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## Architectural Design for Living Artifacts

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# The Multisensory Museum

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Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives  
on Touch, Sound, Smell,  
Memory, and Space

Edited by Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone

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## Architectural Design for Living Artifacts

*Joy Monice Malnar and Frank Vodvarka*

The architectural challenges associated with the design of museums in the Western tradition are not significantly different from those encountered in architecture generally: aesthetics, program, and structure. In this paradigm, the architect determines the aesthetic outcome (form and context) desired, the development of the interior spaces that will house the artifacts and associated aspects of exhibition, and a structural system that best expresses that outcome. These factors remain fairly constant, even though buildings of course have varying functions such that we can easily distinguish between the hospital and museum. While this list suggests that there is a procedural order to the process of combining these aspects into a single built artifact, these facets can be—and usually are—approached as quasi-separate considerations. Thus changes often occur once the structure largely becomes the responsibility of an engineering firm, and the precise nature of the interior spaces becomes the responsibility of a professional exhibition firm specializing in display programming, leaving only the (original) aesthetic intent to the architect. To this often-volatile mix one might add the additional concerns of client self-identity and budget. But however the situation evolves, the artifacts themselves tend to be seen as fixed objects whose location and display will be governed by the visual needs of a controlled, semi-fixed audience. This paradigm is reinforced by the use of closed display units, flow planning, and ever-present security personnel.

In her book, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998, 57) takes this a step further: “The partiality so essential to the ethnographic object as a fragment is also expressed in the fragmentation of sensory apprehension in conventional museum exhibitions.” She points out:

The European tendency has been to split up the senses and parcel them out one at a time to the appropriate art form. One sense, one art form. We listen to music. We look at paintings. Dancers don't talk. Musicians don't dance. Sensory atrophy is coupled with close focus and sustained attention. All distractions must be eliminated—no talking, rustling of paper, eating, flashing of cameras. Absolute silence governs the etiquette of symphony halls and museums. Aural and ocular epiphanies in this mode require pristine environments in which the object of contemplation is set off for riveting attention. . . . In contrast with conventional exhibitions in museums, which tend to reduce the sensory complexity of the events they represent and to offer them up for visual delectation alone, indigenous modes of display, particularly the festival, present an important alternative.

In large measure, this paradigm results from the static view Western society takes of historic and cultural artifacts, and the limited interaction that is expected to occur between object and viewer. Even on those rare occasions when some thought is put into a sensory interaction with objects beyond the purely visual, it is usually by virtue of setting up a sensory-specific application, as in museums dedicated to touch or sound. In the course of research for *New Architecture on Indigenous Lands* (Malnar and Vodvarka, 2013), we have experienced a different paradigm, in large degree the result of a purposeful, even causal relationship between artifact and individual. We found that Native peoples in Canada and the United States (the subjects of our book) seldom like the term “museum” at all, as it implies a place of static, visual displays that offer no interaction beyond controlled viewing, and—most importantly—implying that the culture that produced these artifacts is no longer extant.

In the film *Box of Treasures* (1983), Gloria Cranmer Webster (‘Namgis), former curator of the U'mista Cultural Centre, expresses this when she points out: “A lot of those people who have read about us think we all died, that we disappeared because we were the vanishing races those early white people said we were. And when you look at museum exhibits in a lot of places it is as if we were gone. There is no reference to us still being here, still being alive, and we are.” Later in the film, Elder Agnes Alfred (‘Namgis) says: “This place on the beach that you call a museum, we have not had such a thing among our people. It is like a storage box, like a box of treasures the old people used to have.” In an email correspondence to Nancy Marie Mithlo (Chiricahua Apache) (2004, 754), Gloria Cranmer Webster confirms this crucial distinction with the following statement: “U'mista was never meant to be a museum. Wouldn't we have called it that, if that's what it was going to be? Our Board of Directors said, at the time we incorporated as a registered society, ‘We're not building a museum. Museums are for white people and are full of dead things’” (Mithlo, 2004, 754).

Thus, “cultural center” or “research center” are the preferred terms, although they are still less than entirely appropriate, suggesting that these are specialized places where one goes to experience cultural aspects no longer found outside the center. The argument here is that unlike the descendents of Euro-American culture, who have severed a continuous relationship to their own ancestors—and thus freely place their artifacts in funereal isolation—Native peoples feel an intense connection to all who have gone before. In their view, Western museums by contrast do little to bring people together.

Indeed, it is arguable that the concept of promoting social identity and cohesion through design has been fading in Euro-American culture for a very long time, with the result that estrangement itself has been raised to the status of aesthetic value. The difference between Western and indigenous ways of understanding the built world is made clear in the evaluation criteria put forward by a Native organization, the Center for American Indian Research and Native Studies: “CAIRNS believes that the evaluation of projects that provide services to Native communities should include four dimensions—spatial, social, spiritual, and experiential—that conceptually define traditional Native communities.” That this is a quite different set of design priorities from the Western model is no accident and is nowhere better reflected than in the structures that house artifacts and their attendant cultures.

