

MUSEUMS AS ARTIFACTS:
HOW ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORY INFLUENCE
MUSEUMS AND THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

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Amanda Marie Magera

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Thesis Supervisor:

Neill Hadder, Ph.D.
Department of Anthropology

Second Reader:

Stephen Awoniyi, Ph.D.
Department of Health and Human
Performance

Approved:

Heather C. Galloway, Ph.D.
Dean, Honors College

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Abstract

The Built Environment of a museum provides a backdrop for every activity undertaken in a museum. It can complement, distract from, or remain invisible besides the collections the museum contains, but always has an effect on the visitors who come to view those collections. This thesis will explore the Built Environment of the museum, particularly its effect on museum visitors, through a survey of its historical use and its use today through the case studies of six museums in Central Texas.

1. Introduction

The museum is a unique and complex form of communication. It uses numerous media, both verbal and not, to create an experience for a visitor that is like no other. A museum is curated, through the selection, arrangement, and description of objects, but also communicates through human and technological tour guides, audio and video displays, and the built environment of the museum. This thesis will explore the built environment element of a museum's created visitor experience, which includes both its exterior architecture and its interior design and its greatly influenced by the history of the museum in the particular and museums in general.

For much of the 20th century, museums have been dominated by the "white box," an attempt to remove context from the museum and "let the art speak for itself." However, this has not always been the case. From their conception during the Renaissance to today, a museum's built environment has been used to create a variety of experiences for their visitors. From displays of power to displays of national pride, a place of study to a place of entertainment, the built environment of the museum has been used to direct the visitor's experience.

In the most general sense, the built environment is any modification made to the environment by humans. This includes most obviously any sort of building, but also constructed spaces such as squares and parks, as well as streets and other connectors (Eriksen and Smith 4; Lawrence and Low 454). While a place may have a built

environment, the same can also be said for individual buildings. The arrangement of rooms, style of walls, and other parts of the building share in defining the space (Lawrence and Low 454). This built environment may be a conscious construction, meant to create a very particular effect, or a simple realization of traditional styles, the effect of the building having been defined long ago and recaptured in each new building (Lawrence and Low 466). Buildings may also be repurposed from the architect's original plan. In these cases, a new built environment can be layered over the old or the original built environment altered to suit the new purpose. However the built environment is decided upon, it reflects the cultural connections of the people who design and build it (Lawrence and Low 472).

For a museum, I have chosen to define the built environment as the physical mechanism through which the purpose of the collections, through curation, is conveyed to some audience. The purpose and collections of the museum influence the built environment while the built environment influences the curation of the collections and how the purpose is conveyed to the audience.

This purpose has changed radically since the first formal museums opened in the 18th century. Each change in purpose and audience has seen a corresponding shift in the dominant built environment for Western museums. After exploring how these shifts affect the dominant built environment historically, this thesis will look at six of today's museums and analyze how they relate to this narrative.

The six museums have been drawn from the Texas Hill country and I-35 corridor and include the San Antonio Museum of Art, the McNay Museum of Art, the Alamo, the

Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, The George Washington Carver Museum, and the National Museum of the Pacific War.

2. History of Museums: Their Purposes and Architecture

Today's museums come from an idea attributed to the Ancient Greeks and given form by the Renaissance. Museums have gone through numerous changes from the time of their inception until now and each change has written itself into the built environment of the museum. As the museum's purposes and audience changed through history, so too did its form.

2.1 Collection: Temples, Cabinets, and Galleries

The word "museum" comes originally from the Greek, *mouseion*, by way of the Latin *musaeum*, for a place where the Muses dwell (Findlen 23; Alexander and Alexander 3). The Muses, a set of nine goddesses, watched over and served as the inspiration for everything from poetry to history to astronomy (Alexander and Alexander 3).

One famous house of the Muses was the Alexandrian Museum, of which the Library of Alexandria was a part. The Museum existed from the 3rd century BC to the 3rd century AD (Alexander and Alexander 3). The Museum functioned largely as an academy or university, with scholars coming from all over the known world to learn and work on their own theories. However, the Alexandrian Museum also contained numerous artifacts and objects, as well as gardens and a zoo, all meant for the inspiration and edification of those who visited it (Alexander and Alexander 3).

Rome also displayed *objets d'art* as spoils of war and articles of beauty. Mostly statuary, these *objets* were displayed in the public baths which were prevalent throughout the empire (Alexander and Alexander 4; Gielbelhausen 224). When Rome moved from the traditional polytheism to Christianity, the power, and the objects, moved from the temples to the churches. When Rome fell, it was the churches and monasteries that preserved and hoarded these items (Duncan 251). Knights also brought back objects from the Crusades for the glory of God and king, and these objects enriched the treasuries of both kings and cathedrals (Alexander and Alexander 5).

Despite the extensive collections of the ancient and medieval world, the modern definition of the museum truly comes from the Renaissance (Alexander and Alexander 5). The classical origins of the idea would be incorporated later, with the first formal museums. The time just before the Renaissance saw precious items begin to be concentrated in private hands, collected by those individuals with wealth and power. This trend would continue into and beyond the Renaissance and form the basis of many of the first museums.

With the resurgence of classical knowledge during the Renaissance, those who could afford it gathered items from the world over, ranging from biological specimens to ancient artifacts to rare books and paintings, to place under one roof for study, entertainment, and prestige (Duncan 263; Findlen 36-38).

Private scholars gathered their collections into what would come to be known as Cabinets of Curiosities. These cabinets were analogous to the study or library and were filled with an eclectic mix of natural and manmade objects and artifacts (Giebelhausen

224; Alexander and Alexander 5). They allowed scholars to hold a plethora of objects in their own hands, the better to attempt to fix their place in the universe and in relation to all the other items. Of course, not all cabinet owners had a scholarly bent. Some preferred collecting oddities in order to impress their friends and acquaintances (Olmi 132-33). These personal and private Cabinets of Curiosities served as a quiet place to study the macrocosm in microcosm. The cabinets brought a representation of the larger world into a small enough space that the items were convenient to study.

The Cabinets of Curiosities were, or were modeled after, studies and libraries, private places of contemplation. However, the nature of scholarship required this space to be semi-public, as both friends and strangers came to view the collection and use it as a resource in their own studies. These rooms were often literally full of objects, from specimen jars and stuffed animals to Greek vases and Egyptian jewelry covering every available surface, packed into shelves and tacked up on walls.

The owners of these Cabinets could vary greatly in social standing. While wealth was something of a prerequisite for a truly diverse collection, collectors with less disposable income limited themselves to a single genre of item; shells were particularly popular in the Netherlands as a collector's item for the common man (Scheurleer 157).

At least one of these Cabinets, if a slightly exaggerated example, is still extant in its original form. Dating to the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Sir John Soane's large collection was given into the care of the British Government with the condition that nothing be removed, added, or changed. Covering the space of three town houses in central London, the museum displays both the eclectic nature of Soane's collecting and

the genius of his architecture. Remodeling and connecting the three town houses to create separate display and living spaces, Soane included many of his own designs, including numerous skylights that allow the building to be lit completely with natural light, even into the basement. Each room has a nominal theme, but varies from stone lion's paws in the washroom to the sarcophagus of Seti I in the basement to an almost unbelievable room which, while small, contains over 100 paintings, with what seem like solid walls opening to display more paintings inside shallow cabinets, including Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress*. Soane opened the museum to architecture students during his lifetime and negotiated an Act of Parliament to keep the buildings as he wished and open to the public for the benefit of students and scholars after his death in 1837 (Sir John Soane's Museum).

However, not all Cabinets were meant for the benefit of scholars. Nobility, royalty, and others with wealth to spare also created Cabinets, although on a much grander scale than the average scholar. Though these places also served as places of scholarship, the royal collections served primarily as a display of power, meant to impress and awe all who saw them (Duncan 251). The housing of the royal collections reflected this. No humble study, these collections could take up entire palaces. In the 15th century, the Medici in Florence gathered up objects until their primary palace hosted a collection rivaled only by that of the Vatican (Alexander and Alexander 25). Neither the Medici nor the Vatican had any true rival in collecting until the early 17th century, when King Charles I of England amassed an incredible collection of art, particularly paintings, in imitation and enhancement of such noble collections elsewhere

in Europe. He constructed a palace with a great hall decorated by Rubens specifically to house them (Duncan 263; Alexander 25). Upon Charles' execution, his executors saw his collection as a symbol of Charles' royal power and dismantled it to show the loss of that power. Few in England would dare amass such a collection for some time afterward in fear of upsetting the same popular sensibilities that led to Charles' execution (Duncan 263).

