

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

{ Yale University Art Gallery }

Arch 3272b

Exhibitionism: Body Politics, Technology and Display

Spring 2020

Katharine Blackman

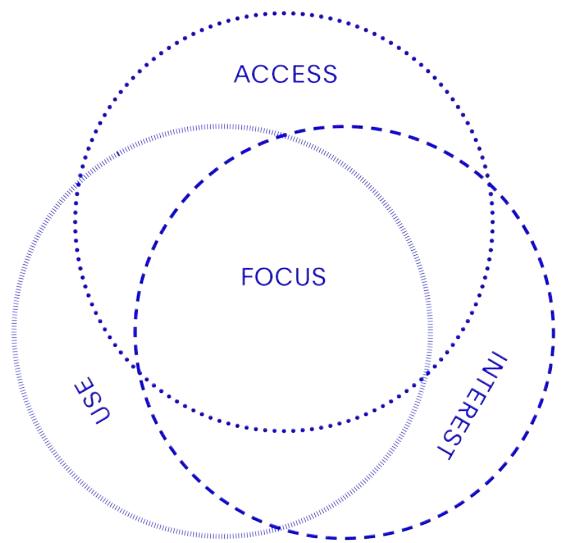
Milo Bonacci

Pricila Chavez Lara

The YUAG Sculpture Garden has the potential to be a lovely space enjoyed by anyone strolling through New Haven, but due to a lack of signage and visibility, it's often overlooked or even forgotten. Among our peers, we've discovered that many people who regularly visit the Gallery don't even know the Sculpture Garden exists!

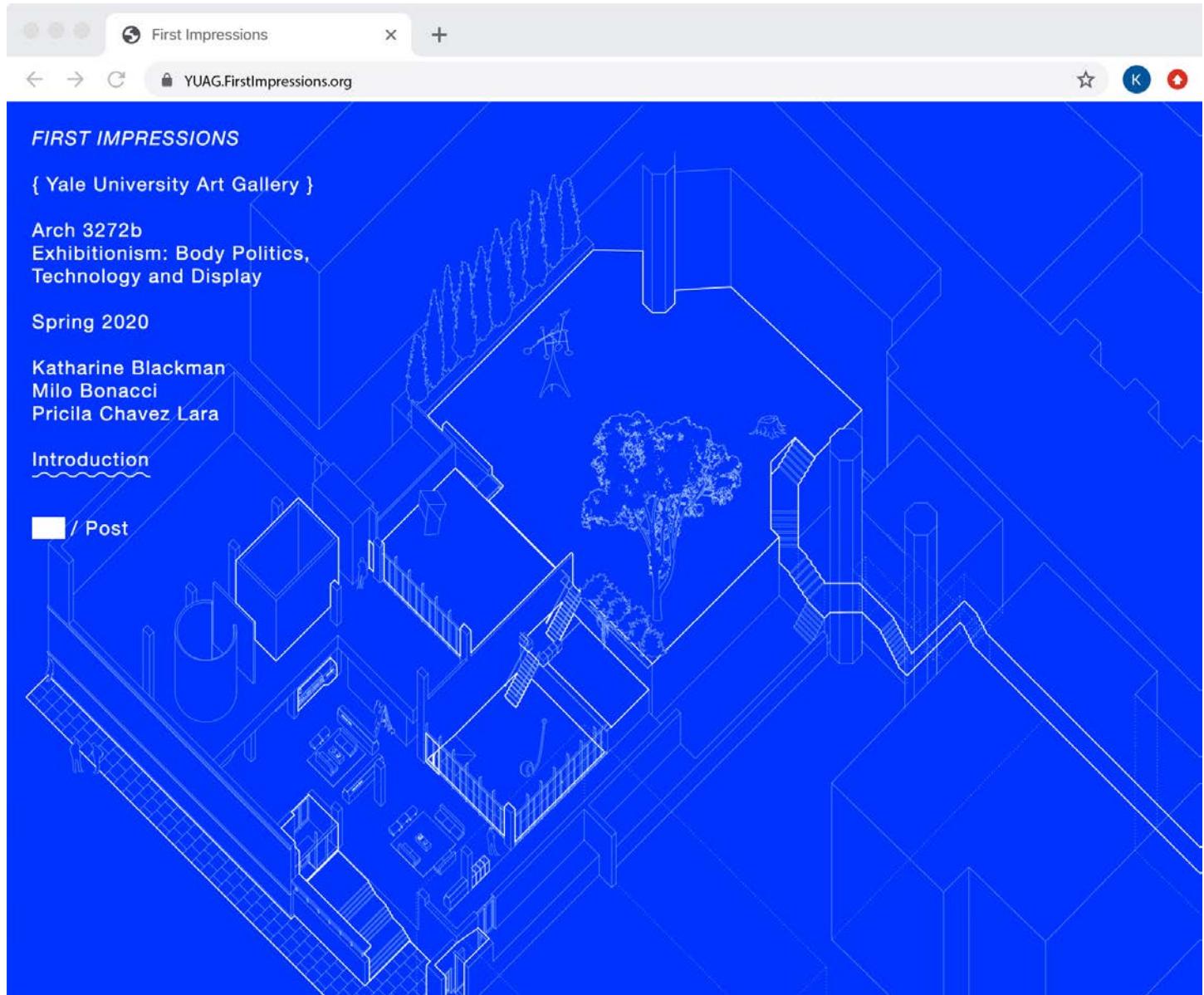
We've identified a number of issues that limit accessibility to the Sculpture Garden for new visitors and wheelchair users. To address these concerns, we've created a menu of modest interventions to ease these friction points and create a more-welcoming and enjoyable experience for visitors. **FIRST IMPRESSIONS** focuses on getting people up and into the sculpture garden, by way of improvements to accessibility, wayfinding, information points and programming.

Our approach is based on ideas of access, interest, and use. First, the Sculpture Garden should be accessible by all bodies: including people coming from a variety of backgrounds (museum goers and non-museum goers), people with different forms of mobility, and people who are concerned about virus transmission in a post-pandemic world. Second, we focus on interest, asking ourselves: what would make people more interested in visiting the Garden? And finally, how can we take full advantage of the space by offering an alternative to the way the Garden is used?



ACCESS	Minimize barriers (physical, cultural, preconceived notions of affordance)
INTEREST	Heighten curiosity and encourage return visits through programmatic development
USE	Expand the programmatic capabilities and flexible uses of the space

To address these issues, we created a website which serves two functions. First, it is an ongoing archive of the project, illustrating both our body of research, and the variety of interventions that will improve access, interest, and use of the Sculpture Garden. And second, the website itself is one of the primary interventions: designed to provide information and to provide a venue for the public to participate in the planning of the Gallery, by contributing their own experiences to the research, and offering ideas for other possible interventions.



[Note: These interventions are deliberately minimalistic and modest in size, as we believe that many small adjustments, which are feasible in scope and scale, can collectively result in dramatic, positive change in the use, culture and experience of the Gallery - such as the activation of the underused Sculpture Garden.]

Additionally, we believe it's important to communicate to YUAG and other institutions that universal design is a moral imperative which can be addressed through simple, logistical, cost effective solutions, not just large scale, extravagant and expensive remodeling.]

[The following catalog is organized in line with our vision of the Gallery “PRE” and “POST” implementation of First Impressions interventions.]

