

# MIKI GARCIA ON THE REOPENING OF MCA SANTA BARBARA

On July 6 the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum reopened with a brand new name, the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara (MCA). Now an accredited museum, it is the only spot along the coastal stretch between LA and San Francisco that solely presents a collection of contemporary art. Heading up the museum's transformation is Executive Director and Curator **Miki Garcia**, who since joining the museum in 2005 has worked with both local and international artists to raise awareness of the non-profit beyond the West Coast.

In anticipation of the museum's reopening, **Whitewall** spoke with Garcia about the museum's new identity, the importance of being a non-profit, and her public art plans for Santa Barbara.

**WHITEWALL: What can we expect from the museum's new identity?**

**MIKI GARCIA:** The decision to become a museum stems from an Arts Regional Initiative Grant of \$250,000 made to us by the James Irvine Foundation, that allowed us to evaluate our financial sustainability, operational capacity, and audience potential. As the only contemporary arts institution between Los Angeles and San Francisco, our Trustees and stakeholders saw our potential to better serve the region by becoming a museum.

The name change also signifies a financial commitment on the part of the Board of Trustees to designate more resources to artists, exhibitions, publications, and public programs, with an expanded dedication to present the most compelling art of our time.

**WW: The museum has chosen to remain a non-profit organization. Why is that important?**

**MG:** It has never been this organization's intention to operate on a for-profit basis. CAF has always been a venue for promoting the most avant-garde work, including video, performance, and ephemeral artworks that are not beholden to the market. In becoming a non-profit museum, we maintain a commitment to risk-taking and experimentation while also providing educational and interpretive opportunities for the understanding of contemporary art.

**WW: You have worked hard as Executive Director to expand the museum's visibility to a wider, more diverse audience. What have been the challenges?**

**MG:** We've increased our visibility by creating more collaborations with businesses and non-profits in the area, opening a public satellite location, and encouraging participation-based programming. For instance, we've launched a new Visiting Artist Summer Series, inviting contemporary artists to create projects in the heavily populated Paseo Nuevo Center Court, where the museum is located on the 2nd floor, in order to attract new audiences to contemporary art.

**WW: You have been responsible for injecting a lot more public art into Santa Barbara, like the 2011 "Home Show, Revisited," since you joined the museum. Do you have any new projects up your sleeve?**

**MG:** There is an exhibition of contemporary Los Angeles architecture entitled 'Almost Anything Goes', that I am organizing with **Brigitte Kouo**, which will hopefully include an outdoor pavilion. In addition, we are in talks with **Marinella Senatore** who is well known for her use of the public to create her film projects.

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