

Napa Valley Register

Our View: The rebirth of di Rosa

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di Rosa



Even if you are a lifelong resident of Napa, you could be forgiven for not having a clear idea what “di Rosa” might be, or perhaps not even having heard of it at all.

Most likely you would have noticed some modernist sculptures of sheep along Highway 12 in Carneros, which guarded its highway frontage for years, but what happened beyond its entry gates was most likely a mystery to most who passed by.

Turns out [di Rosa is an art museum](#), founded by the eccentric journalist-turned-vintner Rene di Rosa, who died in 2010, and his wife, Canadian artist and author Veronica di Rosa, who died in 1991. Set on 217 rolling acres in Carneros, the museum houses the di Rosa’s eclectic collection of modern art, primarily from Bay Area artists starting in the 1950s. It includes three free-standing galleries and a meadow where outdoor art is displayed.

While it’s been a low-profile curiosity and tourist draw for decades, it did not seem to make much of an impression on the public mind. For those locals who had visited, it became that place they went once, long ago. The main gallery hadn’t been changed or refreshed in a decade, since before Rene’s death.

All that is about to change. The new leadership at di Rosa, under Executive Director Robert L. Sain, who came aboard less than two years ago, is moving aggressively to rebrand the museum – or at least

clarify the brand – and make it both a vital local part of the Napa County community and a must-stop visit for art fans regionally, nationally, and even internationally.

They're starting with a new name, the "di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art," and they're shaking up the galleries, shifting the long-static display of the original collection with a series of short-term exhibits comingling elements of the di Rosa collection with new works commissioned from innovative artists.

Their first experiment will be the year-long "Be Not Still" project, which starts in November. It asks artists to reflect on themes in modern American society, including surveillance, American Exceptionalism, and the notion of citizenship.

The exhibit will include spaces for discussion and contemplation by visitors, and interactive displays to learn more about the artists and their themes.

At the same time, the museum is forging connections to locals, to raise awareness of the importance of art, to improve the organization's public recognition, and to raise the funds needed to build on the new vision. Examples include the new "Third Thursdays" series, which invites the public to an evening reception including food, art and music (including an affordable \$5 fee for non-members).

The museum is also working on an art project with the local Boys & Girls clubs, asking students to create their own artworks on the "Be Not Still" theme; the "Let's Look" series of workshops to teach art appreciation in a casual and fun way; and the monthly "Art Spark" program for families to create their own art.

The idea is to make di Rosa a hub for art innovation and education in the community even while making the museum a recognized art destination alongside well-known institutions such as the de Young and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

There are, of course, considerable challenges. The facility will require major upgrading to make it fully accessible to the public, with new trails and lights to allow people to wander freely in the galleries and on the grounds (currently, it is mostly accessible by guided tour). Sain said the institution's \$2 million annual budget will probably have to roughly double to support the upgrades and undertake the ambitious exhibits and public programming they have in mind.

But they are already off to a good start in fundraising, with several artists being sponsored by wineries and individuals, and they are optimistic that a wealthy community such as Napa County can support the relatively modest additional funding that the organization needs.

We applaud di Rosa for its new direction and we hope the community will support it. Their plans come at a good time for this area, which has cemented its position as the world's premier wine region and is now expanding to become a draw for food, music and arts as well.

If the di Rosa leadership can realize its vision, the museum will go from a hidden gem to a very public jewel in Napa's crown.

The Napa Valley Register Editorial Board consists of Publisher Brenda Speth, Editor Sean Scully, and public members Cindy Webber, Ed Shenk, Mary Jean McLaughlin and Chris Hammaker.