

News Release
Public Information
Department

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART UNVEILS PLANS FOR DYNAMIC
GLASS ENTRANCE PAVILION AND PUBLIC PLAZA
TO ENHANCE HISTORIC BEAUX-ARTS BUILDING

September 2000

Designed by Polshek Partnership Architects

Brooklyn, New York, September 20, 2000 —The Brooklyn Museum of Art, which is home to the second largest art collection in America, announced today a major project that will “open up” its historic nineteenth-century structure to better welcome visitors and the community. The redesign and renovation of the building’s primary entrance along Eastern Parkway with an innovative glass entrance pavilion and an accessible public plaza will create a more exciting, welcoming, and focused visitor experience. The design was developed by the Polshek Partnership Architects, James Stewart Polshek, Design Principal.

Funding for this major new project will come from approximately half of the \$120 million *Campaign for the Brooklyn Museum of Art 2000/2005*. The campaign will also focus on increasing the Museum’s endowment by \$50 million, on key strategic initiatives, and on maintaining financial stability. Prior to its announcement today, the campaign has already raised over half of its goal, with two thirds of the funds pledged to date from the Brooklyn Borough President, New York City Council, and the Mayor’s Office, and one third from several Museum Trustees.

Announcing the *Campaign for the Brooklyn Museum of Art*, Robert S. Rubin, Chairman of the BMA’s Board of Trustees, said today: “With this campaign the Museum will make possible a major improvement to the building, that combined with its equally dynamic artistic and educational programs will create a vibrant

Brooklyn Museum of Art

page 2

Museum for the twenty-first century, engaging a wide and diverse public. The Trustees are all committed to significantly upgrading the physical plant, to improving programming capabilities, increasing usage, and ensuring the financial stability of the Museum.”

Entrance Pavilion and Public Plaza

The Museum's master plan architectural team of Arata Isozaki & Associates/Polshak Partnership Architects developed the concept for the project. It focuses on the Eastern Parkway entrance and approximately 82,000 square feet of under-utilized plaza space in front of the Museum. The new pavilion entrance and renovated Grand Lobby will provide a total of more than 17,000 square feet of space and offer a more welcoming and centralized visitor experience. This combined space is double the size of the existing lobby area.

The \$55 million construction program is scheduled to be underway by mid-year 2001 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2002.

“Since the removal of the original staircase in 1934, the entry of the building has always appeared incomplete and somewhat inhospitable,” said Brooklyn Museum of Art Director Arnold L. Lehman. “This contemporary design intervention will transform the experience of the building and will create an extraordinary new civic space for both residents and visitors to New York City, furthering the Museum’s newly articulated mission to expand and diversify our audience. By creating this inviting new “living room” for our extended community, we will provide a dramatic new experience that will reward our visitors for coming here and encourage them to return. It will serve as a new magnet to attract audiences to the richness of cultural experiences that exist in the heart of Brooklyn.”

The new design provides a sheer glass pavilion, symbolically stepping up to and radiating out from the McKim, Mead & White façade. The proposed new entrance is dramatically more accessible than the original — nearly 30 feet of steps that rose up to a third-floor main entrance and were removed in 1934 as a part of a Works Progress Administration project. Following that alteration, the main access to the Museum shifted to a grade-level entrance through what had originally been the backstage of an auditorium.

“The Brooklyn Museum’s twenty-first-century threshold will welcome all who visit the Museum from near and far. Its visual and physical accessibility will allow it to act as a spatial transition, drawing visitors into its expanded lobby and the Museum’s galleries. This dramatic entry is also intended to embrace both its neighborhood and the Museum, forming a gateway to the old and new treasures that lie within,” comments architect James Stewart Polshek.

From the Eastern Parkway Plaza level, a staircase on the west and an amphitheater-style staircase on the east will lead the visitor to a promenade level that will provide opportunities for viewing activities on the exterior Plaza below and, through the stepped glass roof of the new pavilion, into the interior of the ground level-entrance of the Museum. The promenade and plaza areas will provide multiple options for programming, from performances to educational events, as well as providing various areas for informal gatherings for neighbors and members of the community.

“The design concept for the front entrance took its inspiration from the semicircular staircase originally planned by McKim, Mead & White for an east entrance to the building that was never built. This curved form, with its radius springing from the middle of the central building section, allows the front entrance to be oriented in all directions as a universally welcoming gesture,” comments Arata Isozaki.

Two unique fountains designed to animate the Plaza, will feature lively sequences of water jets in various patterns that will engage visitors and pedestrians.

The main fountain will employ compressed air to produce an endless variety of kinetic water patterns. The second fountain will feature a thin, highly reflective sheet of water against black granite; it will interrelate with and serve as an extension of the glass pavilion at the western end of the new entrance and promenade. As part of the BMA’s Campaign, major project support to revitalize the nearly 560,000-square-foot City-owned building and the 82,000-square-foot public plaza has been committed by a variety of public and private sources. To date, Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden has committed \$20.5 million; the City Council has earmarked \$16.2 million; and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has

committed \$5.8 million for a total of \$42.5 million. The remainder of capital funds and of the endowment enhancement will come from private gifts.

“The Museum’s renovation and redesign plan responds to a significant increase in attendance in the past three years because of such high-profile exhibitions as *Monet and the Mediterranean*, *Jewels of the Romanovs*, and SENSATION, as well as our enormously successful First Saturdays program. With an expanded and enhanced entrance pavilion and plaza, we will be better able to accommodate these visitors and make their experience more exciting,” said Dr. Lehman.

The current entrances to the Museum, both from Eastern Parkway and the BMA’s parking lot, will be reconfigured so that the renovated Grand Lobby can better serve as a centralized and accessible entry space for all visitors, containing a variety of improved visitor services. In contrast to the current practice, the new Eastern Parkway entry will separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic, allowing visitors to enter the Museum more safely and without confusion.

The Museum is a New York City landmark and the design is currently being reviewed by the City’s Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Endowment and Strategic Initiative

In addition to funds being allocated for the Museum’s new entrance and plaza and for substantial enhancement of the endowment, the Campaign will also provide for strategic and one-time expenditures in such areas as collections management, reinstallation planning, and necessary technological updates.

The Museum building, which first opened to the public in 1897, was originally designed to be the largest museum in the world. However, only one sixth of the original plan was completed. As part of the 1986 Master Plan, substantial interior renovations were made from 1991 to 1993 to the West Wing of the building (now the Morris A. and Meyer Schapiro Wing), including 30,000 square feet of renovated gallery space, and one floor of curatorial offices. The 460-seat Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Auditorium and 30,000 square feet of up-to-date art storage were also created out of existing space.

The Museum has also just completed a three-year \$18 million roof renovation project that included the replacement of the 5,000-square-foot skylight above the third-floor Beaux-Arts Court. The interior space of the Court has also recently been renovated, providing the public with one of the largest and most beautiful nineteenth-century indoor spaces in New York. Original wall surfaces and fittings have been restored and an advanced acoustical system has been installed.

The Brooklyn Museum's Office of Planning and Architecture will manage the entrance upgrade project in conjunction with Bovis Lend Lease LMB, Inc.

Press Contacts:

Sally Williams
Brooklyn Museum of Art
718-638-5000, ext. 330

Jennifer Essen
Ruder Finn Arts & Communications Counselors
212-593-5881