

Design Overview

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The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University will play an integral role in the academic and social life of a major research university while serving as a vital cultural resource for the Raleigh-Durham community. It has therefore been conceived as a cultural hub that engages students and welcomes the community.

The museum location, adjacent to Duke's Central Campus and between the East and West campuses, places the arts in a strategic position, signaling that the arts' core values of creativity and innovation are integral across all levels of study and inquiry. Furthermore, its placement in a forested area next to the Sarah P. Duke Gardens reinforces the museum's role as a gateway between Duke and the Research Triangle community.

The museum has been conceived as a catalyst and convener that fosters multidisciplinary collaboration and serves as a laboratory for research, experimentation and discovery. The creation of the Nasher at Duke marks the first time that Duke's collections, programs and research initiatives in the arts will be housed within one facility specifically developed for presenting and exploring art. The new building will provide galleries for the presentation of its permanent collection and a wide range of temporary exhibitions. It also includes an auditorium, classrooms and administrative offices.

The design dynamically embraces the surrounding landscape, heightening the relationship between the building and its location, and reinforcing the concept of the museum not as an object within the landscape but rather as "platonic boxes." Positioned in a loose radial pattern near the top of a gentle slope that characterizes the site, their placement defines an irregular, pentagonal central courtyard. Covered by a light canopy of glass and steel, this dramatic central area serves as the museum's lobby and sculpture gallery, and will be a hub for a variety of university and community activities.

Each of the pavilions houses a specific component of the building program. One is designed as gallery space for the permanent collection; two are for the display of temporary exhibitions; another houses an auditorium for classes and community use; and one contains classrooms, a café and administrative offices. The pavilions, monolithic forms with limited fenestration, are made of humble materials in earth tones that refer to the "Duke Stone," a warm, locally quarried stone commonly used in the older buildings on campus.

Allowing for a seamless transition from the surrounding gardens to the interior of the building, the atrium offers views to the outside through full-height glass openings between the pavilions. To further blur the division between interior and exterior, the floor surface of the lobby extends beyond its perimeter to define the exterior entry terraces and an independent terrace for the café. Natural vegetation from the exterior enters the building through a series of planters positioned under the glass roof of the courtyard. Visitors are meant to move from one pavilion to the next as though through an architecturally abstracted version of the natural landscape.