



INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS PHIFER
Principal, Thomas Phifer and Partners and
Design Architect, North Carolina Museum of Art Expansion Initiative

The following interview with architect Thomas Phifer was conducted at his office in New York City in August 2006.

Q *The North Carolina Museum of Art commission resulted from a very thorough and thoughtful international competition. What do you think the selection committee responded to in their encounters with you and your firm?*

TP I think the selection committee was intrigued by our emphasis on making connections to nature with our architecture. That's a top priority for our firm and it's how we shape the design process on all our projects. I think the Museum committee was interested in the how we absorb the natural world into our buildings, the strategies we use to draw nature indoors, and the way the forms of our buildings communicate the presence of nature inside the interiors.

Q *Do you think the Museum was influenced by the fact that you hail from the Carolinas yourself?*

TP I'm originally from South Carolina. I was born and raised and educated there. But I've lived in New York City for almost 30 years. I'm a New Yorker. Of course, our executive architects Pearce Brinkley Cease + Lee are Raleigh folks.

Southerners – and Carolinians in particular, though I guess people from every state would say this – have a very, very deep sense of pride in and attachment to the land. Maybe Southerners still have some sense of their agrarian history. They're usually very aware of landscape, of light, of how light relates to landscape. And we were looking at light and nature when we started on the project in Raleigh. It wasn't a design competition, but we sketched some of our thoughts about how a new building should relate to the setting and connect to the natural atmosphere down there. So I think there was mutual recognition in our shared love for the landscape.

Q *The Museum has 164 acres of rolling landscape, surrounded on some sides by woods and on others by highway. It is the largest fine art museum park in the nation. Is it difficult to make an architectural landmark in such a big open space?*

TP Museums are usually built in the middle of cities, in vibrant urban areas. The NCMA is one of the very few museums in the United States attached to an expansive, almost rural-feeling

landscape. There are built elements on the site already, an existing Museum building designed by Edward Durrell Stone and completed in 1983, and a remarkable outdoor amphitheater and cinema designed by Smith-Miller+Hawkinson Architects with the artist Barbara Kruger.

So while it's a very broad and expansive natural site, it's got some built conditions already in place that we had to accommodate and organize and work with. We're not building the Museum in the middle of a vast empty field.

On this thing about making an architectural landmark, all I can say is that our objective is to make a landmark *experience*, not a landmark building. As architects we don't think we get to choose whether or not our buildings are landmarks because that's an honor the public has to bestow on you over time.

We aspire to make something sublime, something that gives the visitor a great experience on the site. We are trying to make something that is about the site, that's a kind of analog for a personal journey. But with an art museum in particular, architects have a responsibility to refrain from competing with the art or trying to be more important than the artists in the collection. If we do our job well, the architecture is beautiful, you notice it as a visitor, you take it in and then you stop noticing it and your attention and emotions get totally involved with the art, the light, the environment, your own thoughts. Going back to the selection committee, I think this is something they understood and appreciated about us. We want the art to be first. That's not as easy to do as one would think.

Q *What objectives did the Museum articulate for you?*

TP The Museum's first major objective is to create a beautiful, appropriate new home for its permanent collection in a facility that honors and protects the art. And they said they wanted to present the collections in a fresh way. That's something the director, Larry Wheeler, talks about very eloquently. They want to take familiar objects and show them in a new way, in a new place, that makes visitors see them differently and think about them differently. So, I think their objective was to change perception by changing the architectural approach to presenting pictures and sculpture and the collection.

The institution's current Ed Stone building was constructed in the 1970s after Stone's death when North Carolina and everybody else in America was in economic crisis. The State could not construct the whole complex Stone had designed, so the Museum has been living for almost 30 years just a small portion of what was originally supposed to house it. So, the Museum has been improvising there for all these years, growing all these years, have more and more programs and visitors, acquiring more art, and now they are finally in a position to build something at the level of excellence they have always wanted, to the level of their collections.

Since the Stone building won't have to accommodate the permanent collection galleries once the new building is finished, it will be adapted for other important Museum programs and functions. That was also one of the objectives the Museum outlined for us.

Of course, the Museum also told us very, very clearly that they wanted all these various elements knitted together in a coherent, beautiful campus.

Q *Why do you think the NCMA decided to undertake their expansion now?*

TP Well, as I said, the Museum is growing, acquiring art, attracting more traveling exhibitions, having more public programs.

