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An aerial view of the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego's La Jolla campus renovation by Selldorf Architects is shown in this undated photo.

# Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego in La Jolla reopens to the public

By [Julia Dixon Evans](#) / Arts Calendar Editor and Producer  
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The Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD) is branding the newly renovated campus in La Jolla as "art with a view." Designed by architect Annabelle Selldorf and the New York-based firm Selldorf Architects, it's a space worthy of both the view and the art that now hangs on its seemingly endless walls.

Originally the former home of Ellen Browning Scripps — designed by famed architect Irving Gill in 1916 — it became a museum in 1941, then was renovated multiple times throughout the next few decades. A major renovation by the firm Venturi, Scott Brown in 1996 restored the original façade as well as added Axline Court, both elements maintained by Selldorf while also quadrupling the gallery space from 10,000 to 40,000 square feet.

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Nicholas Venezia


The newly expanded MCASD is shown in this undated photo. It features quadruple the gallery space for displaying art, like Ellsworth Kelly's 1963 "Red Blue Green" on the far wall and Sol LeWitt's 1976 "Six-Part Modular Cube" in the foreground.

It means MCASD has room to show so much more of their extensive collection of contemporary art, including several works classified as "debuts" for the museum, never-before-seen pieces or new acquisitions.

To gain space, they excavated underground, moved a massive tree on the property, and the former auditorium was also transformed into gallery space — something that museum leadership said is more in line with their needs as a museum.

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"One of the ways we were able to gain so much gallery space is that we repurposed Sherwood Auditorium into the Iris and Matthew Strauss Galleries. So it's almost 8,000 square feet of galleries with 20-foot ceilings, skylights, wooden floors — and that's where we'll host our special exhibitions," said Kathryn Kanjo, the David C. Copley director and CEO of MCASD.

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The first special exhibition is "Niki de Saint Phalle in the 1960s," a major survey of works by the French-American artist who called San Diego home towards the end of her life.

The exhibition, on view through July 17, 2022, digs into a period of her work that's quite different from the whimsical, fantastical sculptures we know in the region — with abstract assemblages, her radical "shooting paintings" and large scale feminist sculptures.

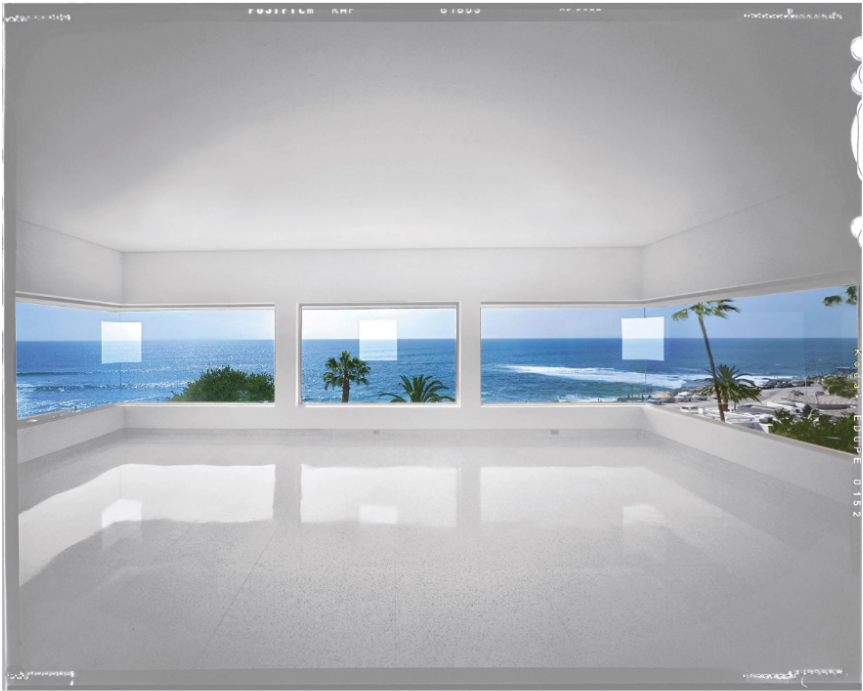


Courtesy of MCASD

Niki de Saint Phalle's "Pirodactyl over New York" is shown in this undated photo. It is a 1962 work of paint, plaster and objects on two wood panels.