PRE // POST

Research collected Jan-Mar 2020 // Imagined opportunities for improvement

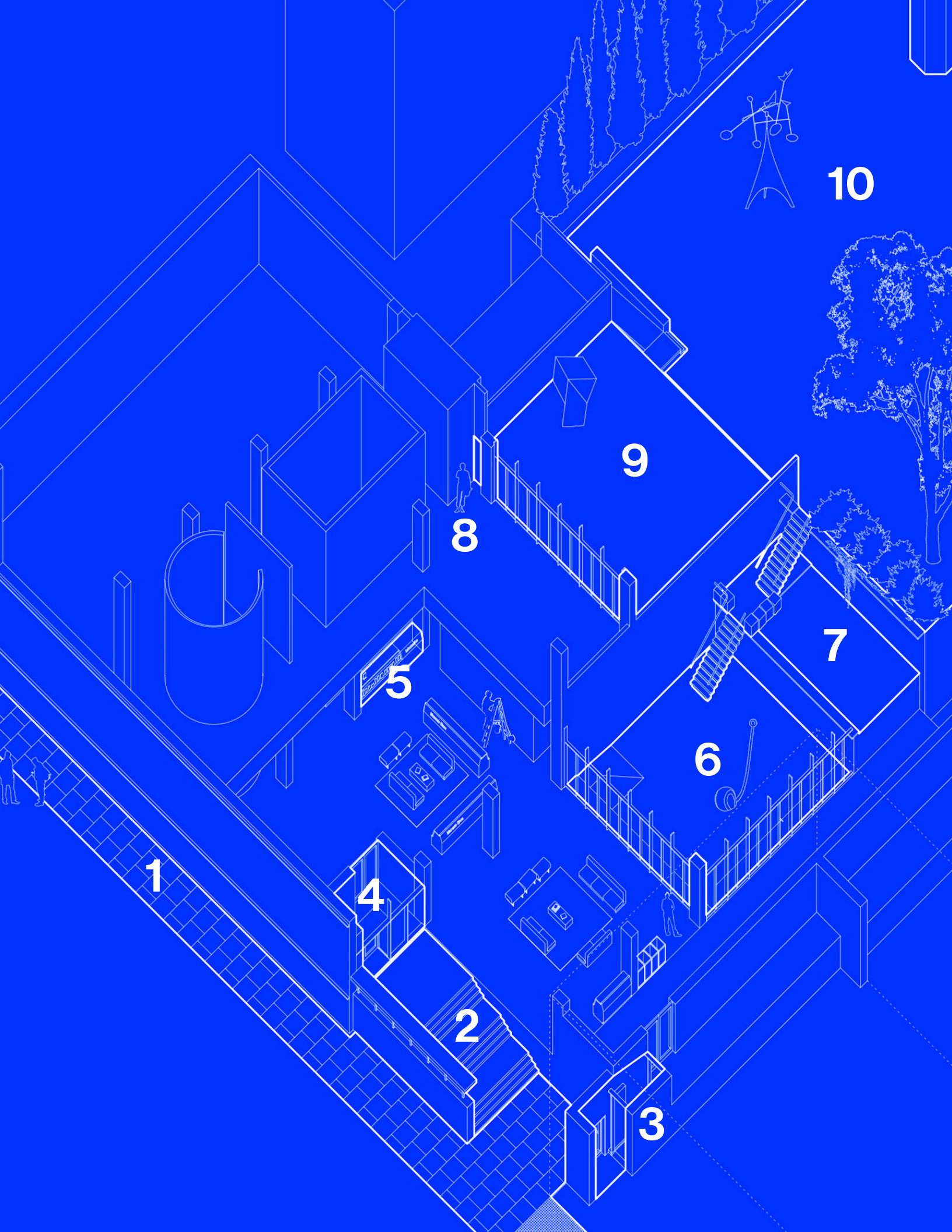
Identifying obstacles to accessibility // Small scale interventions

Analysis of use of Gallery spaces // Spatial re-organization, policy change, programming

Study of Route to Gallery // Simple solutions

Part 1

PRE



1. SIDEWALK

Approaching the Gallery

As people who are unfamiliar with YUAG stroll down Chapel Street, they might not realize they are walking past such a wonderful free community resource. Signage is modest, possibly in deference to the wonderful Kahn architecture, and many of Yale's other buildings are not so open to the public. From the sidewalk, the Gallery is not the most welcoming place for a timid passerby.

What are thresholds of access?

What percentage of visits are spontaneous vs. planned?

How can the Gallery's presence in the city extend beyond the immediate vicinity?



2. STEPS

Divergent Paths

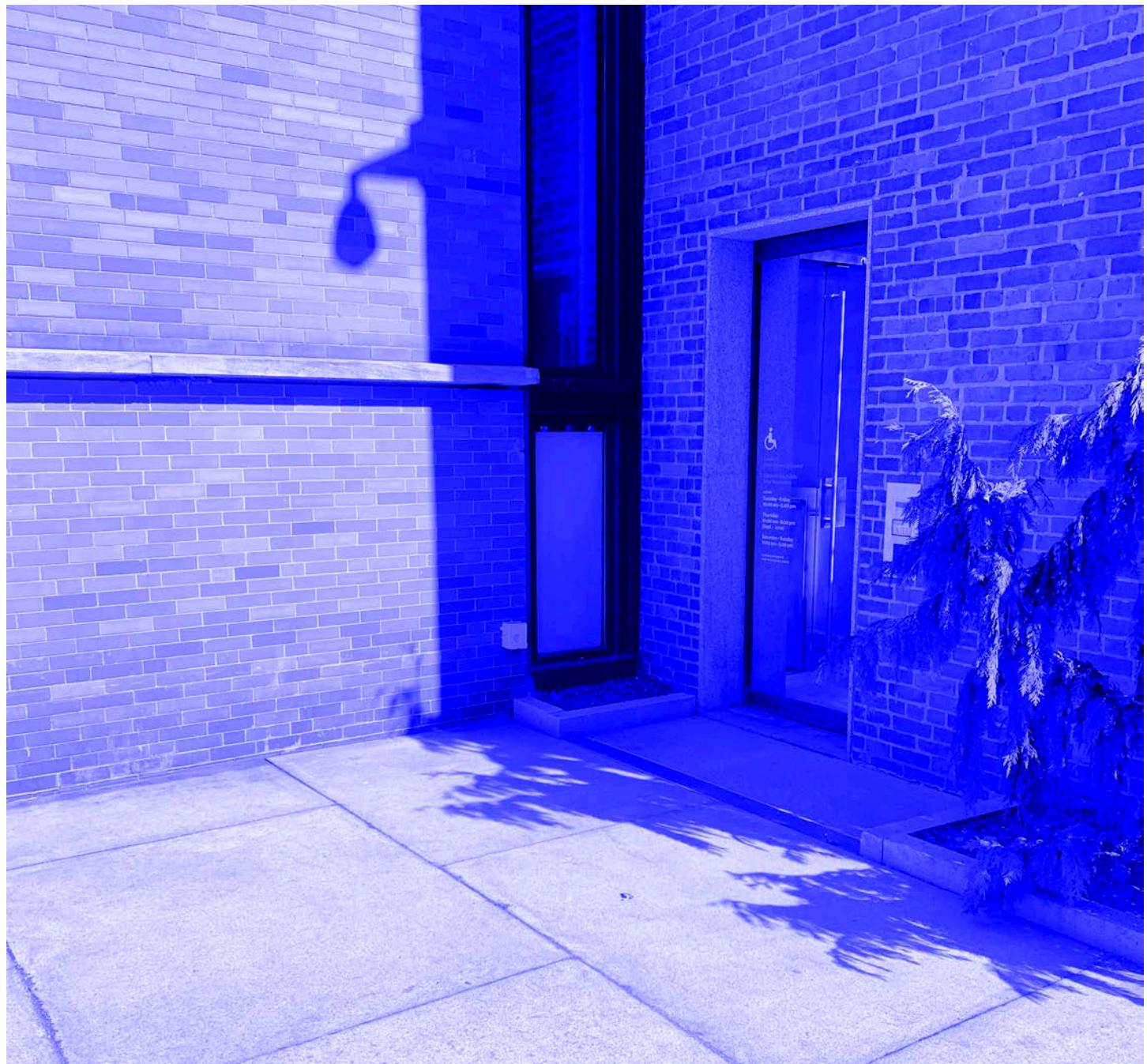
Upon arrival at the Gallery, the paths of those who can use stairs and those who cannot immediately diverge. Facing the Gallery from Chapel Street, visitors either turn left at the main entrance, (proceeding up twelve stairs, through a vestibule, past a friendly but authoritative looking staff member, and into the lobby), or right at the accessible entrance, (into a vestibule, up a lift, into a gallery, waiting for a staff member to open a door, and into the lobby). The Lift is not large enough to allow for accompaniment.



