

arts scottsdale news release
scottsdale museum of contemporary art

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SMOCA PRESENTS GROUNDBREAKING RETROSPECTIVE OF VISIONARY ARCHITECT PAOLO SOLERI'S WORK



Soleri sketching at his desk, Cosanti, circa 1960s. Gelatin-silver print, 10 x 8 inches. Collection of the Cosanti Foundation.
(Photo: Stuart A. Weiner, ©The Weiner Estate)

Paolo Soleri: The City Is Nature
Oct. 14, 2017 – Jan. 28, 2018
Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art
Information at www.SMoCA.org

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. – In October, the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA) will unveil a groundbreaking and unprecedented retrospective of seminal Italian-born American artist and architect Paolo Soleri.

Organized by SMoCA Curator of Contemporary Art Claire C. Carter, *Paolo Soleri: The City Is Nature* focuses on drawings, sculptures and models that Soleri produced during the richest years of his artistic evolution — from 1947 until the mid-1970s. The selected works represent Soleri's most creative moments when he was making his artwork and constructing his home-studio, primarily with his own hands. The exhibition brings together elements from his built and unbuilt residences, bridges, dams, cities and transportation systems.

In addition to original drawings, models and sketchbooks, the exhibition surveys the artist's earliest ceramic and bronze artisan crafts, as well as fabric designs and silkscreens. It also investigates Soleri's personal engagement with the art and architecture of his time; the widespread recognition of his work by museums, scholars and curators; his relationship with Frank Lloyd Wright; and his influence on the American counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s.

"The Museum is very excited about this retrospective," said SMoCA Director and Chief Curator Sara Cochran, Ph.D. It represents the culmination of SMoCA's three exhibitions series with Paolo Soleri and the Cosanti Foundation, and almost a decade of engagement with, and study of, Soleri's work, ideas, models and practices. It has been a joy to have the opportunity to work with Soleri during his lifetime and to publish this comprehensive catalog that we believe will add to the scholarship around this visionary thinker now that he has passed. We look forward to seeing ever more interest and study of this compelling figure who pioneered so many ideas, including the idea of high-density living, and who built some of the icons in the Arizona landscape."

The exhibition will be the first and only retrospective and monographic exhibition since Soleri's death in 2013 in Paradise Valley, Ariz., and represents the largest collection of original drawings, fragile sketchbooks, architectural models, sculptures, prints and photographs presented in North America since 1971. It will cover about 4,500 square feet with works gathered from the artist's vast archives; The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; and private collections. Large scroll drawings — some more than 30 feet long — will be presented for the first time since their conservation in 2005.

Soleri's pioneering idea, "arcology," or the fusion of architecture and ecology, proved prescient in its ties to current issues about sustainable cities, suburban sprawl, climate change, renewable energy and water shortages.

His designs address low-density urban and suburban sprawl and focus on the city's relationship to the natural world and environmental accountability. In his prolific drawings, Soleri imagined vibrant urban spaces created by high-density urban living, respect for natural resources and a commercial sector based upon creativity. The proposed high-rise buildings provide square footage on a smaller footprint. Pedestrian-friendly parks and gardens link the elements of a vibrant city center — private residences, stores, schools, markets, churches, hospitals, libraries, theaters and museums.

"Throughout his career, Soleri's designs changed radically," Carter said, "but one constant remained: a concern for the how man should live among other humans, but also amid the natural splendor of the world around us — and the ways in which our built environment can serve that goal."

Paolo Soleri: The City Is Nature is SMoCA's third and final exhibition exploring the trajectory of Soleri's art, architecture and philosophy, initiated in 2010. The first was *Bridges: Spanning the Ideas of Paolo Soleri* (2011); the second was *Paolo Soleri: Mesa City to Arcosanti* (2013).

Bridges focused on the architect's designs for bridges, which he viewed as metaphors for the way humans connect to one another and the natural landscape, and coincided with the inauguration of Soleri's final construction project, the Soleri Bridge and Plaza on the Scottsdale Waterfront.

The *Mesa City* exhibition concentrated on Soleri's urban designs, including Cosanti and Arcosanti — two residential communities he built in the Arizona desert. Cosanti is Soleri's studio and former residence in Paradise Valley. The name

Cosanti combines the Italian word “*cosa*,” or thing, and the Latin prefix “*anti*,” or against. “Anti-thing,” or anti-materialist, is a value Soleri was committed to in his art, architecture and personal life. Arcosanti is Soleri’s largest experiment with urban design, located about 70 miles north of Phoenix in Mayer, Ariz.

Construction at Cosanti began in 1955 and new construction ended in 1969 when Soleri and his apprentices redirected their attention to Arcosanti. Soleri initially conceived of Arcosanti as a residential community focused on environmental accountability and sustainability. His first designs and models depict a dense urban city with more than 5,000 residents living in massive apse-shaped buildings rising high above a desert canyon. Building vertically would reduce the city’s spatial footprint and provide residents with immediate access to the beautiful natural landscape.

