

KIMBELL ART MUSEUM EXPANSION

2007 – 2013 Forth Worth, USA

Opened in 1972, the Kimbell Art Museum, Louis I. Kahn's last masterpiece, is undoubtedly one of the twentieth century's most celebrated buildings. The extension designed by the Renzo Piano Building Workshop, inaugurated in 2013, eased the shortage of space that had been felt for some time, providing the museum with new galleries for temporary exhibitions, training spaces, a new library and a larger auditorium, as well providing a large underground garage below the park that separates and connects the two buildings.

The new Piano Pavilion (so renamed by the museum board) is about 50 meters west of the Kahn building and bounds a public park between the buildings. This encourages visitors to use the main entrance to the park planned by Kahn, and the service exit, used until now, adjoining the old parking lot. The Piano Pavilion is fully independent by the character of its spaces and architectural vocabulary, but intimately related to Kahn's building, repeating its dimensions and the palette of materials – reinforced concrete, glass and wood. Hence, in moving through the two buildings, visitors feel intimately involved in a common experience.

The two buildings face each other. The façade of the Piano Pavilion repeats the extension of about 90 meters and the tripartite arrangement dictated by the Kahn building. The entrance volume, fully glazed, is slightly set back and flanked by two lateral bodies with blind faces in reinforced concrete. The building is set on two levels: the ground floor – 6.40 meters high, similar to that of the Kahn building – and basement. The plan is divided into two parts. The block towards the park adjoins the atrium with the reception, flanked by two galleries. The rear block, with access through a glazed passage, is covered by a grassy roof and contains a large gallery with carefully controlled lighting for particularly delicate works, training spaces, the library and the double-height auditorium that sinks into the ground, reached through two scenic coplanar staircases set perpendicular to the axis of crossing the building.

A portico of pillars in reinforced concrete with a square section and regularly spaced runs around the building, supporting the wooden beams, which in turn support the roof structure. In addition, the porch shelters the south façade from direct sunlight. The roof, from intrados to extrados, consists of stretched fabric, wooden beams, silk-screened panes of glass and a saw-tooth arrangement of aluminum panels covered with photovoltaic cells that filter the light falling from the north, supplemented when necessary by artificial light devices concealed by stretched fabric. The eleven double wooden beams, which give structure and rhythm to the spaces of the Pavilion, are a tribute to the structural design of the Kahn building. The Douglas fir beams designed by the RPBW, brought from British Columbia, are the same length as the reinforced concrete shells designed by Louis Kahn and August Komendant: 30 meters.



The mixing and pouring of the reinforced concrete walls were entrusted to a Texan outfit under the direct supervision of the Venetian Dottor company. The result is impressive septum walls unjointed in height and length of a light, even grey tone and with a smooth finish like marble: the perfect backdrop for artworks hung directly on the walls. The exhibition galleries are articulated by mobile partitions lined with cotton, another detail taken from Louis Kahn, while the wooden floorboards discreetly conceal the ventilation system.