# SAFEKEEPERS

## SIX NEW MUSEUMS

The seemingly instinctive impulse among humans to archive their own history, and that of their natural habitat, has driven the architectural category of 'museum' for centuries now, and appears in no manner diminished by rumours of our collective demise (say, by our destruction of that habitat). Indeed, the spreading awareness of the precarious state of our planet seems, if anything, to be subconsciously spurring a sense of urgency in the recording of the various histories we have made… As if we can deposit into our cultural institutions not only evidence of our presence but also of our worth, as authenticated by our artworks, our science works, our very industriousness itself. This urge to record may be a monumental exercise in irrelevance, or paramount to the advancement of knowledge. Either way, it makes for some lucky architects.

Because museums have always held high status as commissions – right up there with cathedrals and parliaments – they tend to go to established or 'hot' firms. They are by nature high-profile projects, being both public (at least in spirit, even private museums exist to 'show' something to others) and prestigious (by their nature, they are designed to protect something deemed to be of value). Not infrequently, new museums result from open architectural competitions, which provide relatively unknown offices a shot at the big time, and numerous smaller museums take a chance on unfamous architects, willing as these institutions are to share the adventure of untested talent in return for a less conventional result. Altogether this adds up to a genre rich in variety, and every year, somewhere, very good and sometimes great museum buildings or expansions pop up.

While sometimes overemphasised, the 'After Bilbao' phenomenon, whereby museums and public art galleries carry expectations of major urban transformation, does exist. Yet even before Gehry's milestone achievement (which, by now, even he may be tired of being measured against), major museums enjoyed their share of anticipation and critical attention. It is odd to ponder, say, Paris, without the Centre Pompidou (built long before Bilbao), or London without the Tate Modern, or even New York without the MOMA, but then Berlin, Madrid, Rome and dozens of other cities already had major museums when Gehry was still in diapers, and most of these were housed in neo--classical structures that, for Western architecture, represented the appropriate setting for the contemplation of cultural history. The current progeny of those still-adored places are a much more eclectic group, dispersed to the farthest corners of the globe and looking as different from each other as can be. They all do the same thing – contain and exhibit things we like to look at – but they do it in vastly different garbs. And while we would be the last to say that all neo-classical buildings are similar, the differences are nothing like those between a Herzog & de Meuron and a Zaha Hadid, or between a Steven Holl and a SANAA. Studying the architecture of museums right now vis-à-vis museums a century ago, is like comparing a botanical garden to a farm.

And oh, what a crop! If other building types weren't equally imaginative (houses, for instance), one would be tempted to conclude that the preciousness of museum contents induces a tendency to make their containers fabulous in turn. Yet pulling in an opposite direction should be the inclination toward conservatism, prompted by the belief in long-term preservation of objects in the first place. History may record trends, but it is itself the definition of enduring, ongoing, infinite. Buildings meant to house history… shouldn't they avoid the temporal with all their might? Yet here we have the very latest forms and materials, razor-edged ideas… a category sizzling with energy and experimentation. Undoubtedly it is the often civic position of these buildings that helps raise the stakes. But what else is at play? Do the specific curatorial materials inspire architects to make sure their buildings don't suffer background status by comparison? Is it that housing artworks or irreplaceable artefacts drives home the relative importance of these buildings, relative to, say, housing people or corporations? Whatever the reasons, museums are treated very seriously by the people who design them, the people who administer them and the people who visit them. Societies still agree that safeguarding and displaying civilisation's production is necessary and worthy of effort and investment. Maybe museums reassure us in our quest for meaning. We have faith that things need to be remembered, even if we're not sure exactly why. And since these are places devoted to memory, who can blame their architects for trying to make them memorable as well?