And then in the past several years two other important things have happened. They have officially acquired parcels of property that now total 164 acres and they see that as an opportunity to do something really special in the landscape. And last year the Museum acquired a major collection of Rodin sculptures from the Cantor Foundation and that created another kind of opportunity to create beautiful new architecture for exhibiting those works.

The Museum has an extraordinary general collection that is one of the State's most precious cultural resources, and it must be preserved and protected and celebrated in the appropriate way, a way it never really has been.

Of course, the Museum's mission is to teach, to educate, to expand the worldview of the people of Raleigh and across North Carolina and the Southeast, and to enhance quality of life there. So the Museum has an obligation and a mission to grow. The expansion initiative has been described to us as an affirmation of a great public trust.

Q *How important is the notion of public trust to your design process? How does it filter into your thinking as you conceive the architecture?*

TP The idea of this public trust is absolutely central our thinking, to our design, to how we are creating the campus. The new campus has to have a sense of belonging to everybody equally. So we knew our scheme had to be accessible and open, accepting, inviting. The new building and the campus connections were all designed to make that happen. We wanted it to feel shared, owned by the people. I hope that doesn't sound corny. But it's true.

Q *Are there any buildings you can cite as sources of inspiration for your approach to this assignment? Do you have any favorite museum buildings that influence your work?*

TP Jurgen Bo's building at the Louisiana Museum in Denmark was a major revelation for me. I first went there as a student in 1977. I'd never been to Europe, never been in more than three states – South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia! The Louisiana left an indelible impression. It has this domestic scale that allows for a really magical connection between the visitor and the art and nature, a very human scale, and spaces unfold there gradually in relationship to nature and natural light. The character of the light in the Louisiana building is just sublime. That diaphanous quality had a profound effect on me as an architect. I have never forgotten it.

And who could talk about natural light without citing Louis Kahn's building for the Kimbell Museum in Fort Worth? Kahn got everything right there, from the outdoor procession through a garden, to the way light is managed inside, to the rooms with daylight where the pictures are shown.

It seems to me most museums are just too closed to natural light, perhaps because they're afraid of controlling it. And in urban settings particularly, the city has

been kept at arm's length because the experience of art is presumed to be about looking at a thing inside a discreet volume removed from daily life and the cares of the outside world. Sometimes that works well but I question it as a premise. In North Carolina we're making our building as the foyer to nature, not the foil to it.

Another issue that's very important to us is how we sequence the spaces inside the new building. We're designing an unfolding spatial experience so that visitors get subtle breaks and breathers. You'll go into a gallery space, see work there, have a quiet experience with a picture, go out and get a breather in the main Central Gallery space, go back in to another smaller space and see art in a quiet way, get another breather, and so forth. At John Russell Pope's National Gallery building in Washington, D.C., visitors go into clusters of galleries and then come out and get re-oriented in a beautifully lit center hall. You go into that center hall and you see other visitors doing the same thing. You get a sense of community and shared experience. I really love that approach to organizing the flow of the visit because it allows people to have a wonderful one-on-one experience with art but also have a collective experience.

So looking at art becomes a shared social thing. Art shown in this way doesn't exist in a vacuum, it's less pedantic so you are maybe a little less resistant when you see a picture or a sculpture you don't at first understand or even like. I'm drawn to architectural strategies that suggest art can have a relationship to something other than itself.

Q *Every site has its assets, and its challenges. Can you describe what those are at the Museum's site in Raleigh?*

TP The biggest challenge is unifying the various elements, the existing and the planned pieces of the puzzle, into a beautiful, appropriate whole. Since the pieces that exist already have very strong personalities, it was a challenge not to get sucked into an architectural version of arms escalation. We knew we wanted to connect the dots without being overstated, without trying too hard to make a big statement on the landscape, without trying to compete with the other buildings.

One traditional southern architectural conceit inspired me when we were thinking about this problem. And that's the southern porch. In the south, an open porch is an iconic gesture, the connection between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, family life and community life, and so forth. It's the place where you let everybody know you're home. So the southern porch is the ultimate connector, the link, the civic gesture. I think it was our "Eureka!" moment when we thought about using the southern porch as an organizing principle at the Museum.

