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Some Observations and One Building

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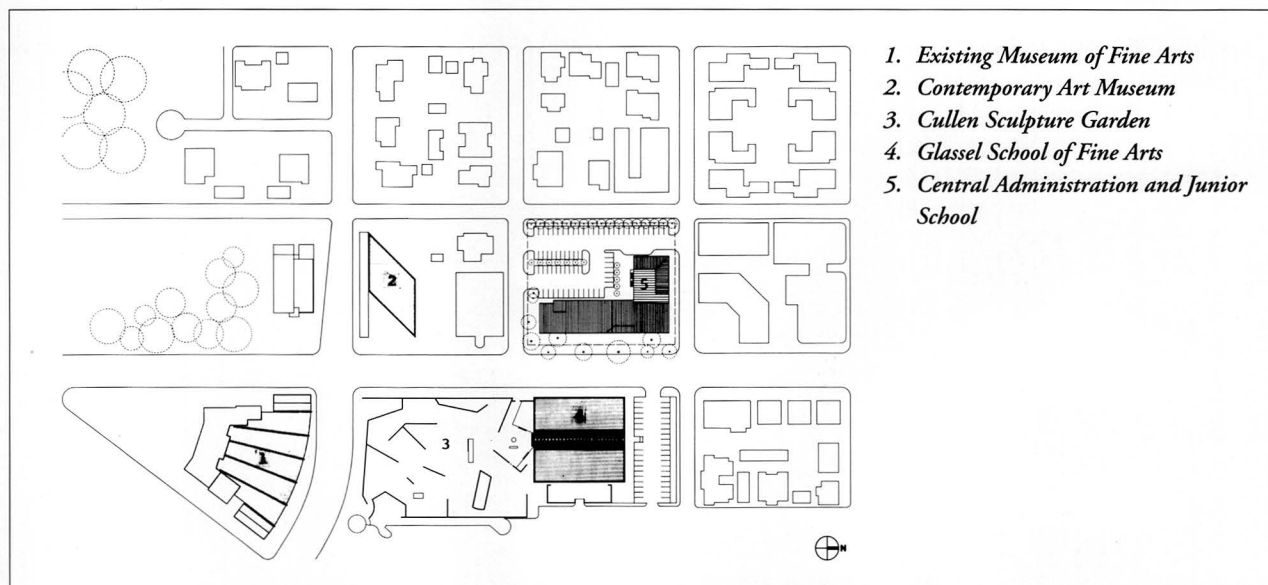
Some Observations and One Building

Carlos Jimenez

The last three decades have witnessed architecture's frequent fluctuations from one design impulse to another. Contextualism, postmodernism, deconstructivism, virtualism and bigness are but a few. These impulses have generated a catalogue of excessive forms and ideas that obviously reflect the agitations of our times. Such pluralistic tendencies offer, however, opportunities for the reevaluation and rediscovery of the discipline itself. One unquestionable benefit is the freedom of a militant ideology or the restraints of a stylistic imperative. Such freedom, though, should not be squandered by turning architecture into an aggressive purveyor of thematic productions that reduce cities to Las Vegas variations.

In my pursuit of architecture, poetry is a source of inspiration. I admire the economy of means and the generous silence in a poem. It is ultimately not the form of the poem, its intricate or elemental construction, or the glow of its words, that which reveals the presence of the work. A poem's presence manifests itself, rather, in the space between one word and another, in the work's ability to recede yet always be near, and in the moment when the poet is no longer important, yet the echoes of the words remain intact against the noise of the world.

I try to create an architecture that does not deny the often elusive and chaotic disposition of our cities, but rather opens up territories for reflection with-



Central Administration and Junior School, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (1991-94)

in them. By this I mean to make spaces that can replenish beleaguered sensibilities by inhabiting quietly within the cacophony of contemporary life. This requires the pursuit of an architecture of simplicity and restraint. This architecture is not one limited to a reductionist attitude, or one confined to muteness, nor is it an architecture that rebuffs the critical improvements enabled by specific technologies. Rather, it is an architecture which emanates from that which is essential to the work itself both as a built idea and as a lasting artifact.

