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## Organizers count on new Kimmel art installation to be smashing success



BY PETER CRIMMINS

Since the Kimmel Center opened 12 years ago, it has struggled to make its interior plaza hospitable. So, for the next few months, visitors to the plaza will be met by a head-on collision.

"The Slow, Inevitable Death of American Muscle," (<http://www.seic.com/enUS/about/13065.htm>) a kinetic, conceptual sculpture by artist Jonathan Schipper, features two, full-sized muscle cars facing each other. They will slowly -- very slowly, about an inch a day -- creep toward each other for 90 days. Soon they will collide, while the hydraulic machinery moving them forward continues, unrelentingly, to crush them into each other. It is a car crash in extremely slow motion.

"Visitors to the Kimmel center can see the cars, hear the glass popping, see the metal crashing into each other," said Dana Grosser of SEI Investments, which owns the piece. "It's really quite dynamic and powerful."

SEI Investments has been hungrily collecting conceptual work for almost two decades. CEO Alfred West and his daughter, Paige, have amassed one of the most ambitious collections of contemporary art in private hands, and launched the annual West Collects prize, awarding \$300,000 annually to 30 artists.

Recently the Wests have been looking for ways to exhibit the collection outside of the SEI corporate headquarters in Oaks, Pa. This is where the Kimmel Center comes in.

The performing arts center on Broad Street is known for the Perelman Theater and Verizon Hall, the home of the Philadelphia Orchestra, but fewer people are aware of an underground black-box theater called the Innovations Studio. An obscure door in the lobby takes visitors to the basement, where a long hallway winds them toward the studio.

With a donation from SEI, the newly named SEI Innovations Studio now has a new entrance at the sidewalk, with an eye-catching exterior glass facade.

"There's a fabulous column of light. It's 10 feet tall, and it's glass," said Kimmel Center president Ann Ewers. "It pierces through the first floor down the mezzanine level , in Phase One. In Phase Two, it will pierce all the way down to the Innovation Studio so you have a column of light that connect bottom floor with top floor."

The SEI Innovations Studio will host two new artist residency programs, for theater and jazz, wherein the public can witness first-hand the development of new work.

Pieces from the West Collection will adorn both the Kimmel's plaza and the Innovations Studio on a constantly rotating basis.

"When Al and Paige created the collection, they wanted to put the pieces not in a museum, but where people live -- in spaces where people are doing other things," said Grosser. "So they are not coming to stand and look at a wall and see a piece of art. They are interacting, and living with it."

The renovations to the Spruce Street side of the Kimmel Center will also include a restaurant, run by chef Jose Garces, scheduled to be completed in December.

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