

Architecture of museums : [exhibition], Museum of Modern Art, New York, September 24-November 11, 1968

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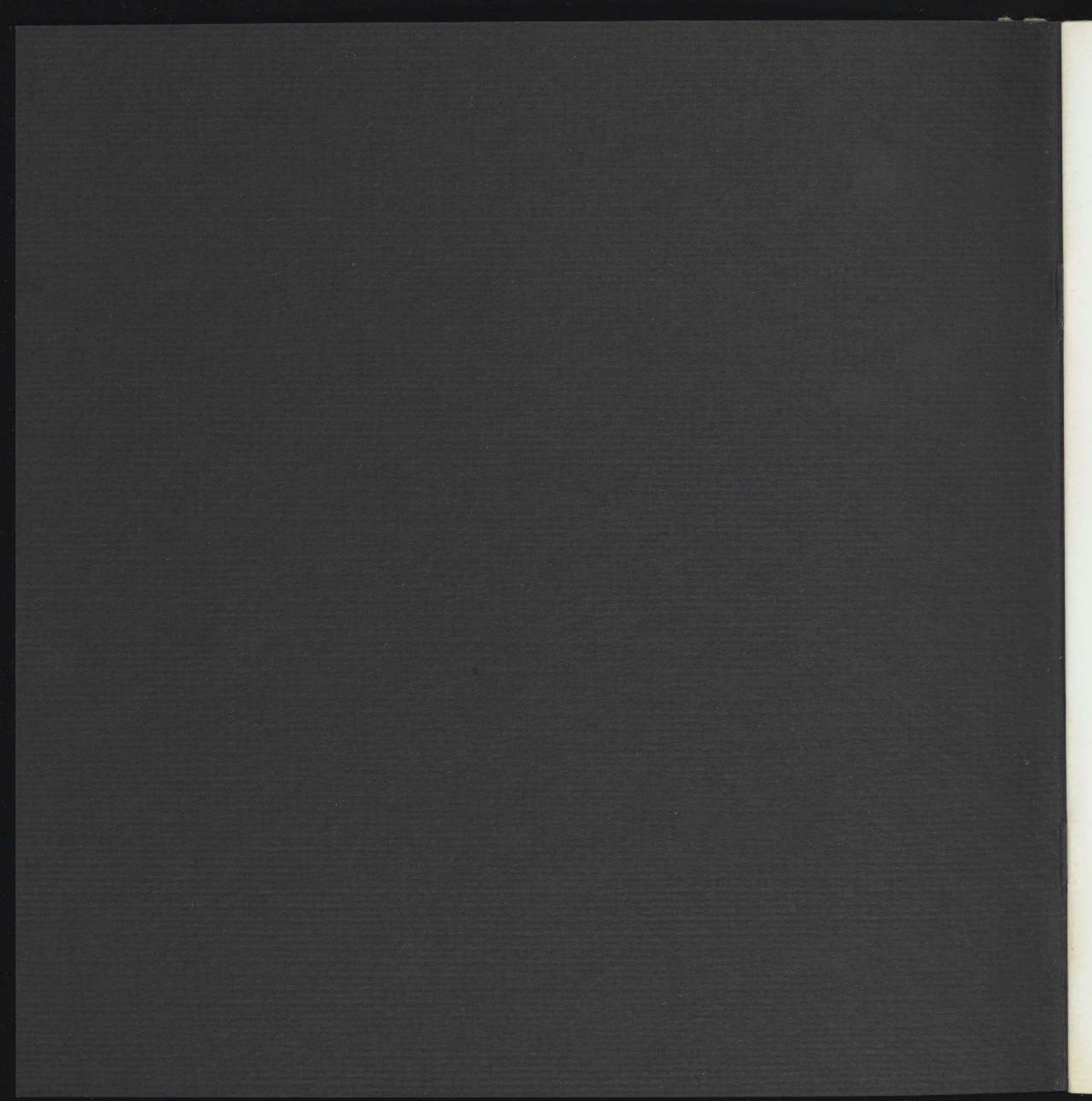
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THE HISTORY OF THE



Architecture of Museums

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. September 24—November 11, 1968



Architecture of Museums

The "musée imaginaire" assembled by André Malraux from mankind's universal reservoir of art has an architectural complement. It is the imaginary museum that has existed in the ideas and designs of architects for two centuries, ever since the museum's inception as a public institution. A gift to modern democracies, museums have remained, through the vicissitudes of their history, one of the few unanimously accepted inventions of the age of enlightenment.