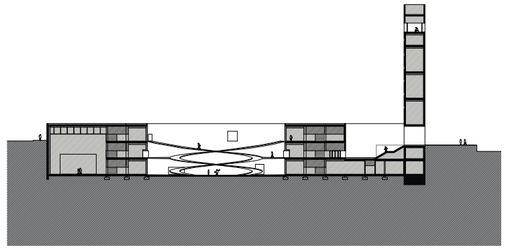
# ANDALUSIA MUSEUM OF MEMORY – GRANADA, SPAIN

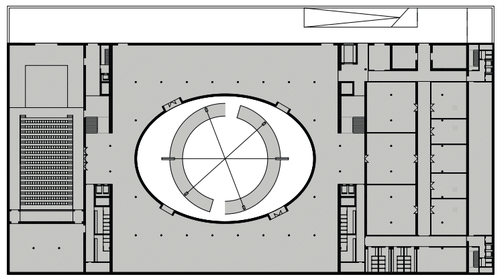
## Alberto Campo Baeza

Photography by Javier Callejas

Justifiably proud of their history, the Andalusians now have a monumental museum to hold the 'memory' of "the most cultivated of the Iberians" (the Roman Strabo), courtesy of Alberto Campo Baeza. Aligned with the same architect's Central Headquarters of the CAJA Granada Savings Bank of 2001, the new structure is based on an enormous three-storey podium that picks up the bank's own. The horizontal parti culminates in a vertical corollary, a narrow slab tower clad in the same white stone, as if a prone figure had suddenly risen from sleep. The volumetric arrangement is simplified to great effect, but Baeza saves his climax for something more – an elliptical courtyard carved out of the centre of the plan. Blanched in white, the space is punctured by infrequent openings that feed onto two interwoven spiral ramps that link the different levels. The dimensions of the courtyard replicate those of a courtyard at the Palace of Charles V at the Alhambra, a worthy antecedent to say the least. Baeza's space is abstracted by its whiteness and the expanses of uninterrupted surface that form it; a sublime architectural place within the institution.

The tower mirrors the bank's tower to jointly offer the city an implicit gateway. The intended plasma screens on its wall, seen from the adjacent highway, would transmit messages and become a sort of tapestry of images





somewhat similar to giant screens in Manhattan's Times Square or London's Piccadilly Circus. By day the wall suggests a deity-scaled canvas waiting to be painted upon. A large open space lies next to the museum, offering a civic forum ideal for contemplating the whole ensemble, or merely reposing in its shadow.

The 'completion' of a large urban intervention comprising both institutional and commercial landmarks constructed a decade apart makes an interesting genesis to the project. But soon that backstory will be forgotten, leaving a whole considerably larger than the sum of its parts. Baeza's command of form and scale allow him to paint with an ambitious brush, which seems entirely necessary to the project's success. Any more modest in scale, fussy in execution and detail, or hesitant in vision, and the complex would lose the audacity so intrinsic to its persuasiveness. The combination of bold gesture and material rigour is essential, as is Baeza's knowledge of when to stop and what not to add. It is like a De Chirico painting come to life: brutally honest, instantly memorable and harshly beautiful.

# CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART EAST WING – CLEVELAND, USA

## Rafael Vinoly Architects

Photography by Brad Feinknopf

No stranger to large institutional commissions, Rafael Vinoly has raised strong reactions on both sides of the fence with his major addition to the renowned Cleveland Museum of Art since its opening less than a year ago. The first of three planned wings, Vinoly's effort is a mixture of the subtle and the loud – a stone-and-glass agglomeration of cubic boxes that seem to cling to the hulk of the original 1916 Beaux-Arts structure, yet also complement it. The 140,000sq ft East Wing happens to link the museum with a 1971 addition by Marcel Breuer, himself an attractor of considerable mixed feelings whenever he built. Vinoly's achievement is to strike a balance between contrasting architectural languages without losing his soul in the process; the East Wing is strong enough visually to stand on its own, yet doesn't attempt to grandstand over its rather weighty neighbours. The programme is fairly standard: a double-height entrance lobby and special exhibition gallery feeding other galleries for both 19th-century and modern art, a photography collection, and offices and workspaces for the conservation department of the museum.

