

WALKER ART CENTER

Walker Art Center 1971

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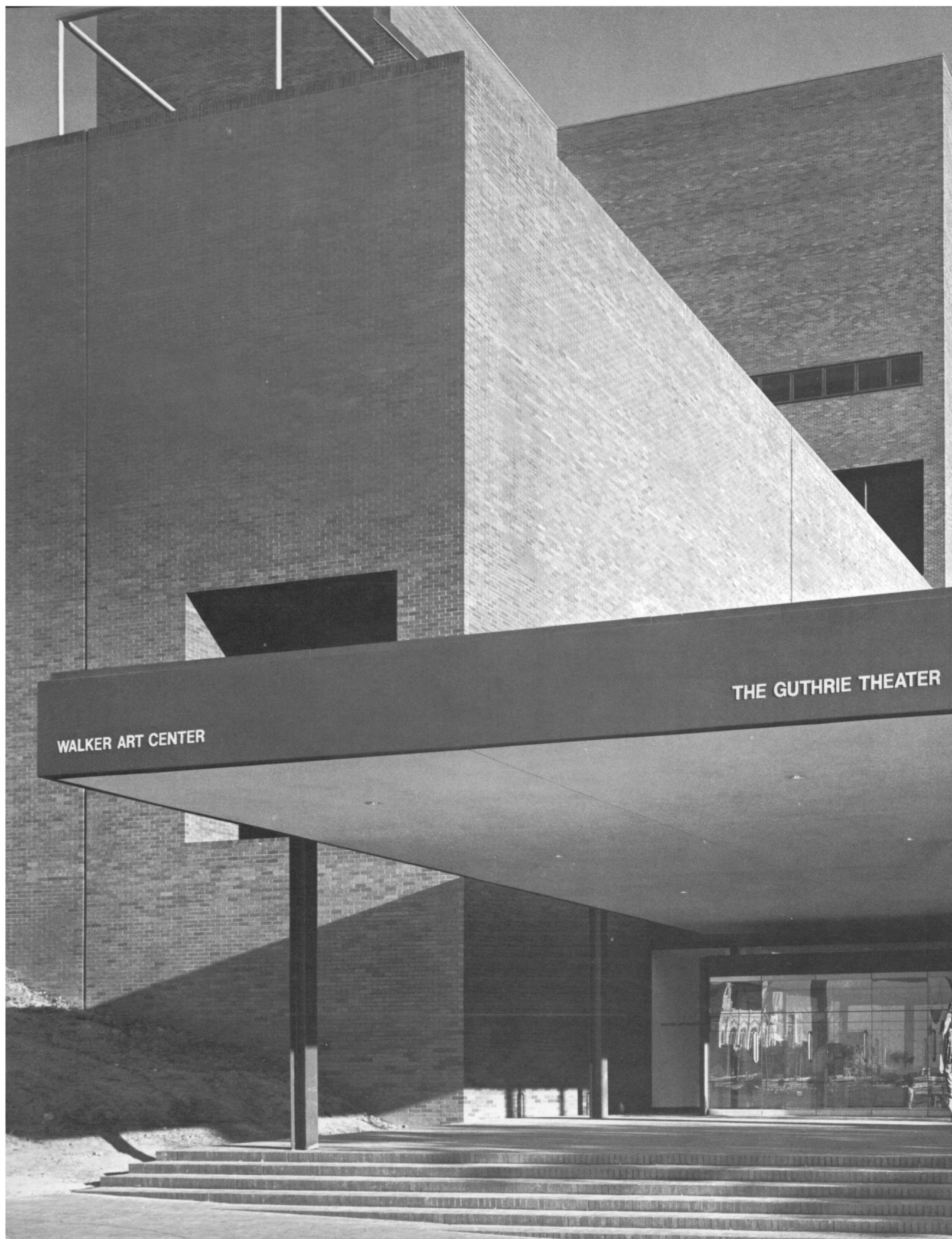
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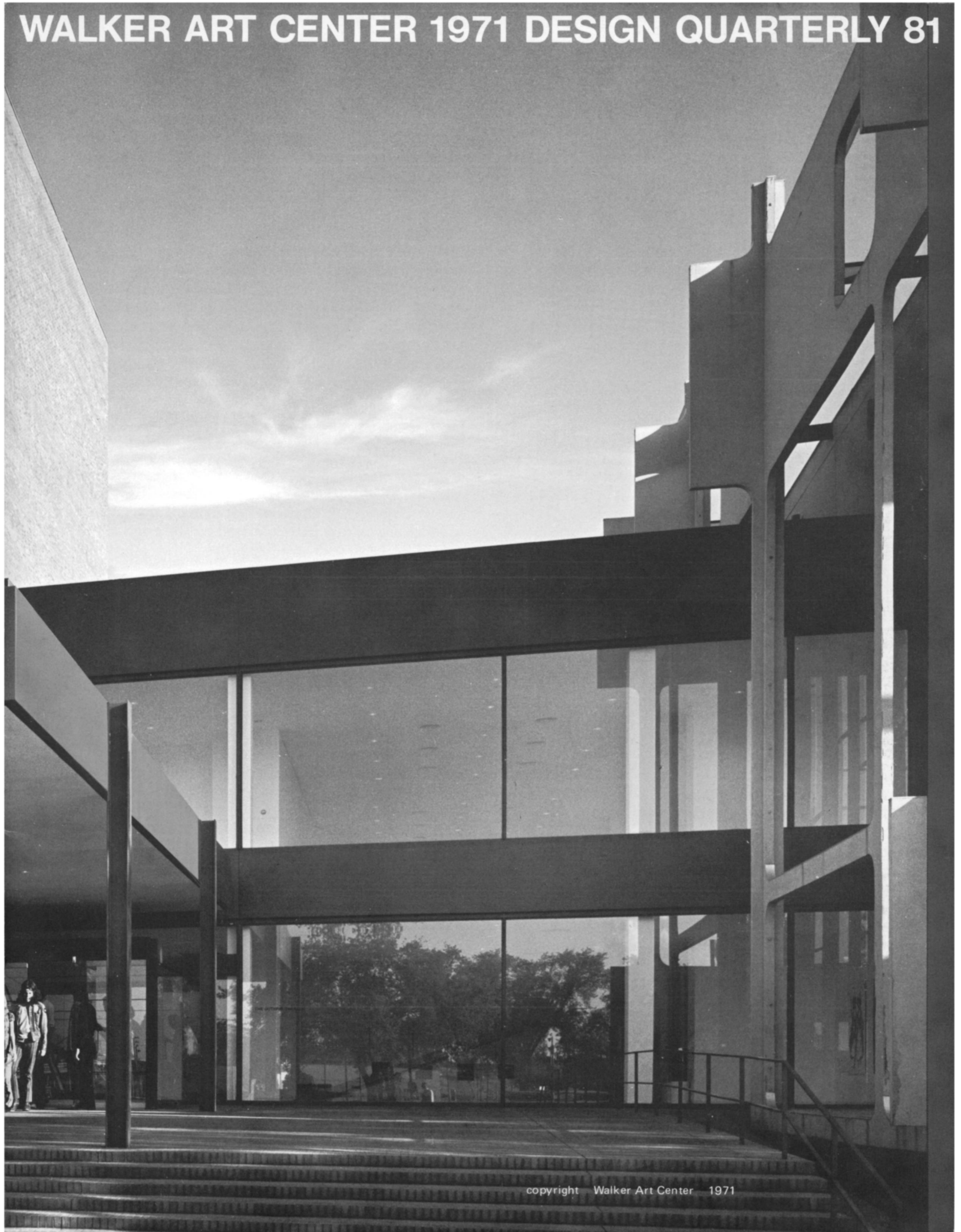


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WALKER ART CENTER 1971 DESIGN QUARTERLY 81



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Walker Art Center is a contemporary art museum concerned with painting, sculpture and other visual manifestations of the recent past and with the innovative work of the present. A primary reason for building the new museum was the need to provide space for a multiplicity of new activities.

Built on marshy ground in 1927, the old Walker Art Center building was in poor structural condition. It was also too small and inflexible to house an expanding permanent collection and the range of temporary exhibitions, education programs, concerts, films and other activities that had come to characterize the museum's program. While the 1,450 seat Guthrie Theater (connected physically to both the old and new museum) is used for many of the Art Center's performing arts events, smaller audience spaces for lectures, films and chamber concerts were required.

Edward Larrabee Barnes was originally asked to remodel the old building and to design new spaces for lectures and performing arts. His preliminary studies revealed the difficulties of shoring up the old structure and the attendant problems of remodeling; cost analyses soon proved that a new building, properly programed, would be a superior long-term solution to the Art Center's needs. The architect's initial proposals for the new museum on adjacent park land were not feasible because of cost and because of the Park Board's unwillingness to use the land for this purpose.

The decision to build on the old site was determined by three general, interrelated factors—economics, proximity to The Guthrie Theater and tradition. The T. B. Walker Foundation provided the land for The Guthrie Theater, built in 1963; purchase of a new site for the Art Center would have greatly increased costs. Although the present site is constricted, it is immediately accessible to central Minneapolis and outlying areas via the adjacent freeway system. The new Art Center was conceived as an urban museum and the retention of the non-idyllic site is implicit recognition that contemporary art has its major sources and audience in the center city. Further, the symbiotic relationship of the museum to The Guthrie Theater increased attendance at both institutions. (Backstage and administrative additions to The Guthrie Theater were designed by Mr. Barnes and constructed concurrently with the new Art Center.)

Rebuilding on the original site made it necessary for the Art Center to function for two years in temporary quarters and to develop exhibitions and programs throughout the city. This required enlisting the interest and support of many public and private organizations—schools, business firms, city agencies—and has significantly influenced the new Art Center's program. The experience of working in diverse city spaces has been invaluable to the Art Center staff and the museum will continue to go out into the community with exhibitions and projects that require a larger or more public environment than any building can provide.

Edward Barnes understands the function of the museum as a background for works of art. The Art Center's requirements were for large interior spaces, free of complex detail. The new galleries allow maximum flexibility in installation; the white, loft-like spaces adapt easily to various kinds of exhibitions and activities. They are in marked contrast to the dark, plum-colored exterior brick that forms a continuous surface enclosing the building.

The new museum has gained fifty percent in gallery space over the previous building. Three roof sculpture terraces were added during the evolution of the program because the site did not allow for a ground floor exterior garden or sculpture court. Administrative, shop and storage facilities have been greatly increased in size and efficiency. Extensive spans are provided, in all interior spaces, by the precast concrete T beams that form the ceilings and floors. Light tracks are contained in the beams and can support temporary partitions. In addition, free-standing temporary partitions can be used to create smaller areas in the galleries. A perceptible scale change, as one progresses through the spaces, gives identity to each gallery. Heights increase from ten feet in Gallery 1 to eighteen feet in Gallery 6 and the galleries are further particularized by their varied square footage.

