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Tuesday, December 5, 2006

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Museum Plaza enlists international art adviser

New type of space interests Dercon

By **Diane Heilenman**
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The Courier-Journal

A new international member for Louisville's Museum Plaza planning team arrived in town yesterday for a first round of introductions to the art and business communities.



"There are a lot of people looking at you and what you're going to do" with the Museum Plaza, Chris Dercon said.

Chris Dercon, 48, is artistic director of Hause der Kunst in Munich, which Adolf Hitler built from 1933 to '37 as a space for the cultural propaganda of his nationalist art program and a way to demonstrate the unacceptability of "degenerate," or what was then contemporary, art. Today, Hause is a contemporary art center.

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Dercon is noted for his experience in transforming older museums into vibrant community centers of art, said Steve Wilson, a Museum Plaza partner who made the rounds yesterday with the new adviser.

Dercon flew in from

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Munich via Brazil and leaves today for Miami before heading on to Houston -- all stops related to his work as a curator, critic and lecturer.

His presence in Louisville underscores the increasingly global position of the \$465 million riverfront project that is scheduled to break ground early next year.

Dercon said yesterday that the project interests

him as a radically new type of exhibition space but that his connection to the project is still "in flux."

"This project is interesting to me on the level of helping out," he said.

The museum part of the mixed-use Museum Plaza project will be more like a kunst halle, or art hall, he said. It will not collect art or display it permanently. Cities of all sizes should have both a museum and a kunst halle, he said.

"If you have only a kunst halle, you create a lot of confusion. If you have only a museum, I think maybe you miss out on some things. A museum is visual literacy, whereas a kunst halle is research labs where you can also make mistakes."

Wilson said he and his partners, and the architects, Joshua Prince-Ramus and Erez Ella of Ramus-Ella Architects (REX), have already discussed a few programming questions with Dercon, who was recommended by REX.

One was, "What's the perfect museum in terms of contemporary art?" Dercon's reply: "One that creates urban excitement."

Dercon praised the Museum Plaza team -- which also recently added the Rotterdam-based WEST 8 landscape and urban design firm -- for doing that already with its concept of retail and residential areas based around a three-story "island" of flexible exhibition space.

However, he said, "I don't know what I can actively contribute to your new museum. I do know that Louisville, Kentucky, is not just part of the state, it's part of the world, and there are a lot of people looking at you and what you're going to do."

Age: 48, born in Lier, Belgium.

Education: Studied art history and theater at Rijksuniversiteit Leiden; film theory at Vrije Unisversiteit, Amsterdam.

Professional:

Artistic director of Hause der Kunst in Munich since 2003. Director, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 1996-2003. Founder/director, Witte de With, contemporary art center, Rotterdam, 1990-95. Program director, Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S. 1, New York City, 1988-89. Co-producer of documentaries on art and culture for Belgische Radio en Televisie, 1982-91. Freelance lecturer, adviser, curator and critic with special interest in museum and exhibition history and development, ongoing.

Personal: Two children: Sam, 13, and Ysemay, 9, both of Princeton, N.J. Hobbies include mountaineering, reading and cooking.



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Wilson said "the title we're using (for Dercon's advisory role now) is director of museum development. We're hopeful he'll end up in Louisville."

Reporter Diane Heilenman can be reached at (502) 582-4682.

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Mickey D said:

<<Oh, wait a minute, I was WORKING. As strange a concept as that is for Mr Wilson, most of us do have to work for a living.

We can't all have hit the marriage lottery and while away our time and our wife's billions being "artsy".>>

Having known Steve Wilson since he was 12, I can assure you he knows what real work is. He grew up on a farm in Western Kentucky. 'nuff said.

He's also been interested in art at least that long. I'm guessing that might be what drew him and LLB together.

If you don't want Museum Plaza for Louisville, Lexington will be glad to have it!

Posted: Mon Dec 11, 2006 9:40 am

This 'proposed' museum plaza reminds me of an abstract work depicting a dog raising his leg to relieve himself. I guess that's what 'rich folk' consider art. No one I know likes the idea of this monstrosity being built and cannot see it adding to Louisville's skyline. Just another example of how the rich can do what they want and crap all over the 'working class'.

This ugly building will go the way of the 'Falls Fountain'. At first some will go 'ooh, ahhh', then it'll change to 'oh well...' and finally, 'What the f*ck? Why did we let THAT be built?'

Posted: Wed Dec 06, 2006 9:02 am

Hey Mickey D, by work do you mean surfing the internet and posting to this paper's chat room during the middle of the day, or does your nick indicate you flip burgers for a living?

Steve Wilson may be a dilettante, but he's putting a lot of equity financing together for a \$450 million dollar project that will employ quite a few people in just it's construction alone. If you're lucky, they'll put a McDonalds on the ground floor and you might be able to work there too!

Here's a man (and yes, his rich wife), who's putting his money on the line to create

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something (some people) will find interesting, and will put the 'Ville on the map, and you're pooh, poohing it. Would you prefer he build some god forsaken strip mall or subdivision and that would be honest work in your eyes?

Posted: Tue Dec 05, 2006 4:23 pm

Micky D, why do you care what Steve Wilson does with his money?

Posted: Tue Dec 05, 2006 1:46 pm

That building is weird looking. I don't like it. Might be cool inside, but outside chafes me.

Posted: Tue Dec 05, 2006 1:22 pm

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