3. LIFT

Accessible Entrance into the Gallery

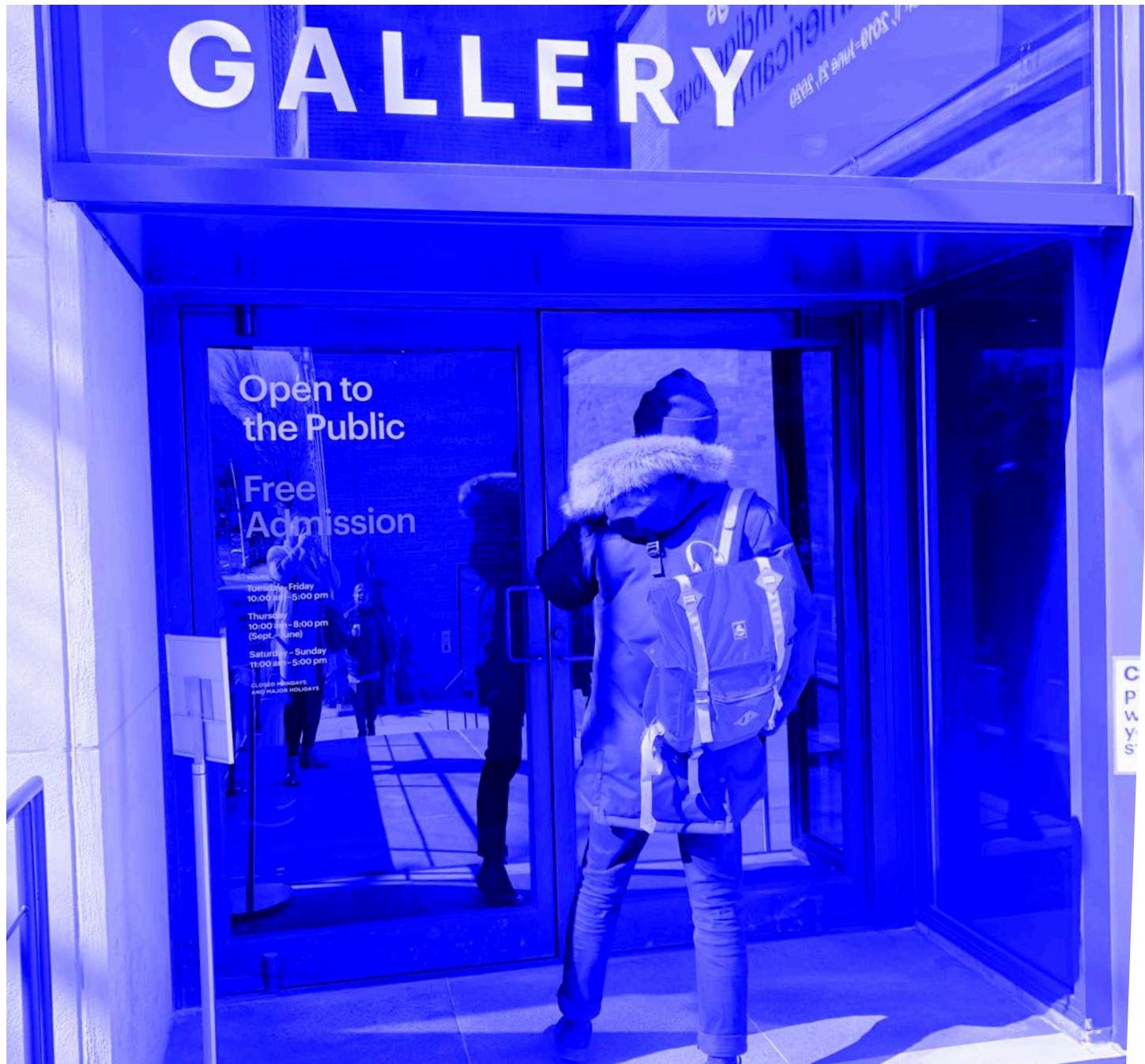
The path for people in wheelchairs to move through the Gallery to the Sculpture Garden is unintuitive, long, convoluted and requires assistance from two members of the Gallery staff. The accessible entry has visitors enter directly into a gallery, not the lobby. By this sequence, wheelchair users might visit the museum entirely without ever entering the lobby, and are not directed towards, or even made aware of the Sculpture Garden in any way.



4. ENTRANCE

Museum Attendance Post Covid-19

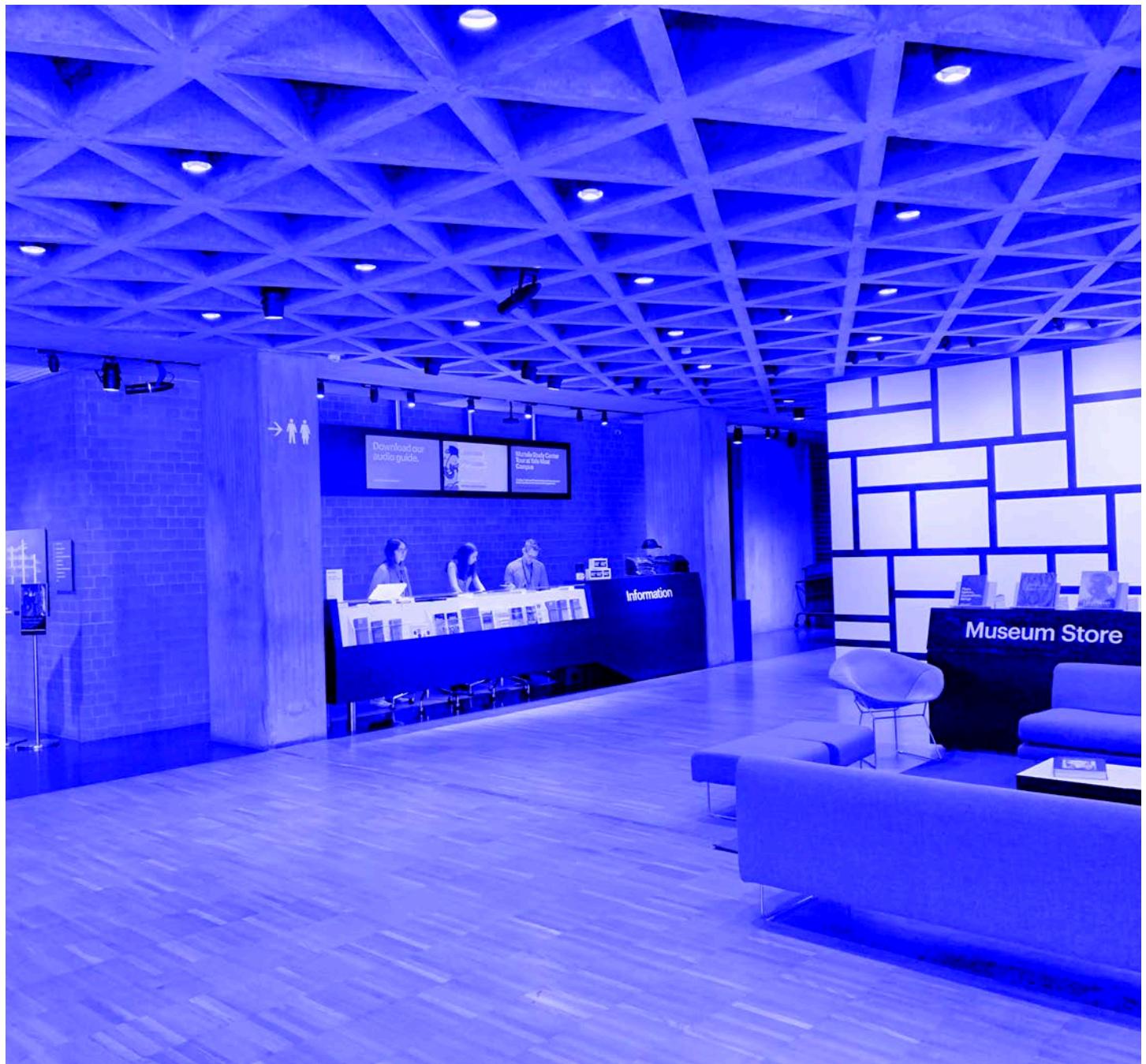
In a post-pandemic society, we anticipate a continuation of today's collective anxiety regarding gathering in public spaces. The gallery might see low attendance, as visitors are wary of participating in "non-essential" activities and uncomfortable near others in confined public spaces. Getting visitors to attend the Gallery is critical to increase interest and use of the Sculpture Garden.



5. INFORMATION DESK

Access to Information

The information desk, while elegantly tucked between columns near the elevator core, is not located in a position to best share information with all bodies. Visitors entering by the accessible (lift) entrance must travel through a gallery into the lobby, and then across the full lobby, gathering, and gift shop areas to get to the information desk-- and would not necessarily encounter it, if they don't already know where it is.