The revolutionary minds of the eighteenth century saw in the idea of the museum a worthy successor to the churches they sought to abolish. The museum the French architect Etienne Boullée projected in 1783, with a "temple of fame for statues of great men" at its center, is in idea and form a secular pantheon. Indeed, that Roman monument became as much the prototype for the interiors of classicists' museums as did Greek temple fronts for their otherwise plain exteriors. During the nineteenth century, while the domed halls still symbolized the universal patrimony of art, the accumulation of treasure within became a matter of patriotic pride. Collections grew at the same rate as did the European nations, and were extended in scope to the most remote cultures and distant past. By the end of the century the many museums that had been built had become overflowing repositories, eventually to be denounced by artists like the Futurists as cemeteries.

Artists, who had been the first museum directors, were also responsible for changes in the concept of the museum, less through critique than through their work and the alteration it effected in visual habits. The transformation of the museum from storehouse to exhibition hall began within existing museums. Curators removed from view increasingly larger parts of their collections in order to introduce new installation techniques. Developed in exhibitions outside museum walls, these innovations resulted from a revolution in architecture itself. Among those architects whose work contributed to new techniques, none has applied his architectural concepts more consistently to exhibition design than Mies van der Rohe. His installations obviate the need for intermediary architectural elements, since the exhibits are made integral parts of the composition. Mies collected paintings but Le Corbusier was

himself a painter who projected museums throughout his life. In addition to his concern for studio-like lighting, a recurrent theme in Le Corbusier's designs is the spiral plan. It reflects his notion of exhibitions as didactic, expository sequences which predetermine the viewer's movement. Frank Lloyd Wright amplified both architects' ideas in his Guggenheim Museum by enclosing a large domed hall in a continuous spiral ramp. Most contemporary projects are variations that elaborate one or another aspect of the masters' exemplary solutions. Le Corbusier's "magic box" is perhaps the most appropriate term for all those museums which exploit, like their classicist antecedents, the solid cubic forms suggested by the introverted building type. A logical extension of these blank-walled schemes is the invisible museum—a building actually buried underground or under its own artificial landscape as in Kevin Roche's museum in Oakland. The many levels of its terraces seem symbolic of the number of functions the museum has assumed today, of which the improvement brought to its urban environment is not the least.

The educational role which the age of enlightenment intended for the museum has not only been revived but increased to an unforeseeable extent. Yet despite these new tasks, the museum can never deny its original function of housing art. Even the most rebellious contemporary work, if it survives the judgment of time, will become a treasure. Architecture that acknowledges this fundamental nature of the museum can arrive at solutions unattainable by accommodations based exclusively on temporary and often undefinable functions. This is why some of the most successful new museums have been established in renovated European castles and palaces.

This exhibition considers such functional aspects of museum design as circulation, lighting, and installation in solutions which contribute to the broader concept of the museum. In addition to their architectural excellence, the examples chosen suggest an ambience congenial to the immanent values of the collection and to the contemplative moments of the viewer.

Ludwig Glaeser

Museum at whose center is a
temple of fame
Project 1783
Etienne Louis Boullée (1728–1799)

Museum
Project 1800
Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781–1841)

Glyptothek
Munich, Germany. 1816–1830
Leo von Klenze (1784–1864)

Altes Museum
Berlin, Germany. 1823–1830
Karl Friedrich Schinkel

Museum, Orianda Castle
Crimea. Project 1838
Karl Friedrich Schinkel

Etienne Louis Boullée's 1783 design for a museum, as visionary as most of his other schemes, projected contemporary ideas and aspirations on a monumental scale. The first museums actually built that embody these ideas, the Glyptothek in Munich and the Altes Museum in Berlin, follow Boullée's square symmetrical plan organized around interior courts and circular domed halls. Modern architects have frequently been inspired by their neoclassical predecessors' work, such as Schinkel's project for Orianda, a summer residence for the Czars in the Crimea, where the museum is incorporated into the podium of a temple.