No small part of the brief for Vinoly was to rationalise what had become a rather disjointed series of exhibition spaces thanks in part to Breuer's addition. The original structure, by Hubbell & Benes, practising in the


Greek Revival style, was suffocating amid a century of subsequent formal decisions. Vinoly has consolidated the larger institution while expanding it and refocused attention on the first building, now to claim the prime role among the other wings, including a renovated Breuer section. Some other pieces of the puzzle have been demolished to allow a spacious indoor plaza under a glass canopy, which will form a welcoming centrepoint for the building and service events and functions as well. Where the new wings join the older structure, glazed galleries appear, allowing a lighter, more transparent appreciation of the primary volume. Vinoly's exterior cladding alternates bands of granite and marble in horizontal stripes that, while momentarily pronounced, quickly recede into a quiet, rich backdrop to both the glass pavilions and bridges, and the large historic mass. It was an intelligent decision; unambiguously modern yet reserved enough to seem appropriately deferential.

Vinoly's oeuvre is lengthy and contains a number of items decidedly less convincing than this, but the East Wing is a declarative success. Perhaps moderated by the credentials of adjacent buildings, the architect has produced one of his strongest works in some time, and pulled off a difficult trick of remarrying an unlikely pair. This one is all about balance, and he has hit the mark near perfectly.

# MAXXI – ROME, ITALY

## Zaha Hadid Architects

Photography by Roland Halbe and Helene Binet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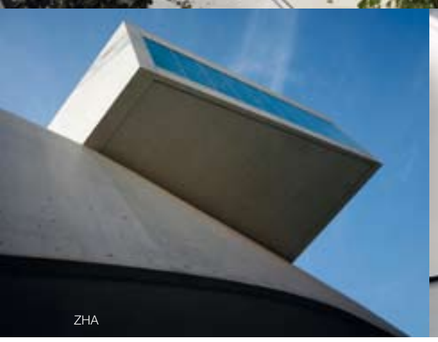
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Hadid's architecture rarely 'looks like' nearby buildings, but she is in fact a highly contextual practitioner, often deriving her principal conceptual diagrams from the immediate situations of her commissions. In the case of the Maxxi, her latest creation, occupying a large site in Rome, this is as true as ever. The building is a river of streaming currents of space and volume, inspired by the site's existing circulation routes and the horizontal linearity of adjacent military barracks. What Hadid does with this found material adds up to her museum, a clutch of likewise linear 'branches' of space requiring variegated movement past artworks, overlit by glazed ceilings with parallel structural beams emphasising the same flowing theme. Critics have been reticent about the applicability of the parti to the institution's principal purpose – to purvey the experience of art – but the architectural experience, at least, is vivid and well-received. The building doesn't exactly slip quietly into the eternal city, but neither does it shout; Hadid has kept its massing deceptively modest, due to the strategy of horizontality. In truth – and revealed from the air – the Maxxi is a large structure, but from the approaching streets it sneaks up on you, or you on it. Once inside, the monumentality of it is disclosed, and the often stark and almost intimidating character of the spaces (which are not rooms per se) introduces a layer of tension that one assumes, was meant to heighten the


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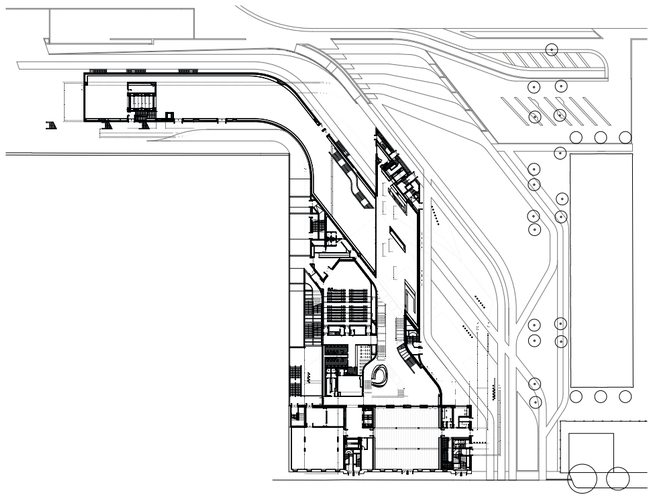


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experience of art. That is not to say it lacks beauty; Hadid loves to play a balancing game between the arresting and the repellent, and at Maxxi, she doesn't hold back.

