

# THE HONEYCOMB EFFECT

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IN 2010, SIX ARCHITECTS WERE ASKED TO PRESENT THEIR DESIGNS FOR BILLIONAIRE ELI BROAD'S HYPER-AMBITIOUS THE BROAD MUSEUM IN DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES. FIVE YEARS LATER, THE 120,000 SQUARE-FOOT \$140 MILLION MUSEUM OPENED ON SEPTEMBER 20TH TO A RED-CARPET GALA OF MOVIE STARS AND ART LUMINARIES. TREATS! LOOKS BACK AT HOW THE DILLER SCOFIDIO+RENFRO DESIGNED "VEIL AND THE VAULT" STRUCTURE SURVIVED A \$20 MILLION LAWSUIT, CRITICAL BACKLASH, DELAYS AND SNIPING IN THE PRESS TO BECOME ONE OF THE MOST FABLED BUILDINGS EVER BUILT IN THE CITY OF ANGELS.





From the start it was an ambitious project. Funded by the third-richest Los Angeles County resident, tract-home king and genuine self-made billionaire, Eli Broad, whose net worth is estimated at \$5.8 billion, was meant to be a showcase for his and wife’s world famous art collection, but it threatened to go off the rails more times than Broad would care to admit. Whether it was last minute architectural alterations, an international design competition, construction 15 months behind, or a \$20 million lawsuit with the German engineering company Seele Inc., the whole thing became an on-going saga for the ages—even by Hollywood standards. Equal in measure only to the complications of producing *Gone With the Wind*, or the urban legends surrounding *The Wizard of Oz*, whether this epic will become the rousing success of either of Victor Fleming’s masterpieces is still to be determined. Of course, it’s also dependent on whom you ask: critics, architects, the German engineers, or any of the other cast of characters.

Announced four years ago, the initial concept for The Broad museum (pronounced Brode) created a generally positive reception amongst the few critics in the industry that still count. Even ones with a more mixed opinion of the overall project, like Nicolai Ouroussoff, noted, “There is something alluring about the design by Diller Scofidio + Renfro.” Architecture aficionado and protégé of the late Herbert Muschamp, Ouroussoff concluded, “Its honeycomb-like exterior is a smart counterpoint to the swirling forms of Frank Gehry’s Walt Disney Concert Hall next door.” The perforated façade—commonly known as “the veil” but recently christened “The Cheese Grater”—was intended to let in light and open up the space to Grand Avenue’s street life below. One point everyone involved would have to agree upon is that many of the difficulties that have plagued The Broad from construction to completion can almost be directly tied back to that porous, honeycomb-like exterior.

#### A VEIL OF TWO CITIES

Initially, Broad envisioned a three-story building “with roughly 40,000 square feet of top-floor exhibition space,” along with offices for his Art Foundation. The museum would be home to nearly 2,000 works from the Broad Collection, which comprises some of the most prominent holdings of postwar and contemporary art in the world. This time, instead of returning to superstar architect Frank Gehry, who had designed the neighboring Disney Hall—thanks to Broad’s tenacious \$220 million fundraising efforts—Broad held a contest. By this point, May, 2010, Broad and Gehry had the sort of tumultuous creative relationship that could have rivaled Selznick’s and Fleming’s. Gehry had infamously told *60 Minutes*’ Morley Safer: “Eli is a control freak. I worked on a house for him. I didn’t want to do it ... I just told him I didn’t like him. He said you’ll learn to like me.” Although currently on speaking terms, it’s no great surprise that when the call went out to various architects and firms, Gehry wasn’t included in the mix.

The pair are a rare breed, billionaires that put their money where their mouth is, when it comes to philanthropy.

