THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART:
AN ANALYSIS AND A GRAND DESIGN

by

Juniper Terence Russell
B.S. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
1974

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Architecture
at the
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
June, 1976

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ABSTRACT

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art: An Analysis and a Grand Design
Juniper Terence Russell

"Submitted to the Department of Architecture on May 10, 1976 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture"

This thesis is an exploration of:

- civic symbolism and identification
- the near context
- the edge formed by a building in a landscape
- the art museum as a jungle filled with fantastic creatures for the wandering visitor
- the orchestration of a large public building
- the internal concerns of an art museum

The difference between the museum experience and the media experience is the primacy of the immediacy of the object in the museum. Modern technology and climate control furthers this end. In the museum the observer is mobile. In the media experience the observer is stationary and the image is mobile.

Thesis Supervisor: Tunney Lee
Associate Professor of Architecture
5.

Analysis of context.....
Los Angeles is a montage of super-imposed cities. Wilshire Boulevard maps out a linear city. The boulevard has modest origins downtown and eventually empties into the sea. The city extends along the boulevard in the northern and southern directions for about five to ten blocks in each direction. The boulevard goes from east to west. The most efficient city bus line runs along this street. The linear city has all of the appropriate components: the rich, the poor, decay, splendor, the university, the petit-bourgeois, suburbs, urbanity, and an approximation to the natural at its terminus. The entire length of the boulevard is faced with small scale commercial and office buildings built in the nineteen fifties in the international style. Occasionally towers appear, sometimes groups of them. Neither parking lots nor small scale housing face onto the boulevard. The parking lots are behind the commercial buildings, completing the blocks. The blocks are otherwise completed by residential buildings separated from the commercial buildings by small alleys. The absence of exposed parking lots and residential buildings make Wilshire unique. The other east-west streets are faced with less attractive buildings serving more
specialized needs. The buildings are less densely packed and are interspersed with parking lots. The traffic moves along faster.

The art museum is in Hancock Park on the north side of Wilshire Boulevard, two blocks east of Fairfax Avenue. Fairfax Avenue is the local north-south distributor and the center of the Los Angeles Jewish Community. East and West of the park are gargantuan parking lots serving three large department stores. These parking lots act as a buffer for the residential neighborhoods and seem to further contain them. There is little danger of the commercial interests spreading into the residential portions of the grid. The neighborhood on the north side is primarily composed of elderly people. The south side is occupied by families. The elderly people are dependent on buses and tend to walk. Fairfax Avenue is serviced by buses. The museum is accessible to L.A.'s pedestrians. The Fairfax bus also takes people to Farmer's Market, a tourist trap. The Jewish elderly form the largest group using the park.

Tourist attractions in Los Angeles are few in number. The tourists all go to see the tar pits and conviently, the museum as well. The tourists add to museum attendance and contribute money through the book store and the cafeteria.
The park is not favored by children. It is not really large enough for athletics and what space there is is interrupted by tar pits. Most of the space is open with the exception of the tree covered walkways. There is not enough variety in the park and few intimate places. Each child visits it once in a group from school or the scouts. The children are lectured about the animals that once existed as evidenced by the discoveries made at the tar pits.

The art museum, as built by William Pereira is a 'temple to art' in an obvious sense. It is columnar and white, appallingly pristine. It is set in a reflecting pool with jets of playing water. It reminds me of a number of buildings built in the U.S. Embassy building program. From the street one walks onto a bridge and then onto a platform set in the water. This platform is then joined to the landing of a grand staircase. The platform is simply a Kashmiri water throne, or an island in a Persian 'little sea' garden. This introduction of water is very curious. It does not take the form of a fountain in a courtyard garden or a mission garden as befits the Spanish precedent.

The culture palace comes to Wilshire Boulevard and water springs forth from the earth unbidden. One block east of the park is the Prudential Plaza. Five years ago
its arcade of shops was made resplendent by the addition of a large fountain. The fountain is of the western variety, water playing upon an art object. On the south side of the boulevard directly across from the museum a large office tower has recently been built. It tries hard to create a cross-axis with the museum but the potent surge of traffic overpowers any architectural gesture. This building is flanked by two pavilions. These buildings all sit on a terrace accessed by bridges across a reflecting pool with jets of water playing. On the south side, one block east of the park is the Crocker Bank building, also built after the completion of the museum. It is adorned by a large scrap metal sculpture supporting a cascade of water. Wilshire Boulevard is long. There are only three other fountains along it. Two of them are small. The third is in front of a Beverly Hills bank pretending to be a culture palace.