6. LOWER PATIO

Access to Sculpture Garden from Lobby

The lower patio of the Sculpture Garden is a beautiful space, which is underused as many visitors, including frequent guests who are familiar with the Gallery, don't realize they can inhabit this outdoor space. There is no signage inviting guests into the Garden, and at times, views into the garden (through the floor to ceiling windows) are blocked by coat racks that line the windows. Additionally, this lower patio is not accessible to all bodies as it requires a step down into the space. There is a second door to this patio which does have a ramp for wheelchair users, but this door is marked "Emergency Use Only." Use of the lower patio is therefore limited to people who are able bodied and "*in the know.*"



7. MIDDLE PATIO

Utilizing the Mezzanine Level

The middle patio of the Sculpture Garden currently acts as a boundary. Looking up from the lower patio, it's not clear that visitors are allowed and welcome to proceed up, into the primary space of the Sculpture Garden. The middle patio, tall and uninhabited, can be perceived more as a wall to first time visitors, who take a look, and turn around, walking back into the lobby without venturing further into the space.



8. 2nd FLOOR ACCESS

Assisted Access to the Garden for Wheelchair Users

The path for people in wheelchairs to move through the Gallery to the Sculpture Garden is long, convoluted, unintuitive, and requires assistance from two members of the Gallery staff. People in wheelchairs cannot access the lower levels of the Sculpture Garden. To enter the garden, they take the elevator to the second floor, and move through the second floor gallery to an unmarked door, which is easy to miss as it is tucked in the corner, dimly lit, and noisy (perhaps due to adjacent HVAC systems). Here, they press a button to request for a staff member to come open the door. It is unlikely for someone to happen upon this route if they don't already know about it.



9. UPPER PATIO

Underused and Under-Programmed

The upper patio of the Sculpture Garden is a wonderful space, with its quiet, serene, park-like atmosphere. Unfortunately, this urban oasis is underused and under-appreciated because it feels empty without furniture, activities and events.



10. GARDEN

A Secret Garden in New Haven

The YUAG Sculpture Garden has the potential to be a lovely space enjoyed by anyone strolling through New Haven, but due to a lack of signage and visibility, it's often overlooked or even forgotten. Among our peers, we've discovered that many people who regularly visit the Gallery don't even know the Sculpture Garden exists!

How can the garden be programmed throughout the season, or throughout the year?

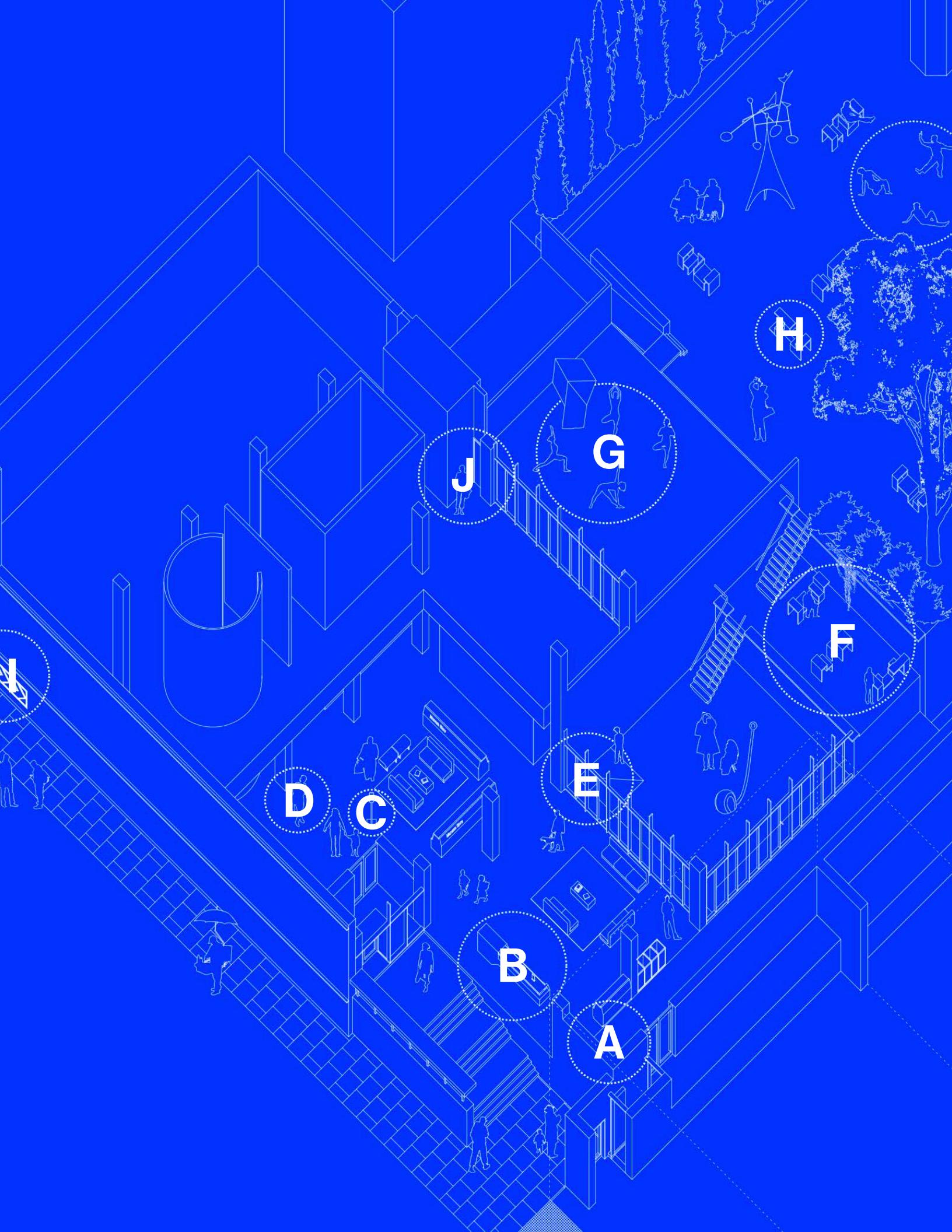
Was the garden visited during their first trip to The Gallery?

What would entice people to come back again?



Part 2

POST



A

B

E

C

D

G

J

H

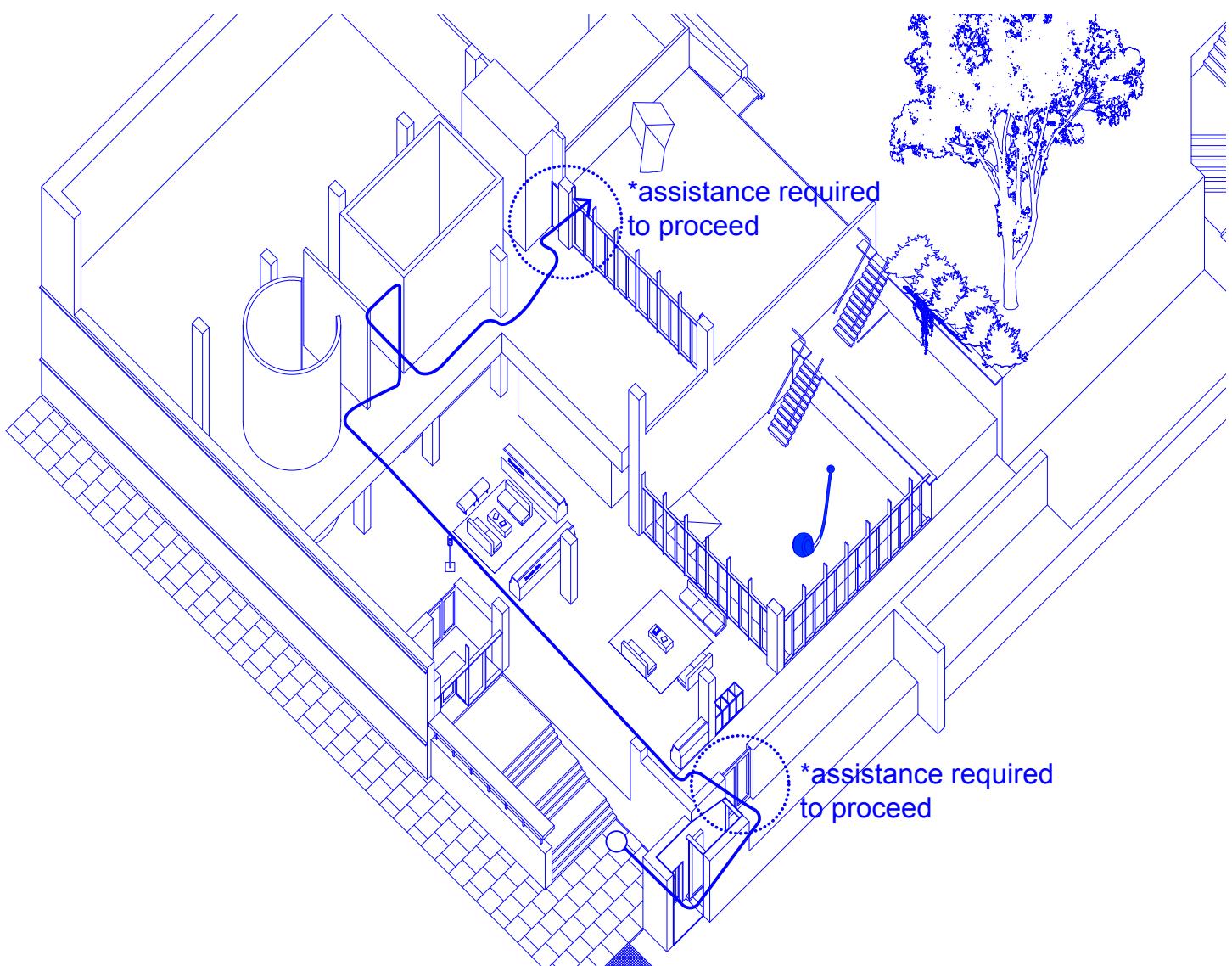
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I