This is certainly the guiding concept behind the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, British Columbia, home of the Kwakwaka'wakw Potlatch Collection. Alert Bay, a village on Cormorant Island (located between Vancouver Island and the mainland), was peopled by the Nimpkish Band, who moved there to work in a fish saltery in the 1870s. The U'mista Cultural Centre was designed by Henry Hawthorn, of Hawthorn Mansfield Towers Architects, with an extension by Marshall Fisher Architects, and direction from council members of the Kwakwaka'wakw. The center was built to house the spectacular masks and ceremonial dress associated with the potlatch ceremony—items that are still used today—and provide a ceremonial space.

Those hosting a potlatch give away useful items like food, blankets, and coppers (worked ornamental mediums of exchange). In return, the hosts enhance their reputation and social rank, their prestige increasing with the sheer generosity of the potlatch. The ceremony was outlawed in Canada in 1885, and shortly afterward in the United States. In both cases, this was the result of instigation by missionaries and government bureaucrats who thought it a profligate and uncivilized custom that made assimilation of the locals difficult (Fisher, 1977, 207). In Canada, the laws against potlatching were later expanded to include guests who participated in the ceremony, and, for that matter, anyone who encouraged the celebration of such a festival. In 1921, the Canadian government raided a large potlatch given on Village Island, ar-

resting forty-five people and confiscating a wide range of ceremonial items—many of which were later sold.

In 1967, the Kwakwaka'wakw initiated efforts to regain these items. The Canadian Museum of Civilization agreed to return objects located in their collections provided appropriate facilities were built to house them. Hence the building of the U'mista Centre, a space in which the architect had to balance standard museum practice against the broader needs of the locals in such a way as to satisfy both. The actual space in which the costumes are displayed—and where ceremonies are held—is in the form of a Wakashan structure, whose western wall is adorned with traditional imagery that can be seen from a distance by approaching boats (figure 16.1).

It has been observed that “there were two kinds of wealth in the Northwest cultures: material and hereditary. The material wealth of the potlatch gifts, masks, canoes and homes was replaceable and therefore could be given away. The wealth of clan affiliation and status, embodied in the songs, myths, dances and crests, was owned by right of inheritance and could not be either given away or sold” (Carr, 1993). Thus the latter aspect constituted the real wealth of society, while the former was transferrable. Nonetheless, on the surface of it, the copious gift-giving was an incomprehensible largesse, an affront to the values of Euro-American culture, which is nothing if not ma-

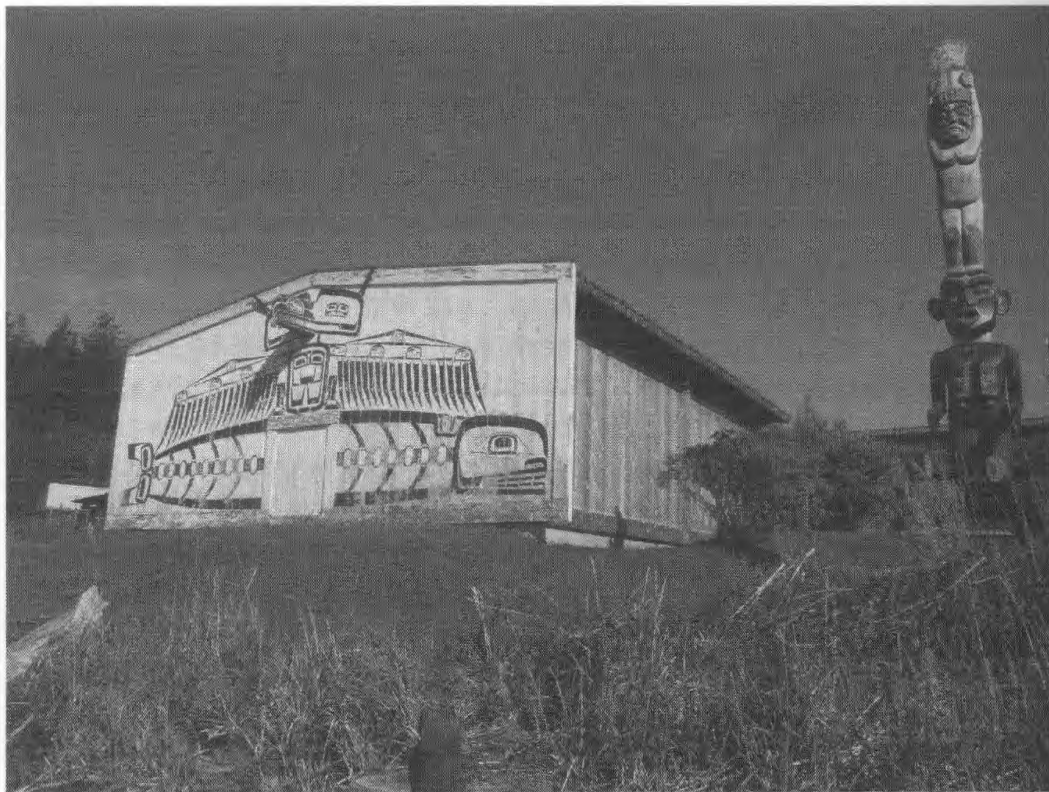


Figure 16.1. U'mista Cultural Centre, 1980. Photo by Frank Vodvarka

terially acquisitive. Moreover, the things thought to be worth the most by Western standards were the very objects given away.