In the end, New York City-based design studio Diller Scofidio + Renfro won the competition, beating out Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. DS+R is led by three partners—Elizabeth Diller, Ricardo Scofidio and Charles Renfro—two of which are recipients of the MacArthur Foundation genius award, a prestigious title, that turned out to be a much needed prerequisite for the “veil-and-vault” concept to come. The \$140 million building, considered a “gift to LA” by the Broads, would feature two floors of gallery space to showcase their worldwide lending library, be free admittance to the public, and transparent and open to the street. The “veil and vault” concept was born in an effort to merge two key programs of the building: public exhibition space and the storage. Even for all of Diller’s expertise, this proved quite a “challenge.” Diller said, “Balancing the two”—due to the size of the storage facility for the collection that had a different set of needs all together— “created a tug of war.” Plus, there was the added element of urbanizing downtown LA, a place without any real “cultural center of gravity.” So, rather than relegate the storage archives to secondary status, the “vault” that houses the collection not on display in the galleries or on loan, “plays a key role in shaping the museum experience from entry to exit.” On entering, you can walk under it, shoot up it, wind through it and stand upon it.

Above the third floor galleries is “the veil,” a five-sided façade that absorbs natural light. Designed deliberately to filter that light, the matte exterior structure spans across the block-long building. From within, it becomes a giant eye-like, glassed-in window known as the “oculus”; it peers eastward above Grand Avenue toward City Hall. Its 23-foot-high ceilings and roof is supported by 7-foot-deep steel girders. A single acre of column-free space has moveable walls for the museum’s various exhibits.

#### THE BATTLE ON BUNKER HILL

Rarely is the museum associated with its historic name location: Bunker Hill. In many ways, though, it’s strangely fitting considering the pending civil suit. The production of the billionaire’s love of all things Pop Art spanned so many years in development and construction it ballooned an already whopping price tag.

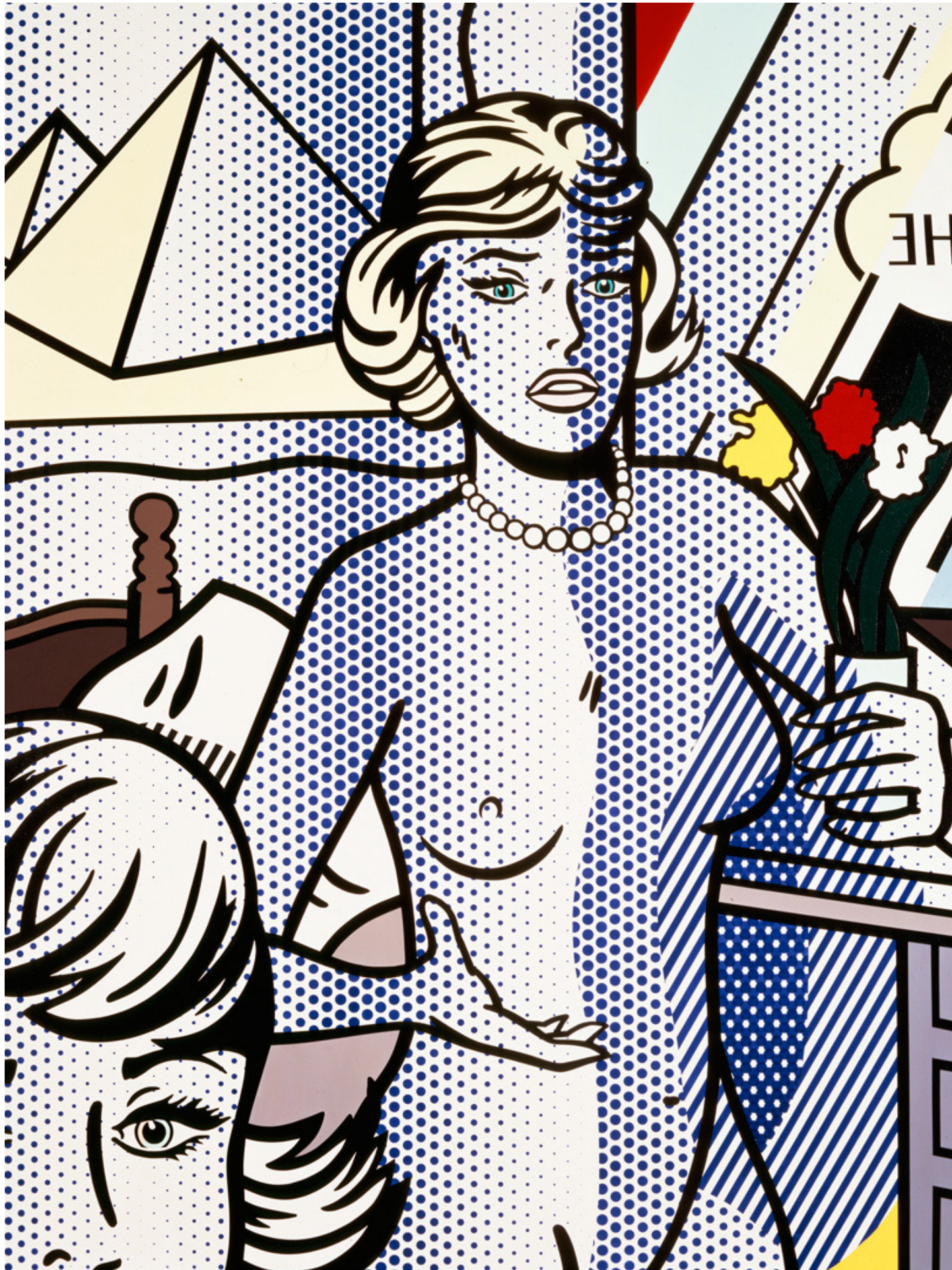
For Broad, the domino effect began when the German-based engineering firm Seele Inc. didn’t make their Oct. 25, 2013, contractual deadline. In an interview with Los Angeles *Times* last September, Elizabeth Diller said, “Our engineer had proposed a more unconventional approach to the veil.” More specifically, one that called for using a heavier material instead of a lighter glass-fiber-reinforced concrete. But, working with that material (precast concrete) proved too complex, so alterations were made, and steel and glass-fiber were brought in as substitutes. This led to months of delays and cost overruns. The budget for the outer façade, which started at \$29.3 million, had soon swelled to \$34.8 million.