So in our scheme you see the southern porch showing up in several places. The most obvious example is the beautiful garden Peter Walker is designing with us in front of the new building to function like a porch, an element of the entry plaza experience that unites the Stone building and the new building, to the outdoor amphitheater, the natural landscape, the art in the landscape. The garden porch is our building's foyer to the rest of the campus.

Our new building also includes outdoor volumes that sort of push into the pavilion from the perimeter. We're calling these outdoor Garden Galleries, veritable porches, separated from inside space by window walls. Our idea with these is that visitors can

see out into the landscape or cross from there to the larger park, walk out into the landscape.

The progression we want to create from the new building to cultivated garden to natural landscape is like what you find at a great French chateau. The chateau is surrounded by very manicured gardens, plateaus, and spaces that have been carefully shaped. But the further you walk away from the chateau and the cultivated gardens, the more informal and natural the landscape becomes. You venture from cultivated to natural in a kind of visual, sensual journey and hopefully that translates into a parallel emotional, psychological journey.

Q *The Museum's Edward Durrell Stone building is two stories in height. Your new expansion building is only one story. Given the Museum's goals and your stated desire to create architectural unity, this is an unexpected choice. Can you elaborate upon it?*

TP We started with the art. We wanted to design a beautiful, contemplative, but still very alive place for looking at the permanent collections. We had to give the institution the kind of spaces it doesn't right now with spaces that have good proportions, human scale, beautiful connections to nature, plenty of natural light. A one-story building was the obvious choice to achieve all of these things at once. Wonderful, constant, controlled top light in the maximum number of rooms is going to be most effectively achieved in a one-story building. And a connection to nature is going to happen best in a building that never gets too far away from the ground plane. The conditions of the site, the expanse of the site allows us to lay low and sit very, very softly on the landscape.

In 1996, I was fortunate enough to win the Rome Prize [from the American Academy in Rome] and I spent six months living in Italy and traveling everywhere to see the architectural ruins at the great sites in Rome, Naples, Sicily and Tunisia. The Greeks and Romans recognized the intelligence of creating a flat landscape, creating a plinth that serves as a tabula rasa for organizing an ensemble of buildings. And that is what we wanted to do here: create a tabula rasa and organize the buildings on it into a beautiful ensemble clustered in gardens.

Q *Weren't the ancient Greeks and Romans the original, great champions of the open front porch?*

TP Yes, the ancient Greeks and Romans put a porch just about anywhere they could, especially at temples! Of course, temples weren't just religious sites. They were town centers, they were trading posts, they were meeting places where the citizens would gather to gossip and get the news, do their business but also learn what was happening in the world.

So if you think of a museum as a modern-day temple, a secular temple, a place where people gather and get information and ideas, then the plinth and the porch really resonate. In Raleigh, our version of the temple is on the ground so you're seeing art and consuming culture in connection with the outside world, in a way that's entirely consistent with the great Modernist ideal of bringing things down to street level, getting grounded. So at our building you're getting grounded literally and metaphorically, you're getting to experience art one-on-one in relationship to the world outside instead

of going up a grand stair and ascending to art like it's a sacrament.

Q *Are you suggesting that you would like to remove an inherently elite aspect of museum culture from the experience at the NCMA?*

TP Well, I think elite ideas can be presented in a non-elitist way that makes room for everybody. I've been going to North Carolina for several years now to work on this project and every single time I'm there I am struck by how many school buses are lined up in front of the Museum. There are literally thousands of children visiting that place every year, and there's no better reminder to keep it real. I think we need to make an entirely open, accessible, beautiful experience that can change the culture of the state of North Carolina by welcoming individuals, opening individual minds, letting people have a great experience.

As I said before, the Museum's mission is to teach. For the people of North Carolina this is an extraordinarily important message, it needs to be there in the architecture of the new building, it needs to be there in the whole campus. The Museum belongs to the people and they belong to it. So we hope the new building will express that in the architecture.

Q *Back to the question of unifying the elements of the site...How will this one-story pavilion relate coherently to Stone's rather massive looking, multi-story brown brick building? The aesthetics of these two structures will be so different, and they'll be also be different from the look and feel of the outdoor amphitheater.*

TP Well, it wouldn't be very enlightened or very optimistic to just imitate those existing pieces in terms of scale and materials.

If you look at great cities and how they evolve, you notice they become stronger and more interesting as the diverse buildings accumulate in close proximity to one another—diverse but appropriate in terms of how each building expresses its purpose and its times and the values of its times. So in Raleigh our decision was to make the new building a discreet volume that expresses the attitudes and technologies of our times, and then to look for one very focused way to connect it to the other elements of the site.

