

Postscripts: L.A. MOCA Trustees Speak Out

brian boucher 08/09/12

An ongoing crisis at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art has seen, this summer, the resignation of long-serving chief curator Paul Schimmel and the departure from the board of all four artist-trustees (John Baldessari, Barbara Kruger, Catherine Opie and Ed Ruscha), following the resignation of three other board members (Kathi Cypres, Jane Nathanson and Steven F. Roth).

The recent exodus marks a new phase in a series of challenges since 2008, when the institution's flagging bank balance required a \$30 million bailout by billionaire patron Eli Broad. New York dealer Jeffrey Deitch was appointed director in 2010 but has faced a wave of bad publicity that has criticized his approach as overly populist, focused on chasing audience at the cost of intellectual rigor.



In an [interview](#) with the *Los Angeles Times* published this weekend, Deitch defended the seriousness of his shows and the museum's new financial austerity, and touted the museum's record attendance figures.

On Wednesday, the museum announced that it would hire a chief curator to replace Schimmel, reversing its earlier announcement, according to a report on [Bloomberg](#).

A.i.A. spoke by phone in July with three non-artist life trustees, all signatories of an open [letter](#) criticizing the "celebrity-driven program that MOCA Director Jeffrey Deitch promotes."

In the third and final interview, we spoke to Beverly Hills-based Frederick M. Nicholas, former MOCA board chairman.

BRIAN BOUCHER Tell us about your involvement with the board.

FREDERICK NICHOLAS I was not on the first board, but I joined shortly after that. I was chairman of the board for five years, which was the longest term of any chairman. I was the third chairman. I also was in charge of constructing both the

Temporary Contemporary and the museum building itself. So I had a lot to do with that museum over the last 30 years.

I know the museum has changed with the times but I personally am very displeased with what's happening.

BOUCHER What do you say to the artists' resignation from the board? What does that mean for the museum?

NICHOLAS I think the departure of the artists from the board is a serious blow to the museum. The museum was started for and by artists and artists have always played a very important role in the function of the museum. Those four are all superstars in their own way. Losing them is a serious blow. I was very, very upset. I was not aware of the artist resignations in the works before they happened.

BOUCHER What are the next steps to ensure the museum's survival?

NICHOLAS What happens now? Everybody is sitting down and I hope we're going to start talking about what's going to happen because those of us who have been around for a long time are very eager to see that it survives. A lot of people are upset and we need to calm them down.

We need MOCA to go back to the kind of organization it was when it started. We want it to be an organization of artists and people who love art and not necessarily people who are trying to get ahead by being members.

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