WORKS FOR NEW SPACES, the opening exhibition, explored the use of the galleries as workshops. Artists designed and constructed pieces in and for specific areas and dynamic spatial changes occurred through the building. (See catalogue, WORKS FOR NEW SPACES, Walker Art Center, 1971.)

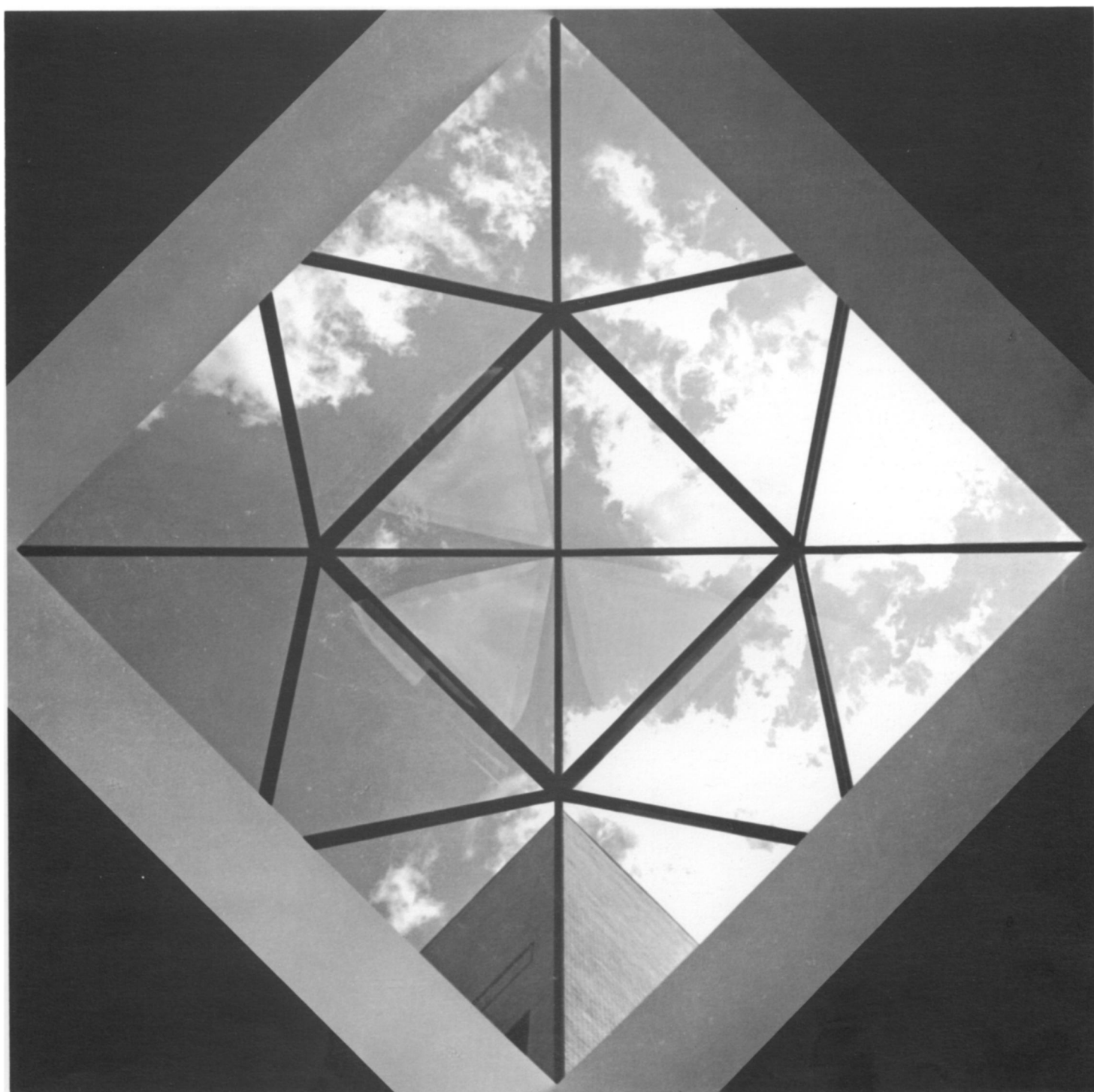
The plan of the new Art Center combines the central core scheme of many classical museums with the sequential, or programed, circulation scheme typified by the Guggenheim Museum. Circulation around the elevator-stair core, from the ground floor to the roof decks, enables the visitor to by-pass galleries closed for installation without interruption or backtracking. The absence of long corridors and interior firestairs results in maximum usable space, and the exterior firestairs read as strong sculptural elements on the massive facades. Continuous interior walls and extended vistas are important benefits of Mr. Barnes' closed plan. Natural light is used sparingly in the lower galleries—none in Gallery 1 and 2, a diagonal window in Gallery 3 and a skylight in Gallery 6. Roof decks act as pedestals for large outdoor sculpture and a full glass wall relates Gallery 7 to Terrace I, where the viewer may study sculpture against the city skyline. A glass wall also relates the restaurant to Terrace III. Through these glass walls and from the triangular window projecting over Terrace II the visitor can see all outdoor sculpture—a useful feature during Minnesota's severe winters.

Adjacent to the concourse, uniting the Walker Art Center and The Guthrie Theater, is the museum's

lobby. The lobby contains the Center Book Shop and serves as an information area for exhibitions and other events. Off the lobby, one half level down, are a small Oriental Gallery and the Education Department. The Auditorium and Lecture/Information Room are also on the lobby level. The steeply raked, 350-seat auditorium, with a huge white screen as its front wall, is used for films, lectures, chamber concerts and other events. A wide, curved wall in the 75-seat Lecture/Information Room is used for films, slides and multiple projection events, and the room serves as an orientation point for tours and classes.

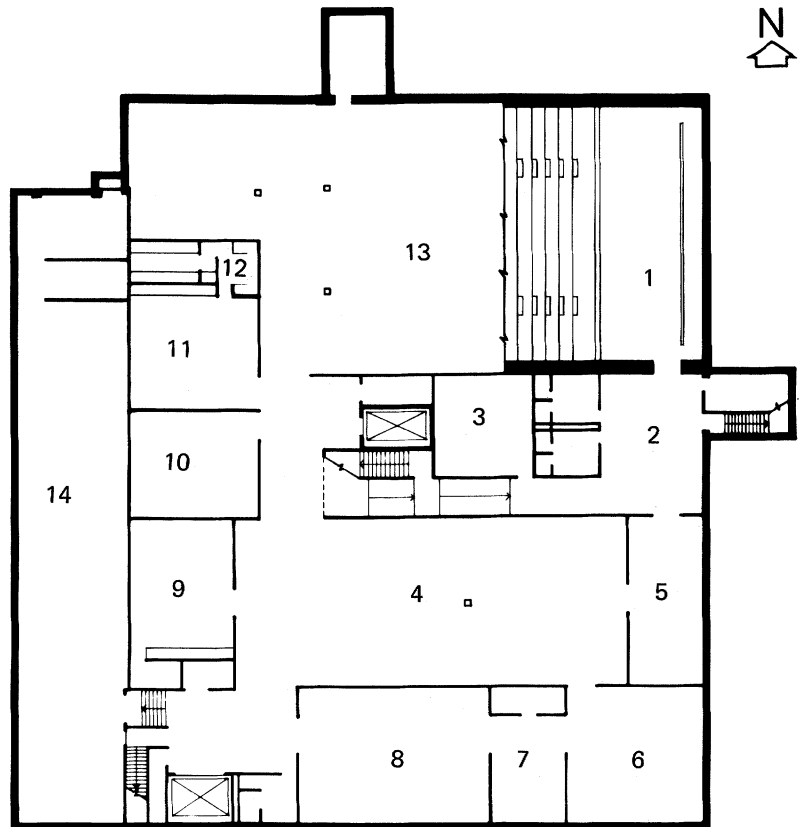
Walker Art Center combines the traditional museum functions—preserving and presenting works of art—with a new objective to provide large, flexible areas for the creation of ambitious works. An open environment for the experience of art unites the artist's needs with those of his growing audience.

Mildred S. Friedman



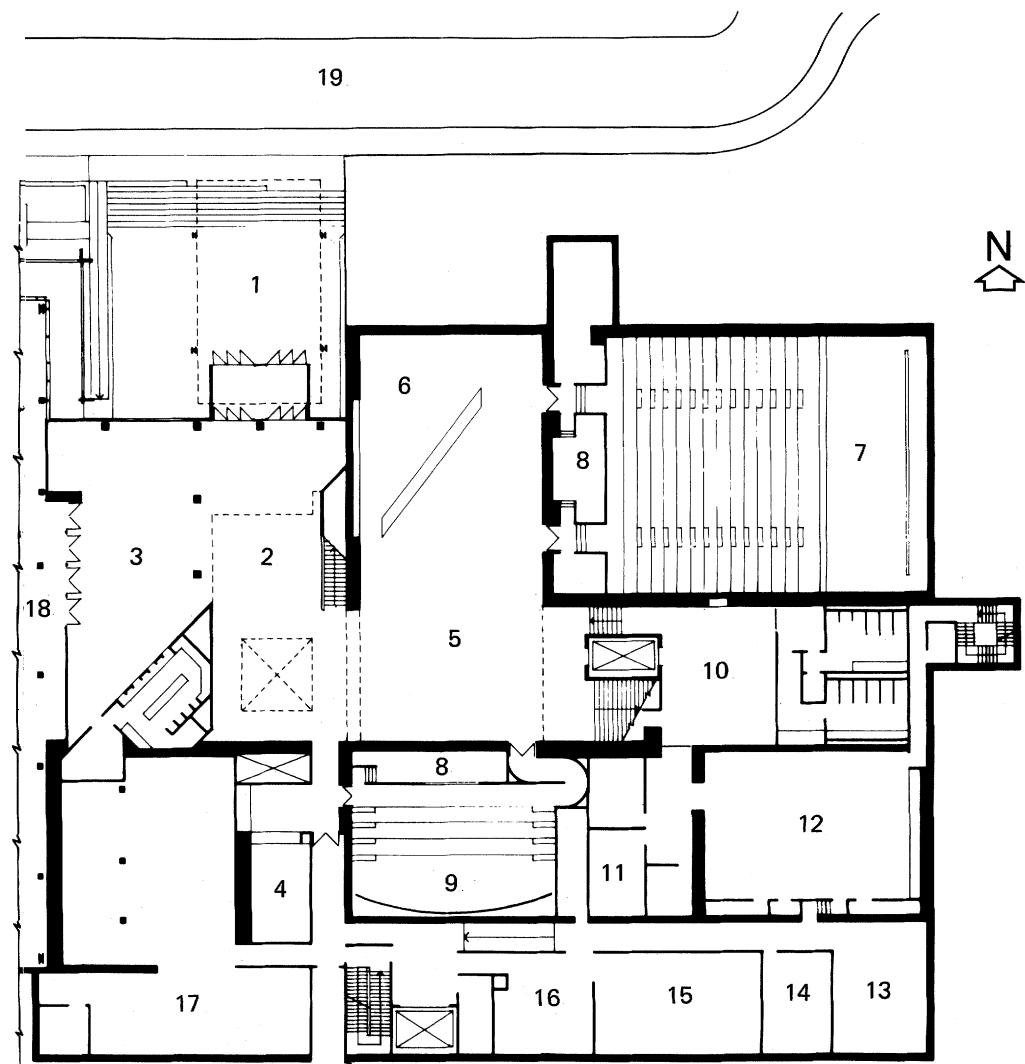
Basement Floor Plan

1. Auditorium Stage
2. Backstage Area
3. Workshop
4. Crate Storage
5. Long Painting Storage
6. Prop Storage
7. Paint Room
8. Carpenter's Shop
9. Exhibition Shop
10. Conservation
11. Photography
12. Dark Room
13. Art Storage
14. Mechanical Space



