

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 25, 1998

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"I sketched a trapezoid on the back of an envelope. I drew a diagonal line across the trapezoid and produced two triangles. That was the beginning."

-- I.M. Pei, *National Geographic*, November 1978

NATIONAL GALLERY COMMEMORATES 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF EAST BUILDING **WITH WORKS SHOWING EARLY ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNS**

Washington, D.C. -- Rare conceptual sketches by I.M. Pei, architect of the East Building of the National Gallery of Art, are among some twenty works that shed light on the early creative process of the pioneering architecture in the exhibition A Design for the National Gallery of Art: Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of I.M. Pei's East Building, on view in the Gallery's East Building auditorium, March 27 - October 11, 1998.

Drawn entirely from the Gallery's archival holdings, the exhibition also includes working studies by I.M. Pei's design team, small sketches from a diary notebook, drawings by architectural draftsman Paul Stevenson Oles, and a scale model of the East and West Buildings. These works show the innovative solutions Pei and his team found as they explored, eliminated, and re-explored creative possibilities for the building's overall plan, exterior profile, and roofing for the atrium.

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Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, said, "The challenges of designing a multi-purpose space for modern art on a trapezoidal plot of land that related to the Gallery's original West Building can be seen in these early design sketches. Those of us who worked at the Gallery at that time had the satisfaction of seeing one of the most significant buildings of the decade come to fruition."

The East Building is a gift to the nation from Paul Mellon, Ailsa Mellon Bruce, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. On July 9, 1968, the trustees of the National Gallery of Art selected I.M. Pei to design a new building for the museum to provide much needed additional space for exhibitions and other museum activities and a home for a new art history research center. The building was to be constructed on an irregularly shaped plot of land directly to the east of the Gallery's original West Building, which had been reserved for the museum since it was established in 1937. It was important that the new building not only conform to the unusual plot, but be appropriate to the monumental scale of the Mall and remain in harmony with the design of John Russell Pope's classicizing West Building, which had opened to the public in 1941.

In a moment of insight, I.M. Pei realized that the difficult trapezoidal plot of land could be divided into two triangles, one an isosceles triangle whose base was bisected by the strong east-west axis of the West Building and the other a smaller right triangle. Pei's design team then searched for an ideal geometry, reflected in quick working studies that taken together provide insight into the gradual evolution of the building

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plan. The exhibition presents a select group of these imaginative studies, taken from more than 130 surviving sheets, which record various considerations of the façade treatment and the painstaking process of designing a roof for the museum's central atrium.

Since its opening dedication on June 1, 1978, the East Building has been host to many of the Gallery's most highly attended exhibitions: The Splendor of Dresden: Five Centuries of Art Collecting, an Exhibition from the German Democratic Republic (1978), the major exhibition celebrating the opening of the East Building; Rodin Rediscovered (1981-82); Treasure Houses of Britain (1985-86); The Art of Paul Gauguin (1988); Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration (1991-1992); and most recently, Picasso: The Early Years, 1892-1906 (1997).

The East Building is also home to works from the Gallery's permanent collection of paintings and sculpture by major twentieth-century artists, including Alexander Calder, Henri Matisse, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko. In addition, it houses the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, a research library, an extensive photographic archive, administrative offices, and an auditorium where lectures and films are presented on a regular basis.

The National Gallery of Art, located on Constitution Avenue, between Third and Seventh Streets, N.W., is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free. For general information, call (202) 737-4215, the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf at (202) 842-6176, or visit the National Gallery's Web site at <http://www.nga.gov>

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National Gallery of Art

Washington, D.C.

A Design for the National Gallery of Art: Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of I.M. Pei's East Building

National Gallery of Art
March 27 – October 11, 1998

Checklist

- Black & White Prints available
- Slides available

- 1a. I.M. Pei
 - Early conceptual sketch for building plan, National Gallery of Art East Building**, fall 1968
 - red crayon and graphite on tracing paper
image: 7.6 x 17.8 cm (3 x 7); sheet: 12.1 x 20 cm (4 3/4 x 7 7/8)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners

- 1b. I.M. Pei
 - Early conceptual sketch for building profile with Capitol, National Gallery of Art East Building**, fall 1968
 - red pen on back of cut receipt
image: 5.1 x 17.8 cm (2 x 7); sheet: 6 x 21.6 cm (2 3/8 x 8 1/2)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners

- 2. I.M. Pei & Partners, National Gallery of Art East Building Design Team
 - Working studies: pencil sketch**, c. September 1968
 - red pencil on tracing paper
image: 33 x 60.3 cm (13 x 23 3/4); sheet: 35.6 x 71.1 cm (14 x 28)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners

3. I.M. Pei & Partners, National Gallery of Art East Building Design Team
Working studies: crayon sketch, c. October 1968
black crayon on architectural tracing paper
image: 34 x 62.2 cm (13 3/8 x 24 1/2); sheet: 35.6 x 69.9 cm (14 x 27 1/2)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
4. I.M. Pei & Partners, National Gallery of Art East Building Design Team
Working studies: felt tip pen sketch, c. October 1968
black felt tip pen on tracing paper
image: 34.3 x 71.1 cm (13 1/2 x 28); sheet: 35.6 x 80.7 cm (14 x 31 3/4)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
- 5a. I.M. Pei & Partners, National Gallery of Art East Building Design Team
 Study for Third Street and Mall facade, no.1, 1969
black pen and graphite on tracing paper
image: 7.6 x 7.6 cm (3 x 3); sheet: 10.8 x 10.8 cm (4 1/4 x 4 1/4)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
- 5b. I.M. Pei & Partners, National Gallery of Art East Building Design Team
Study for Third Street and Mall facade, no. 2, 1969
black pen on tracing paper
image: 6.4 x 8.3 cm (2 1/2 x 3 1/4); sheet: 8.9 x 10.2 cm (3 1/2 x 4)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
- 5c. I.M. Pei & Partners, National Gallery of Art East Building Design Team
Study for Third Street and Mall facade, no. 3, 1969
black pen on tracing paper
image: 6.4 x 8.3 cm (2 1/2 x 3 1/4); sheet: 10.2 x 12.4 cm (4 x 4 7/8)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
- 5d. I.M. Pei & Partners, National Gallery of Art East Building Design Team
Study: "Stepping down the geometry for light", 1969
black pen on tracing paper
image: 10.8 x 9.5 cm (4 1/4 x 3 3/4); 10.8 x 12.1 cm (4 1/4 x 4 3/4)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners

- 5e. I.M. Pei & Partners, National Gallery of Art East Building Design Team
Study for Fourth Street facade, 1969
black pen on tracing paper
image: 7.6 x 20.3 cm (3 x 8); sheet: 10.8 x 21.6 cm (4 1/4 x 8 1/2)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
6. I.M. Pei
 Working sketch for building plan, National Gallery of Art East Building,
● winter 1969
red pen and graphite on tracing paper
image: 10.8 x 17.2 cm (4 1/4 x 6 3/4); sheet: 14 x 20.3 cm (5 1/2 x 8)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
Will be on view first three months, March through June 1998
- I.M. Pei
Working sketch for building plan, National Gallery of Art East Building,
27 January 1969
red pen and graphite on tracing paper
image: 11.4 x 16.5 cm (4 1/2 x 6 1/2); sheet: 12.7 x 21 cm (5 x 8 1/4)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
Will be on view second three months, July through October 1998
7. I.M. Pei & Partners
 Scale model of East and West Buildings of the National Gallery of Art,
spring 1971
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
8. Paul Stevenson Oles
 ***Perspective study for garden court, National Gallery of Art East
Building***, 6 November 1970
graphite on paper
image: 18.6 x 27.9 cm (7 5/16 x 11)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
9. Paul Stevenson Oles
***Perspective study for garden court, National Gallery of Art East
Building***, 1 December 1970
graphite on paper
image: 18.6 x 27.9 cm (7 5/16 x 11)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners

10. Paul Stevenson Oles
 Perspective study for skylight system, National Gallery of Art East Building, 25 January 1971
graphite on paper
image: 26.4 x 33.7 cm (10 3/8 x 13 1/4)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
11. Paul Stevenson Oles
Perspective study for skylight system with bridge, National Gallery of Art East Building, 1 February 1971
graphite on paper
27.9 x 43.2 cm (11 x 17)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
12. Paul Stevenson Oles
 Perspective study for space frame, National Gallery of Art East Building,
11 March 1971
graphite on paper
image: 18.7 x 34.6 cm (7 3/8 x 13 5/8)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
13. Paul Stevenson Oles
 Perspective study for space frame with light diffusion bars, National Gallery of Art East Building, June 1971
graphite on paper
image: 26.7 x 43.2 cm (10 1/2 x 17)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners
14. I.M. Pei & Partners, National Gallery of Art East Building Design Team
Study for space frame node, March 15, 1971
black pen on tracing paper
image: 18.4 x 11.4 cm (7 1/4 x 4 1/2); sheet: 22.9 x 11.4 cm (9 x 4 1/2)
National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Gift of I.M. Pei & Partners