While objects are commonly regarded as those things perceptible to our senses, they also are things to which action, thought, or feeling is directed, or something that on being perceived excites a particular emotion. Thus objects are the tangible, sensory repositories of experience and involve both self-confirmation and social communication. Russell W. Belk points out that to view relationships between people and their possessions as Cartesian fails to account for the power and mystery inherent in many of these relationships. Cartesian rationality, he says, has sought to demystify the role of possessions in our lives, leading us to believe that they are devoid of magical powers and blinding us to their “mystery, beauty and power” (Belk, 1991, 17). In his conception, the rational and measurable benefits of material goods are secondary to their magical function. The myth of rational possession—so central to the basis of Western culture—fails because “it denies the inescapable and essential mysteriousness of our existence” (Belk, 1991, 18). Among the Kwakwaka’wakw, these possessions act as continuous mediators, as their meaning is shared ideologically and functionally, making them particularly powerful social arbiters.

From the ferry, the U’mista Centre—designed in 1980—provides only a limited suggestion of the impressive and varied façades and totems that characterized the entire village’s past appearance. The ceremonial entrance is located on a windowless façade oriented toward the water. Located above the door, near the peak of the gable is a centrally placed, carved head of a raven. The highly three-dimensional straight beak projecting outward stands in strong contrast to the stylized thunderbird and whale painted on the flat wall planks by artist Doug Cranmer (Hereditary Chief of the ‘Namgis Nation). The weathered gray cedar planks provide a large surface for the bold, black-lined paintings of the thunderbird’s feathers and the whale’s internal bones drawn to communicate with pride the heritage of the community when seen from a great distance. There is no hint from the outside that this simple, single-story building, with a low double-pitched roof, is supported by a massive post and beam system significantly larger than necessary for mere structural support. The diameter of the structural elements remains constant whether the beam is spanning a short distance or the full length of the room. This was perhaps originally done for labor-saving purposes, but as present inheritors of a Euro-American tradition used to viewing minimal structures designed by engineers for mathematical efficiency, it provides an unfamiliar proportional relationship.

Today this building contains the family-owned ceremonial regalia—masks, baskets, and coppers—seized by the authorities and has been used



to celebrate significant family events and provide cultural training for their children. The display is cleverly conceived. The Kwakwaka'wakw labored for a long time to reclaim these artifacts, and it was decided that they should be displayed in the U'mista Big House just as they would be seen in a potlatch, not behind glass. In Olin's documentary film, Cranmer Webster explains, "The feeling some of us had was these pieces when they had been returned had been locked up for so long in a strange place that it seemed wrong to lock them up again."

This arrangement provides a more intimate encounter with the masks; in particular, it allows natural materials such as animal skins, cedar bark trimming, and natural dyes to be experienced in multisensory terms. These masks are very much alive—and immediately accessible—to the community. The display room also serves as stage, for the masks and costumes reveal their meaning in their ritual use. Given that these are private community events, the understanding of how the masks come to life, moving to the rhythmic sound of the drums, rattles, and voices, is best comprehended in the film the Kwakwaka'wakw produced, *Box of Treasures*, and the easily accessed film (on YouTube) produced by the Aboriginal Tourism Association BC and filmed within the U'mista Cultural Centre.

When Johnpaul Jones (Choctaw/Cherokee) was retained to design the Southern Ute Tribal Museum and Cultural Center in Ignacio, Colorado, he intended the building to relate the history of the Southern Utes in such a way that it both resonates with the tribe and educates visitors. Located on the bank of the Los Piños river, it is intended to emphasize the connection of the Southern Utes to the eagle, the tribe's sacred symbol, and their "circle of life" belief. Jones and his project manager, Bruce Arnold, worked on the museum over a seven-year period, during which time they held dozens of meetings with members of the tribe. Jones (2010) notes that it took the better part of a year to gain the trust of the elders on the museum board: "And one day they handed us this little pamphlet, and they said, design the building around this. And the pamphlet was all about their circle of life philosophy. That's what we want our building designed around, they said. And that's what we worked with." The new 52,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art center houses the tribe's existing collection of more than 1,500 artifacts and provides space for tribal gatherings. The two wings adjacent to the central cone contain an education wing with arts and crafts classrooms, a multimedia room, and library, and a museum wing with permanent and temporary exhibit rooms. The south wing also contains a dance room where ceremonial regalia is donned for traditional ceremonies, while the semi-enclosed space in front of the entrance is used for larger, community-wide dances.



Figure 16.2. Southern Ute Cultural Center and Museum, 2011. Photo by Frank Vodvarka

The Southern Ute expressed a tremendous concern to make sure that their culture and tradition was personified with integrity through a modern, yet timeless sacred symbol of the eagle: “The arms of the building are symbolic of the wings of an eagle poised for flight. The eagle and the circle of life are both key influences on the building’s design and layout” (Southern Ute Cultural Center & Museum, n.d.). Upon approach, a sense of the building’s main components are apparent (figure 16.2).

