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the
architecture
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SPRING 2015
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architecture should serve the purpose of making the art look its best | museums should offer a kind of place and atmosphere different from the quotidian | incessant consumption is the defining characteristic of our lives today; i believe that museums have become important breakwaters against this tide | good art often enhances good architecture simply because great art has the capacity to transform the visitor's understanding of the world | art museums have evolved from an object-based mission to an audience-based mission. the next phase is a community-based museum | traditional museum design has largely echoed temples and churches, which has for the most part been uninviting and intimidating | there are two types of museum architecture: 1. overexpressionistic, which overwhelms the art, 2. white-box-boring, which sucks the life out of **art**.

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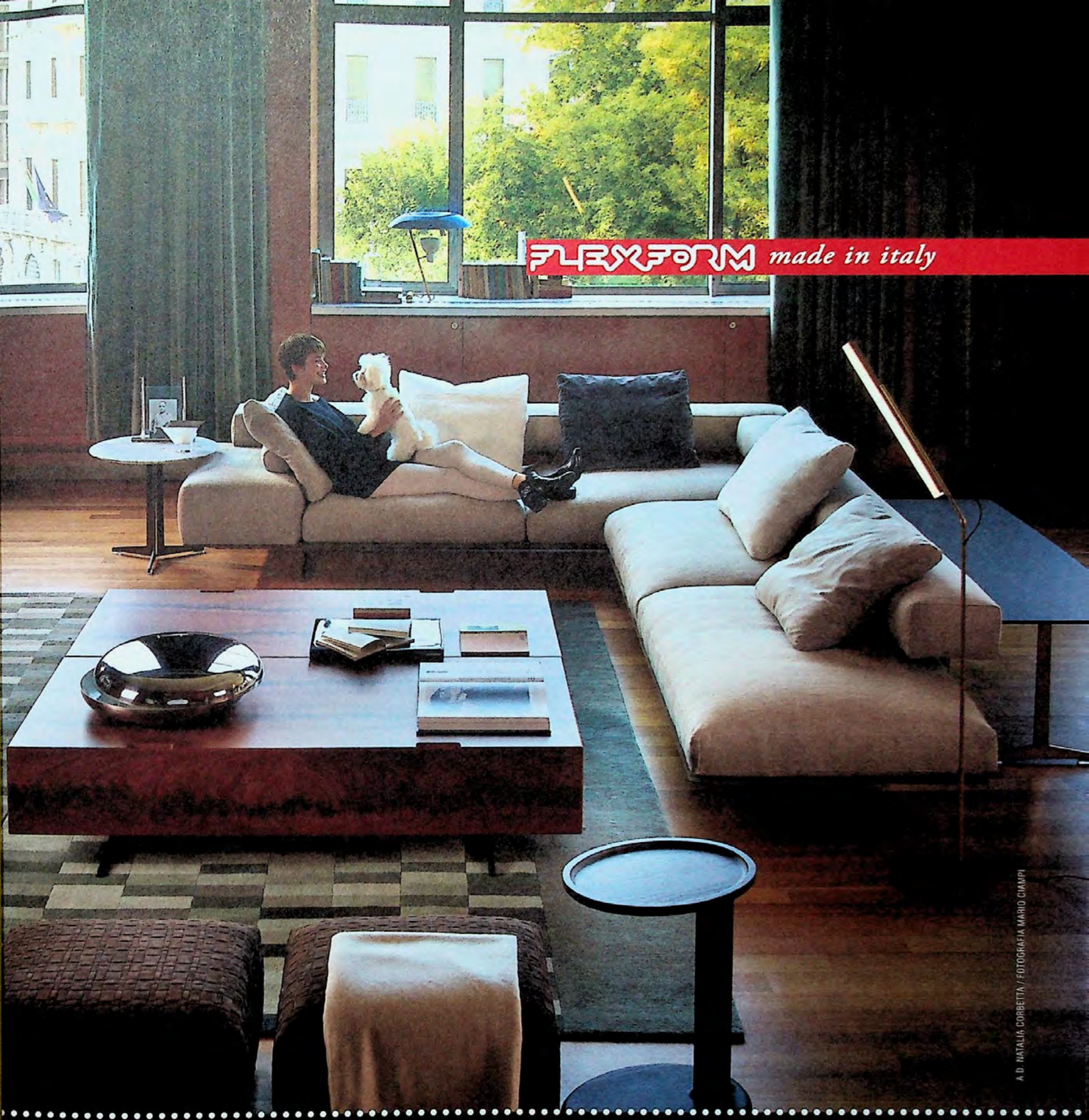

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Cite

THE ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN REVIEW OF HOUSTON

A PUBLICATION OF THE RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE

96 SPRING 2015

Cite (ISSN: 8755-0415) is published quarterly by the Rice Design Alliance, Rice University, Anderson Hall, Room 149, 6100 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77005-1892.

Individual Subscriptions:
U.S. and its possessions: $25 for one year, $40 for two years.
Foreign: $50 for one year, $80 for two years.

Cite is indexed in the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals.

Publication of this issue is supported in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Susan Vaughan Foundation, the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance, and the Texas Commission for the Arts.

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LETTER FROM RONNIE SELF, *Guest Editor*

Museums may be our best patrons of architecture, allowing and even encouraging experimentation while demanding more exacting design.

Cite 96 looks at four art spaces—one realized, one ongoing, and two on the boards—one in Fort Worth and three in Houston. The four are the recently completed Piano Pavilion for the Kimbell Art Museum, the projects for the neighborhood and buildings of the Menil Collection, the ever-evolving community of Project Row Houses, and the designs underway for the campus and buildings of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH).

All of these institutions, varied in size, structure, and mission, are ambitious and provide a range of ideas and approaches for art spaces. They also offer an extraordinary collection of architecture that is well worth study and discussion. With that in mind, Raj Mankad and I invited three writers (Christopher Hawthorne from Los Angeles, Walter Hood from Berkeley, and David Heymann from Austin) to examine and analyze the three projects in Houston mentioned above. I had the pleasure of reviewing the Kimbell pavilion in Fort Worth.

We also felt *Cite* 96 should be an opportunity to hear from those who are most involved in orchestrating these projects: the directors of the various institutions—Eric Lee, Josef Helfenstein, Linda Shearer, and Gary Tinterow—and their architects—Renzo Piano, David Chipperfield, Johnston Marklee, Danny Samuels and Nonya Grenader, and Steven Holl. We sent out short and virtually identical questionnaires related to culture, art, architecture, and context to those concerned and had replies from all. The responses are illuminating and we sincerely thank everyone for participating. It is also of note that the Houston architectural firm Kendall/Heaton is the associate architect for the current MFAH project and the Kimbell Piano Pavilion as well as the earlier MFAH Beck Building and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

It would seem that in this second decade of the twenty-first century—not quite a hundred years since the very first realization of a stand-alone museum building in Texas—we are seeing an unprecedented flurry of important museum projects. In reality, art museums have been steadily realized in Houston and elsewhere around the state over the last century with bursts of activity from time to time. This current activity might be comparable to that short period between 1971 and 1974 that saw the openings of the Rothko Chapel, the current Contemporary Arts Museum Houston building, the Kimbell Art Museum, and Mies van der Rohe's Brown Pavilion. Likewise, Project Row Houses, the Cy Twombly Gallery, and the Byzantine Fresco Chapel all opened between 1993 and 1997. The MFAH Beck Building, the current Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth building, and the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas all opened between 2000 and 2003. All of these projects were ambitious, and they have been met with professional and public enthusiasm. They have sometimes been met with uproar, however, when modifications are seen to compromise what exists. With a strong legacy of acclaimed art spaces, the ante has been upped for new ones. Texan art museums possess restraint, however. They appear immune to the temptations of a more flamboyant architecture. Sobriety mixed with innovation is characteristic of the projects. As has been pointed out within the issue, high standards have been set, there is now a history to honor, and there is a sense that the world is watching for what's next.

In the writings and interviews that follow, museums are described as utopias as well as heterotopias—as a respite from everyday life and conversely as an engagement with everyday life. The Texas urban context is omnipresent in the discussion of all the projects, as is the relationship between density and space—between architecture and nature. It is understood that art is the subject of the projects, but this round of museum designs prioritizes public space, social spaces, civic space, and shared space. They should provide inspiration and offer a different way to see and live in the world.

...and all of this under the intensely sunny, sometimes rainy, big Texas sky.

Ronnie Self

4kimbell

14menil

24prh

34mfah

kimbell

architecture should serve the purpose of making the art look its best

What in your opinion is the art museum's cultural and social mission in general today?

Eric Lee: First of all, it is impossible to generalize about art museums because they are all different. But I do believe that the fundamental mission of every art museum should be to delight, inspire, and educate through art, and to enrich people's lives by providing a captivating respite from the everyday world.

Renzo Piano Building Workshop: Today the notion that a museum has the primary purpose of exhibiting art and protecting art is becoming less and less true. I feel the museums today now have mixed and overlapping missions that make them more dynamic institutions that have greater appeal to all types of visitors. Certainly museums today need to create interest and provoke curiosity with exhibitions, concerts, films, etc., to attract visitors. But to be truly viable the museum needs to educate their visitors and members with study centers, workshops, and lecture series that enhances the emotion and sense of inspiration.

What do you feel is the best relationship between architecture and art?

EL: Architecture and art should complement one another. In a gallery, the architecture should serve the purpose of making the art look its best: the gallery should be properly scaled for the art, have good lighting, direct one's eye to the art (such as a painting on a wall), provide a background of color, materials, and textures to properly frame the art without overwhelming it, and put the visitor in the proper frame of mind for viewing the art. The architecture and art should exist in a careful balance: they should both be strong, but not so strong that one overpowers the other.

It is easier to achieve a balance between architecture and art when a gallery is designed for a specific collection. It is much more difficult to achieve this balance in a gallery for special exhibitions, where an exhibition of Samurai armor might be followed by a show of Impressionist paintings.

RPBW: The relationship between architecture and art, in a museum context, depends greatly on the type of collections, i.e., contemporary art, old masters, sculpture, or works on paper, and whether it is a permanent installation or a temporary exhibition. Therefore, as an architect, I

have difficulty in expressing what is the "best" relationship. For permanent installations I find the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris with the *Nymphéas* of Claude Monet or the Cy Twombly Pavilion in Houston to be perfect examples of architecture and art working together in creating a sublime atmosphere. With temporary exhibition spaces, the tendency is to make the usual nondescript "white box" that aspires to flexibility but tends to fail in providing the sense of place and belonging. To many this may be a desirable need and effect, but we have always felt that architecture should not be intrusive in the realm of art but it should not be completely nonexistent either. Our building at the Kimbell Art Museum was designed to exhibit "old masters." Therefore, the exhibition spaces were purposely designed to create intimate rooms that had great flexibility but were not void of material, texture, color, light, nor architecture.

How would you describe your architectural approach regarding the preexisting building by Louis Kahn, and how did you respond to the preexisting exhibition spaces?

EL: The Louis Kahn Building directly inspired the Renzo Piano Pavilion, which echoes its great predecessor yet is the product of Piano's own style, temperament, and time. You might say that the Piano Pavilion is Virgil to the Kahn Building's Homer.

Most of the galleries Piano has designed have been modern white box galleries, in part to allow for maximum flexibility in the installation of art. But at the Kimbell, Renzo came to believe that he could not possibly have white box galleries when rich, warm, architecturally powerful galleries were next door in the Kahn Building. Renzo introduced concrete on the galleries' peripheral walls, which correspond to the travertine walls of the Kahn galleries, and ceilings supported by long wooden beams, which correspond to the concrete cycloid vaults of the Kahn Building.

RPBW: The first words that come to mind are thoughtful and sensitive. We understood immediately the ramifications of building on the "Great Lawn" in front of the Kahn Building and that our project would be exposed to serious criticism if not designed properly. Therefore, we were constantly moving between drawings, models, and reality. We paced the site trying to understand the appropriate distances and heights. We made numerous mockups in Genova and Fort Worth to select the appropriate facade materials. Then we made renderings and models to confirm our assumptions about scale and sense of presence. And when we all finally felt comfortable with the design direction, we then paced the site again to reconfirm that all was correct. Certainly the Kahn Building was a great inspiration for our work. His palette of materials, the structural expression, and the use of controlled natural light brought about a work of architecture with great integrity that we all desired to emulate.

Have you found anything particular about realizing a project in Texas?

EL: The intense light of Texas has an enormous impact on both the design of buildings and how they look once they are realized. And the optimism and can-do spirit of Texas make the projects happen!

RPBW: As you know, we have been fortunate to realize four important museum buildings in Texas. Our first project in Texas started with the Menil Collection completed in 1987, then the Cy Twombly Gallery completed in 1997, the Nasher Sculpture Center completed in 2003, and now the Piano Pavilion at the Kimbell Art Museum. However, I would like to emphasize that our adventures in Texas have all been very positive. This could be attributed to a strong and capable building industry with a can-do attitude coupled with pride. Very likely the biggest positive factor for us building in Texas has been our clients. All our clients in Texas have been open to a challenge in making architecture that does more than just respond to their functional needs but can evoke profound emotion and enrich our lives with joy. Again, we have been fortunate!

Both Eric Lee, Director of the Kimbell, and Mark Carroll, Principal at Renzo Piano Building Workshop, responded to the same series of questions via email.

the tendency is to make the usual nondescript "white box" that aspires to flexibility but tends to fail in providing the sense of place and belonging.

SEEMING INEVITABILITY :

RENZO PIANO DESIGNS A REVERENT ADDITION TO LOUIS KAHN'S KIMBELL

Left: Aerial view from northwest. Above: Piano Pavilion from east, 2014. Photos: Michel Denancé.

BY RONNIE SELF

Louis Kahn's and Renzo Piano's buildings for the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth are mature projects realized by septuagenarian architects. They show a certain wisdom that may come with age.

As a practitioner, Louis Kahn is generally considered a late bloomer. His most respected works came relatively late in his career, and the Kimbell, which opened a year and a half before his death, is among his very best. Many of Kahn's insights came through reflection in parallel to practice, and his pursuits to reconcile modern architecture with traditions of the past were realized within his own, individual designs.

Piano (along with Richard Rogers and Gianfranco Franchini) won the competition for the Centre Pompidou in Paris as a young architect only in his mid-30s. Piano sees himself as a "builder" and his insights come largely through experience. Aside from the more flamboyant Centre in the French capital, Piano was entrusted relatively early in his career with highly sensitive projects in such places as Malta, Rhodes, and Pompeii. He made studies for interventions to Palladio's basilica in Vicenza. More recently he has been called upon to design additions to modern architectural monuments such as Marcel Breuer's Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and Le Corbusier's chapel of Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp. Piano's means for reconciling modern architecture with traditions of the past have been derived from a direct and considered response to the preexisting architectural object. By now, the experience of engaging with important historical monuments as well as the discipline required to work with the committees and commissions that protect them have been internalized. Piano's approach is generally respectful, but he does not mimic. There is, however, a chameleon-like method where context is often interpreted through materials: Piano's use of stone responds to existing stone, wood responds to wood, concrete responds to concrete, and so on. He also takes cues from surrounding buildings and urbanism. Wisdom may hinge on amassed experience. Older and wiser may be equated with a more nuanced synthesis of information and an ability to surmount egocentricity. In different ways, these are the qualities that both Kahn and Piano brought to the Kimbell Art Museum.

Louis Kahn's lower-level east entry to the Kimbell is on an axis with Darnell Street, which is bordered to the north by Tadao Ando's Modern Art Museum and to the south by a generally unbuilt site also owned by the Kimbell that is known as the "Darnell site." This was the first location

PIANO'S MAIN TASK WAS TO RESPOND APPROPRIATELY TO KAHN'S BUILDING, WHICH HE ACHIEVED THROUGH ALIGNMENTS IN PLAN AND ELEVATION ...

Piano Pavilion, left, and original Kahn Building from west. Photo: Robert LaPrelle.

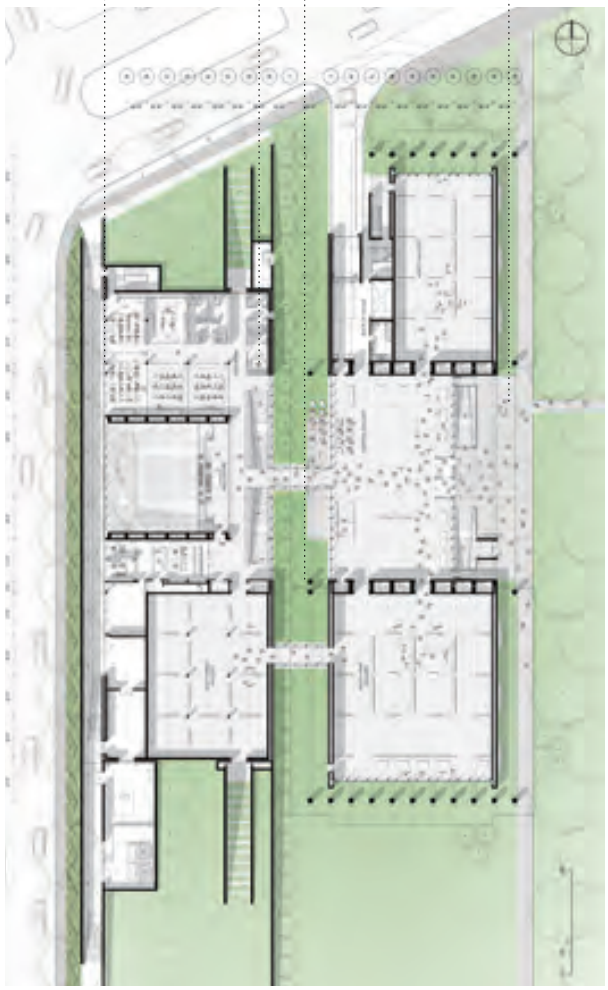
considered for a new project by Renzo Piano Building Workshop. This site, however, cater-cornered and across Van Cliburn Way from Kahn, did not lend itself to establishing a desired relationship between the new and the existing, and the project eventually moved to its present location to the west of Kahn's building.