We found that connection point in Stone's building. When you approach it, there's a piece that cantilevers about 30 feet out and draws you in under it, creating the main entrance to the Museum. It's actually a two-story volume but it reads to the eye like a single form. It's very powerful, very memorable. So we decided to orient the new building so that its entrance faces the entrance to the Stone on a new entrance plaza.

Q *What materials have you chosen for the new building?*

TP For the exterior our goal is to softly draw the landscape up to the building, to make that green landscape feel like it is part the architecture and vice versa. So we chose a beautiful stainless steel that is bead blasted to a very, very soft gleam. It's not mirror-like at all, no hard literal reflections, just a beautiful glow. That steel reflects the landscape and the changing sky and light of day very abstractly.

The steel will wrap the building, which is basically a rectangular box with the outdoor Garden Galleries pushing into its sides in a few spots. The steel is being done in monumental panels, and we've developed a special mounting system that will allow the panels to be flush and appear nearly seamless on the outside of the building. The steel will be like a wrapper and it will have simplicity and calm to draw the architecture and landscape together softly and sort of melt together visually.

So the exterior of the building will look like it's dematerializing in certain places at certain times, and in some other places it will sort of fall back visually as your eye goes elsewhere.

We are investigating how an opaque material can actually create an ethereal effect. Everyone falls back on glass for that effect and we wanted to do it differently, try a different route.

Q ***Take us on an imaginary visit through the new building.***

TP Visitors will drive into the park along a serpentine road that brings them to an arrival plaza, a central plaza. In that plaza, which gives primary access to all the pieces of the composition, visitors decide which way they want to go – to see the permanent collection in the new building, to see a visiting Monet show or take a class in the old building, to walk into the landscape to look at art in nature.

If they want to go into the new building, they will approach it through a double alley of upright trees that are part of the green porch garden I described before, designed by Pete Walker.

You enter the new building through this garden and into the Front Hall, a beautiful, daylight open indoor space that helps visitors get organized for their visit. It's not so much a lobby as an orientation point, and you immediately see art here just beyond the information desk, so you know why you have come.

So the Front Hall is a hub space and from there you can see into the Central Gallery of the new building and the art installed there. You can go that way or you can go off to the right where we have the café, the Museum Shop, the coat check area and various visitor services like restrooms.

From the Front Hall you can go into the Central Gallery and start looking at the art. The Central Gallery is more than 11,000 square feet of space that gives onto a whole series of smaller galleries where the various areas of the collection – American paintings, contemporary art, Renaissance art, and so forth – will be installed.

The palette of materials inside the new building is very simple and sensual, disciplined. Some of the public spaces and some of the galleries will have clear low-iron glass and steel windows or window walls, lined with operable shade systems that can be controlled for customized management of the light in the individual spaces, depending upon what is right for the art. Floors will be white oak throughout the entire building to create visual warmth, particularly in the spaces where European pictures are shown. The walls throughout the building will be extremely simple, well-finished plaster, and in the European paintings galleries the curators are considering some colored walls. And we're incorporating some travertine into spaces where altarpieces are shown, which is something we decided with the curators as a way to set these objects apart and reference the type of ecclesiastical environments where they once lived.

From the Central Hall, you will be able to move through the galleries, take breathers, and create your own path. Of course, the organization of collections will not be messy. There's a rough chronological tendency to the sequencing to provide some logic, some comfort for the visitor, and people can go that route or make their own route.

The Rodin Collection that the Cantor Foundation is giving to the Museum will definitely occupy an important position in the Central Gallery, mainly at the end where a window wall looks out toward the landscape. Since six or seven of the Rodin sculptures can be installed outdoors, there's a great opportunity to use them to create another story about the relationship between inside and outside if we have some Rodin work inside the Central Gallery and some outside just beyond the glass.

Q *Let's talk about scale in the new building. The NCMA permanent collection is broad and general, covering centuries and including many types of objects. How have you created space for specific objects in the context of the larger vision you've outlined for conveying a sense of place? How do you achieve both—a very intense experience with an object, and an equally intense relationship to the surrounding place, while respecting conservation conditions?*

TP We will be able to accommodate the art in variety of spaces. There are some beautiful monumental European paintings. They need large walls and wide galleries so a visitor can step back, move away, observe from a distance. Some of these paintings are like parallel universes and you enter them. So they need their own environments with controlled conditions. The light has to be very carefully managed.

