

Past, present, and future perfect

SFAI director Diane Karp manages an unsteady state of affairs

The Santa Fe Art Institute and the College of Santa Fe are not exactly strange bedfellows — both institutions cater to the arts in unique and special ways. But despite being situated on the campus of the college, SFAI is not a stepchild of the school and should not be viewed as such. It is a separate, nonprofit institution with a nearly 17,000 square-foot facility with office and studio space, galleries, and housing for students and guests in residence.

In existence since 1985, SFAI moved into its permanent digs from cramped temporary quarters on Second Street during the summer of 1999. Designed by renowned Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta, the current building was funded in part by the Burnett Foundation and the Eugene V. and Clare E. Thaw Charitable Trust, with additional support from private donors; all are acknowledged in the institute's main lobby.

With its financial books in the black and 10 years into its 99-year lease, SFAI should be well situated for years to come. But since CSF owns the Art Institute's building, the fate of the college will affect operations for SFAI, perhaps even forcing it to relocate.

Diane Karp, executive director of SFAI, has been guiding the institute since 2001. Additionally, she has consistently organized an eclectic range of exhibitions and events that address local, regional, and international concerns, such as the heartfelt NYC *Emergency Artists Relief Program* in 2002. Karp invited more than 75 New York artists who had been affected by the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center to come to Santa Fe, to decompress in whatever way necessary.

Karp received her doctorate in the history of art from the University of Pennsylvania. After serving on the faculty of Temple University, where she taught 20th-century art history, she was appointed curator of the Ars Medica Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Subsequently, Karp became director of the arts journal *New Observations Magazine*. She recently spoke with *Pasatiempo*.

Pasa: Given the College of Santa Fe's history of fiscal mismanagement, its horrendous debt, and the failure of the Senate Finance Committee to take action, what's your current mind-set?

Diane Karp: Because of the College of Santa Fe's ongoing financial problems, it has been a stressful couple of years for the SFAI. Bumping from one likely outcome to the next



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— Diane Karp, executive director, Santa Fe Art Institute

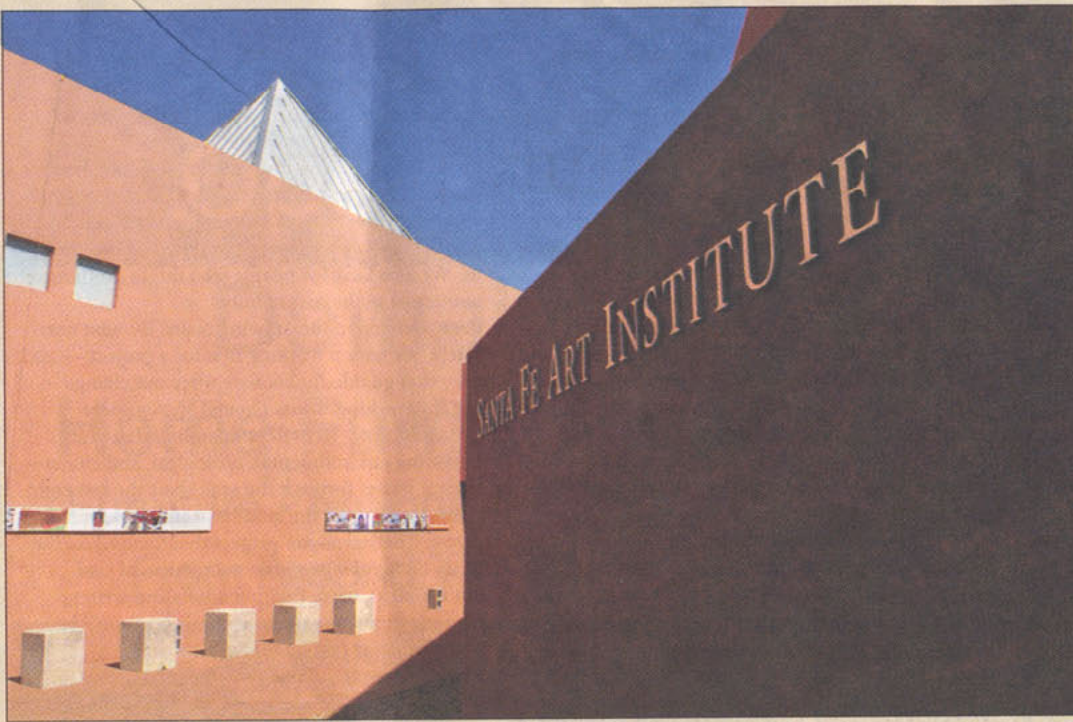
and the uncertainty about the status of our building has been challenging to say the least, but we knew that, whatever happened, we had to keep our focus on our mission: to explore the interconnections between contemporary art and society. ... We simply couldn't let the CSF instability take over our institutional life.

