




Muchnic, Suzanne. "Updating the Getty." *Los Angeles Times*, 12 September 1997, p. F1.

ADDING A CONTEMPORARY TOUCH

 <p>Alexis Smith "Taste," a mixed-media wall piece (detail of a study, below), will be installed in the Getty's restaurant.</p>	 <p>Edward Ruscha The artist's mural-sized painting of bolts of light will be housed in the center's auditorium lobby.</p>	 <p>Robert Irwin His 134,000-square-foot garden, culminating in a maze of azaleas, will be a highlight of the complex.</p>	 <p>David Hockney The Getty recently purchased his "Pearblossom Hwy.," a pivotal photocollage, for its collection.</p>
---	--	--	--

UPDATING THE GETTY

The trust, known for antiquities, asks L.A. artists to create installations for the new center.

By SUZANNE MUCHNIC
TIMES ART WRITER

In a surprising move that broadens its artistic perspective, the J. Paul Getty Trust has commissioned Edward Ruscha and Alexis Smith, two internationally renowned Los Angeles-based artists, to create permanent installations at the new Getty Center in Brentwood.

Ruscha is creating a 23-by-12-foot painting of light streaming through space for the lobby of the auditorium. Smith is designing a three-part, mixed-media wall piece on the subject of taste—in art, food, fashion and decor—for the restaurant. Both works will be completed for the Dec. 16 opening of the \$1-billion arts complex.

Together with the Getty Center's earlier commission of a 134,000-square-foot garden designed by artist Robert Irwin, who makes his home in La Jolla, and the Getty Museum's recent purchase of a monumental photocollage by David Hockney, a British artist who resides in Los Angeles, the Ruscha and Smith projects connect an institution that has been known for collecting the art of bygone times to Southern California's living, breathing local art community.

"The Getty Center itself is a work of art that makes a statement about the importance of culture in Southern California," Getty Trust President Harold M. Williams said of the six-building campus designed by architect Richard Meier. "Enhancing the center with world-class art from Los Angeles

emphasizes the importance of the arts in Southern California."

While the Getty Museum hasn't changed its collecting parameters—which only include 20th century work in the field of photography—the new Brentwood facility provides opportunities for contemporary art that weren't available at the old Getty Museum in Malibu, museum director John Walsh said.

Incorporating today's art is a natural development for an organization as young as the Getty Trust—which was founded in 1953 but took its present form in the early 1980s and is just beginning to define itself at its new home, he said.

"We are glad to leave to the Museum of **Please see GETTY, F22**



Getty Center



KEN HIVELEY / Los Angeles Times

Robert Irwin's commissioned garden will include 500 types of plants, a canopy of trees and zigzag pathways.

Contemporary Art and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art the main job of collecting contemporary art, but there are ways we can contribute," Walsh said. "We can be active without shopping at the dealers." Displaying contemporary art at the Getty Center will help the museum achieve its educational objective by allowing visitors to make connections between the art of the past and the present, he said.

The Ruscha and Smith commissions evolved quite logically, Williams said. "As we finished construction of the Getty Center, it was obvious that we had a number of places that were appropriate locations for some kind of art."

Enlisting Walsh and trust Vice President Stephen D. Rountree as members of a review committee, Williams hired Lisa Lyons, former director of the Lannan Foundation's art programs, to serve as a consultant. Over the past year she has selected more than a dozen locations for art, prioritized them and suggested artists who might be commissioned for some of the sites.

Williams said they decided to start with two of "the most visible sites in public terms—large spaces that were conspicuously empty." The commissions were not restricted to locally based artists, "but the fact that we were able to pick Southern California artists without compromising quality is a real plus," he said.

Lyons characterized the selection process as "trying to find the very best fit of artist and location,

but also recognizing the remarkable resource we have in the immediate region."

"Some of the most important artists working today live and work in Los Angeles," she said. "We reviewed art internationally, and decided that Ruscha and Smith were the very best artists for these two sites. Both have demonstrated their ability to complete very impressive, successful public works. Their previous work, both in the studio and in public places, suggests that they will create works that will be particularly appropriate for these locations."

Despite their extensive experience, working for the Getty is a highly unusual situation for Ruscha and Smith. "It's a million-to-one shot to have the opportunity to do this," Smith said. "It's really exciting to be part of such a high-profile, long-awaited opening."

For her work, titled "Taste," she will combine text and images of fine art and popular culture that address multilayered meanings and definitions of taste in large wall pieces composed of painted images and three-dimensional objects. Her work is still in a conceptual stage, but preliminary drawings include silhouettes of food and eating utensils as well as objects that suggest the taste of different periods, from a Greek vase in the Getty's collection to a Dior dress and Chippendale chair.

"The restaurant offers a perfect chance to juxtapose aesthetic taste with culinary, explore ways that

they use the same word and look at issues of taste," Smith said.

Ruscha said he is approaching his project as if it were an ordinary job, but of course it isn't because of the Getty's prominence and vast audience. Unlike commissions that require a certain subject matter, "there is no question to address at the Getty except art," he said. "This isn't a hunting lodge."

Looking to his own work for inspiration, Ruscha decided to paint rays of light. "In one form or another I've been working with light almost my whole life," he said. But this painting will be different from his previous work. What he has in mind is neither a view through a window nor a dramatic sky, but "bolts of light" that streak diagonally across space and land on the floor. Ruscha has completed larger works at public libraries in Denver and Miami and the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, but the Getty project will be his largest painting on canvas.

In conjunction with the commissions, the new Getty Museum will present small exhibitions to provide a context for the artists' installations. Smith's show, opening Dec. 16 and organized by Lyons, will feature five presentation prints, studies in graphite on tracing paper and a variety of source material used to develop the project. Walsh is organizing Ruscha's show, which will open in May.

While the commissions link the artists with the Getty in a highly visible way, this is not their first

encounter with the trust's varied programs. Both Ruscha and Smith have participated in exhibitions based on the Getty Research Institute's collections, and Smith has designed a Getty book plate that will be available in the new museum's shop.

Still, associating contemporary art with the Getty is a relatively new concept. The oil baron who founded the trust favored Greek and Roman antiquities, French decorative arts and European paintings, and his preferences form the basis of the museum's collection. The old Getty Museum in Malibu is being renovated as a showcase and study center for antiquities. The new museum in Brentwood will house collections of historic European paintings, sculpture, drawings, manuscripts, decorative arts and photography.

The first indication that the Getty Center would accommodate new art was Irwin's commission, announced in 1993. He has designed an enormously complex garden with 500 varieties of plants. The project's central feature is a stream surrounded by a canopy of trees and crossed by zigzag pathways. The banks of the stream will be planted with flowers whose colors grow more intense as visitors walk downhill to a shallow pool at the base of the garden containing a maze of flowering azaleas that appear to be floating.

Last month the Getty Museum's acquisition of Hockney's "Pearblossom Hwy., 11-18th April 1986, #2" was another bold leap forward. Although it joins unconventional photographic works by other living artists, the Hockney is a seminal piece that exemplifies photography's prominence in the field of contemporary art. Measuring about 6½ by 9 feet, the mosaic of 750 color photographs depicts a desert road in the Antelope Valley.