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Dia Center To Open A Museum Upstate

By **CAROL VOGEL**

The Dia Center for the Arts, the innovative contemporary arts institution based in Chelsea, announced yesterday that it would open a massive museum in an abandoned paperboard factory in the hard-pressed Hudson River town of Beacon.

The \$20-million museum, an hour's drive from Manhattan, will feature works by artists like Richard Serra, Dan Flavin, Joseph Beuys and Donald Judd, and will include 160,000 square feet of gallery space. That is roughly four times the exhibition space of the Whitney Museum of American Art and a little less than twice the exhibition space now in the Museum of Modern Art, which is about to undergo an expansion.

The Dia Center said it hoped the waterfront museum, scheduled to open in 2001, would attract 50,000 and 60,000 visitors a year, enough to give a significant boost to the economy of Beacon, a depressed industrial city. Gov. George E. Pataki, who yesterday said the new "world-class" museum would "preserve the Hudson Valley's rich cultural legacy," has pledged \$2 million toward the new space with discretionary money from the state's Community Enhancement Fund. An additional \$800,000 is coming from other state sources, Dutchess County and the City of Beacon.

"This is the first facility I've seen with enough space and light to do justice to our collection," said Michael Govan, the director of Dia. "We have one of the largest and finest museum collections of art of the 1960's and 1970's ranging from Andy Warhol's 'Shadow Paintings' to the recently acquired 'Torqued Ellipses' by Richard Serra. The scale requirements to show some of these works is enormous."

Dia has long been known for its alternative exhibition spaces. This will be the sixth location it has inaugurated. Besides its two galleries on West 22d Street, Dia also operates several site-specific art installations including Walter De Maria's "New York Earth Room" and "The Broken Kilometer" both in Manhattan; "The Lightning Field" in New Mexico, and the Dan Flavin Art Institute in Bridgehampton, N.Y. Dia also has collaborated with others on the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh and the Cy Twombly Gallery in Houston.

The 292,000-square-foot factory off Walcott Avenue and 26 surrounding acres are being donated to Dia by the International Paper Company, whose headquarters are in Purchase, N.Y. The Beacon factory, built in 1929 by what is now Nabisco, has sat empty ever since 1991. The Federal Paper Board Company, which had bought it from Nabisco, was acquired by the International Paper Company in 1995, and the factory came with the sale. International Paper had planned to sell the building, putting a \$2 million price tag on it until it was approached by Governor Pataki who persuaded it to give it to Dia. Mr. Govan said he first saw the building in Beacon last spring. He started bringing artists like Mr. Serra and Robert Ryman, whose works are represented in Dia's collection, for visits to gauge their impressions. Then he went straight to the Governor's office to inquire about support and to his trustees, who have already earmarked close to \$10 million toward the project.

"I've always liked this type of great old industrial building for art," said Leonard Riggio, the chief executive of Barnes & Noble and Dia's chairman. "Having contemporary art along the Hudson is mind boggling to me."

People generally tend to identify contemporary art with big cities. There aren't enough people who realize the landscape in America is full of culture and this kind of celebrates that."

The factory is about two miles from the Tallix Foundry where artists like Frank Stella and Claes Oldenburg have worked. It is also a 15-minute drive across the Hudson from Storm King Art Center, which is devoted primarily to outdoor sculpture.

The factory in Beacon, a historic steel, concrete and glass structure, is a model of functional and elegant early 20th-century industrial architecture, Mr. Govan said. The building is distinguished by high ceilings, large open spaces and an extensive system of north-facing skylights, making it a perfect showcase for contemporary art.

Even though Dia has long had far-flung outposts, the announcement follows a growing interest on the part of New York museums in off-site expansions in the region. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is contemplating a new museum on a Hudson River pier and the Museum of Modern Art has just merged with P.S. 1 in Long Island City, Queens.

Assembled largely during the 1970's and early 1980's by Dia's founders, the German art dealer Heiner Friedrich and the Houston arts patron Philippa de Menil, Dia's collection today has about 500 works and includes those by Beuys, John Chamberlain, Walter De Maria, Flavin and Judd. It also includes a group of 19th-century Hudson River school drawings by John Kensett, Aaron Shattuck and other masters which was assembled by Flavin, who died in 1996 and was a longtime resident of the Hudson Valley and one of Dia's founding artists.

Twenty years ago, Flavin had envisioned a Dia museum in the area for his own works and the Hudson River drawings, a vision that was never realized.

But will people from New York City be willing to drive an hour or spend 1 hour 15 minutes on a Metro North train to see the new museum? "When we opened up Chelsea in 1988, everybody said no one would come," said Mr. Govan. "Now we get over 80,000 visitors a year, and we have over 70 art galleries in our neighborhood."

While Beacon may not be as convenient as, say, P.S. 1, Dia simply could not afford space closer to Manhattan. "This is a \$20-million project that will yield close to 200,000 square feet of gallery space," Mr. Govan said. "A project of that scale in New York City would cost 5 to 10 times that much."

Preliminary studies conducted on behalf of Dia indicate that the new center will generate nearly \$1.7 million annually in revenue, and create 23 jobs.

Mr. Govan said that the new museum would probably have the same admission charge as Dia's Chelsea galleries, \$6. But such details have not been worked out.