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**Tadao Ando, the architect designing the Clark Art Institute's new Visitor, Exhibition and Conference Center, during a press conference at the Clark Tuesday. (Peter Crabtree)**

## **The Clark and Its Star Architect Unveil What's Next**

*K.D. NORRIS/Arts & Entertainment Editor*

WILLIAMSTOWN, Mass. — The mind of Tadao Ando, the Pritzker Prize-winning Japanese architect charged with bringing The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute's diverse campus into 21st Century unison, is always working.

He speaks little English and understands an undetermined amount of the English he hears, so as he sits through the less than exciting parts of a press conference at the Clark Tuesday, Ando examines a very small, metal bottle of Diet Coke placed before him for his convenience. He studies it as if it is the first time he has seen such a beast, which may well be. Finally, he takes a note, presumably on some aspect of the design of the bottle — then he returns to listening, if not understanding, as others talk about the future of the Williamstown art Mecca.

Ando's mind is always working; these days he is working on the ongoing construction of the focal point of the completely redesigned lower main campus, the 44,400-square-foot Visitor, Exhibition, and Conference Center. The project, which includes renovations — re-envisionings — of the original Museum Building and the Manton Research Center, is expected to be completed in summer 2014. The VECC, as it will be so often referred to, will provide a new public entry into the Clark, will unify the two current buildings (of vastly different eras and designs) and, with its tiered water feature — an Ando design signature — will provide open public space year around.

“I think people do not have a lot of (public) places to go, so I feel this place will be a place to experience the seasons,” said Ando, as translated by co-worker Kulapat Yantrasast. “The experience of the Clark is not just inside the rooms but the walking (around the grounds) ...

because of that it is important that people experience this place, (that it) allows the people to explore and claim ownership of that experience. ... (The water feature) allows people to experience change, the seasons and the time of the day. I hope it will be a place people will always want to come and visit.”

The press conference was really more an opportunity for leadership of the Clark — specifically Michael Conforti Clark’s director — to announce the continued activities of the art museum during a nearly three-year period when the campus will be experiencing extensive construction activities.

But the internationally known Ando was clearly the star of the show, just as his design for the Stone Hill Center, completed in 2008, and the VECC will be the architectural stars of the completed campus redesign.

“Everytime, since the first time I came here (10 years ago), when I come here, I am impressed by the unique sense of place in nature with this place, the change of seasons and the wonderful uniqueness this land has,” said Ando. “For that I really feel it is something I really respond to. ... At the same time, nature is matched by the most wonderful art collection that really for me, and many other people, is so inspiring. That reaffirms my belief that art is really the food for the soul, nourishment for curiosity. I think it is very important for people to have a curiosity.

“It might seem like it has taken us quite some years to come to this point, but it has to be a process that has had a lot of collaboration, and a lot of pressure... but at the same time it has raised the level of expectation for all of us. As a team we have been able to come together and create a wonderful vision for the Clark. And I really feel that with this building, this will be one of the most unique museum experiences in the world. For me it has been a great 10 years.”

Among many others, the Clark redesign team includes architects Annabelle Selldorf and Gary Hilderbrand, and their teams — and Ando praised the two and their collaborative work.

When asked what view he is most looking forward to, when the project is complete, Ando — whose mind’s eye probably sees a dozen different views of note in his design — simply says: “The views are definitely something that the architecture will provide and suggest, but I think that it will be a very moving experience that people will actually capture really fine views that they will find by themselves because (the design) has very fluid movement.”

Conforti, responding to the same question, said: “Someone asked me that question and I immediately went to the hilltops, to the view back (to the complex) ... but I think what is really special about this is the view when you approach the (VECC) building, around the pond, up to the new parking lot, where you actually see mountains as you come in ... to walk around the pond, the beauty and tranquility of that, then entering the building and seeing the water feature.

“The experience of what is now a parking lot and seeing that as a garden,” said Conforti. “I think that is going to be extraordinary.”

Most of Conforti's time at the mic, however, was spent talking about series of programs — called ClarkNOW — that will encompass more than 60 projects over the next three years in Williamstown, New York City, and around the globe, including exhibitions, installations, and academic programs.

“The coming years will be a period of great activity for the Clark,” Conforti said, in supplied material. “ClarkNOW allows us to bring our collections and intellectual activities to U.S. and international audiences in new and exciting ways. We will continue to present the thoughtful and resonant exhibitions for which we have become known, deepen our relationship with our landscape and community in Williamstown, and extend our reach by engaging audiences through a mix of new programs presented in new places.”

The first ClarkNOW exhibition, “Rembrandt and Degas: Two Young Artists,” will open in Williamstown on Nov. 13. Co-organized with the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the exhibition will for the first-time explore Rembrandt's influence on Degas through the juxtaposition of youthful self-portraits by these two artists. The exhibition will make its U.S. debut at the Clark and will continue through Feb. 5, 2012, before traveling to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The Clark will also continue its major summer exhibitions in Williamstown, beginning with “Unearthed” in 2012 and a 2013 exhibition on Winslow Homer drawn from the Clark's renowned holdings of the artist's paintings, watercolors, prints, and drawings.

*The Clark is located at 225 South St. For information call 413-458-2303 or visit [clarkart.edu](http://clarkart.edu).*

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