The wings of the building spread outward in a grand gesture to welcome the Southern Ute people and their visitors into the circular, communal gathering space defined on the east by the shade arbor. Dramatically centered in the façade is a fifty-two-foot-tall, truncated conical atrium resembling wickerwork, which provides a welcoming focal point. It also suggests other aspects of Ute culture like tipis, basketry, shawls, and drums. Specifically, the shape was designed to evoke elements of Southern Ute experience, including the wickiup—the traditional domestic structure—and the later tipi typical to the lower elevations, while the lattice refers to basketry and the interior is designed to look like the head of a tightly pulled drum (Gamache, 2008). The overlapping lattice was thought of as a woven shawl, and where it parts it draws attention to the location of the main eastern-facing entry. The soaring atrium is supported by a vertical assembly of pitch pine logs held together at the top by a steel band. While a complicated engineering feat, the central supporting element also expresses the strength gained through the social aspect that binds the tribe together, which according to Jones is based on the knowledge that “a bundle of sticks is stronger than a single stick”(Jones, 2012).

Jones (2010) describes the symbolic aspects of its design: “It has twelve wood columns that run around the central part, and those are tied to the twelve months of the year. And then it’s laid out on the cardinal directions, and also in respect of the equinoxes and the solstices, because this tribe did

a lot of things related to those events . . . So those important events and directions are very strongly established inside that form.” The multiple curves of the wings, latticework, and atrium reflect the Southern Utes’ “circle of life” ways and beliefs, and are carried into the welcoming hall, where a central skylight contains a circle of glass. The skylight is divided into four quadrants, each filled with one of the four colors of the Southern Ute: yellow (representing the east—springtime and infancy), red (south—summer and youth), black (west—fall and adulthood) and white (north—winter and old age), colors that may be seen reflected below. Mary Nowotny (2011, 45), media coordinator for the center, further explains that this “represents components of Ute life as well as the four worlds of many indigenous people: the natural world, the earth, its plants and the cycles of the solstice and equinox; the animal world that shares messages with mankind; the spirit world, in which all things are alive; and the human world, where knowledge is transferred.” While the central column of the atrium draws all together, it is the skylight “that is the point from which all areas of the building radiate” (Southern Ute Cultural Center & Museum, n.d.).

To address the traditional respect the tribe has for the land and its concern for the environment, the semicircular, first-floor turf roof is practical: “Planted with special grasses, it insulates in winter and summer, while passive solar gain in winter provides natural interior warmth.” But it also becomes an “evolving part of the life of the museum” (Southern Ute Cultural Center & Museum, n.d.). The lattice, while visually relating to basket weaving, also serves a necessary function in mitigating the heat buildup in the central glass atrium. Acting as a woven shawl wrapped around the body, the protective aluminum slat-wrapping provides protection from the hot summer rays of the sun (Jones, 2012).

The surrounding landscape is as important as the building. The landscape at the entry point was designed to resemble the Southern Ute’s native lands in the Rocky Mountains. All of the plants are native to the region and represent a wide variety of elevations. Also critical, and represented on the edge of the courtyard, is a reference to water; in his meeting with various Ute groups, a high school student said: “We are mountain people, so you should have a little stream, a little meadow stream as a welcoming and greeting thing” (*Southern Ute Cultural Center Museum: Building a Dream*, n.d.).

Paths wander through the landscape, allowing visitors to appreciate the historical, physical dichotomy of the Southern Ute’s origin. Arnold sees the main idea as people being reminded that this is a Southern Ute place, and that these ancient peoples have been here for all time and will continue to be here for all time. The overriding theme, according to Arnold (Gamache, 2008), is responsiveness to the client: “It’s important that they see themselves in it and

