

Modesto Art Museum

*The city is our collection;
the neighborhoods are our galleries.*

Building a Better Modesto Accomplishments and City Engagement - 2019

The Modesto Art Museum has produced many events and exhibits since 2005. The exhibits brought a variety of arts to Modesto, from prints, mail art, and movies, to industrial photography and electronic art. As much as possible exhibits were participatory, free, and designed to inspire creativity.

The museum's community-engaging and community-building role kicked into high gear when Modesto was ranked the least livable of the nation's 373 largest cities in *Cities: Ranked and Rated*. Instead of disputing the ranking, the museum asked: What can an art museum do to improve the quality of life for the people of Modesto? In 2008, the museum launched *Building a Better Modesto*, an ongoing program using art, architecture, design, landscape, and urban design to create a more livable and vibrant city.

Building a Better Modesto includes:

Modesto Architecture and Design Week (MAD Week) formerly the Modesto Architecture Festival <https://www.madweek.org/>

- The festival mission is to celebrate architecture and design as both an art and a science, and to heighten public awareness of architecture and design and the value of architects and designers in creating more livable and beautiful communities.
- The festival includes architecture, fashion design, graphic design, interior design, landscape architecture, product design, social design, urban design, and user experience design.
- The festival is one of the oldest in the country. As many as 5,000 have participated annually over seven to nine days in dozens of free events and activities including movies, exhibits, talks, tours, workshops, and installations.
- In 2015, the festival received a national award of merit from the American Institute of Architects and brought Modesto positive national attention.
- Besides introducing thousands of participants to the importance of good design in creating more livable cities, the festival offers Continuing Education Units for local AIA architects and internships for university students.
- Between 2012 and 2018, the museum and its principle partner, the American Institute of Architects Sierra Valley Chapter raised more than \$135,000 in grants and more than \$80,000 in sponsorships so that all official festival events could be free for everyone. Another \$50,000 of in-kind gifts were donated. Almost all funds are spent locally.
- The most popular festival event is the family workshop where between 400 and 600 children and their adults build architecture models, experiment with design, and create fun projects.
- The festival is a model and inspiration for new festivals in Sacramento, Stockton, and Santiago, Chile.

Modesto Art Museum

- Visitors to the festival come from all over California, most within 100 miles of Modesto, many from other states, and a sprinkling from Canada and Germany. Zip code information was collected



Other Architecture Aspects of Building a Better Modesto

- Over the last five years, the museum has taken hundreds of people on guided walks through the architecture of downtown Modesto. The tours, offered in English and Spanish, have increased civic pride and appreciation.
- The museum has provided speakers to a wide variety of organizations discussing Modesto's architectural heritage. The talks have heightened awareness and interest in Modesto's architecture and in urban design.
- In 2012, the AIA Sierra Valley and the museum organized the repainting of the streamline art deco gas station on Needham Street. The paint design was chosen through a state-wide competition.
- The museum created five self guided art and architecture tours of the design district and other parts of Modesto for mobile devices. Two of the guides are in English and Spanish. More than 10,000 guides were downloaded in 2014.
- Through *Modesto Heritage*, the museum provides historic architectural information to the city of Modesto and property owners considering façade improvements or historic preservation designation. In 2018, the museum provided historic information for the renovation of the Southern Pacific depot.
- The museum produced *Modesto Modernism*, a 14 minute movie about Modesto's Modernist architecture. The movie was funded by the Creative Work Fund.
- In 2015, the museum provided a \$600 grant to the Stanislaus County Library for architecture books.

Modesto Art Museum

Public Art

- Through the Downtown Design Committee, the museum played a key role in the development and implementation of the city's first public art policy.
- The museum funded three art bike racks as test cases for the city's public art policy. The museum hosted a state-wide design competition for the racks.
- *Meet Your Neighbor*, a 2011 photo event with artist Jessica Gomula, more than 125 large portraits of Modesto residents were placed in windows downtown.



Urban Design and Landscape

- The museum and its partners participated in the world-wide Park(ing) Day, introducing Modesto to the concept of parklets. The museum is actively involved in the designing of new parklets for the city.



Modesto Art Museum

- The museum partnered with CSU Stanislaus in 2012 when the university opened the Building Imagination Center bringing video art and movie production to downtown Modesto. Visual art exhibits were provided by the museum. Several thousand people participated in center events over 18 months.
- Through the Downtown Design Committee, the museum played a major role in the design of the streetscape on 10th Street between I and J, in the creation of the parklets at 10th and J, in the process of designing J Street from 9th to 17th Street, and in the creation of the bike corral at 11th and J.
- The museum designated two neighborhoods as official Modesto Art Museum galleries and created tours for them: the Graceada Park area for its bungalow, storybook, and other early 20th-century architecture, and the Modesto Design District, a 12-square-block area of downtown.
- January through March 2013, the exhibit *Modesto: the Next 100 Years* explored several development projects in the city including the new passenger rail station and the popular downtown parklets. Through maps, drawings, and photos, many provided by the city planning department, visitors attained an understanding of the complexity of these projects and how they will change the urban fabric of Modesto.

Design

- Working with civic groups, the museum branded and promoted a portion of the downtown as the Modesto Design District. As part of the process, the museum worked with merchants and the Modesto Downtown Improvement District to produce Modesto Design Week, 9 days of events in the design district.



- The museum hosted two design exhibits, *Modern Art Kimono* (1,875 visitors) and *Modesto Design* (2,160 visitors). *Modesto Design* explored 100 patent designs of Modesto residents from a 1902 car to cutting edge contemporary furniture.
- Since 2018, the museum has been host to Mo.De, the Modesto Design Collective, a community of designers, innovators, makers, and creative visionaries,

Modesto Art Museum

committed to making Modesto a vibrant design capital that values, celebrates and supports design and the broader creative community.

<https://www.modestodesign.org/>

One of the goals for Building a Better Modesto was and is to increase the vibrancy of downtown Modesto and the entire city by:

1. Attracting people to the area in ways that feature art, architecture, design, landscape, and urban design
2. Changing the long-term way residents perceive and experience the downtown through fostering a pride of place
3. Promoting and institutionalizing design excellence in public art, architecture, urban design, and public spaces among the general public, students, educators, politicians, and design professionals through education and public policy changes

Major Foundation Grants for Building a Better Modesto:

- ArtPlace America, \$101,600
- Creative Work Fund, \$16,950
- Target Foundation, \$10,000
- Teichert Foundation, \$7,400

Building a Better Modesto project partners have included:

- American Institute of Architects, Sierra Valley Chapter
- American Society of Landscape Architects
- Anderson Gallery
- California State University Stanislaus
- Central California Art Association
- Chartreuse Muse Gallery
- City of Modesto
- Crow Trading Company
- Downtown Design Committee
- Downtown Modesto Partnership
- Deva Café
- McHenry Museum
- Modesto Film Society
- Picasso's Gallery and Deli
- Modesto Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Modesto Downtown Improvement District
- Modesto Improvement Partnership
- Modesto Film Society
- Modesto Stanislaus Poetry Center
- Modesto City Schools teachers and students
- Peer Recovery Gallery
- Picasso's Café

Modesto Art Museum

- Stanislaus Community Foundation
- Stanislaus County Library
- State Theatre
- Sylvan Union School District teachers and students