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# The Broad review – first exhibitions have plenty of big hitters but miss the mark

LA's new museum offers visitors a free glimpse at art heavyweights such as Jeff Koons and Yayoi Kusama, but its fuzzy concepts fail to connect

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The Broad Museum in downtown Los Angeles exudes the art world equivalent of that new car smell. The building is stylish, sophisticated, and has the comforting aura of limitless financial resources. On a first walk around the place, designed by the minds behind the High Line, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, it's easy to feel intoxicated by the natural light that filters through a honeycomb exterior cladding on to notable works by major modern and contemporary artists: heavy hitters such as Jeff Koons, Cindy Sherman, Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg, collected by the city's philanthropists Eli and Edythe Broad.

This museum - which opens this weekend - is touted as a gift to Los Angeles culture. It is a privately funded museum, enhancing the neighborhood it shares with the landmark Disney Concert Hall and the Museum of Contemporary Art. A number of the artists are Los Angeles-based, and have been supported by the collectors. The Broad boasts a free admission policy in a neighborhood that has the potential to draw in a wide variety of Angelenos. It's more accessible than hilltop Getty, which is also free, albeit contemporary art is a harder sell for many.

The museum's opening exhibitions include a generous helping - 200 works out of two thousand - of the Broad holdings. The works are primarily painting, sculpture and photography, with a sprinkling of video and installation. The building's design, allows it to serve the purpose of housing the collection - the core of the building is a state of the art storage facility - and to show it publicly. Unlike academically inclined museums, the messaging of a private museum is to communicate the collector's vision, their decision-making processes, and economic status - this building cost $140m, the endowment reportedly surpasses $200m.

From this perspective, it's a solid endeavor. But as installed by director/curator Joanne Heyler, the art narrative is fuzzy at the gate. In the street level entry, an architecturally significant curvaceous gray grotto, two unassuming artworks greet visitors: an untitled melting streetlight sculpture by Urs Fischer from 2012 and an off-kilter stack of giant stack of dishes, No Title, 1993, by Robert Therrien. As the first use of art to create dialogue, they communicate a sense of playful instability - both are fine works, but neither quite strong

enough to stand up to the bold architecture, or to communicate to what might be going on upstairs.

Which is interesting because The Broad is clear in its mission to show off major works, and to identify the clean, pop-inflected aesthetic they favor. From the lobby, a long narrow escalator glides through the concrete mass, depositing visitors in the airy third floor galleries, in front of a prostrate bouquet of Jeff Koons Tulips (1995-2004). On the three walls behind the shiny sculpture there's a multi-paneled 1990 Christopher Wool painting, which in his giant stencil lettering spells out Run Dog Run. The juxtaposition is elegant and vaguely ominous, though the linkage is opaque, other than they are successful white male New York artists who emerged in the 1980s.

On the opposite side of this vast room there are large-scale works by Mark Bradford, Julie Mehretu, El Antsui, and a smaller Marlene Dumas painting. These artists are women and people of color, whose works address socio-political themes. The dynamic is curious, the curatorial implications of this face off are not entirely clear. Is this meant as an expression of diversity, or a kind of face off between art world demographics? (If you are inclined to go there, the ratio of male to female artists is fairly standard for the industry.)

Thankfully, there are a good number of solo showcases that communicate specific artists' role in contemporary art. There is a stellar Andy Warhol room, which grounds the Broad collection in Pop. it includes iconic works from the 1960s, and notably a 1962 Dance Diagram that is displayed on the floor, facing up, attesting to Warhol's original intent. There's a stunning room of four Ellsworth Kelly's - in red, green, and blue, and a room full of Cy Twombly works, anchored by two paintings in rich shades of green.

Koons is another clear favorite here, though he comes across awkwardly in a room mostly devoted to him (he has single works in other areas). Amid stainless-steel sculptures, a balloon dog, an enshrined vacuum cleaner, Michael Jackson and Bubbles, there is a large horizontal 1995 painting by Lari Pittman that in dense color and pattern expresses longing and despair. Both artists explore the meanings of mid-century modern American tastes and bright color, but Pittman's in a more layered manner that speaks to outsider identity. The juxtaposition of these two artists drains power from them both.

Nearby, early photocopy posters by Jenny Holzer are displayed on a wall parallel to one of the street-facing windows, a narrow passageway that makes the work's inclusion feel like an afterthought. Similarly, wonderfully strange sculptures by Richard Artschwager are tucked into an easy to miss corner, behind a stellar room of work by Roy Lichtenstein. It's a given that working with a new space requires some tinkering, so hopefully subsequent hangings may utilize these spaces more effectively.

The first floor galleries, which will rotate with more frequency, currently showcase international acquisitions of more recent vintage - according to Heyler, the collection adds one new piece weekly. While this sense of the new is appealing, the spaces feel like samplings from commercial galleries rather than museum grade presentations. Still, there's a particularly strong showing by Takashi Murakami, who has a sizable room to contain an epic 82-ft long painting.

Media is also expanded on this floor. There's an installation by Polish-born Goshka Macuga, which features live actors, while the multi-channel, musical video installation by Icelandic performance artist Ragnar Kjartansson is fit into an awkward room, with significant sound bleed into a strong room of paintings by Luc Tuymans, Rudolf Stingel, and Jenny Saville, a group room that congeals better than most. In general, these galleries feel less assured, less identifiable with the collectors.

Tucked in a nook on the way in is Yayoi Kusama's Infinity Mirrored Room - The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away, 2013, a Los Angeles debut. It's a shimmering, liquid experience, but it doesn't much improve on earlier iterations of the same idea, though a tablet enhanced system makes the wait more bearable: you get a text when it's your turn.

For LA art viewers, much of the collection will feel familiar, particularly from handsome presentations at the Broad wing at Lacma. A more permanent home makes sense, but the Broad's role in concert with other local museums has yet to be defined. At its opening, public programming and any upcoming exhibitions have yet to be announced - as is the case with private museums, there can be a greater sense of nimbleness, and also the freedom to create their own vision outside of scholarship.

Yet this position may also be responsible for the awkwardness to the conversations between works, while the access to the art is laudable, the display could be far more dynamic. A walk across the street to Moca hammers in the point. While the older galleries there feel a little physically ragged, their selection of permanent collection works communicate visual and conceptual connections that resonate far more than any of the rooms at the Broad. To its credit, the museum seems to embrace the awkward aspects of being the alluring new kind on the block, and has the resources and motivation to plan for life after the road test.

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