Situated at 200 feet the one from the other and perfectly aligned in plan, the two buildings have a strong relationship. Still, the loss of the open lawn that existed in front of the Kimbell where Piano's building now stands is regrettable. Kahn's Kimbell was conceived as a large house or a villa in a park, and unlike much of the abundant open and green space in the Fort Worth Cultural District, that park was actually used. The built and landscaped definition of the prior Kimbell lawn was minimal, but anchored by the museum and rows of trees, it was just enough to make the lawn a true public space for picnickers, sports players, and the like—a type of space even more precious as the area around the Cultural District densifies. The lawn was informal and free of artifice. It was also befitting to Fort Worth in its size and its impression of wide open space. The park also afforded a long, impressive view of Kahn's west porch (particularly striking at night) from Camp Bowie Boulevard and Will Rogers Road. Piano's new outdoor space is more like a courtyard—more contained and more formal. It is more urban in its design, yet less public in its use.

While some of Louis Kahn's more ambitious and larger preliminary design schemes for the Kimbell would have removed the double offset rows of elm trees in the middle of the site, his smaller, built version responded to and was intimately linked to the grid of the existing vegetation. The trees, planted in the 1930s, had originally bordered a street that was later replaced by a lawn. By the time Piano's project began, the trees were at the end of their lifespan and were removed in order to construct an underground parking garage for 135 cars located between the two buildings. After investigating other options for planting patterns in the new Kimbell courtyard, Piano and the landscape architect Michael Morgan decided to replicate the preexisting landscape in the choice and placement of major trees. Likewise, the iconic yaupon holly grove that is an integral part of Kahn's west entry sequence was replaced with new trees. Since these hollies are younger and have lower branches than the older trees that were removed, they have the surprising effect of completely masking (for now) Piano's building from Kahn's west entrance lobby. Piano's east facade is austere and lacks the surface texture he often seeks. At night, however, there is an interesting play of Chinese shadows on the blank concrete planes since pedestrians pass between the wall and the ground level lights that illuminate them.

Of Renzo Piano's many museum projects, several have been located in park-like or suburban settings. Of Louis Kahn's three constructed museums, the Kimbell is the only one to be situated in a park. In the budding Fort Worth Cultural District of Kahn's time, there was relatively little immediate built context to respond to. Kahn developed a comprehensive site plan in a band bordered by streets on three sides to the north, east, and south and contained by the allée of elm trees on the fourth side to the west. Along with the building itself, parking areas, service areas, and a sculpture garden are carved into the landscape to form one coherent ensemble. There are no sacrificed or back sides to the project.

Piano's main task was to respond appropriately to Kahn's building, which he achieved through alignments in plan and elevation and by dividing his project into two major bodies: a concrete-walled, glass-roofed pavilion facing Kahn and a separate, sod-roofed structure behind it, designed to integrate a significant portion of the project with the landscape and thereby lessen its overall impact. The back portion does not



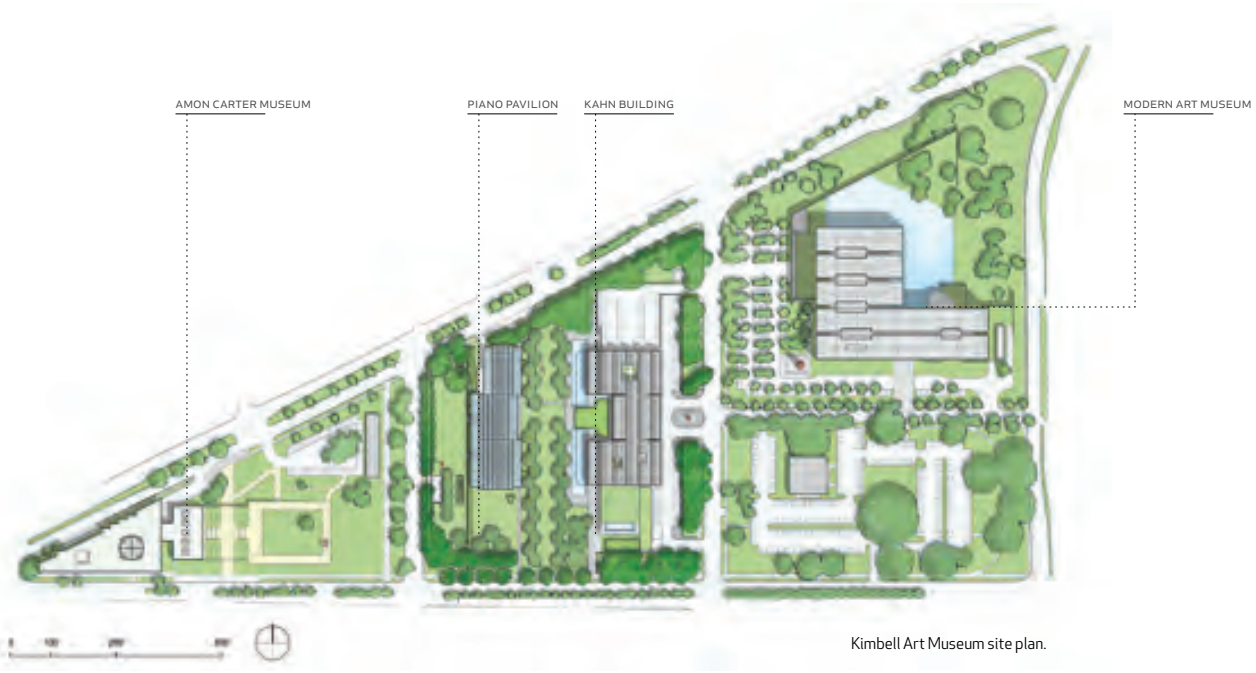
Campus section (top) and Piano Pavilion ground floor plan (above).

JUST AS KAHN'S BUILDING WAS SO COMPLETE THAT ANY DIRECT ADDITIONS WOULD HAVE SPOILED IT, THE NEW KIMBELL IS ALSO COMPLETE.

disappear, however. Its ground slope is too steep to merge into the park space comfortably enough for spontaneous use by visitors, and the composition of concrete retaining walls and steel handrails presents an alienating face to Will Rogers Road and to the Amon Carter Museum to the west. It will undoubtedly soften as the vegetation grows.

The Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas is included in Peter Buchanan's fifth volume of *Renzo Piano Building Workshop: Complete Works*. Immediately following the description and analysis of the project is an interesting essay that compares and contrasts the Nasher and Kahn's Kimbell. (The text, published in 2008, predated Piano's Kimbell commission.) In reference to both buildings and as a "criterion of architectural quality," Buchanan speaks of "...the achievement of seeming inevitability in which every part of the design has found its exact form and place within the internal logic of the scheme."

Kahn's Kimbell is extraordinary and unmatched in its synthesis of the parts and the whole. Beyond the synthesis of form, space, structure, and light within the cycloid vaults, there is the "inevitability" of the linear, two-story light wells, for example, that bring natural light to office and service areas at the lower level; likewise, the courtyard that bypasses the gallery level brings light to the conservation area at the lower level. It is also somewhat remarkable that the loading dock door on the north facade fits so effortlessly in the 20-foot vaulted bay.



Kimbell Art Museum site plan.

Kahn's building has nevertheless been criticized for the way the auditorium (182 seats) and the library were squeezed into the building modules. We can imagine, however, that the freight elevator, located almost as if a free-standing object in the vaulted bay of the cafeteria, would have caused the architect more grief since it does not conform to the reigning servant/served order of the project. These are quibbles when compared to the near perfection of the overall layout.

Piano's pavilion assumes the internal logic of Kahn's building for certain aspects of the design, develops its own logic for others, and draws upon over 35 years of experience in museum design for many.

Piano's glass-roofed pavilion matches the overall length of Kahn's building and aligns the new with the existing. Piano divided the building mass into three parts just as Kahn did. He enters in the middle bay. Piano twice translated Kahn's system of double stairs into his project (once in the same direction and once flipped), and the well that lights his 298-seat auditorium echoes the light wells of the earlier building. While visitors are not able to actually pass through the project as is possible in Kahn's building, Piano's auditorium light well provides a connection to the outdoors, predominately the sky, and counteracts any dead-end effect of the underground portion of the project. The light well is the end of an axis that begins with Darnell Street to the east, moves up and through Kahn's building via his double stair, through the yaupon holly grove and newly planted courtyard, through Piano's building, and down into the auditorium via another double stair. It is a rich succession of spaces and precisely the sequence Renzo Piano Building Workshop depicted in presentation section drawings. It is difficult to imagine that the axis could ever be extended further to the west. Just as Kahn's building was so complete that any direct additions would have spoiled it, the new Kimbell is also complete.

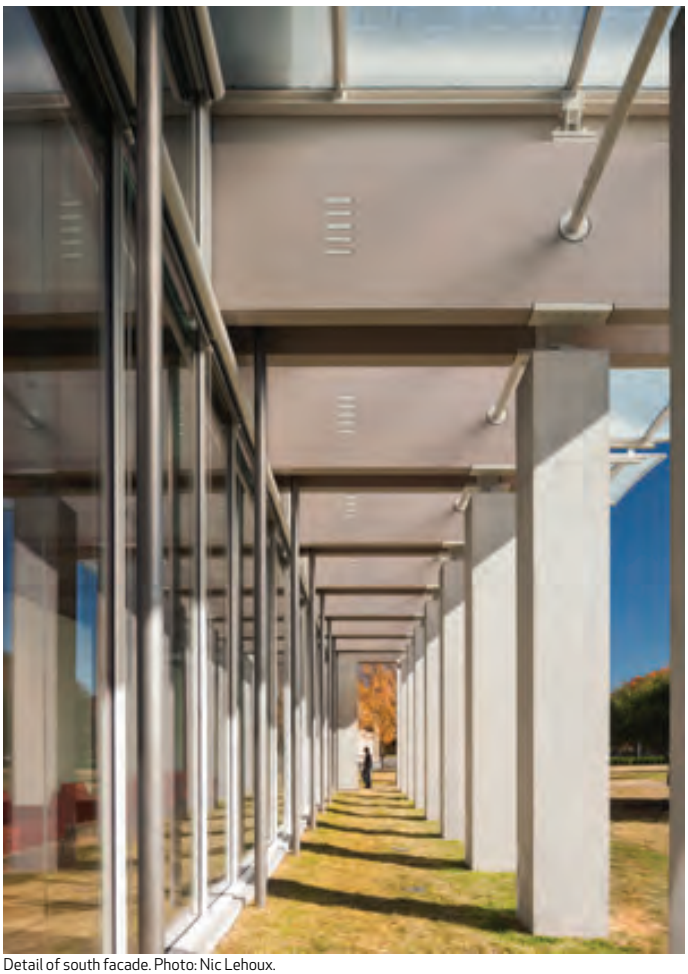
Contrary to general opinion, Kahn's east entry (often referred to as the back entry) is arguably equal to or even richer experientially than the west entry. From a more constrained and darker space below, visitors ascend to the brighter upper level entrance lobby that allows for long views into the art galleries and even longer views outside. Perhaps what is more important is the simple fact that the building can be traversed and the sense of liberty, accessibility, and connection that disposition provides. The Kahn Building remains a key point in the Cultural District as a link between the Amon Carter and the Piano Pavilion to the west and the Modern to the east. Its position will certainly become even more important if the Darnell site is developed.

Piano also took cues from Kahn for material choices and details. After exploring travertine for exterior finishes, Piano decided to use a meticulously crafted, titanium-laced concrete that has a cooler tone than Kahn's. He borrowed the two-foot square dimensions of Kahn's columns for his own, and he closed the space between concrete walls and the roof structure above with a glass band much as Kahn did. Piano's building is slightly taller than Kahn's, but since its floor level is three and a half feet lower, its horizontal glass roof remains below the top of Kahn's cycloid vault. Piano's new building is also smaller in total floor area.

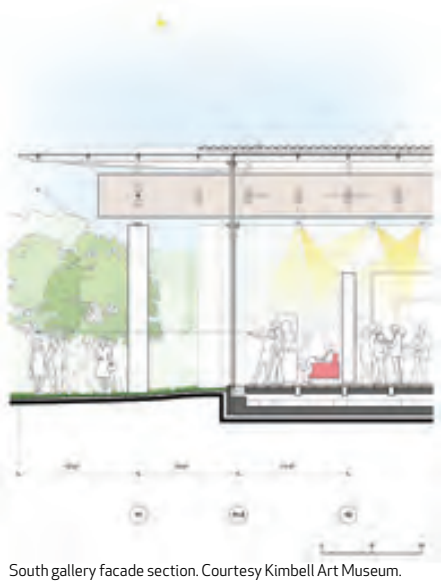
The use of a repetitive module is common in both Kahn's and Piano's work in general. Kahn's Kimbell has two modules with columns placed at 22-foot centers for the cycloid vaults and eight-foot centers for the flat-roofed areas between. Piano chose a 10-foot module for his glass-roofed pavilion that is made apparent by the tightly spaced concrete columns on the north and south elevations. The columns support paired laminated beams of Douglas fir (100 feet long, eight inches wide, and 52 inches deep) oriented in the north-south direction and thus following the general thrust of Kahn's building. Inside, the close spacing of the beams reads more as a field than a module. Piano's module, however, does not always allow for the same "inevitability" as does Kahn's, and the delivery area at the northwest corner of the glass-roofed pavilion is unable to conform to the internal logic of the building, since large vehicles simply cannot pass between columns spaced at 10-foot centers. This part of the project takes on the appearance of an add-on.

In some respects the Piano Pavilion is a hybrid, a "best of" his research and projects elaborated over the years—realized or not. At a planning scale there are often strongly expressed parallel walls (this time in concrete) and build-

Piano Pavilion, detail of south facade. Photo: Michel Denancé.



Detail of south facade. Photo: Nic Lehoux.

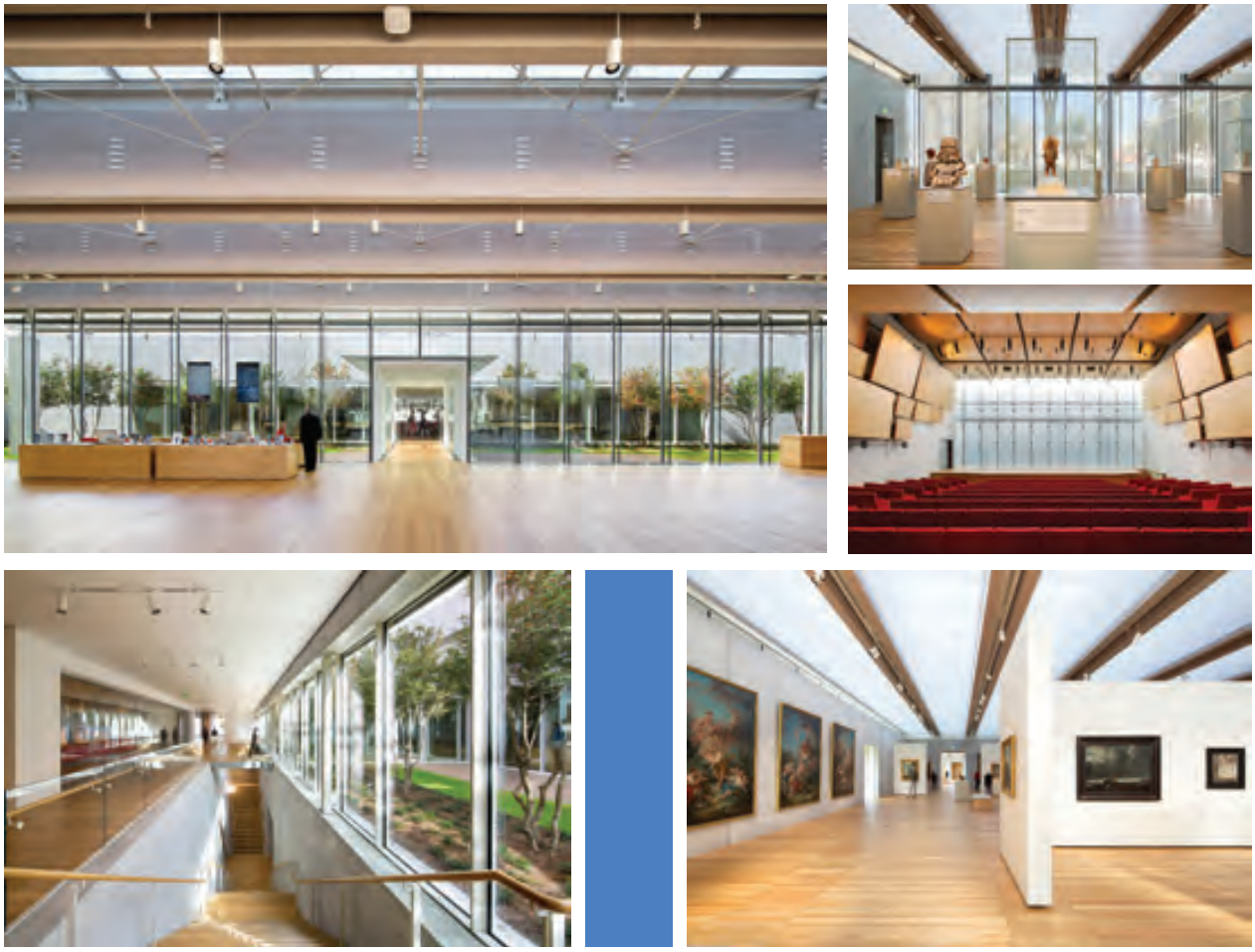


South gallery facade section. Courtesy Kimbell Art Museum.

ing volumes integrated into the landscape as sod-covered forms. At a structural level, laminated wood beams are a material of choice. At a technical level, the ingenious "breathable floor" in Fort Worth that uses narrow, open joints between the floor planks to allow for the delivery of conditioned air is a solution that has been in gestation for a while. In detail, the glass roof complex is a combination of elements from various projects and studies: slightly curved, fritted glass panels that form the building enclosure; flat, cantilevered, perimeter glass panels that participate in the building's image; exterior louvers covered with photovoltaic cells that shade and protect the glass roof below, and a fabric scrim inside that diffuses light and softens the space.