In January, we were told that the College of Santa Fe had defaulted on \$25 million in bonds and learned that Rep. "Lucky" Varela [D-Santa Fe] was going to sponsor a bill in the state legislature to save the college. At this point it was clear that we needed to explore various possibilities in case the state takeover did not succeed. We considered many options to keep the campus viable including public-private collaborations. Collaboration has always been our modus operandi, so thinking about working together with other entities is a natural for us.

We also started in January to lobby for the state takeover. As the bill moved through

the various committees, it began to pick up incredibly positive momentum. Until the last days, it appeared possible that the bill would make it through with \$3 million in funding. However, the Senate Finance Committee had other priorities, and there it died. Obviously, with those hopes and expectations dashed, we were worried about the future of our beautiful Ricardo Legorreta building.

The governor's creation of the Task Force — under the able guidance of Dr. Bruce Perlman — to explore and propose solutions for the campus gives me great hope. He has tapped some of the best and brightest to work together to keep the campus a vital part of the fabric of Santa Fe and New Mexico. How appropriate it is for Santa Fe ... to have a world-class arts campus. I believe that they will come up with some workable, creative proposals and that from this group thinking will surface a solution that will take the campus to a new and better place.



Clyde Mueller/The New Mexican



Michelle LaPlante/Chicks

Artist in residence Karima Klassen admiring work by her SFAI colleague Claudia Borgna

Pasa: With such persistent anxiety over the situation, what motivates you to get up and go to work?

Karp: I think mostly it's human beings. What separates us from the rest of the world — except for maybe a couple of very creative birds — is our creativity. And that creativity is something that universally has saved us in moments of duress, in moments of terror, in moments of great joy and splendid affluence.

The way in which we open conversations with nations that have been our enemies or those perceived as hostile or antithetical to American democracy and our ideals has invariably been through cultural exchange. So if we take all those amazing ideas of artists and writers and filmmakers ... we suddenly find ourselves dealing with languages that are not universal in the true sense of the word — it's not one language — but they are languages that can communicate across great barriers and borders. That's what lights my fire.

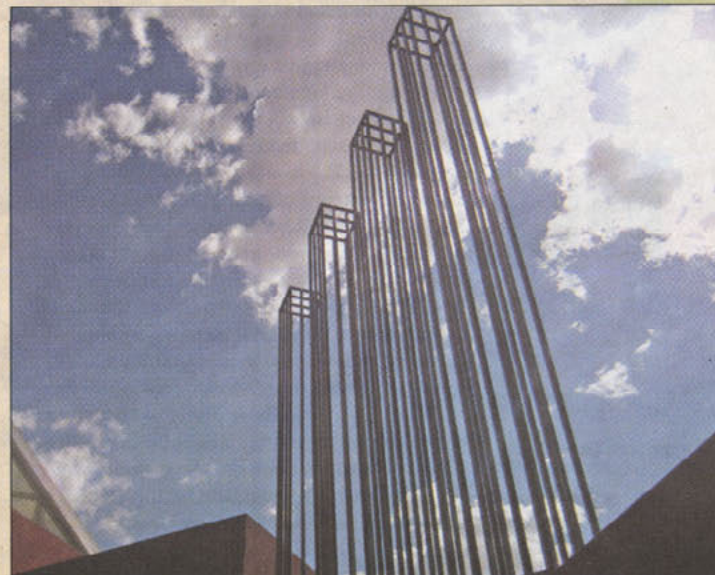
Pasa: You spoke earlier of SFAI's mission of exploring the interconnections between art and contemporary society. How have you been going about accomplishing this?

Karp: One of the first exhibitions we ever did was the year after 9/11 [*NYC Emergency Artists Relief Program*]. We wanted to do an exhibition dealing with issues of what was going on in contemporary culture, and I was struck by the fact that terrorism had come to have a unified, singular event. ... And the more we looked at the way in which artists and writers had engaged with contemporary society, we realized that there was terrorism that took place everyday: racial terrorism, social terrorism, and terrorism within the workplace.

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Mural painted as part of SFAI's Youth Education and Outreach Graffiti Mentorship Program, seen from inside SFAI



Kaili Chun (artist-in-residence from Hawaii): untitled, 2008, welded steel, approximately 8 x 12 x 12 feet



The Santa Fe Art Institute, despite being situated on the campus of the College of Santa Fe, is not a stepchild of the school.