Like Charles I, nobles and royalty throughout Europe amassed collections and built special palaces designed to house them. Louis XIV graced the Louvre Palace with a gallery specifically for showing off his many paintings at its heart (Alexander and Alexander 25; Duncan 251). In the latter half of the 18th century, Catherine the Great put St. Petersburg on the collecting map, building on the collection of Peter the Great, and began the construction of the Hermitage in 1767 to house her incredible collection (Alexander and Alexander 27). Through the 17th and 18th centuries, the Hapsburgs in Spain and Rudolf II in Prague also gathered notable collections, modifying their palaces to best display their numerous acquisitions (Alexander and Alexander 26).

These collections served as a display of power for the monarchs. As Charles I's collection symbolized his royal power, and its dismantling the removal of that power, other monarchs and nobles used their collections to publicly proclaim their personal power. As Royal, or at the very least noble, collections access was restricted to those who found favor with the collection's owner, almost exclusively noble and learned men. Louis XIV combined his primary collection, the Apollo Gallery, with reception halls, allowing him to awe those he received (Duncan 251). Rudolf II often did the same, using

his collections as a place to meet privately with visiting dignitaries (Kaufman 527). The public was also occasionally allowed to view these incredible private collections. The Medici accepted visitors as early as the 16th century, while the French collection remained private until Louis XV opened his collections twice a week to the people of France in 1750 (Alexander and Alexander 27-28). In Russia, visitors were required to wear court dress to the Hermitage until 1866, since they were in truth visiting the czar, and only being allowed to see the collections on his sufferance (Alexander and Alexander 35).

These nobles also used their collections as a reflection of themselves. As shown by the name of his gallery, Louis XIV identified with Apollo, hence his moniker of “The Sun King,” and stocked his galleries with pieces that represented this idealized version of his rule (Duncan 251). When he received people in his gallery, he ensured that they made the connection between himself and the sun god.

2.2 Audience: The First Museums Go Public

When the first formal museums opened in the mid 18th century, the “public” that they opened to was much more restricted than that of today, or even at the end of the same century. These museums, like the royal collections and Cabinets of Curiosities they sprang from, were meant for the learned elite, scholars of the nobility and gentility.

While nominally anyone was allowed entrance to the museum, there were often standards of dress or other measures that prevented people outside the nobility or gentility from visiting (Alexander and Alexander 9, 35; Duncan 265; Giebelhausen 224). To the people of the upper classes who founded these museums, those of the lower classes had neither the education nor the culture to properly appreciate the museum. Thus, the first museums meant for the public were housed in buildings, either previous palaces or places of monumental architecture, which generally made the common man uncomfortable (Alexander and Alexander 9). However, this attitude gradually changed and by the time the major American museums began opening in the mid 19th century the museum had shifted from an institution of the learned to a symbol of national power and pride, where all were invited to bask in the glory of the state. Despite this shift in attitude, there was no corresponding shift in museum architecture. Instead, palatial and monumental architecture remained common until the beginning of the 20th century.

The first museums grew out of the extensive royal and noble collections of the Renaissance era and fell into two general categories (Alexander and Alexander 27; Duncan 251). The first museums were those which grew directly out of a royal collection and simply took over the building in which the collection was already housed. The Uffizi Palace in Florence grew out of the last of the Medici collection and opened in 1743 (Alexander and Alexander 27). The Hermitage in Saint Petersburg grew out of the collections of Catherine the Great, and was expanded during the reign of Nicholas I, eventually encompassing the Winter Palace, primary seat of the Romanovs and was opened to the public in 1852 (The State Hermitage Museum). For the first museums, simply being in a palace, former or not, meant that the weight of history was behind the exclusion of the common man from these museums. Little had to be done in order to filter the visitors of these museums because the building itself served as a filter. After hundreds of years of exclusion, as well as the dominion of the nobility, these palaces were associated with people of power, of whom the common man definitely wasn't.

Alongside the museums which remained in the palaces which housed their collections, other museums began to be housed in buildings designed for this purpose. Because their buildings were new, these museums did not have the same association with wealth, privilege, and education that the palatial museums did. These new museums had to find another way to associate themselves with these qualities.

For most of these museums, that meant designing their buildings after intimidating structures, either palaces or Greek and Roman temples. A palace design allowed these museums to draw on the already existing tradition of exclusion while a

temple template drew on a design associated with scholarship and the ancient origins of the idea of the museum. These buildings were designed at such a large scale as to overwhelm any not used to such monumental buildings (Alexander and Alexander 9).

The Pio-Clementine Museum opened in 1773 and included numerous items from the Vatican's expansive collection of art (Alexander and Alexander 27). The museum was modeled after the Roman baths which had traditionally displayed sculpture and its design had a lasting effect on museum architecture. Both the grand staircase, a large stairway prominently featured, usually just inside the main doors, and the rotunda, a central, high ceilinged, round room, which are found in many museums today can be traced back to the Pio-Clementine (Giebelhausen 224, 226).

The British Museum opened in 1759, after the British government was willed the collection of Sir Hans Sloane (Alexander and Alexander 28, 58). Housed in a mansion which stood on the current site of the museum, it was given its own building in the mid 19th century. The museum was modeled after a Greek Temple, with a large triangle shaped frieze supported by stone columns creating a portico over the entrance, marking its connection to the Greeks in both the concept of the museum and the antiquities it contained (The British Museum). The museum building consisted of four main wings enclosing a grand court with the circular reading room in the center, modeling half of what Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand decreed as the ideal design for a museum. Durand's design included four wings in a square connected to a central rotunda by wings in the shape of a Greek cross, as well as separate entrances for each wing (Giebelhausen 225).

Though small when it opened, the British Museum soon came to showcase numerous objects of historical and cultural significance. The Elgin Marbles from the acropolis, part of a still ongoing tension with Greece, are one such example; the famous Rosetta Stone is another (Alexander and Alexander 59). The Marbles and the Rosetta Stone, and other objects like them from Britain's many colonies, displayed Britain's wealth as well as its power as both a colonial and intellectual empire.

The Louvre opened in the opulent palace of Louis XVI in 1793, showcasing the treasures collected by generations of French monarchs. However, despite the typical origin of its buildings and collections, the Louvre does have a rather different ideological origin than most of the other museums. Rather than the collection being turned over to the public by the last of the line, as in the case of the Uffizi, or being gradually made more available by the royals themselves, as in the case of the Hermitage, the collections of the Louvre were seized during the French Revolution by the people of France, who considered the collections a sign of royal power (Alexander and Alexander 29; Duncan 251). Instead of destroying the collections, as they had destroyed the monarch only a year previously, the new leaders of France converted the collections into a symbol of the people. The treasures which had previously reinforced the power of the monarch became a visual reminder of the success of the people in wresting that power away. Leaving the collections in the palace, the new French government opened it up to anyone who wished to visit, allowing the common people to walk the halls where only nobles had ambled before and view the new sign of the people's power (Duncan 252).

Photographs of the Louvre rarely do justice to the scale of the museum. The Louvre consists of three wings in a “U” shape around a central courtyard. The two side wings are at least twice as long as the square center wing and separate buildings extend them twice again further. Originally, the museum only utilized a few galleries in the main palace building, sharing the space with the royal family and administrators. Gradually, the museum expanded to take over the entirety of the complex and its galleries now cover some 650,000 square feet (Louvre). The museum became a symbol of the new France, palatial architecture and all. In this case, the palace served, not as a filter, but rather as a symbol of the people’s triumph over the monarchy and so became inclusionary rather than exclusionary.

The museum experience itself was drastically different during this time from what museum goers experience today. Objects were rarely under glass and museum visitors were allowed, even encouraged, to touch and handle the objects. Touch, smell, and even occasionally taste, were considered important ways of interacting with and understanding these foreign objects (Classen and Howes 201-2). Items were handled freely by the private owners of Cabinets of Curiosities and visitors were allowed the same level of interaction with items in early museums. Though museums had begun to move toward being a place of entertainment and leisure, they still clung tight to their scholarly roots, including the multisensory method of interacting with objects. As museums moved into the 19th century, preservation became more and more important, a priority which ran counter to the open access accorded to museum visitors as a matter

of course in the previous century and resulted in putting the collections under glass or behind velvet ropes (Classen and Howes 201-2, 207-8).

During and after the reign of Napoleon, a flurry of national museums were founded in the image of and in competition with the Louvre (Duncan 261; Alexander and Alexander 31). Much as the Louvre displayed the national power of France, other nations wanted a place to display their own wealth, power, and intellectual superiority (Duncan 261). These national museums continued to use the palace model for the outside of a museum, many of them growing out of royal collections, while the insides were closer to a study or gallery, which were often aligned to the objects within to provide context (Alexander and Alexander 32; Giebelhausen 227). The layout also reflected the dominant organization scheme, a narrative which moved visitors from Egypt, Greece, and Rome up to the pinnacle of art, the Renaissance masters (Duncan 256).