Judging from the number of commissions he has received since he completed the Menil Collection in 1987, Renzo Piano's model for the contemporary museum—simple spaces, with naturally and evenly lit galleries—is highly appreciated by the museum world as a good environment for art. Some museums by other architects over the last 25 years may be more significant as buildings, but less noteworthy as museums. By now we know Piano's approach of the "roofless" museum—the entirely glass-roofed building with light diffusing and shading layers that are adapted depending on the context. While Piano's recurring concept may cause a certain fatigue in the architectural community, it remains desirable for museum directors, curators, and collectors who are considering an individual building to be inhabited by art.

Both Piano and Kahn had the good fortune of realizing relatively small, pavilion museums for the Kimbell that allow most all gallery spaces to benefit from natural top lighting. Piano's one-story museums are more successful than his taller projects. Likewise, Kahn toyed with reusing his remarkable Kimbell solution for the top floor of his multistory Yale Center for British Art. His final lighting solution in New Haven, however, which uses conventional skylights with exterior shading, is not nearly as distilled as in Fort Worth. Kahn did, nevertheless, reuse



Clockwise from top left: Entry lobby, north gallery, auditorium, gallery, and stairs leading to auditorium of Piano Pavilion. Photos: Michel Denancé.

the Kimbell cycloid vault and lighting solution for an entirely different building type at his later Wolfson Engineering Center in Tel-Aviv.

There are some significant differences between Piano's Kimbell and many of his other projects. Most of Piano's museums were conceived for modern and contemporary art and hanging surfaces are generally gypsum board and white. The Kimbell's collection is composed of earlier historical works and the concrete walls are at the same time a response to the collection and to the travertine walls of Kahn's building. The wall surface of the actual building is limited, however, and a system of movable, fabric-covered exhibition walls, also inspired by those in Kahn's building, was developed. These thin partitions are bolted to the floor in predetermined positions and will likely be the primary hanging surface in the South Gallery (76 x 90 feet), which was envisioned for traveling shows—more like a kunsthalle—and is even more open, loft-like, and straightforward than most of Piano's exhibition spaces. There are also more openings to the outside with views to the lawn to the south and to the street and passing traffic to the north, and the considerable amounts of light coming in from the large glazed facades make Piano's trademark top lighting less palpable. The transparency of Piano's building would also make the museum more accessible to the public and the art more of an everyday experience. Kahn's building is more introverted and ritualistic. It speaks to our emotions while Piano's building speaks to our senses.

Having worked in Kahn's office during the late 1960s, Piano says that he respects the elder architect's quality of "patient determination." Piano has likely developed the same quality as well as humility and restraint while maintaining an ember of provocation. The potentially egocentric planning decision to place a building in Kahn's front yard was countered by a reverent architecture. Older and wiser may allow for making a mark without making a splash. ■

FIRMS

CLIENT: KIMBELL ART FOUNDATION

ARCHITECTS:
RENZO PIANO BUILDING WORKSHOP
WITH KENDALL/HEATON ASSOCIATES, INC.

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: GUY NORDENSON & ASSOCIATES
WITH BROCKETTE/DAVIS/DRAKE, INC.

SERVICES: ARUP WITH SUMMIT CONSULTANTS

LIGHTING: ARUP

FACADE CONSULTANT: FRONT

LANDSCAPE: POND & COMPANY

CONCRETE CONSULTANT: DOTTOR GROUP

PROJECT MANAGER: PARATUS GROUP

menil

Museums should offer a kind of place and atmosphere different from the quotidian; going to a museum is about editing out all the noise so that you can see things differently.

What in your opinion is the art museum's cultural and social mission in general today?

Josef Helfenstein: I strongly feel that art belongs to the public and is made for the public good. Museums therefore have a legacy for our communities—not just for one segment of society, but for the community in all its diversity. Members of all socioeconomic groups should have access to art, as they should have to a decent education. In our increasingly commercialized and privatized societies, museums are very crucial as cultural treasure houses, platforms of memory, and places of education and public discussion.

But most important: museums are places of wonder and of beauty. I think the Menil is such a place. It is also more than a museum: as Reyner Banham observed, it is a neighborhood of art. The Menil has always tried to integrate modern aesthetics with ethics.

David Chipperfield: Museums hold an increasingly important position in a society so often absorbed by the superficial and the ephemeral. Incessant consumption is the defining characteristic of our lives today; I believe that museums have become important breakwaters against this tide.

Johnston Marklee: Art museums are about slowness. We live in a time when everything is available all the time, a lot of information without knowledge, a lot of distraction without concentration. Museums should offer a kind of place and atmosphere different from the quotidian; going to a museum is about editing out all the noise so that you can see things differently.

What do you feel is the best relationship between architecture and art?

JH: Museum architecture should support the display of works of art and the visitor's perception of them. Ideally, that relationship is reciprocal; in other words, good art often enhances good architecture simply because great art has the capacity to transform the visitor's under-

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is really a holistic place,
a kind of contemporary urban utopia—
but one that is real.

standing of the world. And the same can be true for architecture, although it usually has a more functional purpose than art has.

DC: Like much contemporary architecture, the architecture of the museum has become increasingly concerned with image. Architects are responsible for attracting larger audiences to museums and consequently seek to be iconic in their work. In this pursuit the more delicate duty of the museum—to provide a place for viewing art and for concentration—is sometimes forgotten.

However it is also true that the engagement between contemporary art and its viewer has become increasingly complex. Artists seek to challenge accepted modes of presentation for their work, fostering engagement through participation and performance. To be places of contemplation and of dialogue simultaneously is the challenge facing today's institutions.

JM: We find it best when the architecture acts as a backdrop to art—a backdrop that is not mute but reticent, remaining silent unless spoken to.

How would you describe your architectural approach regarding the preexisting buildings by Renzo Piano Building Workshop and other buildings of the Menil campus, and how did you respond to the preexisting exhibition spaces?

JH: What is extremely successful about Renzo Piano's main museum building and Cy Twombly Gallery, and also the neighboring Rothko Chapel by Philip Johnson, Howard Barnstone, and Eugene Aubry, is that they have defined a neighborhood in a completely understated, unimposing way. They managed to create a true dialogue with the surrounding fabric of vernacular buildings, mostly bungalows. For me, the post-Piano approach is based on understanding the delicacy of this balance, and on not imposing a hierarchy. On our "campus" the museum buildings, bungalows, outdoor sculptures, trees, the visitors, their dogs, and even the cars are all literally on the same level. People visiting our museum never even have to take a step up to enter a building and experience art. It is a very simple, astonishing, beautiful concept. The scale between these different elements is right, and so is the relationship between architecture and nature, and the way light is integrated into the buildings.

For me, the Menil neighborhood is really a holistic place, a kind of contemporary urban utopia—but one that is real. And this seems to me the basis for any change or expansion. We have no intention to alter the existing buildings or exhibition spaces. However, the Menil Drawing Institute will add a new stand-alone building, whose size will respect the current relationship between the main building and the single-artist spaces as well as the fabric of the bungalows. The placement of the Drawing Institute will completely change and expand the reach of the current campus through the creation of a new park southeast of the Twombly Gallery. This space is currently not accessible to the public. I am really looking forward to this change—it will be eye-opening.

DC: It is difficult to think of a more pleasing cultural environment than that of the Menil. The setting and the intelligent architecture conspire together to make a place that is both very special and very normal. The unmonumental but supremely dignified museum architecture sits convincingly within a rather domestic setting, reinforcing the personality of the collection and putting its art in a unique position.

JM: We see our building as mediating between the scale of the institutional buildings and the residential buildings on the Menil campus, taking a cue from the original Piano building. We imagine ours could be perceived as a building that existed before the Piano buildings but after the pre-war bungalows, in an era of in-between. The Drawing Institute also reflects this in the character and scale of its interior exhibition spaces, which are formally somewhere between an institution and a house. Mastering the building's scale within the context was paramount to the problem of shaping an environment to study and exhibit drawings.

Have you found anything particular about realizing a project in Texas?

JH: Due to the absence of planning in Houston, the Menil has always felt that we as the client have the responsibility to do things right, not so much from the perspective of a property owner as from a civic point of view. In our efforts to do so, it helps that Houston has a great sense of energy and opportunity and is economically thriving, which we hope will continue to fuel this city's great tradition of private philanthropy. Perhaps because of its youthful nature, and certainly because of its diversity, which I see as Houston's greatest asset, this is an outstanding city to give life to new ideas.

DC: We have enjoyed the open and enthusiastic atmosphere of the institution and the youthful energy of the city, as well as the light that Renzo Piano so skillfully made into the main material of his architecture.

JM: The intensity of the sun and rain could not be taken lightly. On the one hand, we wanted to create an intimate building that was nestled into the park and surrounding trees, while on the other we had to protect the building's contents from the extreme conditions of sun and water in Texas. By stretching the roof out over the landscape to define interior-exterior courtyards and porches, we created a protective halo. This in-between space, which is shadowy and dry, buffers the interior of the building from the exterior, like a space suit!

Josef Helfenstein, Director of the Menil; David Chipperfield, who created a new master plan; and the Menil Drawing Institute architects, Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee, responded to the same series of questions via email.

RADICALLY UNDERSTATED

MENIL DRAWING INSTITUTE AND MASTER PLAN

BALANCE **CAUTION** AND **INNOVATION**

BY CHRISTOPHER HAWTHORNE

Rendered aerial view of Menil Drawing Institute, Twombly, and Menil Collection from southeast. Courtesy Menil Collection.

It is rare that a week goes by during which I do not get at least one email trumpeting the expansion plans of an American art museum. Across the country, museums are chasing extra square footage and the prestige that comes with hiring a prominent architect to design a substantial and eye-catching new building. Peter Zumthor in Los Angeles. Shigeru Ban in Aspen. Diller, Scofidio + Renfro in Berkeley. Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron in Miami. Snøhetta in San Francisco. And Renzo Piano—well, Renzo Piano nearly everywhere, from New York to Chicago to Cambridge, Massachusetts. (And across the Charles River from Cambridge in Boston, too, for good measure.) As an architecture critic, I could devote myself to reviewing only new museum wings in this country, leaving every other building type and every other country unexamined, and still have trouble keeping up.

Menil Drawing Institute west elevation. Courtesy Menil.

Against this backdrop, the master plan that the Menil Collection in Houston is relying on to guide its own expansion seems not just genuinely but almost radically understated. Produced by David Chipperfield Architects, the plan emerged from an invited competition overseen by Josef Helfenstein, the director of the Menil since 2004, and was approved by the museum's board in 2009. It calls for measured growth over time, one small stand-alone art gallery at a time, along with the addition of a café and expanded parking lot. It does not call for a grand new central building or a linked collection of impressively scaled wings. Nor has it been a vehicle for the museum to correct or flee from the perceived missteps of other capital projects or smooth over the errors of earlier architects, directors, and boards of trustees, as has arguably been the case at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), the Whitney Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, or the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), to name just a few in what has grown to become a very long list of art-world institutions plagued by that kind of intergenerational architectural regret. It is instead a document intended to build on and indeed safeguard the considerable, singular appeal of the museum's original gallery building, designed by Piano and opened to the public in June 1987—as well as the bungalows from the 1920s and 1930s that line the edges of the museum campus and the simply treated landscape, made up mostly of grass, substantial oak trees, and a small handful of artworks, that holds the 30-acre parcel together.

The Chipperfield master plan, in fact, attempts to add new structures to the Menil campus very much in the image of the quietly astonishing Piano building, which remains with the Beyeler Foundation in Basel, Switzerland, the finest artworld design of the Italian architect's long career. The model is clear: the horizontal, usually single-story, gallery building set into that green landscape and visible in the round. Quite carefully the master plan also seeks to stitch the museum campus more securely into the urban fabric and to the surrounding city grid, strengthening the sense of a north-south axis through the site and looking ahead to the day when a lightrail line will be finished along Richmond Avenue, on the Menil's southern edge, changing the way visitors approach the museum and its relationship with the rest of Houston. In the methodical and unflashy nature of its approach to expansion, the Menil is matched among American museums perhaps only by the Clark Institute in William-

Menil Drawing Institute south elevation. Courtesy Menil.

stown, Massachusetts, which unveiled an expansion by Tadao Ando and Annabelle Selldorf in 2014.

At the same time, the Chipperfield plan holds the potential to produce some of the most important museum buildings of the first few decades of the twenty-first century. And in fact it is this relationship between institutional caution and architectural ambition that I am interested in exploring here. Paradoxically enough, it turns out that the sobriety of the Menil's expansion efforts and Helfenstein's leadership style more broadly have been key elements in helping the museum become a patron of searching, innovative architecture. The first building proposal to come out of the master plan process, Johnston Marklee's Menil Drawing Institute (MDI), is evidence of this productive relationship between caution and experimentation. It is a design that appears spare, even plain, at first glance and reveals layers of complexity, surprise, and risk-taking the more it is studied.

I hope I'm not implying that the museum has decided to follow this unusual course without anxiety or conflict. In fact uneasiness about Johnston Marklee's lack of experience, particularly among board members who preferred simply to hire Chipperfield to design the MDI, since he was already in charge of the master plan, nearly upended plans for the building (though the board ultimately was unanimous in its selection of Johnston Marklee). And there are forks in the road yet to come.

To succeed, every director of a major American museum these days has to be an expert in two things: in the history of art and in the separate realm, slippery and ineffable, of raising money. An interest or expertise in architecture (or more broadly in urbanism, in the question of how neighborhoods and cities are made and how they grow) has not typically been a central requirement. In fact a museum director who is too interested in architecture and capital improvements (see Richard Koshalek at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden or Michael Govan at LACMA) is often at risk of being criticized for neglecting the most important parts of his or her job. Perhaps as a result of that fact, many museum directors I've met over the years have worn their lack of knowledge of or passion for architecture as a badge of honor. When I traveled last year to Houston to meet with Helfenstein and discuss the Menil's long-range building plan, I found a museum director taking pains to avoid both those poles. Helfenstein, who was born in Bern, Switzerland, and came to the United States in 1999 to run the Krannert Museum at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, is no Koshalek, in the sense that when he talks about architecture and urban design he uses the same measured tone he employs when he's discussing forecasts for the Menil's endowment. You don't get the sense that he is captivated by Chipperfield as a personality the way Govan is to a certain degree captivated by Zumthor. But neither is Helfenstein the smooth technocrat, the perfectly coiffed and expertly tailored museum director who seems a transplant from Wall Street. He is knowledgeable and enthusiastic about architecture but has a cautious streak that seems preternatural. We met in a conference room on the second floor of the main Menil building. Models of the museum campus were on the table; renderings of the MDI were arranged along the walls. Soon we'd be joined by Sheryl Kolasinski, the Menil's deputy director, who joined the museum in 2012 after 17 years at the Smithsonian Institution.

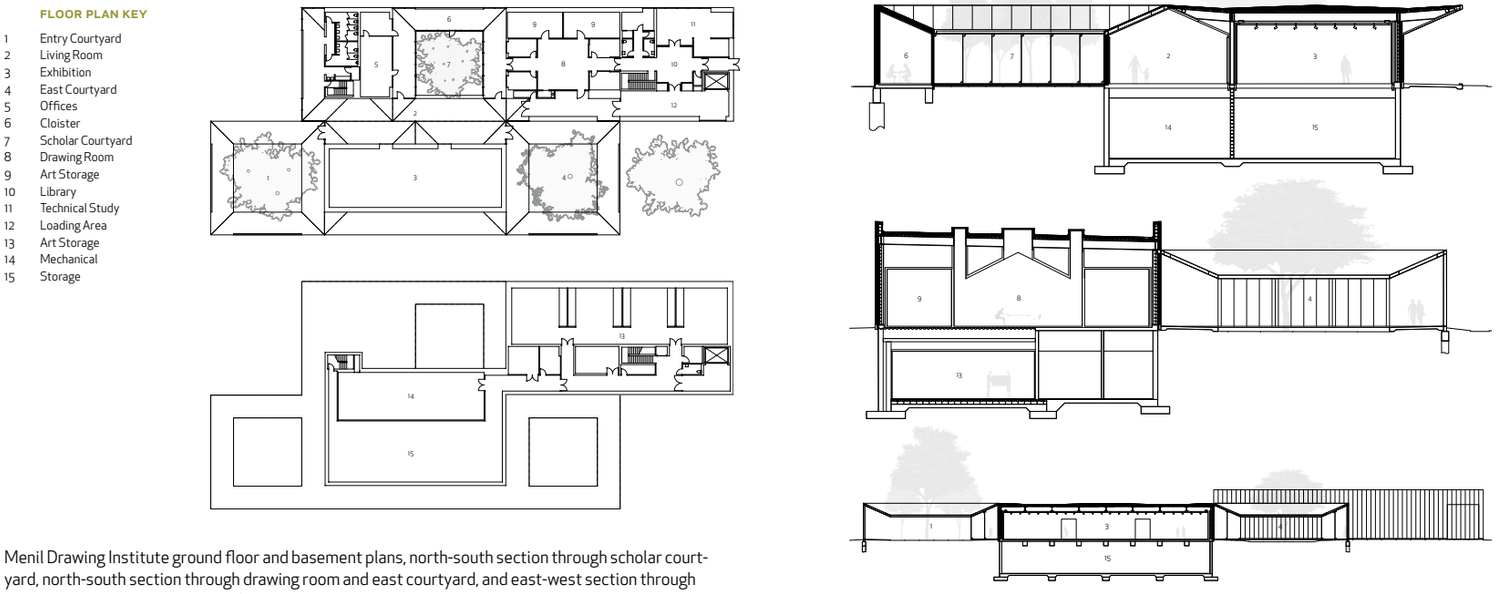
Tellingly, Helfenstein began his description of Chipperfield's master plan by explaining not what the museum was hoping to build or add but what it wanted to protect.