The proper 'temple to the muses' is the Music Center, downtown. The Greeks considered the performing to be the muses and painting to be but a skill. The Music Center is the obvious precedent for the development of the art museum. It has a raised terrace with a fountain. The buildings appear to float on the terrace. The buildings are white,
columnar and terribly clean. Across the street is the famous 'Department of Water and Power' building. This building is also surrounded by a reflecting pool and has jets that shoot water up as high as the third floor. It is dramatically lit at night. Someone attending a concert in the evening would be left with impressions of downtown that include only the Music Center, in all of its glory, and the Water and Power Building lit against the darkness of the slumbering city. These buildings are at the top of a hill, a fitting approach for a pilgrimage.

If you go down some stairs from the Music Center complex and walk through a tunnel you arrive at the garden between the Los Angeles County Court House and the Hall of Records. You see a gigantic fountain, say fifty feet across. This complex was built in the late fifties. The buildings are masses and volumes with marble arcades on the ground floor. They are similar to the modern buildings at U.C.L.A. and in Mexico.

Wilshire Boulevard ends in front of a large office tower before penetrating very deeply into the downtown area. The boulevard is tied into downtown by the identity of the images of the two culture palaces. The presence
of water ties the culture palaces to the civic center. Behind the Hall of Records is a large embankment. A wide cascade of water flows down this. Part of the way down a freeway zips across this cascade. The cascade is a symbol of the downtown area for the approaching motorist.

The oasis around the art museum has since dried up. The Crocker bank sculpture has rusted and the art museum's reflecting pool has been filled in and fenced to decrease security costs. There is only water downtown. I do not understand the appearance or the disappearance of the civic water.

The best known landmark in the city and 'of the city' is the belated city hall, the art deco building seen so many times on television during the credits for some police drama or another. In most cities and towns the image of government is neo-classical. There are few monumental pedimented buildings in the city. The only one that comes to mind is a pink Hari-Krishna temple with green corinthian capitals. Neoclassicism comes to play in six story office buildings of the stacked palace variety. The civic buildings in most towns in California are Spanish colonial or mission style. This tradition is part of the eclectic input for the Los Angeles County Public Library and Union Station. The new idiom for culture palace as Greek temple is partic-
ularly singular, alien and therefore potent.

There is some validity in an attempt to tie the city together. I just find the sterility, simplicity and alien character of the applied imagery shocking. Hitler used such devices.

In Los Angeles there are some incredible examples of sensitive landscaping and architectural integration. The fore-mentioned court house and U.C.L.A. both contain modern buildings beautifully integrated and adapted to human scale on the ground level. Most modern buildings are barren, not because they are bad buildings, but because the budget has been cut or because the architect has not been concerned with this edge. The building facade can be an aesthetic abstract pattern or a super graphic if care is taken with the sensitive area. This approach to modern architecture is unique to the west, probably because of the climate. The east seems doomed to vast wastelands of miserable trees in planter boxes. The art museum could have been such a building in a voluptuous setting.

Los Angeles is the land of milk and honey. L.A. is embodied in all of the romanticism that brought people west to California. Some people have built their fantasies. The city has always given more freedom to its inhabitants than cities that do not sprawl. This freedom, the climate
and the availability of land have fostered experimentation in architecture.

The architecture in LOs Angeles is rich because of this dream, because of the presence of the pioneers of modern design and because of the Spanish colonial influence.

The Spanish colonial influence appears most in the stucco buildings of the twenties, both duplexes and single family houses. In addition to form, richness arises from the moorish use of color and tile juxtaposed against lush vegetation.

The two Austrians, R.M. Schindler and Richard Neutra have left a permanent impression upon the development of the ideal single family house, in addition to contributing to the progress of modern design in the city.

Most of Frank Lloyd Wright's work in L.A. is similar to art deco in origin. The houses all appear to be of the sort that he designed in Sullivan's office, Assyrian or Mayan funerary stuff, both in form and in decoration.

