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 **Karen Ocamb**
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New West Hollywood Library Invites Cultural Renaissance

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West Hollywood Library (Photo by Jonathan Moore)

I am a child of what conservatives in the dark and conformist 1950s called the **Countercultural movement**. Born of the outlaw and Beatnik *Howl* against societal oppression, the 1960s flourished with color and celebration of individual creativity and artistic expression. One of the leading lights articulating the significance of art and literature to civilization was President John F. Kennedy.

In an **October 26, 1963 speech** at Amherst College in Massachusetts honoring the late poet Robert Frost, Kennedy said:

Our national strength matters, but the spirit which informs and controls our strength matters just as much... For art establishes the basic human truth which must serve as the touchstone of our judgment.

The artist, however faithful to his personal vision of reality, becomes the last champion of the individual mind and sensibility against an intrusive society and an officious state... If sometimes our great artists have been the most critical of our society, it is because their sensitivity and their concern for justice, which must motivate any true artist, makes him aware that our Nation falls short of its highest potential. I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist.

I was reminded of the importance of art, literature and culture during a preview reception Saturday night for the opening of the **new West Hollywood Library** -- which will be officially dedicated and opened on Saturday, October 1 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the West Hollywood Park Plaza, 625 N. San Vicente Boulevard. Best-selling author Jackie Collins will be the guest speaker; she will also participate in the **10th Annual West Hollywood Book Fair** on Sunday, October 2 at West Hollywood Park Plaza.

My friends **videographers Renee Sotile and Mary Jo Godges** and I interviewed artist **Shepard Fairey** -- perhaps best known for his iconic poster of candidate Barack Obama and his post-Prop 8 poster for Love and Equality (**Mark Hefflinger wrote about Fairey** in a piece on an art exhibit called Manifest Equality). Fairey said it took four weeks to complete the mural outside the West Hollywood City Council Chambers. Of those opposed to marriage equality, he said: "For someone to tell you who or how to love -- that's just crazy."

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Fairey mural outside West Hollywood City Council Chambers (Photo by Karen Ocamb)



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Girl holding Shepard Fairey Love Unites poster at a post-Prop 8 rally downtown LA (Photo by Karen Ocamb)

Murals by Fairey, Retna (a.k.a. Marquis Lewis), and Kenny Scharf on the exterior walls of the library are [part of a collaboration](#) between Vanity Fair and Cadillac in partnership with the City of West Hollywood and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) as part of their popular "Art in the Streets" exhibition (now at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA until August 8). Renowned photographer David LaChapelle is shooting the artists and their murals for a spread in the November issue of *Vanity Fair*, which goes on sale Oct. 11. The official unveiling of the murals is slated for October 12.



Shepard Fairey exterior mural part of MOCA exhibit



Kenny Scherf mural on the Library exterior as seen from the park (Photo by Karen Ocamb)

We also interviewed the shy and smart artist [David Wiseman](#) whose [indoor environmental](#) sculpture is breathtaking. These video interviews and other video coverage will be posted on [FrontiersLA.com](#).



Artist David Weisman (Photo by Karen Ocamb)



A section of artist David Weisman's tree sculpture (Photo by Karen Ocamb)

The dream for the new library in a facility that would also serve as the civic and cultural center of West Hollywood (the new City Council Chambers are there, too) originated more than 15 years ago with longtime Councilmember John Heilman, with help [along the way from Mayor John Duran](#).



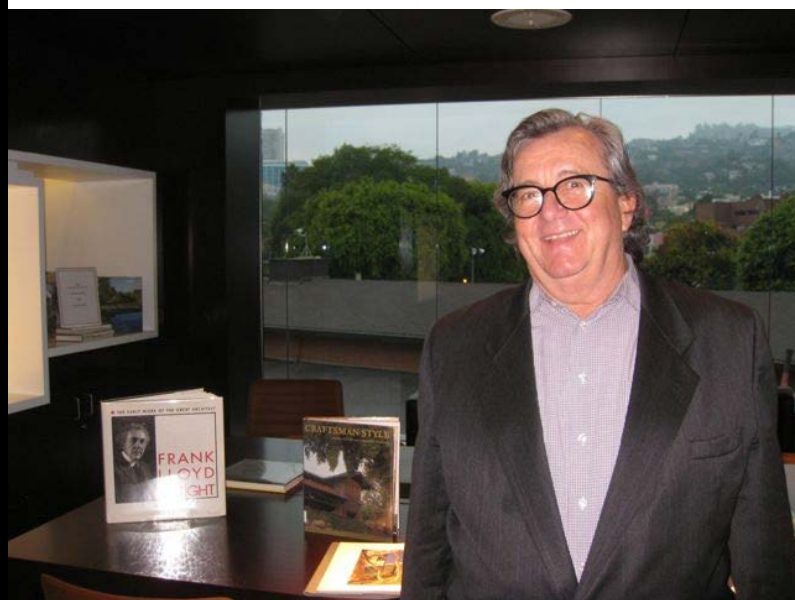
WeHo City Manager Paul Arevalo, Councilmembers John Heilman and Abbe Land, Christopher BonBright, Mayor John Duran, Councilmember John D'Amico (Photo by Karen Ocamb)



West Hollywood City Councilmember John Heilman, Heilman's deputy Fran Solomon, and library consultant Linda Demmers (Photo by Karen Ocamb)

But Heilman deflected taking credit, telling me:

The idea of a new library came from the community. I helped move it forward. I've had the opportunity to see the library during the construction phase during tours for potential donors and community leaders. But the tours occurred while some areas were still hidden behind construction equipment and before the bookshelves and furniture were in and certainly before the books and computers were installed. It was great to see everything together. I'm certain that our new library will be a resource for the community for years to come.