"This is a low-key neighborhood," he said. "What stands out for me is the complete lack of hierarchy in terms of how things are treated. It's all on the same level. There's no pedestal—not for the buildings, not for the art."

In the Renzo Piano building, he added, "There's not even the beginning of a staircase or anything like that."

Of course, the inspiration for that horizontality, that sense of being close to the ground, literally and philosophically, is the collection of bungalows. "The bungalows have porches. This building [the Piano] has a porch around it. Not only is there no hierarchy in terms of height, there's none in terms of public and private. You sit on any of these porches, as a private person; you sit and look out, and you can actually talk to strangers. Europeans come here and they can't believe it."

Similar ideas guided Piano's design for the Cy Twombly Gallery, a quiet cube faced in concrete block that was completed in 1995. Frankness and openness is also evident in the approach of the Menil's landscape architects, Michael van Valkenburgh Associates. When Van Valkenburgh started work on the campus,



Menil Drawing Institute ground floor and basement plans, north-south section through scholar courtyard, north-south section through drawing room and east courtyard, and east-west section through courtyards and exhibition space. Courtesy Menil.

Helfenstein said, "We already had a template. We didn't need people to come in and start overdesigning the park, with paths that we don't need. That's very fancy, that approach, and people do that today."

Still, it would be a mistake, Helfenstein added, to confuse the sense of modesty that seems to have imbued the whole Menil campus with contentment or stasis. The approach of the campus is in fact a bold statement of principle in Houston, he said, given the ad-hoc approach to development that rules the rest of the city.

"There's really high standards here, a sense that the world is watching us," he told me. When it comes to the new buildings on the campus, "If we do something sort of average, it will be an embarrassment, and it will be terrible, kind of ruining what we've done before."

This is the crux of what makes the Menil an outlier in the American museum world, this slow-going progressivism. In most museum expansions I cover, the goal is not to protect what has come before but, in one way or another, to redeem it. This is the case at museums as different as MoMA and LACMA, SFMOMA and the Barnes Foundation. New buildings are expected to replace, make up for, or disembowel the buildings erected by previous directors and trustees. The process is not additive but consists of a series, endlessly repeatable, of fresh starts. It's a truly American approach: the eternal dream of the clean slate.

At the Menil that idea is anathema. Much of the architectural spirit of the museum, of course, can be traced back to the rigorously productive relationship Dominique de Menil forged with Renzo Piano, who was 45 years old when she chose him to design the museum's main gallery building. His design, equally informed by Craig Ellwood's Case Study Houses in Los Angeles and the high-tech experiments of Piano's former collaborator Richard Rogers, with whom he designed the Centre Pompidou a decade before, seemed effortlessly to sidestep the debates then roiling architecture about postmodernism versus late modernism, historical reference versus flat-roofed, forward-looking clarity. The building, produced at a time of significant soul-searching and uncertainty in the profession, is as comfortable in its own skin as any piece of museum architecture in the world. It has a gently retrospective appeal in its nod to Ellwood but is free of anxiety about any conflict between historicism and modernism.

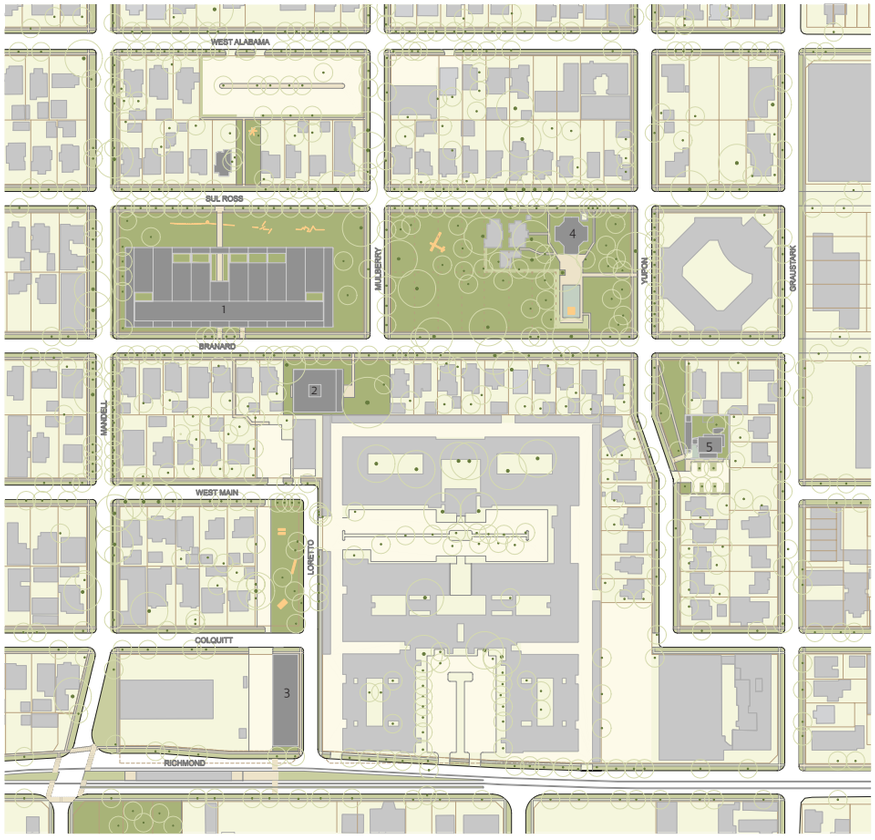
In an attempt to recapture some of that spirit, or at least honor it, Helfenstein and the Menil board made their boldest move simply in how they organized the process of selecting a master planner. Together they made a series of consequential decisions: first to set up an invited competition (six offices narrowed down to a shortlist of four), next to invite architecture rather than planning firms to take part in that competition, and finally not to hire an outside consultant to run it, as many expanding museums do. The finalists that emerged from that competition suggested both its ambition and its tolerance for relative youth and anonymity: along with Chipperfield's office, they included Office dA from Boston and two firms from Madrid, Mansilla + Tuñón and Herreros Arquitectos.

The competition for the MDI followed similar lines. (The master plan competition "was such a good process," Helfenstein said, "that we felt naively that we should do it again.") To guard against conservatism, Helfenstein added the architecture dean at Rice, Sarah Whiting, to the jury, and it was she who recommended inviting Johnston Marklee. The shortlist for the building was, like the one of master plan candidates, a mixture of well-known and emerging offices. Chipperfield and the Tokyo firm SANAA made up the well-known group and were joined by Johnston Marklee, whose married partners, Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee, are in their late 40s, and the 42-year-old Mexico City architect Tatiana Bilbao.

Still, as the jury neared consensus on Johnston Marklee, more than a little doubt emerged.

The MDI competition was "really a cauldron of opinions," said Kolasinski, who arrived at the Menil just as the process was unfolding. "It was exciting. Maybe a little too exciting."

In the end, Johnston Marklee won the job, a major breakthrough for the firm, and one that arrives as its founders are just about the same age Renzo Piano was when he was hired by Dominique de Menil. Their scheme is a deft and timely marriage of abstraction and rich allusion and incorporates a number of domestic, residential metaphors. (The main circulation and gathering space will be called the Living Room.) The MDI will be more approachable, more domestic in scale, than a typical museum wing but certainly grander and more ambitious in circulation and in how it treats display than a house. Most impressive of all is how, in making room for three courtyards, each containing an existing oak tree, and in connecting to the Menil landscape, the design bears in mind a key lesson about visiting museums that too many

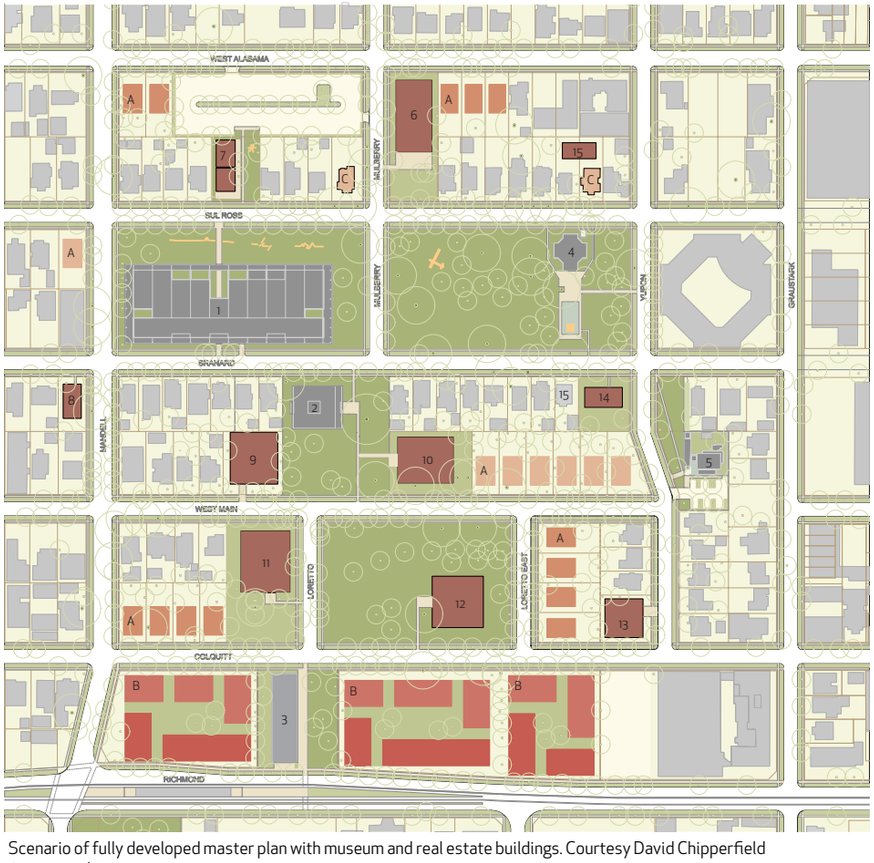


Site plan for existing buildings. Courtesy David Chipperfield Architects/The Menil Foundation.

In the 2009 master plan by David Chipperfield, most existing duplexes and bungalows are preserved. Changes include removing the Richmont Square Apartments, connecting W. Main and Colquitt Streets, creating new park space, and building high-density residential development along Richmond Avenue.

EXISTING BUILDINGS

1 The Menil Collection
2 Cy Twombly Gallery
3 Richmond Hall
4 The Rothko Chapel
5 Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum



Scenario of fully developed master plan with museum and real estate buildings. Courtesy David Chipperfield Architects/The Menil Foundation.

EXISTING BUILDINGS

1 The Menil Collection
2 Cy Twombly Gallery
3 Richmond Hall
4 The Rothko Chapel
5 Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum

NEW MUSEUM BUILDINGS

6 Menil Hall
7 Bookstore/Cafe
8 Archives
9 Energy House
10 Single artist gallery
11 MDISC
12 Single artist gallery
13 Storage building

NEW ROTHKO CHAPEL BUILDINGS

14 Function and office buildings
15 Storage building and bungalow

REAL ESTATE

A Low rise residential development
B High rise commercial and residential mixed use (2nd levels underground parking)
C Relocated bungalows

2 levels
3 levels
4 levels
8 levels

THE QUESTION NOW FOR THE MENIL IS WHETHER THE BUILDINGS YET TO COME CAN ACHIEVE THE SAME KIND OF COMPLEX, AMBITIOUS GRACEFULNESS.

architects forget: that the transition from inside to out, from the intensity of concentrating on looking to the pleasure of concentrating on nothing at all and merely feeling the sun or the rain on your skin, can be more crucial than the transitions from one gallery to the next.

The MDI will offer a test of Johnston Marklee's ability to turn promise and a thoughtful approach to expanding a practice into a persuasive collection of built work. The architects made some compromises in order to maintain the MDI's modest single-story profile, rising no more than 16 feet; roughly half of the building's 30,000 square feet of interior space will be located on a basement level, dedicated mostly to art storage. This can't have been an easy sell for curators and conservationists concerned about flooding and other possible damage.

Above ground the design is an extended architectural essay on one kind of design characteristic nestling within its opposite. The MDI is meant to be filled with dappled light, strategically mediated by the roof and the oak trees, in some rooms (especially the Living Room) and nearly paranoid about light levels, to protect works on paper, in others. Some interior spaces will be spacious enough and faced with glass to feel open-air, while its courtyards, lined vertically with wide cedar planks, will feel like interior rooms. The roof, formed from an unusually thin steel plate, lends the building a spare, modernist personality from certain angles; but inside the faceted ceiling suggests a gabled geometry.

That is a lot of complexity and metaphorical layering to pile into a building that will contain just 17,000 square feet of above-ground space, which is smaller than many houses in Houston's higher-end residential precincts. It will be a real breakthrough if the final product lives up to the renderings: A building packed into a manageable scale in contrast to the wan, attenuated, oversized wings so many other museums are building. A gallery building that feels thick with architectural ideas and gives consistent access to the outdoors, that leaves you wanting more instead of fighting off gallery fatigue? That is a rare concept these days.

Thomas de Monchaux, writing in *Architect* magazine, suggested that the building might prove to be a bit too well-behaved in the end for the unruly complexity of Houston. Yet in certain ways the MDI design's Trojan-horse qualities—the way it cloaks its experimental streak in rather reserved outer dress—make it especially suitable for the Menil campus, which has long operated as a both quiet refuge (for Houstonians and visitors alike) and a proving ground for new approaches to museum architecture.

More than any other building in his portfolio, it is the Menil, Piano's first major American commission, that has made him the most prolific museum architect of his generation. Piano's building for the Menil remains the one that other museums' boards of trustees make pilgrimages to see; it remains the one that spawns expansions of remarkable scale in other cities—expansions, ironically enough, that often lack the sense of scale and proportion that make the Menil building so impressive.

The question now for the Menil is whether the buildings yet to come—the MDI first and then two additional gallery buildings—can achieve the same kind of complex, ambitious grace.

The early signs are good, though there have been some significant hiccups. The museum's plans to restore a bungalow on the north side of the campus as a new café didn't entirely pan out; the building was not in good shape and has been entirely replaced by the architects Stern and Bucek. Adaptive reuse morphed instead into the kind of historicism and polite contextualism the Menil has until now studiously avoided. Meanwhile an adjacent parking lot has been fitted with a geothermal system and new landscaping by Van Valkenburgh's firm. Groundbreaking for the MDI is scheduled for 2015, with completion anticipated by the end of 2016. Johnston Marklee is also designing a replacement for a utilities building, called the Energy House, just west of the MDI site.

Work will then accelerate on the southern half of the campus. West Main Street will extend east across the campus, strengthening the sense of the urban grid.

The museum has taken down part of the Richmont Square apartment building (which it owns) for the MDI and will ultimately demolish the rest, making room for two additional gallery buildings just south of the MDI, while simultaneously working with a private developer to build a new apartment complex along Richmond Avenue. That project will both provide new revenue for the museum, replacing the rental income lost when Richmont Square and its 500 rental units come down, and create an architectural buffer between busy Richmond Avenue and the center of the Menil campus. The museum won't have final say on the architect of the new apartment building but will have significant input on its design and—perhaps more important—its scale. Indeed the museum may push for a midrise building there not only to maximize rental income but to build something of a wall between Richmond Avenue and the museum campus.

Even as these additions are planned and implemented, Helfenstein, as if to cement his status outside the mainstream of American museum directors, does his best to keep in mind what can be pared back or done without. At one point in our conversation, I asked him about a small building on one of the master plan models.

Helfenstein told me it was an auditorium, something the Menil has never had—and in the minds of certain trustees has always needed. "It's on the menu for the master plan. But I believe we have an auditorium, and it's called the out-of-doors. We do very beautiful events outside all the time."

A formal auditorium, he added, "would be a waste of money. And kind of absurd. I don't think we're going to do it." ■

FIRMS

ARCHITECTS: JOHNSTON MARKLEE, LOS ANGELES,
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: GUY NORDENSON AND ASSOCIATES WITH CARDNO HAYNES WHALEY
MECHANICAL AND ELECTRICAL ENGINEER: STANTEC
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: MICHAEL VAN VALKENBURGH ASSOCIATES
LIGHTING DESIGN: GEORGE SEXTON ASSOCIATES
CIVIL ENGINEER: LOCKWOOD ANDREWS NEWNAM
BUILDING ENVELOPE ENGINEER: SIMPSON GUMPERTZ & HEGER
COST CONSULTING: AECOM
ACOUSTICAL/AV/IT: ARUP

Clockwise from top left: Menil Drawing Institute interior, west elevation, east courtyard, and scholar courtyard interior view. Courtesy Menil.

prh

Do you consider Project Row Houses (PRH) as a kind of museum? What in your opinion is the art museum's cultural and social mission in general today, and how does PRH fit or not in that mission?

