

CONCRETE *Reflections*

THE REOPENING OF THE MODERN ART MUSEUM OF FORT WORTH
IS A TRIUMPH OF INSPIRATION, INNOVATION AND INTEGRATION

by melinda kaitcer / photography by jeremy enlow



Just as the raised hand and mirrored backdrop of Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Etruscan* seems to call people to gather and, as they do so, they become an integral part of the work itself, Fort Worth's new Modern Art Museum has achieved its goal of

calling together art, architecture and the community it serves into an integrated whole.

As visitors indeed gather to experience this dramatic new point of Fort Worth's cultural triangle, whose major points include the Kimbell Art Museum and the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, they view the realization of a daring vision and five years of collaborative effort led by world-renowned architect Tadanu Ando of Osaka, Japan. "In this time of computers and technology, people can become very isolated from one another," Ando said, speaking through interpreter Kulapat Yantrasast. "I see an art museum as the core of cultural life — a place for people to come together, not just to view art, but to connect as a community. I wanted this museum to relate to everyone in a natural way — through the art, the building, and the landscape. I hope it can be part of everyone's life."

The opening of the new Modern also celebrates the 110th anniversary of the museum's founding charter, making it the oldest — and the newest — art museum in Texas at the same time, said docent Barbara Pfaffenberger. The natural rhythm of the modular, spectacularly lit gallery spaces, the breathtaking panorama of our city invited into the space by soaring double-height glass walls, and the tranquility reflected in the meandering pond all serve to achieve Ando's vision.

Ando applauded the courage and the energy of the project team, led by Peter Arendt, director of design and construction, MPA Foundation, in what he called a "true collaboration" to make this vision a reality. After its 1999 groundbreaking, work on this \$65 million, 153,000 square-foot project pushed the envelope of American fabrication and engineering — a feat Ando himself wasn't even sure could be achieved — and set a new benchmark with this project, Ando's first large-scale public commission in the United States. The new Modern features 53,000 square feet of gallery space that will house more than 2,600 significant works of modern and contemporary international art — one of the foremost collections of postwar art in the central United States, museum officials said. A 5,600-square-foot education center will provide three classrooms for hands-on

art activities and lectures, and the innovative acoustics of the 250-seat auditorium will accommodate lectures, film festivals, and musical performances. Adjacent to the auditorium is a 250-seat full-service café, offering fine cuisine and an outdoor dining terrace overlooking a 2-acre reflecting pond.

In keeping with Ando's trademark style, the museum embodies the pure unadorned elements of a modern work of art. The design is deceptively simple. The materials are basic. There are only three colors of paint used throughout the building, said Paul Sipes, vice president/senior project manager at Linbeck Construction.

Nevertheless, a structure of this magnitude presented the design team with many formidable challenges. Among them: How to erect massive, planar, satiny walls of solid, cast-in-place concrete. How to create a seamless harmony of natural and artificial light to fill the spaces and accent the art while adhering to strict exposure limitations. How to balance the modular spaces in such a way as to achieve intimacy with a wide variety of art within such a large structure.

The design solution is embodied in three 40-foot-high pavilions of gallery space interspersed with 20-foot-high spaces to provide dramatic display area for all scales of work — and increasing the museum's actual gallery space from 10,000 square feet to 53,000 square feet.

Dramatic 40-foot-high glass walls rise above a flush, continuous plane of granite flooring that visually extends the indoor spaces out and brings the indoor spaces into the glass envelope surrounding the cast concrete gallery walls. The result is a magnificent public gathering and circulation space from which to view the reflecting pond, the landscaping, and the outdoor sculpture, while keeping gallery areas quiet and protected from distraction.



ABOVE: Michelangelo Pistoletto, *The Etruscan*, (L'etrusco), 1976; bronze, mirror.

OPPOSITE PAGE, (FRONT) Richard Long, *Cornwall Summer Circle*, 1995, *Cornish slate from Dalabole*, (BACK) Gerhard Richter, *Seestücke-Welle (Sea Piece-Wake)*, 1969, photograph.



