

BUFFALO AKG ART MUSEUM OMA / SHOHEI SHIGEMATSU

We often say that there are only two types of museums: a museum in the park, embedded in the tranquility of nature, and a museum in the city, implanted within the energy of urbanism. The Buffalo AKG Art Museum is both. It sits at the northern edge of the historic Delaware Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. The city is known for its history of industrial revolution and the current revitalization of remnants from that past. It has a rich architectural history—from silos and manufacturing facilities to buildings by Eero Saarinen, Louis Sullivan, and Frank Lloyd Wright.

The museum itself has two connected historic buildings: a 1905 solid, neo-classical building by Edward B. Green originally planned for the 1901 Pan-American Exposition and a 1962 Modernist extension by Gordon Bunshaft that included a new auditorium box and an outdoor courtyard. Despite being in the park, the two buildings side-by-side severed views and access to it from the city, and even from inside the museum itself. Our ambition for the extension was not only to expand the complex to accommodate the museum's growing art collection and diversifying programs, but also to reconnect it to the park and city and establish a new openness to public activities. The 1905 and 1962 buildings command a clear separation, closed off from their surroundings. In contrast, the approach for the new pavilion is to unlock the full potential of being in the park.

On the new Jeffrey E. Gundlach Building's ground floor, we started with galleries in the shape of a cross, or a plus sign (because it's an addition). The galleries lie at the heart of the building while four transparent corners—containing lobby, media gallery, office, and loading dock—bring the park in and surround the museum in nature. While the scale of the cross galleries is akin to that of the intimate rooms of the 1905 structure, two larger, more efficient gallery boxes that resonate with Bunshaft's box are stacked above. A double-height gallery in the front of the building connects the cross and flexible boxes.

We had been observing how museums are evolving to provide diverse avenues of public engagement through expanded gallery activities and non-exhibition programs. We felt that museums now need to strike the right balance between programmed and programmable space, and must find new relationships between them. Our response was to wrap the second-level gallery with a promenade, an unprogrammed space for various activities—from sculpture exhibitions and galas to educational programs and wellness classes. The promenade and stack of efficient galleries are enveloped by a transparent facade that achieves an open and ephemeral quality. This "veil" covers the promenade to form a double-height buffer zone between nature and art. The resulting winter garden simultaneously embeds visitors in the park and exposes the museum's activities to the campus and city. It is an inverse of the Bunshaft: while he captured nature at the center of art, we place art at the core surrounded by nature.

In addition to the new Gundlach Building, the existing campus as a whole is preserved and improved. The new, scenic John J. Albright Bridge connecting the Gundlach Building to the 1905 building, now known as the Robert and Elisabeth Wilmers Building, weaves through, and immerses visitors in, the historic park landscape. We bury the surface parking lot underground and place a large park lawn at the center of the campus and restore the historic steps of the Wilmers Building facing the lawn. The 1962 building, now known as the Seymour H. Knox Building, becomes a new community engagement, learning and creativity center; greatly enhanced by and monumental artwork *Common Sky* by Olafur Eliasson and Sebastian Behmann of Studio Other Spaces, which now encloses the original open-air and largely inaccessible interior courtyard to create the Ralph C. Wilson Foundation Town Square. Most importantly, a new point of entry on the east facade of the Knox Building establishes a through-connection from the city to the park.

While the existing buildings were hermetic historically, the new Gundlach Building opens itself up to its surroundings—a transparent entity that contributes a new profile and language to the lineage of architectural history of the institution. Together, the new complex offers an array of programs and spatial experiences—from classic to

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PROJECT TEXT AND CREDITS

modern to contemporary, gallery to classroom, intimate rooms to grand halls, lawn to courtyard to winter garden. The result is a true campus-like museum that integrates art, architecture, and nature.

CREDITS

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Landscape Architect: Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates

Structure: Arup

MEFPF: Buro Happold

Civil: Wendel

Façade & Waterproofing: Thornton Thomasetti

Exterior Lighting: Arup

Museum Lighting: Litelab

AVIT: Buro Happold

Code: Paul Battaglia

Historic Preservation: Preservation Studios

Acoustics: Jaffe Holden

VT: Van Deusen & Associates

Specification Writer: The Friday Group LLC

Cost: Cost Plus

Geotech: McMahon & Mann Consulting Engineers

Parking: Philip Habib & Associates

Graphic Design: Wkshps with Once-Future Office

Town Square Roof, Common Sky: Studio Other Spaces - Olafur Eliasson and Sebastian Behmann