Linda Shearer: Yes, I absolutely consider PRH to be a museum, a living museum, and in fact a model for the museum of the future. I have observed art museums evolve from an object-based mission (acquisition, conservation, research, documentation, etc.) to an audience-based mission (need to address changing demographics, issues of diversity, relevancy, etc.). The next phase in my mind is a community-based museum—which will not necessarily look like the art museums of today. As hard as museums attempt to reach new audiences who do not have regular opportunities to visit museums, it can't really be done without being *in* the community. The notion of "outreach" is a fundamentally flawed one and only underscores the privileged nature that allows one to "reach out," and not in. PRH is unique in that it addresses the whole person; Joseph Beuys's concept of "social sculpture" is totally appropriate for PRH—a work of art does not have to be an object on a wall or pedestal. It can be the dynamics of an interaction that takes place between an artist from New York City, for example, and one of the women in PRH's Young Mothers Residential Program (YMRP) where a mutual sense of creativity or aspiration can be shared. PRH sees the setting as critical to the creative experience: relevant architecture (historical and contemporary) goes hand in hand with the arts, education, creating a safety net with the YMRP, and affordable housing.

Traditional museum design has largely echoed temples and churches, which have for the most part been uninviting and intimidating to those who are not familiar or comfortable with visiting museums. Contemporary architecture has attempted to mitigate that barrier by taking a more open and inclusive approach. Nonetheless, that shift has not really addressed the perception of privilege and exclusivity, and the pragmatic issue of security. PRH has neither security nor climate control; it invites visitors to walk the entire site, look at the Art Houses and the public art located throughout the site, talk to the individuals they encounter, see the streets and green spaces—in short, to experience firsthand the nuanced role of art within the community and neighborhood of the historic Third Ward.

What do you feel is the best relationship between architecture and art?

LS: Having worked for 11 years at the Guggenheim Museum in my early 20s, I have a rather unusual interpretation of that relationship! The most successful exhibitions were those that interacted with the architecture. Needless to say, that was mostly sculpture or site-specific work; paintings fared far less well in those curved bays and terrazzo ramps inclined at a three degree angle. For some years now, they have focused more and more on site-specific installations, as with the recent Turrell extravaganza. I also worked at Zaha Hadid's Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, where similar issues dominated. At PRH some of our most compelling projects are those where the artist is responding directly to the architecture (and history) of the shotgun-style house, like Sean Shim-Boyle, for example. So when there is harmony between the art and the architecture, that is moving; but when the art pushes back against and challenges the architecture, that can also be exciting.

How would you describe your architectural approach regarding the preexisting buildings? Do you anticipate a shift in that moving forward?

LS: Given their architectural importance, like the shotgun-style houses or the Eldorado, our approach is to honor their history and preserve them as best as we possibly can. Some buildings do not stand up to the test of time, but the ones that do are precious to PRH. And no, I do not foresee a shift in that approach. For example, the shotgun-style houses do not need improvements, as far as I am concerned. They do, however, need to be maintained. Three years ago we were able to replace the roofs on 15 of the houses; that had become an urgent need because the 80-plus-year-old houses were leaking badly with any heavy rain. Between the young mothers living in five of them and art being installed in eight of them, it was critical the roofs be fixed. As for the Eldorado, ideally we would return it to its original facade, as well as bring it up-to-date with state-of-the-art equipment—projection capabilities, theatrical sound and lighting, an elevator, and handicap accessibility in general. The Ballroom was built before air conditioning, and the windows all opened to the street; now they are considerably smaller and do not open. The facade has been greatly compromised over the years; it would be a dream to return it to its former design.

Have you found anything particular about realizing a project in Texas?

LS: I always think back to Toby Kamps's "No Zoning" exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. The combination of no formal zoning regulations with a certain lack of caution and a Texas Wild West, can-do attitude creates an atmosphere whereby the realization of projects is entirely feasible. Of course, it depends on the nature of the project: is it indoors or outdoors; is it on PRH property or not; is the space abandoned or actively functioning; are licensed professionals needed or can it be accomplished by staff; does it need permits or not; are local or out-of-town artists involved; do we have the funding to complete it? If the answers to these questions are self-evident, then you're at least on your way. I think it's fair to say that some projects need to be done stealthily and at night, if possible!

For example, we received a Texas Historic Marker in 2011 for the corner of Dowling and Francis Streets where the famed Houston blues musician Sam Lightnin' Hopkins (1912—1982) would regularly catch the #80 bus. Our plan had always been to commission an artist to create a bus stop dedicated to Hopkins. Terry Adkins (1954—2014) had organized a Round of Art Houses at Project Row Houses in 2008 dedicated to Lightnin' Hopkins, so he was the logical artist. We received funding for the project from the New York-based Nathan Cummings Foundation, but Terry was always too busy to concentrate on it. Between delays and his unexpected death in 2014, we turned to a local Houston artist, Robert Hodge, based in the Third Ward. His studio is on PRH property, immediately adjacent to the site of the existing bus stop. We did not request or receive Houston Metro's permission to build a bench next to the Marker referencing Hopkins; it was completed in 2014 and is now actively used by people waiting for the bus, as well as local residents looking for a place to sit. In other words, it was a project that evolved over the course of nearly six years. Would it have happened sooner in another part of the country? Not necessarily.

Of course, we have been enormously fortunate to have partnered on numerous collaborations with the Rice Building Workshop. And while some projects take longer than others, Nonya Grenader and Danny Samuels, the co-directors, make sure everything runs like clockwork. They are working on an academic schedule with concrete deadlines, so there is little room for delays.

when the art pushes back against and challenges the architecture, that can also be exciting.

Rice Building Workshop: Project Row Houses (PRH) is less a museum than an active catalyst of social art in the community. In that regard, architecture, beginning with the shotgun houses themselves and including all the Rice Building Workshop work, is a part of it, but not the most significant.

Our role as architect is part of a very large collaboration involving over 500 students, responding to the ideas and needs of a fascinating client (PRH). Along the way, there have been numerous consultants, material suppliers, contributors, and volunteers. In addition, we have had the critical support of Rice School of Architecture.

Since our first meeting with Rick Lowe (18 years ago), we have responded to certain PRH needs—from programs to create houses for young families in the PRH community to making living spaces for visiting artists and artists-in-residence. Some of our design/build projects were for new, affordable housing and some focused on the adaptive reuse of original housing stock. Residential projects have ranged in scale from 500 to 900 square feet. And there were other needs resulting in design work at a greater scale—from duplexes, to commercial space, to neighborhood planning issues.

We have learned a great deal from PRH—not only the wisdom and presence of the place itself but also, from the people at PRH and the larger neighborhood. During our 18 years together, we have watched families evolve, kids grow up, and some elders pass away—all against a vibrant backdrop of PRH programs with art and music and conversation. And we haven't even touched on various forces of change that happen in a city.

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Linda Shearer, Executive Director of Project Row Houses, and Nonya Grenader and Danny Samuels of Rice Building Workshop responded to similar questions via email.

MUSING THE THIRD WARD

AT PROJECT ROW HOUSES:

IN 2014, RICK LOWE WAS INDUCTED AS A MACARTHUR "GENIUS" FELLOW FOR HIS ROLE AS FOUNDER OF PROJECT ROW HOUSES, AFFIRMING AND RAISING THE INTERNATIONAL PROFILE OF THE INSTITUTION. MANY HAVE HELD IT UP AS THE MODEL FOR *THE* BURGEONING "SOCIAL PRACTICE" AND "CREATIVE PLACEMAKING" MOVEMENTS WITHIN THE ART WORLD, BUT LOWE HIMSELF HAS RAISED CRITICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THOSE ASSOCIATIONS.

FROM CULTURAL PRACTICE TO COMMUNITY INSTITUTION

HOW THEN SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT PROJECT ROW HOUSES? **WALTER HOOD** AND **CARMEN TAYLOR** ESSAY A NEW LANGUAGE TO DESCRIBE THE PRH MODEL.

Potluck meal photograph courtesy PRH.

PRH campus from Live Oak and Holman streets. Photo by Pete Molick.

In his book *The New Vision*, published in 1938 to inform laymen and artists about the foundation of Bauhaus education, László Moholy-Nagy writes, "Everyone is talented. Every healthy man has a deep capacity for bringing to development the creative energies found in his nature, if he is deeply interested in his work." Moholy-Nagy's assertion that every person has a "deep capacity" to express creativity encapsulates the value and mission of Project Row Houses (PRH) in the Third Ward of Houston.

BY WALTER HOOD AND CARMEN TAYLOR

Stark white row houses adorn two neighborhood blocks, with a wide street separating them from an empty parking lot. When we arrived on a weekday, the street was quiet. There were a few people in the brick administration building on the corner, located next to the row houses. A teenager sat at a table inside doing homework. The space felt both empty and alive; its design was somewhat modest, furnished like a small home office.

Neither a bustling neighborhood nor a fallow or neglected one, the site of Project Row Houses is a place that negotiates the stratum of change. In 1993, Rick Lowe and a group of artists began renovating 22 abandoned shotgun houses on the two-block site, forming PRH. The project, which Lowe launched to bring art into the life and maintenance of the neighborhood, has been engaging participants' creativity through rehabilitation, housing develop-

Project Row Houses is defined as much by the buildings as the space between them. Porches, shared backyards, alleys, and park space create a spatial condition or typology that encourages mindfulness and neighborliness.

PRH CAMPUS

1 Mod Pod
2 XS House
3 ZeRow House
4 Duplexes
5 Shotgun Houses
6 RBW Work Yard
7 Eldorado Ballroom
8 Emancipation Park

Project Row Houses site plan. Mapping by Edison Ding and Rice Building Workshop.

ment, and art practice for the past 20 years. With artist-in-residence programs, low-income housing projects, and a laundromat and other business ventures focused on the occupations and talents of people who live in the Third Ward, PRH has advocated for a resilient neighborhood within Houston's constant development.

This April, Lowe spoke at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, explaining his art practice and the ideas that surrounded the creation and continuation of PRH. He discussed the significance of giving *value*, *appreciation*, and *dignity* to ordinary people. Through his examples of how recognition of the ordinary acts and practices of the Third Ward neighborhood have established its value, Lowe suggested the importance of acknowledging that around the corner you may meet the next great chef or a budding entrepreneur. Lowe was first drawn to the shotgun houses of PRH for their ordinariness but also, most importantly, because people couldn't see their worth. Through his art practice, Lowe has discovered that he can help people living in and outside of the Third Ward see the value of this place.

At PRH, validation of neighborhood worth manifests in many ways. One man in the Third Ward loves to barbeque. His enthusiasm, recognized by PRH, garnered an ad campaign to promote his food, affirming his skill and presence. Cookie Love, a woman who made money by doing people's laundry, now works from an established laundromat called Cookie Love's Wash 'n' Fold. And Assata Richards, a participant in PRH's Young Mothers Residential Program, later earned a Ph.D., became a board member of the housing authority, and has run for the Houston City Council. During our visit, a man rode by on a bike with music blasting and lights flashing. Lowe walked up and asked, "Do you live here?" And just like that, the music man became a newly befriended neighbor.

Neither a studio practice nor a temporary social art installation, PRH is a cultural institution. By fostering a space that is inclusive of its geographic context and people, Lowe has created a kind of museum that is shaped and maintained by cultural practices. Art actions here are idiosyncratic, unique to their locality, and relate directly to the place they occur within rather than to the place where they are housed (as is the case in a typical art museum setting). In the Third Ward, "cultural practices" are those everyday actions valued as art, whether they are culinary, sculptural, or celebratory. Similarly, Lowe's art is a cultural practice, to give it a new moniker. One that is both reflective and active in engaging the arts with daily life.

Often discussed as one of the most successful of emergent "social art practices," PRH confronts the critique of social art's function. In an article for the *International Socialist Review*, Ben Davis asks, "Is this strand of art a starting point for addressing social problems, or a distraction that keeps us from seeing their true extent?" One response is that such art is not necessarily about solving social problems. Instead of asking how art can solve a housing crisis, a drug war, or a homeless problem, artists should address a different question: how can art validate and encourage people to define themselves in the world? Art can be a vehicle for empowerment outside the boundaries of bureaucratic malaise. PRH's foray into CDC (Community Development Corporation) housing, for example, emerged from Lowe's recognition of a need for local housing and the idea that as an art institution, PRH could work with a traditional institution like Rice University to develop housing on PRH property. The addition of new housing to the PRH site bolstered the social nature of the art institution. But as the

Duplexes, 2004, Rice Building Workshop. Images Courtesy RBW.

CDC expanded its housing development to other sites not contiguous with PRH, Lowe decided to separate the CDC from the PRH art institution, a move that sheds light on the limits of agency in social art practices. Development becomes less about art and more about business and finance. The "power of art" in this context is diminished when it becomes subservient to other imperatives.

Gentrification is a real concern in places like the Third Ward, and artists are often a major harbinger of the arrival of new wealthier residents. PRH, however, demonstrates how artists can be part of what is already there. Artists didn't discover row houses and Rick Lowe didn't discover the Third Ward. He instead saw people living in a place and decided to become part of their lives.

A cultural art practice, unlike a social art practice, is about time and investment. Many social art practices provide commentary on social issues, but they engage with place as the setting for the art, not as the site of an intended physical transformation. Take, for example, Suzanne Lacy's orchestrated works; they are powerful events that leave a lasting memory—and lead to possible consequent actions—but they are somewhat ambiguous in terms of site transformation. In contrast, the culture of Project Row Houses demands that engagement be constant and ongoing. Culture, with its semantic roots in the act of "cultivating," suggests an artist's and institution's engagement in the production of both art and life. This engagement occurs daily through nurturing and caring for a place and its people, and connecting their patterns and practices to a larger purpose, whether that is spiritual, communal, or inspirational. A cultural practice can be articulated as a triad of active engagement with the everyday and mundane, with a community's lifeways, and with acts of commemoration. PRH fosters practices in its community that reinforce this triad of allegiances.

THE EVERYDAY AND MUNDANE

The museum today is most commonly associated with an institutional practice that is scripted and procedural, choosing which artists to exhibit and validate, therefore elevating the worth of their work and name. Project Row Houses suggests a different museum model, one where ordinary actions and events are valued by both the spectator and the performer or art-

ist. PRH's cultural practice asserts that we are enriched spiritually through the everyday and mundane. Awareness of the everyday instills in us a sense of passing time, our obligations, and the remarkable skills we activate for daily routines. By recognizing the mundane, PRH demonstrates how a museum structure can form a proscenium for daily life. Organizationally, PRH and traditional art museums have a similar structure in that each has gallery spaces where revolving art installations are displayed. Programmatically, they also have fellowships, residencies, boards of directors, and funding streams in common. Yet what makes PRH extraordinary is its ordinariness. The row houses themselves are art; people live and play in these spaces. Art is intertwined with the condition of the neighborhood. Like John Biggers's painting *Shotgun, Third Ward # 1*, where mothers wearing dresses stand in front of the Third Ward row houses and children are playing in the street, PRH is as much about the idea of "place" as it is about its buildings or objects.

In this sense, PRH's physical, social, and cultural manifestation and its actions are the antithesis of the normative museum structure. Neither an institutional campus nor a single objectified building, PRH is a continuous presence that validates both its community and its neighborhood. People and art coexist, expressing the realities of daily life. PRH allows one to imagine living in a different sort of art museum. What if you could touch the art? Or have sculpture, painting, and performances in your backyard?

PRH encourages nuanced community participation, the opportunity to watch what is happening every day. The English language lacks a word or phrase to describe this experience of engaging in everyday observations associated directly to actions or places, but the Italian word *guardare* comes close, associating stillness and mindfulness with the act of watching. This sense of *guardare* in the Third Ward—watching a neighbor doing laundry or mowing the lawn—introduces the concept of watching everyday occurrences as the means to curate an event without reframing the subject. Whereas an art museum curates an exhibition by reframing art in a gallery for a viewer, PRH validates watching as a curatorial act and the practice of living as art. Understanding ordinariness is art. PRH's role is facilitating observation of the ordinary for the neighborhood, its people, and its visitors.

As we repeat our mundane acts day after day, they leave a cultural trace. These traces, like the stream of lights that mark evening rush hour on the freeway, are ritualized in everyday life. At PRH, the traces are subtle: the conversation of the guys hanging out at the park, the movement of artists in and out of the shotguns, and the dance of the man on the corner blasting music from a boombox. By not disrupting these everyday patterns, PRH embraces the mundane—not only in the accommodation of cultural patterns and practices, but also in the making of art.

During our visit to Project Row Houses, we saw two installations that were striking in their ability to showcase the mundane. The first, a storefront in one of the shotguns, resembled a familiar neighborhood corner store. We walked in the house to find a group of women eating their lunch. The artist-in-residence, Michelle Barnes, explained that she was setting up a space for women in the neighborhood to sell their art. Hand-sewn dolls, homemade cupcakes, earrings, and paper cranes were on display, eclectic and wide ranging in their references. The second installation, Lovie Olivia's *Material-lies,* was in another row house a few doors down from the shop. It featured the findings of an "archeological dig" beneath the row houses—old bottles, toothbrushes, and other household debris were displayed like precious items uncovered from the neighborhood's past. At some point, the children around the street must have been in that crawl space first! Both installations evoked the particular familiarity of home—a bricolage, ad hoc aesthetic born from both practical and creative construction, which often brings unrelated things together.

In the late nineteenth century, Houston's founders divided Houston into a ward system having six political and geographic districts. One morning over breakfast, Lowe explained the ward system to us. He took his pancake and cut it into six triangles. "This is the basic idea," he said, showing us the pancake, now sliced like a pizza pie. "Each segmented neighborhood pinwheels around the center." This formal idea of compact neighborhoods emanating from a center point has since been disrupted by infringing freeways and speculative developments that cut across the wards, eroding their pattern. Along with the disappearance of the wards' formal boundaries has come a major change in Houstonians' way of life. The original wards have become a set of decentralized neighborhoods bounded by large-scale infrastructure, a vast plane where patterns of life are difficult to make sense of.