SFAI building, designed by architect Ricardo Legorreta

Top, María Jose Rojas (artist in residence from Chile): *Red Cloud*, 2005, balloons, approximately 25 x 5 x 5 feet

Diane Karp, continued from Page 28

So we decided to do an exhibition inviting artists who had made these issues their life's work.

Another example was when Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison did the *Santa Fe Watershed: Lessons From the Genius of Place* exhibition in 2004. It was an exhibition grounded in Santa Fe, exploring really diverse, alternative solutions to what was going on with the watershed and the Santa Fe River. Artists have this ability to be the most creative problem solvers in the world; that's what they do for a living. They sit around and think about ways to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct problems.

Pasa: What would you be doing if not in this role?

Karp: I can't imagine myself not being in the nonprofit world.

Pasa: Are you an artist or writer?

Karp: I'm a wonk! I'm an art historian, and I started in a very peculiar way. I'm a first-generation American from an immigrant family based in Ukraine that fled the Bolshevik Revolution. They came to this country uneducated. But our family believed that whatever you did in life, it had to have a give-back; you had to be socially responsible.

In my senior year at the University of Pennsylvania, I got into an art-history class, and it was like my world opened. I was good at math, I was good at science, and I graduated with a degree in pre-med, but [the art-history class] was like a bolt of lightning. ... I'm not gifted, I'm not an artist, I'm not talented, but I was transformed and never looked back.

Pasa: Each year, SFAI chooses a theme around which its lectures, workshops, and exhibits are based. Who conceives of the themes?

Karp: That falls on my desk. But we talk about it in staff meetings and sometimes the idea is seen as wobbly, but usually everybody agrees.

Pasa: But the concept has to be approved by a board or some other committee to move forward.

Karp: Absolutely; we go before our board and talk about it. And we try to come together as a team.

Pasa: Explain this year's theme, *Memory: Shadow and Light — Art as Individual/Collective Memory*.

Karp: For me, the idea was that the arts could address memory in a way that very few other things do. I've been reading and thinking about the difference between memory and history. Trained as a scientist, I want to know how memory works physically and how memory functions in terms of individuals and communities and societies. And because that history is this singular story, it's about selected facts taken from whoever won a particular war or conflict. But memory is this very rich substratum that is an example of individual memory, communal memory, and national memory; and it has as much to do with those ultimate historical facts.

Memory is one of those places of engagement where the artists and the work and the audience come together seamlessly. ... So memory really is an ideal subject, especially for the 400th anniversary of Santa Fe. We are not only a city

of cultures and of places, we are, more than anything, a city of memories.

Pasa: Where do you find your artists and scholars?

Karp: There are different layers to that. The workshops that we do — the hands-on, skill-based workshops — often people will make proposals to us. We also look for people who might do things of interest to the community.

Pasa: What's on the drawing board for next year?

Karp: We have a working title for a project — and I say that guardedly, because titles can change — but the working title is *Ground Management: Unsteady State*. We will be spending that year exploring environmental, ecological, and climate-change issues through the arts. Over the last eight years, issues with the land have changed for the worse. The Harrisons' project that focused on the Santa Fe River was a little microcosm of that. ... But for 2010, we're inviting artists and writers who are thinking on a larger scale, and we'll be doing projects that have a wider reach.

Pasa: So fate and future — your final comment?

Karp: We have an amazing year of programs scheduled for 2009 and 2010, and if it happens that we need to find a new home, we will, but we truly expect to be here in our building for a very long time. After all, we still have 89 years left on our lease, and there is much to do to make the arts an essential part of everyone's life. ◀

Memories of things to come

Below are some selections from the Santa Fe Art Institute's schedule of upcoming lectures and workshops. SFAI is at the College of Santa Fe, 1600 St. Michael's Drive.

May 11 & 12 Lecture and workshop with photographer David Maisel. For more than two decades, Maisel has produced images of stressed landscapes via aerial photography. He has been artist in residence at the Getty Research Institute and at the Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, California.

June 7, 8 & 9 Workshop, performance, and lecture by performance artist and musician Laurie Anderson.

July 13 Lecture by Santa Fe sculptor, designer, and blacksmith Tom Joyce.

Aug. 3 & 4 Lecture and workshop with Blake Gopnik, chief art critic for *The Washington Post*.

Oct. 26 Lecture by British realist painter and writer Rackstraw Downes. His work is represented in numerous collections and museums, including New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Dec. 7 & 8 Lecture and workshop with American photographer Susan Meiselas, who documented political strife in Central America during the 1970s and 1980s.

For information, call 424-5050 or visit sfai.org.