Diller said the heavier material turned out to be impractical due to LA’s very unique “in case of earthquakes”



Robert Rauschenberg / *Untitled* / 1954  
oil, fabric, and newspaper on canvas, 70 3/4 x 48 in.  
©Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY





Roy Lichtenstein / *Nude with Pyramid* / 1994 / oil and magna on cavas, 84 x 70 in. / © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein / Courtesy of The Broad



The Broad museum's lobby with interior veil / Photo by Iwan Baan / Courtesy of The Broad and Diller Scofidio + Renfro

building safety laws. It would require so much steel reinforcement “it just didn’t make sense,” so designers returned to the lighter concrete plan. A time sensitive fact that now has Eli Broad and Seele Inc. in a gargantuan lawsuit. According to the pending civil case, “The company’s failure to design, fabricate and install Broad’s façade” caused a chain of events that pushed back the timetable for other aspects of the project.

Another element that was removed from the initial proposal is a certain aspect of the original architectural narrative very specific to L.A. One of the first to notice the change to the ground level parking entry on Second Street was Ouroussoff. For him, it had lost “the interweaving of pedestrian and automotive life that is central to the experience of Los Angeles generally, and of Grand Avenue in particular, with its views onto nearby freeways.” This entrance was removed somewhere during the design process, and in the *New York Times* critic’s estimation “what was once a more complex reading of urban mobility has been reduced to something more banal.” Simply, a three-story, 364-space, parking garage.

#### ELI & EDYTHE BROAD

When Eli Broad and his wife, Edythe, moved to Los Angeles in 1963, aerospace was the city’s leading industry and The Museum of Contemporary Art didn’t even exist. One could argue that the Broads (predominantly Eli) have taken it on to inherit Dorothy Chandler’s mission: “To create a vital cultural center by bringing together the elites of both the downtown business establishment and the Westside Hollywood powers.”

