

Step into a Masterpiece

theMcNay

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**The McNay Adds Modernist Jewel to the Constellation
of Great Museum Architecture in Texas**

San Antonio, Texas — Home to one of the nation's most important collections of modern French and American art, the McNay Art Museum nearly doubles in size this summer with the opening of the Jane and Arthur Stieren Center for Exhibitions. The 45,000-sq. ft. expansion is a bold modernist foil to the McNay's landmark home, a Spanish Colonial-style mansion set amid 23 acres of surrounding gardens in the heart of San Antonio.

The \$33.1 million Stieren Center opens to the public with a weekend-long celebration beginning Saturday, June 7, 2008. Its architect is Jean-Paul Viguier, a master builder responsible for many of the most visible aspects of modern-day Paris, from twin towers in Coeur Défense to the André Citroën Park in the 14th arrondissement.

The inaugural exhibition, *American Art Since 1945: In a New Light*, marks the first time the McNay has exhibited the full extent of its contemporary collection. In the natural light of the new galleries, new strengths will be visible, particularly in Op Art and geometric abstraction. Recent painting acquisitions will be featured in works by such artists as Willem de Kooning, Larry Poons, Dorothea Rockburne, and Alexander Liberman, as well as new sculpture acquisitions, including works by Raoul Hague, John Chamberlain, Kiki Smith, Red Grooms, and Chakaia Booker.

The Stieren Center is a long, low two-story glass pavilion set deep into a grassy slope. A glass curtain wall spans the façade at the upper level, alternately opening out onto a terrace or plunging a story into a contoured sculpture garden. On the lower level, the glass facade plays peek-a-boo with the surrounding grounds—disappearing behind a paved terrace here, opening out again onto the new sculpture garden there, and disappearing again behind another planted slope. In the sculpture garden, stone partitions align with the building's grid to delineate three outdoor "galleries" to prolong the experience of the building.

The design derives from the principle that works of art need natural light. To modulate the bright south Texas sun, the architect and his team devised an ingenious glass and steel roof system, approximately seven feet thick. Fixed louvers, moveable horizontal shades, and silk-screened glass panels produce a soft, dancing quality to the light and control its level and direction. Roof-overhang cantilevers above the façade, augmented by light-filtering shades, protect the interior galleries from direct light.

The museum's interior spaces are continuous, changeable, and seemingly free of structure.

"The museum's Spanish Colonial revival-style home was designed in the '20s to offer views of the inner courtyard and surrounding landscaped grounds. Viguier immediately understood this Texas vernacular and the importance of the connection between the indoors and outdoors here," says William J. Chiego, director of the McNay.

"The French modernists of the '30s designed for tropical climates, inventing whole systems of metal cladding and movable walls. I was nourished on that," says Viguier, who has played a leading role in French architecture since the early '80s as teacher, urban planner, and creator of a series of books on Eileen Gray, Gabriel Guévrékian, and Jean Ginsberg. Today, the Viguier atelier is known for creating dramatic yet formally rigorous skyscrapers and large-scale public and private projects in France, China, Malaysia, Hungary, and Spain.

The architect's only previous commission in the United States—the tilted, prism-shaped Sofitel Water Tower Hotel (1998) in downtown Chicago—was named to the "America's 150 Best Loved Buildings" list earlier this year by the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Not only is the Stieren Center Viguier's first museum in the U.S., it is the first museum expansion in this country designed by a French architect.

Beloved by generations of San Antonians, the museum's original home is considered one of the finest examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival-style in the city. Built in 1928 by local architects Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres, the historic core boasts coffered, stenciled ceilings, graceful archways, and fine embellishments, ranging from ceramic tile from around the world to wrought-iron window grilles, gates, and lanterns made in San Antonio. The first phase of the current expansion program was a \$7.6M restoration and renovation of the home in 2001.

"It may seem strange that the leadership of the McNay turned to a European urbanist to expand its revivalist home, located on landscaped grounds in south Texas. But we were struck by the clarity and modernist simplicity of his approach," says Jane Stieren Lacy, emeritus trustee. "The design is a fitting homage to the vanguard spirit of the museum's founder, Marion Koogler McNay."

