



NEW MUSEUM: The Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, N. Y. The structure was designed by I. M. Pei and Partners.

Architecture: Object Lesson in Art and Museology

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SYRACUSE—Anyone who wants to know what the 20th century is about esthetically will be well rewarded by a trip to the Everson Museum of Art, a small, superb structure that opened here last weekend to serve this community of 300,000. After eight long years of planning

and fund raising for a total of slightly less than \$3.5 million, Syracuse has built an object

lesson in art and museology.

The Everson Museum sets a standard that other cities, embarked on a wave of museum and cultural center building of epic proportions and some historical significance, will now be called on to match.

Everson's building has been designed by I. M. Pei and Partners, with the sensitive collaboration of the museum's director, Max Sullivan, and the sensible backing of an obviously nonmeddling board of trustees whose faith in professionalism has been justified by the results. They must be doing something right, because Mr. Pei has received the commission for the extension of the National Gallery in Washington on the strength of the Syracuse job.

This is the architecture of today as art history will eventually record it. It does not try to be pretty, or classical, or decorative, or evocative, or palatable to the cautious. It does its own thing.

Most important of all, it is a clear demonstration of the dramatic oneness of contemporary art and architecture.

This is a fact of art that has escaped those constantly calling for "integration of the

art." It has eluded the critics who deal in increasingly complicated treatises on increasingly minimal aspects of modern painting and sculpture without recognition of their relationship to the contemporary environment.

It has been ignored by most museum directors who treat art of any kind as something to be maintained and displayed in a vacuum. No greater disservice or distortion would be inflicted on the art of this century.

Not since the age of fresco, to which the current phenomenon bears tenuous resemblances, have art and architecture provided such an esthetic and environmental whole. If the specialists would stop looking at their specialties long enough, they could see the shape and meaning of art in our time. Everson is a good place to see it.

On the Highest Plane

The visitor will not find a notable permanent collection. There are other cities to go for that. But he will have what the contemporary art museum can, and should, uniquely provide: a fully dimensional esthetic experience in which the building and its contents interact on the highest plane.

Whether Everson has succeeded by design or accident or both, this esthetic totality is undoubtedly a more important and valuable objective for the small museum in the small city than the costly and competitive building of a large collection.

It gives that old chestnut, "art appreciation," new meaning. It should be the primary aim of any arts building program. If the point is missed, as it is being missed or muffed in so many of the

new centers, the result is second-rate art and compromise culture.

The form of the Syracuse building is a squared pinwheel consisting of four gallery blocks around a sculpture court. Placed in the desolate limbo of center city urban renewal, opposite an older sports and convention hall, next to a steam plant and with future neighbors amorphous, the museum gives style where none exists. It also connects with an underground parking garage, a planning plus.

The material is the same inside and out—reinforced concrete faced with a diagonally striated, bush hammered aggregate that warms the gray with crushed rose granite. Exposed, natural concrete borders the panels and is used for stairs, balconies and bridges inside.

The identical exterior and interior finishes can be seen simultaneously through glass panels set in channels in the walls between the gallery blocks. The only additional material is oak, beautifully used for gallery floors, stair rails and display cabinets.

Outside, the small, but massive blocks hover over a large, paved plaza. Above ground, the whole structure is only 130 feet by 140 feet. Underground, it broadens to a 260-foot length to accom-

modate administrative and members' quarters and an elegant 320-seat auditorium.

Inside, the gallery blocks have controlled, artificial light. They are bridged continuously around the two-story, 50-foot square interior court, where natural light pours down from rimming skylights of clear glass, always visible from the galleries. Passing clouds and outdoor planting become part of the building through these and the glazing that joins them, running from ground to roof, at two corners.

Timeless and Classical

The carefully arranged and detailed sequences and play of space and light, the changing views of art form and color, the way the pedestrian moves and experiences and enjoys all this, is architecture. The way in which abstract painting—such as the huge Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler canvasses hung on the court wall—is enriched and completed by the setting is art. And the reverse, of course, is true also.

At its small scale, the building is comfortably monumental. It is timeless and classical without caricaturing classicism or compromising its contemporaneity. As art and culture Everson is now—and it is going to last a good long time.