

Prominent SoCal Latin American art museum cuts \$600K from budget, lays off five employees

By Adolfo Guzman-Lopez | November 6th, 2012, 5:37pm

The Museum of Latin American Art has laid off its chief curator and four other workers to cut costs.

“We had to retrench and reduce our budget by some \$600,000,” said museum CEO Stuart Ashman, “and we had to eliminate certain positions in the museum, and unfortunately the chief curator position was one of those.”

The museum hired chief curator Cecilia Fajardo Hill three years ago from a private art foundation in Miami. [Here she is](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QRIExZEvBc) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QRIExZEvBc>) talking about her views on art soon after MOLAA hired her in 2009.

Ashman said he'd heard opposition to the layoffs mostly from Fajardo Hill's supporters. UCLA professor Chon Noriega, a high-profile Latino art promoter in Los Angeles, said the news of her layoff shocked him.

“She brings a strong theoretical and transnational framework to Latin American modern and contemporary art,” he said.

Noriega praised a conference between MOLAA and the Getty last year that tackled the issue of rethinking Latin American art. CEO Ashman praised Fajardo Hill's work for MOLAA and said the cuts were necessary because of a chronic budget deficit.

Wealthy entrepreneur and art collector Robert Gumbiner founded the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach 16 years ago. Gumbiner used to cover the museum's yearly operating deficits. But since his death three years ago, Ashman said, the organization has had to live within its means.

“With this \$600,000 reduction, we feel we could achieve the balanced budget that we need to achieve because we can't go into debt,” he said. The institution laid off four full-time employees and one part-time employee on Monday.

Ashman said two junior curators remain and the museum will strive to continue presenting compelling exhibits. The museum will rely, he said, on social media to attract more visitors. The museum projects attendance this year to be up about 6% compared to last year. Ashman attributed much of that gain to a grant from Target that provides free admission on Sundays.

The museum's layoffs coincide with rising attendance and critical praise for shows museum curators originated. While it's focused on the work of artists living in Latin America, in recent years it has included Latino artists from the United States in group shows.



courtesy MoLAA

The late Robert Gumbiner at Long Beach's Museum of Latin American Art, which he founded in the mid 1990s. Since his death three years ago, the institution has had to live within its means. This week it dismissed several employees including its chief curator.



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