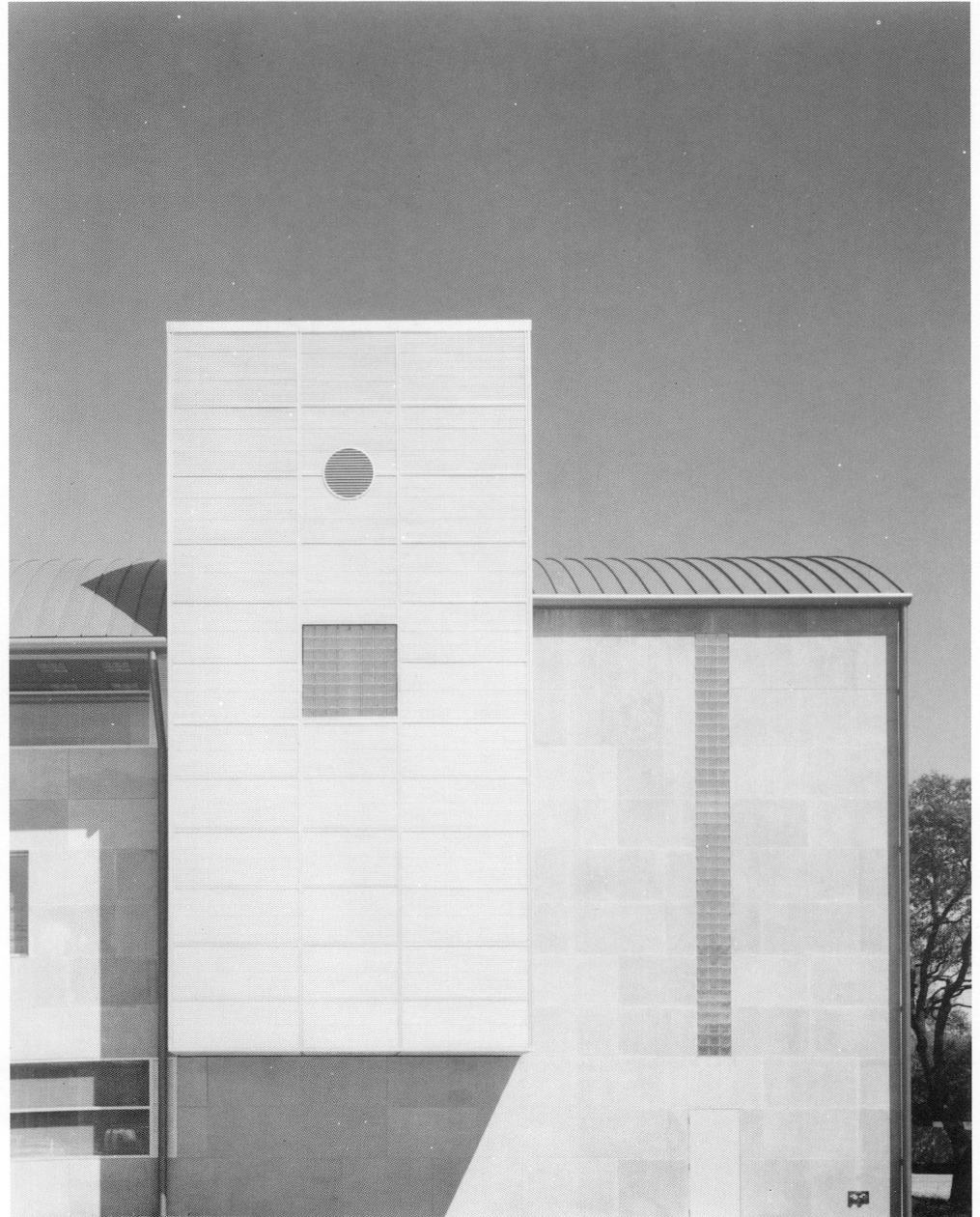
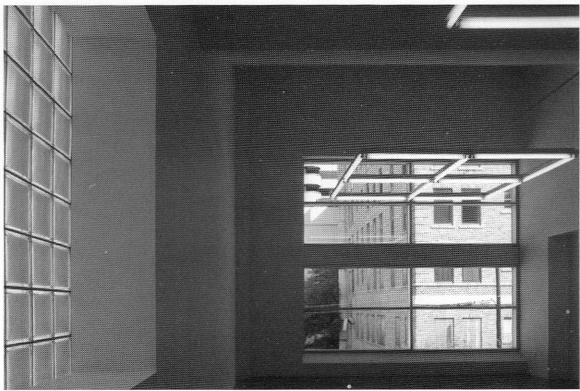
The Spanish architect Alejandro de la Sota said that an architect "is foremost