One doesn't always know where one is inside the Maxxi, and that's not a bad thing. There is a possibility of losing oneself in the streaming spaces and flying bridges of the galleries, following a meandering path of art, subtly nudged by the built surfaces of the architecture, the lines of daylight above, and the curves and bends in the surfaces. It is a 'brave new world' refutation of neo-classical museum-making, an original re-invention of an institutional type long comfortable with certain definitions and conventions; a proposal to rethink how we visit, if not view, art.

The Maxxi is surely one of the most radical architectural additions to Rome in recent decades, and has been the focus of major attention, excitement and trepidation since Hadid won the commission. Many think of the city as though it were a fragile relic unable to withstand new additions or changes, and while the historic centre is indeed rather insular, thanks to its purity as an historical record of two millennia of sublime building, the immediate environs, such as where Maxxi is located, has plenty of possible sites for new architecture of high calibre. Zaha Hadid has proven she wasn't intimidated by the city's unique aura, nor did she feel compelled to showboat. Maxxi is a curious animal, to be sure, but it seems appropriately self-confident to survive the laser gaze of critics, one and all, that is focused upon it. Once again, Hadid has stalled her detractors and exalted her fans.

# HERNING MUSEUM – HERNING, DENMARK

## Steven Holl Architects

Photography by Steen Gyldendal

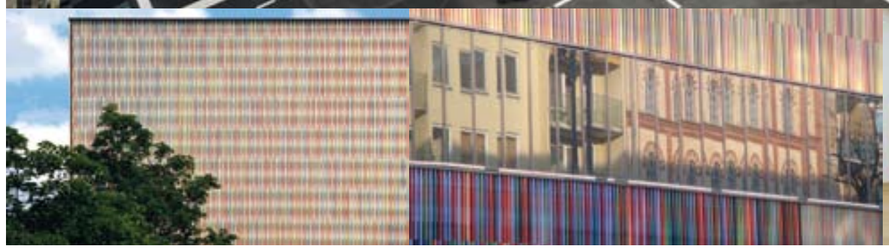
This supremely understated building by American architect Steven Holl seems to settle upon its quiet, rural site with a whisper. The white surfaces of the clustered volumes immediately suggest an early Modernist ancestry, but it's the bright contrast with green surroundings that Holl must have been focused on. Keeping his sculptural hand under strict control, the architect exhibits luscious restraint here, as if he's interpreting a northern European characteristic of placidity in concrete and glass. In fact, this may be his most light-handed work in years.

The museum uses a series of berms and pools to make a semi-protected courtyard space that captures southern sunlight. Orthogonal galleries group around this space, capped with curved roofs that collect natural light and gently allow it inside. The perimeter walls are load-bearing, articulated as protective elements, while interior walls are moveable panels allowing flexible arrangements of exhibits. The roofs utilise a two-directional truss arrangement yielding freedom below. They are tied down via stress rods embedded in the clerestory windows. On the expansive exterior plastered

# MUSEUM BRANDHORST – MUNICH, GERMANY

## Sauerbruch Hutton

Photographs courtesy of the architects



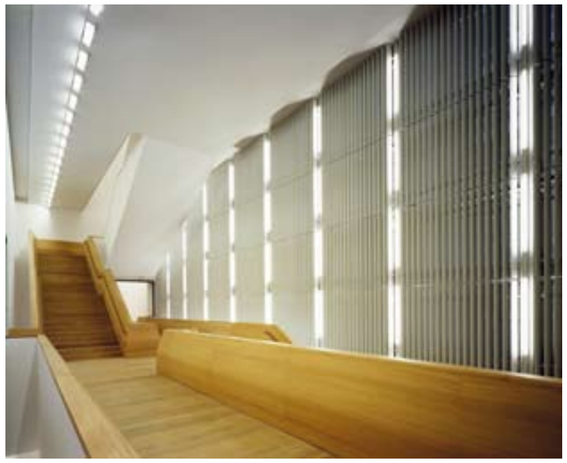
walls, fabric-forms left deliberate patterns on the surface, referencing local fabric-making traditions and lending the planes a subtle filigree of visual interest. The 5,600sq m programme includes a 150-seat auditorium, music rehearsal rooms, a restaurant, media library, office space plus exhibition galleries.

