Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

First Night at The Broad: Spectacular, Brilliant Programming

Allon Schoener · Monday, February 23rd, 2015

Sky Lit: Volume, Light and Sound

The Broad, under construction. Photo by Gary Leonard. Used with permission.

On February 15, there was one of the first opportunities for the public to see the interior of the building and to be introduced to on-site programming. Approximately 3,500 people filtered through the space over a seven-hour period.

When you exited the huge freight elevator (which is, as the elevator operator announced, “the largest in Los Angeles”) serving temporarily as a passenger elevator, you entered the third floor gallery to find yourself in one of the grandest spaces available anywhere in the world in which to view contemporary art. My instant reaction was “WOW!”

Third floor exhibition gallery under construction with Yann Novak’s “Stillness” seen in the distance. Photo credit: Chris Wormald

This space evokes memories of the Grand Palais in Paris where, under a glass roof, there are huge open spaces devoid of columns and walls that can create a dissonant viewing experience.

Recognizing that the building is still under construction, there were no artifacts displayed. In September, the emptiness of the gallery will be replaced by an exhibition of selected works from the museum’s collection. Clearly, they will transform the space by adding another dimension to the experience. The Broad, by definition, is not restricted to the presentation of two and three-dimensional artifacts. Its scope embraces what might be called “the contemporary aesthetic experience.” Therefore, it was appropriate that its *vernissage* be totally without artifacts.

The event was magnificently orchestrated by Ed Patuto, Director of Audience Engagement at The Broad. He chose to create a multi-layered experience in which the audience was exposed to two distinct styles of installation art: private-restrained in contrast with spectacle-driven.

For one night only, two exterior walls running the length of the building served as venues for two temporary art installations. Recognizing that the space is vast, it posed a challenge to both artists. They created contrasting immersive experiences. BJ Nilsen’s piece was intimate and close. Yann Novak’s was vast and overwhelming.

BJ Nilsen, DTLA, 2015

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BJ Nilsen chose to create experiences focusing entirely on sound without a visual component; Yann Novak created an expansive visual and sound presentation that was in total harmony with the scale of the space. Both were appropriate and sympathetic to the “in construction” state of the building and the mission of the museum.

BJ Nilsen’s sound installation utilized actual sounds recorded in Downtown Los Angeles. A distinct sound experience is provided by a series of small speakers mounted at ear level. In order to hear the entire work of art, one must walk from speaker to speaker. As an evocation of John Cage’s principles of random experience, it was not necessary to follow a linear path and walk from one to another. Consequently, no one had the same listening experience.

Yann Novak, Stillness, 2015. Photo credit: Robert Crouch

In contrast to BJ Nilsen’s intimate sound experience, the second installation, Yann Novak’s visually stunning *Stillness*, a vast sound and light projection, was not seen until after sunset. Following in the footsteps of Bill Viola, the unqualified master of *in situ* projection, sound and light environments, Novak’s installation covers one vast wall. He had orchestrated fragments of dissected actual images and projected them as one elongated continuity which effectively embraced its exhibition environment. It fully complemented the grandeur of the space.

At times, the sound accompaniment was overwhelming and people standing in the path of the projectors, creating shadows, were distracting. However, these minimal irritations did not detract from the overwhelming impact of the work.

This minuscule innovative introduction suggests great things yet-to-come at The Broad.

And what about the architecture?

How can one discuss the architectural merits of a building when it is still under construction? You can’t. However, one can have expectations.

The Broad’s architects are Diller Scofidio + Renfro, a 115-person interdisciplinary design studio that integrates architecture, the visual arts, and the performing arts. Based in New York City, DS+R is led by three partners — Elizabeth Diller, Ricardo Scofidio, and Charles Renfro — who work collaboratively on each project.

Among their most recognizable projects is the New York City *High Line*, an elevated urban park built on the remnants of a freight railroad spur. It has become one of the city’s major tourist attractions. Why?

It provides every person who walks any section of it with an amazing choreographed experience in which it is possible to view architecture, people, traffic and commerce from a personal vantage point along an extended path encountering mini rest areas and mini parks.

Ricardo Scofido, one of the three partners, was on hand to view the February 15th event. Elizabeth

Diller, his wife, serves as the lead partner and spokesperson for the office In itself, this sets the office apart from most architectural practices. He said prior to establishing their current office that he and his wife had been involved professionally with dancers and choreographers. Furthermore, he was happy to see his wife assume the mantle of lead partner and spokesperson.

The relationship of architect to client is critical in the architectural equation. Good architects create bad buildings when they have bad clients, and good buildings when there is client/architect harmony. Early signs indicate that client/architect harmony to be the case with The Broad.

Top image: The Broad, viewed from above

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