In Britain, the British National Gallery opened in 1824 to display paintings, in counterpoint to the British Museum's much wider range of objects (Duncan 269). Responding to a growing movement of patriotism in Britain, the National Gallery was created after a long struggle by the aristocracy against its democratic overtones (Duncan 269-70). By opening a picture gallery for the people of Britain, the art gallery would be lost as a symbol of the learned and privileged aristocracy. The National Gallery became a symbol of the power of the common people, billed as a great social leveler which would improve morals and behavior in the lowest classes (Duncan 271).

First located in a house, the museum was moved into its current building in 1835. The National Gallery was designed to be ornamental and features the Greek façade and columns common to much of the museum architecture at this time (Duncan 277). The inner layout also follows the norm, sprawling galleries, each a grid of box-like rooms with doorways on each wall leading to more box-like rooms. This layout can quickly disorient visitors, resulting in frustration as visitors miss items they wish to see or find themselves wandering, lost, when they wish to move on.

In America, museums began with a different purpose, but used the same monumental architecture found in Europe. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Field Museum in Chicago were both founded in the late 19th century and fall in to this category. They both feature awe inspiring classical façades and tall, open atriums, with a typical grand staircase (Alexander and Alexander 37). In the Field Museum, the grand staircase leads to a second-story balcony which runs along the wall around the atrium and grants the visitor passage from gallery to gallery while also allowing them to glimpse activity both in the atrium and across the museum.

Falling more in line ideologically with the Louvre than the rest of Europe's museums, American museums were always intended for the common people. They focused on enlightening and educating the public, as well as inspiring artists with their collections (Alexander and Alexander 7, 36-37). The Smithsonian Institution, now a complex of museums, was originally a research institute and carried on the educational portion of its mission long after becoming the national museum of the United States (Alexander and Alexander 39). American museums were the first to introduce docents, a

practice quickly copied by European museums in order to guide the visitor through the museum as the curators saw it and ensure that they got the most out of their visit (Alexander and Alexander 7).

European museums changed slowly with the times, becoming more open and accessible, but the architecture remained largely monumental. Through the 19th century, museums began to diversify and specialize. Rather than survey museums, such as the Louvre and, to a lesser extent, the British Museum, museums began to be formed with a particular focus in mind. The Victoria and Albert Museum, originally the South Kensington Museum, focuses on the decorative arts, including much of what a typical art museum might, but including a spotlight on practical decorative works, such as clothing, furniture, and ceramic ware. Beginning as a group of glass and metal buildings left over from a World's Fair, the museum was eventually given a monumental façade to match the other national museums (Victoria and Albert Museum). While each type of museum might have a predominant style, they still retained the palatial and temple-like façades.

2.3 Environment: In and Out of the “White Box”

In the 20th century, museums continued to expand on their functions, and, for the first time, the dominant idea of what a museum building should be changed. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, museums were designed after their first containers: palaces and studies. In the 20th century, museums were designed around the objects inside, meant to help the visitor see the museum as the curators and administrators believed it should be seen.

Beginning in the early to mid 19th century, modern architecture gave us the form of our cities today, modern skyscrapers of glass and steel, with few flourishes or other identifying markers. These buildings are efficient, meant to deny any sort of sentimentality or nostalgia (Duncan and Wallach 485). Museums built during this time followed this pattern, becoming square and angular, covered in steel and glass. Inside the museum, a new philosophy began to take hold.

Often referred to as the “white box” style of museum, this philosophy argued that works of art were best seen with no context, allowing the visitor to interact with the work individually, with no outside influence (Giebelhausen 233; Duncan and Wallach 484). The museum was supposed to provoke the contemplation of art divorced from the history and other contexts surrounding the piece (Duncan and Wallace 484). In a “white box” museum, the focus was on the subjective interpretation of the individual; the

building of the museum provided only and empty, neutral container for these opportunities (Giebelhausen 239; Duncan and Wallace 485).

To this effect, museum interiors lost the ornate decorations common to the palatial style 18th and 19th century museums and instead used white walls—hence the name “white box”—and plain interiors to focus the visitors’ attention solely on the work of art. This ideology remained dominant in the museum field for the rest of the 20th century (Giebelhausen 233).

Pioneering the “white box” style museum, the Museum of Modern Art in New York became the archetype for all modern art museums that followed (Duncan and Wallach 485). The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) opened in 1939 (Giebelhausen 232). A glass and steel structure originally surrounded by brick row houses, it provided a sharp contrast of the modern against the past (Duncan and Wallach 485). First conceived of as a truly “modern” museum with collections only spanning fifty years from the present, MoMA was designed to be flexible, allowing the interior of the museum to be redesigned as styles changed. Though this idea was eventually abandoned, the inherent flexibility found its way into the “white box” style of museum and moveable walls and partitions are a common feature of museums today (Giebelhausen 232-33, Foster, Hollier, Kolbowski, Krauss, and Riley 15-16).

In the mid to late 20th century, with the advent of post-modernism, museum designers began to reject the “white box” in favor of giving their visitors a unique experience. Museum designers of the post-modern era reacted against the efficient and detached ideology of modernism. They rejected the ideology of the “white box,” arguing

that there was no such thing as a place without context (Alexander and Alexander 11-12, Giebelhausen 234, 239). Instead, post-modern museum designers argued that the museum had a bias simply by existing and displaying objects and, rather than deny that bias, chose to use it to tell their own narrative (Alexander and Alexander 257-58). Museum architecture moved away from the modern glass and steel exterior, the outside of the museum instead becoming more iconic and distinctive, while the interiors, with some exceptions, remained largely in the “white box” style (Giebelhausen 234).

In museum buildings, the rejection of the “white box” has fallen into two major categories: the museum building as self-referential and the museum building as metaphor. In the “museum as self-referential,” the building of the museum purposely draws attention to itself. The building becomes an active container rather than a passive one. The building can at times compete with or overwhelm the objects within, but it provides a unique visitor experience (Alexander and Alexander 43, Foster, et al. 11).

One such example is the Guggenheim museums. The current buildings of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, built in 1959, and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, built in 1997, were meant to give the museum visitor, not an experience in “neutral” space, but rather a unique experience found nowhere else in the world (Giebelhausen 234). These buildings were given over to the imagination of architects, the Solomon R. Guggenheim to Frank Lloyd Wright and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao to Frank Gehry, who were allowed to create a building that would define the museums they housed, rather than being containers for them (The

Guggenheim Foundation “Frank Lloyd Wright”, “History”). In New York, Wright designed the original Guggenheim to display a static, never expanding collection of abstract art (Newhouse 162). With this specific collection, he designed a spiral gallery, curving continuously upward and open to the atrium, which reached from the floor to the ceiling skylights. An addition in 1992 has since disrupted this continuous path, with the need for more exhibit space manifesting itself in rectilinear galleries much more akin to the “white box” of MoMA than Wright’s original design (Newhouse 166). From the street, the two parts of the museum appear disjointed, as if an office building had been built in close proximity to the museum. The original building is all gentle curves set in concrete while the additions are distinguished by straight lines and right angles of glass and steel. Wright’s space was designed to partially replicate an artist’s studio, but has largely become another “white box” museum, albeit one with interesting architecture.

The Guggenheim Bilbao features shimmering curving exterior walls which appear to move in and out of each other to form three dimensional waves above and around the building. Placed alongside the Nervión River, the Guggenheim Bilbao appears as an extension of the water and its reflection does not look out of place among the waves. Inside the building, galleries move away from the center of the museum in straight lines while openings in the center of the rooms allow visitors to see to the floor below. Visitors move between galleries by means of skywalks which skirt the entrance atrium and allow the visitor to see both up and down through the center of the museum. Both the Guggenheim Museums defy the traditional linearity of museums to give their visitors a truly unique experience.

In the “museum as metaphor” method, the forms of the museum, from the building itself to the way the exhibits are set up, are all meant to reinforce the message the museum is trying to convey and draw the visitor further into the museum’s ideology, its way of seeing. The National Museum of the American Indian, a part of the Smithsonian Museum which opened on the National Mall in 2004, looks to give voice to peoples rather than simply display their artifacts. Called “museum different,” the museum seeks to break with traditional museum ideology and instead create a museum where the culture inside is living, rather than preserved (Alexander and Alexander 13). The entire museum was designed and is curated by Native people, including the building itself. The structure is made to resemble a number of Native structures, such as the Pueblo cliff dwellings in the curving sandstone exterior and a dance circle with a ceremonial fire in the rotunda (Berlo and Jonaitis 18). The museum is oriented to the cardinal directions with stone markers brought from the far reaches of the Americas placed outside the museum so that they intersect at the hearth stone in the rotunda. The grounds around the museum are landscaped to show environments important to the full range of Native Americans (NMAI). Inside is no different. There are hardly any straight lines inside the museum. Instead, partitions are curved, rejecting the “white box” and interjecting a Native point of view (Berlo and Jonaitis 22). The building works in harmony with the exhibits to focus the visitor on the living, Native voice that both express.