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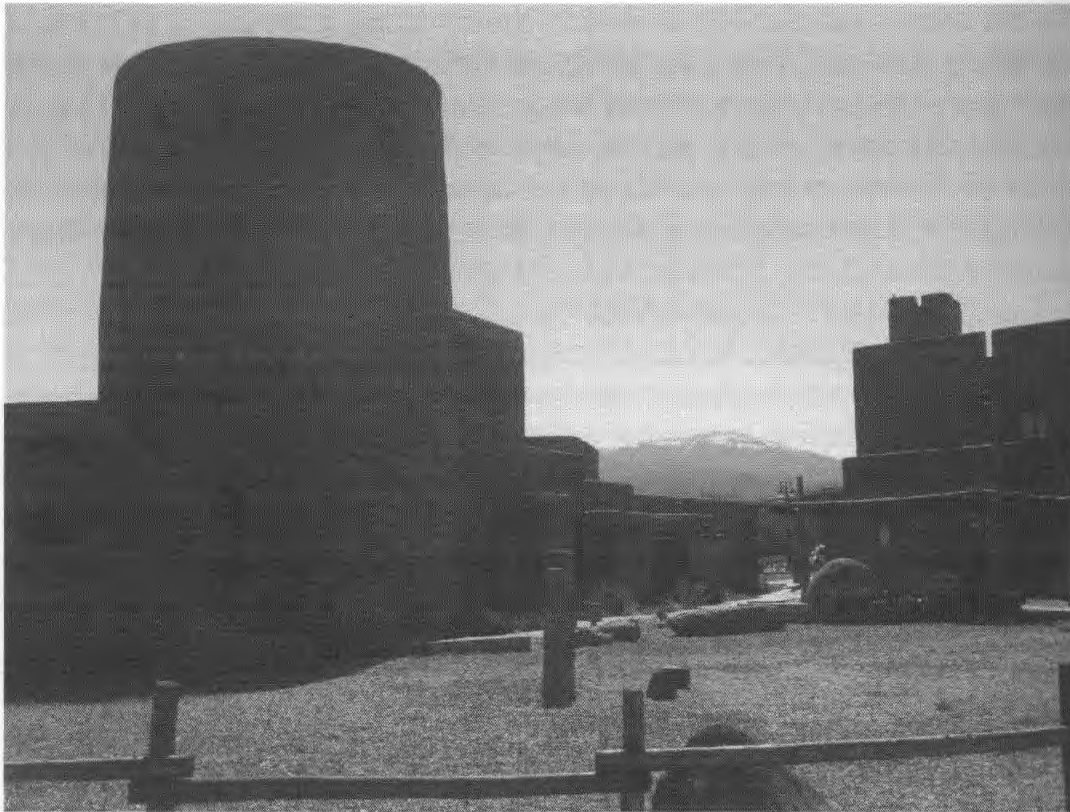
that they can sit inside their ways and beliefs in the museum.” The result is a building that concretizes the Southern Ute’s philosophies while devoting space to caring for their treasured family artifacts, photographs, and stories, but with an area equal in size devoted to celebrating their living culture.

The idea of a center for the housing, use, and creation of cultural materials has found an interesting incarnation at the Poeh Center—Pueblo of Pojoaque, in New Mexico.

The Pueblo of Pojoaque—*Po-suwae-geh*, or “Water-drinking place,” in Tewa—has long been considered the cultural center for the Tewa people. Pojoaque was a stopping place for travelers, and known for its rich cultural and artistic traditions, especially as seen in its polychrome pottery, stone carving, and basket making. Planning for a cultural center and museum really began in 1987 as the concept of Governor George Rivera, who saw such a center as a means of cultural preservation, but perhaps more importantly, revitalization. By 1993 sufficient monies had been raised as to make possible plans for a permanent facility, to be named the Poeh Center, *Poeh* meaning “traditional pathway” in Tewa.

The Tribal Council took the unusual step of forming their own construction company, Pojoaque Pueblo Construction Services Corporation (PPCSC), which was chartered to work on a variety of commercial construction projects throughout the state, and to utilize the profits for the construction and maintenance of the Poeh Center (Honoring Nations Award, 2000). Nycha Leia Zenderman (1996, 235) explains that the final design is the result of professional design expertise blended with ideas from individuals in the Pueblo itself and was “directly inspired and informed by the architectural design principles of Pojoaque’s ancestors, the Anasazi, and from the surviving architecture of the Northern Pueblos . . .” This derivation did not preclude the incorporation of contemporary structural techniques and mechanical systems, as Pueblo culture has always been attuned to practical possibilities. The four-story tower, signifying the four worlds of the Tewa, is a striking expression of adobe construction perhaps possible only on tribal lands where local building codes do not apply. That is, its height would normally not be permitted in adobe, despite several of the pueblos historically being even taller (figure 16.3).

The cultural center occupies a three-acre site on land donated by the Pueblo of Pojoaque. Phase I of the project was completed in 1996, comprising classrooms, pottery, jewelry, and sculpture studios, and workshops in a 7,560-square-foot facility. By 2002, Phase II was complete, which houses the center’s administrative offices and museum in an 18,966-square-foot structure. The project is ambitious: When complete, the center will comprise the Poeh Museum itself, an art sales gallery, a museum collections research space, and classrooms. It may also include a children’s museum, a library and



**Figure 16.3.** Poeh Cultural Center and Museum, 2002. Photo by Frank Vodvarka

archive research center, a theater, and even a café that focuses on traditional foods and their cultural role (George Rivera, pers. comm.). By placing each function in separate buildings, the end result will closely resemble a traditional Pueblo village. Traditional materials—adobe brick and local wood—have been used in the center’s construction, and incorporated training programs in the traditional construction methods (Facilities. Poeh Center, n.d.). It is in fact a point of pride that the facilities have been built in the traditional pueblo architectural form, as they feel that pueblo architectural design and building techniques are as important as the other traditional arts the center is reviving (Poeh Center Presentation, 2000).

The interior of the Poeh Center is visually intriguing, with ceiling beams made from spruce, pine, and Douglas fir in an alternating pattern of thin to thick log diameters in order to ensure an even appearance. Rivera points out that the ceiling in each room is different, a consequence of financial necessity that wound up having aesthetic appeal. The very thinness of the wood actually has a historical basis—the wood-carrying capacity of horse-drawn carts. McHorse, Jr. (Rivera et al., 2010) noted that the floors were made of local flagstone, dung, mud, and wood but also pointed out: “We want to try to maintain our traditional building styles but by the same token the functions

of this facility require a high degree of sensitivity to climate control and security, so we had to incorporate that without changing the type of structures we have in the southwest.”