Today, as L.A.’s leading patrons of the arts the two are fierce advocates in the advancement of “entrepreneurship for the public good in education, science and the arts” through their foundations. The pair are a rare breed: billionaires that put their money where their mouth is. In

2010, the Broads announced their participation in “The Giving Pledge,” a commitment for wealthy individuals to give at least half of their wealth to charity. The Broads personally committed to give 75% of their wealth away. The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and The Broad Art Foundation have assets of \$3 billion, with their Art Foundation operating as an active “lending library” from its collection and the Broads’ personal holdings. Dedicated to increasing access to contemporary art for all audiences worldwide, it has made more than 8,000 loans of art to some 500 museums and university galleries. Ironically enough, before his first Basquiat, the first thing Eli Broad had ever collected was stamps.

Eli L. Broad, the only son of Lithuanian Jewish immigrants, was born in the Bronx in 1933 and raised in Detroit. Eli’s father, a house painter, managed to open two five-and-dime stores there. His mother, a dressmaker by trade, worked their stores. Broad went to public schools and then college at Michigan State University. “The first dream I had was just to get a college education” he has always maintained. Which he achieved—in three years. By the time he was 25, he also happened to have become a millionaire by borrowing \$25,000 from his wife’s parents and building model homes in the Northeast suburbs of Detroit in 1957.

It wasn’t until 1973, however, that Broad became interested in the art

world. Since then, the Broads have built a collection of 2,000 works by more than 200 artists. The couple began picking up work by Jeff Koons and Roy Lichtenstein back in the early-’80s. Now, they own the largest private collection of Koons’ pieces and 34 of his Pop-predecessor, Lichtenstein. Eli enjoys the spotlight the art world affords, while Edythe is happier to remain in the background. In 1994, Broad made more headlines by charging a \$2.48 million Roy Lichtenstein

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he bought at Sotheby's to his American Express card—then donating the frequent-flyer miles to local art students. As personal favorites of the couple, both artists are heavily featured throughout The Broad. Or, as *Vogue's* arts editor, Mark Guiducci, humorously referred to it, “a resplendent trophy room, the proud product of decades of big-game collecting.” It has an estimated cost of \$80-100 million, paid by Broad, who has also agreed to pay \$7.7 million of his own money for a 99-year lease on downtown public land.