Houston is a city of "a third kind," as former Rice School of Architecture Dean Lars Lerup poetically writes in *One Million Acres and No Zoning*. In this "restless middle landscape," a lack of shared space and a predominately motorized urban area lead to a particularly ambiguous way of life. Lifeways, a term that denotes the type of daily patterns people practice in a place, depend on the scale of a neighborhood, whether the place is urban or rural, etc. As these everyday rituals grow ever more indistinct within Houston's constant transformations, lifeways here are increasingly dominated by the city's infrastructure.

In this context, Project Row Houses offers a different model for viewing the lifeways of the Third Ward. If lifeways are the types of daily patterns people practice in a place, then a cultural practice may suggest how a change in a place's environmental, physical, and spatial morphology can impact these daily patterns. Sometimes this change may be advocated for, encouraged, self-selected, and managed by the community. But oftentimes change emanates from the outside, from the influence of others. In PRH's case, the change managed and self-selected by Rick Lowe and his supporters serves a pedagogical purpose. The initial transformation of the row houses, which deliberately

allowed this change within the Third Ward to originate from the condition of the neighborhood itself, positioned PRH as an educational institution, teaching us about a way of life and, in turn, giving residents and visitors choices about their own lifeways. PRH opens up space where creativity is a tangible part of the neighborhood's development.

Within a six-block area of the Third Ward, distinct patterns and practices have emerged from the densely programmed site of PRH. The form of the row houses with their front porches welcomes the social cadence of the street. Shared backyards and alleyways make an interstitial space, encouraging communication and interpersonal relationships. As a visitor, you are swept into a familiar milieu of home.

Twenty years after PRH's inception, the continued maintenance of the shotgun houses in the neighborhood, along with Rice University's interest in developing row houses as an affordable housing infill typology, suggests that the "way of life" that PRH offers has been

Clockwise from top left: 2505 Holman porch, Sean Shim-Boyle installation (Round 38, 2013), Lovie Olivia's *Material-lies* (Round 39, 2014), detail from *Material-lies*. Photos by Claudia Casberian and Alex Barber.

Clockwise from top left: the late Cleveland Turner aka Flower Man; Turner and the late Eugene Howard aka Brother- in-Law; shared backyards at Project Row Houses; backyard of XS House. Photos courtesy Rice Building Workshop.

embraced by those who are here (and want to be here). Supportive of mothers and their children, it encourages day-to-day exchanges between neighbors, the constant acknowledgment of neighborhood history through creative practices, and shared local knowledge through simple acts. Even new townhouse developments within a few blocks of the row houses do not seem out of place: PRH does not advocate for things around it to be homogeneous. It is more concerned with the life that emerges from a diverse grouping of people. PRH views its collection of buildings as precious, but it also maintains a strong separate identity, acknowledging that other things can come in and add to the neighborhood's story without distracting from its own goals and mission. This identity is increasingly important as the Third Ward faces the challenges of gentrification; PRH's success has attracted a new gentry. Lacking a master plan for neighborhood development, PRH's open and incremental approach instead is shaping the dynamics of the neighborhood. PRH plays a powerful role, and its potency lies in its ability to be continuously present—not to calcify into ruins or grow static. This allows an evolving community stage to serve as a conduit between existing residents and new populations moving into the Third Ward. With attention from the international art world and *New York Time*s readership, PRH draws a wide range of visitors, putting it in the curious position of bringing together a mix of people who might not otherwise find themselves in the Third Ward.

Emancipation Park, a few blocks from Project Row Houses, was Houston's first public park. It began with 10 acres of land, bought by a group of former slaves to celebrate Juneteenth, a date that marks when Texas slaves found out that they were free. As reported by Lisa Gray in the *Houston Chronicle*, now a $33 million renovation plan is underway to make the park a "national landmark." As development interest moves into the Third Ward, future construction plans like this dot the neighborhood. Yet, Lowe holds to his belief in the value of ordinary, everyday experiences and maintains that this change too can exist alongside PRH. It just means that another layer of time and culture will emerge and shape the neighborhood lifeway. By working with, rather than against, developments like Emancipation Park, PRH is part of the changes in its own neighborhood. Lowe says that he is committed to focusing on PRH's mission, and he regards what is out of PRH's control as a matter of negotiating forces. In many ways, PRH has become an institutional nucleus for the Third Ward, from which its value in people and their histories emanate. The power of Lowe's cultural practice comes from its advocacy for cultural establishments that Lowe described in an interview for the Spring 2010 issue of *BOMB Magazine* as "articulated by a collection of people independent of the whim or taste of the powerful."

[T]here has to be that interval of neglect, there has to be discontinuity; it is religiously and artistically essential. That is what I mean when I refer to the necessity for ruins: ruins provide the incentive for restoration, and for a return to origins.... the landscape has to be plundered and stripped before we can restore the natural ecosystem; the neighborhood has to be a slum before we can rediscover it and gentrify it. That is how we reproduce the cosmic scheme and correct history.

– J.B. JACKSON, THE NECESSITY FOR RUINS

COMMEMORATION

When Project Row Houses began, the 22 rundown shotgun houses that Lowe and his group restored and painted white were in a neglected area, struggling with the depredation of drugs and prostitution. For that reason, the Third Ward and these row houses spring to mind when reading J.B. Jackson's thoughts about the return to origins and the need for ruins. Restoration of a "ruin" brings a remote past suddenly into the present, where it becomes real. The shotgun house has undergone a well-documented transformation by John Michael Vlach and others from its origins in West Africa to the African diaspora's construction of similar dwellings in the United States. This building type appeared on rural and urban sites, homes to slaves and indentured servants. These houses were small, cramped, and simply constructed. The people occupying them did not herald the houses as special abodes—they were akin to the one-room cabin. Bringing back the shotgun house today recalls its origins, its epoch, and its cultural setting, and this is what is remembered, not the wooden boards and slates or the narrowness of the building. Now the houses represent the stories of the people that once lived in them and why.

By preserving and restoring the physical row house, Lowe and PRH commemorate how people have lived in Houston over the past 150 years without having to post signage, give tours, or write narratives. Lowe's work makes a bold statement about renewal. If his practice reproduces the cosmic scheme and corrects history, the progression of history is from shotgun house to art institution. What a great correction to build—from worker housing to a cultural establishment. At PRH, this correction of history occurs every time an installation goes up, every time there is a new resident, every time a single mother gets a Ph.D. The ruin is primary to renewal—and unlike Jackson's normative view of succession, from slum to gentrification, the physical object of the row house makes this succession cultural. People may choose to gentrify the area or not; change in the neighborhood may be managed or organic. Since renewal is cultural, not everyone's return to origins is the same. PRH asserts that ruins matter to the future and that bringing back the ruins in our life is necessary for renewal. Art is presented and maintained through the lens of memory!

The Third Ward is the muse for PRH; it is the inspiration for the art—it is the inspiration for the artist. By taking this place as its muse, a different type of museum has developed, one where nothing is collected, but everything is curated—people's lives, experiences, and stories shape the common knowledge of the Third Ward. The irony of this approach is that artists have always had muses and many have also been inspired by place—landscapes, countries, cities, and neighborhoods like Black Mountain, South Africa, South America, Paris, Los Angeles, Amsterdam, and Harlem. For PRH, perhaps, the muse is home—the neighborhood that returns us to a new origin, a corrected history seen through the lens of ordinary people's lives. As a cultural art practice, PRH demonstrates that by placing value on the everyday and mundane, on a community's lifeways, and on the commemoration of people and place, art becomes a significant framework, able to shape and improve daily life. Lowe's practice asserts that community change is inevitable, but that alternative possibilities exist within this change to our neighborhoods and cities. A cultural art practice engages history while creating a vibrant context for the future within the present condition of a place. This future context is one where the detritus of the past is not swept clean, but rather nurtured through its decay and resurrected in the constant dynamic of everyday life. Residents old and new contribute to these everyday experiences; new developments are always in conversation with the past. PRH's legacy, then, will only continue to grow and change as it is shaped by the passing of time, recognizing the life of the Third Ward as art itself. ■

mfah

There is no such thing
as neutrality in architecture;
all spaces affect the experience of art,
no matter how minimal or uninflected.
As a museum man, I consider myself
the referee, ensuring that art and
architecture play well together,
respectfully and engagingly.

Here, the sky is the
limit, and everyone
knows about the big
skies of Texas.

The great light
of the big Texas
sky is central
to our "luminous
canopy."

What in your opinion is the art museum's cultural and social mission in general today?

Gary Tinterow: While art museums have assumed increasing importance in the lives of their communities throughout the twentieth century, a fundamental shift has occurred over the last 20 years. No longer the exclusive province of experts and collectors, American art museums have evolved to become community centers, loci of education, inspiration, and renewal. Accordingly, our plan for campus expansion places community interests first, providing verdant spaces and fountains, outdoor and indoor gathering places to eat and relax, to view art, films, and performances, and to attend lectures, conferences, and concerts; we will privilege social spaces.

Steven Holl: Today the art museum's cultural and social mission is more important than anytime yet in its history. Art education is a mission that has been central to The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) since its inception. Today its Glassell School of Art is the only museum school to offer full-time studio instruction spanning all ages—from age 3 to postgraduate adults. The social mission of museums has grown steadily in the last 100 years to make them the "social condensors" of modern urban life. For these missions, it is one of the finest commissions for an architect today.

What do you feel is the best relationship between architecture and art?

GT: The best relationship between art and architecture is dynamic, in which one enhances the other. There is no such thing as neutrality in architecture; all spaces affect the experience of art, no matter how minimal or uninflected. As a museum man, I consider myself the referee, insuring that art and architecture play well together, respectfully and engagingly. And since many of the artists whose work we display are long gone, we must take extra precautions to look after the interests of the art as we create spaces for exhibition. That said, bad space, poorly proportioned space, boring space can be brutal, if not fatal to art. And much art created in the second half of the twentieth century is especially sensitive to its environment.

SH: Museum architecture must foreground the art. Today, there are two types of museum architecture:

1) Overexpressionistic, which overwhelms the art.

2) White-box-boring, which sucks the life out of art.

We aim for a third type, which has a spatial energy that pulls the user through the galleries while providing great space and light for the art.

How would you describe your architectural approach regarding the preexisting buildings by William Ward Watkin, Kenneth Franzheim, Mies van der Rohe, and Rafael Moneo, and how did you respond to the preexisting exhibition spaces?

GT: Our architects are very conscious of the notable buildings on our campus, and their work responds respectfully to the existing context. American museums as a group do not have an impressive record of historic preservation, especially of interior spaces. I find that stripping older buildings of accretions and returning galleries to original proportions and details usually yields improved spaces for the display of art. As we work with Steven Holl Architects and Lake|Flato on our new facilities, Willard Holmes and I are carefully restoring our buildings by Mies, Watkin, Franzheim, and Moneo. All our facilities will sparkle when our project is complete in 2019.

SH: Our approach to the existing buildings at MFAH was to envision the whole as a new campus with green space as the syntax that connects the different buildings.

Our new museum in translucent matte glass will shape space and be in "complementary contrast" to the black steel and glass of the Mies van der Rohe architecture and the stone of Rafael Moneo's building.

Have you found anything particular about realizing a project in Texas?

GT: Texas, Houston in particular, provides an exceptional climate for realizing grand projects. Here, the sky is the limit, and everyone knows about the big skies of Texas.

SH: The great light of the big Texas sky is central to our "luminous canopy;" the lush Houston vegetation punctuates our architecture with rich green spaces.

Gary Tinterow, Director of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and Steven Holl, architect for the expansion of the campus, responded to the same series of questions via email.

A BINDING DEBATE RENEWE

STEVEN HOLL'S BUILDINGS FOR THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

BY DAVID HEYMANN

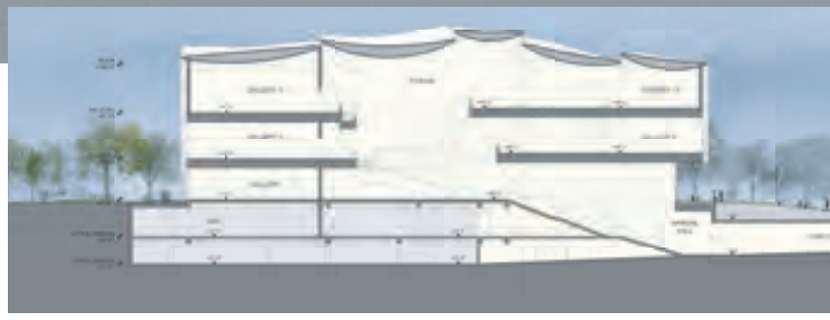
Steven Holl's promising design development proposal for Houston's Museum of Fine Arts' new Nancy and Rich Kinder Building is both ambitious and reasonable. Holl's site plan, which includes a new Glassell School of Art, brings legibility and continuity to the museum campus. His design for the Kinder Building maximizes gallery space on a difficult, triangular site, and holds the center by strength of presence. By irregularly slicing its upper edges with the curving offset planes of its roof, Holl has worked to make the building's substantial mass hard to perceive precisely. Clad in backlit half-circular tubes of fritted glass that add further ambiguity, the new Kinder Building will shimmer, organizing urban space in the way a vase can give order to a slightly disorganized room.

D:

Though the glowing facade of the Kinder Building shares attributes with Holl's Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, the design is more reminiscent of Hans Scharoun's extraordinary, idiosyncratic Berlin Philharmonie—another opaque, scooped mass shining against a great, dark Mies museum! Like that pairing in Berlin, the organic functionalism of Holl's Kinder Building establishes a handsome debate with the rationalism of Mies' great Brown Pavilion. I think as architecture, it is going to work well. So—breathe a sigh of relief—let's get to the details.

Several characteristics define the extraordinary Fayez S. Sarofim campus of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH). Because its growth has been controlled by the random availability of property, the MFAH ensemble consists of singular buildings on roughly adjacent blocks, not bound together by a defined campus boundary or by conventional spatial mechanisms like axis, symmetry, or syntax. Despite substantial individual differences, the MFAH buildings share a recognizable striving presence. We understand them collectively because, like a loosely organized group of well-dressed politicians canvasing for votes in some central city neighborhood, they are more alike than they are like anything around them. (And, like politicians, each has been considered from every angle not to offend; remarkably, none has a true backside, a phenomenon Holl's Kinder Building continues through clever handling of the loading dock.)

Most of the MFAH's major buildings have been designed by strong architects relatively late in their careers, when accomplishment and certainty allow them to ease up on each design commission having to prove everything. The MFAH buildings are simple rather than complex, refined rather than rough, serious rather than exuberant, bespoke rather than experimental, restrained rather than complicated, and remarkably confident rather than brittle. The major buildings sustain a comfortable dialogue perhaps best described as grunting admiration between viable, mature alternatives. The exception is the existing Glassell School, which, despite success as an educational facility, is diagrammatic and tinny as urban architecture, its glass blocks yearning to be recognized for their Modernist props.



Preceding page: View of campus looking south from Glassell School of Art. Above and left: Sections and elevations of Glassell, Kinder, and Law Buildings. Below: Site plan for MFAH. Images courtesy MFAH.

The MFAH master plan is defined by block-filling buildings that are both discrete and interact to form a greater whole. Steven Holl ignored a competition brief to design a multi-story parking garage and instead proposed an underground solution for cars. The existing Glassell building will be demolished, making way for a new plaza and school building. The Kinder Building is sited on what was the First Presbyterian Church parking lot.

Fayez S. Sarofim Campus

1 Brown Pavilion
2 Audrey Beck Jones Building
3 Nancy and Rich Kinder Building
4 Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden
5 Glassell School of Art
6 The Brown Foundation, Inc. Plaza

Collectively the MFAH buildings form a genus into which the new Kinder Building fits easily: block-like, complete, inscrutable, heavy, and discrete on the exterior; generous, regular (lacking idiosyncrasy), proper, stately, flowing, and calm on the interior. This consistency suggests the MFAH chooses architects heading in that design direction already, or it cleverly herds them that way. The one non-building construction on the campus—the Cullen Sculpture Garden designed by the un-herdable Isamu Noguchi—does not share these qualities. In the experience of the site, it has always seemed odd and cranky, its excellence notwithstanding. It is closer in spirit to Gunnar Birkerts' adjacent Contemporary Arts Museum, which, 40-plus years old, feels younger than all the MFAH buildings that postdate it.

A NEW MASTER PLAN

The new Kinder Building will be built on what has always been the logical place for the MFAH to expand: the parking lot next to the Noguchi garden on the north side of Bissonnet, directly across from Mies' curving Brown Pavilion of the Caroline Weiss Law Building. Long the parking lot for the adjacent First Presbyterian Church of Houston, this open parcel is an inadvertent, ill-defined hole in the center of the campus. In 2007 the MFAH was able to obtain the land from the church—it continues to serve as a shared parking lot. In 2008 the MFAH set about establishing a shortlist of architects to design a new building in which it could finally bring together its twentieth and twenty-first century holdings—the art that tracks the rise and apotheosis of Modernism and its complex fallouts. (The new building is not designed for major traveling exhibitions, which will mostly continue to go to the Brown Pavilion.)

In 2012, three firms—Steven Holl, Snøhetta, and Morphosis—presented conceptual site plans and proposals for the architecture of the new building. Holl was hired to proceed. Since the site purchase was tied to an MFAH commitment to provide parking for the church—and the new building itself requires substantial parking—the brief the architects were given included the design of a new, eight- to ten-story parking tower on lots the MFAH owns just to the north of the existing Glassell School, which was to remain. Both Snøhetta and Morphosis included this garage tower in their designs. But Holl proposed an alternative, counter to the brief: bury all the parking in two garages, one under the new Kinder Building, the other under an entirely new, expanded Glassell School. Instead of recreating the existing school's hulking mass, Holl's new school is an "L" opening onto a large, street-level public plaza facing Montrose.