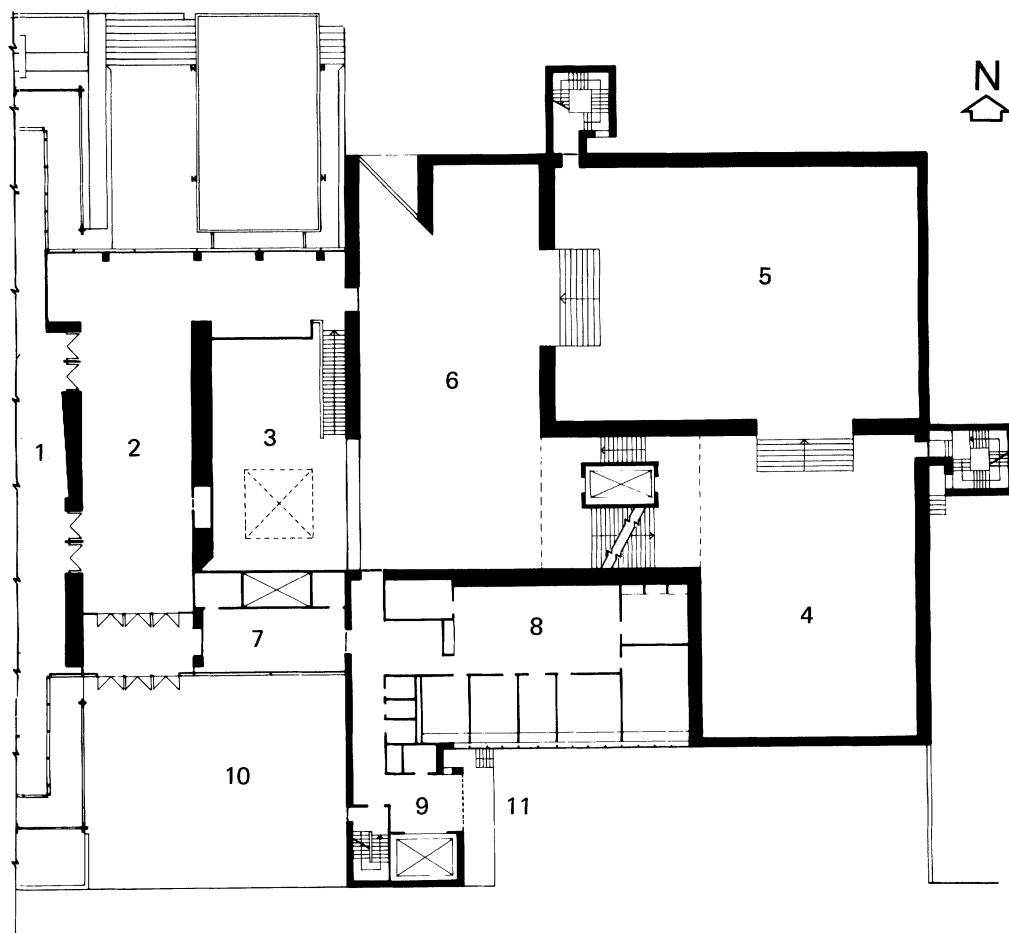
Ground Floor Plan

1. North Entrance Plaza
2. Concourse
3. Guthrie Lobby and Box Office
4. Art Center Coat Room
5. Art Center Lobby
6. Center Book Shop
7. Auditorium
8. Projection Booth
9. Lecture/Information Room
10. Oriental Gallery
11. Education Department
12. Education Studio
13. Maintenance Department
14. Staff Lounge
15. Publication Storage
16. Mail Room
17. Mechanical Space
18. Guthrie Theater House
19. Vineland Place



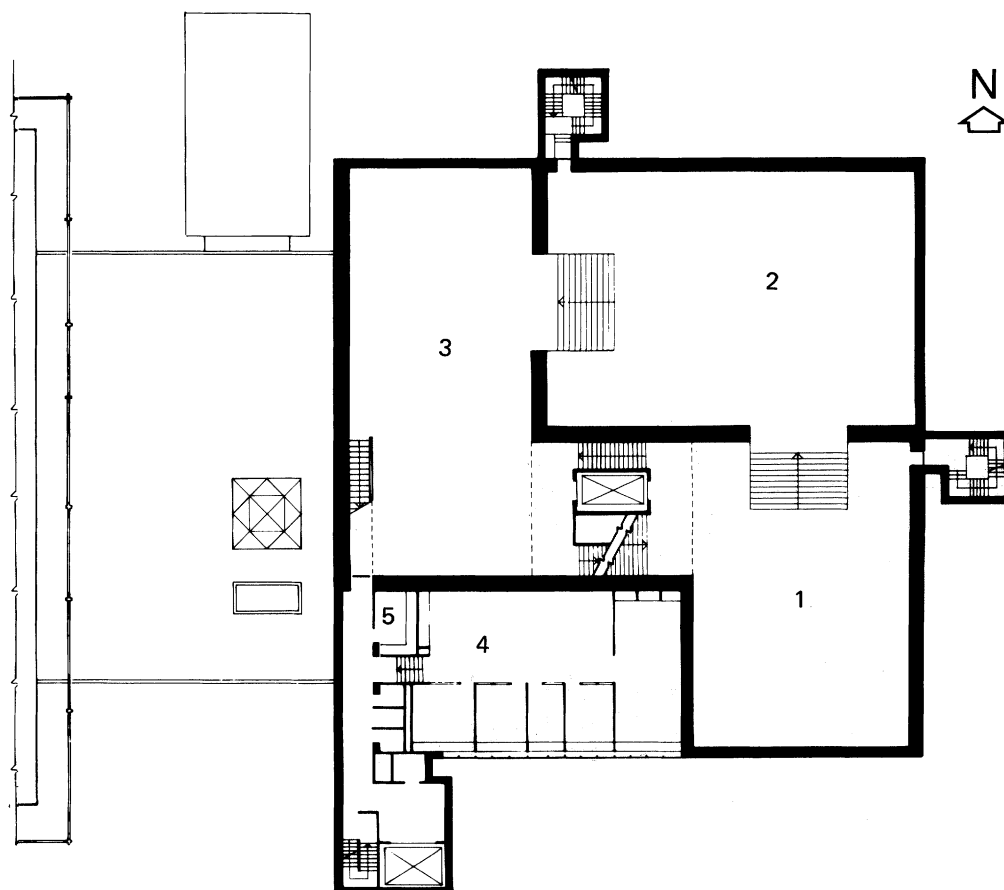
First Floor Plan

1. The Guthrie Theater Balcony
2. The Guthrie Theater Upper Lobby
3. Open to Lobby Below
4. Gallery 1
5. Gallery 2
6. Gallery 3
7. Administrative Lobby
8. Administrative Offices
9. Loading Dock
10. South Entrance Plaza
11. Delivery Entrance