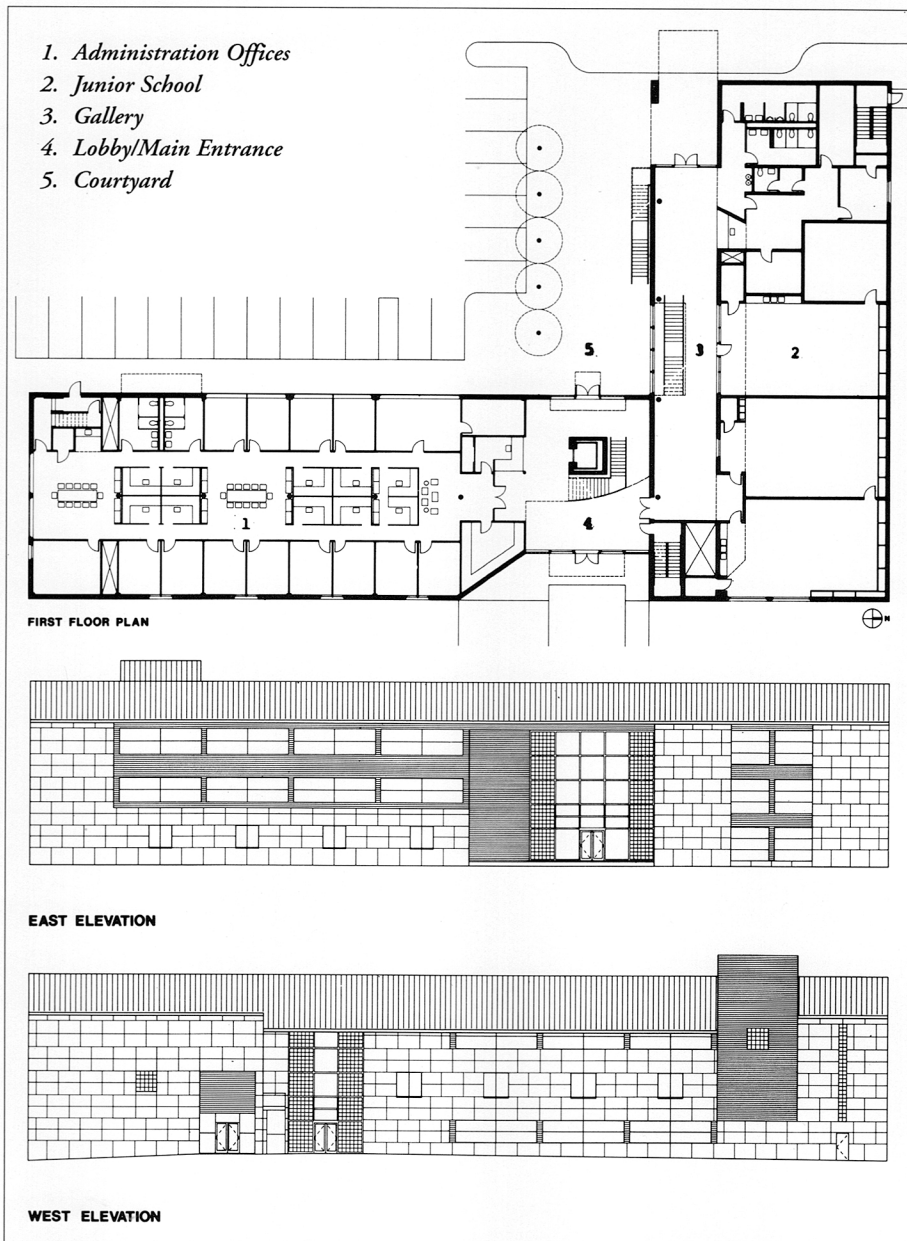
an intellectual and a technician." Poetry is where the two meet. Thus, how a building is constructed and how it endures is of utmost importance so that its presence can be transferred into the future, to other programs, to other sensibilities, all the while the building remains. For it is ultimately a matter of survival within a world where architecture must constantly reclaim its reverence. If not the faith or the instruments to reveal it.