There are some unconventional methods connected with the center; for one thing, there are few specific references to what you will see in the exhibits. Instead, the Elders were asked how they would want to be represented. Rivera (2010) explains:

When we go through the exhibit you will see it is a little unusual. There are no labels at all. You can get a headset and listen to some of the Elders speaking about the way of life in the pueblos but it is not specific, saying that this is what that sculpture represents. It is more about being in these little environments that we created, and interpreting it and getting a feeling in yourself . . . We don't want another museum that just puts labels on everything.

Another anomaly concerns the running water in the midst of the permanent exhibits, which are arranged by seasons. Rivera (2010) explains: “everybody said we can't have water in the exhibit, that we could do fake water. But that wasn't going to cut it for us. We had to have this element. It is critical for our exhibit to have water flowing through it. All the pueblos are built around rivers and creeks.”

The Poeh Center is the sum of many parts, and the “museum” display areas are not necessarily the most significant; in fact it is arguable that in terms of maintaining culture, the studios are more important. And the studios—of which there are several—are indeed impressive, as they are designed with care and integrity (figure 16.4). The massive stone column that dominates the jewelry studio was cut from the nearby mountains, and the huge wooden beam is fitted to the stone with great care. Governor Rivera is a noted sculptor, and it was he who hollowed the stone column so as to allow the beam to fit into its concave embrace. (Governor Rivera's work—heroic bronze sculpture—may be seen in the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. The fact of an artist serving as political figure is not unusual in Pueblo culture; the Governor of the Zuni Pueblo creates jewelry.) Again, as with the importance of real water in the exhibition, the integrity of the stone is maintained; unlike typical construction of our day the column is solid and not faced with thin slices of veneer. While in the Tewa language, there is no word for “art,” the Poeh Cultural Center and Museum has devoted the majority of buildings to places where the “creative impetus that evokes both experimentation and a sense of timelessness that has defined the transmission of knowledge among [their] Pueblo people both in the past and in the future” can take place.

The Huhugam Heritage Center of the Gila River Indian Community in Chandler, Arizona, was designed by Donald J. Stastny, of StastnyBrun



Figure 16.4. Poeh Cultural Center Jewelry Studio, 1996. Photo by Frank Vodvarka

Architects Inc. with David N. Sloan (Navajo) of D. Sloan Architects. It is a unique building that becomes one with the surrounding five mountain ranges. It has, as a part of its design, its own earthen berm suggestive of the lip on a southwestern water jar, or olla, but also the ubiquitous earthen works common to Native North America. The inside of the berm is stepped in the manner of Huhugam agriculture terraces. The Huhugam Heritage Center serves two functions: as venue for the archaeological collections recovered as part of the Bureau of Reclamation's Central Arizona Irrigation Project; and the need for a cultural center for the community. Specifically, the facility contains the Gila River Indian Community's archaeological and ethnographic collections and Tribal Archives, as well as a library and reading area, and a museum with exhibit support functions. The architects worked closely with the Gila River Indian Community to create a sixty-eight-acre campus of buildings that speaks of the local community's respect for the land and water, a seamless integration of structure and landscape (figure 16.5).

Sloan (2010) describes the process:

We [Stastny and Sloan] started working with the Bureau of Reclamation in partnership with the tribe. Then we went through many visioning sessions with the community. We worked with the two tribes, the Pima and the Maricopa, and

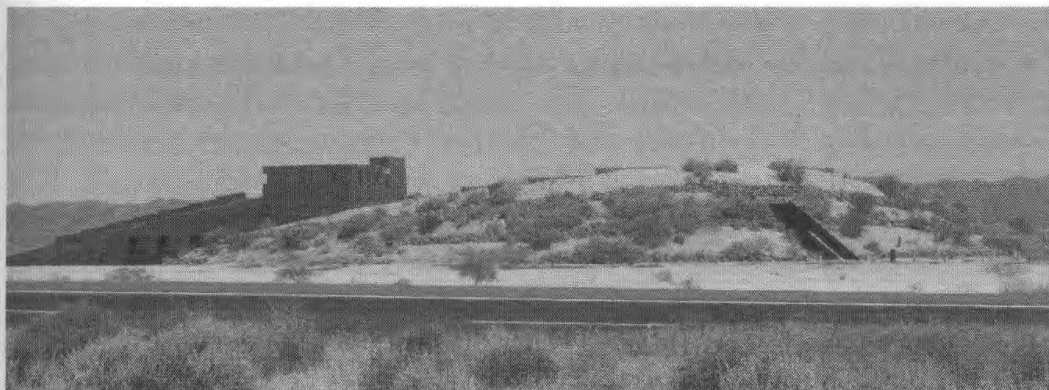


Figure 16.5. Huhugam Heritage Center, 2004. Photo by Frank Vodvarka

you had to understand their history. What we tried to do was to provide a lot of visual information on boards, and we would talk about the landscape. Elders would come in and recognize their images, they'd recognize their history, and then they would begin to tell their stories about that.