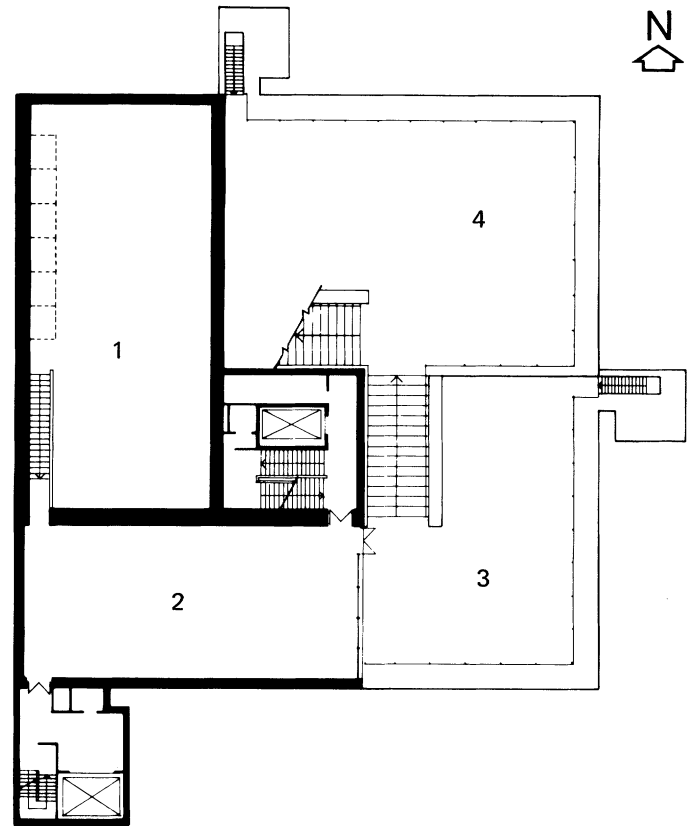
Second Floor Plan

1. Gallery 4
2. Gallery 5
3. Gallery 6
4. Administrative Offices
5. Staff Lounge



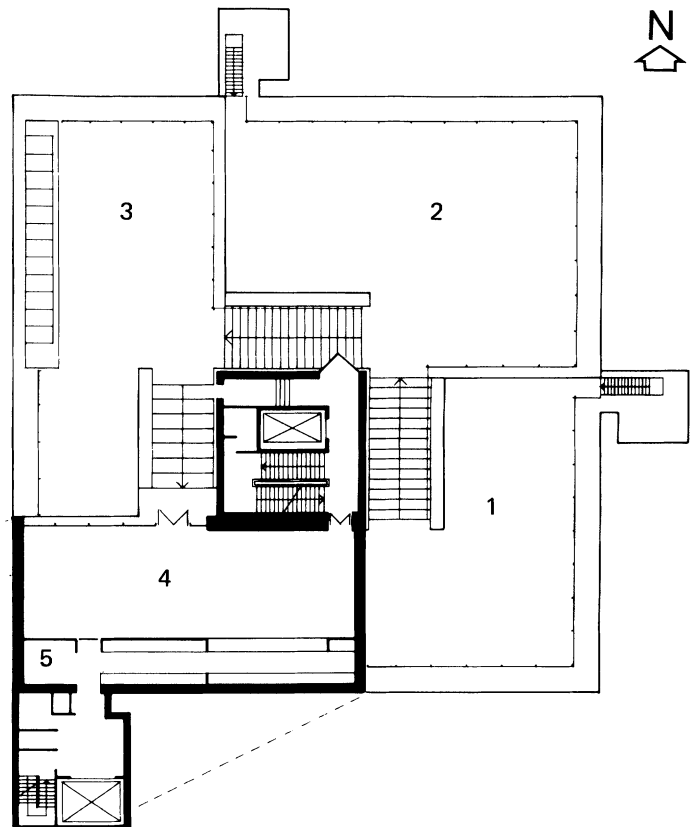
Third Floor Plan

1. Open to Gallery 6 Below
2. Gallery 7
3. Terrace I
4. Terrace II



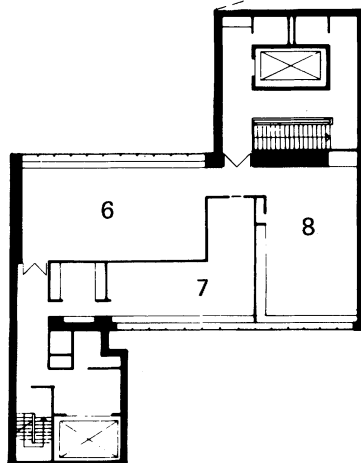
Fourth Floor Plan

1. Terrace I
2. Terrace II
3. Terrace III
4. Restaurant
5. Kitchen



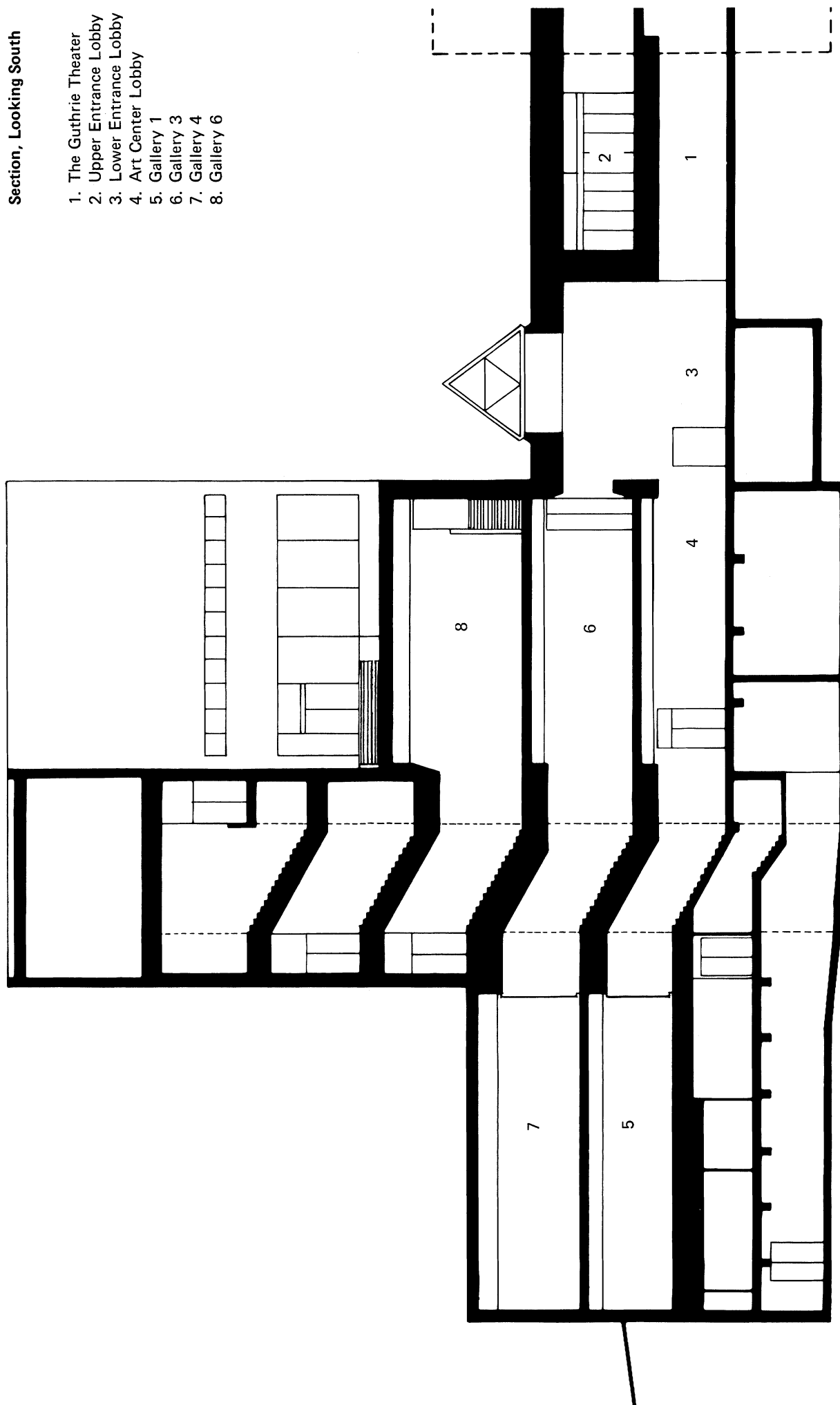
Fifth Floor Plan

6. Conference Room
7. Library
8. Design Studio

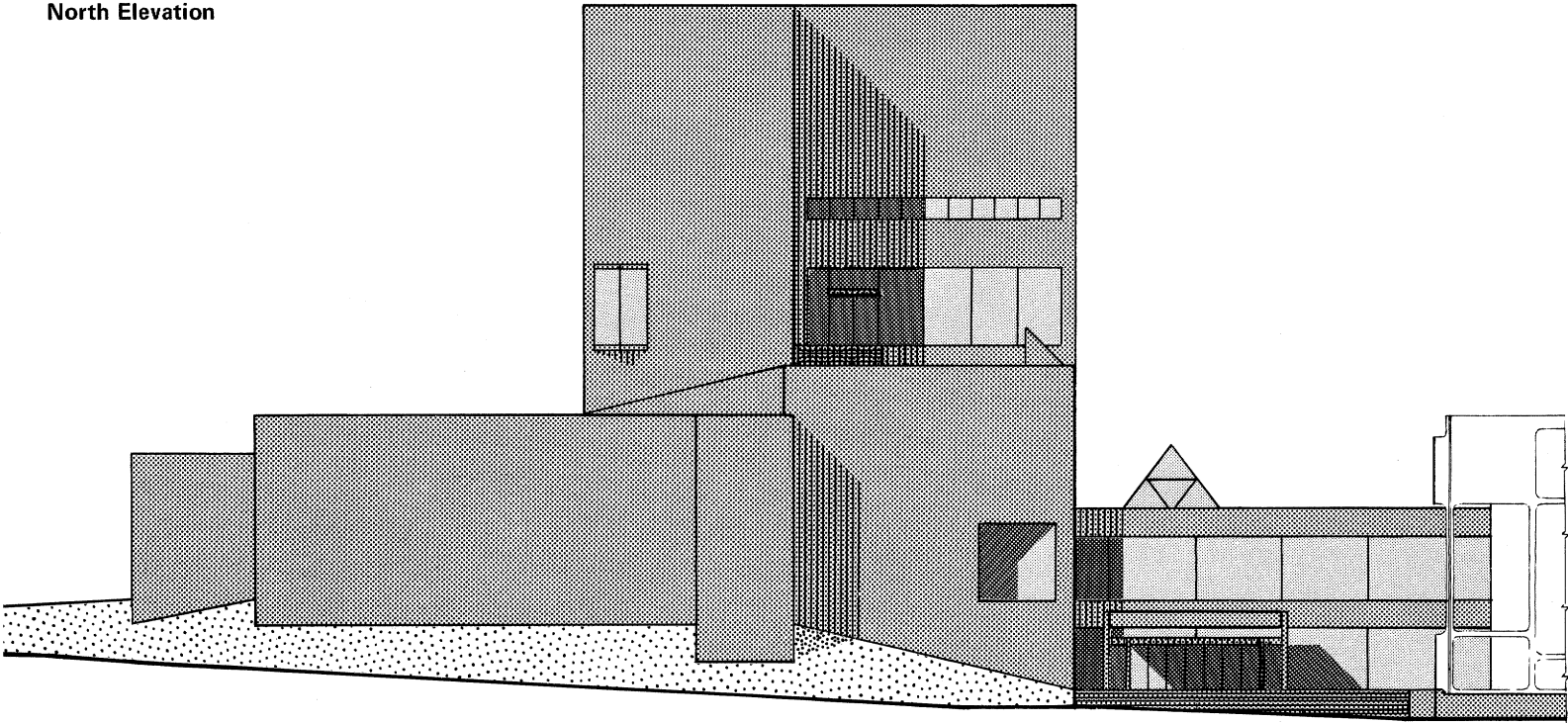


Section, Looking South

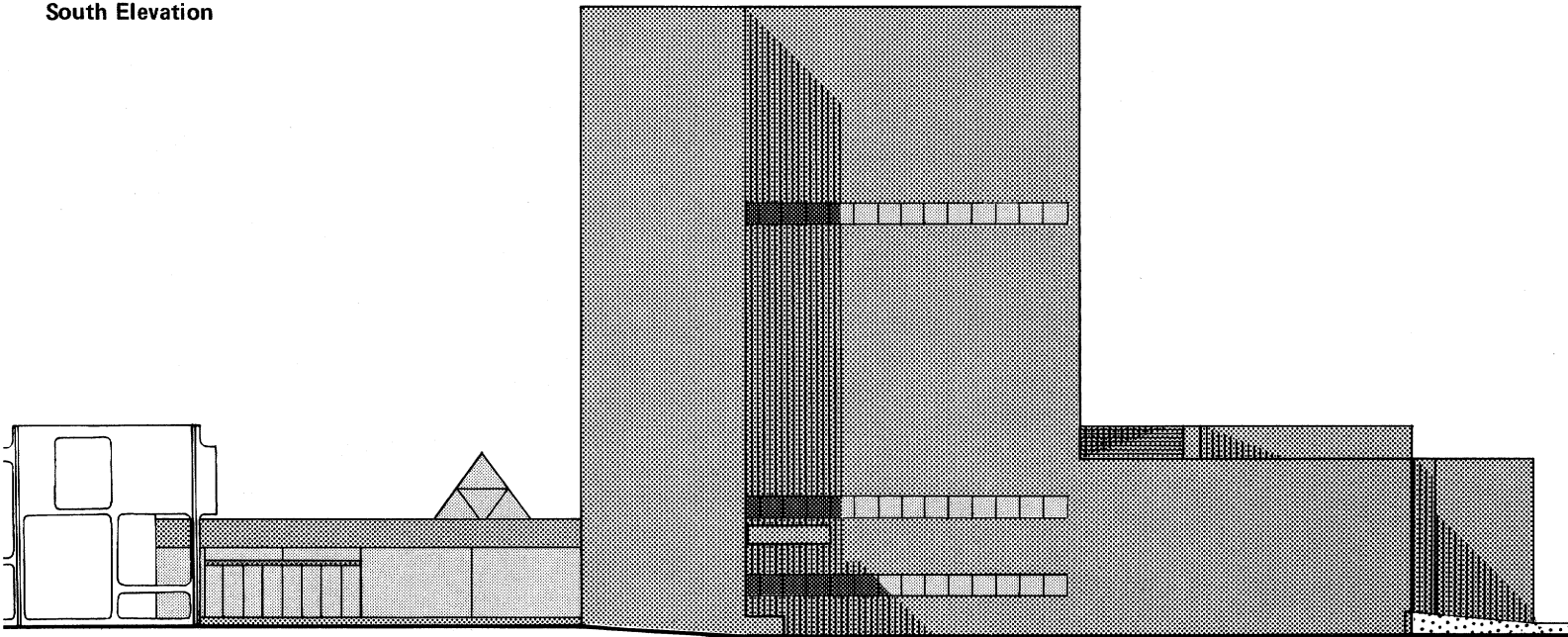
1. The Guthrie Theater
2. Upper Entrance Lobby
3. Lower Entrance Lobby
4. Art Center Lobby
5. Gallery 1
6. Gallery 3
7. Gallery 4
8. Gallery 6



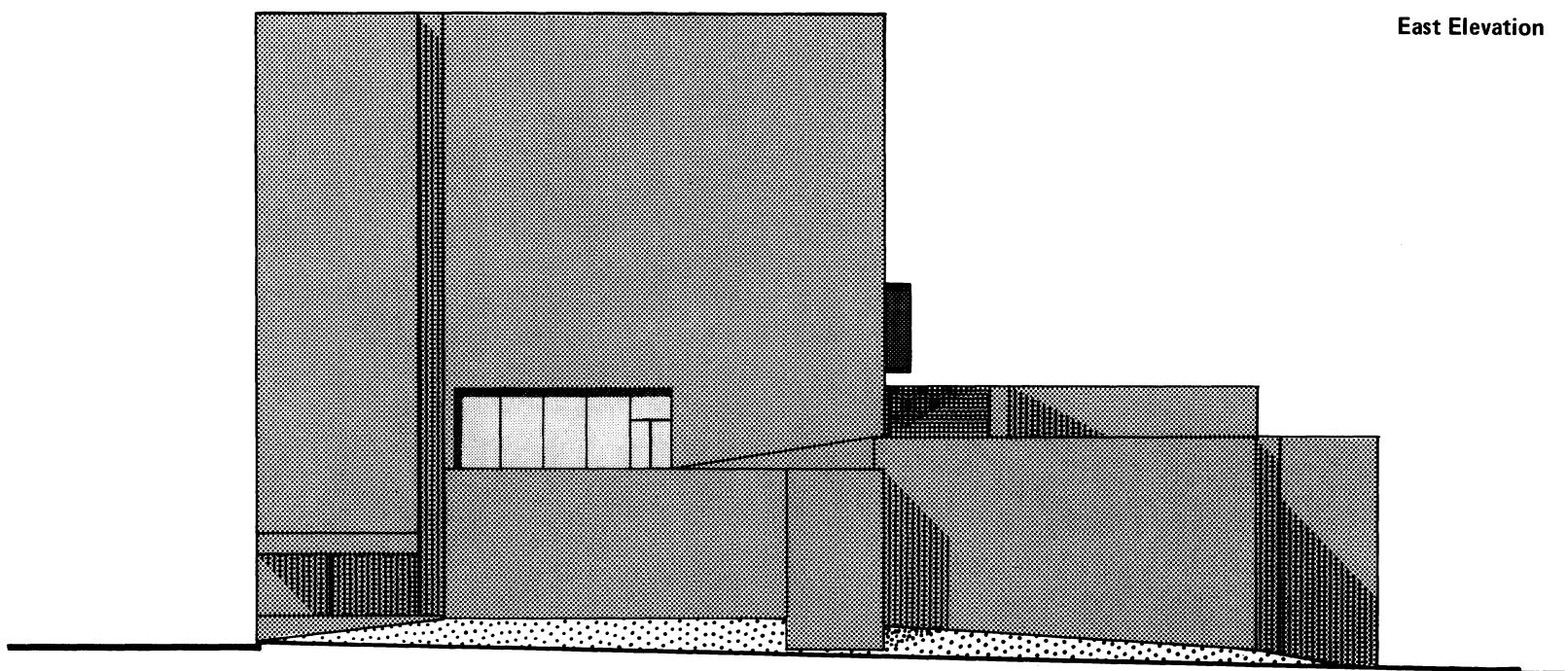
North Elevation



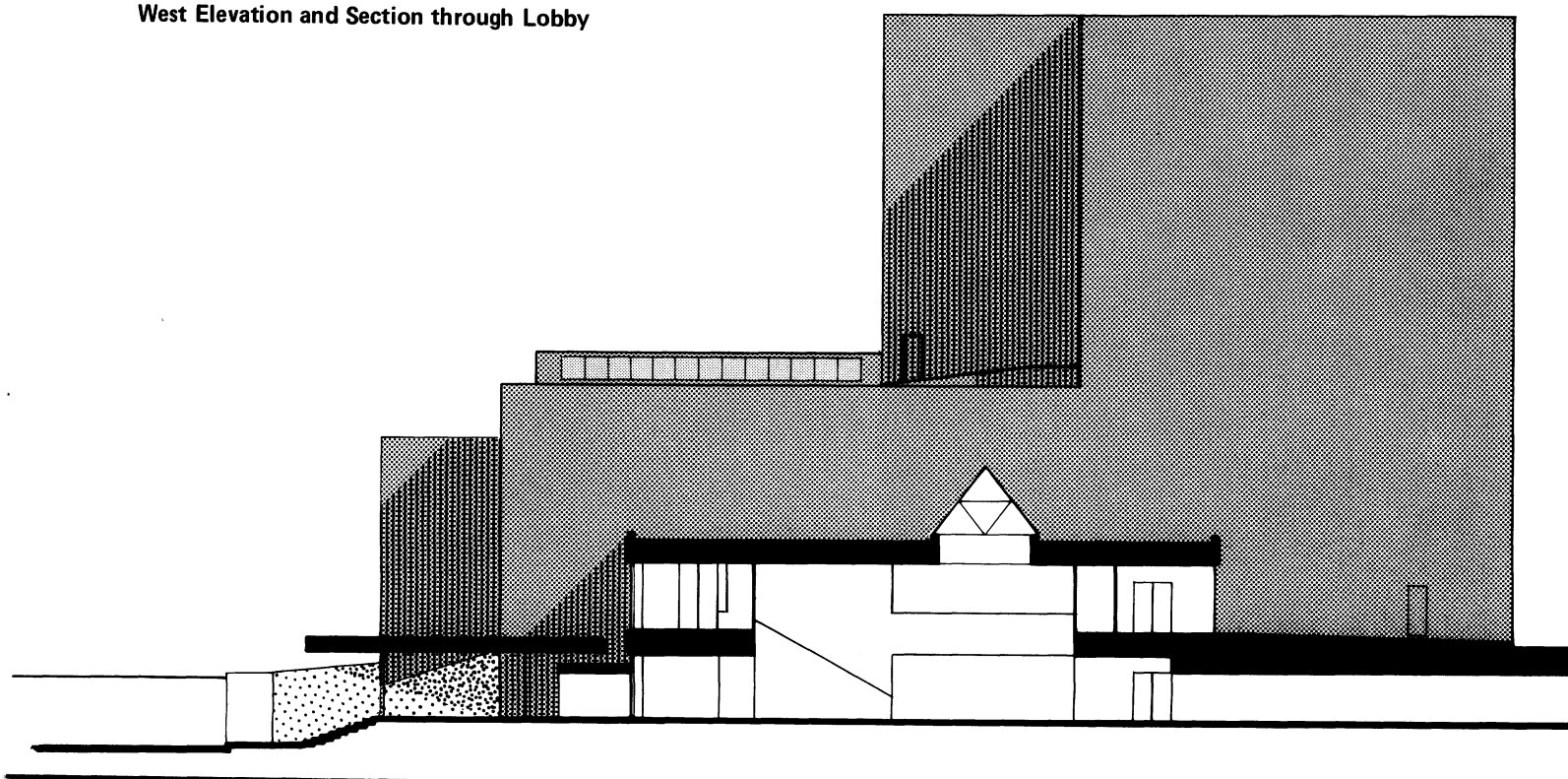
South Elevation



East Elevation



West Elevation and Section through Lobby



We are trying to create architecture that does not compete with art—to put the priorities in the right order. We want the visitor to remember paintings in space, sculpture against sky, and a sense of continuous flow. It is flow more than form that has concerned us. The sequence of spaces must be seductive. There must be a subtle sense of going somewhere, like a river. At the same time the architecture must be relatively uneventful and anonymous.

The generating idea behind the design is the helical plan which provides sequential flow from the lobby to the roof whether going up or down. At the same time, direct access to individual galleries is possible by using the elevator or core stairs. This circulation system is the armature of the building.

Museum fatigue is reduced by a sense of progression; it is also avoided by gentle variations, by occasionally providing orientation to daylight, and by giving each gallery its own sense of place.

The ambience of the galleries is white on white. Reflected light is maximized. Architectural details are minimized; elaborate wall systems and “interesting” materials are avoided. We want the paintings to be seen in space, not “against” confusing surfaces. We want a sense of release, not of containment.

On the roof, the walls and paving are all one material—dark plum-colored brick. The building itself is a pedestal. Sculpture is seen against giant walls and stepped terraces, and best of all, against the distant Minneapolis skyline. It is important to see sculpture related to architecture. It is equally important to see it standing alone.

