

NUMU

AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO EDUCATION AND ENTERTAINMENT

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NEW MUSEUM LOS GATOS

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New Museum Los Gatos (NUMU) has taken apart a traditional art and history museum and put it back together in a fascinating and creative way. Despite technically existing in various forms for over 50 years, the current iteration of the museum is something very special. Its leadership thinks of it as a startup, and in that vision, isn't afraid to take chances or to run lightly and efficiently.

When NUMU's current leadership inherited an archive room packed full with treasured artifacts, they found the vestiges of the people who have influenced this valley. Hats, both men's and women's, in a range of styles and varying levels of historical significance, are high on a shelf. A 1940s Los Gatos High School cheerleading outfit hangs nearby. In one corner sit seven taxidermic ducks and wild birds, holdovers from the early days when this was a natural history museum. A collection of Native American beaded leather and stone tools waits to be displayed in an upcoming exhibit exploring the legacy of the American Indian Urban Relocation Program.

Facing the challenge of telling the stories of this

community in a way that engages and inspires, NUMU recently underwent a complete rebranding and developed a new gallery space. With fresh perspective and visionary leadership, this decades-old institution has evolved away from the weight and heft of traditional history telling (stuffed waterfowl included) to find a lighter, more modern way to connect with its audience.

According to Maureen Cappon-Javey, the deputy director, they started by thinking about every person who might step through the museum doors. "We set out to organize it so that there's something for every age, every person," she explains. From there, they determined that each exhibit should have relevance to Los Gatos. Whether it's a broad study of what was meaningful to people here (like a recent artistic survey on an Arcadian theme) or someone from Los Gatos with a wider influence in the world, everything is both locally connected and globally relevant. Lisa Coscino, executive director, has a vision that "everyone here sees themselves—feels a connection—sees that they're part of the story."



Left to right: Amy Long, Marianne McGrath, Gabriel Coke, Leslie Sanchez, Julie Harper, Kim Snyder (seated), Madeleine Crow (seated), Lisa Coscino, Shay Barnett, and Maureen Cappon-Javey

The museum has been transformed internally, but also externally. It now occupies the circa 1960s library, located in the downtown plaza across from the high school. The polished cement floors, pressure-sensitive temporary walls, and boxy, sparse Brutalist aesthetic creates a perfect blank canvas—a space that moves and adjusts and becomes whatever the curator wants it to be.

In keeping with the rebrand and finely tuned mission, the rotating exhibits are the real stars. While traditional art and history museums can overwhelm visitors with visuals and information, this space feels light and effervescent. The exhibition design is so delicate that it feels like art itself. There is a creative use of negative space that lets the visitor's mind feel clear and focused, ready to be taken to places it never expected.

Just as the museum direction and design encourages the rethinking and reimagining of traditional disciplines, it also serves as an outlet for the creativity it inspires. NUMU offers classical instruction in drawing and painting through its atelier program, where students of all levels work with

an accomplished instructor. The studio offers open time, advanced training in classical techniques, visiting artist workshops, and a multifaceted MakerSpace studio that welcomes artists and explorers of all ages and abilities. It's an incubator for area talent, and a chance for anyone to expand their boundaries of comfort and creativity.

NUMU feels like a museum for real people. In the thoughtful examination of the museum's mission, Lisa, Maureen, and their team considered their audience—scientists, engineers, doctors, experts of all kinds. "Silicon Valley is full of sophisticated people, and we wanted them to be wowed," explained Lisa. "But," she continued, "we want them to come back because it's fun."

As plans evolve for a locals' Make and Mingle Night, where participants will drink wine, view exhibits, and try their hand at a makers project, it's certain that visitors will have fun. And as the museum continues to settle into its new identity and to excite with innovative exhibits, it's certain, too, that visitors will be wowed.

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