The visuals, Sloan (2010) believes, were crucial: “if you create a lot of visual imagery for the community, it really starts people talking together, especially discussion between the elders and the youth, and then the tribal leaders. A lot of times they're not in a context like that where they are able to express and flow their ideas to one another. That's when that consensus-building starts . . .” Don Stastny echoes the importance of client interaction when he says: “In the case of Huhugam, we spent a good deal of time out in the community . . . David [Sloan] has the sensitivity to understand and respect what other native cultures believe—and he and I are very careful to not dig into areas that the community may not want to share” (Don Stastny, pers. comm.).

The center's functions have been divided among a number of buildings that are separate, yet joined peripherally to the central court. The central outdoor area is based on the “ball courts” used by the Hohokam people, so-called on the assumption that they are a northern corollary to the Mesoamerican phenomenon found in Mexico and Central America. In any event, the “ball court” at the Huhugam Heritage Center is used for music and dance on a regular basis. The trellised, ethnobotanical gardens, based on the community's relationship with desert plants, was designed by McCormack Landscape Architects. Brian McCormack (Nez Perce), one of only three licensed Native American Landscape Architects in the United States, was the main landscape consultant on the project. The site's interpretive signage tells the stories of the Huhugam in their own words in regard to the use of the plant species.

The Vision/Program/Concept Design, as it evolved, clearly portrayed the Huhugam on their own terms and recognized the traditional relationship between the people, the land, and the sky. “Discussion revolved around the



feeling and smell of the buildings, the textures, and the sunlight, as well as the shapes of architecture and the materials used for building. Historic and symbolic thoughts were shared with regard to basketry, pottery, the Casa Grande, calendar sticks, forms and textures” (StastnyBrun et al., 1998, 8). Other elements that were to act as inspiration included the sacred number four with regard to directions, life transitions, seasons, and colors, but also such symbols as animals, legends, artifacts, patterns, and the like. What is striking about this long list of items is the sensory aspect of many of them, and the stress on symbolic concerns, as neither is customarily found in early stages of Western design programming.

These two parameters led, according to the architects, to an analysis of the project’s organization and layout, with seminal elements like east-facing entries, cardinal points, and such. The environment—and especially water—had to be considered in terms of location, appearance, and smell (StastnyBrun et al., 1998, 8). No matter how clever the design, or efficient the programming, a failure in these areas would have produced an alien (and alienating) building. “The importance of the land, water, flora and fauna will also be paramount in the landscape design. The modern-day descendants of the Huhugam have stressed the importance of water and plants. . . . They represent many things for the people, such as comfort, security, etc.” (StastnyBrun et al., 1998, 16). The design also had to take into account the difference between rectilinear and curvilinear shapes in building structure and landscape.

The interior of the center serves the functions of housing a permanent collection of Huhugam artifacts generally, with specific spaces for modern Pima and Maricopa objects, and changing exhibitions of works that relate to the area. Part of the permanent collection is devoted to the Breazeale Basket Collection purchased by the Gila River Indian Community and consisting of eighty-four Pima baskets. The collection is unique because many of the weavers can be identified and because they have named some of the designs. All the spaces have in common an attention to light and materials.

The design also points to what would be a stunning direction in Native American architecture in the Southwest, again raising the question of unique approaches generally. In response to our query, Stastny stated the situation succinctly:

Is there a new tribal architecture emerging? I would hope so, but if it is coming, it is coming very slowly. Probably the number of Native American architects and landscape architects has a lot to do with it. There is a danger to thinking that native architecture can be achieved in casinos or by painting symbols on walls. It has to come from creating architecture and sites that tell stories, that provide places to gather and teach, that incorporate ceremony and procession—and most of all, give the native people a voice. (Stastny, pers. comm.)

In these places, artifacts are housed that either are still in general use, or have associated spaces that allow for ceremonial practices directly connected with these objects.

### **NEW APPROACHES: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ARCHITECTS AND CURATORS**

Ironically, Native Americans—as a condition of artifact retrieval from various authorities and institutions—have often had to call their own centers “museums” and conform to museum standards. Yet it is entirely common that the square-footage provided for making artifacts and performing ceremony exceeds that reserved for artifact display. Architectural design difficulty proceeds from having to use technologically sound—yet symbolically correct—materials, a modern aesthetic that hearkens to a particular worldview, and an interactive system of spaces that accommodates both a multisensory understanding of objects and their actual purpose in ritual and ceremony. The resulting building must be authentically a part of its milieu such that it is regularly used for rituals both mundane and extraordinary, rather than exist as a specialized part of a larger, and often disinterested, culture. On Native lands it is required that the architect have a far more holistic view of the design process, and be involved in every step of the building’s construction. The result is a fully sensate building at one with its site and culture quite different from the usual Western museum experience.

What can Western design take from the Native American experience? That depends on the degree to which we embrace our own history, its ideas and artifacts. Certainly, the Native view of building could be of tremendous value as instruction to a generation of contemporary Euro-American architects that the cultural meaning that has largely been lost in Western design is something worth regaining. Sean Robin (1995, 8) refers to this when he says: “We also expect that non-Native communities will continue to learn the lessons that can be generalized from indigenous experience and culture.”