The impact of the Greene Brothers is reflected in all of the houses you see everywhere, especially in the ghetto where it is not economically desireable to tear them down yet. These houses have low pitched spreading roofs, wide porches with attenuating columns and are framed with heavy timbers. The sources for these forms and materials
are lost among the Japanese, the Indians and the Swiss.

I shall say one last time that I feel that another kind of cultural palace is in order, something with a subtlety deeply embedded in the psyche of Los Angeles. You might affectively argue that a tabloid culture palace is at home in the bosom of fantasyland, the city that contains the image producing workshops of the country, the silver screen and the television industry. Taking this point of view would limit all judgements to personal taste.

I am going to re-design the art museum for my personal pleasure and edification.

The city is now building a paleontology museum in the park. It is mostly underground but clearly intrusive. The park is unique. The city is making a mistake. The park is unique, not only because of the presence of the tar pits; the only naturally occurring spring in the city is in this park. This spring is piped all over the city in a conduit and flows freely through the park before being contained and submerged again.

In 1969 the city was considering the purchase of a vacant Chinese department store located at the south-eastern corner of the intersection of Wilshire and Fairfax. They did not make the purchase. The department store occupied the ground floor of the Prudential Building moved into it
causing the small shops in the arcade to close down because of the decreased volume of passing people. If the Chinese department store had been made into a paleontology museum then the two sides of the boulevard would have been joined by a rare merger of learning and shopping activities, supporting and relieving one another. The shops in the Prudential arcade would still be in business. I am going to assume that the city made the purchase.
A simple modern building in a lush tropical garden

The Department of Water and Power
31. Parking behind Wilshire Boulevard
May Co. Appliance Store

Prudential Plaza

WILSHIRE BOULEVARD

Crocker Bank
A restaurant across the street from the May Co.
The May Co. located at the intersection of Fairfax and Wilshire
THE PARK EDGE

WILSHIRE BOULEVARD
THE BACK EDGE

Sixth Street

The Park La Brea Community
THE PARK

Observation Pit
display of bones and tar
# LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

## 1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPACE ALLOCATION</th>
<th>SQUARE FEET</th>
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<tr>
<td>Permanent Gallery</td>
<td>70,675</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Gallery</td>
<td>8,550</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foyer</td>
<td>2,800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Auditorium</td>
<td>9,281</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restaurant and kitchen</td>
<td>3,675</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support facilities</td>
<td>18,294</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration and board room</td>
<td>7,350</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exhibition preparation &amp; storage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children's Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Member's room</td>
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**Total:** 137,400

## 1962

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<th>GROSS BUILDING AREA</th>
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<tr>
<td>Building A</td>
<td>88,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building B</td>
<td>38,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building C</td>
<td>41,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes auditorium, cafeteria,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library, children, education &amp;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>member's room</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Support facilities</td>
<td>20,894</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service dock</td>
<td>8,812</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open plaza area</td>
<td>57,975</td>
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<td>Squares, ramps etc.</td>
<td>23,700</td>
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**Total:** 280,361

Auditorium 625 seats
5.56 acres of site
23 acres of park
CRITIQUE OF PEREIRA'S MUSEUM

The built terrace is a pleasant contrast to the natural ground. The museum appears to sit in the immediate context, the park, or the grand context, the hills, depending upon where you happen to be on the terrace. Soft sounds of minstrels fill the air. Light is gently dappled by arcade coverings. Shadows move across the pavement with the breeze. An afternoon on the terrace could not be more pleasant.

The natural lighting inside the museum needs improvement. All necessary lighting is artificial. There are only a couple of sidelights for view and orientation. The skylight illuminates the atrium and the derivative circulation spaces. Lighting is dull and homogeneous. There is no battle being waged between drama and clarity in the lighting design. There is no interesting introduction of direct sunlight in allowable places. The museum is an anonymous flexible warehouse, not a series of memorable moments. The curatorial spaces and the library are servant spaces and lack amenity. Access to them is far removed from the circulation path. The architecture does not make available to the public the richness of an exchange between the art object and the literature about it.
GATES

The museum could be a gateway to the park. A visit to the art museum would then be more like a visit to a shrine dedicated to the natural environment and the art object. The park would attain more civic importance.