Museum for a Small City
Project 1942
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

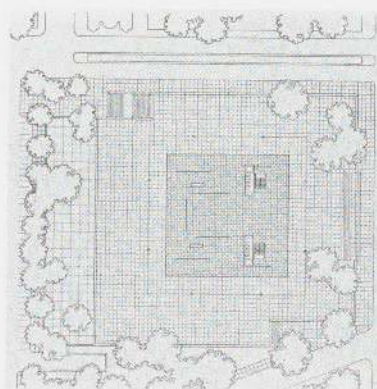
Cullinan Hall, Museum of Fine Arts
Houston, Texas. 1958
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

Mies van der Rohe's museum projects illustrate the consistent application of his architectural principles to exhibition design; paintings as well as sculpture are used as if they were walls and columns defining an open space. This concept requires the large uninterrupted space which appears first in his 1942 project, the Museum for a Small City, then in Cullinan Hall built in 1958 in Houston, and finally the recently completed New National Gallery in Berlin.



New National Gallery
Berlin, Germany. 1968
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
(preceding page)

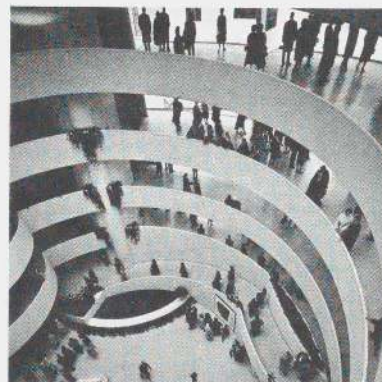
A classically Miesian solution, this large clear-span hall on a podium is one of the most beautiful of Mies' executed projects. The 196-foot-square steel roof is carried on eight cruciform columns outside the glass walls giving maximum flexibility to the 28-foot-high interior. This open hall for temporary exhibitions contrasts with the permanent galleries and the adjoining sculpture court, both concealed within a massive granite podium.



Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier were interested in the spiral circulation pattern both for its own sake and for the didactic purposes of an exhibition. Whereas Le Corbusier developed a square spiral plan for his museums primarily as a convenient exhibition scheme and then as a readily expandable building type, Wright adopted the circular spiral plan as a way of giving movement formal expression.

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
New York City. 1959
Frank Lloyd Wright

In this museum Wright returned to a spiral ramp plan first employed in the Gordon Strong Automobile Objective project of 1925. It produces an exhilarating interior space through which the visitor is literally transported. The organic form of the ramps takes advantage of the sculptural qualities of reinforced concrete, and if built at a larger scale the difficulties in displaying paintings on its slanting and curved walls would be eliminated.



The World Museum
of the Mundaneum
Geneva, Switzerland. Project 1929
Le Corbusier

Museum of Contemporary Art
Paris, France. Project 1931
Le Corbusier

Musée à croissance illimitée
Philippeville, Algeria. Project 1939
Le Corbusier

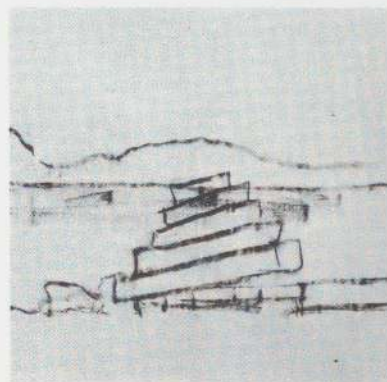
Museum, Cultural Center
Ahmedabad, India. 1954
Le Corbusier

The National Museum
of Western Art
Tokyo, Japan. 1959
Le Corbusier

International Art Center
Erlenbach near Frankfurt/Main.
Project 1963
Le Corbusier

Centre Le Corbusier
Zurich, Switzerland. 1967
Le Corbusier

Le Corbusier's first square spiral scheme, the World Museum, was similar to Wright's circular plan in that the spiral was expressed three dimensionally—in this case a pyramid. Conceived in order to exhibit a collection didactically by unfolding it in a one-directional sequence, the solution called for an entrance to the galleries at the top level. In later spiral schemes, however, Le Corbusier flattened the spiral into a box, which made it laterally extensible.



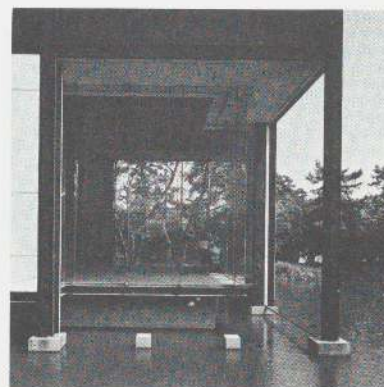
This small exhibition hall, built after Le Corbusier's death, is a variation on a theme which appeared in a number of his designs for pavilions. The modular two-story steel frame building is sheltered under a roof made up of two angular steel canopies.