A. LIFT INTO THE LOBBY

Accessible Entrance into the Gallery

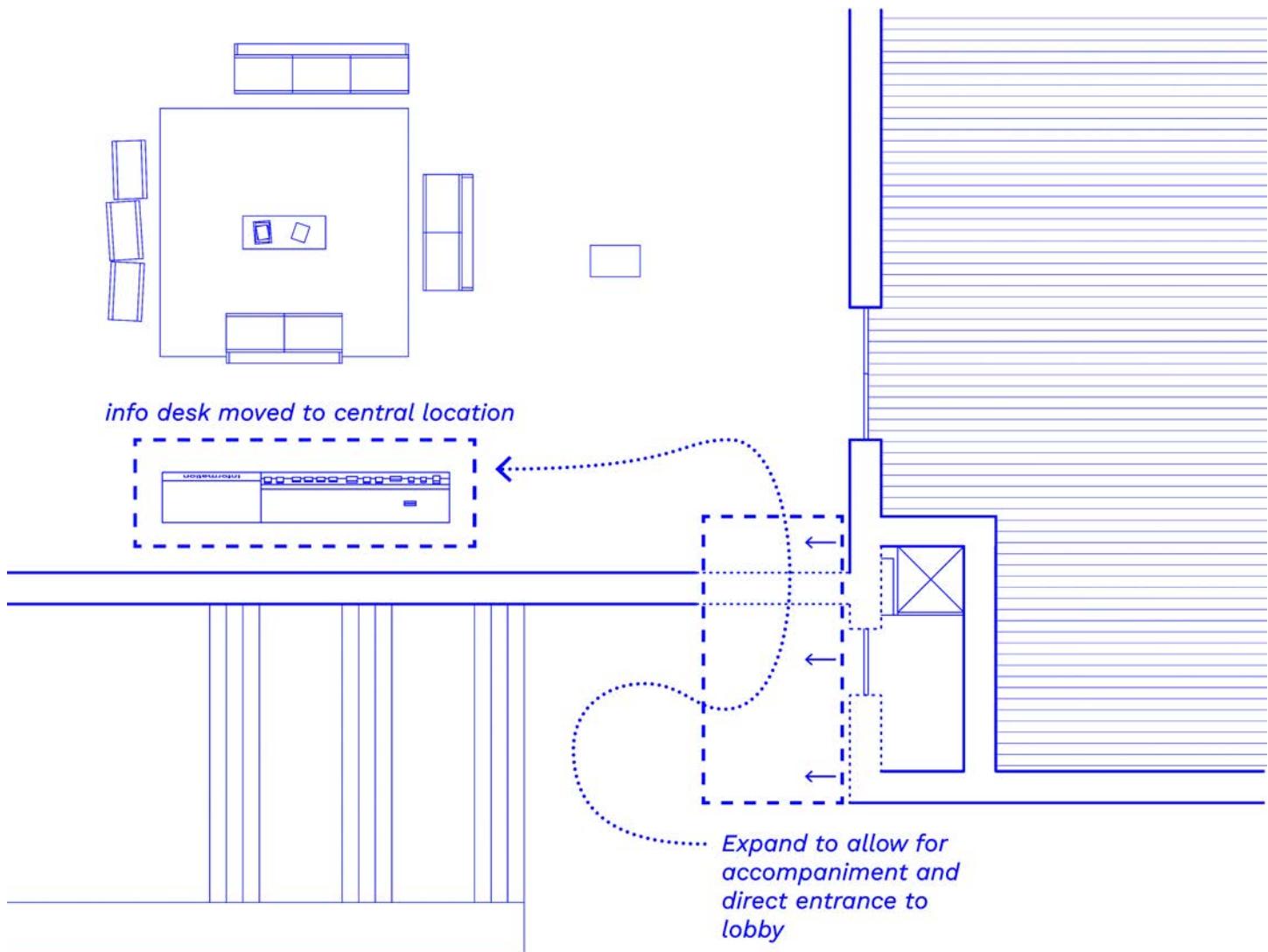
YUAG will move the lift 8' west, so wheelchair users can enter directly into the lobby. Here they will find more access to information and services, and encounter a Gallery docent, who might suggest a visit to the Sculpture Garden. Also, entrance directly into the lobby removes the need for a staff member to assist with the door (from gallery to lobby) for entry, allowing for greater autonomy for guests in wheelchairs. The information desk is moved towards this new entrance, and is equidistant from the primary and accessible entrances, equally serving all bodies.



B. CENTRALLY LOCATED INFORMATION DESK

Access to Information

YUAG will relocate the information desk to the south wall of the lobby, between the primary and accessible entrances. With this, all visitors will encounter the information desk immediately upon entrance, where they receive information, guidance and recommendations for their visit. Desk staff can remind visitors to check out the Sculpture Garden, if they haven't already done so. The new information desk directly faces the lower courtyard of the Sculpture Garden, so visitors know exactly how to get there.