Rocky LaFleur (Photo by Karen Ocamb)

Rocky LaFleur, Heilman's friend, neighbor and a sales representative with Kneeder/Fauchere at the Pacific Design Center across the street from the library, was less reserved. Overseeing an environmentally-controlled room housing precious historical archives, LaFleur excitedly explained how he and Heilman dreamed of a significant community library and cultural center years before any plans were drawn up.



Pacific Design Center is across the street from the Library (Photo by Karen Ocamb)

But LaFleur was almost beside himself with the idea that young artists and designers could come from around the world to find a welcoming place to learn and develop their creativity in the new facility. He said he came to West Hollywood 32 years ago and used the existing library to learn about design. He is hoping that the many designers and architects who have come to West Hollywood for West Week or worked at the Pacific Design Center or used West Hollywood for inspiration or to create their original homes will donate their sketches, books and collections to the new library for others to appreciate. "This is one of the most exciting days of my life," LaFleur said.

The new Library complex has a creative feel to it, with art inside and out.



Detail from ceiling in West Hollywood Library (Photo by Jonathan Moore)

It is also a **certified "Green Building"** with a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver rating. Within its 32,000 square feet, are computer (with wireless internet) and technology areas, signature collections (including arts and design, international languages), a children's theatre and other areas for youth, as well as books, music and DVDs with viewing areas. The city estimates that just over 35% of its population is gay and, according to Daphne Dennis, the city's Social Services Manager, as of 2010 about 12% of the city's population is HIV positive. Gays and people with HIV/AIDS **are also represented** in the library.



HIV and LGBT stacks in the Library (Photo by Karen Ocamb)

Los Angeles is also proud of its library and [public arts displays](#). But this new library, alongside the park and new sports facilities, has the potential to be what the [Oscar Wilde Bookstore](#) in Greenwich Village and A Different Light Bookstore at Sunset Junction in Silverlake -- the [site of which was leveled on Saturday](#) -- were for LGBTs and creative people in the 60s and 70s. Only this one is not subject to the winds of the economy and commerce.



West Hollywood Library (Photo by Jo Anne Sitjar)

Libraries are the great levelers and the thought of budding creative people from the Valley or South or East LA hopping a bus and coming to WeHo to learn, to observe and mingle with others developing similar interests suggests a possible flowering -- a Renaissance -- of culture and color and Freedom of Expression unlike any we've seen since the vibrant 1960s.

Only this time the movement is being spearheaded not by a single prominent leader but by a community in the Creative City of West Hollywood.

West Hollywood is providing free parking at the new parking garage at 625 N. San Vicente Boulevard (enter from Robertson Boulevard at El Tovar Place) and at the Pacific Design Center at 8687 Melrose Avenue for the WeHo Book Fair on Oct. 2. There will also be complimentary Cityline Shuttle service available from Plummer Park to West Hollywood Park. The Cityline Shuttle will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, October 1st.

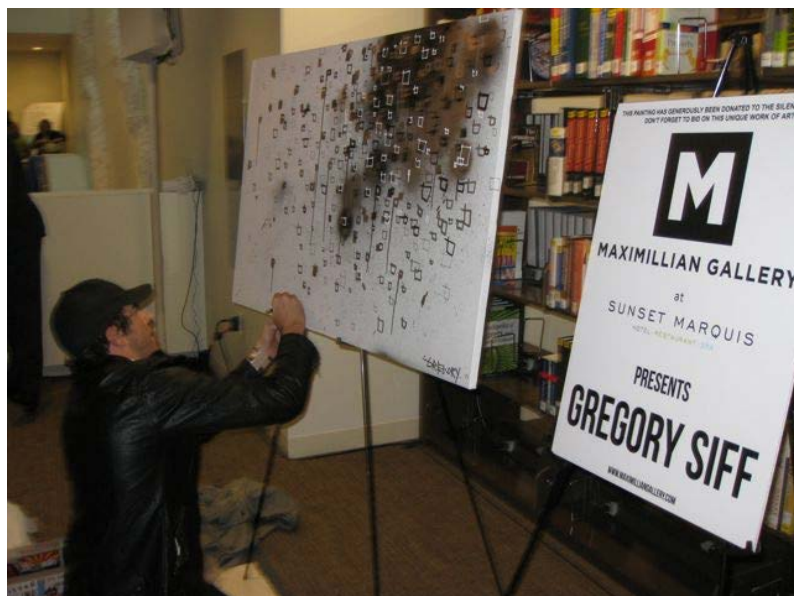
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Eric Shaw Quinn and Christopher Rice (Photo by Karen Ocamb)



LA County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky (Photo by Karen Ocamb)



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