Aside from providing much needed interior space, the immediate intelligence of rebuilding Glassell is readily apparent. In Holl's campus plan, the plaza provides a visible outdoor arena for arts activities, balancing the current center of indoor visitor activity in Rafael Moneo's Audrey Jones Beck Building; it integrates Carlos Jiménez's Central Administration Building into the perceptible district of the museum; and, with minor modifications to Noguchi's existing bounding walls, it embraces the sculpture garden, recognizing its central importance. And it also removes the one building in the collection not at the level of the others' discourse.

To continue providing parking, Holl's new Glassell School has to be built before the Kinder Building. Construction begins this summer. The Kinder Building will then follow. After the Kinder is completed, the new Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation Center for Conservation, designed by Lake|Flato, will be built atop half of the parking garage east of the Beck Building. The entire construction campaign is scheduled to end in fall 2019.

GLASSELL SCHOOL OF ART

Set above two stories of underground parking—part of which serves as an art forum from which a tunnel links to the museum—the "L" of Holl's three-story Glassell is organized around a skylit, stepped concrete theater/gallery/atrium/stairwell at the joint between its two legs. These legs house studios, classrooms, and support spaces along double-loaded corridors. The roof of the long eastern leg slopes continuously from Noguchi's garden, where it starts as an amphitheater, up to a pergola over the third floor of the northern leg. For now its surface is mostly shown as green roof—though it's hard to imagine how that will be accomplished or maintained. Regardless, the view from the roof deck over the plaza will be compelling. Though Moneo's Beck Building is largely hidden, the rest of the MFAH campus is seen against the larger context of Hermann Park, the Medical Center, and Rice University.

The school's elevations are composed of vertical precast concrete panels assembled in a regularly irregular pattern of parallelograms and trapezoids (a familiar current trope, with enough shapes repeating and reversing so you cannot perceive an order). Large expanses of translucent OKALUX glazing span between the precast panels. The panels and glazing are set variously along, at an angle to, or in from the edges of the exposed concrete floor slabs. The overall effect demands attention—perhaps more than any other building in the complex. That will likely work well against Jimenez's restrained Administration Building across the street. New trees along the street edge will further bind the plaza—partly intended for the display of sculpture—and the Noguchi garden. All in all, a defined open space will now extend along Montrose from Bissonnet to Bartlett, complementing the solid mass the MFAH presents along the three blocks of Bissonnet and Binz east of Montrose.

NANCY AND RICH KINDER BUILDING

That his master plan proposal increases the legibility and cohesion of the MFAH campus was likely not the only reason Holl was commissioned for the Kinder Building. There are at least two other good ones. The first is the wayfinding clarity Holl often strives for in his plan making. The new Kinder Building is a three-story block (set over two floors of underground parking) organized about a central skylit entry and circulation court. This court is linked to both the Glassell and Law Buildings by tunnels. (The tunnel to Law comes in where the Turrell tunnel links to Beck.)

Holl imparts a simple logic to the complex truncated-triangular shape of the building mass given to the Kinder Building by the site. Into each of its three long sides, he cuts two small, three-sided, open, vertical, transparently glazed courtyards at regular intervals. Into the southeast corner of the short truncated side—the public corner facing Mies and Moneo—he cuts a larger vertical court. These courts crucially break down the scale of the exterior mass, which is roughly as big as either the Law or Beck Buildings. On the interior of the ground floor, the courtyards establish the various points of entry and the dimension of the various programs. On the upper floors, the courtyard cuts determine the length of the

Plans for roof, third floor, second floor, and first floor of the Kinder Building. Courtesy MFAH.

largely opaque gallery blocks and set up the rhythm of the experience: art, relief, art, relief.

In Holl's design the Kinder Building's ground floor is largely open through transparent glazing to adjacent outside spaces and connecting views. It is mostly given over to present conventions of the art museum as social entity: entry, circulation court, café, restaurant, conference center, store. But there is still space for three galleries, beginning the circling exhibition sequence around the open, vaguely ovoid central court and its elegant, ribboning stair. The upper two floors are each a ring of regular gallery boxes around this court. These boxes are simple, individual blocks of space defined with opaque concrete walls—though the interior finish is not yet determined. Each is further subdivided within into simple configurations of rooms by what one assumes are mostly alterable sub-walls. The layout in plan seems direct, flexible, and legible to the visitor.

It is the outside walls of these gallery blocks that are clad with the custom-fabricated half-round glass tubes; the essential task of these tubes is to animate the substantial opaque mass of the building. The drawings show occasional voids in these exterior concrete walls where one hopes a distorted, liquid natural light will enter through those tubes. The uppermost of the gallery floors and the central court also take in natural light from slit windows in the building's roof, which is composed of adjacent, irregular curving planes. In the not yet fully developed building sections—it's not clear how artificial light will work, nor how glare will be controlled—light enters in the gaps formed between the offset curves of these planes, somewhat like an upside-down version of the roof of Holl's Stretto House in Dallas. Holl's sketches explain the roof panel shapes as derived from "clouds." The analogy is a useless stretch, and not really because Holl's "clouds" are spherical, but because Holl has long and far more convincingly argued for the primacy of sensory experience over symbol or sign in the understanding of architectural meaning. The term here is used to convince by sleight of hand—hard to disagree with clouds!—so I'm trying to avoid using it.

Given the difficulty of the geometry of the buildable site, Holl manages to wring a tremendous percentage of the volume back for exhibition with remarkably little support space in the plans. In the current drawings, he avoids tactics (often arising to recognize site circumstance) that occasionally make his plans mannered, picturesque, or inflexible. Instead he seems to have focused on sequence and adjacency, on how one simple space leads or connects to the next. This can be beautifully seen in the views to and from the ground floor and the adjacent Noguchi garden, which in the renderings now seems meaningfully connected rather than broodingly hermetic.

It isn't clear yet how the design will accommodate darkness (for the exhibition of drawings, photographs, electronic media, etc.). And the relative scale of exhibition spaces seems remarkably consistent—the source of some difficulties with Breuer's great Whitney Museum of American Art building. This consistency is alleviated somewhat by a slight ramping of the floor plate on each upper level. The gallery boxes will thus vary somewhat in height; the occasional steps and ramps add, I think, a slight but necessary grace to the circulation sequence. Overall the plan is refreshingly free of excessive architectural gesture, and, since neither room nor path seem overtly favored, this would appear to be a template to favor curators, and committed viewing.

The second other reason Holl was the logical candidate for this commission is his skill with, for lack of a better term, discrete thingy-ness—in particular, the rich, ambiguous simplicity of discrete thingy-ness he has been achieving in his buildings in this advanced stage of his career. Kenneth Frampton has pointed out that Holl, like Álvaro Siza Vieira, has long argued (in both writings and designs) for the primacy of the site, on the one hand, and for the building not to have to overtly reflect the specifics of the site, on the other. Since that is a fairly apt description of how the MFAH campus architecture works to begin with, one might have seen his hiring as preordained. In any event, Holl follows through not only with his initial site clarification, but also with the development of the form of the building that the site gesture frees.

WHERE THE MIES BUILDING STRIVES TO BE ENTIRELY LEGIBLE, THE HOLL BUILDING SEEMS INTENTIONALLY AMBIGUOUS.

In designing the Kinder Building, Holl has clearly given careful consideration to the dilemma of Mies' Brown Pavilion across the street—how could you not do so? In the illustrations the relationship seems well managed. The urban space is given meaning by the calculated difference of the two objects, rather

View of Kinder Building entrance looking north from Main Street. Courtesy MFAH.

than by traditional negative or positive readings of the shape of space, which, in this instance, does not really matter. Both buildings are powerful and serene. But where the Mies building strives to be entirely legible, the Holl building seems (at least in the renderings) intentionally ambiguous. In the uncertainties of its form and material presence, it offers doubt in the face of certainty, and it seems to do this happily, refracting light where the Mies building absorbs it. The calculated disagreement of these two central buildings will give powerful order to the overall campus, and coming upon these two sizable protagonists should be like stumbling onto a fairly intense debate taking place in public.

BERLIN, TEXAS

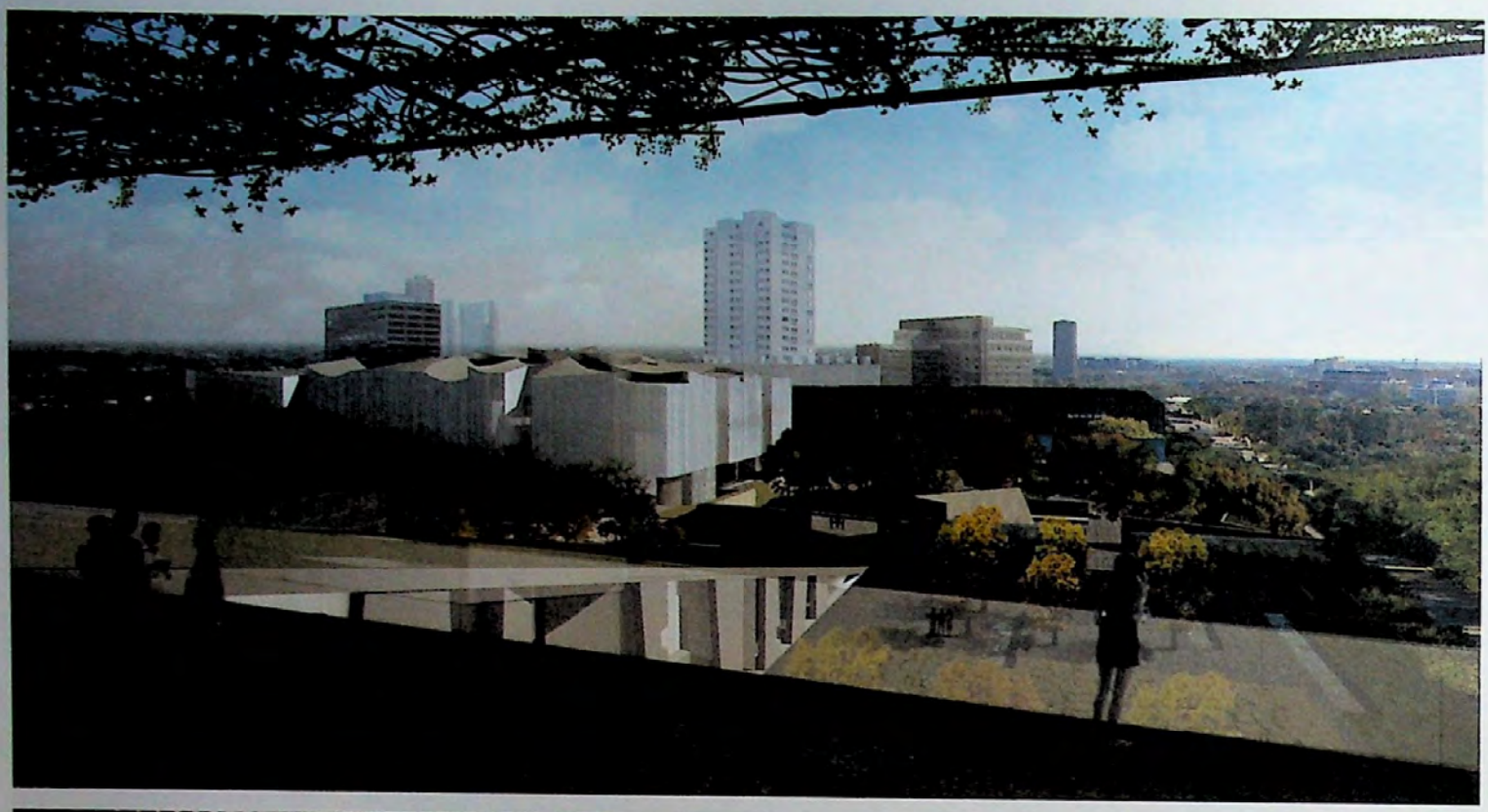
Actually, the particular nature of that debate is worth a bit more consideration. For as many years as I can recall, the Bissonnet parking lot site and some variant of the Kinder Building program have been given to architecture students. The vast majority have broken their teeth trying to cope with the impossible, magisterial, and slightly condescending tectonic sureness (and the weirdly implicit morality) of Mies' Brown Pavilion. When I was a student in the early 1980s we simply did not have the design tools to resolve—even to understand—the problem. Do you remember that era's emphatic hope that after-Modern urban space might be resolved through a concentration on a consistent urban fabric—binding the city together by making things similar—naively ignoring the marketplace city's resistance to that very thing? Since then, groundbreaking works by Siza, Frank Gehry, Herzog & De Meuron, and others have activated cities through a dialogue between ever more powerfully different urban pieces.

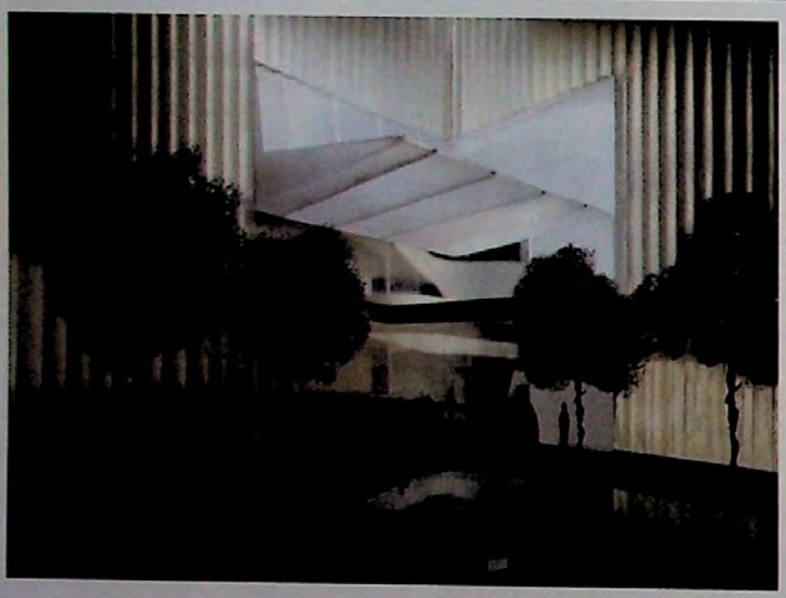
Curiously, the underlying tension between Holl's Kinder Building and Mies' Brown Pavilion goes back (at least) to a debate between members of The Ring, an architectural collective in Berlin in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The core of the debate arose from a disagreement between Mies and Hugo Häring (later taken up by Häring's immediate follower Hans Scharoun). Though both believed in a rejection of historicism, they differed on the degree to which a building should express uncertainty.

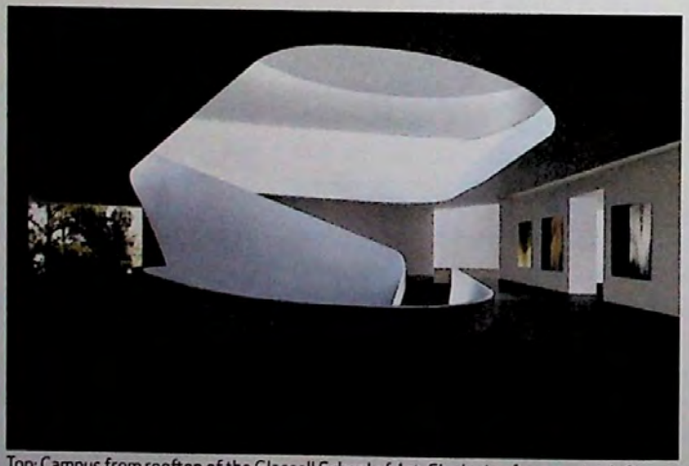
Häring's position, called organic functionalism, was that the various purposes of a building, logically pursued in design, would lead to new and surprising forms. A good historic example of what he meant would be a Gothic cathedral, which, conceived largely to shape an interior space, nonetheless gives compelling urban order. Scharoun's Berlin Philharmonie is the Modern exemplar of this way of thinking. Its power arises in part from your not being able to say why it is the way it is, yet it does not seem "composed." Mies' position, still labeled rationalism (though in retrospect it is hardly that), was that the idiosyncrasies of program should be suppressed in favor of an absolute order that achieved its urban consequence through an apparent legibility of new construction techniques. The historic paradigm of this approach would be the Parthenon. The distinct advantages and disadvantages of Mies' position—a powerful space that is absolutely merciless to almost everything set within it—are entirely evident in Mies' Neue Nationalgalerie, which sits near Scharoun's Philharmonie in Berlin's Kulturforum.

The similarity of the two situations extends beyond the forms and discourse of the buildings: it includes a larger desire to create a legible arts forum in the central city over an area of a number of city blocks. In bombed-out postwar Berlin, they had arguably about as little usable historic context as Houston. And in the disagreement between the Philharmonie and the Neue Nationalgalerie, one can sense a city that imagines its future as not uniform, something I admire in an age of doubt.

Despite similarities in site consideration, there are certainly critical differences between







Top: Campus from rooftop of the Glassell School of Art. Clockwise from center left: Kinder Building entrance, lobby, second-floor forum gallery, and ground floor restaurant. Images courtesy MFAH.

Top: Glassell School of Art plans from ground floor to rooftop. Above: Glassell facade and Brown Foundation, Inc. Plaza (left) and Berlin Philharmonie seen from the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany. Drawings and rendering courtesy MFAH. Photo by Nathan Sheppard.

Scharoun and Holl's approaches to developing form. Scharoun began with a profound consideration—and often complex spatial development—of interior needs and experiences, and how these were tied to the urban situation. For this building Holl seems to begin with ideas of complex exterior presence and simple interior configurations; he has intelligently figured out how to allow for both those conditions to coexist. With Scharoun, intent on making an architecture for a new democracy, the remarkable open-ness (with its many entries) is earned from the concept of a populace flowing in from multiple sides; with Holl the same potential, arising from the repeated courtyard cuts, is slightly deceiving, the appearance of access rather than the fact. That said, Peter Blundell Jones notes that Scharoun's actual porosity no longer works: "[t]hese are just glaring examples of a general conflict which has arisen between Scharoun's intentions and the condition of public life today."