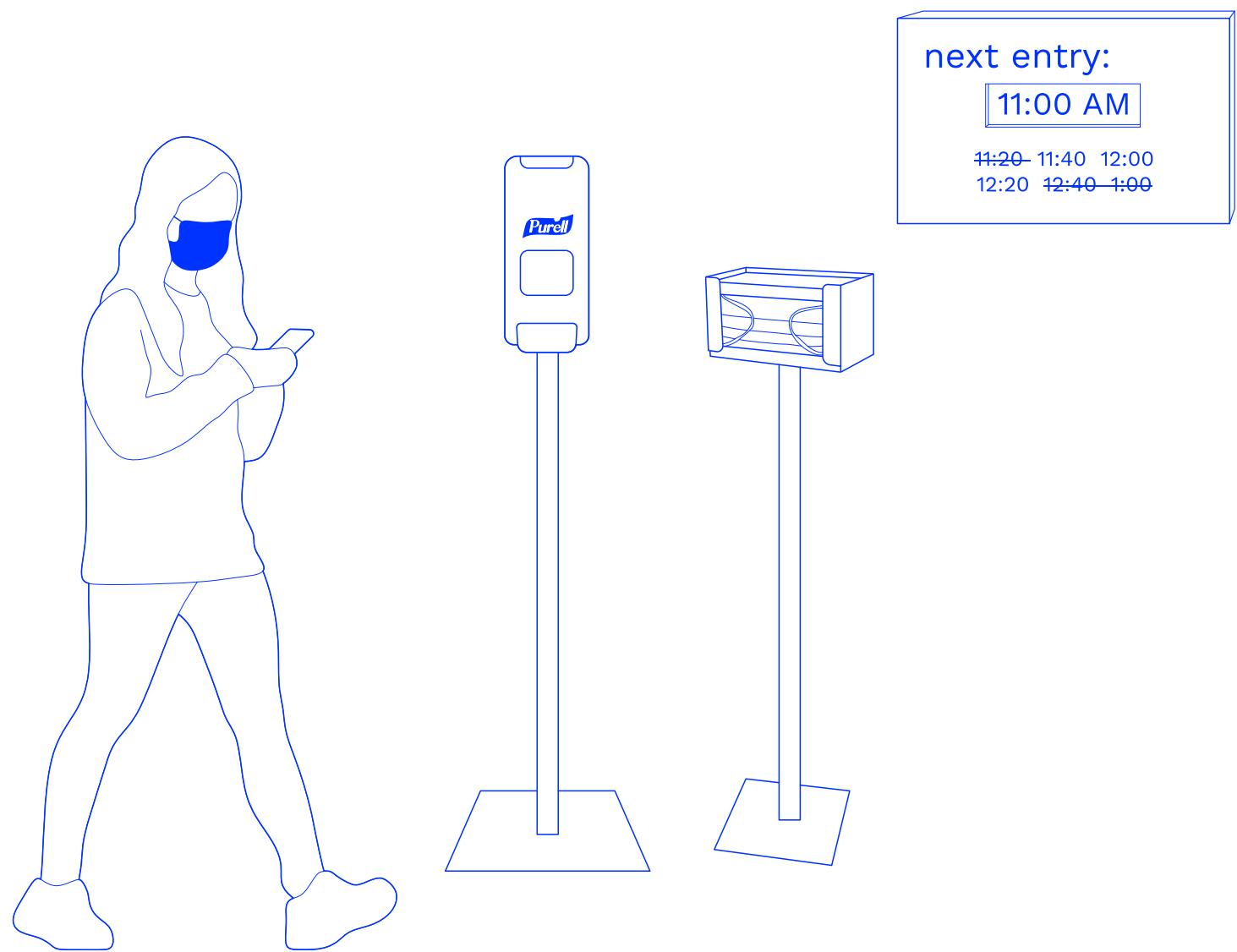


C. HAND SANITIZER DISPENSERS

YUAG Response to Covid-19

YUAG will utilize the entry to reassure guests of Gallery distancing policies, distribute face masks and provide hand sanitizer. Doors all now have touchless functionality, and entry to the gallery is timed to limit the number of visitors at one time. Fewer visitors at once allows for greater distancing within the museum.

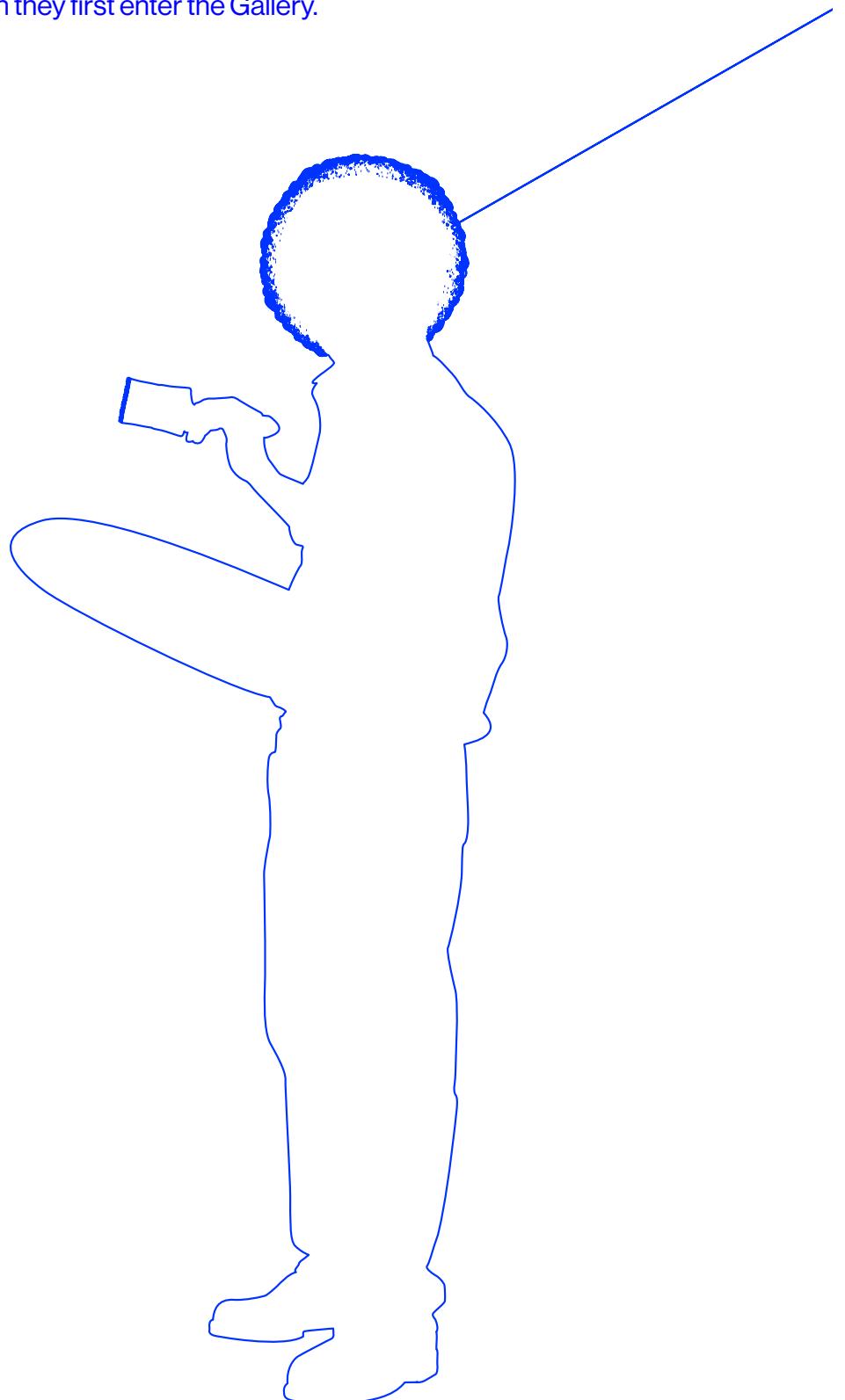
When the Gallery is at maximum capacity, visitors are encouraged to visit the Sculpture Garden, which is accessible via High Street, without having to enter the Gallery. The Sculpture Garden offers an alternative to the confined Gallery, as a park-like space to get fresh air and enjoy nature.



D. THE FIRST FRIENDLY FACE

First Impressions

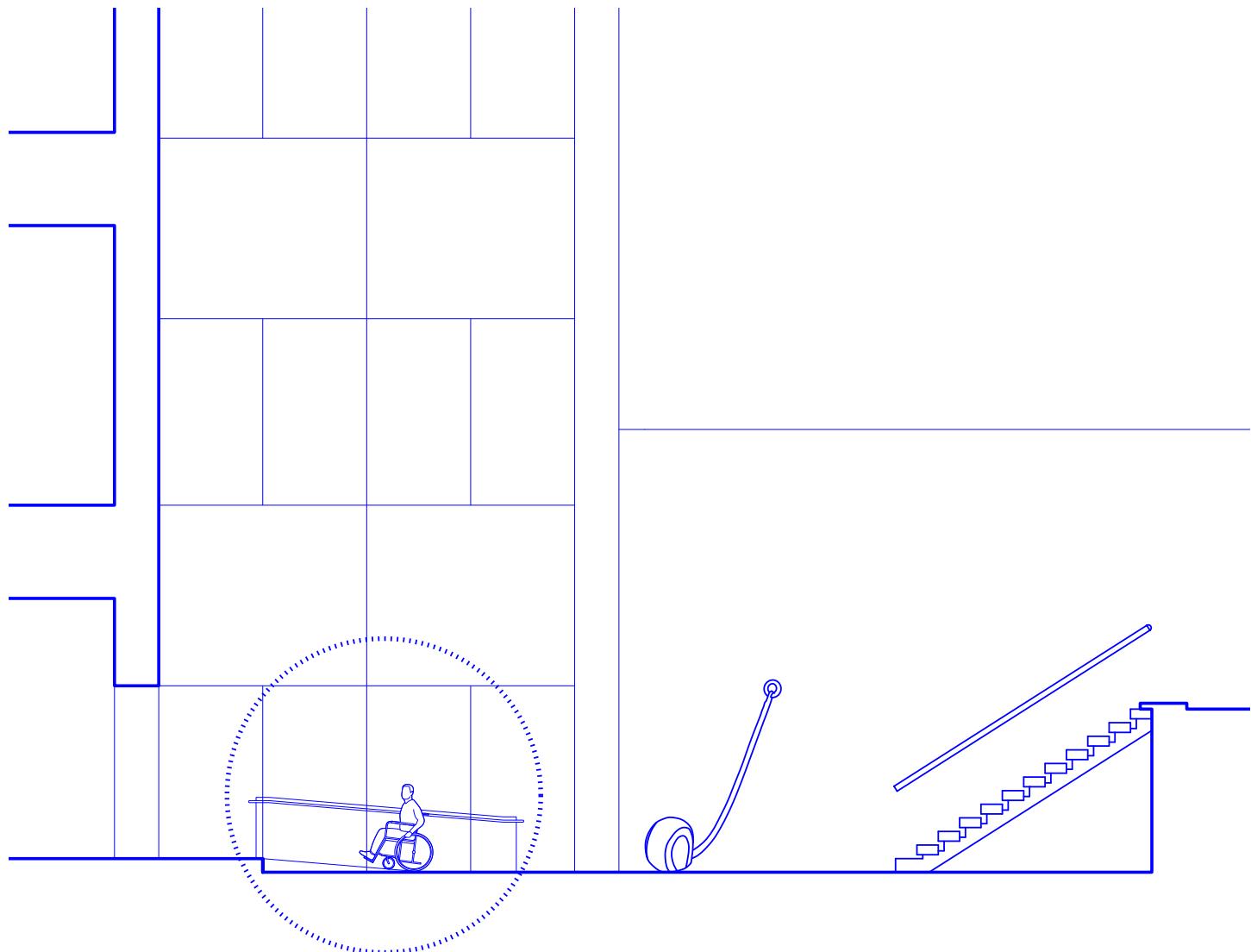
The first person a visitor encounters when entering the Gallery will be a friendly face - acting more as a greeter than a security guard - who will welcome them, and offer tips for first timers. YUAG provides newly redesigned uniforms to staff, less formal and guard-like, and more casual and approachable. As a result, guests are no longer intimidated when they first enter the Gallery.



