

Ground-

As research for the upcoming *Place is the Space* exhibition catalog, former chief curator Dominic Molon spoke with several CAM associates who were instrumental in the creation of the building at 3750 Washington and the forging of the identity of the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.

breakers

Following are excerpts from Molon's interviews with Emily Rauh Pulitzer, CAM board member and member of architect selection committee; Donna Moog, former board chair and member of architect selection committee; and Betsy Millard, former director, about the construction of the building, selecting architect Brad Cloepfil, and the legacy they hoped to inspire with CAM.

Dominic Molon **What were the key elements that shaped the decision to pursue a new building for what was then the Forum for Contemporary Art?**

Emily Rauh Pulitzer We started out as the First Street Forum on Laclede's Landing. The motivation behind the creation of the [original] institution was that there was no



Emily Rauh Pulitzer

cultural center downtown. We did a broad spectrum of exhibitions, which continued when we moved to 555 Washington. When Andrea Kirsh came as the director, she realized that nobody knew what we were because we were something different each time we did a show. She looked at the St. Louis community and said, "There's really no one focusing on contemporary art." The Saint Louis Art Museum showed contemporary art, but we really needed a larger presence with more diverse views. So we changed our mission. The next director, Betsy Millard, was very effective in carrying out the new mission of focusing on contemporary art. This was all a process of maturing.

Betsy Millard [Through our various moves and locations,] we realized that you're never really home until you own your own space. Every time we moved, the community said, "You're still in business? And where are you located?" It's kind of a mental thing—having a place that will forever be the Contemporary Art Museum's—or the Forum for Contemporary Art. We wanted to create the building in such a way that aligned with the mission of the museum. And the mission of the



Betsy Millard

museum was not to simply go out and hire somebody and build a building, in that sort-of traditional "Hey, let's just go pick an architect and do it" way. So we decided to make it a very public process. And that's how we got to the idea of the short list and asking each of them to give a public lecture. Nothing like that had happened before in St. Louis. It was pretty exciting.

Donna Moog First we had the concept of open space. And flexibility. A desire to have a more concrete presence in the community—the change of name and of venue were ways to achieve this. A permanent presence required a name that was more in line with a museum. We wanted a building that was worthy of being a partner to the Pulitzer. That reinforced the desire to have something that was special, that set us apart, and that was consistent with our mission—which was showing the best contemporary art in the world.

Was the intent always to retain CAM's status as a non-collecting institution?

BM It was very pragmatic decision. First the board talked about what

already existed in St. Louis. At that time, Laumeier, the Washington University Art Gallery (now the Mildred Lane Kemper), the Saint Louis Art Museum were collecting contemporary art. We realized pretty quickly that it didn't make sense to collect. Collecting also changes your ability to build; you have to give over all that square footage. There's also something about collecting and [the art] staying contemporary. At a certain point, it no longer is.

What tipped the commission in Brad Cloepfil's favor? I'm curious about the selection process for how the architect was chosen.

ERP The feeling was that we needed to have a really creative architect—and that we needed to be as creative in the selection of an architect as we were in our art programming. After we'd narrowed the selection down to six architects, each one gave a lecture at Washington University, which meant that the community got involved and gave the architects a chance to look at the site. Then the next step was to go and look at projects by each of these architects.

DM Toward the end there were only a few candidates we were really considering. There were a couple who just didn't fit well with our concept. There were a couple who we felt lacked interest in the project. And then there were two—of which Brad was one. A number of us had gone to Portland to see his work, and we were very impressed. He didn't have a huge number of projects but the main project he had, which was the white Infinity building, was extremely appealing, and we were impressed with the quality of his work. He was a talented architect who didn't really have a lot of national exposure. One of the sketches that he did was very simple,

very abstract, but very exciting. You could tell he had really put a lot of thought into his presentation and that he was excited—he was just as excited about our project as we were about his work. It was a clear decision at that point.

BM Brad came in with an incredible amount of energy and incredible clarity about his ideas. He understood the Ando building, he respected the Ando building, but he also didn't have any qualms about challenging it. And he kept the mission of the institution in mind. We were trying very much to find important emerging artists but also clarify what had been going on in the art world over the last twenty-five years. We felt Brad was part of the next generation of architects, which fit the profile of the kind of artists that we'd like to show.

Is there anything in terms of understanding the development of the building that I shouldn't leave out?

BM Most architects would say, "Okay, here's the Ando, here's the street, here's that curve." Brad did this thing where he drew a line across the page that went up and down and curved out and curved up and then curved down again. We were looking at it, saying, "What is this?" And he said, "This is your site. The Mississippi River is over here ..." He started thinking about the site at the Mississippi River and the way the land rises out of the river and dips down again around Washington. He made us think about where we fit within the *whole* landscape. And then, at the meeting with Tadao Ando and Richard Serra, all of a sudden it was: "Well, we're going to have this curved wall, and the Serra is going to be the joint that holds these two things together—these two parts of the same limb." And it just took off from there.