A museum is not a temple to the donors, or a monument to the architect, or a security vault—in short, it is not a thing unto itself. It is part of the fabric of daily life, sharing urban benefits and problems with its neighbors.

The building is not isolated. It shares a two-level entrance lobby with The Guthrie Theater, a lobby that joins the two institutions and provides passage from the front entrance to the parking in the rear. This space, with adjoining bookstore and box office, is a public concourse, a meeting place. It is not a pristine foyer open only at certain hours. Attendance figures show the gains.

The massing of the building is not formal or classic. A low roof line forms a continuous street facade with The Guthrie Theater, facing the park. The high tower (with restaurant, conference room, and penthouse work space) lines up with the North American Life and Casualty Company building beyond and conceals what might have been an overbearing neighbor. The bold, stepped roof terraces turn the corner facing the expressway. Thus the building reflects the site conditions, and relates to the surrounding neighborhood.

Edward Larrabee Barnes

Edward Larrabee Barnes, FAIA

1915	Born Chicago
1938	Harvard University—BS cum laude
1942	Harvard Graduate School of Design— MA Architecture
1941–1942	Sheldon Traveling Fellowship

Selected Projects

Houses in Connecticut, Texas, Minnesota and New York

Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine

United States Consulate, Tabriz, Iran

Forty-story office building for New England Merchants

National Bank, Boston, Massachusetts

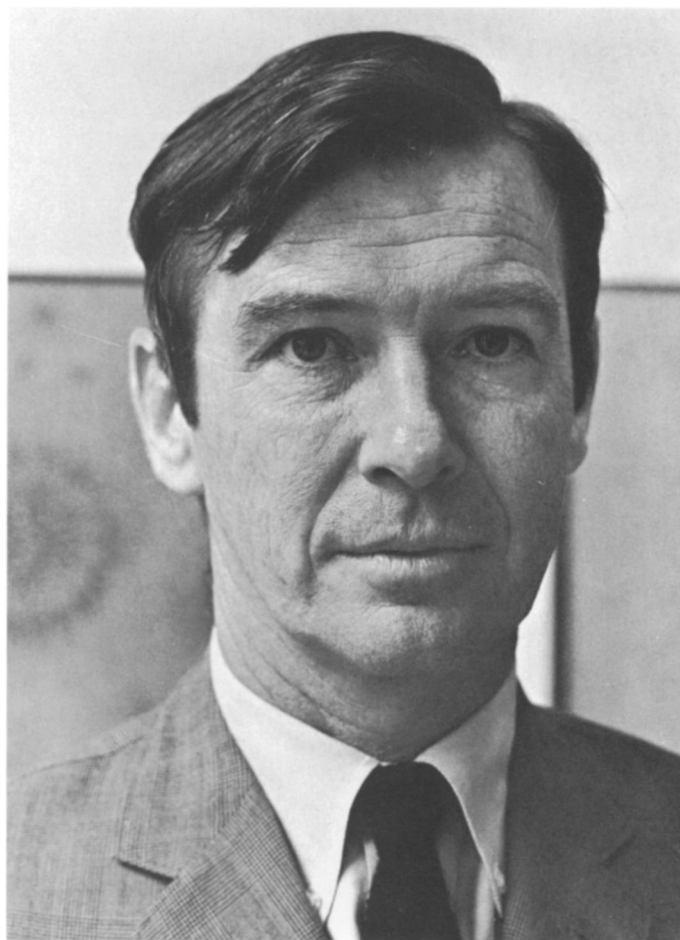
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Selected Work in Progress

Crown Center Redevelopment—office building, shopping center and theaters around public square, Kansas City, Missouri

Campus plan and principal buildings (four theaters, library, gymnasium, student union, music and theater arts buildings) for College of Performing Arts, New York State University, Purchase, New York

Scaife Museum of Art—Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



courtesy Minneapolis Star & Tribune

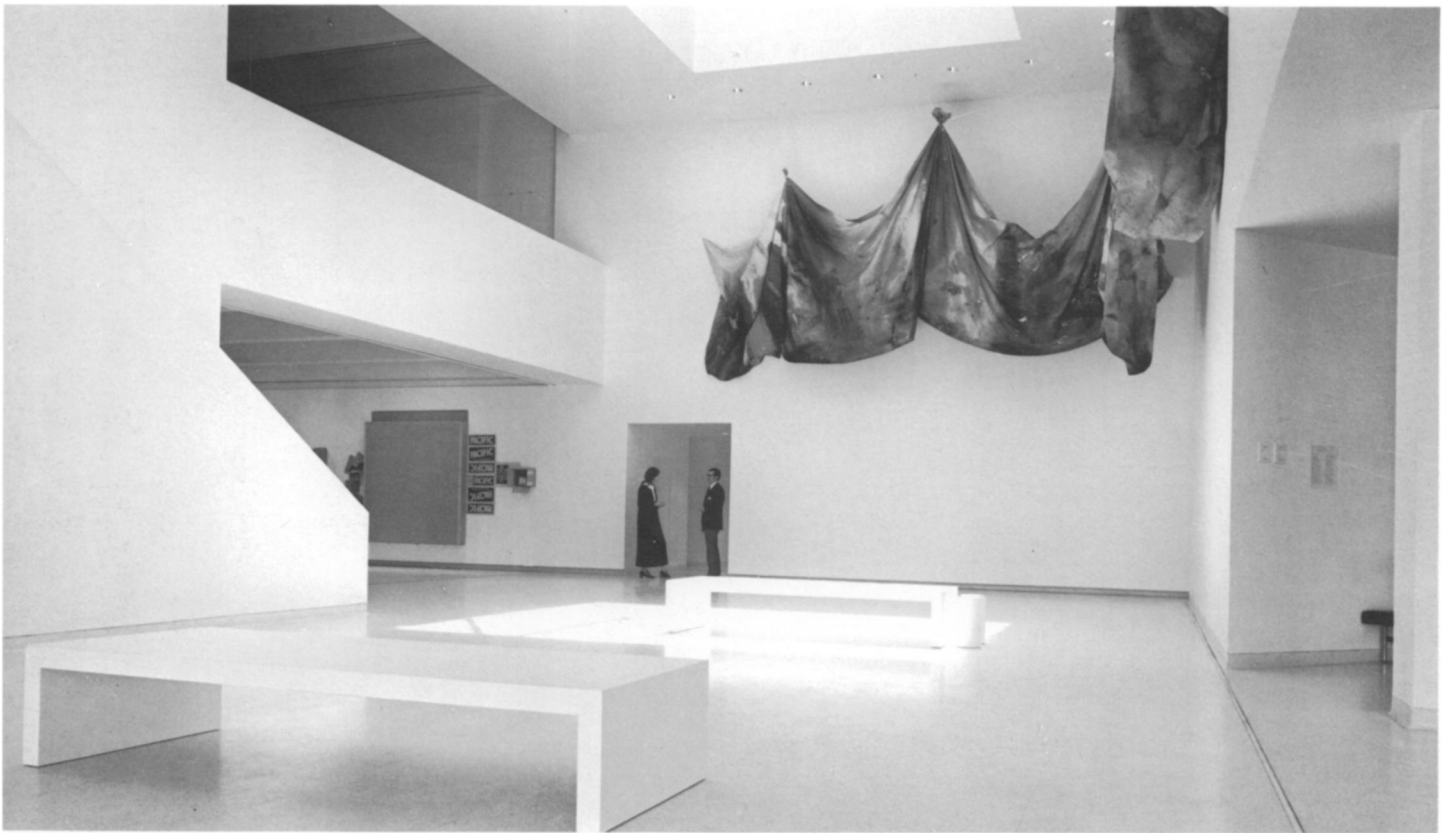
Honors

1959	A. W. Brunner Prize from the National Institute of Arts and Letters
1960	Silver Medal Award from the Architectural League
1964	First Honor Award from the Urban Renewal Administration, San Juan Project
1971	Medal of Honor from the New York Chapter, American Institute of Architects, Purchase Project

Concourse

A two-story concourse with a large, pyramidal skylight connects the Art Center lobby to The Guthrie Theater ticket office. The museum side of this

common entry and exhibition area can be closed with sliding partitions. The concourse stairway leads to a gallery space, glass-enclosed on the north side, linking the museum with the Theater's upper lobby.



Lobby and Center Book Shop

The museum's lobby functions as an exhibition area and as a foyer for the adjacent Auditorium and Lecture/Information Room. The Center Book Shop,

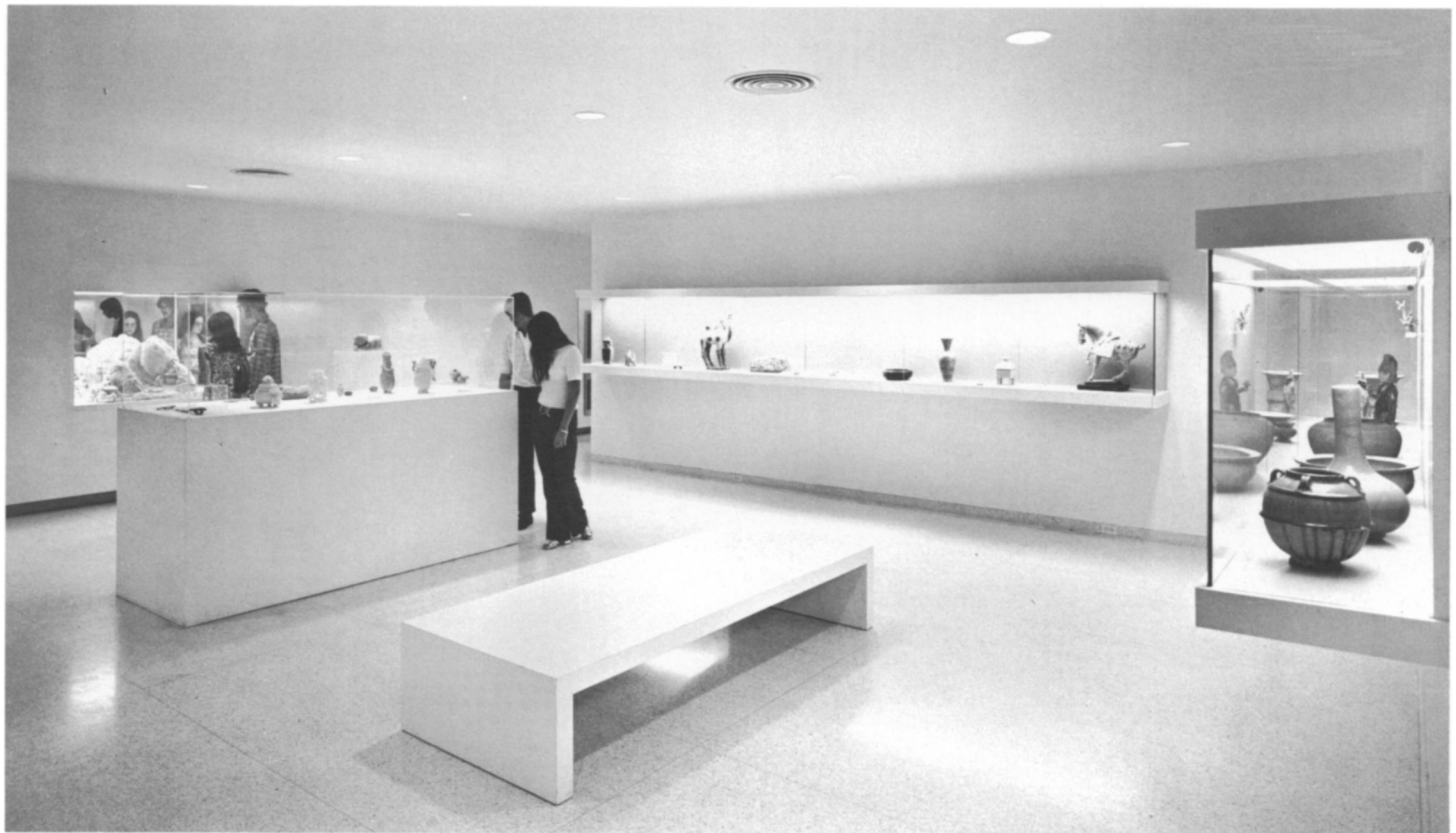
delineated by a 36-foot diagonal counter, occupies one-third of this space. Recessed shelving provides display space for museum publications and books on the arts, and the glass counter contains multiples and other small objects for sale.