Holl's work now encompasses a surprising diversity of programmes, locations and approaches. The originality of approach, not to say of form, that we expect of the office has proven repeatedly that it can impress as easily by what it does not do as by what it does. This latest institution is so formally quiet, it draws one in for a closer study, then reveals its attributes systematically: proportion, spatial relationships, manipulation of light, and so forth. It is a building that seems unattached to a specific moment in time, which seems a good way to ensure its longevity.

This institution, which holds the impressive contemporary collection of Udo Brandhorst, including works by Basquiat, Hirst, Warhol, Richter and others, is by Berlin-based Sauerbruch Hutton. They have produced a clear, straightforward three-storey building of compelling, sensible art spaces and enlivened it with a cladding system of 36,000 ceramic louvres glazed in 21 different colours. Within this rests a second skin of folded metal. Together, the two skins effect a seemingly transforming epidermis of subtle polychromy that foreshadows the offerings on the walls inside. At once contemporary and gently playful, the outer aspect of the museum reflects its own purpose as a container of modern, high-spirited artworks.

The volume of the building is orthogonal and unsurprising; its interest is entirely in the surfacing, which alters with weather and natural daylight conditions, but is never extroverted. On the interior, the gallery spaces are amply proportioned and enjoy a bath of natural light through indirectly glazed ceilings. Indeed, the interior spaces seem much more monumental than expected from the external massing; appropriately large for some of the pieces in the collection. The architects have done much with this strategy of a decorated series of boxes, and the white blankness of the galleries works refreshingly against the complex, colourful facades that enclose them.

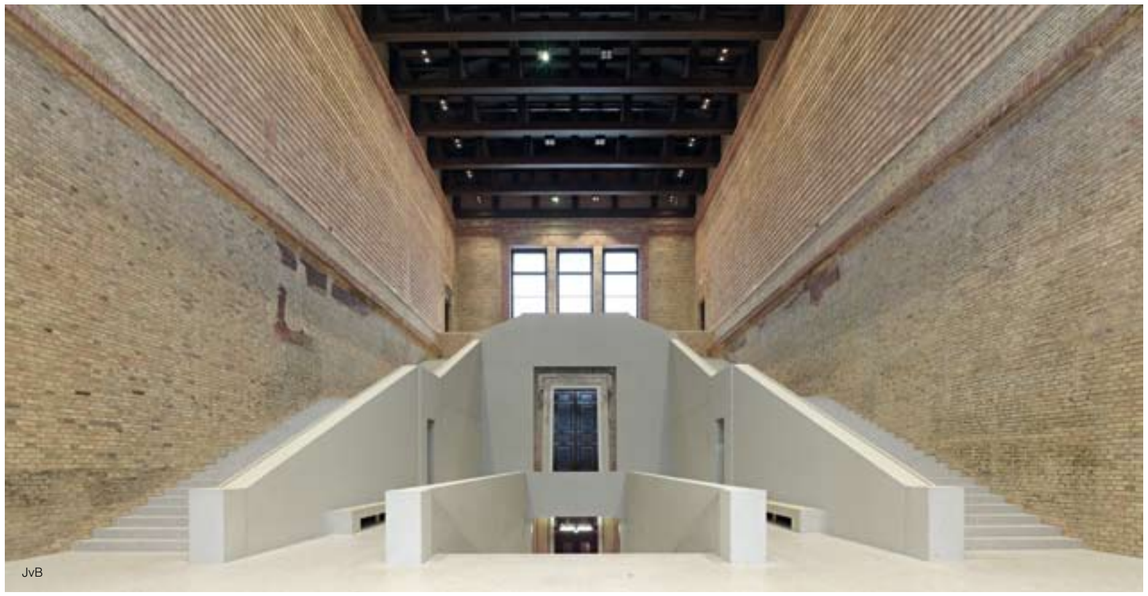
Sauerbruch Hutton often uses this approach in its commissions: cloaking fairly regular forms – pragmatic spatial containers – in quietly original outer skins. The firm enjoys colour and tonality, and uses it skillfully, without treading into facetiousness or irony. In a sense, they follow a long tradition in museum architecture: the cladding of straightforward spaces in an architectural 'dressing' of its time. It's just that neo-classicism has been replaced in their case with something very different. Still, the relationship between interior and exterior is very traditional here, and no revolutionary concept is brought to the engagement with art; we still wander through lovely halls and gaze on paintings on white walls. That works, and if it contrasts with Zaha Hadid's undertaking further south, so much the better; it provides a great study in opposites. A simple body in a sinuous, colourful gown versus white-and-black draped over a unique form. It would be wonderful to curate an exhibition to visit both museums, and view the same paintings in each, testing these poles.



