redevelopment programs, improve exhibitions and to reach larger and larger numbers of people."²⁹ While on the job as director he came into many problems; such as his performance with his fund-raising and leadership, the press and his personal life, and, while running the museum, his health was also greatly affected. Eighteen months later the board decided they were not going to renew his contract. Dean Bartee termed the parting "amiable," but local observers of the art scene were aware of tumultuous situations in which Moore had been criticized for his short comings as a fund-raiser, his low profile demeanor and his apparent lack of leadership."³⁰ Moore was stunned after the boards' decision. But then again he was relieved because he didn't have to pursue expectations that were unrealistic to him. After leaving the museum Moore proceeded to open his own gallery called Allegra Gallery, it was located downtown.

John Olbrantz predecessor of Russell Moore became director in 1985. Olbrantz received a bachelor's degree in art history in 1972 from Western Washington University in Bellingham, and then in 1976 received his master's from the University of Washington majoring in Greek and Roman Art with a minor in American art. Olbrantz was offered the job as director when Moore's contract ran through. John Olbrantz has had a reputation as being an aggressive curator and administrator.³¹ Before coming to the San Jose Museum of Art he took a modest museum in Bellevue, Washington and helped it become a well-respected museum. Olbrantz was also offered the directorship of the Art Museum of Santa Cruz County, but he declined because he felt that he was ready to take on the financial and artistic problems of the San Jose Museum of Art. His plans for the museum were in terms of finances, to bring both revenues and expenses into line, and he wanted to be networking on a national level. Olbrantz was confident because he felt "the opportunities to succeed are there, and I'm willing to take the chance. I've always been stimulated by challenges. Certainly the museum has had a number of challenges, and I feel I'm up to it. I feel I can make a difference."³² But, during the eighteen month period that he was employed by the museum, the board was getting fed up with his ways. He was supposed to make appointments to take board members on their fund-raising calls, but never did. Board members said it was Olbrantz's fault if they didn't have their shares to raise money for the museum, for that reason.

"He didn't use the skills of the board."³³ John Olbrantz was fired for the reason that he lacked the administrative and financial know-how to run the troubled museum. A few staff members did not agree, they blamed the board for the museums troubles and they accused the board of putting the museum at "serious risk."³⁴ Dean Bartee felt that Olbrantz's creative insights were not at fault. He was fired for "not being responsive, not providing information that the board required in a timely manner, and not meeting deadlines."³⁵ After John Olbrantz was fired and a new director was hired, four staff members resigned. These proved to be difficult times for the museum.

Mary Anne Garland was the next director to take on the incredible job of getting the museum out of chaos. In 1987 Garland took Olbrantz's place as executive director. Garland had already been working at the San Jose Museum of Art as the development director. Garland had also worked with many museums all-around the country to help them satisfy the concerns of investors. Mary Anne Garland supposedly had completed the course work for her doctoral degree in aesthetics- the branch of philosophy that studies the sources, forms and effects of creativity- from Southern Illinois University. Garland came to San Jose in 1984 from Seattle as consultant with the Charles Bentz company to conduct a feasibility study for the ailing San Jose Museum of Art.³⁶ Garland is a well-rounded person; she ran a non-profit family abuse center and was also involved in independent

fund-raising and management consulting. Antecedently everyone found out her credentials were not up to date they all approved of her. However, the press picked found out that she did not have the credentials that she said she had, and the press then used it to exploit her. Upon checking with the University's registrar, it was revealed that Garland only holds a master's degree in philosophy. The board came to the conclusion that she never finished her doctorate. The board correspondingly found that she had lied about working for the Tacoma Zoological Society with Jim Nikkel. Nikkel had said Garland may have been at the presentation, but how she could have worked for them he did not know. He said that they never got the job. Dean Bartee had said that it did not bother him that Garland had falsified her credentials because he liked the things she had to offer to the museum. He thought Mary Anne Garland had accomplished a lot in two years, she was very skillful in organizing, and she had wonderful communication skills. Beyond the Ph.D. she did not have, Garland was fired because of the community outrage. She was fired due to the propaganda against her.