Were there any things that were planned for the building that wound up not making the cut?

BM When we were designing it, there were certain things that we knew were absolute must-haves—superstructure of the upper register of concrete and that sort of thing. There were great ideas for sliding walls between the performance space and the gallery space, but they were very expensive. We didn't want a lot of high-end materiality. We didn't want fancy floors because the floors were going to get drilled into. We knew there were going to be cracks. Our construction manager said, "It's gonna crack—you've got to pour seams." But putting in those seams would kill the whole idea. Now that crack is actually an iconic part of the building.

How do you feel the building was received, not only in St. Louis at the time but nationally, internationally? Is there an element of the building that you find to be most successful?



Donna Moog

DM It has so much integrity and consistency. From the inside, from the outside—the vision of space is very thoughtful. One of the things that I really like about it is that big curve at the corner. It's elegant, it's different, and it makes a statement. What's inside is a little unexpected.



Cole Lu: SMELLS LIKE CONTENT

Presented by Teen Museum Studies

Taiwanese-born, St. Louis-based artist Cole Lu explores the role of technology in communication. *SMELLS LIKE CONTENT* is a new, site-specific multi-media installation that features painting, video, and sculpture.

Acting as a bridge between the objects in the exhibition, Lu's video combines sourced internet material with original footage shot by the artist. In it, a performer, whose hands are covered in paint, uses the movements of American Sign Language to play the theremin, an electronic musical instrument activated by motion.

With the proliferation of texting, web chats, and emojis, Lu's work offers a poignant and compelling view of how meaning is constructed and deconstructed in today's digital climate.

Cole Lu: SMELLS LIKE CONTENT is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by the Teen Museum Studies class of 2015 and Tuan Nguyen, Director of Education. This innovative career-based program gives teens unique access to the inner workings of the Museum. Participants work with staff members in all departments—from curating to public relations to accounting—to organize an exhibition from start to finish.

Teen Museum Studies is generously supported by The Middle Fund; Elissa and Paul Cahn; and Dorte and Jim Probst.



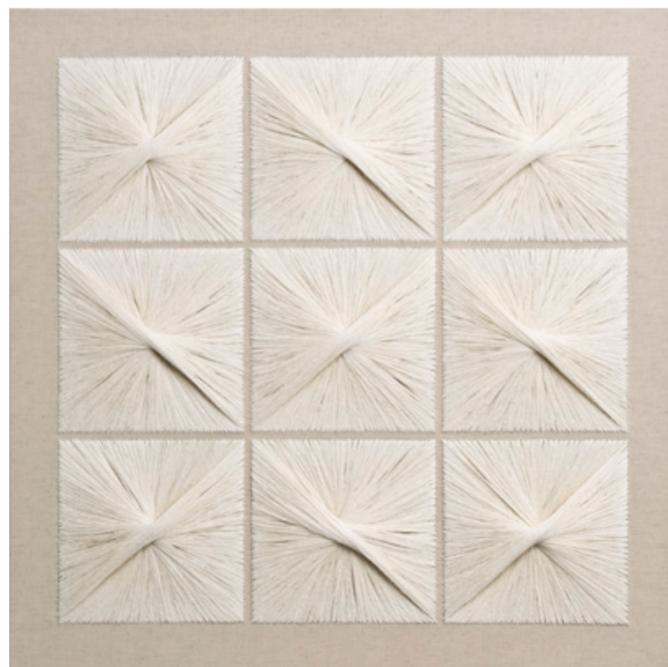
Cole Lu, *SMELLS LIKE CONTENT*, 2015. Single channel video, color, sound.
Courtesy the artist.



Video Interview

Watch a video of the artist as she answers questions from the Teen Museum Studies students.

View by visiting <https://goo.gl/kCRTr8>



Sheila Hicks, *Masonry Panel*, 1981. Linen and cotton, 35 1/2 x 35 1/2 x 1/4 inches. Courtesy the artist and Sikkema, Jenkins & Co., New York.

Sheila Hicks



Sheila Hicks, *Oracle from Constantinople*, 2008–2010. Linen, 96 x 68 x 10 inches. Collection of Fotene Demoulas and Tom Coté, Boston.

September 11–December 27, 2015

Friday, September 11

Patron Preview 10:00–11:00 am

Member Preview 6:00–7:00 pm

Public Reception 7:00–9:00 pm

Paris-based American artist Sheila Hicks has been creating hand-woven, abstract fiber-based installations and sculptures for nearly sixty years. From large-scale commissions to gallery exhibitions, her multifaceted practice spans the worlds of commercial production and fine art, while also drawing on indigenous traditions from around the world. CAM's exhibition features works from the 1960s to the present, bringing together major works from private and public collections, including pieces from the artist's ongoing series of small-scale portable weavings, or *minimes*. Experimenting with classical textile techniques like dyeing, spinning, and weaving, Hicks has developed her own idiosyncratic style. She incorporates natural and synthetic fibers—and even everyday office supplies—into her surprising, exuberant forms. The intense tactility of her objects, and the riotous color of her installations expand fiber's kinship to both painting and sculpture. The works in the exhibition map a cross-section of Hicks's practice over the last fifty years and exemplify her masterful and ongoing articulation of color, materiality, space, and scale.

