

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met), located in New York City, is one of the architectural wonders of the United States with a structure that establishes the building as the preeminent institution of the arts. Yet this seamless neoclassical composition is a blend of iterative designs from multiple architects over more than 100 years: Calvert Vaux & Jacob Mould in 1880, Richard Morris Hunt in 1902, McKim, Mead & White in 1913, Kevin Roche & John Dinkeloo in 1991 [**Figure 1**]. The Met was designed to draw in pedestrians with its vast scale and add gravitas to the works of art with stylized complexity. Since its inception, the Met has continuously evolved its form to accommodate growing functional needs while dually fulfilling its original purpose.

Perhaps the most recognizable component of the Met is the Fifth Avenue façade completed by architect Richard Morris Hunt in 1902 [**Figure 2**]. This early evolution of the Met is a face lift from the museum's original form [**Figure 3**]. Hunt incorporates dominating scale, bilateral symmetry, bold geometric shapes, and high-quality limestone to establish gravitas and grab attention. The main body is divided into three bays bordered by pairs of colossal Corinthian columns. Each bay possesses a monumental arch with decorative keystones and moldings and house semicircular windows that invite natural light into the museum. The decorative columnar pairs are adorned with their own entablature while a single cornice and dental ornament traverses the main body. Bilaterally symmetric wings accompany the main body and have since been generously extended to meet the needs of additional gallery space [**Figure 4**]. Hunt's façade incorporates ordered opposition (massive yet intricate, dominating yet inviting, eclectic yet integrated) and displays architectural prowess realized as a single structure. These classicizing features indicate importance and define the Met as the place to be for people interested in art. The Met's exterior form draws pedestrians in by sampling what's inside the museum and controls its users from that point on.

As visitors enter the Met, the museum's many wings and galleries continue the spectacle created by the exterior as they maintain gravitas and function as stylistic pedestals for the artwork within. The interior is gigantic as it spans a quarter mile and is more than two million

square feet to accommodate countless works of art. Visitors start their journey from the Great Hall **[Figure 5]** which is massive in scale, elaborate in design, and echoes the Fifth Avenue façade's Roman style. Each of the three massive bays of the Great Hall is vaulted with a striking dome and is supported by arches that spring from enormous piers. On the lower level, elegant Ionic columns support a mezzanine that wraps around the Hall while murals and banners introduce current exhibits. Straight ahead is the Grand Stairway **[Figure 6]** with a fleet of stairs surrounded by Corinthian columns and decorative arches with generous ornamentation. These classicizing interior spaces affirm the Met's mission of captivating audiences and setting up the best possible backdrop for its artwork. Deeper in the building are various wings that either hold permanent collections or focus on different periods and geographies; they vary with respect to both style and artwork. The Sackler Wing displays the Temple of Dendur (Rome, 10 BCE) with a modern backdrop of stone, glass, and water that creates a powerful and unique architectural interaction **[Figure 7]**. The American Wing maintains a collection of works from North America situated beside a beautiful Beaux-Arts styled facia that integrates natural, rational, and modern elements **[Figure 8]**. The Wallace Wing holds contemporary art in a more streamlined interior space and extends the museum's range of galleries **[Figure 9]**. In many ways, the Met's diverse interior spaces are works of art in and of themselves while they continuously induce deeper exploration of the museum's exhibits; it is easy to get lost inside the Met which is to the museum's advantage. Most directly however, the eclectic styles within the Met provide flexibility for curators who seek backdrops and gallery spaces that best complement their shows.

Although sections of the Met were designed by eminent architectures and consequently reflect diverse architectural styles, they are all related in form and function. The many iterations of the Met's architecture underscore its simple and enduring mission: engage visitors and complement the artwork within. With an array of captivating styles and interior spaces, the Met has cemented its position as a leading institution of the arts while also representing a joint architectural masterpiece.

## **Bibliography**

### ***Historical Sources***

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### ***Images***

Figure 1: Floor plan ([link](#))

Figure 2: Hunt’s Fifth Avenue Façade ([link](#))

Figure 3: Original Building ([link](#))

Figure 4: Contemporary Fifth Avenue Façade ([link](#))

Figure 5: Great Hall ([link](#))

Figure 6: Grand Stairway ([link](#))

Figure 7: Sackler Wing ([link](#))

Figure 8: American Wing ([link](#))

Figure 9: Wallace Wing ([link](#))