At the same time, the Museum has a terrific collection of Roman and Greek antiquities that are less sensitive to natural light and we want to place those in juxtaposition with vignettes of outdoors and views of the landscape. Carlo Scarpa's addition to the Canova Museum (Possagno, Italy) was an inspiration here. Scarpa did that building in the late 1950s and it presents classical sculpture in an amazing, daring way, with light permeating the space, windows of different sizes punctured into the walls, a really powerful connection to natural light and nature.

Our new building is not for visiting and temporary shows. It won't require the same kind of super-flexible space curators need to anticipate the unknown. So that allows us to really work with the character of the collections to create a strong, beautiful sense of place.

Q *But flexibility is a necessity in all museums, isn't it? Since even permanent collections change and are reinterpreted over the years, one would expect flexibility to be a priority.*

TP Flexibility is definitely very important and we've designed it into the new building. But I think flexibility has become a kind of buzz word, it's a little over-rated as a design feature these days and I think sometimes it's just a fallback position when the client or the architect doesn't have really firm grasp on the institution's identity. Completely neutral and flexible space isn't always the best answer and we think it's very important for spaces to have appropriate character.

The character of the space at the NCMA building will come from the natural

daylight, the way it is brought indoors by the baroque curves of the coffered ceilings, and the relationship to the outdoor Garden Galleries. The interiors will be gentle and subtle but not neutral. Beyond that, we're trying to create the most beautifully proportioned galleries possible, dictated by the works to be shown in them.

Flexibility will be in the new building but it won't be obvious to the naked eye. Within the architecture we've created the look of permanence but the ability to move walls as the need arises, whenever it arises over the years. You'll never notice this if you are the visitor, we don't want you to. We're hoping to make spaces that convey confidence and I don't think you can do that for a permanent art collection if everything looks temporary and provisional.

Q ***You've said in the past that you view light as a building material. How will you work with it here?***

TP Natural light is a central element in our work. I think you could say it's one of our pre-occupations. From the beginning, we've made it a priority to allow controlled daylight into the new building galleries. This idea drove the form of the architecture, since the best way to guarantee getting controlled daylight into all the spaces is to make a single-story building, as I explained before.

Of course, one of our other priorities is protection of the art, which is an invaluable and irreplaceable asset. And we want to be sure that the light enhances visitors' experience with the art rather than detracting from it. That's why controlling the daylight is so important.

In working with our great lighting consultants, Paul Marantz of Fisher Marantz Stone on the electric lighting and Andy Sedgwick of Ove Arup on controlling the daylight, we've identified some important principles for the Museum. First, to eliminate glare it's essential that daylight be introduced at the center of a gallery, rather than along the walls. With paintings – and the Museum has an extensive and outstanding collection of paintings – you also want the light to come into the gallery as far up above and away from the pictures as possible. The daylight must be allowed to spread softly and evenly through the space and eventually light the art on the walls. You control the daylight by diffusing it.

Of course, there are times of the year or even particular times of day when there will not be enough daylight to illuminate the art, so we also need a means for beautifully supplementing the natural light with electric light when that's necessary or desired.

So, working closely with our consultants, we identified a proportioned pattern for the ceiling grid that accommodates an ideally balanced combination of daylight and electric light in the galleries. This pattern led us to design a system of vaulted ceiling coffers that have become the dominant ceiling form for the entire new building.

Q ***Can you elaborate on the vaulted ceiling coffers?***

TP There is this system of vaulted coffers at the ceiling of the building in a regular pattern. At the top of each coffer is an oculus that takes in and filters the daylight, and then at the base of each coffer is a lighting track to accommodate the electric lighting. The right amount of controlled light for each gallery falls from the top of each

coffer and is softly directed downward and outward and evenly onto the gallery walls.

To control the light falling through the coffers we have developed a unique system at the skylight glass in each oculus. Several distinct elements within the glasswork to block, filter, and then softly direct the light that is allowed at the galleries. Various combinations of these elements allow us to effectively dial up or dial down the light allowed into different galleries. We've been working with the Museum's curators and conservators to predetermine the amount of light allowed for each portion of the collection and we've adjusted the oculus skylights accordingly. In the end, less than one percent of the daylight available outside is allowed into the building, where it's softly diffused and will light the galleries in a very soulful way.

