



Clockwise from top: works by Carsten Holler, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Jean Prouve and Doris Salcedo from recent shows at the Tate Modern.

Below: The exterior of the Tate Modern.

PHOTOS: BLOOMBERG

Tate Modern's expansion is the cost of success

The London museum has overcrowded galleries and needs more space — even though it barely has the money to maintain its current facilities

BY CAROL VOGEL
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When the Tate Modern opened here 10 years ago, it was the first national museum built in Britain in 100 years and the first museum in London devoted solely to modern art. A hulking brick building that was a former power station on the south side of the Thames River at Bankside, a slowly gentrifying area just opposite St Paul's Cathedral, the US\$208 million museum captivated the art world and made a city better known for its stuffer, historic collections into an international mecca for new art.

Forty-five million people have been through the galleries of the Tate Modern since its opening, more than twice the number officials had predicted. Now Nicholas Serota, director of all the Tate museums (a network that includes Tate Britain across the river in Millbank as well as branches in Liverpool and St Ives) and the mastermind behind the Tate Modern, insists that despite the rocky economy and the recent announcement of government cutbacks for arts financing, the Tate Modern must grow.

A victim of its own success, the museum has overcrowded galleries, he explained, and needs not just more space but also different kinds of spaces. This spring it broke ground on an extension next to the existing building on a plot of land with disused oil tanks that once held fuel to power London. Under construction is an 11-story glass-and-perforated-brick origamili-like structure by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron, who transformed the power station into the Tate Modern.

"Of course it's a tough time," Serota said one summer morning sitting sipping tea in his office across the river at Tate Britain. "But it's not the moment to give up. Some of the great museums in America were built during a depression."

On a cloudless afternoon a few days later, the grounds around the Tate Modern were packed. Families were picnicking on its lawn beside the banks of the Thames; crowds were hanging around Turbine Hall, the museum's cavernous main entrance; and people were clustered inside the galleries, many glued to the video screens of *A Story of Deception*, a major exhibition devoted to Francis Alys, a Mexico City artist known for politically charged work. But unlike most US museums, which feel spic and span, the Tate Modern seems worn out.

Visitors have not been kind to the building. When it opened, officials said they expected 2 million to 2.5 million people the first year. More than 5 million came. Now attendance hovers around 4.5 million people a year. (By way of comparison, the Museum of Modern Art in New York reports that its attendance last year was about 3 million, a record for the institution.) The Tate Modern's galleries have taken a beating. Some look as though they could use fresh paint; the bathrooms are dirty; and during rush hour the cafes seem chaotic.

"I think it's better than it was," Serota said. "Frankly we were overwhelmed when we first opened. To go from zero to 5 million visitors in one year is asking a lot. And I think that years two and three the institution was to some extent struggling with its own success. But it's now grown to a place where it seems comfortable."

The extension was part of the Tate Modern's original plan, Serota was quick to point out. (Crews are working daily, and the museum's Web site, tate.org.uk/modern/transformingtm/today.htm, offers a live feed from the site, updated every 15 minutes.)

Yet the US\$328.6 million extension may be a financial drain on the institution, although the museum has received US\$77 million from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport; US\$10.8 million from the London Development Agency; and money from private sources. A spokeswoman for the Tate said about half the money had been raised, although she declined to give a figure. That leaves Serota with about US\$164 million still to raise.

And because Serota is arguably the most

powerful figure in the London art world, no artists, dealers, curators or collectors would speak for attribution about the financial problems at Tate Modern. But many are whispering that this is hardly the moment to be getting bigger, especially since the Tate Modern barely has the money to maintain the building it has.

"It's not a question of bigger," Serota argued. "We need to be able to do things that we cannot now currently do, particularly in the field of learning but also different scales of projects — different displays and exhibitions."

The extension, he said, would also alleviate some of the museum's current problems, like crowding.

The Tate Modern does not have the kind of world-class collection that the Museum of Modern Art does and probably never will. In large part this is because the UK has had few philanthropists or collectors who have given their collections to museums, and fewer still who have collected modern art. Another problem is that the great works are either astronomically expensive or already in other museum collections. To compensate the Tate Modern has been aggressively concentrating on building its holdings in art from the past 50 years.

"We have a large collection that the public has come to love and appreciate," he said. When things are taken off view, he said, "like Rebecca Horn's *Concert for Anarchy*, or Cornelia Parker's *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*, people complain. We have also bought a lot of film and video installations that we want to be able to show as well as photography."

Norman Rosenthal, who was exhibition secretary of the Royal Academy in London for 31 years, said he understood Serota's problem.

"The Tate Modern has had an effect on London that the Pompidou Center had on Paris," he said in a telephone interview. "It has exponentially changed the nature of London in a way nobody could have anticipated."

Sympathetic to the enormous practical challenges of running a museum, Rosenthal added that he saw both the merits and the difficulties of expanding in today's economy.

"Certainly this is not an age of luxury," he said. "The Goldman Sachian era of the 1990s is over."

And although he agreed that some of the galleries at the Tate Modern could look a bit "grimy," he said that moving forward was a good thing, difficult though it would be.

"All the museums in New York are too small for contemporary art," he said. "It's a worldwide phenomenon."

Besides, an extension will make the institution more popular still, he said, adding, "Everyone loves something new."

When Tate Modern first opened, US money accounted for nearly 30 percent of its individual financing. A look at the donors' wall includes the names of some of America's best-known contemporary-art collectors: Donald Fisher, a founder of the Gap; Charles Schwab, the investment magnate; Donald L. Bryant, the New York collector; the Boston collectors Dr. Mortimer and Theresa Sackler. US corporations like Bloomberg were also generous.

Henry Christensen III, a Manhattan lawyer who is a trustee of American Patrons of the Tate, a nonprofit fundraising arm that has tax-exempt status in the US, called the extension "a giant challenge" but a necessary one, adding that the museum's US fundraising has been "unabated even in this economy." But so far, officials at the Tate said, only about 4 percent of the money raised for the extension has come from the US.

"If you had a choice, you wouldn't have launched a program to expand at this time," Serota said, but added: "Obviously it's slower than it was but we're making good progress. There is money around. We just have to keep going."