The approach to a gate determines its viability. The gate to Istanbul University is set at a thirty degree angle to the street set back in a plaza. It can be approached axially or from the direction that it is tilted towards. Gates approached from directly along side of them tend to disappear. The turrets help prevent this dematerialization. (The first photograph is of the gate to Istanbul University, the second photo is of a gate across the street from the outermost wall of the Topkapi.)

There is a gate to an orphan home across the street from the outermost wall of the Topkapi Palace. The street turns a corner directly in front of it enabling it to be approached axially from one direction and along side from the other.

In the design eventually presented in this thesis, the gate is approached axially or from along side by the pedestrian. The auto approaches it from along side. The addition of an arcade fingerling out into the park on the east side prevents the gate from dematerializing.
Traffic as water...

a functional cross-axis cannot be made.

Wilshire and the gateway to downtown formed by the Arco Towers and pre-empted by the advertisements of the boarding houses.

The facade of the museum as billboards for the auto.
A sequence of concerns involved in designing the museum
Sliding storage gallery at Bunshaft's Hirshorn
the elimination of
the middle distance

the stage and the street

Pereira's Museum

M.O.M.A.

Breuer's Whitney
NATURAL LIGHTING IN THE MUSEUM

1. direct sunlight
2. diffuse light directionally distributed
3. diffuse light centralized

Boymans van Berininger Museum

Light is collected and then distributed.

Guggenheim

a clerestory that sends light
depth into the space

Patterns of light and shadow
in non-exhibition spaces

a solution to
the glare problem

a blob
of light
LIGHT IDENTIFIED WITH CIRCULATION......

Kahn's Kimbell, Fort Worth, Texas

Barne's Scaife at the Carnegie Inst. of Tech.

An atrium scheme has light and orientation both following along with and spilling into circulation. ... circumambulating a blob of light
CIRCULATION

Barne's Slalom

Perspective and sequence are rigidly controlled. Orientation and reference are ever changing.

The Black Box

The space is extremely flexible but there is little diversity or interest.

The Atrium

a sequential progression of black boxes.
Pereira's Museum
Shafts must be entered to move vertically.

Barne's Walker Art Center
Movement is more continuous
but the internal reference
atrium is absent.

Rietveld and van Tricht's van Gogh Museum
The circulation element is suspended in the atrium
Section through main gallery and dome.

Wright's Guggenheim

The movement is even more continuous but the atrium is monotonous and external reference is lacking.

The Wandering Helix

It is less monotonous because it has more than one atrium.

However, it is only suitable for the wandering visitor.

It needs a threaded core for quick access or departure.
The problem is solved by tying the ends together.
Now it is possible to short circuit the path by taking the elevator. For the true wandering visitor and the frequent visitor one path is not enough. The element of surprise must be fostered. So black boxes are now accessible from flat nodes in the ramp. The boxes join other boxes creating loops of movement feeding back into the ramp system. These boxes occasionally offer a view into atria that they are not related to. The logic of the system is simple enough for the visitor to comprehend comfortably.
THE SHELTERING EDGE
Total organic form has been abandoned because the clarity of the dialogue between box and tube is lost. The ramp could be organic because it is small enough but the boxes must be rectilinear.

Display mountings and glass sheathing the tubes could be compared to the stripes on a snake. These patterns would make good fenestration studies being both periodic and interesting.

Villa Strozzi, Florence

Hans Hollein
This is the system of ramps used in my design.
THE ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

- The drawing that follows the front elevation and the entrance perspective is an axonometric of the park edge.
- The ordering of the plans is from the top down because the visitor would most likely ride the elevator to the top and meander down. The arrows follow the ramp down.
LOCATION OF SECTION CUTS
I have completed phase two of a ten phase process. I have effectively dealt with the functional interactions of people, goods, art objects and natural lighting. The marriage between structure and form has yet to be consummated. The bride does not suit the groom. The roof plan must be simplified. In the design the roof plan is expressing the functional envelopes covered by them. Such a display of function for the birds and passing planes is not my intension. The ramps must become more organic with the development of a radically different structural system. I am pleased with what appears to be coming out of the street interface and the park edge.
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