Q *And visitors will see the system? It will be visible?*

TP It will be visible inside the building and the outside, too. At the exterior of the building the coffered ceiling system that helps to control interior light expresses itself on the exterior as a vaulted roof perforated by the oculi that emit light to the galleries. The roof plane will read like a floating carpet with a regular pattern of vaults, sort of like gentle waves. I think this form is extremely beautiful and sculptural, and it sort of echoes the hills of the site. But this is really just a wonderful side effect of the building expressing how the galleries inside of it function and how the vaults and coffers bring nature indoors by capturing daylight. The architecture tells you where the soul of the building is—in the galleries—from the moment you come onto the site and approach the building. We're very excited about this.

Q *Let's talk about the Garden Galleries. What will visitors find there?*

TP The Museum has pieces in the permanent collection that will be shown outdoors. Of course, we hope the outdoor Garden Galleries will inspire the curators to commission leading artists to make new site-specific works, to respond to the character of the spaces, to reinvent the way you look at them over time. So we're designing the outdoor Garden Galleries to anticipate this.

With the Smith-Miller+Hawkinson and Barbara Kruger piece down there, the NCMA secured a place in the history of commissioned public art in America. So it would make a lot of sense for them to continue exploring the possibilities with commissioned outdoor work. The museum park is surrounded by wooded areas, and the curators are playing with those in wonderful ways to commission works that visitors will encounter on walking paths there. And Mary Miss is working with Dan Gottlieb, the Museum's Deputy Director, on a very ambitious public work at the pond in the park.

Q *Have you applied any of the architectural advances in this project to other buildings your firm is now designing elsewhere?*

TP Now, no project exists in a vacuum. We have small houses and big buildings like the federal courthouse we're building in Salt Lake City, and we try to explore the same issues on all of them. The research is shared in our office and it's used wherever it works. I can say for sure that we have certain pre-occupations that are consistent from building to building. We have a pre-occupation with natural light. We have a pre-

occupation with finding ways to unite nature and the individual through architecture. We have a pre-occupation with new technology that makes a beautiful building also a building that works well.

Sometimes you don't know you're going to carry a lesson forward until it happens. One day you're a young man looking at a Giacometti sculpture in a pool of water at the Louisiana Museum and then suddenly it's 30 years later and you're drawing on that mental image and the feeling you had to design an art museum in North Carolina. Who knew?

I think about that and then I think about all those school kids going into the North Carolina Museum of Art. It's amazing to imagine that somebody might have an experience today, this afternoon, that changes the way they see things and think about things in ten or twenty or thirty years from now. That's the privilege of designing a museum and it's a tremendous honor, but it's also a tremendous responsibility. I think about that a lot in North Carolina, since the Museum is a state institution and it's built upon public trust.

Q *Architects bear civic responsibility.*

TP They absolutely do bear civic responsibility. I think that's true no matter whether the building is public or private. Of course, it's especially true here at the North Carolina Museum because this is not a private foundation or a private collection or a house museum. It's a public institution paid for with public funds. As I said before, we're very conscious that this a public trust. So making an open, accessible building that has something to say about the connection between art and the rest of the world is a civic responsibility to us. We think about that constantly as we work on this project. That's another pre-occupation we have.

Q *How do you personally define success in a project like this one?*

TP Well, over the years I've noticed something about how I look at architecture out in the world. I start out by examining the architecture in a formal way, but I always end up focused mainly on the people and what they're doing in and around a building, how they're engaging the architecture.

So in Rome, I'd go to a piazza – Piazza del Popolo, let's say, or Piazza Navona – and in the piazza I'd look at the buildings around the open space, think about how they're configured, think about the materials, look at how the light works on them. But then I'd find myself spending a lot more time watching the people, watching how they moved through the space, watching how the buildings seemed to direct people's paths or have an impact on how they behave and interact. I guess I'm saying the relationship of people to buildings is more interesting to me in the end than just the buildings themselves.

So I think I'll go to the North Carolina Museum of Art in five years or so and look at the people wandering through, and see if they're pausing and looking at the paintings, enjoying the gardens, embracing it, owning the place, talking about it, really taking it over. I'm hoping the people will be having not just an "art experience" but also a life experience. I guess that sounds like a pretty lofty goal. But why not?

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