

THE MUSEUM STRIPPED BARE BY (or TO?) ITS GALLERIES

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Synopsis: This architecture design studio proposes both a brief and a counter-brief. Students can adopt either position, after having briefly tested both.

- *Brief: students will envision a hypothetical art museum **without** galleries.*
- *Counter-Brief: students will envision a hypothetical art museum with **only** galleries.*

Within either framework, you will work in pairs to design a new medium sized museum on a site to be determined in conversation with the students. In either case, you will challenge traditional spatial and organizational qualities of galleries and support spaces in a search for a rigorous and inventive architecture. At the beginning of the semester we will make several field trips to museums in NYC.

From Cabinet of Curiosities to Mall

The evolution of the museum from private collection to tourist mecca parallels a spatial evolution from room to larger frameworks. From Wunderkammer to mall, museums have become spatially and technically more complex as they accommodate an exponentially increased number and type of visitors, a wider range of art forms, a broader selection of programs and uses, and more stringent technical, environmental and security parameters. As with most cultural and technological shifts, the transformation of the museum as a type has been gradual enough to go largely unnoticed, or at least incrementally accepted, by the public. The museum-goer now expects tour bus drop-off, an atrium, multiple restaurants, multiple gift stores, movie theaters and auditoria, VIP entrances and function rooms, kids' spaces, education spaces, restrooms, coat checks... the list continues to grow. Meanwhile the development of new art forms either outpaces or is sometimes constrained by the spatial and technical capacities of the spaces in which they are displayed or enacted to the public. Has the museum as a building type grown too complex? Or should we, as architects, embrace this increasing complexity?

Museum as Iceberg

Behind the scenes, collection, conservation, scholarship and interpretation, and to some extent education have historically occurred beyond the public's gaze. Support spaces, ranging from loading docks to storage to workshops and labs are on a trajectory of increasing complexity, technical performance, and sheer scale. Compressed between competing external and internal pressures – a populist and scenographic landscape for visitors and this technical apparatus supporting them and the art – galleries have become highly mediated spaces. As with the airport, primary and secondary functions intertwine, capturing increasing periods of time and amounts of money from exhausted visitors. In some ways the cumulative space of the galleries within a museum resembles the visible portion of an iceberg, connected to a submerged realm either invisible to the museum-goer, or visible as something else: a space of commerce and spectacle.

Challenges to the Gallery

With a decline in philanthropic support, museums in the last two decades have turned their attention from constructing iconic new buildings, to focusing on assets at hand, such as their back of house spaces. Also seeing opportunities to more directly engage their visitors, art institutions have developed new ways to reveal the internal processes of collection, conservation and interpretation. These traditionally 'invisible' spaces have expanded curatorial routes. Works such as Janet Cardiff's 2001 *PS1 Walk*, undermine the authority of the gallery as the ideal space for art, in this case sending visitors on a solitary audio tour of the museum's support spaces. As such, both artists and institutions increasingly question the gallery as the museum's primary physical and conceptual building block, and by extension the organizational structures of museums at large.



Museum without Walls

In 1947, art theorist Andre Malraux went further, imagining a museum without limits. In his seminal *Musée Imaginaire*, he conceptualized the museum “as an open field into which the viewer’s own imaginative, imaginative, projective, play was welcomed”. An idealized collection of the imagination, it was in reaction to the rigid sequential experience of the institutionalized museum, as represented by a series of rooms *en filade*. Translated into English as *Museum Without Walls*, *Musée Imaginaire*’s spatial analog can be found in the universal spaces of Mies van der Rohe (National Gallery) and the spiral ramp of Frank Lloyd Wright (Guggenheim).

Studio

Our studio begins at this moment of uncertainty about the gallery. Within the framework of designing an art museum, should we accept or resist its gradual disappearance as legible space – a room? We choose both.

Brief: A Museum without Galleries

Students will envision a hypothetical art museum **without** galleries. By this we mean without galleries as we conceive of them today. Instead, the museum’s increasing heterogeneity, complexity and populism will serve as a springboard for the imagination – an extrapolation of the museum’s evolution that considers what could happen in the museum’s supposedly secondary spaces? Could spaces for production, support, guest services, education and circulation serve as an armature for art? How would a museum without traditional galleries adapt to existing art forms or catalyze new ones? This brief represents a radical acceptance of current trends – an extrapolation on the erasure of the room.