A STAR-STUDDED OPENING

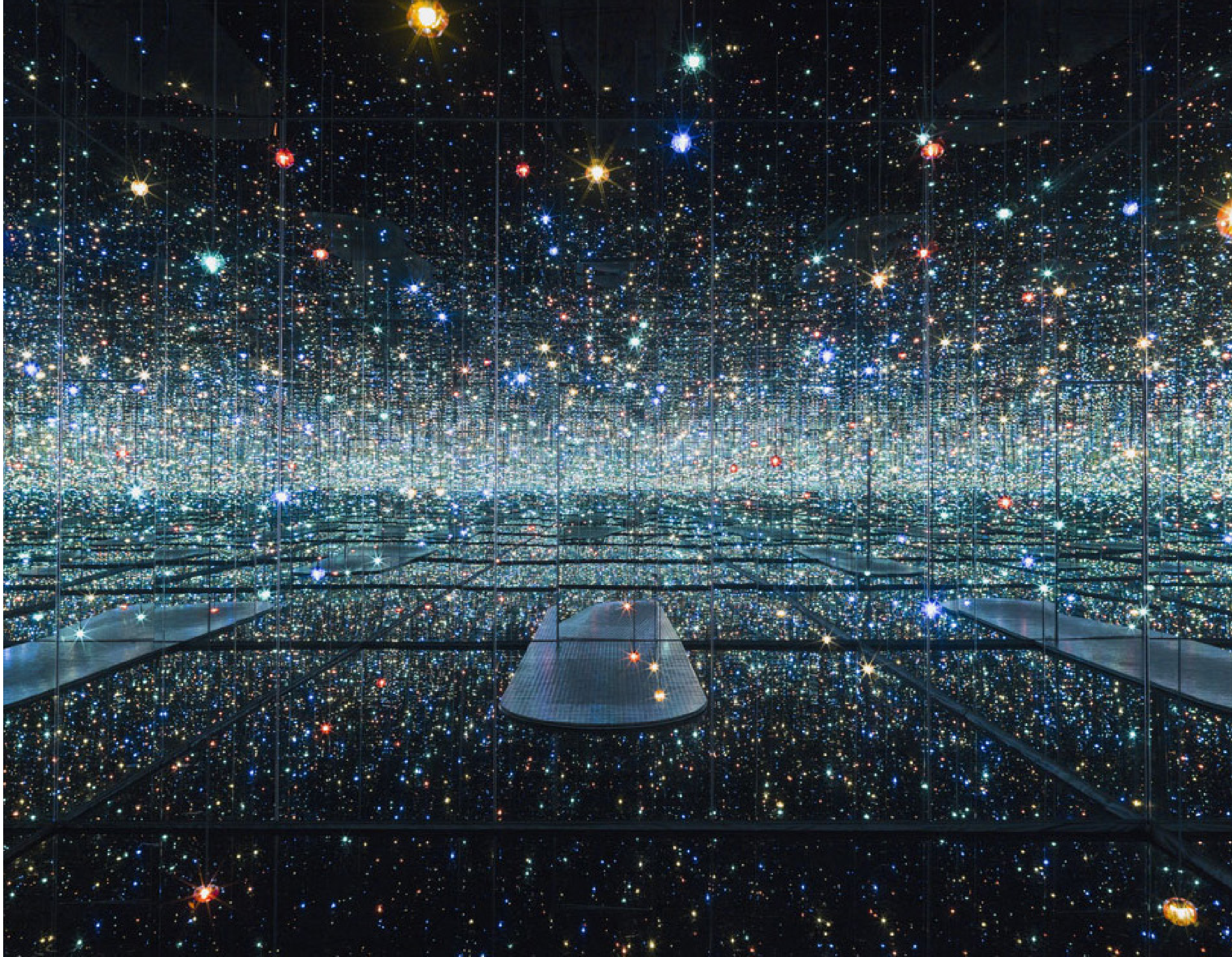
On September 20th 2015, The Broad officially opened. Grand Avenue shut down so a red carpet could be draped along a four block stretch. The LA Philharmonic played *The Godfather* and *Titanic* (!?) themes as a who's who of New York's art world and Los Angeles' film industry arrived. Guests included Sheena Wagstaff of the Met, Thelma Golden of Studio Museum, Adam Weinberg of The Whitney as well as Gwyneth Paltrow, Owen Wilson, Frank Gehry, Tessa Thompson, Tobey Maguire, Kamala Harris and

Mayor Eric Garcetti. Edythe also attended, wearing her customary dark pantsuit and comfortable flats, which perfectly juxtaposed against a giant blue dog, shiny silver bunny and massive display of multicolored inflatable tulips. Besides Lichtenstein and Koons galore, guests viewed works by Andy Warhol, Ed Ruscha, Kara Walker, Barbara Kruger, Cindy

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Sherman, John Baldessari and Jasper Johns. In smaller rooms on the first floor, artists Takashi Murakami, Yayoi Kusama and Icelandic video artist, Ragnar Kjartansson, were on display, which, inevitably, caused velvet rope like queues on opening night. Murakami's influence on Japan rivals that of Warhol's here. He frequently incorporates fine art with otaku lifestyle (juvenile culture obsessed with toys, anime, and video games); his centerpiece of cartoon-like sculptures appears to be a homage to magic mushrooms. Kusama's Infinity Mirrored Room was particularly popular. The disorienting mirrored room full of LED lights was only open to one viewer at a time—for approximately 45 seconds. For fear of seizure, perhaps? And representing Iceland on this cavernous and at times psychedelic adventure was a monumental, immersive, nine-screen video piece.