I appreciate the simplicity of Holl's plans, which support rather than diagnose, criticize, or recast the norms of the current public life of the art museum. The ambiguities of the form of the building are not entirely at odds with the plans either. If Holl has renewed an old debate, his terms are thus slightly more civil, in keeping with the idea that these buildings are colleagues that respectfully disagree. ■

FIRMS

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ASSOCIATE ARCHITECT: KENDALL/HEATON ASSOCIATES, INC., HOUSTON, TX

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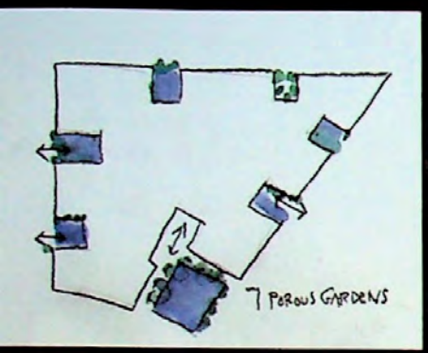

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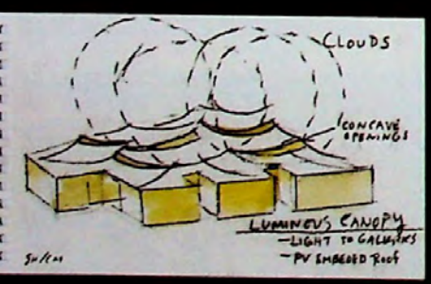

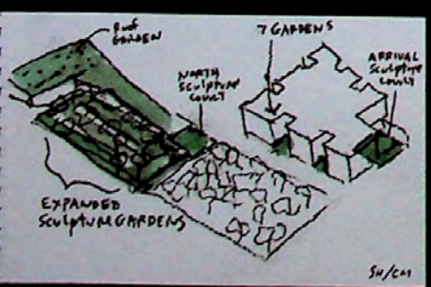

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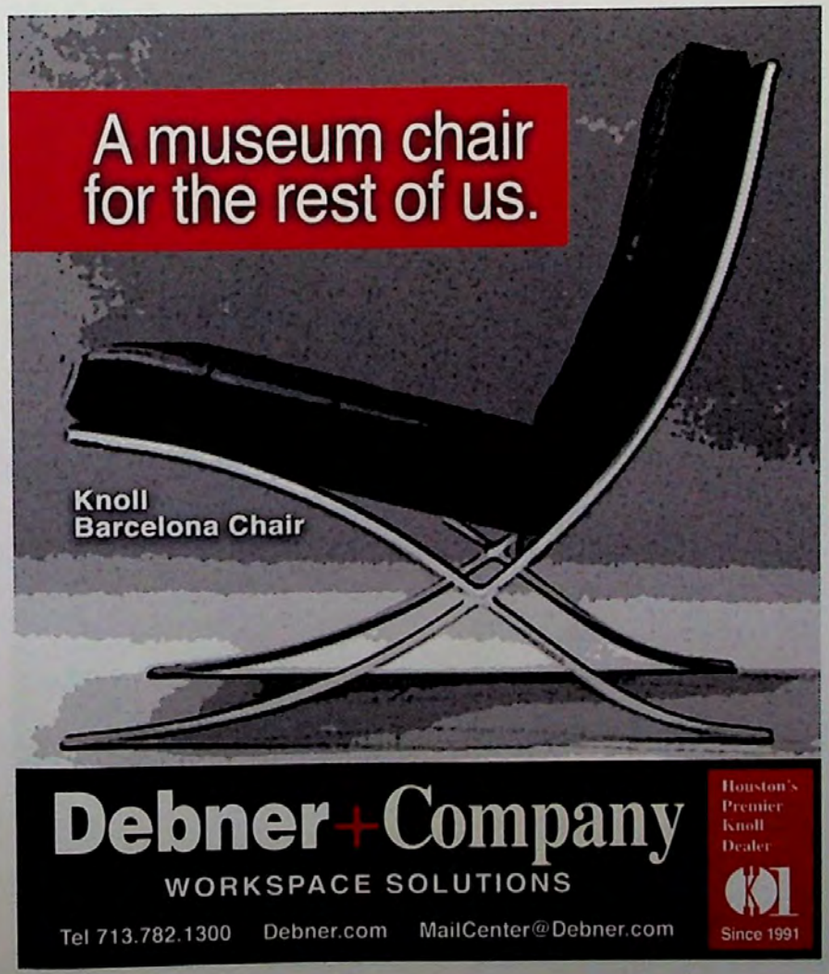

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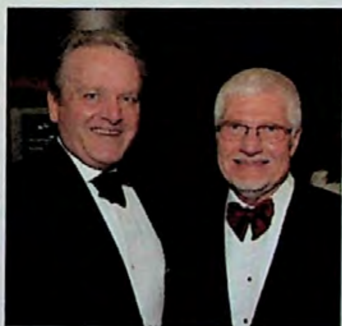


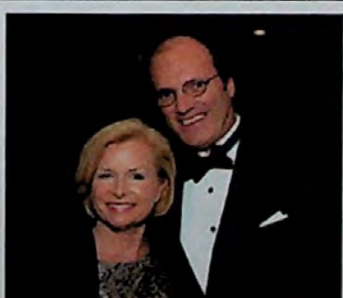


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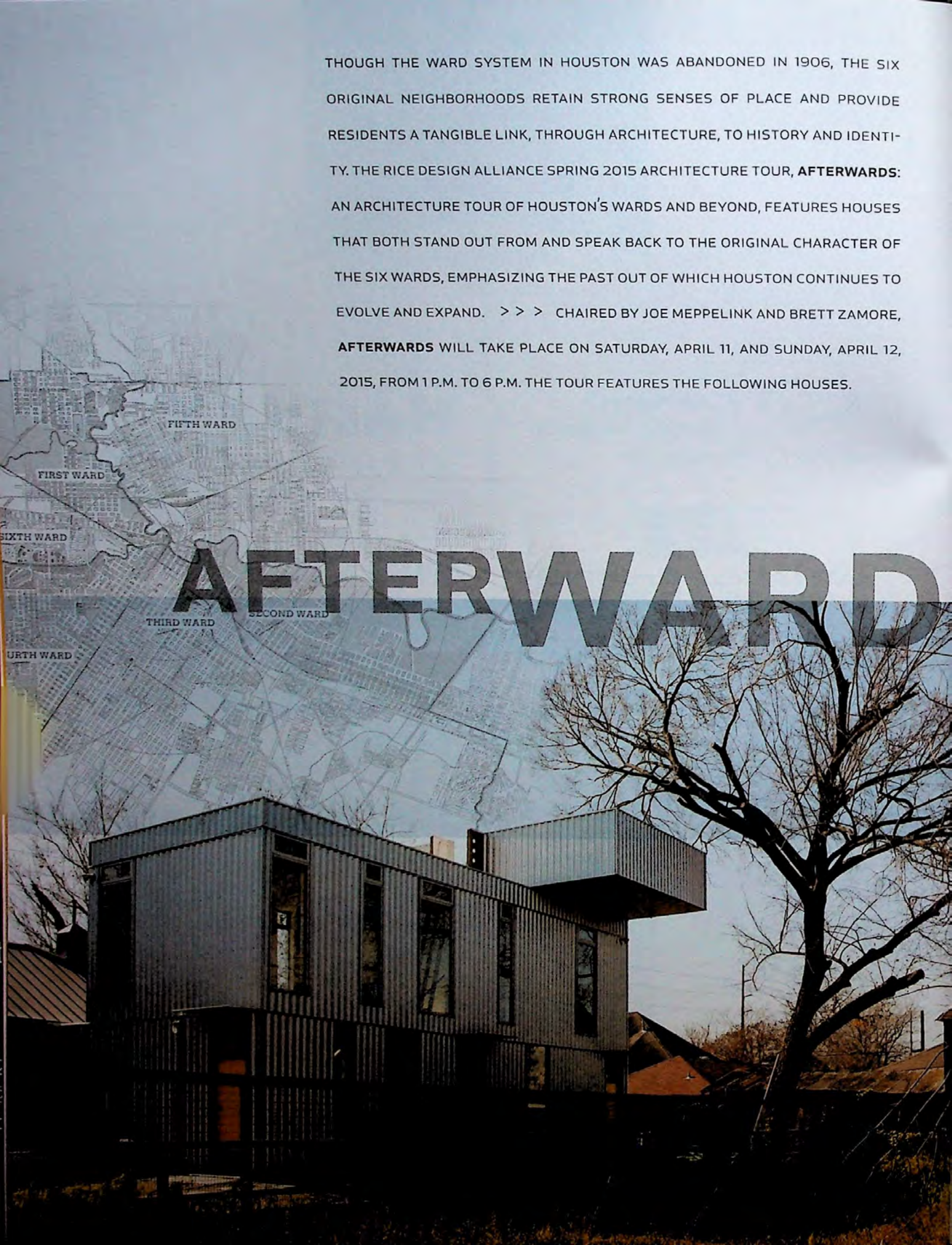
AFTERWARD

THOUGH THE WARD SYSTEM IN HOUSTON WAS ABANDONED IN 1906, THE SIX ORIGINAL NEIGHBORHOODS RETAIN STRONG SENSES OF PLACE AND PROVIDE RESIDENTS A TANGIBLE LINK, THROUGH ARCHITECTURE, TO HISTORY AND IDENTITY. THE RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE SPRING 2015 ARCHITECTURE TOUR, **AFTERWARDS: AN ARCHITECTURE TOUR OF HOUSTON'S WARDS AND BEYOND**, FEATURES HOUSES THAT BOTH STAND OUT FROM AND SPEAK BACK TO THE ORIGINAL CHARACTER OF THE SIX WARDS, EMPHASIZING THE PAST OUT OF WHICH HOUSTON CONTINUES TO EVOLVE AND EXPAND. > > > CHAIRED BY JOE MEPPELINK AND BRETT ZAMORE, **AFTERWARDS** WILL TAKE PLACE ON SATURDAY, APRIL 11, AND SUNDAY, APRIL 12, 2015, FROM 1 P.M. TO 6 P.M. THE TOUR FEATURES THE FOLLOWING HOUSES.

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2


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4

1507 Chestnut Street, kinneymorrow architecture, 2015 *(previous page)*

2102 Francis Street, Brett Zamore Design, 2014 *(1)*

1515 Woodhead Street, pb elemental design, 2013 *(2)*

317 Sampson Street, Janusz Design, 2015 *(3)*

714/716 Sabine Street, Gottleib Eisele, 1872 and Murphy Mears, 2014 *(4)*

205 North St. Charles Street, CONTENT, 2014 *(5)*

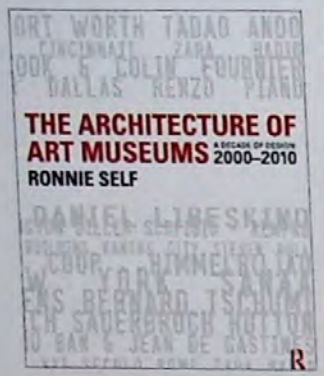
734 Tulane Street, Shade Development, 2008 *(6)*

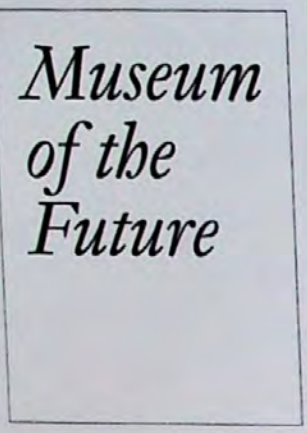
1217 Robin Street, Rodrigo Tovar, 2014 *(7)*

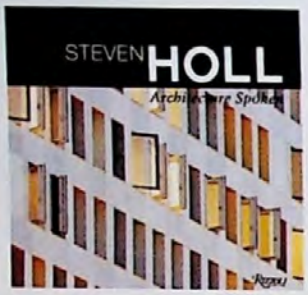

5


6


7







MFAH BOOKSTORE SELECTS

The Architecture of Art Museums: A Decade of Design, 2000-2010
By Ronnie Self
The most significant museum designs of the first decade of the century are scrupulously analyzed here by Houston architect Ronnie Self, guest editor of this issue of Cite.
Routledge, 2014, paperback, 297 pages, $58.95, $47.16 for RDA Members

Museum of the Future
Edited by Cristina Bechtler, Dora Imhof.
Museums of contemporary art are expanding and in crisis . This publication gathers interviews with artists, architects, and curators of the contemporary art world, such as John Baldessari, Ute Meta Bauer, Suzanne Cotter, Bice Curiger, Chris Dercon, Charles Esche, Liam Gillick, Michael Govan, Jacques Herzog, Thomas Hirschhorn, Philipp Kaiser, Rem Koolhaas, Lars Nittve, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Thierry Raspail, Tobias Rehberger and Beatrix Ruf, among others.
Published by JRP|Ringier, 2015, paperback, 240 pages, $29.95, $23.96 for RDA Members

Making a Museum in the 21st Century
Edited by Melissa Chiu
Making a Museum in the 21st Century addresses some of the most pressing issues for museums in a new era of popularity and audience engagement. Over the past decade, spectacular buildings and increased attendance have been accompanied by increased expectations for museums to create new ways for visitors to interact with art.
Published by Asia Society, 2015, flexi, 160 pages, $24.95, $19.95 for RDA Members

El Croquis 172 - Steven Holl 2008-2014
This special issue features 25 recent projects by Steven Holl, many of them in China. Besides his widely published Sliced Porosity Block in Chengdu, the magazine also profiles designs for the Glasgow School of Art, arts centers at Princeton University and Virginia Commonwealth University, the HEART Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, the Knut Hamsun Centre, V&A Dundee, and the ecology and planning museums in Tianjin Eco-city, among others. The issue includes a conversation with Holl and Sol Madridejos, Juan Carlos Sancho and Antón García Abril, plus an analytical essay by Thomas de Monchaux
Published by El Croquis, 2014, flexi, 362 pages, Spanish/English, $109, $87.20 for RDA Members

Architecture Spoken
By Steven Holl
Steven Holl: Architecture Spoken offers the reader unprecedented access to the thought processes and work of this groundbreaking, cutting-edge architect through his own words—and more than 300 sumptuously photographed illustrations. This monograph on Holl's work is long out-of-print. An extremely limited number of copies are still available at the MFAH bookstore.
Rizzoli, 2007, hardcover, 304 pages, new, $90, $72 for RDA Members

What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation
By Jim Finkelpearl
In a series of 15 conversations, artists comment on their experiences working cooperatively, joined at times by colleagues from related fields, including social policy, architecture, art history, urban planning, and new media. Issues discussed include the experiences of working in public and of working with museums and libraries, opportunities for social change, the lines between education and art, spirituality, collaborative opportunities made available by new media, and the elusive criteria for evaluating cooperative art.
Duke University Press, 2013, paperback, 388 pages, $26.95, $21.56 for RDA Members

offcite.org

Texas has at least 660 museums, according to the Historical Commission. Follow Allyn West's travels across Texas for the State of Museums series on OffCite.org. Use the hashtag #StateOfMuseums to view related content on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

GRAND SALINE SALT PALACE MUSEUM It's the only building in the world made out of rock salt, and visitors are allowed, if not encouraged, to lick it. Torn down and rebuilt three times since the 1930s, the museum celebrates a massive mine, owned now by Morton, that could supply the world with salt for an estimated 20,000 years.

PEROT MUSEUM OF NATURE AND SCIENCE *Dallas Morning News* architecture critic Mark Lamster saw the Morphosis-designed museum and said it "looks like nothing so much as a boxy spaceship arrived from the faraway galaxy of Starchitecturas Major." But a 10-year-old boy arriving on a bus from his suburban school might say: "Awesome!"

NATIONAL COWGIRL HALL OF FAME Sited across the street from the Swine Barn inside the Fort Worth Cultural District, the periodistic building is the only one in the world dedicated to the women of the American West. Designed by David Schwarz, it's ornamented with "feminine" touches the way a boot or pearl-buttoned shirt might be.

STATE OF MUSEUMS

EASTLAND OUTDOOR ART At first I idealized the possibilities of art fixed into the dailiness of Eastlandites' lives. Wouldn't we all stand to be improved if we meditated on *Mona Lisa* while we waited for our pizza to heat up?

CREATION EVIDENCE MUSEUM The biosphere, one of the main attractions, is supposedly designed to reproduce the unique atmospheric conditions of the pre-flood world in which humans were Shaquille O'Neal-sized and lived peaceably among the Paluxysauri.

DR PEPPER MUSEUM The three-story museum struck me as a kind of unintentional diorama of the division of labor and corporate hierarchical structures. You could cross-section it, open it up, and show students of all ages roughly how American companies were built in the 20th century: workers make things at the bottom; middle managers figure out how to package and sell it; and the head honchos make the big decisions at the top.

CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN Their collection of sculptures and temporary installations spans two buildings, which present two ways of thinking about how we experience art. The Jones Center encourages the pop-in, the window shopper's whim. Laguna Gloria encourages the retreat.

ARTPACE Despite the highfalutin enterprise of contemporary art, the Artpace building, renovated by Lake|Flato, suggests a willingness to go with what works. The galleries, stripped of art, could house a band saw, and it wouldn't feel out of place.

BY ALLYN WEST

1 Grand Saline Salt Palace Museum, Grand Saline
2 Perot Museum of Nature and Science, Dallas
3 The National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, Fort Worth
4 Outdoor Art Exhibit, Eastland
5 Creation Evidence Museum of Texas, Glen Rose
6 Dr Pepper Museum, Waco
7 The Contemporary Austin, Austin
8 Artpace, San Antonio

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