Art + Architecture
An application of art and culture from around the world

An Honors Thesis (Arch 402)

by

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May 2014

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2014
Abstract

Art is an essential aspect of any community. All over the world art is a celebrated and crucial part of any culture. It symbolizes the past, explains the present, and looks toward the future. I explored the concept of art, its relationship to the local community, the culture of the place, and its effect on the architecture while on a study abroad experience, Polyark 19 World Tour 5. During this time, I developed a hometown project which I felt would better the community. Before the design process I met with local organizations to discuss what would be beneficial. The program which I developed was a community arts center and theater that was inspired by precedents that were studied and examined while on route.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Rod Underwood for his help in advising me through this process. He was a great help during the design phase of the project.

I would like to thank Les Smith for giving me critiques on the design process as well.

I would like to thank the Arts Partnership of Hancock County for meeting with me before and after the project to discuss how this facility would better the community.
On January 3, 2013, I embarked on a journey that would change my life forever. It was 30 countries, 24 students, 2 faculty, and 103 days. On this journey, I witnessed so many different cultures, and how these cultures affect the architecture and design around them. While on route, I developed a project based off of a site in my hometown.

In 2007 Findlay, Ohio was hit with the worst flood it had experienced in almost 100 years. According to the Washington Post, the river crested at 14 feet. As a result from this hundreds of building in the downtown were damaged and repairs are still happening today. One of these cases is Central Middle School. Central Middle School served the community in several different ways, with one being its large auditorium. Here performances were held for local groups of all ages as well as professional tours. After the flood however, a new middle school was proposed to be built elsewhere, leaving Central vulnerable to demolition.

The Arts Partnership of Hancock County became interested in the property and wanted to restore the old auditorium and incorporate a new community arts center. I contacted the Arts Partnership and requested a meeting to discuss the site of Central Middle School, their involvement with the theater, and what they could see as potential for the site and how it would better the community. The people at the Arts Partnership were very enthusiastic and believed the city of
Findlay needed a facility to educate the community in the arts, host public events, and showcase local artist's work.

While on the tour, I was able to develop the program and concept for my design. I explored the various forms of art we encountered and considered how these could be interpreted as architecture. This is translated into the way the users interacted with the building as well as how materials are applied. The aspect in which this is shown is through the main concept of the design, which was to break up the conventional idea of a box. This was achieved by splitting up the program between the two connected buildings that are rotated off axis of one another. By doing this a new and unique space was created between the two buildings to allow for an outdoor amphitheater, inspired by the Sony Center in Berlin, above.

In the master plan shown above, it is clear to see how the two buildings are offset from one another. The amphitheater that is created through this design choice opens out towards the green space behind the community center. During the summer months concerts and other
performances are held here, as well as an outdoor movie series. The manipulated contours of the landscape blend into the concrete seating of the outdoor theater to allow for additional seating on the grassy slope.

I also choose to expand the original site to allow access to the river. There is no park located near the downtown, yet there are several residential neighborhoods that would benefit from having one. This allowed me the opportunity to incorporate the river into the design. A walkway along the river is established as well as a stepped out platform that extends over the river so users may appreciate the natural waterway. The expanded site provides for the community to gather during festivals that occur in the downtown. The design for this was inspired by the open plaza in Vienna, shown below, in which the local community is encouraged to gather in a large open space.
The louvers on the outside also help to reinforce the main design concept. They puncture through the building and are rotated at different angles. This allows for sun shading on the south side of the building as well as breaking up the square main square of the building, going along with the initial concept. The Torre Agbar in Barcelona, shown bottom left, uses a series of louvers to provide sun shading while also creating a unique facade. The louvers of the art center were inspired by a piece of public art in Berlin, shown bottom right. The sculpture uses hard lines to form a geometrical shape. This contrasts to the typical idea of a classical sculpture just like how the design of the building contrasts the traditional buildings around it.

The program for the project was developed based on the need the arts partnership had for the space as well as inspirations from precedents I studied while on the World Tour. I split up the program into the two buildings. The main building houses the theater as well as an open atrium to exhibit local artist's work. This was intended to join the different mediums of art into one space so when people came for the theater, they would also be able to enjoy a local art show. The Louvre Museum in Paris seamlessly incorporates traditional and contemporary design while also creating a unique space in which visitors can view the collection on display from many different heights.
This inspired the design of the tiered art exhibit along the outside of the theater. The main building also houses the backstage for the theater, practice rooms, as well as a loading and unloading zone that is earth covered by the manipulated landscape. The second building houses an event space to be rented out by the community, offices for the Arts Partnership, and a restaurant. The roof of this building is made to act like an amphitheater. The design is inspired by Renzo Piano’s Nemo Museum in Amsterdam. The exterior of the building is dominated by a terraced pavilion to provide a space for the public to enjoy the view of the water and the city.
This rooftop is accessible by a catwalk that connects the two buildings. This aspect was drawn from the building below on the left in Berlin. A bridge is stretched across the river to unite the two buildings as well as symbolically unite the two sides of Berlin. This feature creates a unique space and allows for a cohesive design. Along the stepped roof, there is vegetation along each step to buffer the transition along with making the roof more comfortable and inviting to the visitors. The design for this as well as the amphitheater below was inspired by the traditional Greek amphitheater located at Delphi, bottom right. Along the ruined steps of the theater, the vegetation had overgrown creating a unique blend of the hard and soft surfaces.
Today, the Arts Partnership is breaking ground on the Marathon Center for the Performing Arts designed by RCM Architects in Findlay, Ohio. The property was bought from Findlay City Schools for $1 as a contribution to the project. The rest of the $10 million project is funded by Marathon Petroleum Company located in Findlay. The center will open in the fall of 2015 with great support of the community.

Art is an essential aspect of any society. All over the world art is a celebrated and crucial part of any culture. It symbolizes the past, explains the present, and looks toward the future. In an age when art programs are being cut from schools and communities, it is refreshing to see a community stand behind a project such as this.

Where is the line drawn between art and architecture? Or is there even a line at all? At what point does art become architecture, and vice versa? The design of the theater and community art center in Findlay, Ohio was based off of these three questions and various case studies from around the world.

So what is the difference between art and architecture? Architecture is art.
Works Cited


All photographs were taken by Kathleen Strigle

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