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Description of the Visual and Performing Arts Center.

The Bennington College Visual and Performing Arts Center is being constructed along the natural ridge between the southeast part of Jennings Meadow and the higher, smaller meadow of Cricket Hill, on the site of the old entrance road to the college.

The first elements of this building complex, the Suzanne Lemberg Usdan Gallery and a kiln building, were completed in March, 1972, and are currently being used as visual arts teaching facilities. The V.A.P.A. complex will be linked by informal pedestrian paths to the Administration Barn, Commons, Dickinson Science Building and Tishman Lecture Hall to complete the south section of the academic campus.

The new buildings are designed to take advantage of the natural contours and open spaces of the site, with various entrances and walkways overlooking the meadow and the pond. The outside courts will have simple paving and rough benches. The buildings themselves will be of heavy timber frame with large exterior surfaces of naturally weathering cedar siding. The rugged appearance will blend with the existing campus buildings and the rural setting.

The V.A.P.A. will contain three related performance areas and a major visual arts building. The visual arts building will join the existing Usdan Gallery and the kiln building on the west, and with the performing arts theaters on the east.

The principal studios and shops of the visual arts building will be dominated by a two-storey, heavy timbered structure with a high bay space -- much like a simple factory bay -- lit by large northern skylights. This Galleria will be the central working space of the visual arts building and can be modified by bridges, ramps, moveable staircases and controlled natural and artificial lighting to accommodate the teaching of all aspects of the visual arts. Disciplines which need a fixed location and permanent equipment, such as graphics, photography, serigraphy, architecture, will have permanent studios at the lower levels of the Galleria.

Description of the V.A.P.A. Center (cont.)

The three performing arts theaters will be shells defining flexible workings spaces for each of the three disciplines of dance, drama and music. They will be large, open-span structures of heavy timber, with open trusses crossing above the performing spaces. Rough cut natural cedar walls will be exposed both inside and out, and the lower portions will be of concrete construction.

Each of the individual performing theater/workshops will have particular characteristics of spatial and acoustical flexibility and responsiveness to varied performance requirements. The music theater will have a high variability of elements for acoustical response with a fixed audience area with a capacity of 450. The drama workshop will have a more fixed acoustic range, but a wide range of light, projection, scenic and spatial control, including an adjacent facsimile space which can become part of the performing space or closed behind double isolation walls. The dance workshop will have many of the variable characteristics of the music and drama theaters, but a freedom of spatial choice which will allow dancers to explore spatial continuities and forms not found within the restrictions of a conventional stage.

Below the lobby level will be the screen room, make-up and backup room, and on the same level as the theaters will be a scene shop and storage area. The performing arts support spaces connect with the visual arts center with a common meeting and study area and an upper-level closed lounge.