While the post-modern museum is focused on a building designed around a particular museum, not all museums have buildings that were designed for them. These

repurposed buildings have occurred at several points during the history of museums, but the effect of each on the built environment of the museum is unique. While many of the buildings housing the first museums may be considered repurposed, at least some of their spaces were created with the idea of displaying objects. In contrast, some museums today have moved into buildings that were never intended to serve that purpose. These repurposed buildings come with their own histories and built environment which are then overlaid by those created for the museum.

The effect of this overlay depends on several factors. The original function of the building being repurposed has a large effect on how the space is laid out and thus how the museum can fill that space. The effect of the repurposed building also depends on the degree to which the building is incorporated into the museum and how aware the visitors are of the building's history. Depending on the museum, the building's original use may be obscured as much as possible or incorporated into the built environment of the final museum.

The Tate Modern in London opened in an old power plant on the banks of the Thames River in 2000. The plans for renovation of the building were purposely chosen to retain the original feel of the power plant. Today, the Tate Modern houses modern and contemporary works in a building featuring an enormous great hall accented by steel and glass panels and geometric forms which accent the building's history. In San Antonio, the San Antonio Museum of Art (SAMA) moved into the abandoned Lone Star brewery. Lone Star Beer has long been iconic in Texas and San Antonio. The old brewery was built on the San Antonio River and features a castle like sandstone main building as

well as numerous outbuildings in the same style. SAMA purchased the brewery in the 1970s and opened after extensive renovations in 1981. SAMA will be discussed in more detail as one of the case studies in the next section.

The buildings of museums also reflect the dominant cultural thought at the time of their construction. Much as MoMA reflects the modernist aesthetic common at its origin, museums built today reflect a changing idea of what a building should be. In San Francisco, the Exploratorium is set to open as a net-zero energy museum, reflecting the increased cultural awareness of the importance of conservation and renewable energy which is particularly prevalent in California (Truong). The Exploratorium reopened in its new location on the San Francisco Bay in April of 2013. It uses over 5,000 solar panels to generate electricity, the Bay for heating and cooling, and some creative gallery divisions to provide a maximum of natural light. In addition to being simply environmentally friendly, the whole project also serves as one of the museum's exhibits, integrating the building fully into the science museum (Exploratorium).

This same reflection of culture has occurred throughout the world. As the Western idea of a museum was spread through colonialism, other cultures took the idea and adapted it to their own particular concept of objects and display. In West Africa, the Asante people of Ghana put together a museum in an unused part of the palace to commemorate the silver jubilee of their king. Those in charge of creating the museum were familiar with Western museums, but found many reasons why copying them wholesale would not work for their museum (McLeod 457-8). For one thing, objects removed from the ceremonial circuit lose their importance and thus the interest of the

local people (McLeod 456). However, the museum would not be only for locals, but also for foreign visitors who would expect to see displays like those in Western museums. Their solution was to create a museum in two parts. The first floor would be left as it had been while in use and life-size effigies of former kings and queen mothers would be installed in positions that represented their actions during life. The second floor would become a Western style display of replica objects, common in the Asante regalia, which would allow the museum to hold the objects while they remained in the ceremonial circuit as “reserve” objects (McLeod 459). The effigies quickly became the most popular part of the museum with locals and other Ghanaians. By adapting the Western idea of a museum, the Asante created a museum which had meaning to the people whose culture it displayed. The Old Palace provided an appropriate backdrop to this display of Asante culture and allowed them to build a successful museum in a region where museums were notorious for doing poorly (McLeod 456-7).

Today, museums take any number of shapes and forms. The British Museum and Louvre have their palatial exterior and modern interior. MoMA has its glass and steel building and “white box” galleries. The Guggenheims and NMAI eschew straight lines and modernist architecture –and ideology—both inside and out. SAMA and the Tate Modern find a new function for an old building. The Old Palace museum in Ghana and the San Francisco Exploratorium express the local culture. There are even museums which exist without any physical form at all, instead keeping their collections in an entirely digital format which is accessible to visitors in every part of the world.

Each of the historical forms of the museum is still alive and well today and can sometimes be found even within the same building. Each layer of history is built upon the previous, but all shine through and are seen in the present day. When and where a museum began gives it its initial shape, but these shapes are not static. They change with the times, in as much as they are able. Each museum provides a unique opportunity and challenge for adaptation and implementation of changing styles and ideas about what a museum is and does. To look at the building of a museum today is to read not only the history of that particular museum but also the history of museums as an idea made concrete.

3. Museum Critiques

Museums are a lot like dogs. Everyone knows what one is, but when asked to describe it, each person has a very different image of just what *it* is. There may be underlying similarities between descriptions, but, by and large, it is difficult to believe they are descriptions of the same animal. They can be big or small, mixed or pure, and serve a variety of functions which vary independently of physical descriptions.

The physical appearance of museums today is largely a product of the long history of the museum's built environment. With the other elements of the museum, curation, tour guides, and multimedia displays, the built environment constructs the museum's sense of place, that almost indefinable feeling that allows a visitor to form an emotional connection to the space and therefore differentiate it from all others in their memory.

There are two main parts to a museum's built environment. Permanent fixtures are those which cannot be changed without serious remodeling. Building facades, load bearing walls, and built in display cases all fall into this category. Impermanent fixtures are those which can easily be changed from exhibit to exhibit. Paint colors, wall decorations, partition walls, and free standing display cases are examples. These two categories reflect different parts of the museum. The permanent fixtures reflect the museum at its inception. Whatever the defining concepts of the museum were at the time of its design are shown in the permanent architecture of the museum. The

impermanent fixtures, being much more flexible, reflect the current ideas on museum design. These fixtures change both slowly over time and quickly as exhibits change.

Combined, the permanent and impermanent fixtures of a museum influence a visitor's perception of the museum from the moment they first see it until they walk back out the front door. How a museum uses these fixtures in relation to the other elements of a museum defines the museum's sense of place.

The following section will critique the built environment of six museums, how they use their built environment to create a sense of place and how their built environment relates to the historical built environments of museums.

3.1 The San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, TX

The San Antonio Museum of Art utilizes its built environment to create strong connections to the San Antonio community and reinforces those connections with programs and its collections. In addition to its strong connections to the community, it also manages its built environment to connect it to western-style museums around the world. In doing so, SAMA provides a sense of both the traditional/universal and the local/unique.

The building which SAMA inhabits was originally the Lone Star Brewery (Figure 3.1.1). Lone Star Beer was a huge part of the community in San Antonio and enjoyed widespread popularity throughout Texas. The building has been a San Antonio landmark since it was built in 1884 (Fig. 3.1.2). The museum's symbol, a tower flanked by two shorter squares with curved "v" indentions in the top, is drawn from the architecture of the building, particularly the crenellations (Figure 3.1.3). One visitor mentioned the symbol as showing "a respect for the history of the building." By acknowledging the building's history, SAMA takes advantage of the existing connection of the space to the San Antonio community.

The museum is located in the downtown area of San Antonio, and backs up onto the Museum reach of the iconic Riverwalk. From the skywalk between the 4th floors of the two main towers, the Riverwalk as well as other San Antonio landmarks, such as the Tower of the Americas and the Pearl Brewery are easily visible (Figure 3.1.4). To a visitor

who is familiar with the geography of San Antonio, the skywalk places SAMA within the context of the greater community and helps to keep the visitor oriented within the city.

This community nature of the museum is supported by both the programs and the collections. The museum is free on Tuesdays and Sundays and offers a number of programs, including weekly volunteer led meditation and monthly art crawls for toddlers and their caregivers that are meant for local visitors and returning members. SAMA also acknowledges the large Hispanic population of San Antonio by featuring a large and prominent Latin American collection, which includes modern, folk, and pre-Columbian objects (Fig. 3.1.5-6). Of course, such strong connections to the community it serves helps SAMA to stay relevant to that community, and therefore economically viable, but the preeminence of the Latin American collections also contributes greatly to creating SAMA's sense of place.

The museum also incorporates elements which allow it to serve as an educational and cultural center. A lecture hall just off the main atrium is used by art classes, guest speakers, and a cultural film series. Other lectures are held throughout the museum, focusing around objects in the collections. Though the building at times serves as an impediment to these types of lectures—too many people in a space full of other things is a common problem—it is worked around through the use of portable stools and tables, allowing impromptu classrooms to be set up nearly anywhere in the museum.

