



Views of the facade

## SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

*Architects: Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.*

*Location: Seattle, WA*

*Client: Seattle Art Museum*

*Area: 150,000 sf*

*Construction Cost: \$28,100,000*

*Completion: 1991*

By expanding to a downtown site, the Seattle Museum of Art required a new building that would provide civic presence amidst the burgeoning commercial district's planned skyscrapers. The Museum concurrently sought a larger, more diverse audience and a secure controlled environment for its important Asian, African, and American Indian collections. In addition, it required a flexible plan and systems to allow opening one or both main entrances for various combinations of access to the auditorium, galleries, and reception and retail spaces. The client's program also called for galleries to be artificially lit to protect fragile art and artifacts.

VSBA's design for the Seattle Art Museum conforms not to the current trend of museum as articulated pavilions but to an older tradition of museum as generic loft space: the adapted palaces and grand museum of the 19th century and New York's original Museum of Modern Art. The Museum conforms to its context within the downtown grid plan. Its civic qualities

do not come from its special location (at the end of a boulevard, for instance) but through its combinations of scale, big and little. Through this quality, the relatively small Museum holds its own amongst larger surrounding buildings.

At the site, the Museum's west end pulls back dramatically to both create an entry plaza at First Avenue and accommodate a monumental civic sculpture; the south facade of fluted limestone is incised at large scale with the Museum's name. The 30-foot setback, required to preserve the view corridor to Puget Sound, allows for a wide terraced stair to the Second Avenue entrance. The stair offers landscaping, sculpture, and seating, and attracts passersby as well as Museum visitors. In contrast to the formality of the fluted limestone, the ground level is a lively juxtaposition of colorful painted stone and terra cotta arches and columns reflecting the variety of Seattle's cultures and the Museum's collections. This openness, rhythm, color, and ornamentation, as well as the play of small- and large-scale elements, makes the building friendly from the outside despite its overall lack of windows. A two-level parking garage just north of the Museum also bears decorative street facades.



Seattle Art Museum



Inside, a wide stone stair mimicking the outdoor terracing also connects the First and Second Avenue entrances. Rising gradually, with sculpture on each landing, the stair is a many-leveled room and cafe as well as a route to the galleries. The main lobby is located at the First Avenue entrance, and the ground level includes information and orientation functions, classrooms, the museum shop, an auditorium, and an enclosed loading area. At the stair's mid-level, a broad landing opens onto a mezzanine restaurant and the terrace outdoors; for banquets and receptions, the dining area can be extended onto the landing and outside. The second-floor level holds the lobby and admission desk for the Second Avenue entrance, as well as a large flexible gallery for traveling exhibitions.

The third and fourth floors contain varied and flexible permanent galleries. Visitor circulation is defined by a progression of columns and large windows at each end of the building connecting viewers to the outside world. Each floor also contains classrooms placed near relevant art exhibitions. The fifth floor holds administrative offices, a conservation laboratory, and a library.



As a modern urban facility, the 150,000 sf Seattle Art Museum incorporates sophisticated security systems, zoning of visitors and staff, and precautions to reduce earthquake damage. Yet all these systems are presented with great subtlety to avoid alienating users.

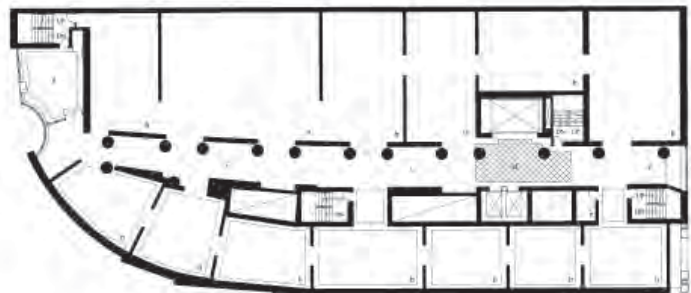
*Award:* The International Award for Architecture in Stone, Intermarmomach Veronafiere, 1993.