While the board was trying to locate a new director, Albert Dixon returned as interim director until the board found a person suitable for the position. I. Michael Danoff was selected for the directorship in 1988 by the board. They picked him for the job because he is a hard worker who's capable of getting the job done without upsetting anybody. Preceding his arrival to the San Jose Museum of Art he was

employed at many different museums. One that stands out is the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the place where the board found him. Klein, who is familiar with the problems that plagued the San Jose Museum during the recent years, thinks Danoff will be good for the museum. "He's a good guy to smooth out differences. Danoff does not have a reputation for flamboyance. He's not likely to make strong friends or strong enemies," said Klein.³⁷ Danoff has a strong leadership and that's exactly what the San Jose Museum of Art needs. He has dealt with many struggling museums and he has had experience with turning them around. In addition to working at the museum, Danoff will be teaching at San Jose State University. Danoff wants the best for the museum; he wants the museum to explore liaisons with other art organizations, such as the San Jose Repertory, the Ballet and the Symphony. Since Danoff took over at the museum he has brought in many well known artists. With such "art of our time," the museum had many compliments from San Jose State University faculty and students, from collectors and also from contemporary art groupies.³⁸ But detractors said the museum exists for the sake of small elitist group of tax payers, among others, and is not creating programs that reflected the community. The consensus is that Danoff's exhibits largely ignored regional art, multi-cultural art, and art that appeals to an audience beyond the cutting-edge.³⁹ Problems seem to come with the territory of being an executive director. Danoff promoted Colleen Vojvodich as

curator without a search of someone better suited for the job. Board members saw their romantic involvement as a conflict of interest that might affect the stability of the museum. Knowledge of his involvement with the curator caused the museum to be under heavy scrutiny. The most visible sign of trouble in the museum was the exhibit choices that neglected to draw in the necessary crowds or inspire fund-raising efforts. Danoff left his job at the museum in 1991.

Josi Callan was appointed Director of the San Jose Museum of Art in August 1991, after serving two years as Associate Director. While in office as Associate Director she was responsible for all outside affairs of the museum. Callan has a BA in Art History and a Masters degree in Behavioral Sciences from the California State University.⁴⁰ During the preceding twelve years, Ms. Callan loved the work she did. She held a senior management positions in non-profit and educational institutions.⁴¹ Her main focuses were fund-raising and community relations. Callan served as the Director of Marketing and Development for the Denver Symphony Orchestra; Director of Project Development for the Pacific Mountain Network.⁴² The San Jose Museum of Art has achieved financial stability in the 1991-92 fiscal year, under Callan's leadership.⁴³ The Museum has also reached its highest level in the participation of educational programs. Callan tries to focus on community awareness of art all the time. She currently serves as Chair of the San Jose Arts Roundtable, is a member of the Advisory Board for the Bay

Area Research Project and is a participant in Leadership San Jose.⁴⁴ Her goals for the museum are mainly getting everything settled so the Whitney Museum can establish it's exhibits. She also wants the physical environment to be more educated about the understanding of art. Vicky Clarke, the Assistant Director, said "Josi is so motivated in her work. She is the best thing that has happened to the museum."⁴⁵

New Wing and Its Budget

To broaden the galleries and exhibits, the museum has taken bids to add a new wing to the historical building that houses the museum. The museum had hoped to add 45,000 square feet, but because this addition has come to cost nearly 50% over budget, the city officials have considered revising and down-scaling the original floor plan. In 1988 the new addition was expected to cost about 7.8 million dollars, but at the present, the price now well exceeds \$14 million.⁴⁶ Community support for the addition has improved morale, however.⁴⁷ The city had budgeted \$5 million for its contribution to the museum, but to date it has donated approximately \$7 million. More than three million dollars have been raised privately from corporations, foundations, and individuals. Major contributors include the late Lucile and David Packard (with a one million dollar gift), the International Business Machines Corp. (with a two-hundred and fifty-five thousand dollar gift), and the San Jose Mercury News contributed a gift of 250,000 dollars.⁴⁸ But, with a 14,000,000 dollar price tag, the museum is going to have to do much more heavy fund raising on its own.