In addition to the Saint Phalle exhibition, MCASD is also installing more than 200 works from their permanent collection, which are now situated in a mostly permanent arrangement with some pieces rotating out periodically for preservation reasons.

Many beloved works have returned, including "1°2°3°4°," a site-specific 1997 Robert Irwin work that cuts several square holes directly into the glass windows overlooking the Pacific Ocean — plus an entire room of Irwin works.



Robert Irwin

In this undated photo, Robert Irwin's 1997 site-specific work "1°2°3°4°" cuts apertures directly into — and through — the windows.

Irwin, who lives in San Diego, is known globally as one of the foremost artists in the California Light and Space Movement, spanning several decades in the 1950s through the 1970s. MCASD has an impressive collection of Light and Space works, including pieces by Larry Bell, Craig Kauffman, Mary Corse and DeWain Valentine, many of them on display in an impressive, airy interior gallery with louvered skylights.

Roaming the galleries, the progression in the curatorial choices is evident: Each room

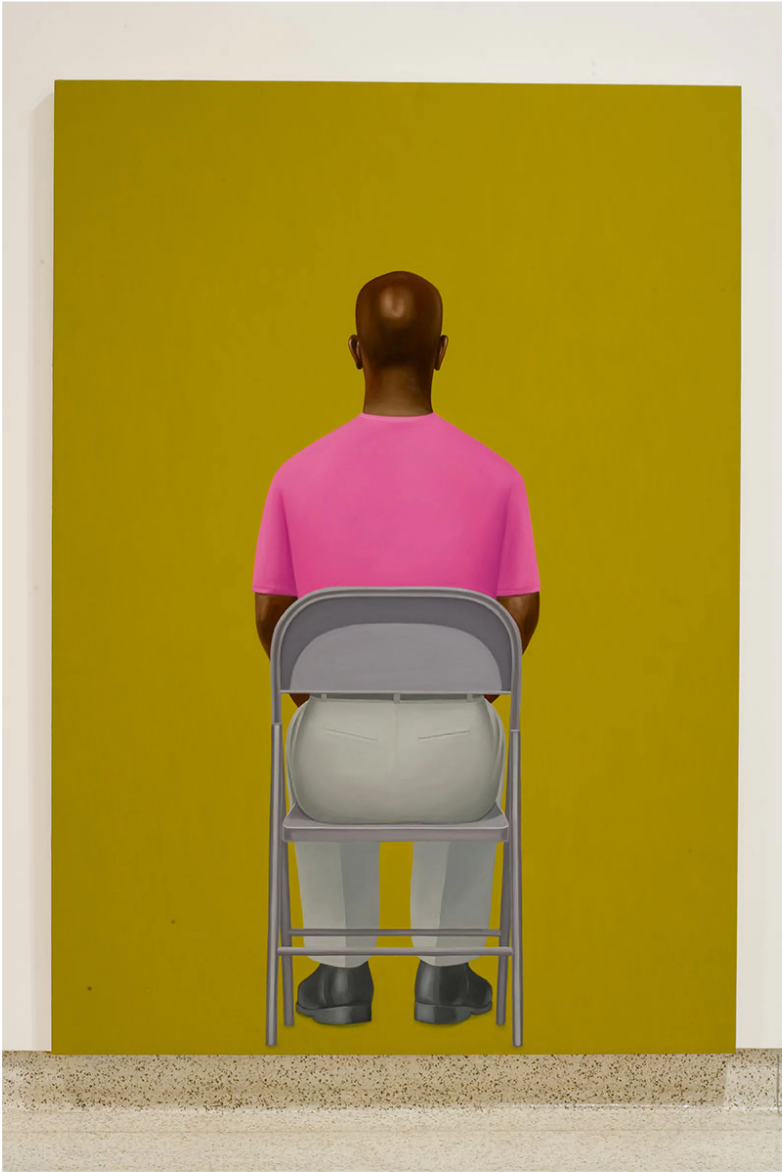


suggests a particular period or movement.