The gala and artworks were praised by most. However, the overall honeycomb-effect of the façade continued to be questioned online. From the LAist to Twitter and beyond elements of the exoskeletal structure have been compared to every pop culture monument from the Death Star to the Eye of Sauron. Rarely has a building—museum or otherwise—infiltrated the current zeitgeist to such a scale. Especially when you consider that it isn't the only textured chrysalis new to the Angeleno horizon. The Peterson Automotive Museum was built in 1994 and The Gores Group HQ in 2014. Yet, in both of those cases, there were few debates, no design renderings leaked, and little to no public interest to speak of. One wonders if So Cal's design insiders are privy to some creative tactile building trend that the rest of us are not.



Yayoi Kusama, Infinity Mirrored Room / *The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away* / 2013 / wood, metal, glass mirrors, plastic, acrylic panel, rubber, LED lighting system, acrylic balls, and water / 113 1/4 x 163 1/2 x 163 1/2 in. / © Yayoi Kusama, Courtesy of David Zwirner, N.Y.





Eli and Edythe Broad / Photo by Elizabeth Daniels



Installation of Robert Therrien's *Under the Table* in The Broad's third-floor galleries  
Photo by Elizabeth Daniels / Courtesy of The Broad and Diller Scofidio + Renfro

#### BUILT TO LAST?

*The Los Angeles Business Journal* recently cited the subcontractor in charge of designing and constructing the museum's honeycombed outer veil is moving to foreclose on the museum in order to recoup nearly \$7 million in construction expenses. The case is still pending in LA Superior Court, and the foreclosure is expected to be consolidated with Broad's original lawsuit. Stating that Seele failed to live up to a guarantee that its work would be "of extraordinary quality, consistent with world-renowned German engineering" and would "deliver a product that was not mere Tiffany, but Cartier quality." Regardless of the final legal outcome, Broad has delivered another civic centerpiece to downtown, proving that he is one of the few power players that continue to champion LA's architectural vitality for all its inhabitants and making art available to as many people as possible. At an interview at his museum, Mr. Broad stated, "We want more people here, more pedestrian traffic and more activities." Based on its electric car charging stations, bike parking spaces, easy access to public transit, including the new Metro Regional Connector station at the corner of 2nd Street and Hope Street, The Broad is fully prepared to do just that.

By offering free general admission, his intention that the museum become a popular destination for the masses, is already coming to fruition. To visit, advanced reservations of timed tickets online are encouraged. At this time there are no more tickets available for most days left this year; they are already receiving reservations for January and February of 2016. Socially responsible to a fault, its rooftop drains routed to street level gardens that filter runoff and high-efficiency plumbing fixtures that help reduce water use by 40 percent, aims to be in the top tier of eco-conscious and museums in the country. Public amenities available adjacent include 24,000-square-foot public plaza and a new restaurant being developed by restaurateur Bill Chait. The plaza's bosque of 100-year-old barouni olive trees and grass create public space for picnics, outdoor films, performances and educational events. The lease costs will go toward a special fund for affordable housing in the two residential towers that are expected to eventually share the parcel with the museum, which has no board of directors nor additional funds to raise.

Broad's main critic, Ouroussoff, still questions if "his urban ideal" is based more on "the Upper East Side of Manhattan or central Paris" models and that "however attractive it has little to do with Los Angeles' sprawl." However, by all sense and purposes, The Broad has achieved what its founder set out to do for the community: to be more inclusive than elitist. To Eli Broad, "Artists rarely do the same thing over and over again. Art is about the new, doing things in a new way."

Five years in the making, criticized and controversial, The Broad has been called everything from a vanity project to underwhelming and ugly.

But, quite frankly my dear, I don't think Eli Broad gives a damn.

Andy Warhol / *Small Torn Campbell's Soup Can (Pepper Pot)*, 1962  
casein, gold paint, and graphite on linen, 20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm)  
© 2015 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Campbell Trademarks used with permission of Campbell Soup Company



Jean-Michel Basquiat / *Untitled* / 1981

acrylic and oilstick on canvas, 81 x 69 1/4 in./ © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat / ADAGP, Paris / ARS New York 2015 / Photo by Douglas M. Parker Studio, L.A.