# NEUES MUSEUM – BERLIN, GERMANY

## David Chipperfield Architects

Photography By Ute Zscharnt, Christian Richters, Jorg von Bruchhausen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Somewhat like Steven Holl, David Chipperfield is incapable of making uninteresting architecture, and like Holl again, his buildings never resemble previous works. This time, he was working with a special site, renovating the fabled Neues Museum in central Berlin, one of the greatest art repositories anywhere, and delicately placed at the very heart of the German capital. Originally built in the mid-19th century, the museum was extensively damaged at the end of the Second World War and suffered neglect and exposure to weather for decades. In 1997 Chipperfield won an international competition to rebuild it. Part restoration project, part new construction, the present Neues is a fascinating hybrid that clarifies its own history while gloriously entering a new phase of it.

The architect used prefabricated concrete elements with marble chips embedded, brick, and formed concrete. New spaces include an Egyptian court, an apse in the Greek courtyard and the South Dome, built of recycled handmade bricks. A new structure, the James Simon Gallery, will be constructed adjacent to the Spree river. The gentle juxtaposition of the soft grey concrete elements with the richly textured brick walls and classical stone details of the original building make for a dramatic stage set, particularly within the huge scale of the building's great halls. By eschewing classical details on his own inserted pieces, Chipperfield quietly establishes the timeline of the building, and brings it right up to date.


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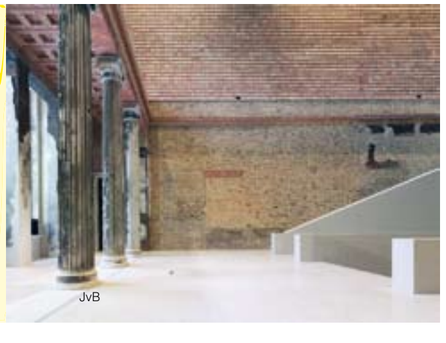
In one sense, the extreme restraint of the architect's work here almost makes one wonder what the interest was for him, other than the prestigious address. Then one remembers Chipperfield's oeuvre, and the fact that silence, or something extremely close to it, is an abiding interest of his. Thus the opportunity to work as close to anonymously as one can imagine in a setting this loaded, may have been at the core of it; he was tantalised by what not to do. And his work here is so thoroughly in the spirit of the building that it is tempting to describe it as neo-classical as well, in its strict order, rigorous decorative consistency, monumentality of scale, embrace of bilateral symmetry, and so forth. If there could be such a thing as a contemporary neo-classical spirit in 2010, certainly David Chipperfield might be its embodiment.

Easily one of the most fascinating practices in existence at the moment, David Chipperfield has revived a world-class museum with a masterly hand, and whether or not it was as evident 13 years ago as it is now, the match of commission and architect seems, in retrospect, a stroke of genius.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