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“I wanted to create spaces where people who are visiting and enjoying themselves will not be disturbing people looking at art,” Ando said. Outside, the museum’s immense cantilevered cast concrete roof slabs are supported by five 40-foot-tall Y-shaped columns that not only create a striking, easy-to-recognize symbol for the new Modern, but also cast a subtle reflection of peace symbols in the pond below.

The location of the new Modern’s 11-acre site, just across the street from the Kimbell Art Museum, a world-renowned Louis Kahn’s design in its own right, created both an opportunity and a challenge, Ando said.

“I truly regard the Kimbell as one of the best buildings in the world,” he said, “and Louis Kahn is one of the great architects of the 20th century. I was very excited at the opportunity to build next to him. I wanted to create a link to this work already present, so I started with the idea of linkage — to tie the two together — but also to create more of an openness for the Modern.”

Ando achieves this openness, in part, by incorporating a dramatic array of diffused and reflected natural light via a sophisticated system of continuous linear skylights, clerestory windows, and rooftop light-deflecting louvers that encourage and capitalize on changing patterns of light.

When visitors first approach the new Modern, they are at once drawn into the open and reflective nature of the building. After being greeted by Richard Serra’s *Vortex*, 2002, the 67-foot-tall steel sculpture on the extended walkway at the front of the museum, they’ll enter to a dramatic view through double-height glass of the three flat-roofed gallery pavilions — and their reflections — in the pond that seemingly surrounds it all. Inside to the left is the grand staircase that leads along smooth-as-silk concrete walls to the vaulted skylight-washed entrance to the second-floor gallery. The permanent collection’s giant, bilious green Andy Warhol self-portrait makes eye contact at the top of the stairs, engaging them fully into the modern art experience upon entry into the gallery. The rhythm of the spaces, wide to narrow, single-height then double-height, moves visitors through the building, each space unfolding to the next, with each art installation afforded the space and lighting to allow a viewer to



AN ENGAGING GREETING Richard Serra, *Vortex*, 2002, Cor-ten steel, 67 ft.

completely absorb themselves in the work — or move past it to another — with equal ease.

Some pieces might be familiar; others will be among the new acquisitions to the museum’s permanent collection. Titled *110 Years: The Permanent Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth*, this commemorative opening exhibition will be on view to the public through March 9, 2003. The presentation, organized and installed by the museum’s chief curator, Michael Auping, was made possible by a generous grant from the Henry Luce Foundation of New York.

By far the largest exhibit in the museum’s history, *110 Years* will consume all 53,000 square feet of gallery space. “The exhibition promises many surprises,” Auping said. “Over the past five years, we have been very busy acquiring key works that fill out the collection, and at least 20 major works will be unveiled with the opening of the museum.”

Occasionally, as visitors wind their way through the pavilions, they round a corner and are again brought face-to-face with a glass-walled panorama of the city of Fort Worth. As light changes throughout the day, so does the hue of the reflections in the pond. This culminates in a spectacular display as the pink-orange glow of the setting Texas sun reaches the heat-blasted anodized aluminum that sheathes the west-end walls and bathes the adjacent sculpture garden, home to Henry Moore’s *Two-Piece Reclining Figure No.2*, in a spectacular display of color and light. By night, the new Modern projects a luminous glow out onto its city like a giant lantern beckoning the community to gather and share its quiet reflections.

Whether a fan of modern art, innovative architecture, sitting by a quiet pond, or enjoying a spectacular sunset, the new Modern seems to indeed provide, as Tadao Ando and the project team envisioned, “a place where the community — especially children — can come and know they belong. A place they will want to come back to. A place that will make even the children so proud of this museum and this city that they will want to give their creative energy back to it.” In his work, *Paradise 9*, artist Thomas Struth invites the viewer to use his art as the opportunity to go inside himself. Similarly, the new Modern seems to invite us



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT / Ron Mueck, *Untitled (Seated Woman)*, 1999, silicone, acrylic, polyurethane foam, and fabric; Eric Swenson, *Untitled*, 2000, mixed media; Sean Scully, *Catherine*, 1983, oil on canvas, two panels; Andy Warhol, *Self Portrait*, 1986, synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen on canvas; Anselm Kiefer, *Book With Wings*, 1992-94, lead, tin, and steel, (with museum architect Tadao Ando looking on)