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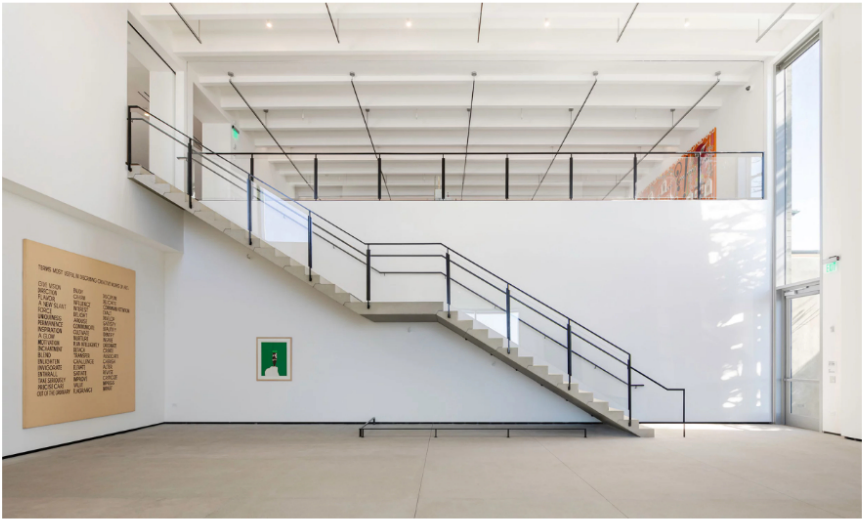
The museum's collection exemplifies their commitment to the art of the time, but also that of the region with many works on display by San Diego and Tijuana artists. Some highlights: "Filthy water cannot be washed," an oversized cyanotype by Andrea Chung; "Untitled Figure," a work by Tijuana-born artist Salomón Huerta featuring a subject seated, facing away from the viewer. The massive work is installed low on the wall, as if the chair in the painting were situated at floor-level, which makes the piece feel larger than life.



Courtesy of MCASD

Salomón Huerta's 2000 work "Untitled Figure" is shown in this undated picture.

Plus, don't miss the John Baldessari piece, the nine-and-a-half-foot tall "Terms Most Useful in Describing Creative Works of Art" which hangs prominently across from two Andy Warhol works; a Claes Oldenburg popsicle sculpture; Niki de Saint Phalle's "Big Ganesh" elephant — and the view.



Nicholas Venezia

In this undated photo, John Baldessari's 1966-1968 work, "Terms Most Useful in Describing Creative Works of Art," is on view near Marisol's 1967 "Paris Review" in the reopened Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego in La Jolla.

Art lovers may recognize many names in the collection: Cindy Sherman, Claes Oldenburg, Jenny Holzer, Helen Pashigan, Roy Lichtenstein, Marisol, Mark Rothko or Yayoi Kusama (the list is too long), and in the maze-like space, it's not a stretch to wonder out loud, "Wait, there's more?" when rounding another corner into another gallery – but there are plenty of places to step away, rest, and take in the view.

This weekend, to celebrate the reopening, [museum admission is free](#). Saturday, April 9 includes a ribbon cutting ceremony, entertainment and self-guided tours of the galleries from [10 a.m. to 8 p.m.](#) On Sunday, the first family-friendly [Prebys Play Day](#) is from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., with hands-on art-making. [Free Third Thursday](#) and [Free Second Sunday](#) programs also begin this month.



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Julia Dixon Evans



Julia Dixon Evans writes the KPBS Arts newsletter, produces and edits the KPBS/Arts Calendar and works with the KPBS team to cover San Diego's diverse arts scene. Previously, Julia wrote the weekly Culture Report for Voice of San Diego and has reported on arts, culture, books, music, television, dining, the outdoors and more for The A.V. Club, Literary Hub and San Diego CityBeat. She studied literature at UCSD (where she was an oboist in the La Jolla Symphony), and is a published novelist and short fiction writer. She is the founder of Last Exit, a local reading series and literary journal, and she won the 2019 National Magazine Award for Fiction. Julia lives with her family in North Park and loves trail running, vegan tacos and live music.

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