



**NOSTOS** James Leventhal, former director of development at San Jose Museum of Art, returns to the downtown art scene.

**BATON PASS** Shawna Lucey seeks to define the future of opera at Opera San Jose.

*La Traviata*. She directs a legacy production of *Tosca* for San Francisco Opera, and continues to stage works with the New York Metropolitan Opera House, Kansas City's Lyric Opera and elsewhere. Still, Opera San Jose made a lasting impression.

"I was really struck by my time at Opera San Jose," she says. "It was a great highlight in my directing career, so [this] was the perfect match, a fantastic turn of events for me."

Though its roots stretch back to 1978, Opera San Jose became official in 1984 and was paying performers by its 1985-86 season. In 1992, Dalis told the *Mercury News* the company's "one purpose" was to give young, local talent career opportunities.

Nikola Printz joined Opera San Jose as a singer in residence last

August. Their first performance with the company, however, was in 2014.

"I was only a year out of my undergrad," Printz says.

Printz typifies Opera San Jose's ongoing efforts to reflect the changing face of opera. The non-binary singer sometimes falls in the mezzo-soprano range, but say they reject the Fach system, which groups singers into roles based on vocal range.

"I like to be labelless," they say. "I like to sing pieces of music that inspire me. Whatever you want to do, you should do."

Next month, Printz plays the lead in Opera San Jose's maximalist production of *Carmen*, easily the company's biggest since returning to in-person performances last November. The show includes a large cast and chorus, flamenco dancers and a children's choir—which, after almost two full years of livestreamed events and binged Hulu, sounds distinctly operatic.

"We live in dynamic, unprecedented times," Lucey says. "Opera can be right at the center of community, because the stories we're telling are so compelling."

## ARTISTIC CONTEMPORARIES

Just a few blocks south on First Street, the Institute of Contemporary Art has likewise been experiencing a period of major change after its longtime executive director retired in 2020.

Earlier this month, James Leventhal, former director of development at San Jose's Museum of Art, stepped aboard as the new executive director at the ICA. With him, he brings an unconventional interpretation of the word "contemporary."

"Artistic human production across time is perennially contemporary," Leventhal says. "The issues that we've been grappling with across time and space remain relevant today."

It may be a bold stance, but it reflects the ambitious goals of the small but inspired nonprofit museum. Originally opened in 1980—just a few years before Opera San Jose—recent years have seen consistent change at the gallery, including interior overhauls, staff shake-ups and exterior installations.

In 2020, the museum launched its Façade Project, installing a 50-foot mural by LA artist Amir H. Fallah above its entryway. Its current façade work, "A Chapter of Love," by Conrad Egyir, went up last October.

"I love the fact that there's [now] external messaging and presence for the ICA, even when the doors might not be open," Leventhal says.

Contemporary art is a wide field with a vast variety of movements and perspectives, but Leventhal identifies two major threads running throughout. The first is the rediscovery of overlooked talent, artists like Bay Area mixed-media artist and sculptor Mildred Howard, who Leventhal describes as "likely one of the most important alive today." The second is the push into fully digital spaces, with works exploring virtual environments, social media and the dreaded NFT. If things go according to plan, one of the most artistic spaces in San Jose won't be downtown at all—it'll be on their website.

"I want to start working with media studies and really think how we can use this space online to push us to a place where we feel slightly uncomfortable and most human," Leventhal says.

This spring, the museum hosts an immersive exhibit by sculptor/installation artist Soo Sunny Park, whose recent work *Expanded Present* currently frames the doorway of the Smithsonian's Arts + Industries building in Washington, DC. *Viewing Filter (Veil of Vision)* opens in March, and comprises a hanging network of nylon, metal and reflective artworks that Leventhal says illustrates the concept of the "matrixial:" "the intersection of the feminine, technology and nature."

And though opera and contemporary art may seem to be opposites almost by definition, both new directors agree on one thing: San Joseans will always need places to gather and experience art together.

"I feel like we are best as people when we gather," Leventhal says.

"It is fundamentally a need of humans to gather and to tell stories," Lucey says. "This is how we continue to have a life as a community." **M**