



Snø Job: 15 Highlights of the Expanded SFMOMA

By Jonathan Curiel

With almost three times as much exhibit space as before, SFMOMA is now an art cathedral where once it was merely a nice church. After three years of expansion under Norwegian architectural firm Snøhetta — which included a \$305 million injection that transformed the five-story museum into a 10-story labyrinth, making even the upper-floor stairwells worth a gawk or two— San Francisco now has a modern art museum that's as outsized as can be.

When SFMOMA reopens on Saturday, May 14, it will have 1,900 artworks on display, and 19 special exhibitions. Everything is magnified: Instead of one screening room for art films, there are now scores. Instead of one space for photographs, there's now a large wing for them — along with room on other floors. And instead of one or two floors for paintings from heavyweights, there are now multiple floors, each one with "blockbuster" artworks that smother the senses.

With so many pieces that deserve close attention — from eye-opening videos by Jim Campbell to old-school paintings by Cy Twombly — where to start? Here are 15 new destinations within SFMOMA that herald the museum's reintroduction as a fulcrum of the Bay Area art scene.

Sequence by Richard Serra. Located in a gallery by the new Howard Street entrance, Sequence is Serra at his sculptural best — a 200-ton figure-eight of curved, brown steel that art-goers can walk into and around. SFMOMA installed an amphitheater-style seating area in the same gallery so people can cozy up to Sequence the way they would a theatrical stage. Sequence is a kind of sculptural-performance piece, and part of an enlarged exhibition area for those who want a free sample of the work within. (People 18 and younger now have free entrance to the entire museum.)

Alexander Calder and the "Living Wall." On the third floor, Calder gets an indoor gallery where his springy sculptures can float in the air from the drafts that come in from the doors leading into the nearby outdoor sculpture terrace. There, two large Calder sculptures front a living wall. With more than 19,000 plants poking out, it's reportedly the largest in the United States. Calder was inspired by the kinds of birds that will visit this horizontal garden, which is the yin to the indoor gallery's yang.

Chuck Close and Andy Warhol Galleries. With much more room at its disposal, SFMOMA emphasizes its collaboration with longtime patrons Doris and Donald Fisher, whose personal collection of postwar and contemporary art is among the world's most extensive. The museum has a 100-year agreement with the Fisher Collection that enables SFMOMA to parse out whole sections of work, including that of Chuck Close and Andy Warhol. To see an arc of their output — from Warhol's Jackie Triptych to Close's Gwynne — is to get an intimate perspective on their careers that doesn't emerge from any single work.

Gerhard Richter and Anselm Kiefer. Ditto for Richter and Kiefer, the German artists who work in big frames and were two of the Fishers' most admired European artists. Kiefer's Wege: markischer Sand (Ways: March Sand) is among the wall-sized paintings that swirls and pulsates from its position on

the new sixth floor.

Jim Goldberg's "Rich and Poor" photos. As part of its new third-floor Pritzker Center for Photography — which is the largest U.S. art museum center devoted to the exhibition, interpretation, and study of the genre — SFMOMA displays Goldberg's "Rich and Poor" series, which profiles the lives of wealthy and itinerant San Franciscans in the 1970s and '80s. Each of the candid photos has the subjects' confessional writing layered on top, and each is a raw and powerful window into the lives of haves and have-nots — a social splintering that's more relevant than ever in the new San Francisco.

Nicholas Nixon's The Brown Sisters. Another iconic photography series gets unearthed for SFMOMA's reopening, and this series — Nixon's annual photographs of his wife and her sisters, ongoing for more than 40 years — is a time capsule of how loved ones age over decades. Having the whole series side by side is a chance to survey a project that's all too easy to take for granted since it's helped spawn so many similar photo projects.

Diane Arbus. SFMOMA has long championed Arbus, including with the 2003 "Revelations" exhibit that traveled around the world. Now, Arbus gets her own gallery on the fourth floor, and it features some of the last images that Arbus made before her 1971 suicide. These photos of the physically and intellectually disabled are vintage Arbus: beautiful, troubling, provocative.

Dennis Adams' Patricia Hearst: A thru Z. Adams, who filters recent history through the lens of photographic and cinematic assemblage, chooses the newspaper heiress Patty Hearst for this surreal retrospective of her time as a kidnap victim-turned-bank robber. The screenprints that Adams has assembled in this giant collage are an alphabetic road map of Hearst's transition from innocent teenager to wanted criminal.

Passage by Shirin Neshat. On view in its own sixth-floor screening room, Passage is the Iranian-born filmmaker's stunning 11-minute film of a funeral procession with three parallel views: women in shrouds digging into the earth, men in black carrying a body, and a girl playing outside. With music by Phillip Glass, the film feels like a journey into a physical and spiritual realm that has no equal.

"Typeface to Interface." Everything from 1960s rock posters to early Apple computers gets scrutinized in this graphic-design exhibit on the new sixth floor. With 250 works on display, SFMOMA finally devotes serious space to graphic design, whose history has been formulated over and over in the Bay Area.

"Film as Place." SFMOMA's exhibit of art films brings together the work of five people who explore physical space with an intense intellectual rigor. Among them: Beryl Korot's 1974 work Dachau, a four-monitor piece that visits the former Nazi concentration camp and juxtaposes tourist sights and sounds with Dachau's weight of history; and Jananne Al-Ani's Shadow Sites II, which zeroes in on Middle Eastern terrain from above, going from abstraction to eye level in a way that makes the landscape (and our emotions) come beautifully alive.

Nicole Miller's Cornel West video. In 2011, Miller made a video featuring academic Cornel West talking brilliantly about the connections among birth, politics, funk music, and other matters in a way that only Cornel West can — and from the back of a moving car. In a kind of desktop orbit, Miller's untitled work loops internet tabs related to West's oration. SFMOMA acquired this untitled piece in 2014, and its display on the seventh floor lets West's voice boom out from the maelstrom of other art on that level. (The video is part of the museum's "Campaign for Art," which brings thousands of new works to SFMOMA in the fields of media arts, photography, painting, sculpture, and architecture and design.)

Ellsworth Kelly and Agnes Martin galleries. Kelly and Martin also (thankfully) get their own galleries on the fourth floor, and that means more room to meditate on Kelly's celebrated color spectrums and on Martin's muted, abstracted tones. The galleries are adjacent, connecting the work of friends who first met in post-World War II New York but then went their separate ways.

Edward Hopper's Intermission. SFMOMA bought this painting of isolation and contemplation just before the museum's 2013 closing, but it's now part of the revamped second-floor collection that also houses "Art of Northern California: Three Views," which showcases a work that's Hopper's antithesis: Robert Arneson's California Artist, a sculpture that celebrates the joy of being alive and iconoclastic.

The building itself. Outside, SFMOMA now has a cocoon of sinewy white wrap — the 10-story extension that emanates from the 1995 building that Mario Botta made of distinctive bricks. Inside, the new design by the architectural firm Snøhetta both complements Botta's original ideas and supersedes them. Gone, for example, is the grand interior staircase that greeted visitors from the Third Street side, replaced by a less formidable stairwell that takes visitors to the expanded second floor. There, the wide expanse welcomes visitors like the interior of New York's Grand Central Station: In every direction are passageways to environs that are entirely enticing. The museum's map is recommended. So is the adequate amount of time. Where the old SFMOMA could be properly seen in a few hours, the new SFMOMA requires the better part of an entire day, and even that won't be enough — not nearly enough — for the most intrepid art-goers.