This exhibition is generously supported by Nancy and Kenneth Kranzberg. Special thanks to Galerie Frank Elbaz, Paris; Alison Jacques Gallery, London; and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York.

Sheila Hicks is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Kelly Shindler, Associate Curator.



Sheila Hicks, *Ringlets*, 1993. Rubber bands and paper clips. Irregular, 12 1/2 x 5 inches. Collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum.

Wyatt Kahn

Object Paintings

September 11–December 27, 2015

Friday, September 11

Patron Preview 10:00–11:00 am

Member Preview 6:00–7:00 pm

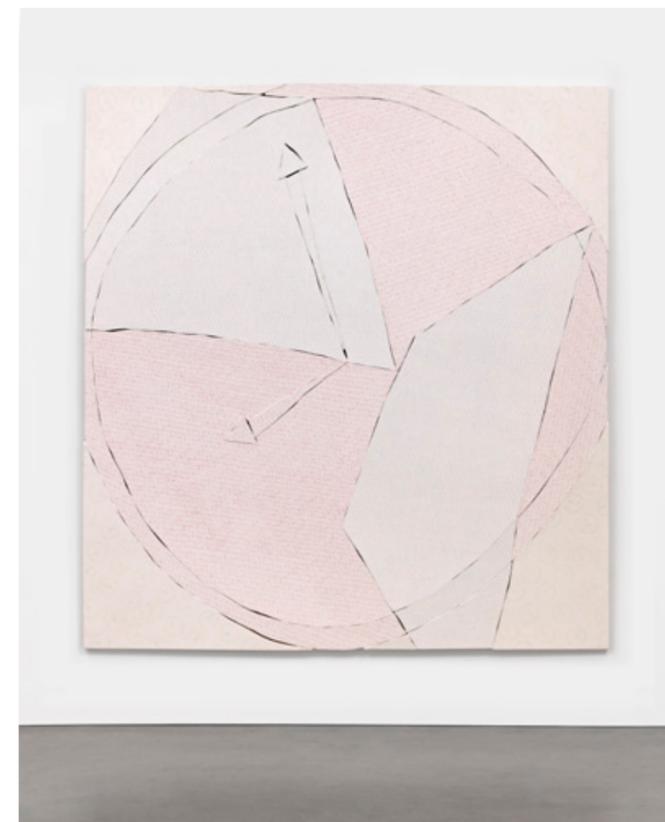
Public Reception 7:00–9:00 pm

Thursday, December 10 and Friday, December 11

Performance 7:30 pm



Wyatt Kahn, *Bad Girl*, 2015. Canvas on canvas on panel, 96 x 68 1/2 inches. Courtesy the artist; Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich; Xavier Hufkens, Brussels; T293, Rome. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.



Wyatt Kahn, *Father Time*, 2014. Linen on acrylic on canvas on panel, 74 x 79 1/2 inches. Collection of Marguerite Steed Hoffman, Dallas. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.

Object Paintings is the first solo museum exhibition of work by New York-based artist Wyatt Kahn. With references ranging from Soviet architecture to Cubism, Kahn's work explores how paintings can be made entirely without paint. The exhibition features the artist's signature constructed works, which he creates by stretching unprimed canvas over irregular, hand-cut wood panels and then piecing them together, leaving large gaps in the picture plane. Smudges, stains, and erasure marks on the raw surface of the canvas allow the material to retain a flawed authenticity and allude to a human body. Recently, Kahn's compositions have moved away from the abstract to form recognizable objects—a clock, a drum, or a guitar. This exhibition also premieres a new series of relief paintings that are composed of multiple panels of varying depths where a foot, an ear, a pair of eyeglasses oscillate between background and foreground, creating complex spatial relationships. The works in *Object Paintings* investigate how we read signs and symbols, and communicate narrative and content.

This exhibition is generously supported by Sima Familant. Special thanks to Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich; Adrian Rosenfeld; Xavier Hufkens, Brussels; and T293, Rome.

Wyatt Kahn: *Object Paintings* is organized by the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Jeffrey Uslip, Chief Curator.

Performance: The Studio

Thu, Dec 10, and Fri, Dec 11, 7:30 pm

\$25. \$20 members. Purchase tickets at camstl.org/performance.

Commissioned by Performa, *The Studio* is the first museum presentation of Wyatt Kahn's theatrical puppet show, which features his paintings as puppets and the artist himself as the puppet master.

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