Oriental Gallery

Located immediately off the lobby and down a half-flight of stairs, the Oriental Gallery is designed to display

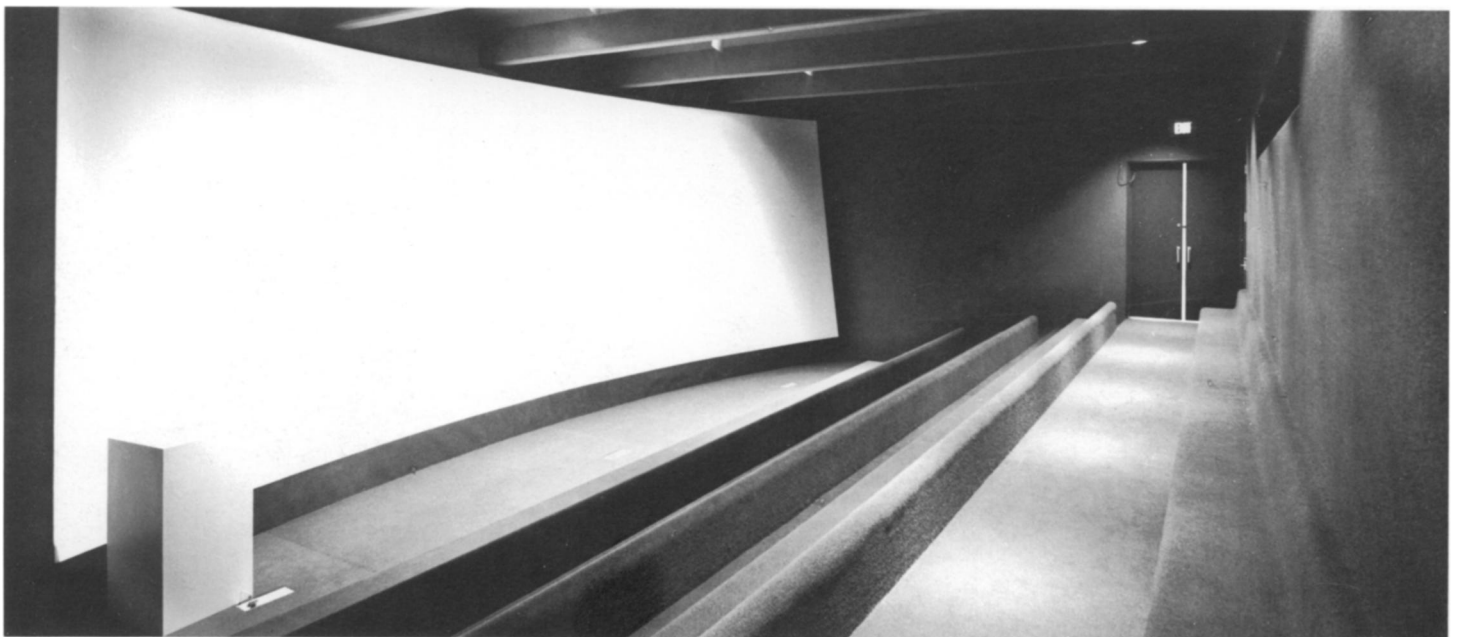
selected pieces from the T. B. Walker collection of jades and ceramics. The objects range from small bottles, vases and ceremonial vessels to a monumental jade mountain.



Lecture/Information Room

A unique feature of the museum is the Lecture/Information Room. Its parabolic screen accommodates

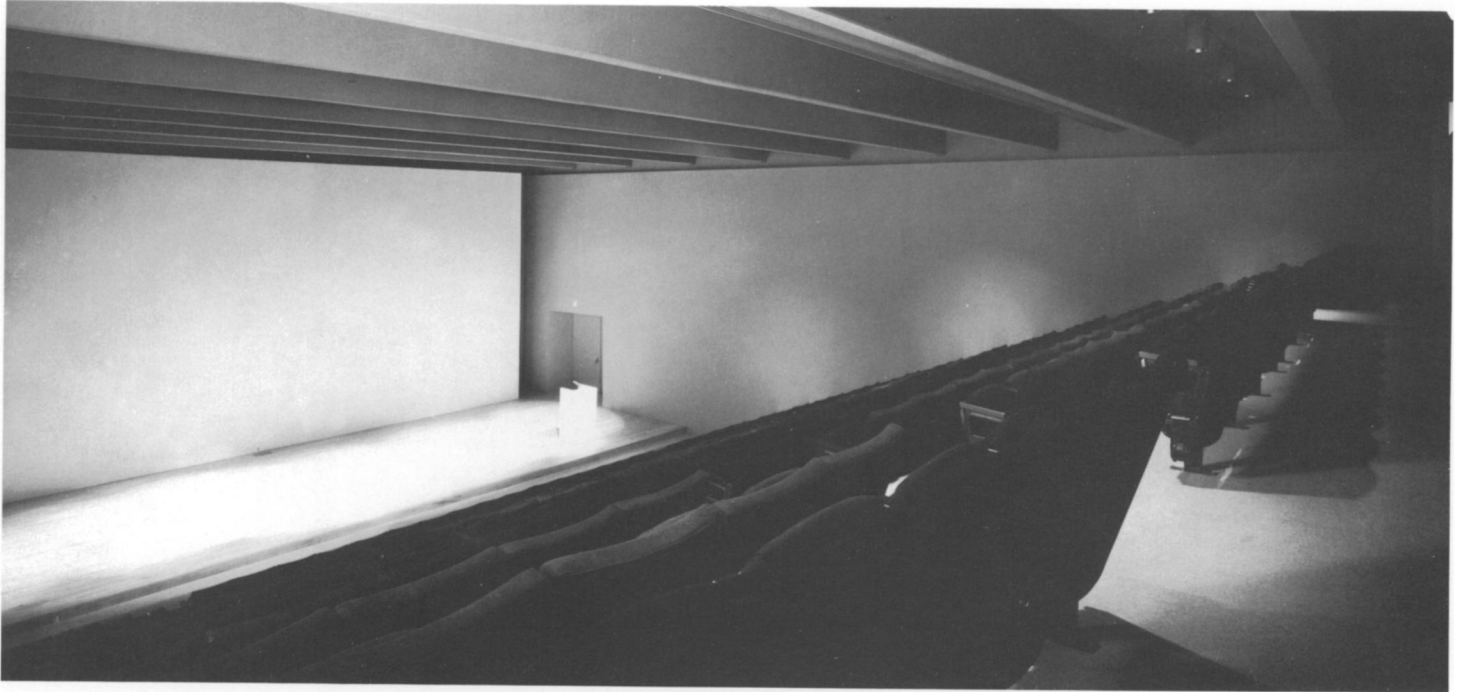
four simultaneous slide projections or a cinemascope film. The floor, rear wall and long benches are carpeted in the same dark plum color as the painted side walls and ceiling.



Auditorium

The Art Center's Auditorium is used for films, lectures and small stage events. It is a cool beige shell with a free-standing projection screen of standard drywall construction. The 19 x 40 foot screen can be viewed ad-

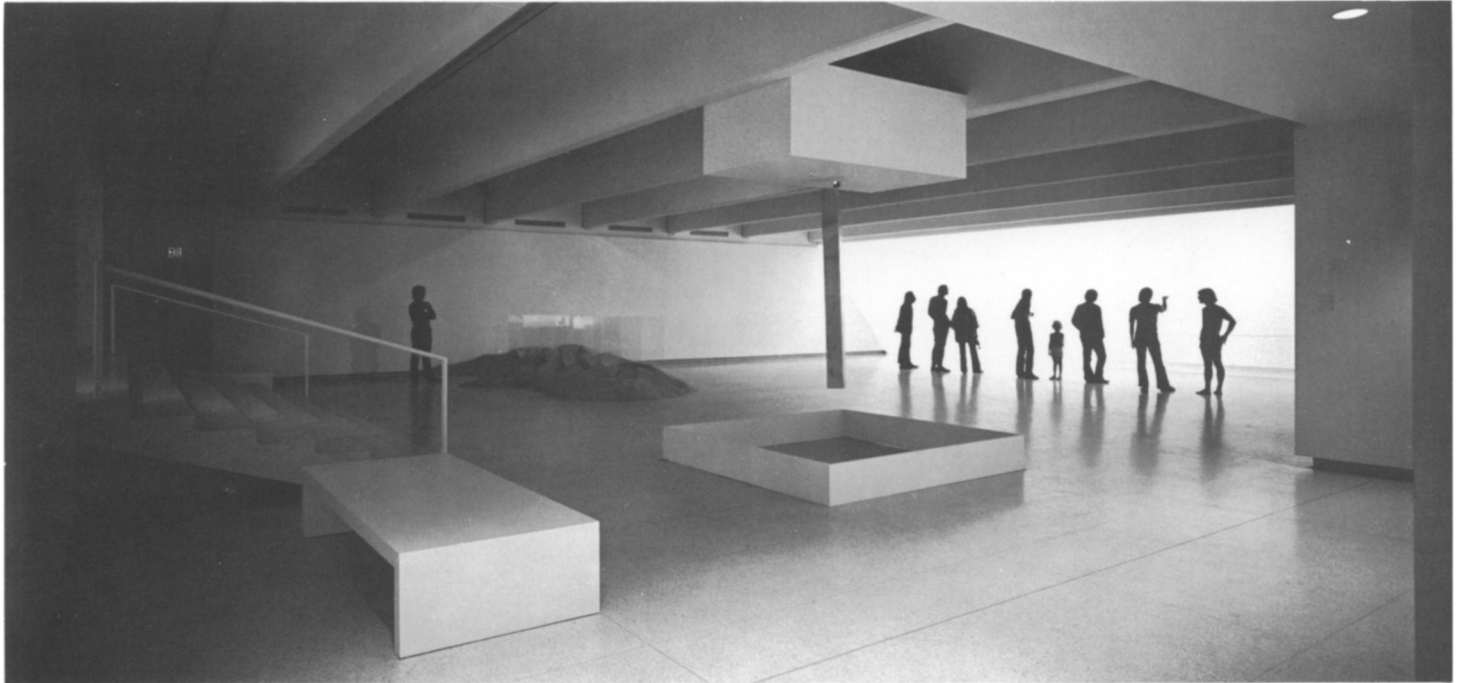
vantageously from any seat. End panels, normally used on chairs flanking the aisles, are removed to reveal the chairs' iron structure, which is painted black to match the upholstery. Downlighting, stagelights and exposed air ducts are contained in the T beams.