Through the building and curation of the museum, SAMA fosters a sense of community among its members. As one member put it, “other museums may have people who feel it's theirs, but this one is mine.”

While SAMA has a strong local connection, it also has a strong connection to the traditional western style museum world as well. Visitors enter the museum and find themselves in an atrium, complete with skylights and a prominent grand staircase (Figure 3.1.7). Moving into the museum exhibits, visitors are first faced with the “white box” aesthetic (Figure 3.1.8). However, as the visitor continues to move further into the museum, this “white box” aesthetic slowly fades and galleries shift from removing the context around the objects to providing subtle context which complements the themes of the galleries.

The statuary hall at the end of the west wing showcases a bit of the old brewery building, with brick walls and a peaked wooden slat roof (Figure 3.1.9). However, to one visitor, it “was just like being back [at the museums] in Italy.” The age that shows through in the hall complements the statuary and places them in a context quite different from that of the “white box” aesthetic. Elsewhere in the museum, this effect is created through paint colors and different adornments of the dividing walls. The room displaying objects from Oceania is painted an ocean blue-green (Figure 3.1.10) while the Middle East art is displayed in a sand colored room featuring peaked arches and geometric designs that echo those in the art (Figure 3.1.11).

The museum also acknowledges the modern style museum in the external architecture in its Asian art wing. Housed in a green glass and steel box that sits above the original sandstone brick façade of the building, the addition looks out of place, especially in contrast to the other additions designed to match the original building (Figure 3.1.12). Inside, the exhibits vary from the Japanese gallery, which is cloaked in

shadow (Figure 3.1.13), to the ceramics gallery, which takes full advantage of the windows and a skylight to allow for natural light and warmth not found anywhere else in the museum (Figure 3.1.14).

SAMA acknowledges another portion of the “white box” style in its separate exhibition space. Major exhibitions for the museum are housed in an adjacent building connected to the main museum by a short glass corridor. Inside, the gallery is the most undeveloped of any room in the museum. Walls only reach to a few feet above a visitor’s head and a warehouse style ceiling hosts track lighting. Everything about the space proclaims both “unfinished” and “temporary.” Much as the galleries at MoMA are meant to do, the space transforms to suit the needs of each new exhibition (Figure 3.1.15).

Events put on by the museum utilize the built environment of the museum to lend appropriate ambience to the proceedings. Meditation is held every Saturday in the Japanese gallery, a dark space with several sharp turns which limits the line of sight (Figure 3.1.13). The volunteer sits on mats in a prepared space which also serves as part of the exhibit on Japanese housing. Visitors are invited to find a spot throughout the gallery and the nonlinear nature of the gallery often keeps those meditating from seeing each other. They meet each other with surprise at the end of the meditation period, leading to impromptu circles where regulars catch up with others they haven’t seen in a week or more. The objects in the gallery also contribute to the meditative atmosphere. A number of intricate wooden Buddhas are displayed and one visitor commented that they help create an atmosphere of acceptance which makes it more comfortable to

meditate in the gallery (Figure 3.1.16). Between the dark and quiet and the objects of display, the Japanese gallery lends itself to the morning meditation it is used for.

SAMA utilizes its built environment for far more than a simple display of objects. Through its value of history and carefully calculated additions, SAMA acknowledges both the local community and the greater museum community. It also uses the building to subtly reinforce the themes of the objects in each particular gallery and takes advantage of the ambience thus created for events designed to fit those spaces. Through its built environment, SAMA places itself firmly within the history of the community and the history of the idea of the museum, while also creating a unique sense of place which its members respond to and cherish.

3.2 The McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX

The McNay Art Museum is composed of several additions to an old Spanish Colonial Revival style home, each addition clearly distinguishable both inside and outside of the museum (Fig. 3.2.1). Though all one building, these different phases each have a different impact on the art which they hold and the visitors who view them. The museum utilizes a number of different contexts and links them to the works displayed in them, matching the museum's diverse collection with an equally diverse built environment.

Visitors enter the museum through the most recent addition to the museum. A modernist steel and glass box, it overlooks the museum's sculpture gardens (Fig. 3.2.2). Inside, the addition houses a welcome desk and gift shop as well as changing exhibitions and modern sculpture. To the left of the welcome desk is the entrance to the original museum building while the exhibit space is to the right. The changing exhibition is always of modern art, a reference to the founder's wish for the museum to serve primarily as a museum of modern art. As a backdrop for these modern works, the space utilizes the "white box" aesthetic made so common by the Museum of Modern Art in New York (Fig. 3.2.3). Moveable walls provide the exhibit space with flexibility for each show and allow the path to change with each exhibit. The built environment in this part of the museum is a clear context for the art it contains. Despite the fact that one of the main ideas behind the "white box" aesthetic was to remove context, the addition of the

McNay Museum is such a contrast to the rest of the museum that it becomes a context when paired with modern art. Since the other art is put into an environment that contains, if not a great deal, at least some context, the absence of context in the addition becomes itself a context, serving to show off works that were created with the “white box” aesthetic in mind.

Stepping through the doors into the original building of the museum, the visitor leaves the modernist aesthetic and steps into a world of history and deliberately evoked sense of place. The original building of the museum was built as a home for Marion Koogler McNay and her husband in the Spanish Colonial Revival style in late 1920s and includes 23 acres of surrounding land (Fig. 3.2.4). The house is built in a horseshoe shape surrounding a central courtyard and features bright tile and terra cotta throughout. On her death, she created the McNay Museum, leaving her home and her impressive art collection as its foundation.

While much of the building has been renovated to provide for the needs and aesthetics of a modern art museum, those rooms which have not stand in sharp contrast to every other part of the museum. These rooms are not backdrops or frames, but equal members of the collection. Decorated with bright floral pattern stencils designed by McNay herself and wood and brick work, the rooms easily hold the visitor’s attention for an equal or greater time than the art hanging on their walls (Fig. 3.2.5-7). A museum docent usually stands in these rooms and is happy to inform visitors about the room’s, and the house’s, history. The rooms also have their own labels, including text detailing the use of the room and pictures of the room during McNay’s lifetime.

These labels help to incorporate the rooms into the exhibit; just as the art has labels, so, too, does the room.

However, the rooms which have been renovated do not completely dissociate themselves from this past history. Several of the rooms feature a window which takes up an entire wall and looks out into the central courtyard (Fig. 3.2.8). The lush greenery, large fountain pool, and showcase of the home's architecture tug at the visitor's attention and build anticipation for the time when the visitor can step out of the museum and into the home (Fig. 3.2.9). These rooms are not in the "white box" style, with soft cream walls and carpeted or light colored wood floors, but neither do they have the decorated style found in the original rooms of the house. They provide a transition between the space of denied context and the rooms which still remain part of a home.

The second floor of the house is actually the proposed starting point according to the visitor guide. The central room is set up to show an orientation video about the founder of the museum, Marion Koogler McNay. From this point, visitors are encouraged to move through the museum chronologically, beginning with the Renaissance and Medieval art on the second floor and then moving to the 19th century art on the first floor and through the galleries in a counter-clockwise motion before finishing at the entrance in the contemporary exhibition gallery. Except for the stairways and orientation room (Fig. 3.2.10), the second floor is much like the renovated rooms on the first floor, not completely devoid of a created sense of place, but not displayed as a work of art in its own right (Fig. 3.2.11).

On the other side of the house, an addition has been built which serves as a repository for theatre arts and the McNay library. This space is reached through a glass enclosed patio that shows off more of the original home and blurs the distinction between inside and outside as visitors pass through decorative doors (Fig. 3.2.12) to reach it. The farthest part of the gallery is set up as a study, complete with coffee table books and shelves tall enough to need a ladder to reach the top (Fig. 3.2.13). The room also opens onto the floor below, which houses the majority of the McNay's library, through a spiral stairway. The space lets the visitor glimpse a world which seems far away from the carefully curated galleries of the rest of the museum, but which is tied to it through the use of the space for displays and the selection of books displayed around the room.

Outside of the building, the grounds continue the art displays, complementing modern and traditional sculpture with beautiful landscaping and several water features. Each area of the grounds has its own theme. The sculpture gardens showcase smaller modern sculpture (Fig. 3.2.2) while the main lawn displays larger pieces (Fig. 3.2.14). Farther away from the house, a water garden is set up in the Eastern style, complete with what appears to be a Buddhist figure and stone lantern (Fig. 3.2.15).

