

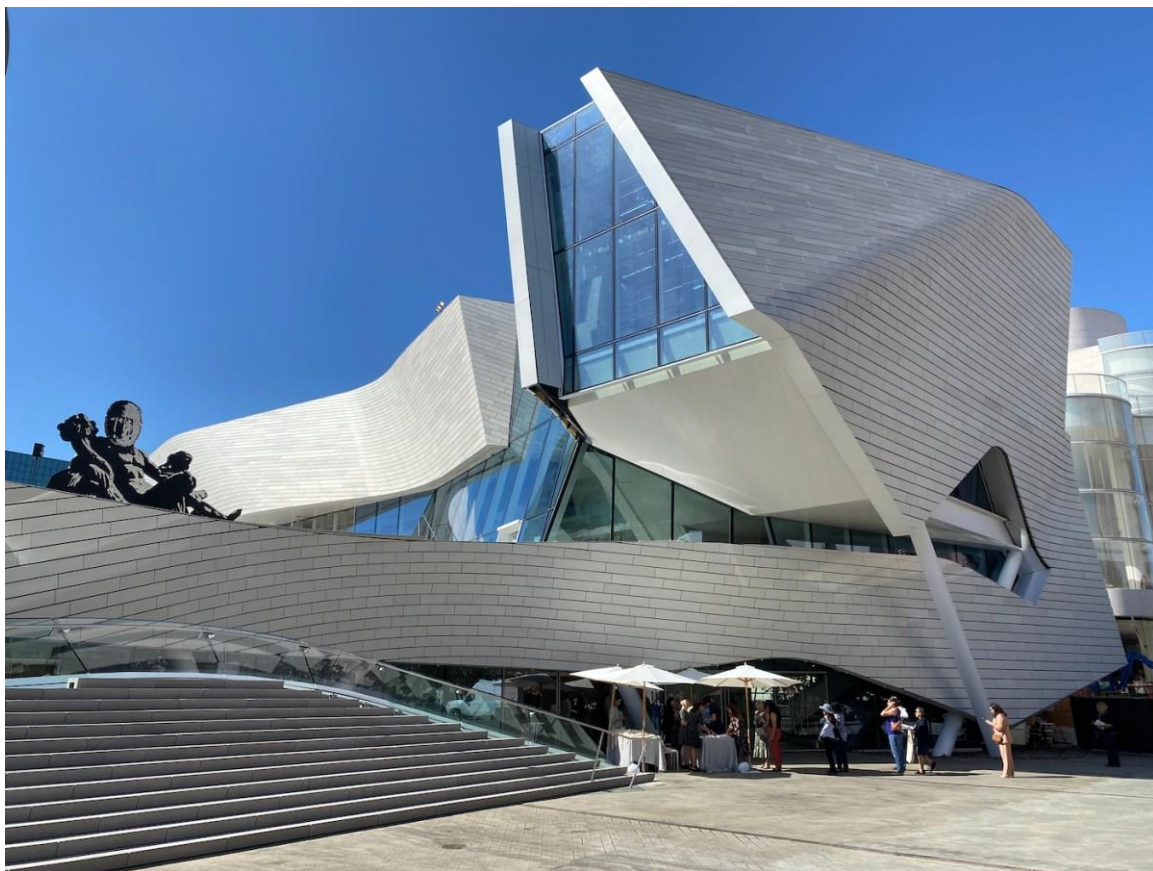
News

Orange County Museum of Art Reopens With Free Entry For the Next 10 Years

The museum opens to the public on October 8 with a 24-hour kickoff and a rebooted California Biennial.



