

ADDENDUM TO ART POLICY COMMITTEE REPORT

Summary of Gallery-Studio Tour

Jane McCullough

For two very full (and very warm) days in July, members of the Bennington College Art Division and the Trustee Art Policy Committee joined forces for an investigating tour of school and college art facilities recently built in New England.

The ten-member team, in what developed into a caravan of cars, started in New Haven, where it visited two buildings with the kind guidance of Mrs. Brown, and moved north to Wellesley, Boston, Waltham, and Andover, Massachusetts, where it disbanded at the end of the second day, appropriately eye- and arch-weary.

The purpose of the tour was learning by seeing -- specifically, to see and judge firsthand how other educational institutions have planned their studios and galleries, how they look and work educationally, how they might (or might not) have something to contribute to the planning of a new art center for Bennington. Wherever possible, the group talked to those who programmed and those who use the buildings, to find out both the planning process and the degree of satisfaction with the results.

After the touring group dispersed, each member wrote a report to Mrs. Winston, giving individual reactions and conclusions. The total literary output from the trip probably weighs several pounds; for those who might prefer an abbreviated pocket edition, we have prepared this summary of what was seen and what was said about it. Much of this thinking has been incorporated into the recommendations on program of the Art Policy Committee.

Trustees: Mrs. Winston, Mrs. Meyer, Mr. McCullough.
Members of Art Policy Committee: Mrs. McCullough, Mrs. (and Mr.) Roy Friedman.
Faculty: Mr. Feeley, Mr. Rosen, Mr. Stroud, Mr. Olitsky.

Buildings Visited

Graduate School of
Art and Architecture
Yale University
(Paul Rudolph)
(Shown to us by Betty Brown)

Selected typical comments

- "A dark medieval monument."
- "Tomb-like unworkable maze."
- "Dramatic quality of drafting room might have some advantages over long periods."
- " 'Pit' idea has possibilities for informal gatherings."
- "Beautiful anti-people architecture."
- "The faults are plainly as much the responsibility of the users as of the architect."
- "Would be greatly improved without the walls - and for that matter the paintings."

all reports available on request to College Dev. office

Jewett Art Center
Wellesley College

(Paul Rudolph)

"Entire purpose is diametrically opposed to ours."
"Meagre, confused, and tight."
"Built without careful programming."
"Emphasis on exterior appearance rather than workable plan."
"Gallery in center of building is serious security problem."
"Full of thoughtless mistakes that drive the users wild."
"An oppressive anti-student, anti-art building."

Carpenter Center for the
Visual Arts
Harvard University

(LeCorbusier)

"Interesting as a structure--deficiencies in function."
"Most interesting to look at...."
"All-glass studios is the 'pancakes-in-the-window' approach."
"Concourse below gives a possibility of variety, permits one to experience either in a social or solitary way."
"Strength and character--a work of art, but not a workable space."
"Large individual studios are the least formal, the closest to what we want."

Poses Art Museum
Brandeis University

(Max Abramovitz)

"A marble mausoleum."
"No thought given to the way a gallery must function."
"Would have served beautifully for a travel bureau."
"Daylighting is good--building imposing and static."
"Separation of galleries and studios is not satisfactory."

Art Studios
Brandeis University

(Max Abramovitz)

"Studios do not absorb activity, they spell it out."
"Clean workmanlike studios, too small for work of today."
"A place for puttering around with crayon, paint, and clay."
"Excellent (skylight) illumination."
"A place for traditional art to happen."

Visual Arts Center
Andover Academy

(Ben Thompson)

"Planned for teaching at prep school level - difficult to compare..."
"A nicety (studios) giving a sense of white-collar creativity."
"Little awareness of what contemporary art experience should be for studio."
"A feeling of excessive weight, tightness in enclosed space."
"Very satisfactory solution to space and function problems posed by faculty and administration... too small and intricate for our purposes."
"Excellent auditorium and audio-visual center... Bennington should consider this."

Science Building
Andover

(Ben Thompson)

"Teaching facilities--classrooms, labs, auditoriums--were the best I've seen...Bennington should not have less."

"Has its own character and distinction, but takes its place well with the old buildings."

"Most satisfactory interpretation of careful programming."

General Comments

Most learning was by "negative" example: much of what was seen demonstrated what not to do in Bennington terms, what was not wanted.

The faculty commented on the danger of excessive structuring of a building plan -- that is, a concise plan that looks good as a diagram but is not suited to day-to-day workshops.

The Carpenter Center attracted the most favorable comments as far as studio space goes--as they were the largest and most free. But faculty felt on the whole that no school had so far built the kind of studio that Bennington teaching requires. The closest thing to that vision was the Andover science workshop. "The only space we saw that was of interest was that huge empty space at Andover....if only students could be given that space to work, who knows, something might happen...."

Ideas about a museum-gallery crystalized as a result of seeing a range of examples: At Wellesley, the gallery was found too central; at Brandeis the museum was too isolated from actual teaching areas; at Andover it was linked to the studio and audio-visual center, but could be shut off for security purposes, or entered and used separately. The general reaction was in favor of a solution in the latter direction.

It was eminently clear that the most important issue that emerges is, "the problem of organizing the internal space of the building." And that the direct involvement of the future users of the building is essential to achieving a well-planned building. And that the lack of such involvement, however time-consuming it is, always shows up in planning that conflicts with educational purpose and atmosphere.