The primary requirement of most museums is blank wall space. Skylights are preferable to windows which produce glare, and artificial light allows both to be eliminated if desired. Throughout most of the century, modern architects have been attracted to the resultant solid cubic form. In most examples, galleries are organized around a central interior space, often an atrium or light well, reminiscent of Palladian schemes. To stress the geometry of the form, architects have sometimes raised the cubic volume off the ground. Le Corbusier called attention to the symbolism of the box as a "boîte aux miracles" in a sketch for his Tokyo museum complex. Many recent variations on the theme of the magic box, however, have sought more complicated geometric configurations by either breaking open the single box or by clustering boxes in groups.

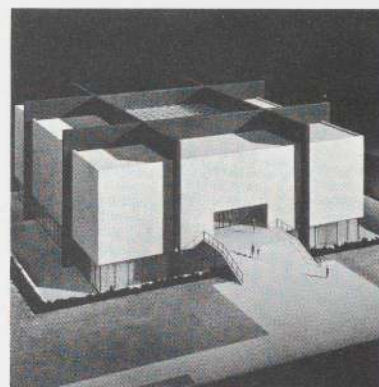
Museum of Modern Art, Annex
Kamakura, Japan, 1966
Junzo Sakakura

Designed as an annex to a museum the small box-like pavilion is an elegantly detailed steel framed structure in the tradition of Mies van der Rohe. Where it projects into the water, corners are set back and walled in glass.



Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute
Utica, New York. 1960
Philip Johnson

*A solid cubic volume is suspended
from four intersecting beams carried
on exterior columns. Galleries within
open onto a two-story-high skylit
court.*



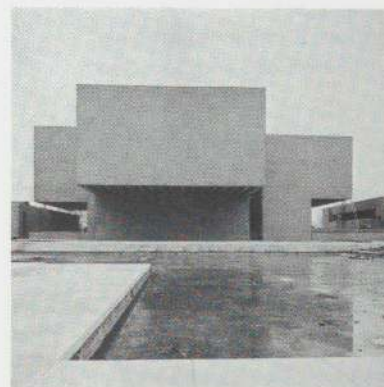
Richard Kaselowsky-Haus
Bielefeld, Germany. 1968
Philip Johnson

Whitney Museum of American Art
New York, 1966
Marcel Breuer and Hamilton Smith

Vertical Museum
(Adolf Loos Museum)
Vienna, Austria, Project 1966
Karl Mang and Eva Mang-Frimmel

Everson Museum of Art
Syracuse, New York. 1968
I. M. Pei and Associates

*Projecting and receding cantilevered
cubic volumes with blank façades
create a variety of forms and spaces.
Yet the plan is surprisingly simple:
four two-story-high units connected
by bridges surround a large
independently roofed sculpture court.*



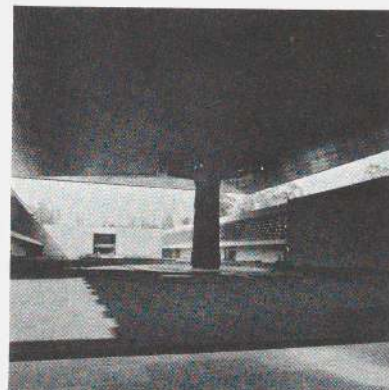
Pavilion for Antique Toys
Princeton, New Jersey. 1968
Peter D. Eisenman

Nature and Science Museum
Union County, N.J. Project 1966
Michael Graves

Newark Museum Extension
Newark, New Jersey. Under design
Michael Graves

National Museum of Anthropology
Mexico D.F. 1964
P. Ramirez Vasquez, R. Mijares Al-
cerreca, and J. Campuzano Fernandez

*A series of boxes arranged around a
large court forms a sequence of
volumes, indoor and outdoor spaces,
paced according to the organization
of the collection. The circulation
scheme brings visitors out into the
courtyard after they have seen each
anthropological unit.*



Israel Museum
Jerusalem, Israel. 1965
Alfred Mansfeld and Dora Gad

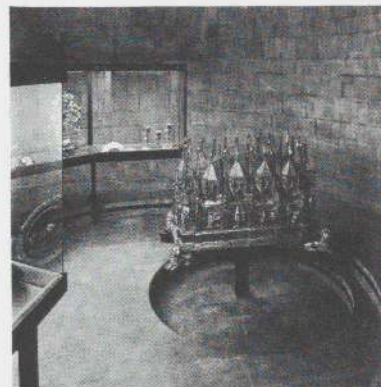
Modern Art Museum
Caracas, Venezuela. Project 1955
Oscar Niemeyer

