

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN MUSEUM OF ART BUILDS FOR THE FUTURE

Q: HOW DID THE MUSEUM ARRIVE AT THIS DESIGN?

A: Our design process has been deeply consultative. During both the period when the building's programmatic needs were being determined and the schematic design phase, the Museum conducted numerous focus groups and committee meetings involving faculty, staff, volunteers, students, visitors, non-visitors, community members, and civic leaders. The views of these participants deeply informed the functional and design choices. The program needs very much shaped the exterior skin of the building, which was truly designed from the inside out.

As a university museum in a community setting, UMMA is committed to education and to the pursuit of new ideas. Advancing the architecture and design of our own time is one significant component of this commitment. Much of what we do as a university must respectfully and thoughtfully push the boundaries and foster discussion. The resulting design accomplishes this while addressing the Museum's critical educational and outreach mission.

Q: WHY DOESN'T THE NEW BUILDING LOOK LIKE THE EXISTING ONE?

A: The expansion will embody an architectural sensibility of its own time and place and will respond to the current and future needs of the Museum of Art and of the University. Just as the existing building reflected the Beaux Arts revival tastes of its time, the new building reflects design currents of the 21st century. The Museum is fortunate to work with an architect with a demonstrated sensitivity to museum site and facility requirements as well as urban planning. Historic preservation guidelines, to which we are adhering for this project, suggest that additions to historic structures be stylistically distinct from the original; expanded historic facilities must declare where the "old" ends and the new begins.

The massing and scale of the new wing is in keeping with the scale of the buildings along State Street as well as with the building that once occupied the site, the Romance Languages Building demolished in the 1950s. The new wing is in fact shorter than Alumni Memorial Hall, and honors the uniform setback along State Street. The materials for the new wing are being selected to work effectively with those of the surrounding buildings.

The images of the new addition shown here are preliminary renderings that describe more about the scale and volume of the expansion than of specific material choices. They are schematic rather than realistically descriptive and should not be read as literal expressions of how the building will be experienced or how the art will be displayed. All works of architecture are inherently experiential; only once the new wing is built and operational will its many details, vistas, and relationships be truly legible.

Q: WHAT WILL THE RENOVATION OF THE EXISTING BUILDING ENTAIL? WILL STYLISTIC CHANGES BE MADE?

A: Other than connecting to the new building, the exterior character of Alumni Memorial Hall will not change. Much of the work to be done on Alumni Memorial Hall is in the nature of historic restoration—restoring original skylights and cove ceilings—or is in the building’s mechanical systems, such as climate control, ventilation, and security.

Q: HOW AND WHY DID YOU SELECT THE ARCHITECT?

A: Most of the world’s great architects, working in widely varying styles, were considered for the project. From these, a short list was developed, interviews were conducted, and Brad Cloepfil and his firm Allied Works Architecture of Portland, Oregon, were selected to oversee UMMA’s transformation. Cloepfil is one of the rising stars of the international architectural community, with a holistic and creative approach both to new design and to renovation/expansion projects. In 2003 he completed the St. Louis Contemporary Art Museum to wide public and critical acclaim; other recent projects have included an ambitious expansion of the Seattle Art Museum and the renovation of the Huntington Hartford building at 2 Columbus Circle in New York City for the Museum of Arts and Design. Cloepfil has said of the UMMA project that there is no more exciting design opportunity in the United States, deriving from a shared vision for a new kind of museum.

The UM Board of Regents approved Cloepfil’s appointment to the project in October 2003 and enthusiastically endorsed the schematic design in June 2004. UMMA’s project has already won a coveted design award from the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

Q: WHY DOES THE MUSEUM NEED AN ADDITION? WHAT WILL THE NEW BUILDING CONTAIN?

A: The expansion and renovation of the Museum’s current facility has been an identified need for decades. Currently, the Museum can only exhibit three to four percent of its collections at any given moment. Storage space is insufficient to the needs of UMMA’s growing collections. Most spaces in the Museum, including galleries, serve two or even three distinct purposes. The absence of adequate object study and classroom facilities inhibits UMMA’s ability to fulfill its fundamental teaching mission.

The 53,000 square foot addition will more than double the Museum’s physical space and enable the Museum to better accommodate temporary exhibitions, lectures, concerts, classes, and community meetings through substantial new gallery space; state-of-the-art collections storage and “open” storage for greater public accessibility; a print study room; Asian conservation lab; auditorium; University classrooms and art-making facilities; an expanded Museum shop; and improved visitor amenities and public gathering spaces.

Q: HOW CAN THE MUSEUM BUILD IN LIGHT OF THE CURRENT FISCAL SITUATION AT THE UNIVERSITY AND THE STATE OF MICHIGAN? WHO IS FUNDING THIS PROJECT?

A: UMMA has an ethical obligation to care for the art collections in its trust, and to use these to the benefit of its multiple and diverse audiences. U-M students need a quality visual arts experience as part of their broad preparation for future leadership roles. The \$41.9 million building project will be funded almost entirely with private support, using donations that would not otherwise be available for another project.

Q: IS THE MUSEUM’S BUILDING PROJECT PART OF THE UNIVERSITY-WIDE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN THAT KICKED OFF IN MAY 2004?

A: Yes, the Museum renovation and expansion has been identified as a key component of the UM capital campaign entitled The Michigan Difference, which was completed in December 2008.

Q: WILL THE MAIN ENTRANCE REMAIN THE SAME?

A: There will be multiple points of entry once the new addition is built, but UMMA’s current entrance will remain the primary entrance to the Museum. The addition’s entrances will be at grade for greater disabled access and to more readily welcome passers-by.

Q: WILL THE NEW BUILDING BLOCK ACCESS TO THE DIAG?

A: No. The main footpath to the Diag, adjacent to Angell Hall, will remain open and accessible, and substantial green space will remain, as well as three open courtyards for gathering, foot traffic, and outdoor art.

Q: WHAT KINDS OF AMENITIES WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE NEW MUSEUM?

A: The planned expansion will permit a number of improvements to visitor amenities including an extended-hours public zone with a commons. UMMA’s expansion and restoration will also include an expanded Museum Store, expanded restroom facilities, and improved access for disabled visitors.

Q: WILL COMMUNITY GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS BE ABLE TO RENT SPACE IN THE NEW BUILDING?

A: Yes, space for expanded and more varied special events, including rental events, is planned for the new building, including meeting space for campus and community organizations.

Q: WHEN WILL THE PROJECT BE COMPLETED?

A: The expanded and restored Museum of Art will open to the public with a 24-hour open house from 6 pm Saturday, March 28 through 6 pm Sunday, March 29, 2009.

Q: IN LIGHT OF RECENT AND LIKELY ONGOING BUDGET CONSTRAINTS AT THE STATE LEVEL, HOW WILL THE OPERATIONS OF AN EXPANDED MUSEUM COMPLEX BE SUSTAINED GOING FORWARD?

A: The University of Michigan expects to cover core facilities costs such as utilities and maintenance from its general fund. Additional increased operating expenses such as salary and program expenses will be covered by an increase to the Museum's endowments, which is also being sought as part of the current campaign.

Q: IS THE MUSEUM CLOSED DURING THE RENOVATION AND BUILDING PROCESS?

A: UMMA operated a temporary exhibition space called UMMA Off/Site at 1301 South University Avenue (at the corner of South Forest Avenue) from mid-2006 through January 4, 2009 while the original facility was under construction. Located immediately adjacent to the University's Central Campus, near much off-campus student housing, and less than a block from the Forest Avenue parking structure, the open 4,000-square-foot space presented temporary exhibitions devoted to American and international photography, film, and video.