

Art fair organizers hope to turn San Diego into a visual arts mecca

By PAM KRAGEN - pkragen@nctimes.com | Posted: Sunday, August 29, 2010 12:00 am

SAN DIEGO ---- The event known as Art San Diego 2010 has a new name, a new location, new dates and new curators this year, but the focus is the same ---- bringing the works of international artists and the well-heeled people who buy them together under one roof.

Art San Diego 2010 Contemporary Art Fair opens Sept. 2 and continues through Sept. 5 at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront Hotel in downtown San Diego. The four-day event includes art exhibits by nearly 60 galleries from the U.S., Mexico and abroad as well as a series of panel discussions, film screenings, dinners, cocktail parties and performing arts events. Organizers are expecting as many as 5,000 attendees.

The art fair was first launched last year as the Beyond the Border International Contemporary Art Fair, a two-day exhibit at the Grand Del Mar resort in Carmel Valley. The inaugural event was a success, drawing more than 2,500 art collectors from North County, San Diego, Orange County, Palm Springs and Mexico, said founder and executive director Ann Berchtold.

"We launched it as a pilot project last year and weren't sure what to expect, but we sold out our gallery space, sold out our opening night and all the galleries reported strong sales," Berchtold said. "It proved that there was an appetite for this kind of event this year."

To capitalize on last year's success and expand on it, Berchtold made several changes this year. First, she moved the event downtown to make it more central and to allow her to coordinate more programs with downtown museums and galleries. She expanded the event by a day to give shoppers and artists more time to connect. And she changed the name.

"It makes more sense to call it Art San Diego because it's downtown, and we want it to be a citywide event," she said. "Also, San Diego is a great draw. We talked to a lot of galleries and they told me to use the name because San Diego speaks for itself. People don't have to guess what it is or where it is."

Another change this year is the appointment of a new curatorial director and committee, which Berchtold said was done to "strengthen the curatorial vision" for the fair. The committee's new director is Marcela Quiroz Luna, and committee members include Lisa Dennison, chairperson for Sotheby's North and South America; Cecilia Fejardo-Hill, chief curator of the Museum of Latin American Art; George Melrod, editor of "art ltd"; and Deborah Klochko, director of the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego, among others.

Among the local galleries exhibiting at the fair this year are Del Mar's Beyond the Border Fine Art Gallery, Scott White Contemporary Art in San Diego; and La Jolla's Joseph Bellows Gallery. Also featured are galleries from New York, Miami, Brooklyn, Los Angeles, Santa Monica, and international exhibitors from England, Argentina and Mexico.

Encinitas sculptor Jeffery Laudenslager ---- who specializes in large-scale, kinetic sculptures ---- said he's installing one of his latest pieces in the center of the show's main exhibition hall. Although he's a first-timer with the San Diego event, Laudenslager has been exhibiting his work at regional art fairs for more than 20 years and he thinks these events are one of the best ways artists can market their work.

"I've always had great experiences at art fairs," Laudenslager said. "The collectors who come tend to be serious."

Laudenslager said he hopes Art San Diego will eventually take its place as one of the region's major art fairs. For too many years, San Diego has been seen as "the second cousin of L.A.," he said, and its time has come.

"This is a new thing for San Diego and if it works, the rewards will be substantial," he said. "In order to become a major art town, it takes a four-cornered approach. It takes the galleries, the artists, the museums and the collectors to pull together to create the critical mass, and we've never had that situation. But Ann has put a lot of energy into making this happen and it's an exciting

opportunity."

Although the weak economy has been hard on many luxury product makers, the art market is solid. A May 6 article in the Wall Street Journal reported that the fine art market is booming again, judging by recent sales at the world's two leading art auction houses, Sotheby's and Christie's.

"There was a blue period for a while, but things are really coming back strong," Berchtold said. "People are still putting money into expensive pieces of artwork."

However, Berchtold said that while art lovers are still buying, the prices they're paying have declined.

"The price point that's more palatable for San Diego buyers is \$2,000 to \$30,000 range," Berchtold said. "We will have some blue-chip works by modern masters at our show, but they won't be the dominant works."

Berchtold said a nice extension for Art San Diego has been a lot of new partnerships with other makers of luxury brands, who are eager to put their products in front of the fair's art-shoppers.

"I think we provide a wonderful new kind of platform that hits a demographic that sometimes gets left behind for some of these big events," she said. "It's a buyer who's a little older, more sophisticated and cultured."

Art San Diego kicks off Sept. 2 evening with an art preview, VIP opening night party and San Diego Fine Art Society's Art Awards dinner.

Regular fair hours begin Friday, with open art viewing from noon to 8 p.m. Sept. 3 and 4, and from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sept. 5. There will also be a series of one- to two-hour lectures and panel discussions daily on topics including "Art Collectors Boot Camp," "Art as a Hidden Asset," "Panorama: Mexico" and "Everything You've Always Wanted to Know About Collecting Fine Art Photography."

There will also be several film screenings about fine art, cocktail parties, and "The Art of Wine & Food," a \$225-a-plate dinner hosted by the American Institute of Wine & Food, and much more. A full schedule can be found at artsandiego-fair.com.

Several free public events are taking place in association with Art San Diego:

-- Dancers from Patricia Rincon Dance Collective will offer a free performance at 7 p.m. Sept. 2 on the Hilton San Diego Bayfront Hotel lawn. It's a preview of their shows scheduled for Sept. 3 and 4 at Sushi Performance and Visual Art in San Diego.

-- Artist Jon Block will present "Sight & Sound Concert on the Bay" from 7 to 10 p.m. Sept. 3 on the outdoor patio at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront Hotel. Block describes the all-ages event as a free outdoor rock concert featuring the bands Vinyl Film and Republic of Letters, large-scale art installations by Rich Walker and two dance acts.

-- To tie into Art San Diego, a group of galleries in San Diego's East Village are hosting an "Open Space" art walk on Sept. 4 evening. From 4 to 8 p.m., art lovers are invited to visit the community's warehouse district, which has been converted into a network of artist studios, hidden courtyards, contemporary galleries, restaurants and bars. Pick up maps at any of the gallery locations in the community, including Space 4 Art, 325 15th St. in San Diego. Call 619-269-7230.

-- From 7 to 10 p.m. Sept. 4, vacant warehouses and old factories in Barrio Logan will be turned into galleries and performance spaces for the night for the Barrio Logan Block Party.

-- "Art Reach for Kids," from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sept. 5 at the hotel, will offer free art activities for children.

-- More than a dozen art galleries in downtown San Diego are hosting exhibitions to tie into the fair. Find a map to these exhibits on the art fair's website.

-- Fair admission is \$15 per day, but there are a couple of ways to get free tickets. Patrons who ride an Amtrak train to the event can get in free by showing their train ticket at the box office. Also, September is San Diego Arts Month, and visitors who register for an Arts Pass on the arts month website (artsmonthsd.com) can get a free pass to the show.

Art San Diego 2010 Contemporary Art Fair

When: 5 to 11 p.m. Sept. 2; noon to 10 p.m. Sept. 3 and 4; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sept. 5

Where: Hilton San Diego Bayfront, 1 Park Blvd., San Diego

Tickets: \$15, one-day pass (\$10, students); \$35-\$225, evening events, dinners

Info: artsandiego-fair.com