Joseph H. Hirshhorn Museum
Washington, D.C. Project 1967
Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill:

Site limitations and other conditions often suggest that architecture should minimize its presence; in a few cases this has been accomplished with considerable success. The Oakland Museum achieves the actual integration of building with landscape, but in other solutions the building is simply buried, either partially or entirely. Thus invisible, the museum, still architectural in its structuring of interior spaces, is the closest approximation to the ancient subterranean treasure house.

Museum of the Treasury,
San Lorenzo Cathedral
Genoa, Italy. 1956
Franco Albini

In order to place the collection of a cathedral's treasury as close as possible to the church, the architect sunk the structure entirely below the ground in the adjoining courtyard. Resembling a series of ancient tholoid tombs, this museum offers a rich succession of spaces and volumes almost impossible to capture by photograph.



Silkeborg Museum
Silkeborg, Norway. Project 1963
Jörn Utzon

Underground Art Gallery
New Canaan, Connecticut. 1966
Philip Johnson

The Shrine of the Book (The D. S.
and R. H. Gottesman Center for
Rare Manuscripts)
Jerusalem, Israel. 1965
Frederick Kiesler and Armand Bartos

Gallo-Roman Lapidary
Buzenol-Montauban, Belgium. 1960
Constantin L.-Brodzki

Louisiana Museum
Humblebaek near Copenhagen,
Denmark. 1958
Jørgen Bo and Vilhelm Wohlert

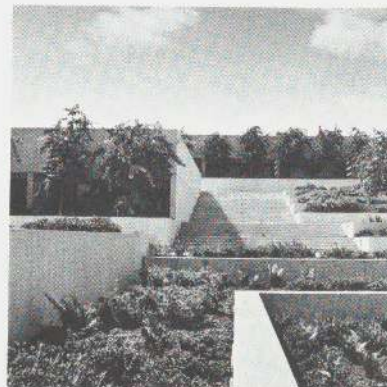
Albright-Knox Art Gallery
Buffalo, New York. 1962
Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill: Gordon
Bunshaft, Senior Partner in
Charge of Design

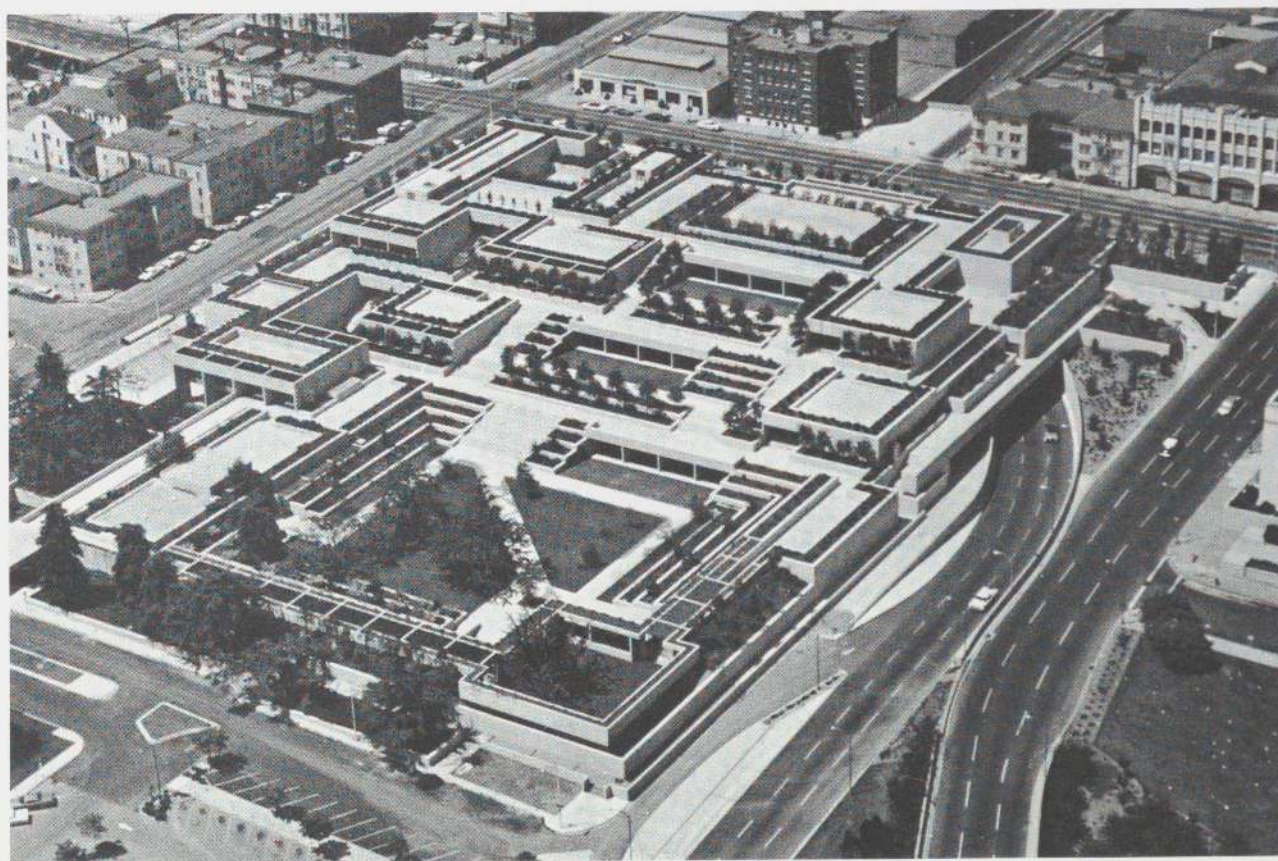
The galleries and the sculpture court onto which they open are contained within a podium that supports at one end a glass-walled auditorium. This solution provides a gallery area equal in size to the adjoining neoclassical museum, without competing with it.