Arcosanti quickly became a nexus in American avant-garde art, music and theater. During the latter half of the 20th century, Cosanti and Arcosanti were considered pilgrimage sites for the counter-culture, and were visited by celebrated artists and intellectuals, such as composer John Cage, feminist Betty Friedan, scientist Stephen Jay Gould, choreographer Anna Halprin, photographers Julius Shulman and Hans Namuth, and filmmakers Frances Ford Coppola and George Lucas.

The majority of structures were completed by the early 1980s. The number of residents peaked in the mid-1970s when more than 150 people camped onsite. During the 1980s economic crisis, financial resources, as well as popular interest in the site, waned.

Today, Arcosanti includes a ceramics workshop and bronze foundry, community spaces, a performance stage, cafeteria, dormitories and private residences where about 40 permanent and semi-permanent individuals live.

Soleri, born in Turin, Italy, in 1919, initially was drawn to the United States by the desire to apprentice at Taliesin West with Wright, and he fell in love with the American Southwest, the desert landscape and the freedom isolation provided. Although Italian by birth, Soleri became a U.S. citizen and always identified as an American artist.

He first drew national attention while apprenticing under Wright in 1948 and his artwork figured into the earliest integrations of art and architecture in American art museums. He was included in The Museum of Modern Art’s book, *The Architecture of Bridges* (1949), which was followed by three seminal contemporary architecture exhibitions at MoMA: *Built in the USA: Post-War Architecture* (1952), *Visionary Architecture* (1960) and *Modern Architecture, U.S.A.* (1965). In the 1950s and ‘60s, Soleri was exhibited beside Le Corbusier, Buckminster Fuller, Louis Kahn, Charles and Ray Eames, and Wright.

In 2000 Soleri received a Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale. He was awarded gold medals from the American Institute of Architects and the Union of International Architects, and received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum in 2006.

Despite these accolades, until now the last major U.S. exhibition of Soleri’s work, *The Architectural Visions of Paolo Soleri*, was organized in 1969–1970 by the Corcoran Museum of Art and traveled to the Whitney Museum of American Art; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and the Berkeley Art Museum; among others.

EXHIBITION PUBLICATION

In celebration of the exhibition, a large-format, hardcover catalog, authored by Claire C. Carter, will document the artworks and concepts in this exhibition. Four chapters by expert historians will closely examine Soleri’s often-overlooked achievements within the disciplines of design and craft, futurist and utopian architecture, and 1970s theories of consciousness-raising and therapy. The book will demonstrate the widespread popular interest and excitement about Soleri’s ideas in 1970 and offer a variety of possibilities for the steep decline in his popularity and the resulting lack of historical attention paid to this important artist. *Repositioning Paolo Soleri: The City Is Nature* will be the only monograph to analyze Soleri’s art and ideas after 2009 and will include an extensive annotated bibliography, a previously unpublished 1974 interview with the architect and a photographic essay of Soleri’s two experimental communities, Cosanti and Arcosanti.

SCOTTSDALE ARTS

Through its partnership with the City of Scottsdale, the nonprofit Scottsdale Arts (formerly known as Scottsdale Cultural Council) creates diverse, inspired arts experiences and educational opportunities that foster active, lifelong community engagement with the arts. Since its founding in 1987, Scottsdale Arts has grown into a regionally and nationally significant, multi-disciplinary arts organization offering an exceptional variety of programs through three acclaimed divisions – Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA) and Scottsdale Public Art – serving more than 400,000 participants annually.

ABOUT SMOCA

Founded in 1999, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA) explores the best of contemporary art, architecture and design. Global in its focus, the Museum is a unique and vital cultural resource for the Southwest, serving local audiences as well as visitors from the United States and abroad. Designed by award-winning architect Will Bruder, SMoCA's minimalist building (an ingenious renovation of a former movie theater) has four galleries for showcasing changing exhibitions and works from the Museum's collection, along with SMoCA Lounge, a living, functional art installation and space for community engagement. The Museum presents a wide variety of educational programs and special events for adults and families, including lectures, readings, performances, docent-led tours, workshops and classes. SMoCA also features an outdoor sculpture garden housing James Turrell's *Knight Rise*, one of the renowned artist's public skyspaces, and *Scrim Wall*, a monumental curtain of translucent glass panels by James Carpenter Design Associates. The Museum's retail store, Shop@SMoCA, offers classic design objects and furnishings, contemporary jewelry, art and architecture books and imaginative gifts for all occasions.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art
7374 E. Second St., Scottsdale, AZ 85251

www.SMoCA.org

480-874-4666

SMoCA@ScottsdaleArts.org

HOURS AND ADMISSION

Tuesday – Wednesday, noon – 5 p.m.

Thursday – Saturday, noon – 9 p.m.

Sunday, noon – 5 p.m.

Closed Mondays and major holidays

Admission: \$10 adults, \$7 students, free for members and children under 15

Free on Thursdays and after 5 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays