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Santa Fe's contemporary art scene stays current with the economy.

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In Santa Fe, the financial world and the art world go hand in hand—recent research shows art sales represent nearly 40 percent of the annual inflow into the economy. As such, the art world also was rocked by the shaky economy of 2010. Tumultuous times were made that much more turbulent when three of Santa Fe's contemporary art institutions brought on new leadership. At the same time, the scene continued to evolve, as new endeavors burst onto the scene.

This past year, the New Mexico Museum of Art, SITE Santa Fe and the Center for Contemporary Arts all hired new executive directors, Mary Kershaw, Irene Hofmann and Craig Anderson, respectively. Their appointments echo broad shifts on all levels for these institutions [Cover story, Aug. 18: "Changing of the Garde"] and much has happened with new captains at the helm.

At the same time, NMMA lost three positions—administrator, financial specialist and senior curator—in the past year, although it also received payout from endowments, which did not occur in 2009.

"We've spent a bit of time internally reviewing our procedures and refocusing our priorities," Kershaw, who was traveling abroad at press time, writes to SFR via email. "We now plan our activity program at the same time as our exhibitions, with an eye to building new audiences and engaging our current audiences more actively." Kershaw also notes the addition of music at the museum on Fridays and one-person shows that focus on New Mexico artists.

Additionally, NMMA just launched three web initiatives, all aimed at making the museum's collection accessible via the internet.

Hofmann, who moved to Santa Fe two months ago from Baltimore, Md., says she has spent much of her time acquainting herself with Santa Fe and the job at SITE.

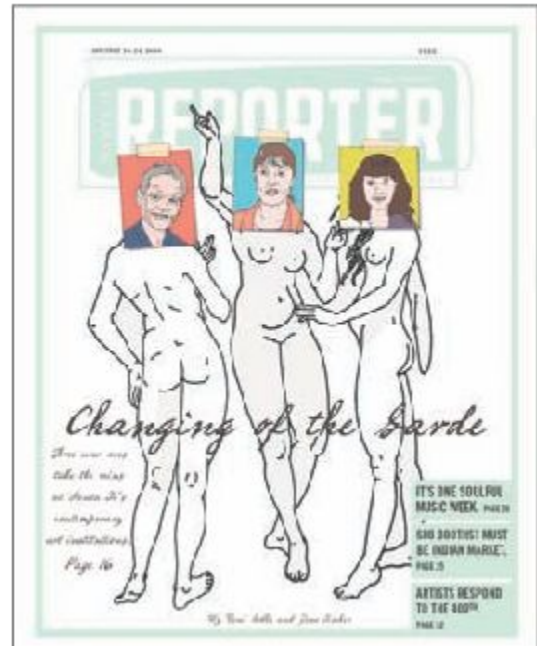
Still, she's already initiated a microgranting program, adapted from similar programs in other cities, called Spread, which offers funding to New Mexico artists for interesting projects. The money is raised at dinner parties, during which artists make their pitches and guests vote on who receives the door money. The first dinner is scheduled for March.

This time last year, CCA was in danger of closing, but was saved at the last minute by two anonymous donors. According to Anderson, CCA has been "on a balanced budget since February," but he admits that the search for funding is "competitive." Despite the difficulties, Anderson says that CCA's mission—"to create, maintain and promote a vibrant regional gathering place for the exploration and presentation of diverse and challenging contemporary art forms and ideas through our interdisciplinary programs"—remains the same.

Just as maintaining long-standing institutions can be tenuous in the current economy, so can initiating new, small ventures. Contemporary art galleries Axle Contemporary, Eggman and Walrus, and David Richard Contemporary all opened shop in 2010.

Evan Glassman, owner of Eggman and Walrus, which opened in September and focuses largely on young contemporary artists, says these first few months have been "challenging, exciting, but highly difficult."

"Sales are good," he says, but "it's a lot of work."



David Richard Contemporary opened in June and represents national and international abstraction artists, as well as buyers.

"It's not been a shoe-in," owner David Eichholtz says, but "we've been pleased with sales and there's been a general acceptance." The gallery, he adds, is "here for the long haul."

With all of its parts constantly in motion, a cohesive picture of the contemporary art scene can be elusive.

But while internal views on the scene differ, they all remain positive.

"For a city the scale of Santa Fe, it's pretty impressive who is here and the conversations happening around contemporary art," Hofmann says.

Eichholtz points to Santa Fe's history as a place that "has always attracted artists from all over the world, to experiment with new forms of art, new mediums." Despite the economy, the contemporary art scene "continues to be influenced by an influx of artists from all over the place," he says.

And those artists work together. Kershaw describes the art environment as "collaborative...across the contemporary art institutions now, which I think will only help to build on the strength of the contemporary scene in Santa Fe."

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