Marion Koogler McNay (1883–1950) was an American original who gave San Antonio residents their first real look at the art of their time by opening up her home, and a collection that included works by Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Picasso, and Matisse, to the public in the 40s and early 50s. In conceiving and endowing the first museum of modern art in Texas, Marion McNay blazed the path for future generations of adventuresome Texas collectors to create small, private museums that show modern art to exquisite effect.

“We believe that with the Stieren Center we have created a worthy newcomer to the constellation of great museum architecture of Texas,” adds Chiego.

Jane and Arthur Stieren Center for Exhibitions

A soft gray-green stone paves the pathway and front landing, frames the glass threshold, and, as pillar and post, enters the lobby of the Jane and Arthur Stieren Center for Exhibitions. Like a memory of landscape, the cool stone reappears at junctures throughout the museum.

Once inside the AT&T Lobby, the Stieren Center’s first gathering space, visitors find the main galleries to the right filled with natural light and capped by a fritted, glass-paneled ceiling, the roof system’s functional bottom layer. Designed to change configuration as needed, the 7,500 sq. ft. Tobin Exhibition Galleries, as the space is named, allows the McNay to host larger traveling exhibitions for the first time. Flowing from the AT&T Lobby are the museum store and the Ewing Halsell Foundation Reception Hall for special events.

From the Tobin Exhibition Galleries, shallow stairways lead down into a long, dramatic barrel of a gallery running parallel to the glass façade. This sculpture gallery overlooks the whole of the new sculpture garden and opens onto an elevated terrace, the Brown Foundation Sculpture Terrace. A monumental perforated, bronzed metal staircase leads to the Center’s lower garden level, where four more galleries, the 225-seat Elizabeth and William J. Chiego Lecture Hall, two learning centers, technical and storage spaces and restrooms are found.

In the sculpture garden, meandering pathways offer views of sculptures, gardens and the McNay’s buildings.

The Team

Jean-Paul Viguier designed the new Jane and Arthur Stieren Center for Exhibitions with project architect Blin Trincal of Jean-Paul Viguier S.A. d’architecture. Directing the building project on behalf of the McNay are Robert Portnoff, AIA, and Antonio Dominguez of the Paratus Group of New York. The Paratus Group currently provides project management for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum’s restoration of its Frank Lloyd Wright landmark. Paratus served The Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio on The Glass Pavilion by SANAA as well as the Morgan Library & Museum, New York’s recent expansion by Renzo Piano.

San Antonio-based Ford Powell & Carson, Inc., a multi-disciplinary design firm with deep roots in south Texas, is executive architect for the Stieren Center. Ford Powell & Carson knows the McNay well, having expanded the museum in several increments between 1970 and 1982. Founder O’Neil Ford (1905-1982) dominated the architectural scene in San Antonio during the middle decades of the 20th century as an especially adept practitioner of regionally sensitive design.

The McNay announced the selection of Jean-Paul Viguier as design architect for the expansion in 2003. Also competing for the commission were Machado & Silvetti, Boston; The Polshek Partnership, New York; Carlos Jiménez, Houston; and Weiss Manfredi, New York.

The First Museum of Modern Art in Texas

The McNay Art Museum was established as the first museum of modern art in Texas in 1950 upon the death of its founder, who left a collection of some 800 works of art. Included were paintings and drawings by French masters like Cézanne, Van Gogh, Seurat, Gauguin, and Matisse, and American masters like Hassam, Prendergast, and Demuth. Also included in the bequest were several dozen santos—both retablos (paintings) and bultos (sculptures)—acquired by Mrs. McNay in the 20s, when Catholic churches in New Mexico were replacing folk art masterpieces with store-bought church art from the East. Rio Grande blankets, Kiowa Five and Santa Fe Indian School drawings, as well as ceramics, jewelry, and furniture, were included in the founding bequest.

The collection of the McNay Art Museum has grown remarkably since that time. Today the permanent collection tells the story of European and American art from the 19th century to the present. Noted strengths are French Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and School of Paris holdings. The American painting collection is particularly strong in modernism as embodied by artists of the Stieglitz group such as Dove, Marin, Hartley and O'Keeffe, and works by their contemporaries Hopper, Kuhn, and Sheeler. Over the course of the last decade, modern sculpture and contemporary art have been the primary focus of collecting efforts.

The McNay also houses a renowned collection of prints and drawings noted for complete suites and rare impressions. The museum's Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts focuses on opera, ballet, and the American musical stage, and is among the leading collections of theatre arts in an American art museum.

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