



# Curating Destiny

The Hirshhorn's proposed jaw-dropping spectacles are more than just hot air. | By Tiffany Jow |

On March 22, when the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden unveils its latest digital projection exhibition by Doug Aitken, the undulating work of art will blanket the donut-shaped Smithsonian's facade. Eleven high-definition projectors will seamlessly fuse images rotating, rising and falling around the building into a 360-degree film. "Song 1," perhaps titled for its foreshadowing effects, is just the first of the transformations Richard Koshalek will direct for the museum in 2012.

During his tenure as the president of the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, CA, critics suggested then-president Koshalek's plan to build a \$50 million Frank Gehry design was the mark of his "edifice complex." Three years into his term as the director of the Hirshhorn, the 69-year-old's enthusiasm for edgy infrastructure projects with outsize pricetags is earning him an international reputation for innovation and the adoration of his board.

Intent to revolutionize a museum whose profile has seldom been on top in the art world, Koshalek hopes to use the museum, inside and out, to impact U.S. cultural policy. His ambitious plan includes curating exhibitions and educational programs with global reach, such as the upcoming Ai Weiwei exhibit. But he's perhaps gained the most notoriety for the other ways he plans to use the building itself, like the much-talked-about \$7.4 million Seasonal Inflatable Structure by Diller Scofidio + Renfro. "I've always believed that if you have a very strong idea, the funding will be found," he says.

While his vision has been criticized once again for its largesse, Koshalek says complaints that plans for financing and opening the bubble extension haven't been solidified should be attributed to "logistics." The Hirshhorn remained mum about the project while working to get the green light

from the U.S. Commission on Fine Arts, the National Capital Planning Commission and the museum board, as well as funding from Nokia, the MacArthur Foundation, the Person Foundation and Bloomberg.

This October, the bubble will rise for symposiums organized with the Council on Foreign Relations, the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and bigwigs such as *The Hurt Locker* director Kathryn Bigelow and conductor Daniel Barenboim. Koshalek and his board have long intended for this project to insert the museum into national social and political debates.

"People say, 'Oh, the money isn't coming in,' but we're just \$3 million away," he says. "The problem has been the scale of a 15-story building—it's never been done before. The pantheon in Rome can fit inside this structure. It simply takes longer than ever expected to get through normal processes." The bubble needs to be able to withstand 80 mile-per-hour winds, for example, requiring studies that take time to conduct.

For an architectural trifecta, the museum will transform the lobby from its current shop to a space for long-term installations this fall, as well. The first will be by conceptual artist Barbara Kruger, who'll plaster her iconic collaged texts on the walls, ceiling, floor and even escalators in the space leading to a new bookstore downstairs. "While other (museums) have moved toward an entertainment approach," says chief curator Kerry Brougher, "we're trying to do substantial exhibitions that other institutions wouldn't dare attempt."

The tremendous interest of the museum world tells Koshalek he's on the right track. Only time and delivery will quiet his critics. He's not concerned. "The validation for what we're doing is coming from just about everywhere," Koshalek says. "It's too important not to keep moving forward." ■