The first phase of the museum's expansion will include the cost of the new building shell, designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, and a portion of the interior. Next, the construction will start. The addition will stand

deferentially behind the old museum, forming a backdrop for one side of the new plaza. The building borrows abstract geometry from the old, but none of the rich style or decoration that give the old building meaning.⁴⁹ It chooses parts of the building to echo and parts to ignore. The dark sandstone base of the old building will be duplicated, but none of the carved decoration will be included in the severe square openings of the addition. The two buildings will be connected by a glass foyer. (which is today's new public entry to the museum) A two-story gateway will signal the entry, but it will not be as spectacular as the two existing entries. Precast concrete has been substituted for limestone exterior, which was originally planned for the museum. By doing this it will help keep the budget at about only thirty percent over. The two stories of the new addition are not as impressive as to the speculative Fairmont Hotel.⁵⁰ Its fiat facade is much more less shapely. Most arcades are welcoming to pedestrians who want to get out of the sun, or the rain, but the San Jose Museum of Art's arcade is an empty gesture.⁵¹ The old half of the museum offered windows and belfries, to give it a sense of the human size of the building, while the new addition's gridded face is scaleless. The San Jose Art Museum wanted to have a wood paneled barrel-vaulted ceiling (expressed in the low vault of the roof outside) to evoke the effect of a piece of fine cabinetry. Five galleries will be added due to the new addition. Four of the five need controllable artificial lighting to protect fragile artworks

that will be exhibited. The fifth gallery has been designed to have a ninety foot long computer designed skylight. This will allow direct light to reflect light into all corners of the room through out the year. Among the fortunate few who have seen the interior gallery spaces, at the Museum's "Sneak Peek" on June 23, 1990, at 6 p.m., the " oh, wow!" response has been unanimous.⁶² On June 1, 1991, the 45,000 square foot new wing to the museum was unveiled , tripling the exhibition space of the museum. All together the San Jose Museum of Art offers 78,000 square feet, with the historic building at 33,000 sq. ft. and the new addition 45,000 sq. ft. With the new addition the museum can offer 13,215 sq. ft. of exhibition space. The new addition allowed the museum to attract major national traveling exhibitions, as well as space to build and display its permanent collection. In the beginning of May 1993 the three upstairs galleries of the new wing will be closed for approximately eleven months to complete a few unfinished touches; such as the ceiling, floors, walls, pedestools for art pieces, as well as office and storage space in the basement. Admission fees during this time will be reduced to two dollars, since the downstair's galleries of the wing, as well as the historic building will be exhibiting art. The construction will hopefully be done by the spring of 1994.

Art School

As children, one of our favorite past times was coloring on big pieces of paper with crayons, and then some of these children became wonderful artists. Presently the public school system's budget does not allow art in their curriculum and that is where the art school of the San Jose Museum of Art plays an important part. The art school is an outstanding part of The San Jose Museum of Art. It has offered classes since 1976, although the enrollment has risen. The art school is the only on-site elementary-grade-level museum art school in the Bay Area. The museum's director, Josi Callan, is one of the school's biggest supporters. "I love it," she says. "It introduces kids to the museum. Often we spend time trying to introduce adults to the museum, but children are our future. They are the ones we have to reach."⁶³ The art school has five satellite sites in low-income neighborhoods and provides a twofold benefit to the community. The mission of the art school is to balance instruction of techniques and skills with encouragement and inspiration for self-expression.⁵⁴ While developing social communication and intellectual skills, the art school hopes the students grow creatively and will also strengthen their artistic capabilities. Students take hands-on classes. They explore art through activities and viewing art works in the museum's galleries. The teachers of the art school go through an extensive one-year apprenticeship

program before joining the art school program. The art school teachers teach the subjects of; working with clay, painting and drawing, still life and figure painting, sculpture, and comic book art. The art school's twenty-three instructors, all of whom are working artists as well as teachers, do not just teach at the museum; they go to many different schools as well. They shuttle among thirty Santa Clara County schools to bring about 6,000 students a weekly ninety minute art lesson to the classrooms at their own schools or community centers. But they do also teach with about 1,500 students on Saturdays and some weekdays. The ratio of students to instructors in a full class is a maximum fifteen to one. The director of the art school is Diane Levinson. She began her career in an art school, New York Museum of Modern Art, while in elementary school. The SJMA school of art, Levinson says, is not a big money maker. The program's budget is only about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.⁵⁵ The San Jose Museum of Art school is supported by program fees paid by the schools, tuition from individual students and grants from a number of foundations, corporations and public agencies, including the city of San Jose.⁵⁶ Hopefully, the students who take these classes will multiply since the children are our future.

Conclusion

The San Jose Museum of Art is, in many ways, a "new museum."⁶⁷ The museum still provides citizens with culture and art. The building itself is a piece of art, but not everyone looks at it that way. It was built as a Post Office, in use for the people and then was converted into a library which gave people a place to relax or learn. The museum now gives people the option to do anything that their imagination will let them do. The San Jose Museum of Art will always be a historical landmark to those who have been able to realize the importance of it.

Notes

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