

## THE HIGH MUSEUM OF ART

Atlanta, USA

The High Museum of Art was founded by the Atlanta Art Association in 1905. With a permanent collection of over 11,000 works of art, it's the most important art museum in the south-eastern United States.

Its headquarters, the Stent Family Wing, was designed by Richard Meier in the early 1980s.

This 12,500 square-metre building is located on Peachtree Street in the heart of Atlanta's "art district".

The building is part of a larger complex known as the Woodruff Arts Centre, which houses the Atlanta College of Art and is home to the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and the Alliance Theatre.

In 1999, High Museum Director Michael Shapiro and Woodruff Art Center President Shelton Stanfill commissioned the Renzo Piano Building Workshop to expand the museum.

The goal was to double the exhibition space in order to ensure that the entire collection, which had increased over the years, could be displayed to the public.

The block upon which the museum complex stood also had to be reorganized to create a dialogue between the new and the existing buildings.

In order to match the existing structure's scale, the project was divided into three separate buildings that would form a cultural campus: the Wieland Pavilion, the Anne Cox Chambers Wing and an administrative services centre.

All of the buildings would be built around a public square. "Sifly Piazza" is the true heart of the campus, nestled between the Woodruff Art Centre, Meir's High Museum and the new buildings.

This pedestrian-only square is an urban element absorbed by the museum and alleviates its institutional role by promoting interaction with the community.

The intervention area had an irregular trapezoidal shape and bordered on 16th street, Peachtree street (from which Meier's Stent Family Wing can be accessed), 15th street (which the Woodruff Arts Centre overlooks) and Lombard way. The main entrance was moved to Lombard way, where the expansion work itself was carried out. The new galleries for the permanent collection and the temporary exhibitions, as well as the offices, the restaurant, the cafes and the bookshops, are all facing the square and are visually interconnected by a glass roof.

The largest building, the Wieland Pavilion, contains a portion of the permanent collection, along with an area that can be adapted to host special exhibits. The levels hosting the gallery are 36.6 metres long by 24.4 metres wide. The building has an

outdoor terrace, boasting a sculpture by Oldenburg, and is connected to the Meier wing by means of a system of glass bridges.

With its two floors dedicated to gallery displays, the Anne Cox Chambers Wing is designed to host special collections and is flanked by the administrative offices building.

The theme of natural lighting from above was proposed for the two buildings that would host the collections: the roof filters the natural light while guaranteeing perfect temperature conditions for the artworks on display.

One of the project's main points of discussion was roof and facade design, and the solution eventually adopted was that to create a continuity between these two elements. The vertical facade is comprised of modular aluminium panels which, at the height of the roof, curve to the north to connect with the skylights and harness the natural light.

The ceiling, made up of GFRG modules (Glass Fibre Reinforced Gypsum), that are closed on the lower floors and perforated on the top floor, allows for the sun's rays to illuminate the galleries below through nearly 1,000 skylights.

The skylights are topped with protective north-facing funnel-shaped elements, which regulate the amount of light entering the building. The roof modules have a standard size of 1.2 metres. The same modules are also installed vertically upon the building's facade and are covered with glass "ribbons" up to the first floor, and with aluminium for the two subsequent floors.

These white aluminium panels join with the metallic surfaces of the Stent Family Wing.

The High Museum of Art was opened to the public in November of 2005.

Over the following three months, the Anne Cox Chambers Wing would host a portion of Paris's Louvre collection. The Louvre was bringing its prestigious collection to the United States for the first time, and the Renzo Piano Building Workshop had built the structure that would house it.

L. Piano