E. RAMP ACCESS TO LOWER PATIO

Access to Sculpture Garden from Lobby

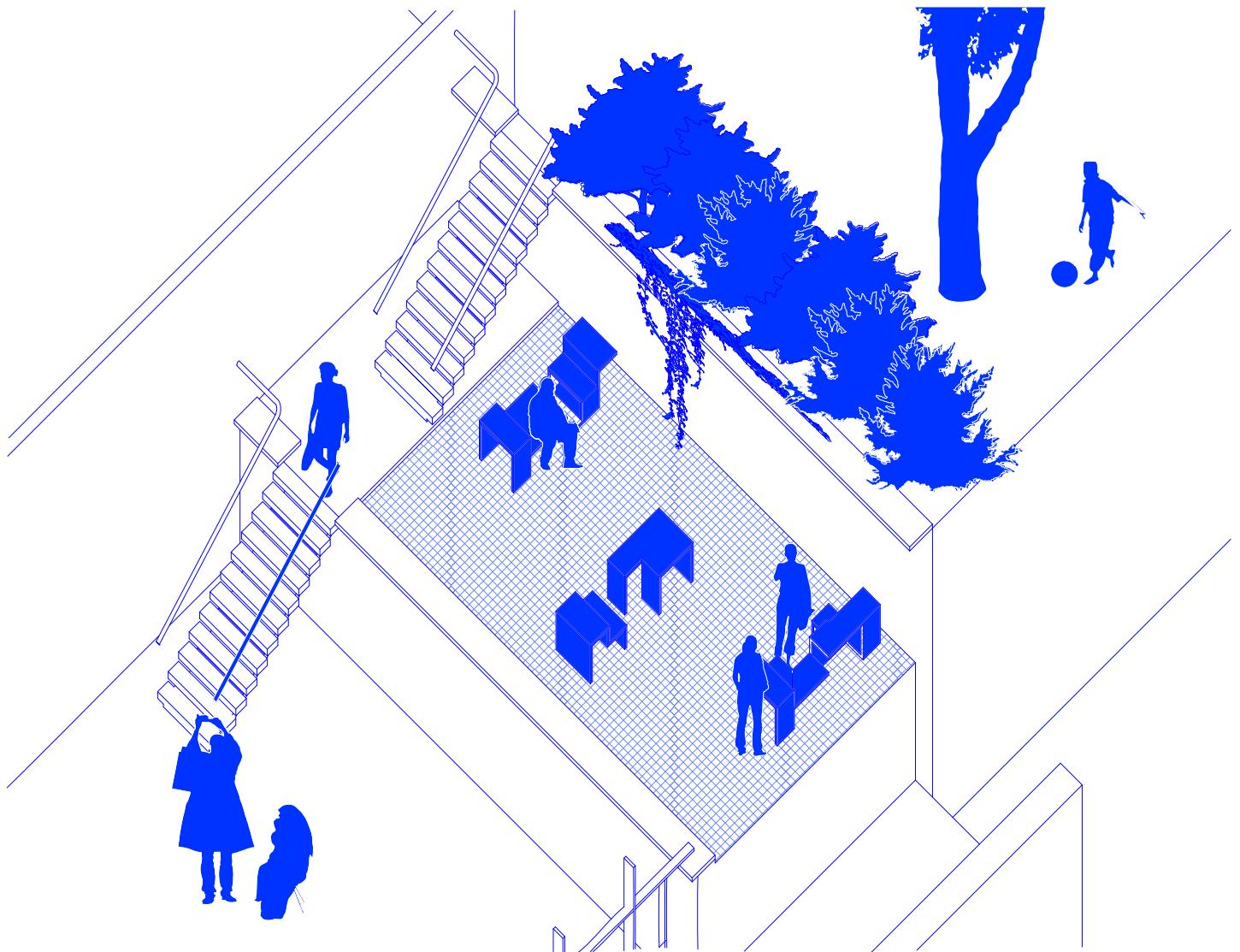
YUAG can recharge the lower patio as an active space and an extension of the lobby by installing large, sliding doors in the curtain wall that can remain open all day when weather permits. This move is intended to produce a deeper interconnected relationship between the spaces, and signal to visitors that they are allowed and encouraged to enter the patio. Additionally, a ramp will be installed to allow access for people in wheelchairs.



F. MID-PATIO RECONFIGURED AS OCCUPIABLE SPACE

Utilizing the Mezzanine Level

The middle patio is transformed into an active space, not just a landing for a path up to the main garden area. Inserting furniture into this seemingly abandoned space will welcome people onto the patio and encourage them to move further up and into the garden space. The middle patio is a beautiful spot to rest your feet, get some fresh air, take a lunch break and/or have an informal meeting with (new) friends. The once unusable space is now a lively social area.