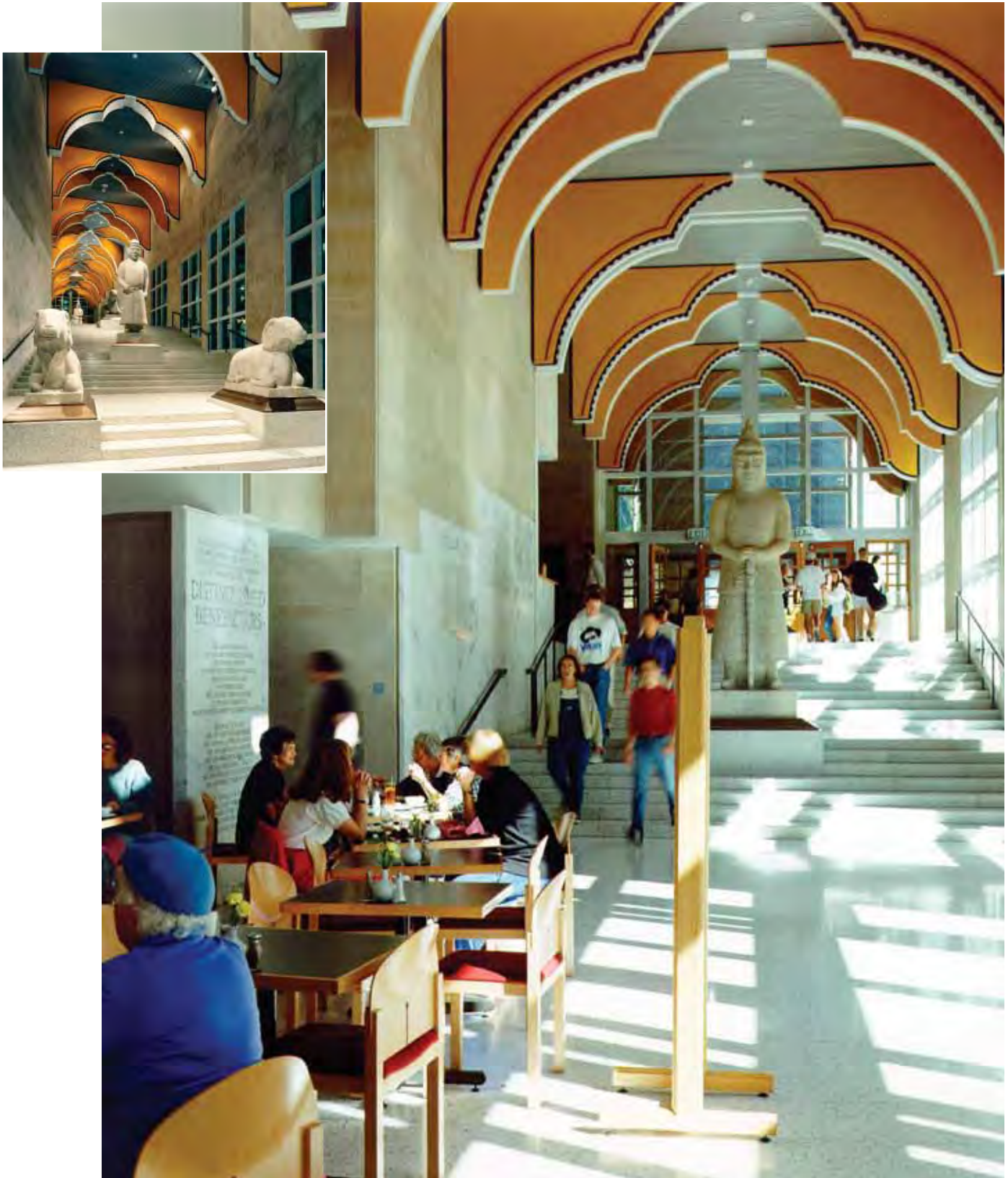
Views of galleries



Site plan



Gallery level plan



*Stair gallery*

**Seattle Art Museum**