by Matt Stromberg
October 2, 2022



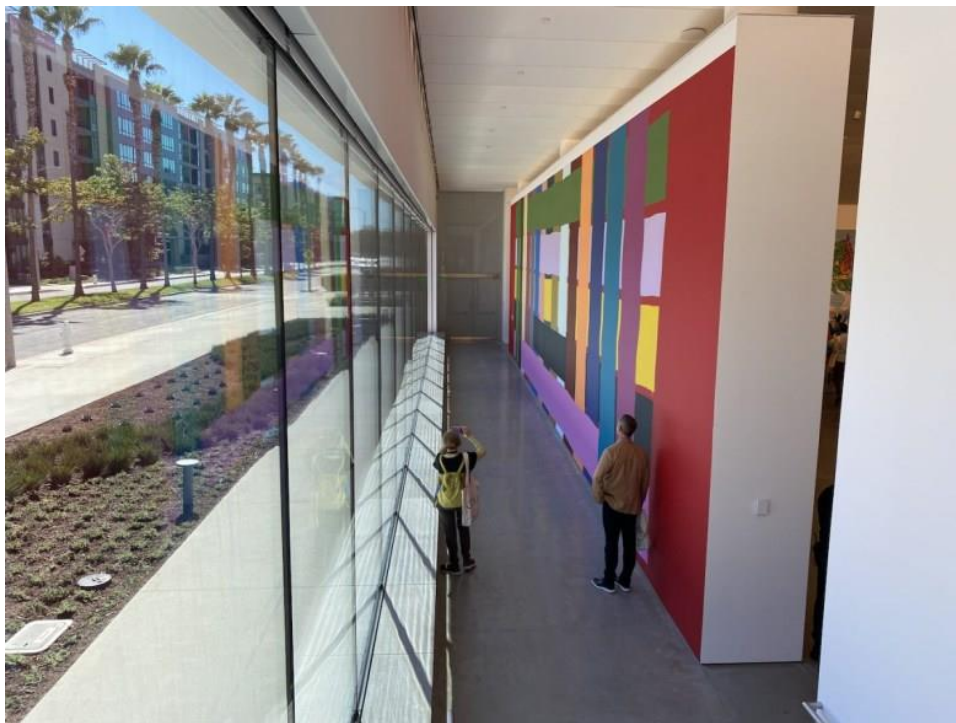
The new Orange County Museum of Art (all photos Matt Stromberg/Hyperallergic)

On October 8, six decades since its founding as the Balboa Pavilion Gallery, the Orange County Museum of Art (OCMA) will reopen with a brand-new building in the Segerstrom Center for the Arts campus in Costa Mesa — and entry will be free for the next 10 years.

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“Access to art is a basic human right,” OCMA Director Heidi Zuckerman told a crowd during a preview of the new building this week. Designed by Morphosis Studio, the \$93 million structure features 25,000 square feet of exhibition space, almost half the museum’s total area, and an inviting outdoor plaza reminiscent of Italian piazzas. The long-awaited reopening is the culmination of almost 15 years of planning dating back to 2008, when the museum announced its intention to move from its previous location in Newport Beach.



California Biennial 2022: Pacific Gold installation view, with mural by Alicia McCarthy

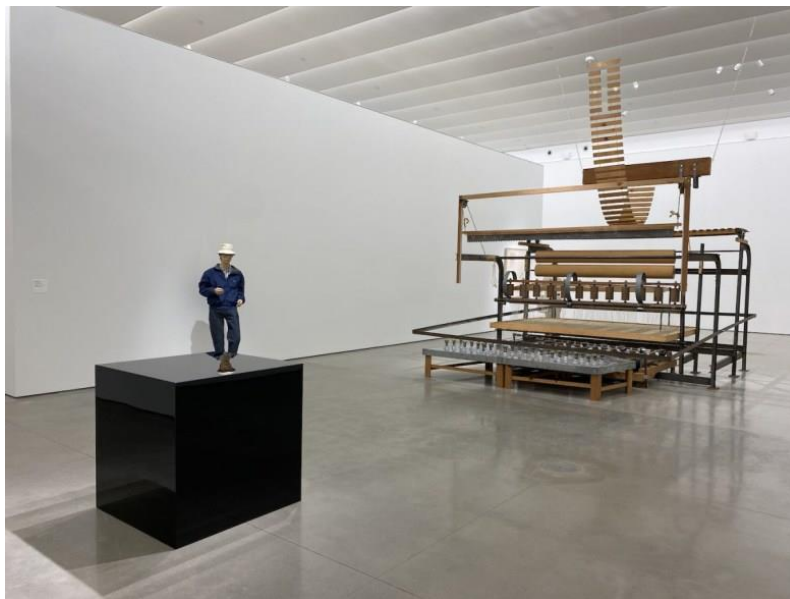
Over the past 60 years, the museum has mounted critical exhibitions of contemporary art, including early shows of the work of Vija Celmins, Chris Burden, Charles Ray, and Catherine Opie. In 1984, former curator Paul Schimmel launched the Newport Beach Biennial (now the California Biennial), which became an important showcase of emerging artists throughout the state. Against the stereotypical backdrop of Orange County as superficial, OCMA stood out as a cultural beacon.

