

Good Design Does Denver

AN ART & ARCHITECTURE TOUR THROUGH THE MILE-HIGH CITY

Denver Art Museum

A LETTER FROM MODERN ART TO THE PEOPLE OF THE PHOENIX ART SCENE.

Dear Phoenix,
Go to Denver.
Thanks,
Modern Art

EVERY TIME I RETURN FROM A TRIP TO Europe, I get depressed. Not because I miss walking or cool bars or better clothes or meeting people from other parts of the world, but because the moment I see the woman in the bright red straw cowboy hat, bedazzled jeans, and Bebe tee back at Sky Harbor, I realize I probably should have stayed over there. In much the same way on a recent trip to Denver, I witnessed an art scene that seemed cohesive, part of the daily fabric, and operating to its fullest potential. And it kind of made me want to stay.

To understand the art scene in Denver, as an outsider, is to *not* understand it. There's the ArtDistrict Santa Fe, which is comparable to our 3rd Street and Roosevelt area but centered on a six-

block-long stretch of road (Santa Fe Street) – it's as if our art scene were headquartered in that great stock of buildings just east of 16th Street on McDowell. There's RiNo (River North), a scattered but divinely inspiring section of town where artists have rehabbed old warehouses and industrial spaces – think Bentley Projects, times 20. There's the Daniel Libeskind-designed Denver Art Museum—it's the anchor, and kind of comparable to our Phoenix Art Museum but more dashing. Then there's the most recent influx of energy, the Museum of Contemporary Art—think SMOCA but less curvy, bigger, and not designed by Will Bruder.

Denver's MCA was designed by David Adjaye, whose London-based firm, Adjaye Associates, is hoping for Gold LEED-certification. Over 50 percent of the building's exterior is a double-skin façade, composed of a tinted glass curtain wall and an interior of Monopan®, a translucent, honeycomb-like composite recycled building material. Besides creating a cavity plenum that reduces

cooling loads and serves as a release chamber for exhaust air from the interior, the double skin allows the building to glow from within at night, illuminating the corner of 15th and Delgany like a beacon of modern design. There technically isn't a front door to the simple rectangular structure; it's entered through a kind of outdoor hallway, where visitors check in at an open-air front desk. Inside, slivers of natural light pour across expansive white walls and pull visitors in various directions, eventually culminating at the rooftop organic café where one of the best views of downtown Denver can be had.

The undisputed grande dame of the art scene in Denver, though, is the Denver Art Museum, with its photogenic new Hamilton wing unveiled in late 2006 and designed by Daniel Libeskind. You've likely seen this building published in a thousand places, but the structure (and the collection within) is truly deserving of its nearly two years in the spotlight. From the exterior, the building is an abstraction of Rocky Mountain peaks and geometric rock crystals. Inside, an exciting type of

vertigo awaits. There's no doubt the curators have been challenged to find a simple straight wall on which to hang work, but meandering through the museum feels like exploring a snow-capped cavern — there's something different around every corner. Besides being *in* architecture that reflects the wild exterior, you'll enjoy finding spots where angled walls work for art and spots where they, well, don't.

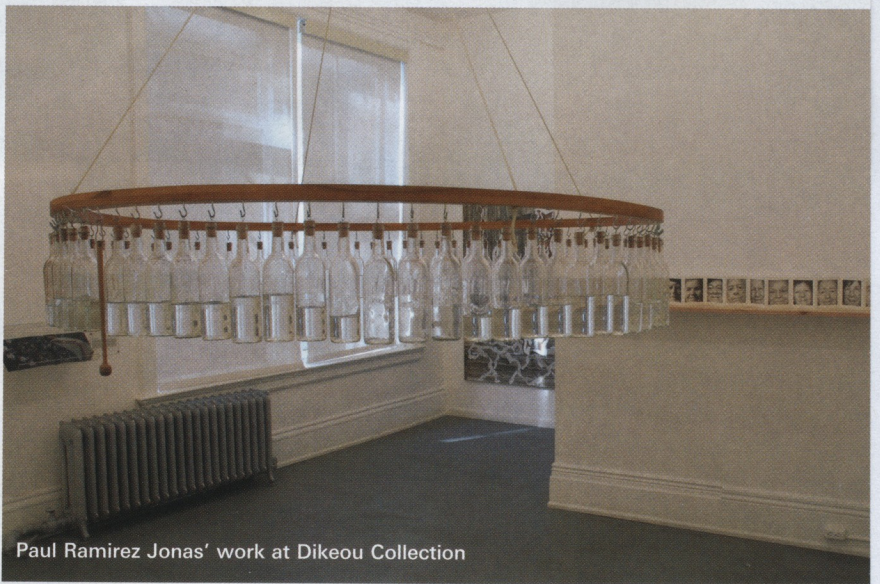
For a more insider's art experience, head to Santa Fe Street, where one by one, dealers, entrepreneurs, and artists are rehabbing spaces to form a centralized collection of locally owned galleries, restaurants, and shops. The area holds First Friday openings similar to other cities and a Third Friday night aimed at collectors. There's an entire day's worth of gallery jumping here, so start at one of our favorites, Habitat, and let fate lead you from there.

Minutes from ArtDistrict Santa Fe is one of Denver's greatest art secrets — The Dikeou Collection, curated by Devon Dikeou. This shy but extremely connected arts advocate is the publisher of Zing Magazine, an oversized and somewhat underground publication that invites artists to submit work for 16-page spreads. Dikeou's collection is located in over a dozen rooms on the fifth floor of a non-descript office building. You'll think you're in the wrong place until the moment you encounter any one of the cutting-edge contemporary works. They may include giant, blow-up bunnies, doll-filled planes made of cardboard, a room filled almost to the ceiling with wood, or life-size mannequins crawling for their lives.

The urban renewal continues in River North (RiNo), where people like painter Tracy Weil have targeted a healthy stock of warehouses and industrial buildings. Weil has reworked an existing building into a modern space where she can live, work, exhibit, and entertain all at once. She shows by appointment only, and if you're lucky, she'll take you up the tower for a spectacular view of somewhat distant downtown. It's from this tower that you may be able to understand this scene — you know, the one that's so hard to understand. As scattered and all over the map as it may be, that's what makes it so fun to explore. There's good art everywhere you turn.



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Paul Ramirez Jonas' work at Dikeou Collection



The Weilworks tower