Another, even deeper problem is alluded to in these types of discussions—the sort of mind/body separation that has been central to our self-view in Western culture. In his discussion of the Navajo Universe, Gary Witherspoon (1977, 151) comments that given the Western predilection for seeing the world in dualities, it is “not surprising that art would be divorced from the more practical affairs of business and government and the more serious matters of science, philosophy, and theology. In the Navajo world, however, art is not divorced from everyday life, for the creation of beauty and the incorporation of oneself in beauty represent the highest attainment and ultimate destiny of man.” Thus,

he points out, “The Navajo experience beauty primarily through expression and creation, not through perception and preservation” (1977, 151). While it would be in error to assume that the Navajo view absolutely prevails among Native Americans, it is common. Witherspoon (1977, 152) concludes by noting that the Navajo find it incomprehensible that we have more art critics and consumers than art creators and see art as marginal rather than integrated. Small wonder the Western concept of the museum is seen as an aberration.

In her article, “‘Red Man’s Burden’: The Politics of Inclusion in Museum Settings,” Nancy Marie Mithlo (2004, 746) discusses “the complexities involved in Indian/non-Indian relations in museums.” Her research and experiences with the inclusion of indigenous artifacts in Western museum settings has led her to conclude that “both Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge systems can be interpreted as subjective enterprises with restricted codes. Museum mandates to collect and preserve are not universal standards but particular norms associated with specific embedded social histories.” In another insightful article by Mithlo, “No Word for Art in Our Language?: Old Questions, New Paradigms,” (2012, 113) she explains:

From one perspective, the “no word for art” descriptor indicates an Indigenous rejection of how Native arts are perceived in non-Native contexts such as museums, cultural centers, galleries, and scholarly texts—contexts that imbue fine arts with the Western values of individualism, commercialism, objectivism, and competition, as framed by an elitist point of reference. A rejection of the term “art” is then a rejection of Western culture as capitalist, patriarchal, and, ultimately, shallow, one that does not value the central principles of Indigenous identity, such as land, language, family, and spirituality. A refusal to be co-opted into a more narrow definition of what is an intrinsically more holistic enterprise is also a refusal to be named. It is an effort toward self-determination.

Thus the application of Western museum standards involves ideology, as well as the more prosaic considerations of practical display—a seemingly insurmountable design obstacle.

Notwithstanding, it is indeed possible for architects to successfully design on Native lands. The question really is: How do designers—Native and non-Native alike—make provision for a client whose cultural modalities are significantly different from their own? What become the controlling factors in creating a new and innovative design paradigm? We believe there are four key considerations: first, the attitude of the designers; second, the nature of their education; third, the source of the project’s financing; and fourth, the degree of client control over the project (regardless of funding source). While the latter two lie beyond the scope of this chapter, the others are critical. The first refers to the willingness of the designer to listen and sensitively respond

to the client's unique set of expectations, which—while time-consuming—is critical to the result. Second, the education of architects is, by virtue of their academic institutions and licensing, almost exclusively Western, a situation producing mixed results at best.

Every culture develops its own sensori-symbolic formula, suggesting that it is necessary to evolve a flexible design typology both specific and overarching. Such a formula might include the following elements: first, a determination, by virtue of an inclusive, specific research, of the relative value placed on the senses in order to design buildings that will perceptually resonate with a particular culture; second, the need to identify the symbolic, spiritual, and mythological concerns—and their spatial manifestations—that local cultures consider appropriate and necessary; third, the development of a new way of thinking about the appropriate functions of cultural space, from the ceremonial to the evocative; fourth, the importance of prior consensus in the group who will be the building's primary occupants; and last, the creation of a design that represents a larger social ethos, as it will house the integrative activities and objects of an entire peoples.

There are, of course, always the prosaic issues, which in Native culture often involve materials that need to be locally available, inexpensive, and easily manipulated by the community. Maintenance must be considered no matter the building's type, and technical installations requiring specialized skills probably should be avoided in remote areas. Any designer would be wise to listen to local residents in regard to long-standing practices vis-a-vis weather and topographic conditions—as well as traditional ways of ameliorating them.

The architect Daniel Glenn (Crow) (2001, 147) offers us an inclusive description of the extant approaches to indigenous design, which basically fall into three categories—iconographic, naturalistic, and cosmological. The first attempts to express the culture through the built expression of emblematic icons; the second is an approach in which architects design buildings to express the spirit of nature; and the third seeks a spiritual design, in which the universal worldview of a tribe is used to inform the tectonics and siting of structures. Here the cosmology of the tribe is a primary tool in generating the form of the building. As for architecture's final form, Glenn (2001, 144) concludes: "First, a participatory process directly involving tribal members is vital in determining the nature of a culturally specific design. Second, critical determinants of form can be drawn from traditional tribal architecture and artifacts without necessarily being derivative of the form of those artifacts." The most vital element, however, is to recognize the fundamentally different way in which Native peoples regard the nature of culture itself; for them, a successful cultural center—or, if one insists, museum—is that which engages and reinforces the social bond.

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