

CULTURE MONSTER BLOG

American Museum of Ceramic Art lands bigger space -- and Millard Sheets mural

OCT. 11, 2010 3:30 PM PT

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In a strange turn of events, the banking world's loss is the art world's gain. One of the many bank failures in recent memory, the PFF Bank and Trust at 399 N. Garey Ave. in Pomona closed its doors last year, and the FDIC put its building up for sale this year.

But instead of another business taking over the two-story, 51,000-square-foot building, the [American Museum of Ceramic Art](#) (AMOCA) will be moving in and gaining some serious elbow room. Museum founder David Armstrong, who says he bought the building for \$2.5 million and will continue to lease the second floor to Western University, is turning the first floor into AMOCA's new home.

The museum's current home, just four blocks away on South Garey Avenue, has 2,600 square feet of exhibition space. The new building will have closer to 7,000. It also will have room, Armstrong says, for a permanent collection display, a reference library, an education and studio area with a communal kiln, and a museum shop.

One big bonus: The first floor of the building, near the old tellers counter, has a 77-foot-wide mural by Millard Sheets depicting the early, railroad-fueled growth of

Pomona. 'It's the building's pièce de résistance -- a wonderful mural,' says Armstrong, who wrote the painting into his contract with the FDIC lest it be removed or destroyed.

'As it turns out, this mural is very significant to the museum, because Millard Sheets is the person who hired Peter Voulkos to establish the ceramic arts program at Otis in the early 1950s,' he says.

Armstrong expects his new classroom area to be open by January 2011 and the museum to be fully functional in its new space by November 2011. That is when the museum will stage its Getty-funded 'Pacific Standard Time' exhibition: a sweeping survey featuring artists such as Voulkos, Harrison Macintosh, John Mason, Glen Lukens and Marguerite Wildenhain, who have tested the expressive nature of ceramics and helped boost its standing as an art form.

Until then, the South Garey space will remain open. Up now is 'Peregrinación: Mexican Folk Ceramics,' to become the backdrop for the museum's Day of the Dead celebration on October 30.

-- Jori Finkel

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