Counter-Brief: A Museum with only Galleries

Students will envision a hypothetical art museum **with** only galleries. By this we mean that the museum’s supposedly secondary spaces are now to be reframed as galleries in their own right. In this case the project will reject or absorb the museum’s increasing spatial heterogeneity, complexity and populism within the spatial limits of the gallery. How would a museum reframe all of its constituent parts within the logic of rooms, while resisting a nostalgic return to the Wunderkammer? This counter-brief therefore represents an act of resistance, an insistence on the spatial primacy of the room.

Studio Organization

Students will work in pairs. Expected to research, read selected readings, develop clear concepts and conceptual drawings, build digital and physical models in series, students will be challenged to develop conceptually innovative designs for radical museums with an understanding of the broader context of the evolving discourse about the relationship between art and its environment. Eric Bunge and Mimi Hoang will each be in studio an average of 1.5 times a week, with scheduled overlaps for internal pinups and reviews.

Note: We will have two finals. The first is the design final with an invited jury on August 1st. The second, on August 7th, is a pdf submission, which will address some of the comments from the design final review jury by revising or adding drawings.

Students selected for this studio should come to the first class on June 5th with your portfolio (for us to understand your educational background), and a plan and section of an art museum you are interested in. Please be prepared to briefly present.

Problem 1.1 (June 5th - June 10th): Research + Precedent Analysis

Each group of students will study a pair of museum precedents, producing analytical drawings and “anatomical” models. Your goal is to represent the museums in three ways:

- As a whole, with everything – galleries + support spaces, etc.
- With galleries removed. What remains?
- Without everything else – only galleries.

In each case, you will represent both tangible aspects – ie the physical/spatial organization of the buildings - as well as intangible aspects – ie the operational, curatorial, environmental, conceptual, etc. Pairs of museums selected by your critics from this list will be assigned through a mini-lottery:

Primary list of museums in NYC

- Met Breuer, Marcel Breuer
- New Museum, SANAA
- Whitney, Renzo Piano
- Guggenheim, Frank Lloyd Wright
- MoMA PS1
- Noguchi Museum, Isamu Noguchi

Primary list of museums outside NYC

- Sir John Soane’s Museum
- Centre Pompidou, Paris, Piano/Rogers
- Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark, Wohlert and Bo.
- MUSAC, Leon, Spain, Mansilla & Tuñon
- Chichu Art Musuem, Japan, Tadao Ando
- Maxxi Musuem, Rome, Zaha Hadid Architects

Additional museums in NYC

- MoMA
- Brooklyn Museum of Art
- Studio Museum, Harlem
- Museo del Barrio
- Frick Museum
- Cooper Hewitt
- Neue Galerie
- Sculpture Center
- Japan Society

Pinup: June 10th.

Deliverables: Analytical axonometrics.

Problem 1.2 (June 10th - June 17th): Refinement

Each group will make a decision: brief or counter brief? You will focus on one interpretation (without galleries or with only galleries) of your two precedents.

Pinup: June 17th.

Deliverables:

- A single, immersive, detailed and spectacular axonometric drawing for each museum (total 2 drawings).
- A 3d-printed model for each (total 2). Take photos on a black background and include in your presentation.
- The entire studio presentation will be presented as a single 11”x17” pdf, with a template provided by your TA.

Problem 2.1 (June 17th - July 3rd): Proto-Museum

Each group will design a proto-museum, without galleries or with only galleries, on an abstract site to be provided. By “proto”, we mean before, or almost – for us the “proto-building” is an abstract conceptual model that tests systems of organization and spatial structure. This proto-building will be the DNA of your future design. We will work at a fast pace through iterative design studies, starting with small models and increasing in scale/size.

Midterm: July 3rd

Deliverables:

- Physical “Proto-Model” (and previous studies)
- A single, immersive, detailed and spectacular axonometric drawing of your proto-museum.
- Plans and Sections – no renderings or perspectives.

Problem 2.2 (July 3rd - August 1st): Museum

Each group will work towards the design of their museum on a site to be determined in conversation with the students.

Final Review: August 1st

Deliverables: to be determined.

Bibliography (forthcoming)