The grounds are accessible to the public all the way around the building and I met at least one person taking advantage of the paths to jog. From outside, the various additions to the museum become obvious (Fig. 3.2.1). The house stands at the center while the additions flank it, each distinct from the original and claiming their share of attention. The additions do not attempt to harmonize with the house, but instead

declare in no uncertain terms that the museum's exterior, like its interior, is as diverse as the collections it contains.

3.3 The Alamo , San Antonio, TX

The Alamo is a Texas historic site, but it is also a semi-curated space. The site contains what remains of the Mission San Antonio de Valero, and was the site of the Battle of the Alamo during the Texas War for Independence. After the Texans suffered a brutal defeat at the hands of the Mexican forces, “Remember the Alamo!” became the rallying cry for Texans fighting for independence and remains a phrase known to every Texan today. After the battle which made it famous, the Alamo went through many phases of construction, including the addition of the now iconic bell-shaped front (Fig. 3.3.1). In 1905, the Daughters of the Texas Republic (DTR) took over the site and continue to maintain it with no support from the Texas government. Located in the heart of downtown San Antonio, the site is surrounded on all sides by city streets, hotels, and corporate buildings. However, there is a long standing rule that no building in the vicinity can be so tall that it casts a shadow on the Alamo, and thus the area is free of the urban canyons found in other cities.

The site consists of the main mission building, called the Shrine of Texas Liberty, a gift shop, old barracks, and a meeting hall and library building. Of these, only the mission building and the barracks were on the site during the Battle of the Alamo. Much of the original site is now under the Alamo Plaza and nearby Alamo Street. Today’s site includes extensive walled gardens and courtyards that were not part of the original Alamo, but serve as a lovely park in downtown San Antonio (Fig. 3.3.2).

The Alamo is generally packed with people. Any school in the area and many outside of it bring students to the Alamo every year and it is difficult to wander the site without running into at least one school group (Fig. 3.3.3). In addition, the Alamo has become the quintessential icon of Texas. Native Texans and foreigners alike come to take in the site and no native can call themselves a “true” Texan until they have been to the Alamo. This moment is usually recorded through a photograph in front of the bell-shaped front (Fig. 3.3.4). This has become such a rite of passage that the site employs a photographer, much like those found at theme parks, to stand just outside the door and photograph every visitor before they enter the Shrine. These photographs are then available for purchase in the gift shop.

Lines for the Alamo can stretch around the block on a nice day, and due to space constraints, visitors are herded through the Shrine and out the exit door in order to make room for more visitors (Fig. 3.3.5). The hustle and bustle of the Alamo stands in sharp contrast to the typical museum atmosphere. Where most museums encourage their visitors to linger and “muse” on their collections, the Alamo runs people through its space in an effort to accommodate the large crowds and provide every visitor with the “Alamo experience.”

Even on the rare slow days, visitors are not inclined to linger in the Shrine. Stern staff members discourage conversation and ask visitors not to touch the walls or take photographs (Fig. 3.3.6). Depending on the days, visitors may be allowed to wander through the small rooms inside the Shrine, viewing objects owned by the defenders of the Alamo and reading small plaques which detail what each room was used for. Other

days, visitors are only allowed in the main large room, almost half its space taken up by wooden display cases arranged in the center and flags representing the origin of every defender of the Alamo standing against the walls. Velvet ropes and wrought iron grates abound inside the building, providing a sharp dividing line between the areas where the visitor is and is not allowed to go. Doorways are narrow and often roped off, which, when everyone wants to take a look, creates choke points which hold up traffic. The space is lit through electric chandeliers, casting shadows throughout the Shrine and placing the lit display cases in sharp relief. The lighting is clearly supposed to reflect how the Shrine would have been lit when in use, but only adds to the disorientation of visitors inside the building.

Taken together, the rules and the crowds strip the Shrine of the religious atmosphere inherent in both its history and its name. Despite efforts on the part of the DTR to create a holy space of reflection, the space functions more as an exhibit at a theme park, complete with an exit into the gift shop. The Shrine is a clear example of how people and rules can create a built environment which is very different than that created by the physical space itself.

The gift shop, called the Sales Museum on the Alamo site maps, contains several display cases with models of the Alamo as it would have looked as a mission and during the battle, complete with tiny people going about their business. However, the displays are eclipsed by the enormity of merchandise inside the shop. This space is also very crowded, as visitors are funneled out of the Shrine and straight into the gift shop. Unlike the Shrine, visitors are encouraged to linger in the shop, increasing the crowding to a

level that is incredibly uncomfortable on any day where the site is even marginally well visited. The building was built in the 1930s and its architecture compliments that of the original buildings (Figure 3.3.7). However, this architecture is only noticeable from the outside; inside, the pace is so frantic and the space so crowded that it is difficult to concentrate on anything but avoiding running into the other visitors or the merchandise.

In the old barracks building, another exhibit space is set up, this one dedicated to the day to day lives of soldiers stationed at the Alamo (Fig. 3.3.8). Visitors can marvel at a millstone, glance into a reconstructed infirmary room and walk through panels and display cases detailing life at the Alamo. Though no photographs are allowed in this space either, the atmosphere is more relaxed. Fewer visitors make their way through these exhibits and thus the pace is more leisurely. The space is also cool, due to the thick stone walls, and is a perfect place to escape the Texas heat.

Even on days when the Shrine is not crowded, the grounds are. The grounds are beautiful, with numerous live oak trees providing greenery even through the winter. In the spring and summer, flowers bloom in beds throughout the grounds and the paths are a welcome place to stroll. In one courtyard on the grounds, cannons from all over Texas are displayed, including one purported to be the famous cannon from Goliad which provoked the skirmish considered to be the start of the Texas Revolution (Fig. 3.3.9). In addition to the cannons, the Six Flags over Texas, those of France, Spain, Mexico, Texas, the United States, and the Confederate States, each of which claimed Texas at some point in its history fly over the courtyard (Fig. 3.3.10). Even visitors from

outside Texans will recognize this symbol of Texas history from the theme parks of the same name. The cannons and flags provide the backdrop for history talks given by the docents. These talks take visitors through the background of the Texas Revolution, up to the Battle of the Alamo, and into the days of the Republic of Texas. Standing on a platform just in front of the flags, the docents point to cannons and buildings as they recite the narrative of the founding of Texas.

Whereas many museums are fighting to gain the visitors necessary to their survival, the Alamo has too many to easily accommodate. History is abundant and present throughout the site, but when the crowds inside the Shrine and Sales Museums are compared to the empty areas of the more accessible history exhibits on the grounds, it becomes obvious that history is not what the visitors come to see. The Alamo is a traditional place to take out of town guests and, as mentioned before, all native Texans must make the pilgrimage at least once during their lives. These visitors are generally only too happy to make it through the Shrine and out into the grounds where a moment of peace can be had before continuing on to the nearby commercial Riverwalk. The few guests that do come for the history of the site find themselves beleaguered and disappointed with the frantic pace of what is purported to be a Shrine to Texas Liberty. Throughout the site, the peaceful, historic built environment created by the buildings and grounds is overwhelmed by the frantic pace set by the tourists who overrun the site on a daily basis.

3.4 The Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX

The Blanton Museum of Art stands only a few blocks from the capitol building on the edge of the University of Texas campus in downtown Austin. Though on the edge of campus, the museum is at the heart of Austin and serves as a reflection of one vision of the larger Austin culture. Austin prides itself on not being normal and the building of the Blanton Museum was certainly designed with the same thought in mind.

The most striking and subtle feature of the museum is the shape of the building itself. Unlike most buildings, the Blanton Museum has only one right angle (Fig. 3.4.1). The effect of this irregularity is not easily discernible, but once noticed, it is difficult to un-notice. The shape of the building is echoed in the not-quite-square shape of the atrium in the center of the museum and the non-parallel walls of the hallways which connect the two major galleries on the second floor (Fig. 3.4.2, Fig.3.4.3). The angles in the main museum building are continued in the paired building across the green space in front of the entrance. Housing a small café, gift shop, conference rooms and classrooms, the smaller of the building's walls are on a line with those of the main building. Together, they create the outline of a larger, though still irregular, shape, which appears to have had a trapezoidal section cut out of the middle to create the green space.

The green space between the two buildings points directly down Congress Avenue, to the Texas State Capitol building, giving visitors to the museum an easy view

of one of the most recognizable landmarks in Austin (Fig. 3.4.4). The view from between the buildings seems to draw the Capitol building into a dialogue with the museum, reinforcing the strong presence and effect that the University of Texas has in Texas's capital.