The building which accompanies these observations is presented here as a record of built convictions that resolved very specific issues of program and site. The

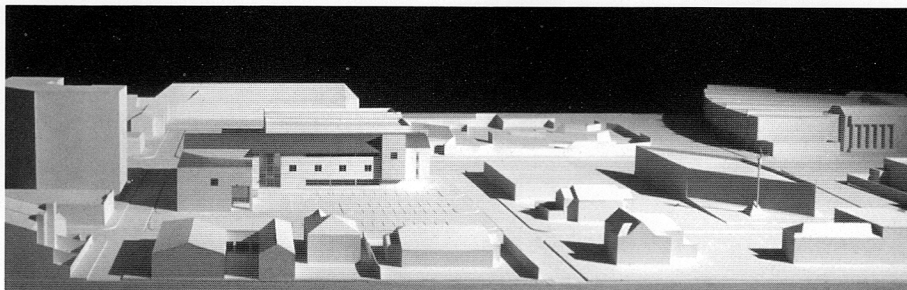
1. Existing Museum of Fine Arts
2. Contemporary Art Museum
3. Cullen Sculpture Garden
4. Glassell School of Fine Arts
5. Central Administration and Junior School

60,000 square foot building is comprised of two highly distinct programs for a single client, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. One contains the museum's administrative offices, the other an art school for children sponsored by the institution. The L-shaped design solution integrates the double program as a singular building yet gives each function its individual character and identity. An intermediate three story volume both joins and separates the offices wing from the school wing creating a light-filled public space. A built work in an architect's life clarifies not only the intentions that motivated the work, but serves as witness to their unfolding in time.

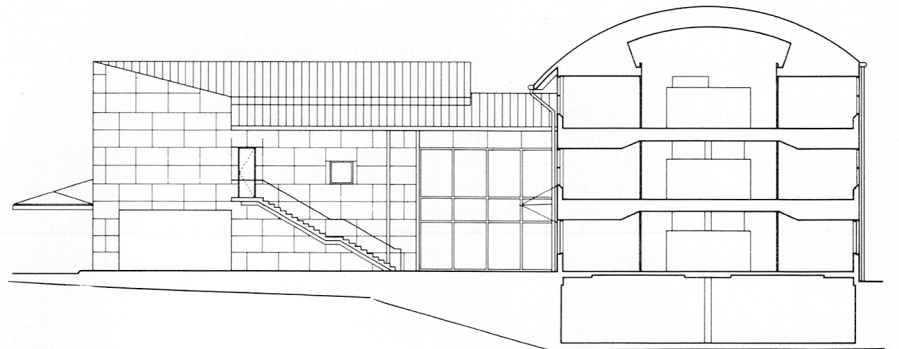




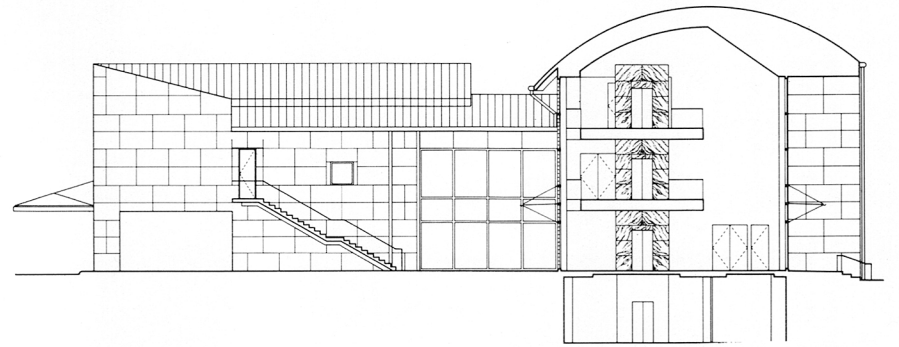
Top to Bottom: Plan, East Elevation, West Elevation



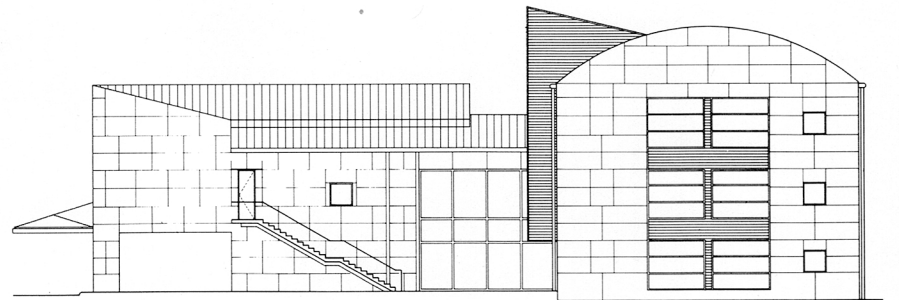
Site Model



Cross Section through Lobby/Main Entrance



Cross Section through Administration Offices



South Elevation

