

Billy Al Bengston continued from pg. 1.

Recently, Bengston has focused on the forms of the universe. The "moonscapes," which include Bengston's print "Eighty-Eight" commissioned by the MOCA Contemporaries in conjunction with the 1988 Grand Splash, are painted in a linear fashion similar to the iris paintings. Using enormous brush strokes to streak paint across the canvas and flecks of iridescent color, Bengston creates eerily sensuous images of the universe.

In the exhibition catalogue Karen Tsujimoto suggests that the moon image conjures up "romanticism, mysticism, and spiritualism." The artist himself eschews any other intent than to experiment with artistic considerations. However, certainly in this age of the "New Age," the moonscapes evoke cosmic musings. Perhaps we should defer to the private dialogue between the viewer and these all-encompassing visual environments.

Billy Al Bengston's amazing gradation of color, the arresting beauty of his images, and his unique choice of subjects underscores Bengston's importance to contemporary art.

The Billy Al Bengston print "Eighty-Eight" is still available to the MOCA Contemporaries for \$250 and to non-members for \$295. The print is on display at the MOCA bookstore at California Plaza. Please telephone Leslie Marcus at (213) 621-2766 for more information.

-TR

PROFILES

profiles

An Interview with Frederick Nicholas

Editor's Note: As part of an ongoing effort to introduce the MOCA Contemporaries to the MOCA staff and trustees, *Brushstrokes* recently spoke with Frederick Nicholas, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of MOCA. What follows are Mr. Nicholas' comments on MOCA, the art community, collecting, and the role of the MOCA Contemporaries.

B: *MOCA has developed into a substantial institution in a short period of time. What is its next stage of development?*

FN: Each Chairman of MOCA - Eli Broad, Bill Kieschnick, and myself - has taken MOCA a step forward in its development. Eli brought MOCA from its infancy; Bill, from its adolescence; and I am bringing it to its maturity. Under my administration MOCA

has become a part of the downtown cultural establishment. The downtown business community might not like contemporary art, but they do respect MOCA

because it is an important cultural institution in the city....And they support it on that basis. So, in a sense, MOCA is now an adult.

MOCA's primary role is to ... look to the future and help educate the public....Because of MOCA's youth and its involvement in the contemporary scene, it is trying ... to bring art to the public, particularly to the young people ... so that art can become an important factor in the growth and enrichment of our



Frederick Nicholas

society.

Art is not elitism; it is part of our being, it belongs to every man. That is what MOCA has to get out
continued on pg. 6.

to the people, and MOCA must be on the cutting edge of what is happening in our society....MOCA must be courageous enough and have sufficient funds available so that it can make people think and develop programs, not only exhibitions but also educational programs, to get art to the people.

B: *There is a growing concern that the whole art world is becoming too commercialized, that art is becoming a commodity. What are the implications for the public and the artist?*

FN: I am concerned about the future, but not the future of art, because art will always be with us. I am concerned about the type of the people involved with art. More and more, collecting art is becoming a status symbol....Art is being viewed as an investment. When you start doing that, you lose the appreciation of beauty and expression. Art is then appreciated for its value rather than its content. Artists have become the superstars of our society, the new millionaires.

To own a painting which was purchased for \$2,000 and is now worth \$5,000,000 is total lunacy, and it reflects poorly on our society. What do you do about it? If you are running a museum, you have to be very concerned about it. You have to be worried that... the aesthetic values will start to become eroded. You look to the name of the artist and to the price of the work rather than to the quality of the work, and that bothers me too. Fortunately, we have at MOCA people who are deeply committed to the collection and showing of art. Richard Koshalek and our curators have an innocence

that is refreshing and honorable, and we must preserve that innocence. As a result of the chaos in the art market, it is going to be important to MOCA to conserve its energies, and concentrate on the depth and beauty of its collection, and choose carefully the kind of shows it will mount. I am optimistic about MOCA, but I am pessimistic about our society.

B: *With respect to the gallery scene there isn't an awful lot going on downtown. Do you think that will change?*

FN: Downtown Los Angeles has been developing over the past 10 years and is now booming. It will be a great city by the year 2000, but in the meantime galleries cannot survive until more people live in the downtown area. To have a downtown artist community is going to be difficult unless there is some subsidized housing for the artists.

B: *When did you begin collecting art?*

FN: I started collecting art when I was going to law school at the University of Chicago. I became interested in art by going to the Art Institute which I visited almost weekly. I had no background or experience at all in art....My first purchase was a Pre-Columbian piece which I bought when I was a student....When I came back to Los Angeles, I continued collecting. For years I collected primitive art and then gradually went into contemporary art. Now I have a wide variety of cultures, an eclectic collection, if you will.

B: *Do you have any advice for young people who don't have a lot of money but would like to further their interest in art and collecting?*

FN: I know a city official who collects young artists at low prices. Over the years he has been able to put together a fascinating collection of contemporary art because he has a great eye; he goes to galleries, meets artists, and learns about art. So it does not always take money; it takes a vital interest.

B: *Many young people have joined the MOCA Contemporaries as a means of participating in the cultural growth of the city. Do you see them as providing the next generation of leaders for our cultural institutions?*

FN: I think they will be....I want to say that the MOCA Contemporaries is one of MOCA's most important support groups. Because of the energy and the strength of its constituency, we are looking to the MOCA Contemporaries for our future leaders. MOCA is a young institution and its success lies with its young supporters. We expect the members of the MOCA Contemporaries to lead the Museum into the 21st Century.

B: *Do you have any parting comments for our readers?*

FN: I think that by the year 2000 Los Angeles will be the most important city in the world. It is going to have a different demographic look than it does now. We will have the blend of the Asian, Latino, and European cultures to enrich and regenerate our community. I see art, music, and architecture growing a thousandfold in the next 11 years. I think to be young and active in the City of Los Angeles during that period will be fantastic. So I envy all of you.

-PH