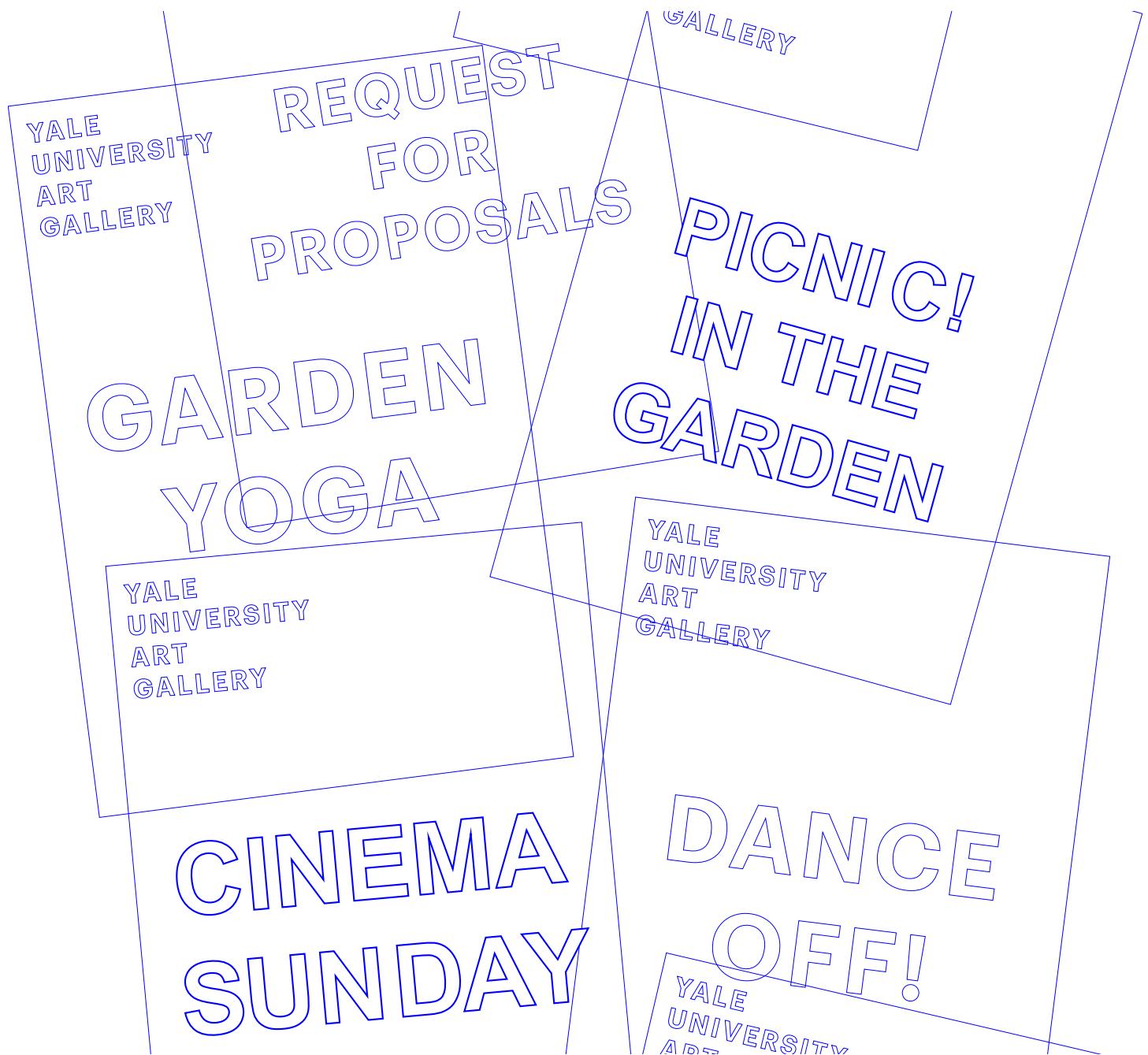


G. PROGRAMMING

YOGA!, ET CETERA

YUAG rolls out a brand new series of monthly, weekly, seasonal and annual events which occur in the Sculpture Garden. Yoga classes, film screenings, dance parties, art talks, lunch with docents, children's events, and concerts fill the space with life, and the Sculpture Garden is New Haven's *place to be* on a Friday night. Also, having learned about the space after attending an event, visitors are more likely to return to the Sculpture Garden on their own time, enjoying the space independently.

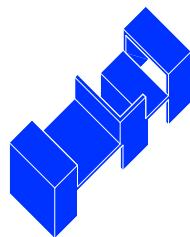
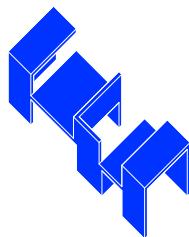
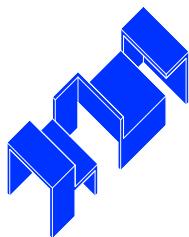
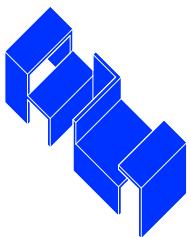
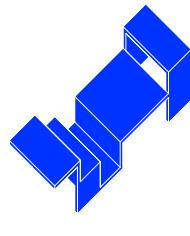
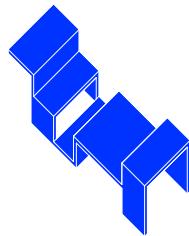
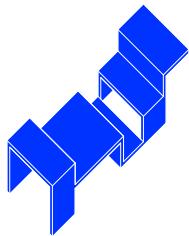
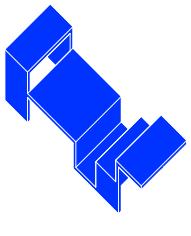
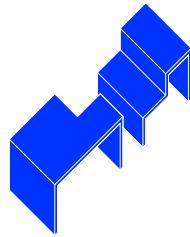
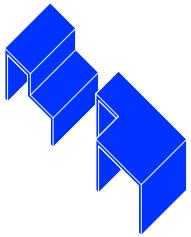
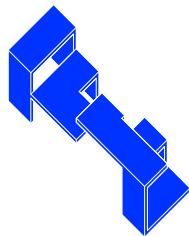
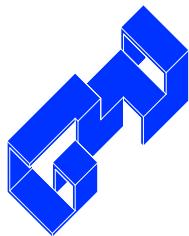
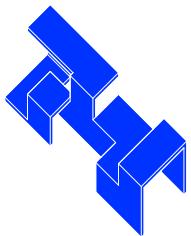
The value of a programmable, open-air, beautiful space can't be overstated. As we emerge from quarantine and isolation, there is a lot of potential in reconsidering and reconfiguring our social gatherings.



H. RFP (HYPOTHETICAL DESIGN COMPETITIONS)

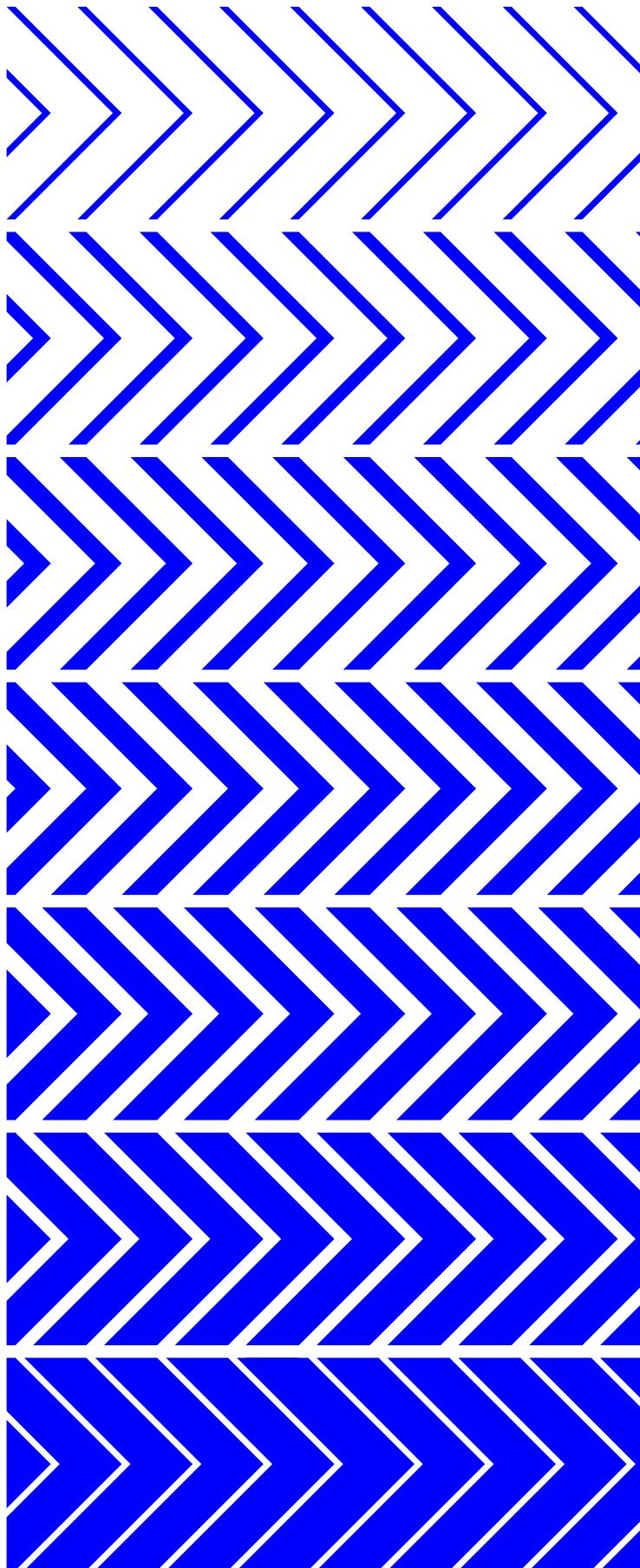
Design by Democracy

The Gallery's yearly design competition inspires design students, carpenters, DIY-ers, and creatives to bring their A-game. Participants submit design proposals for furniture, installations, sculptures, or pavilions, and the three winning proposals (critic's choice, popular vote, and most sustainable) are fabricated and installed in the Sculpture Garden each summer. These installations entice visitors to use the Sculpture Garden, and engage the broader New Haven community in its design.



I. MACRO-SCALE WAYFINDING

Abstract graphic identity extending into the city to indicate proximity



“...The Gallery is in that direction”

“...The Gallery is not far”

“...I must be approaching The Gallery”

“...We are getting closer to The Gallery”

“...The Gallery is right there”

“...The Gallery is right here”

“I am going to go inside”

J. 2ND FLOOR ACCESS TO GARDEN

Assisted Access to the Garden for Wheelchair Users

The area near the door is sunnier and more inviting because the solid, heavy, opaque door is replaced by a glass door (to match many of the other doors in the YUAG). The door opens by a sensor, activated when someone approaches, eliminating the need for reliance on YUAG staff, and supporting independent wandering through the Gallery spaces. A large sign indicates that this door is an accessible entrance to the Sculpture Garden.

