

The New York Times

October 2, 2014



ED ARAQUEL/FOX

GRACEPOINT Nick Nolte, left, Anna Gunn and David Tennant are in this remake of "Broadchurch" on Fox. Review, Page 3.

SculptureCenter Steps Out Into the Light

By RANDY KENNEDY

Visiting the SculptureCenter on its dead-end street in Long Island City, Queens, feels like stumbling onto a loner artist's studio. The two-story brick building, a former trolley repair shop with the words "Derrick and Hoist Co. Inc." fading beneath the cornice, has worn its institutional identity so lightly that the center has existed for years as a kind of art-world secret, attracting only 13,000 visitors in 2013, despite being highly

regarded by critics and artists.

But now, 86 years into one of the stranger vagabond histories of any New York City art institution, the nonprofit center is beginning to look — if not act — more like a museum. On Sunday, it will open its expanded and renovated building to the public, after a 14-month, \$4.5 million project that used the raw materials of contemporary sculpture — Cor-Ten steel plates, concrete slab and plywood — to alter subtly the building's exterior and interior.

The center, at 44-19 Purves Street, just off Jackson Avenue, will have a new courtyard entrance that leads to its first substantial front desk and a bookshop, across from which visitors will be able to see beyond a floating wall into the cavernous main exhibition space. A roll-up gate that was once the way inside for many of the largest sculptural pieces has been replaced by castle-sized steel doors that look as if they were conceived by

Continued on Page 2

C2

N

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2014

SculptureCenter Ready To Step Out Into Light

From First Arts Page

Richard Serra. But most of the building remains defiantly garage-like, down to old ceramic electrical insulators jutting from the basement walls.

"There are plenty of white boxes in New York, and we don't want to be another one," said Mary Ceruti, the center's executive director and chief curator, who added that though the center is only blocks from several subway stops and a five-minute walk from MoMA PS1, it has been a place whose location has long defined whom it attracts.

"People come here ready to see art because they've made the effort, and that's a good thing," Ms. Ceruti said. "Would I like more people to make that effort? Yes, and that's part of why we did this."

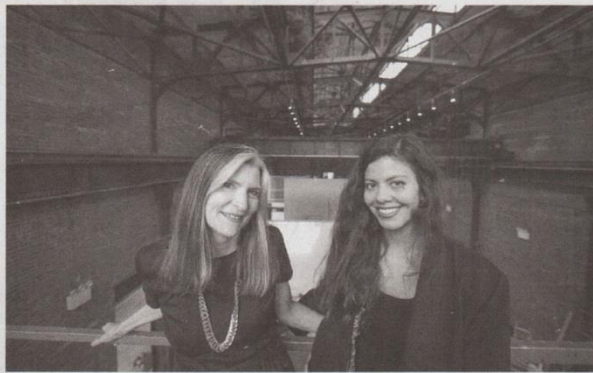
In some ways, the renovation — while exceedingly modest, compared with those at many other American art institutions — is an indication of the SculptureCenter's success in a contentious bet it made 13 years ago. Founded in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, in 1928 as the Clay Club, the center soon moved to the West Village and then, in

1948, to a carriage house on the Upper East Side, where it operated a beloved school with artists' studios.

But in 2001, its board, deciding that the institution was mired in outdated figurative ideas and was out of touch with contemporary artists, upended everything, closing the school and the studios, selling the carriage house and reinventing the center in Queens as a European-style Kunsthal, a noncollecting museum whose mission was to nurture the work of emerging and underappreciated artists.

The move left anger and disappointment in its wake, but by several measures, the center has thrived since. It has shown, early on, the work of many younger artists who have gone on to substantial careers, like Monika Sosnowska, a Polish artist with a show of new work at the Hauser & Wirth gallery in Chelsea; Gedi Sibony; Seth Price; Jessica Jackson Hutchins; and Rashid Johnson, whose first solo museum show was there.

It sometimes seems that little of the subsequent attention the artists receive rubs off on the center. But by showing such work, it has solidified a reputation as a place where artists can



FRED B. CONRAD/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mary Ceruti, left, the director of the SculptureCenter, in Long Island City, Queens, with Ruba Katrib, curator of its first postrenovation exhibition, "Puddle, pothole, portal."

develop somewhat insulated from the growing pressures of the art market.

"Sometimes, even now," Ms. Ceruti recalled, "I have a trustee who says, 'Mary, what do you think of this artist?' And I say, 'Well, when we showed her five years ago...' And then I tell the trustee, 'You were at that show!'"

She added, "We have to find better ways to help people re-

member what we've done."

Andrew Berman, whose architecture firm designed the expansion (the initial design in 2002 was by Maya Lin) said he had sought mostly to create "a measured process of arrival," an entryway that fostered more anticipation than the center's previous setup, where visitors entered almost smack-dab into exhibition space.

"The thought was to not in any

way iron out its character or even remove the more rough and insistent edges," Mr. Berman said of the space, which grew 2,000 square feet, to 6,500 square feet. "To me, it speaks of a place where things were made. And that's sort of perfect as an art space."

(The exhibition inaugurating the space, "Puddle, pothole, portal," organized by the curator Ruba Katrib and the artist

After 86 years, an art world secret is renovated to become more of a museum.

Camille Henrot, will be a characteristically eccentric, group-show exploration of 20th-century industrial space, using the art of Saul Steinberg and the 1988 movie "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?" as unlikely compasses.)

The project — half of its cost was provided by the city, and the rest by private donors — will make the center more approachable, as the neighborhood around it is rapidly transforming from industrial to residential. Not so long ago, the neighbors were a vacant lot and an auto shop; a nearby lumberyard used to lend its forklift for moving sculptures. Now the center is flanked by two tall, shiny new condominium buildings, and there are rumors that a boutique hotel is coming to the block.

"It's not the Wild West anymore," Ms. Ceruti said. "There's a kind of 'We can't do anything we want, make all the noise we want, the way we used to' feeling in the last few years. But the flip side is that people are much more comfortable coming here now. They know people who live here."