

PMCA:

An Appreciation of California Arts and Culture



Pasadena Museum of California Art

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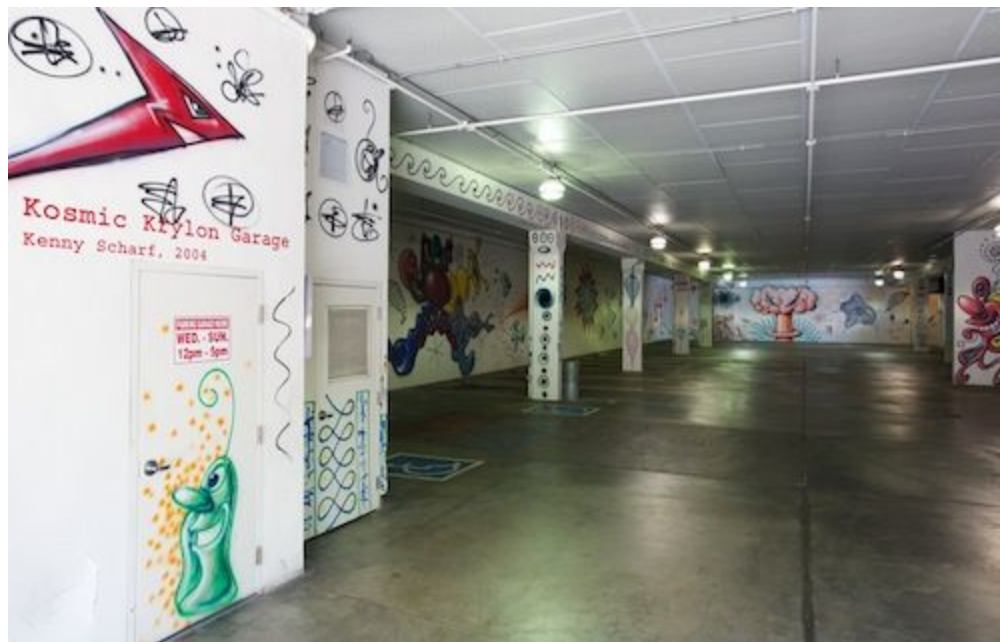


Figure 1. Kenny Scharf's *Kosmic Krylon Garage* installation at PMCA

Introduction

The Pasadena Museum of California Art was founded in 2002 to recognize the unique artistic and cultural history of California. Its mission “is to present the breadth of California art and design through exhibitions that explore the cultural dynamics and influences that are unique to California” (Pasadena Museum of California Art, n.d., para 1).

PMCA is located in the beautiful city of Pasadena in California, a place known for the Rose Parade, its craftsman style bungalows, Art Center College of Design, and its rich arts and cultural offerings. The museum is located on a one way street near Old Pasadena and the Playhouse District. It is easily accessible, with free parking in what is known as the Kosmic Krylon Garage, a permanent installation created by Los Angeles born Kenny Scharf in 2004 (see Figure 1.) It is also just a few short blocks from the Metro Gold Line stop at Memorial Park Station, and if you take this route, PMCA will discount \$2 from your admission ticket.

PMCA is extremely affordable. Adults are only \$7, children under 12 are free, and students and seniors are \$5. They also have several unique offerings in their 123

program: 1st Fridays of the month are free, 2nd Saturday's offer a spotlight talk at 2:00 p.m., and on the 3rd Thursday of each month the museum is open and free from 5:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.



Figure 2. Fourth Grade PUSD student sketching from the current exhibit

PMCA is open Wednesday through Sunday 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., with mornings reserved for special tours, such as the fourth graders of Pasadena's Unified School District who visit the museum through the districts My Masterpieces program. Students, usually one class at a time, get to explore the exhibition space with a docent-lead talk, learn to respond to artwork, analyze paintings, and sketch from any of the installed works (see Figure 2.) The students are always excited to see Kenny Scharf's installation in the garage and often recognize many of the pop cultural references. It's also always interesting to see the different works of art the students gravitate towards within the museum.

History

In 2002 Robert Oltman, a storage company founder, and his wife Arlene, opened the doors of the museum for all to enjoy. As prolific collectors of California art, they realized that there was no museum dedicated to this specific range of eclectic and prevalent work. The Oltmans, who owned the building the museum is housed in, almost impulsively decided to create the PMCA, after mulling over various business ideas. They hired MDA Johnson Favaro Architecture and Urban Design to create the three story building with a gallery space, community room (see Figure 3.), and bookstore. The space is not big, but it's a great place to spend a couple of hours enjoying California arts and culture.



Figure 3. The PMCA community room where classes and workshops take place

The Oltmans, now in their late 70's, created a third floor living space for themselves at the museum as a way to be closer to downtown Pasadena, and they still live there today. Although they exclusively financed the museum's operations for the first five years, they have largely detached themselves from the museum, placed the building in a trust for the museum, and are now focusing on other cultural adventures in the area. Today the museum is a 501c3 with a board of directors and a staff of about ten.

The museum has been largely successful and even weathered the recession in the late 2000's, by relying on contributions, memberships, admission and bookstore sales, as well as supplemental grant money for their annual \$1.5 million budget. Their success comes from their stellar programming which is based on a broad slice of California art and artists: traditional, contemporary and plein air, as well as avant garde. The arts, architecture, and design are all included in their offerings.

Programming

The only real requirement for this cultural museum is that the arts all have roots emanating from California. Their current exhibition *In the Land of Sunshine: Imaging the California Coast Culture* is an assembled array of works centered around the lifestyle of the California coastline, from the mid-1800's to the present day. Artists from Seong Yanchareon to Dennis Hare, and Duncan Gleason are all represented.

Past exhibits have included works by Alex Kritselis, Claire Falkenstein, Brett Weston, Robert Cremean, Lars Jan, Wayne Thiebaud, and one of my favorite artists, art educator and activist Corita Kent. They've had more than 100 exhibits in their 15 years, and over the past five years, many of their exhibits have traveled to other museums with the hope of raising their profile and presence.

Besides PMCA's exhibition space and school tours, they also utilize their community room for weekly workshops and discussions, all open to the public. They are currently offering a textural watercolor class for kids, inspired by their current exhibition on coastal art, and a popular wood block printing class for adults. They've also held, among many other offerings, painting and ceramics workshops, collage classes, embroidery classes, curator discussions, and artist talks. There is something new and interesting happening every week for kids, adults, and families alike.

PMCA also has a great online presence, with an easy to navigate website, Facebook and Instagram accounts, as well as contributions on [Google's Street Art Project](#). Moreover, you can find information on all of their past exhibits on the museum's site, and without a permanent collection, it's nice to find documentation of what was shown.

Conclusion

PMCA is a great little gem of a museum dedicated to advancing knowledge, preserving history, and celebrating California arts and culture. With its rugged coastline, its mountains, and its deserts, this state has a unique and beautiful landscape, captured by many painters for over a hundred years. It also has a varied and interesting artistic and cultural history, with its beach and surf culture, its film industry, and its diverse population. As a native Californian I take pride in our eclectic state, and as an artist I'm glad to see a space interested in promoting its artistic and aesthetic traditions, customs, and heritage. In the words of, Emily, an enthusiastic museumgoer, viewing PMCA's current exhibit, "I learned so much about California, the place where I live, and its artwork!" (personal communication, February 1, 2017).

References

Pasadena Museum of California Art (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://pmcaonline.org/about-us/>

Scharf, K. (2004). *Kosmic Krylon Garage* [Installation]. Pasadena, CA: Pasadena Museum of California Art.