Oakland Museum
Oakland, California. 1968
Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo, and
Associates
(opposite page)

Conceived as a regional museum where three separate collections—art, cultural history, and natural sciences—will be combined in one building, this innovative scheme logically divides the exhibits into three tiers arranged so that the roof of one becomes the terrace for another. The whole complex has received generous planting along its courts, plazas, and stairways, giving it the aspect of hanging gardens, a non-building that will be the focus of its surroundings.



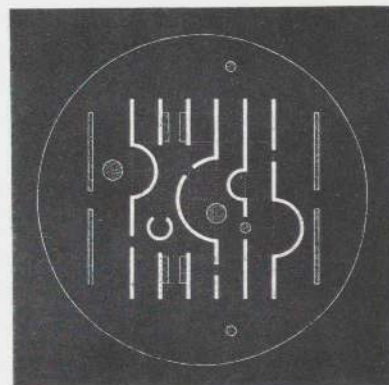




Few museums can provide adequate space for sculpture, and the traditional outdoor architectural setting remains the most suitable exhibition environment. The architectural settings include terraced gardens, walled courts or open-ended pavilions.

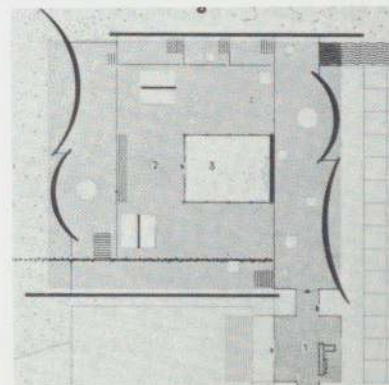
Sonsbeek Sculpture Pavilion
Arnhem, Holland. 1967
Aldo van Eyck

Freestanding walls of concrete block covered by a glass-paneled roof channel outdoor spaces into narrow passageways for small pieces of sculpture, opening into wider niches for larger ones.



Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum
Duisburg, Germany. 1964
Manfred Lehmbruck
(opposite page)

Designed by the son of the sculptor, the museum is less an actual building than a sculpture garden with a roof floating over it. Solid curved walls of concrete conceal an interior sunk below grade to achieve a variety of levels for the placement of sculpture. Light is introduced around edges and through openings in the roof plane, the largest over a glass enclosed atrium.



