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N. Miami museum joins building boom with \$18M expansion

The Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami announced plans for an \$18 million expansion, allowing the institution to show more permanent works.

BY DANIEL CHANG
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Joining a museum building boom, North Miami's Museum of Contemporary Art plans an \$18 million expansion that will showcase its permanent collection and add an education wing.

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The expansion, expected to be complete in 2010, will triple the museum's exhibition space while adding a multipurpose room for performance art and film screenings, an outdoor sculpture roof overlooking a reflecting pool and plaza and other features, MOCA Director Bonnie Clearwater told The Miami Herald on Tuesday.

"It's all about being able to do more," Clearwater said.

Architect Charles Gwathmey, who designed the original building, will also oversee the museum's expansion. He said the museum will expand north onto the outdoor plaza, slightly reducing the brick-paved courtyard but giving a greater presence along North Miami's main downtown thoroughfare, Northeast 125th Street.

The expansion, Gwathmey said, will "recast the whole image of the downtown center of North Miami. . . . It's going to be an anchor."

North Miami Mayor Kevin Burns embraces that vision. The city recently adopted an ordinance allowing sidewalk cafes, and along with a recently opened Starbucks and a soon-to-open Dogma restaurant, he envisions MOCA giving residents and visitors more reasons to linger downtown.

"It'll be a draw," Burns said. Now, he said, "people . . . visit the museum, walk around to some of the art galleries that were open and then they would leave because we didn't have things to keep them here."

MUSEUM BOOM

MOCA's expansion reflects a surge in museum building in Miami-Dade County.

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The Miami Art Museum, now part of the city's downtown cultural center, is planning and designing a new \$208 million home in Bicentennial Park on Biscayne Bay. The Miami Museum of Science and Planetarium and the Historical Museum of South Florida also will share a \$275 million home in the park, next door to MAM. Both buildings are expected to be complete by 2011.

And on the Tamiami Campus of Florida International University, the \$19 million Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum is scheduled to open in 2008.

Michael Spring, director of the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs, said the museum boom represents a coming of age for South Florida's visual arts community.

"The quality of programming is growing. The quality of community interest is growing," he said. "So now we're beginning to rightsize facilities."

For MOCA, the expansion represents another step in its evolution from a museum with a minor collection and temporary exhibitions to a critically respected institution with a complement of lectures, videos, educational programs and a 600-piece permanent collection.

The museum, which has run a satellite gallery in a donated warehouse space in Miami's Wynwood neighborhood since fall 2005, also has garnered a reputation for discovering emerging Miami artists.

BUILDING BONDS

And Clearwater's aptitude for collecting and exhibiting contemporary art of the late 20th century also has helped the museum forge stronger bonds with donors, such as Miami art collectors Rosa and Carlos de la Cruz, who this month gave MOCA and the Tate Modern in London two significant works to be shared.

MOCA, which opened in 1996 and cost \$3.75 million to build, has been able to live within its means, Spring said.

Ever since the Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim Bilbao opened in 1997 in Spain, other museums have strived to emulate that museum's grandiose design and its startling success in attendance -- something called "the Bilbao Effect."

That "tends to make some institutions overextend," Gwathmey said. "Then they don't have either the endowment or the backing or the art to support their architecture, and it becomes dead."

Though the funding formula to pay for the expansion is not yet complete, Burns said it will be paid through "a public-private partnership."

The city of North Miami owns the museum building and the land, Burns said, and funds five of 10 full-time staff positions, including Clearwater's, plus utilities.

City officials budgeted \$829,599 for MOCA this year. And Clearwater estimates it costs \$3 million a year to run MOCA, including in-kind contributions and operations at the donated warehouse space in Wynwood.

Clearwater said MOCA soon will launch a capital and endowment campaign that will include selling naming rights to the new building. It shouldn't be difficult to attract donors to the only major visual arts institution in north Miami-Dade, she said.

"We already have a reputation that far exceeds the size of our building," she said. "Now we'll have a building that will make it possible for us to do even more."



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