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## ICA Turns One

By Andrea Shea December 06, 2007

The Institute of Contemporary Art opened its gleaming glass doors to the public one year ago this coming Monday. Perched on Boston harbor, the architecturally edgy building is the first art museum built in the city in a hundred years. Its eye-catching design, and offerings, are distinctly 21st century. WBUR's Andrea Shea explores whether the ICA is living up to its expectations one year out.

### TEXT OF STORY:

Sound from ICA lobby

ANDREA SHEA: The ICA's first anniversary is marked visually...in the glass-enclosed lobby...with the change-over of its huge, annual mural. The 42-foot-long anime-inspired work that's been up since last year's grand opening was recently destroyed...and then replaced...by a massive time-line piece tracing the evolution of rock 'n' roll. It's by L.A. artist Dave Muller and has a soundtrack with a rotation of more than 130,000 songs.

Music from new Dave Muller installation in the ICA's lobby — The Beatles

ANDREA SHEA: This multi-media mural is in keeping with the ICA's core mission, which is to bring compelling works by national and international artists to museum-goers in Boston. Since upgrading from its cramped-but-quirky Boylston Street location Executive Director Jill Medvedow says the ICA's membership base has more than doubled to 11,000 households, fundraising is on track, and they've welcomed...

JILL MEDVEDOW: Approximately 300,000 visitors. We had projected about 225,000 so we've exceeded that goal.

ANDREA SHEA: But those visitors didn't come here solely to see art. Some paid to see film...or the Mark Morris Dance Group...or to hear talks about culture...or go to a concert by the post-punk Boston band Mission of Burma.

Music: Mission of Burma

ANDREA SHEA: Medvedow says the ICA's state-of-the-art theater...and the sometimes unexpected programming that fills it...expands the idea of what art is. It also expands her institution's role.

JILL MEDVEDOW: We've really tried to bring forward a new and quite different model for a contemporary art museum. We are aggressively multi-disciplinary. So people are as likely to be coming here for performance or a lecture as they are for a museum.

NICK CAPASSO: There's a trend in the museum world of not just focusing on the exhibitions per say but something that is being called 'the museum experience.'

ANDREA SHEA: Nick Capasso is the Acting Director at the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park in Lincoln, which features contemporary work from regional artists...such as this current group installation, 'Trainscape.'

Train sound

ANDREA SHEA: Capasso says the ICA's new paradigm is necessary today because museums...like many other arts institutions...are forced to compete with the internet, sports, and TV for people's time and money. But, Capasso is quick to point out why the ICA's theater, cafe and programming fill a vaster void in society.

NICK CAPASSO: We don't have a meeting place for culture. What that's been reduced to is the mall and that's not really effective in generating or discussing or experiencing culture, so museums are trying to move into this role, and I think with a great deal of success.

ANDREA SHEA: Capasso cites the newly designed Walker Art Center in Minneapolis...with its theater and aggressive programming. But, he adds, the ICA's greatest success to date is the building. Its eye-catching, innovative form continues to attract attention and stimulate conversation about building design in Boston.

STEVE LOCKE: So much of it has been about the building and once you get inside of it the artwork has to take over.

ANDREA SHEA: That's Boston painter Steve Locke and he says most of the artwork hasn't done taken over yet. Lockes been to a bunch of the ICA' exhibitions over the past year, including the first one, 'Super Vision.'

STEVE LOCKE: It was great to be able to see all these artists that never get shown in Boston like James Turrell, like Julie Mehretu, there's that amazing Yoko Ono piece from the 70's, the 'Skyvision' piece, which was really great, but I was much more interested in the building itself than I was in a lot of the work that was in there.

ANDREA SHEA: For Locke the Philip-Lorca diCorca show was the first one where the building, as he puts it, 'disappeared.' And while the architecture and performance space might distract visitors from the art on the walls, Locke says he's all for whatever gets people into museums.

STEVE LOCKE: I think that there's a sort of way in which we want the 'museum experience' to be pure and holy and altogether good and not really corrupted by commerce but I don't think that's the world we live in. A little commerce is ok. I like commerce. (laughs)

ANDREA SHEA: So does the ICA's Executive director Jill Medvedow. She adds, though, that finding a sustainable audience once the architecture's newness and hype wanes is one of the many challenges the ICA faces in the future. It also has to deal with other criticisms over the year including the lack of parking, the gallery space size and location on the 4th floor, and the exhibitions not being edgy enough. Medvedow says there's no shortage of concerns.

JILL MEDVEDOW: It's a big job to program all of these spaces, in so many different disciplines and to keep it exciting. You know most museums after they open tend to see a fair amount of attrition, of members and visitors, I'd like to beat all those odds, but we do have a job to make sure that our audience is much bigger and broader than just the people who are already familiar with contemporary art.

ANDREA SHEA: If the ICA doesn't do that Jill Medvedow says the museum will have failed. To avoid that fate next year's performance schedule includes everyone from choreographer Bill T. Jones to DJ Spooky. As for the art, the museum's curators are planning exhibitions that...before the new ICA was built...never would've had a venue in Boston.