Sonsbeek Sculpture Pavilion
Arnhem, Holland. 1954 (Reconstructed 1965, in the garden of the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo)
Gerrit Rietveld

Museum of Modern Art, Sculpture Garden
New York City. 1952–1954, 1964
Philip Johnson

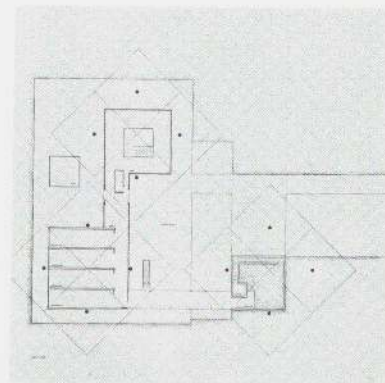
Art Museum
Baghdad, Iraq. Project 1958
Alvar Aalto

Walker Art Center
Minneapolis, Minnesota. Under design
Edward Larrabee Barnes

Air Force Museum
Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio. Project 1964
Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo, and Associates

Di Tella Foundation Museum
Punta del Este, Uruguay. Project 1961
Amancio Williams

High concrete umbrellas, three groups of four, shade terraces and a sunken court for sculptures, as well as a row of galleries. The main platform, accessible by a long ramp, roofs additional facilities on the lower level.



Installations and Renovations

Modern architects have had greater opportunity than curators to experiment with installation techniques in exhibitions outside museums, and to arrive at more effective display methods. They have increased flexibility within museums by introducing movable partitions and have set new standards for hanging paintings by treating them as part of an entire composition. They have redesigned the pedestals for sculpture and created a new awareness of space and its relationship to sculpture. Finally, architects have employed modern techniques to design efficient containers so that the enclosed objects could be presented to the viewer well illuminated and without obstruction. In fact, architects revolutionized museum design from within long before they had a chance to build new museums.

Renovation, or adaptation of an existing structure to better suit museum purposes, represented the first modifications in museum architecture, such as Hubert Robert's proposals for skylights in the Grande Galerie of the Louvre in 1802. Even today some of the best renovations have been done for old houses, castles, and museums. Italian architects, in particular Carlo Scarpa and Franco Albini, are renowned for their renovation of buildings and reorganization of collections. Their manner of asymmetrical composition, pointed juxtapositions, calculated intervals, and the expression of structure in supports introduce alien elements whose function is to divorce an object from its time and place to make it more intensely visible.

(Lighting systems and installation methods shown in the exhibition are drawn from many museums listed previously and on the following page.)

Nouveau Musée des Beaux Arts
du Havre
Le Havre, France. 1958
Guy Lagneau, Raymond Audigier,
Michel Weill, and Jean Dimitrijevic

Peace Memorial Museum
Hiroshima City, Japan. 1955
Kenzo Tange, Takashi Asada, and
Sachio Otani

Museum of Modern Art
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 1957
Affonso Eduardo Reidy

Biennale Pavilion for Finland,
Norway, and Sweden
Venice, Italy. 1962
Sverre Fehn

Yale University Art Gallery
New Haven, Connecticut. 1953
Louis I. Kahn

Gallery of Modern Art
Turin, Italy. 1959
Carlo Bassi and Goffredi Boschetti

Maeght Foundation
St. Paul-de-Vence, France. 1964
Sert, Jackson, and Gourley

The Kimball Art Museum
Fort Worth, Texas. Under design
Louis I. Kahn

Brücke Museum
West Berlin, Germany. 1968
Werner Düttmann

Reuchlinhaus
Pforzheim, Germany. 1961
Manfred Lehmbruck

Ernst Barlach Haus
Hamburg, Germany. 1962
Werner Kallmorgen

Okayama Museum
Okayama City, Japan. 1962
Kunio Mayakawa and Associates

Gallery of Canova's Casts
Possagno, Italy. 1956–1957
Carlo Scarpa

Museum of Architecture
El Escorial, Spain. 1963
Javier Feduchi

Municipal Archeological Museum
Bergamo, Italy. 1960
Sandro Angelini

Cabinet of Prints and Drawings, Uffizi
Florence, Italy. 1958
Eduardo Detti and Carlo Scarpa

Wasa Dockyard Museum
Stockholm, Sweden. 1961
Hans Akerblad and Bjorn Howander

Kestner Museum
Hannover, Germany. 1961
Werner Dierschke

Palazzo Abbatellis
Palermo, Sicily. 1954
Carlo Scarpa

Museo Correr
Venice, Italy. 1953–1961
Carlo Scarpa
(opposite page)