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“Born and raised in Orange County, I didn’t have a lot of exposure to contemporary art in my youth,” John Spiak, director and chief curator of the Grand Central Art Center in nearby Santa Ana, told Hyperallergic via email. “In 1989, at the invitation of a girlfriend taking an art history class, I visited the Newport Harbor Art Museum (now OCMA). I saw an exhibition that changed my world, *American Video Landscape*, organized by the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. I credit OCMA and that specific exhibition as the reason I am a curator today.”



Thirteen Women, with work by Charles Ray and Alice Aycock

When OCMA opens in a week — with a 24-hour kick-off — visitors will encounter five exhibitions that acknowledge the museum’s history while engaging with the present. *13 Women* is a rotating permanent collection show named for the women who recognized the need for a contemporary art space in Orange County and founded the Balboa Pavilion Gallery in 1962. Each iteration will feature art by 13 women artists in the collection alongside a few of their male peers. The inaugural presentation centers Agnes Pelton, Lee Bul, Hilary Pecis, Alice Aycock, and Mary Corse, with work by John Baldessari, Chris Burden, Charles Ray, and Richard Diebenkorn.

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Fred Eversley: Reflecting Back (the World) installation view

The mezzanine gallery features a survey of radiant polished acrylic and resin sculptures by Light and Space pioneer Fred Eversley, who had a seminal exhibition at the Newport Harbor Art Museum in 1976. Playing with color, optics, and luminosity, Eversley's works must be seen in person to appreciate how they change as the viewer moves around them — a challenging feat in the museum's mezzanine, where both space and light are limited. Similarly, a crowd squeezed through a small exhibition focused on the parallels between Peter Walker's landscape designs and Minimalist artworks by Sol Lewitt and Frank Stella that is laid out on the landing between staircases.

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California Biennial 2022: Pacific Gold installation view, with work by Narsiso Martinez and Tanya Aguiñiga

The highlight of the exhibition program is the rebooted California Biennial, which Zuckerman referred to as “the most important survey of California art.” Titled *Pacific Gold* — a name borrowed from a work by Narsiso Martinez featuring a stack of produce boxes onto which he has drawn a portrait of a farm worker — the show wrestles with the heterogeneous, contradictory, and unwieldy themes of life in the Golden State, emphasizing the gulf between the promise of prosperity and equality and realities.

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California Biennial 2022: Pacific Gold installation view, with work by Claire Rojas, Simphiwe Ndzube, and Lily Stockman

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California Biennial 2022: Pacific Gold installation view, with work by Alex Anderson, Candice Lin, James Gobel, and Rashaad Newsome

Curators Elizabeth Armstrong, Gilbert Vicario, and Essence Harden completed 150 studio visits up and down the state before selecting an intergenerational group of 18 artists, focusing on work that is vibrant, energetic, and engaging, a welcome return to materiality after two-plus years of pandemic isolation. Representation, ritual, and hybridity are common themes, from Raul Guerrero’s revisionist takes on colonialism and Laurie Stealink’s kinetic “GATHERING POWER (Indian Market Booth)” to Sadie Barnette’s sparkling Afro-futurist Minimalism and Maria Maea’s combine sculptures incorporating palm fronds and urban detritus. Strands of myth are woven through, seen in Hector Dionicio Mendoza’s cardboard “Coyota,” which sports

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human arms and legs, and Simphiwe Ndzube’s “Ndlovukazi,” which draws on folklore from his native South Africa.



Sanford

Biggers, “Of Many Waters...” (2022)

Although not technically part of the biennial, a commissioned sculpture by Sanford Biggers, “Of Many Waters...,” seems of a piece, welcoming visitors from its perch in the elevated plaza. Made up of shimmering sequins reminiscent of roadside signage common in Southern California, it depicts a reclining figure holding a cornucopia, its head made up of two African masks. This sense of inclusive multiplicity is at the heart of the museum’s mission according to Zuckerman. “People want to be able to see themselves in the institution,” she said.

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