Walking into the museum, a visitor first enters into a narrow space containing the front desk, bathrooms, and a coat room. Upon exiting this space, the visitor finds herself in the atrium of the museum. Like most traditional museum atriums, the Blanton's is tall, reaching through both stories of the museum to upright, north facing skylights in the roof (Fig. 3.4.5). These skylights are arranged in a wave form, zigzagging across the atrium and complementing the walls of the atrium, which also function as a piece of art with white smooth brick walls fading into light blue and then deepening into a darker blue to create the impression of water (Fig. 3.4.6). When standing in the atrium, it is easy for the visitor to feel as though she were under the ocean, staring up at the skylight waves. The pattern of moving from darkness to light is echoed in the second floor. Most of the museum galleries are, while not as dark and narrow as the entrance room, not lit by natural light and only a few reach any great size. However, walking through the galleries, the visitor unexpectedly comes upon rooms which echo the atrium in their light and airy feel. The statuary circle room and the long hall in the larger section of galleries are both visible from several rooms away, as the atrium is from the entrance, and tantalize the visitor with glimpses long before the room is reached (Fig. 3.4.3, Fig. 3.4.7). These rooms break up the museum into areas of dark and light, and create a sense of size and space much greater than what actually is.

The Blanton Museum is much smaller than it seems when a visitor is walking through it. It contains three major sections of galleries, one on the first floor and two on the second. On the first floor, the gallery is used for temporary exhibits and is all one L-shaped room around two sides of the atrium. The room is divided by free standing walls dispersed throughout the room which disrupt a visitor's line of site and prevent them from seeing the actual dimensions of the room. The various walls are all painted different matte jewel tones which helps to reinforce the impression of different rooms within the larger room and expand the space (Fig.3.4.8).

Upstairs, the two sections of galleries are each set up in a different format. To the left of the grand stairway the gallery is comprised of square rooms arranged in a grid, with doorways to the rooms adjoining each side (Fig. 3.4.9). When standing in the corner hexagonal room, it is possible to see all of the way out of the gallery in both directions (Fig. 3.4.10). This arrangement makes the galleries seem to extend to cover a much larger area than they actually do. To the right of the grand stairway, the galleries are much less uniform. There are several smaller rooms and one long room arranged around two sides of the atrium, though the only places to return to the atrium are where the two sections of galleries meet. Despite the largely box-like arrangement, the rooms themselves are not perfect boxes. A curved ceiling softens the severe square of the rooms and raises the height of the room, preventing the visitor from becoming too claustrophobic (Fig. 3.4.11).

The interior of the galleries predominantly follows either the pure "white box" style or the "white box" softened through the application of colored walls; gallery walls

contain only the paintings and their labels. When inside the galleries, the museum's sense of place is subdued by the lack of ornamentation or other context providers. However, the building's architecture peeks through between the galleries and prevents the museum from completely denying a sense of place.

Throughout the museum, the Blanton takes what visitors expect to see in an art museum, an atrium and grand stairway, square galleries and exhibition spaces, and gives them just enough of a twist to make them unique and a bit disconcerting. The motto of the City of Austin is "Keep Austin Weird" and with the Blanton Museum of Art the University of Texas acknowledges both this motto and its own more restrained eccentricity.

3.5 The George Washington Carver Museum, Austin, TX

The George Washington Carver Museum is a small section of a much larger community center. The museum was originally housed in a different building, still on the property, that was moved from the center of Austin to its present location in the 1930s and subsequently turned into a branch of the Austin Public Library. The building was converted back into a museum in the 1980s and in the early 2000s a new building, the present Cultural Center, was built to house the museum and serve as a community center (George Washington Carver Museum).

Parking is in the rear of the building and visitors walk up an impressive set of stairs to gain the top of the hill and the entrance to the Cultural Center. The Center is set back from the street, allowing for a picturesque water fountain and geometric forecourt. The original library building stands just past the main entrance to the Center and is currently being renovated to serve as a genealogy center. Past the original library is the current branch of the Austin Public Library. Kealing Middle School stands behind these three buildings and the school and Cultural center frame a city park, making the Cultural Center more of a complex than a building.

Visitors enter into a large oval shaped foyer with a high ceiling which has decorations and square windows around the upper rim, giving it the nickname of “the drum.” The welcome desk is to the immediate right, halls lead off to the left and right,

and double doors lead to the official museum opposite the entrance to the community center.

The museum is named after and dedicated to George Washington Carver, an African-American scientist most famous for his work with peanuts and crop rotation. Just outside the doors to the museum, an inset display case showcases some of Carver's scientific and personal items, including a preserved bull snake in a glass jar, which the card notes as having been Carver's pet. To the left of the display case, a bust of Carver in glass casing partially obscures a description of Carver's life and his major contributions to science and the African-American community.

Before ever walking through the museum doors, it is clear that this museum enjoys neither professionally trained staff nor a large operating budget. Not only does Carver's bust block the largest section of text in the display, the rest of the items are described by typed note cards, either laid on the case or propped up against the stand of the object. Several of the note cards had fallen over when I went to visit, making it impossible to identify some of the objects.

Stepping through the double doors into the museum proper, the visitor is greeted with the sounds of Juneteenth, the first exhibit of the museum. Brightly colored and loud, the exhibit mimics the actual Juneteenth celebration, including a video of local Juneteenth celebrations, which visitors can sit on a picnic table to watch, and a history of the holiday. There are few artifacts in this exhibit, which consists mostly of panels detailing the history and showing pictures of the celebrations. The sound of the video

continues long after the visitor has left the Juneteenth exhibit and provides a constant background noise while visiting the museum.

The next two rooms showcase local families and their stories. Panels accompanied with plastic “books” of photographs and quotes as well as a few artifacts donated by the families, detail prominent Austin African-American families, following them from their entrance into Texas, often before the Civil War, as slaves or freemen to the descendants who live in Austin today. The stories are personal, working for an insider’s view rather than an overview of the history of the area. A wall in the second room displays an exhibit called “jumping the broom” about marriage in the community. A block of text explaining the origin of jumping the broom accompanies wedding pictures and interviews from couples in the community. The couples were all asked the same 10 or so questions and their answers emphasize the values of the community, primarily faith, tradition, and family.

Here too, the museum’s limited resources make themselves known, mainly in typos and askew labels. Though a bit distracting, these small mistakes do not detract from the overall effect of the stories, and in fact serve to emphasize the community nature of the museum.

The final room of the museum is a rotating exhibit, each kept for a month or two before being replaced. While I was there, it was a showcase of memorabilia from an African-American sorority whose history stretches back over one hundred years. Leaving this room, the visitor walks through a short hallway to the exit of the museum, listening

as the music and laughter of Juneteenth once again become predominant and the visitor exits through the same door they entered.

Each of the rooms in the museum is spare, blonde wood flooring and white walls, leaving the focus on the exhibits. Rather than being sterile, the museum feels incomplete and temporary. The blank space seems to be just waiting to be filled; in fact, several empty spaces have small placards asking visitors if they know of an artifact relating to a particular family that could be used to fill the space. Overall, the museum feels as if a few of the rooms of the community center have been portioned off to form a, largely temporary, museum. This feeling makes it seem more as if the community center created a museum rather than being formed around the museum, and draws the visitor's attention to the purpose of the museum as it is today, to emphasize the community values expressed by the Cultural Center.

The George Washington Carver Museum stands in sharp contrast to the similarly purposed Alamo. Both museums commemorate a part of the identity of the local community, but the George Washington Carver Museum enjoys none of the crowds—or the resources they herald—which are omnipresent at the Alamo. Both museums are meant to teach their visitors about their own history, and in this, the George Washington Carver Museum succeeds far beyond the Alamo. Despite its limited resources, the George Washington Carver Museum connects a community to its past while the Alamo provides an experience to the visitor at the expense of the “musing” part of the museum.

3.6 The National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX

The National Museum of the Pacific War incorporates within its built environment four different, but related settings. The museum is made up of two buildings and two garden areas which each serve a different purpose, but all work together to create the narrative of the museum.

The two buildings house two museums with very different content. The Admiral Nimitz Museum is housed in the old Nimitz Hotel (Fig. 3.7.1), while the George H. W. Bush Gallery (Fig. 3.7.2) is a larger and more recent addition to the museum. The design of the outside of the buildings ties them to their respective collections and story, while the built environment inside the two museums is used to link the different content between the two buildings, giving the visitor a visual link that provides support for a content link which is not as obvious.