Castelvecchio
Verona, Italy. 1958–1961
Carlo Scarpa

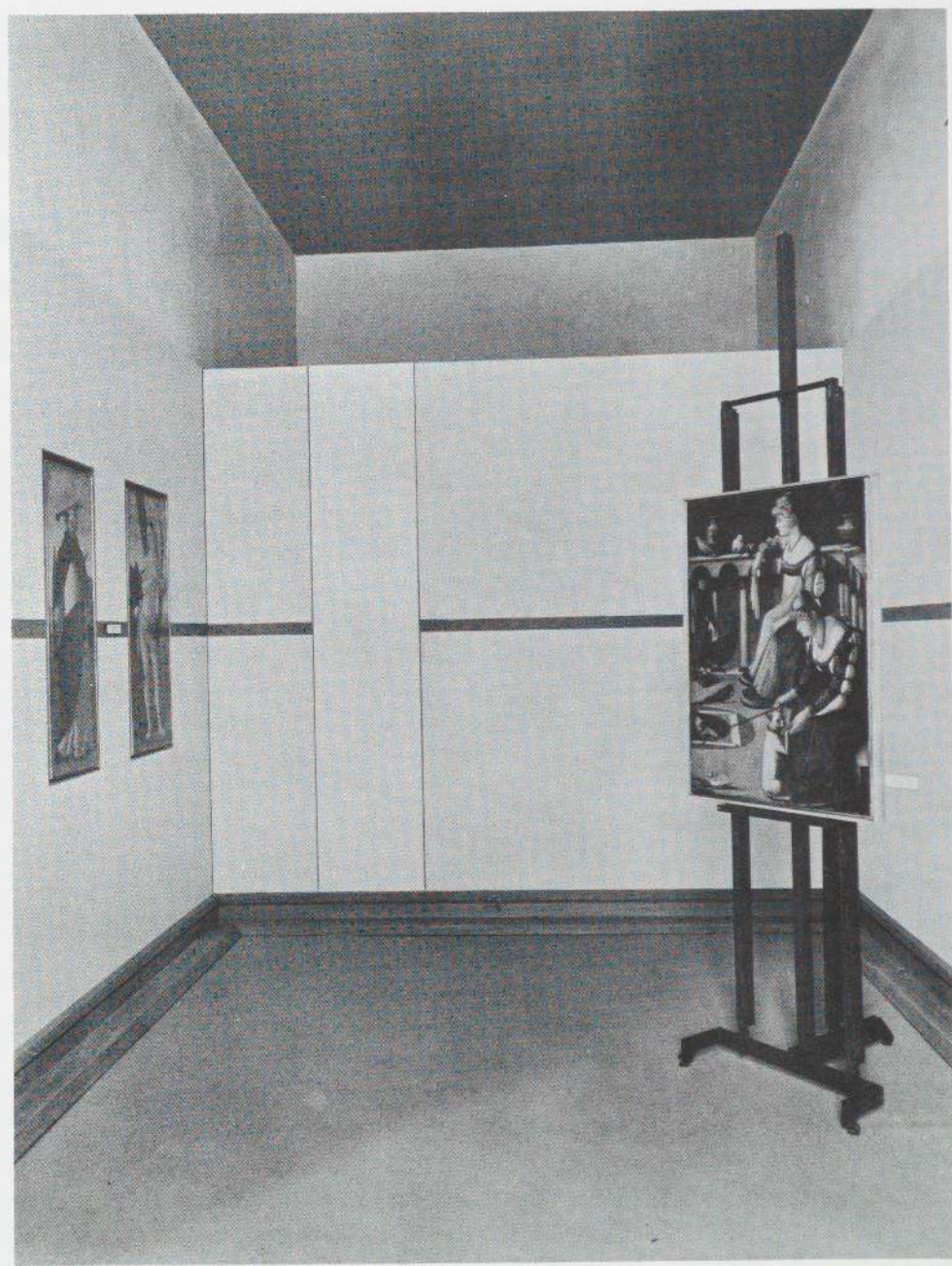
Palazzo Bianco
Genoa, Italy. 1950–1951
Franco Albini and Caterina Marcenaro

Palazzo Rosso
Genoa, Italy. 1953–1961
Franco Albini

Prague Castle Gallery
Prague, Czechoslovakia. 1965
Fr. Cubr and J. Hruby

Historisches Museum
Hannover, Germany. 1966
Dieter Oesterlen

National Pinacoteca
Bologna, Italy. 1955–1957
Leone Pancaldi



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