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AUTUMN CRUZ/acruz@sacbee.com

Rob McCammond, mechanical coordinator, inspects duct supports Tuesday for a new wing of the Crocker Art Museum under construction at Second and O streets in Sacramento. The frame was completed in November for the three-story addition, which will encompass new galleries and a cafe and will feature a spiral staircase.

More Information

- Crocker Art Museum: IN THE KNOW

The biggest project in the 120-year history of Sacramento's Crocker Art Museum will triple the size of the current facility.

When it's done in mid-2010, the new museum will feature:

- A two-story atrium and event space for receptions, with room for 400 inside, and a 7,000-square-foot courtyard with space for 1,200.
- Four times as much space for temporary or traveling exhibitions.
- A new auditorium seating nearly 300 for cultural programs and events.
- An education center with three flexible studio art spaces, a children's participatory gallery and a student exhibition area.

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"It's great to see the Crocker's expansion continuing despite the current economic challenges and I hope more Sacramentans and businesses step up to the plate. Having a world class art museum is a key part of our region's growth. Our new mayor Kevin Johnson has made some positive comments on the importance of preserving and supporting the arts for the community; it would be great to see him put his leadership behind this project too."

-- saywhatSac

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Crocker Museum addition takes shape despite economic downturn

By Mary Lynne Vellinga

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Published: Sunday, Dec. 28, 2008 | Page 3B

Even as the economic climate for arts groups has darkened in recent months, the steel skeleton for an addition that will triple the size of the Crocker Art Museum is rising in a show of optimism.

The addition's three-story frame was finished in late November. The auditorium floor has been poured. Standing on the site at Second and O streets, it's easy to see the outlines of spacious new galleries, the cafe and a three-story spiral staircase near the Crocker's future entrance.

The Herold Wing, a much derided concrete structure added in 1969, has been torn down.

Museum Director Lial Jones said she's still planning on a mid-2010 opening. Nearly all of the private and public donors who pledged a total of \$90 million have been making their payments on schedule.

"So far, people who made commitments to the museum have fulfilled those commitments," she said.

Jones said the Crocker still needs to raise at least \$10 million to finish construction. She's hoping to raise still more to boost the museum's meager \$5 million endowment, which lost 30 percent of its value in the past year in the stock market decline. "People are still supporting the museum, and I expect that will not change," Jones said.

The modern, metal-clad addition was designed by New York architect Charles Gwathmey, whose firm also oversaw the expansion of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York. The new building will be separated by a courtyard from the ornate, Italianate gallery built by the Crockers in the 19th century. The two structures will be connected in the back so patrons can walk from one to the other without going outside, climbing stairs or taking elevators.

Gwathmey's design is relatively low-key, with saw-toothed skylights along the roofline offering the only deviation from standard rectangular and gently rounded forms. The new Crocker addition contrasts with more architecturally adventurous cultural buildings designed in recent years, such as Daniel Libeskind's exuberant addition to the Denver Art Museum, where titanium-sheathed cubes and triangles thrust out at all angles, evoking the Rocky Mountains.

Crocker spokeswoman LeAnne Ruzzamenti said the architectural restraint was a conscious decision of both the museum board and Gwathmey not to overshadow the historic Crocker, which is considered a gem of Victorian-era architecture. The new building's gray and white metal panels echo the grayish-blue paint job the historic Crocker building received last year.

Ruzzamenti said the Crocker board first and foremost wanted a museum that worked as a space to exhibit art, without a lot of extraneous angles that look striking from the outside but can make hanging art or navigating a building more difficult. "Not all art museums prioritize that way, but that was the vision here," she said. "We needed wall space."

The first three shiploads of zinc tiles for the building's exterior have arrived from China at the Port of Oakland, Ruzzamenti said. White oak flooring is waiting in storage. It was left over from the expansion of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which sold it to the Crocker.

"MOMA's excess was enough for us," Ruzzamenti said.

When the expansion is finished, the Crocker's collection of Gold Rush-era California paintings will move to a gallery on the second floor of the new building.

Also on the second floor, an undulating, narrow gallery will hold a new collection of Asmat art from New Guinea given by an anonymous Northern California donor who contributed \$14 million to help build the new building and to care for his collection.

The third floor of the new structure will be devoted to traveling exhibitions, which now face severe space constraints.

A first-floor cafe will be separated from the courtyard by a wall of windows.

The Crocker remains open now, but the construction schedule calls for it to be closed from January to June of 2010 so the works can be moved and the galleries readied for reopening.

Unlike many other art museums, which start construction with little cash in hand, the Crocker already had signed pledges for about \$82 million when it broke ground in July 2007. This fiscal restraint stemmed from the fact that it is owned by the city of Sacramento, Ruzzamenti said. City officials wouldn't let the museum start construction without meeting certain fundraising thresholds.

The city contributed \$12 million, the county of Sacramento \$2.5 million, and the state \$4 million.

Two local families also stepped up with major contributions that allowed construction to begin. Marcy and Mort Friedman, owners of Arden Fair mall, initially pledged \$5 million and later doubled that amount. The Joyce and Jim Teel Foundation – funded by the Raley's grocery chain fortune – raised its contribution from \$8 million to \$13 million.

Since the groundbreaking in July 2007, the Crocker has raised between \$8 million and \$9 million, including a \$2 million grant from the Irvine Foundation and a number of anonymous gifts.

So far, all the money donated for the project has come from just 264 donors. As the museum expansion gets closer to completion, the Crocker will launch a public fundraising campaign to pay for items not included in the initial budget, such as furnishings, Ruzzamenti said.

"We'll be selling an auditorium seat, perhaps," she said.

"We want everyone in the community to be giving to this project."

Call The Bee's Mary Lynne Vellinga, (916) 321-1094.

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sactojen wrote on 12/28/2008 10:50:36 AM:

A nice bit of good news for 2009! The Crocker is a jewel for our city. Congratulations to all who are working on this.

[Recommend \(3\)](#)[Report abuse](#)**saywhatSac** wrote on 12/28/2008 10:47:42 AM:

It's great to see the Crocker's expansion continuing despite the current economic challenges and I hope more Sacramentans and businesses step up to the plate. Having a world class art museum is a key part of our region's growth. Our new mayor Kevin Johnson has made some positive comments on the importance of preserving and supporting the arts for the community; it would be great to see him put his leadership behind this project too.

[Recommend \(6\)](#)[Report abuse](#)**sacreporter** wrote on 12/28/2008 09:02:09 AM:

I live near the Crocker and I have been watching the progress on a daily basis. I look forward to seeing it in its completion. The previous two comments makes me wonder why doesn't someone investigate franksalot's claims about his father. If they are true, then the Raley/Teel money should not be accepted. No matter how much they give to the Crocker project. ~The Sacramento Reporter~

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