Gallery 1

Galleries 1 and 2 are windowless rectangular spaces with long stretches of unbroken wall. Huge precast T beams are exposed to form dynamic ceilings. Recessed terrazzo bases and plaster soffits articulate

the wall as a separate plane. Ventilation grills are set into the soffits between vaults, and return air ducts are located behind the walls along the base line. Photographs of Galleries 1 and 3 show pieces from the opening exhibition, *WORKS FOR NEW SPACES*.



Gallery 3

Floors, walls and ceilings of all seven galleries are white to provide a light-reflecting, but essentially neutral, environment for exhibiting contemporary art. Nails can be driven directly into the gypsum-over-plywood walls and screws can be sunk into the

concrete beams and terrazzo floors. When installations are changed, all surfaces are easily repaired and inexpensive to refinish. Standard incandescent and quartz lights on tracks mounted between the vaults are the primary source of illumination. Gallery 3's single corner window is set at a 45 degree angle from the north wall.



Gallery 5

Half-flights of stairs make an easy transition from gallery to gallery. Temporary structures, such as the

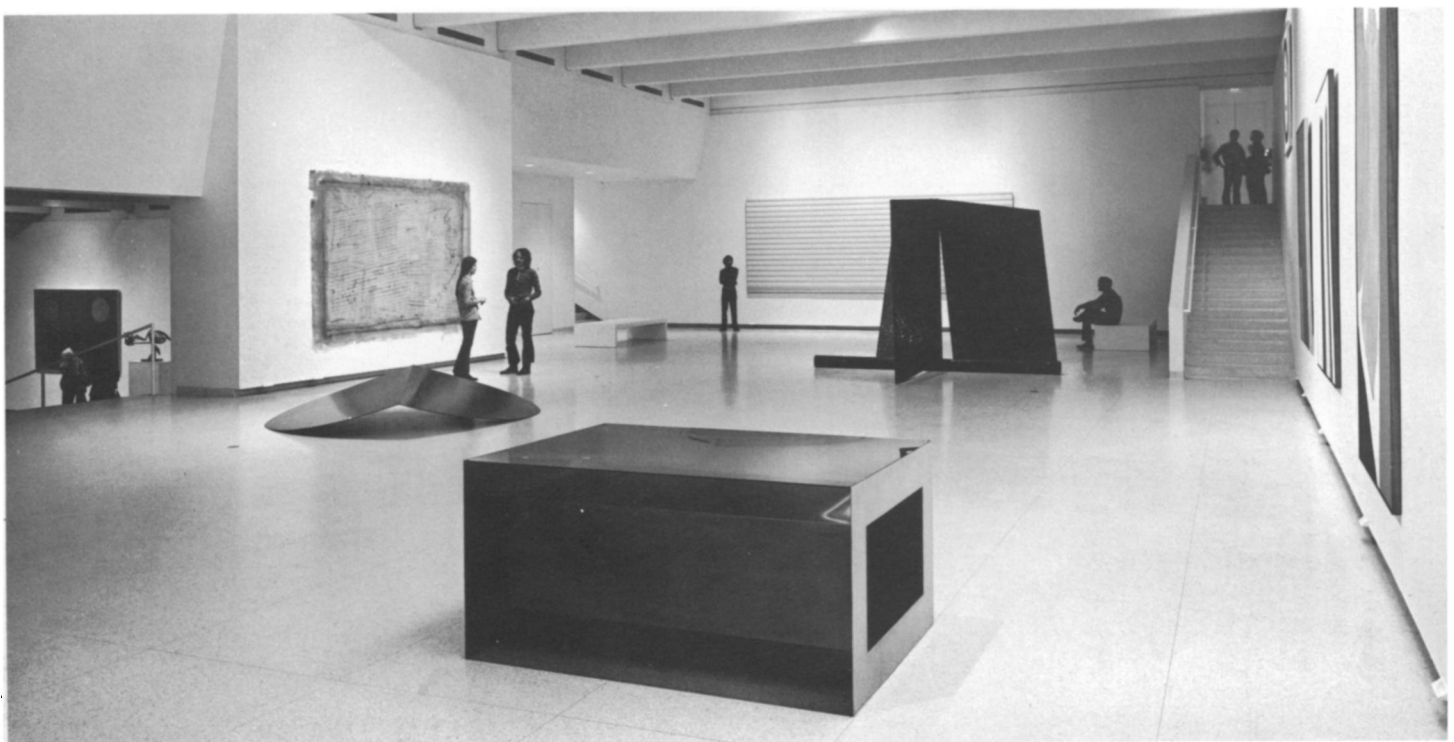
U-shaped wall in the center of Gallery 5, are used to create smaller spaces. During the opening months, Galleries 5, 6 and 7 were installed with works from the permanent collection.



Gallery 6

The Galleries vary in scale and proportion. The largest is Gallery 6—its 42 x 90 foot floor area and 18 foot ceiling make this warehouse-like space particularly

suitable for huge canvases and monumental sculpture. A long, narrow skylight washes one wall with natural light. Labels identifying the works are located at the base line of the walls.



Gallery 7

Older and smaller scale works are installed in Gallery 7, the most intimate of the Art Center's exhibition areas.

At the gallery's east end, a lounge area looks onto the first roof terrace through a floor-to-ceiling glass wall. From this uppermost gallery visitors have access to the three roof terraces.



Terrace I

The Art Center's terraces are paved with the same iron-spot brick as the exterior walls and, as the galleries, are linked by broad stairways around the central core.

Steel frames with glass panels provide a railing system consonant with the windows and doors. A piece from *WORKS FOR NEW SPACES* is shown on the first terrace and sculpture from the permanent collection is installed on Terrace II.



Restaurant

The Art Center's restaurant, situated in the tower overlooking the third terrace, becomes an indoor-outdoor

cafe in good weather and its furnishings are intended for both inside and outside use. Ceilings and walls repeat the character of the galleries and this room provides auxiliary exhibition space.



Terrace III

All sculpture on the terraces can be viewed from inside the building. Each terrace accommodates several large works and the building's stark, rectangular solids

make a dramatic foil for outdoor works. On Terrace III the skylight over Gallery 6 forms a long, 8 foot high wall which serves as a visual break between the Art Center's terraces and adjacent roof tops.



Administrative Areas

Offices are located in the south side of the tower and strip windows, flush with the brick exterior, are repeat-

ed at all office levels. Some walls are clad in a vinyl tacking surface matching the texture and color of the white painted surfaces. Cabinets and desks are custom-made and all areas have the same basic furnishings.



Library

The Art Center's 5,000 volume staff library is a compact L-shaped area intended for reading and research.

Limited space necessitated ceiling high shelving and the accompanying rolling ladder and track system. In contrast to the gallery and office millwork, the library shelves are natural, oiled oak.





Architect	Edward Larrabee Barnes
Associate in Charge	Alistair M. Bevington
Job Captain	Justin Lamb
Structural Engineers	Paul Weidlinger and Meyer, Borgman and Johnson, Inc.
Mechanical and Electrical Engineers	Gausman and Moore
Lighting Consultant	Donald Bliss
Acoustics Consultant	Ranger Farrell and Associates
Interiors	Mildred S. Friedman
Building Graphics	James E. Johnson
General Contractor	Naugle-Leck, Inc.

Space-Cost Data

Area	Square Feet
Exhibition	38,940
Administrative	10,270
Storage, Service	18,950
Performing Arts	7,440
Auxiliary	5,530
Total net space	81,130
Total gross space	117,330
Construction cost	\$4,500,000
Gross unit cost	\$38 per square foot

Primary Manufacturers

Brick	Colonial Brick Co. Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania
Precast T beam system	Wells Concrete Products Co. Wells, Minnesota
Terrazzo floors	Grazzini Brothers Minneapolis, Minnesota
Skylights	Super Sky Products, Inc. Thiensville, Wisconsin
Lighting tracks and fixtures	Edison Price Lighting, Inc. New York, New York
Security system, temperature and humidity controls	Honeywell, Inc. Minneapolis, Minnesota
Custom doors	Trussbilt Inc. St. Paul, Minnesota
Millwork	Aaron Carlson Co. Minneapolis, Minnesota
Finish hardware	Sargent and Co. New Haven, Connecticut
Elevators	Otis Elevator Co. New York, New York
Custom furniture	Intrex, Inc. New York, New York
Auditorium seating	American Seating Co. Grand Rapids, Michigan
Office and gallery furnishings	Intrex, Inc. New York, New York Knoll Associates New York, New York Herman Miller Zeeland, Michigan Stendig, Inc. New York, New York

Major Building Materials

Structural system	Concrete, precast concrete T beams and steel
Exterior facing and paving	Brick
Glazing	Solar gray plate glass
Terrace railings	Painted steel and plate glass
Window frames	Steel
Finished floors	Terrazzo and carpet
Gallery walls	Gypsum board over plywood
Soffits	Plaster
Ceilings (administrative area only)	Plaster
Finish hardware	Stainless steel
Doors and door frames	Hollow metal and wood
Millwork	Wood and plastic laminate
Lighting	Standard incandescent and quartz lamps