The Admiral Nimitz Museum is housed in the old Nimitz Hotel, where Adm. Nimitz grew up. The building has been renovated several times since Adm. Nimitz lived there as a child, but the façade has been restored as much as possible to how it looked during the 1890s, during Adm. Nimitz's childhood. The white slat building features a prominent "ship's prow" beginning at the second story and providing a covered walkway for visitors entering the museum (Fig. 3.7.3). For visitors aware of the building's history, the ship's prow is an almost ironic feature of the building, considering Adm. Nimitz's later career as Commander in Chief of the Pacific (CINCPAC), though

visitors unfamiliar with the history may mistake it for an addition contextualizing the contents of the museum. The building is a designated historical site by the Texas Historical Commission (Fig. 3.7.4) and has been a Fredericksburg landmark for over 150 years. The building's strong ties to the community reflect the exhibits it holds. Whereas the rest of the museum looks at history on the global scale, the Admiral Nimitz Museum is oriented toward the local. The two major exhibits inside tell the story of the Nimitz family in Fredericksburg and the story of the life of Admiral Chester Nimitz, CINCPAC during World War II.

The George H.W. Bush Gallery was built in 2009 and houses the exhibits on the War in the Pacific, which tells the story of the Pacific Theater of WWII beginning with the back-story of the tensions between Japan and China and the opening of Japan to the west in the early 1800s. The entryway to the museum is glass-fronted and roofed in what appears to be ribbed sheet metal, giving the impression of a repurposed aircraft hangar, though it was built for the museum (Fig. 3.7.5). The outside of the museum contains numerous allusions to the ocean, the primary combat theater in the Pacific. The side of the Gallery building is divided from the street by a sinuous curving wall, which makes the Gallery appear to be floating on a sandstone ocean (Fig. 3.7.2) and a side entrance which is capped by shimmering metal waves (Fig. 3.7.6). Combined with the artillery guns positioned all along the side of the gallery (Fig. 3.7.7), the gallery is intentionally built to make the theme of the building apparent before the visitor ever steps inside.

Inside each building, the space is clearly divided into the lobby and the exhibits. The lobby continues the theme begun by the building's exterior. In the Nimitz Museum, the lobby resembles that of a visitor center, with unadorned cream colored walls, white molding, and a large and prominent desk. The lobby reaches into the building to form a hallway between the two exhibits, which stand on either side of the lobby. Off the hallway is a ballroom, the only visitor accessible room in the building that looks like it is part of an old hotel. A large space with aged wood flooring and surrounding balcony, the space reminds the passing visitor of the age and history of the hotel (Fig. 3.7.8), fitting as he or she moves from the Nimitz family history exhibit to the life of Admiral Nimitz. In the George H.W. Bush Gallery, the lobby continues the illusion of an aircraft hangar, with ribbed sheet metal squares curving along the ceiling (Fig. 3.7.9). Both lobbies are well lit and dedicated to directing visitors.

Once inside the exhibits, the two buildings are distinguishable only through content. The exhibits make a sharp contrast to the lobbies, with low lighting and narrow pathways. The light is focused on the walls, which consist primarily of text over large scale pictures, occasionally interspersed with built-in artifact cases (Fig. 3.7.10). Inside the buildings, the linear nature of the narrative of the museum is echoed in the linear path formed by the exhibits. There are few true "rooms" in either of the buildings. Instead, doorways are used to distinguish parts of the path from each other (Fig. 3.7.11-12). This presents the history shown in the buildings as a linear progression, flowing from one part to another, without showing clear divisions between events. This is true in both the exhibits of the Nimitz Museum and those of the George H.W. Bush Gallery.

Despite the obvious differences in content between the exhibits, they are clearly linked through their built environment.

The George H.W. Bush Gallery also uses the accents along the path, doorframes and the decorated columns where panels meet, to indicate where in the narrative the visitor is. When the visitor first enters the museum exhibits, the narrative is of Japanese history and the path is accented with red Shinto arch doorways and column dividers and oriental style designs above and below the pictures and timeline along the walls (Fig. 3.7.11). With the advent of the war, the accents change to steel, and the color palate shifts to greys (Fig. 3.7.12). Other accents include sets of drawers which appear to come from ships, featuring thick rope handles which allow the drawer to be pulled out to display yet more objects. Of course, the most prominent features of the museum are the planes, tanks, boats and artillery. Many of the vehicles saw actual combat and so allow the visitor to see the aftermath of battle. The vehicles are full size and their exhibits create the largest rooms in the museum, though the visitor is separated from them and the path continues without deviation (Fig. 3.7.13).

Sound and light are used to complement the physical accents. In the earliest sections of the museum, before WWII begins, the music is oriental, continuing the impression of the visible museum and placing the visitor firmly in 19th century Japan. The visitor is introduced to the war through an experience of the Pearl Harbor attack. The story is told through text, images, and video projected on a long wall above a small submarine and accented by sounds, lights, and moving projections. For example, when the first submarine torpedoes are fired, first a SONAR ping is heard, followed by the

projection of the image of a torpedo which glides along the floor of the room, finally ending in sound and lights simulating an explosion. Similar multimedia presentations are found throughout the museum. One accompanies a war torn tank and the oral story of the man who survived the attack which left the tank in that condition (Fig. 3.7.14). Other sounds include jungle rainfall, bird calls and insect noises in the island sections and propaganda songs from both the US and Japan. Throughout the museum, the ambient noise reinforces the mood set by the built environment and both place the visitor more firmly in the events displayed in the narrative path of the museum.

The museum also uses technology to create a more interactive environment. Oral history stations allow visitors to hear the history of the war in the words of the people who experienced it firsthand. Stories come from both sides of the war and range from veterans of the war and citizens on the home front to Japanese-Americans who were forced into the internment camps (Fig. 3.7.15). Touch screen computers allow visitors to dig deeper into topics and play trivia games while table top computer screens show the progression of battles, including images, video, and audio (Fig.3.7.16). The integration of technology into the museum allows the visitor a wider experience than could otherwise be had with simple static text and objects.

Outside the museum, the outdoor gardens provide a more implicit, free form continuation of the explicit narrative found in the buildings. While the buildings provide the story before and during the war, the gardens continue the story up to the present day. The Memorial Garden shows the aftermath of the war, displaying plaques and bricks commemorating soldiers who fought in the war, while the Japanese Garden

represents a reconciliation between the two parties whose animosity is so clearly shown in the rest of the museum.

The Memorial Garden is undecorated, only a brick path lined by trees following stone walls which encloses a grassy square (Fig. 3.7.17). The stone walls displays plaques which show the names and stories of men and women who fought in the Pacific theater of WWII while the bricks in the path are available to anyone who wants to support the museum. The most prominent feature is a pool with a propeller from an aircraft carrier serving as a centerpiece (Fig. 3.7.18). In March, when I visited, the grass was largely brown from a combination of winter and drought and the courtyard was a somber contrast to the surrounding areas, full of flower beds and blooming trees.

The Japanese Peace Garden was a gift from the people of Japan in acknowledgement of Adm. Nimitz's respect for the Japanese and his work in healing relations between the US and Japan after the war. The garden is designed in traditional Japanese style, including a small building which models a Japanese study, a sand garden, and small stream (often dry due to Texas's drought), but is installed using native plants (Fig. 3.7.19-20). In mid-march, the redbud trees were in bloom and it was easy to see the parallel to the Japanese cherry blossoms. For anyone who knows how to read it, the garden's melding of Japan and Texas expresses a sense of resolution after the terrible conflict depicted in the George H.W. Bush Gallery.

The National Museum of the Pacific War uses its built environment to integrate the disparate parts of its museum and ensure that the visitor moves through the narrative the museum has created. While the narrative path is very narrow, both

physically and ideologically, the built environment also allows it to be clearly divided without losing the linear nature of the path. Outside the exhibits, the grounds of the museum are incorporated into the narrative and give the events shown in the museum exhibits closure and continuity. The created whole of the museum displays local history and world events, conflict and resolution, and pride and sorrow. Through its built environment, the museum creates a space that allows the visitor to experience all of these places and emotions without leaving one small square block in a Texas Hill Country town.

4. Conclusion

When I began this thesis, I expected to see a great deal less diversity in the museums I studied. All of the museums I looked at no longer put themselves completely inside the “white box.” What I saw instead was a reflection of the long history of museums. From the princely gallery to the cabinets of curiosity to the modern “white box” to the post modern architecture to the unique community museums, each is represented in the museums I studied.

Instead of being ruled by any one style or form, these museums take elements from each of the styles from previous eras and turn them into blocks from which to form their built environment. When the art is modern, for instance, a “white box” style might be used, representing the museums contemporary to the art. At other times, when the art is from a modern culture, the rooms reflect the environment of that culture, ranging from the subtlety of paint colors to detailed architectural accents. History and community are acknowledged in both collections and the rooms and buildings that house them.

Each museum uses context, sometimes subtle, sometimes not, to complement the collections and purposes of the museum. Even the “white box,” meant to provide a context free space for art, becomes a context in this new museum form. Using these contexts, each museum reflects and narrates its own history and the greater history of museums through its own unique built environment

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