I, Karen Brasier, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of:
Master of Architecture in Architecture (Master of)

It is entitled:
Living with Art: Framing the Everyday

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a meditation investigating the ways that domestic display tactics permeate the space of the encyclopedic art museum in ways that affect its framing of art.

The integration of increasingly hybrid and elusive contemporary art into a comprehensive museum structure has resulted in the spectacle of the temporary exhibition, “museum fatigue” caused by the enormity of the encyclopedic collection, and a problem of access to the many objects that live in a typical museum's storage.

My study proposes to overlay art spaces with the processes and patterns of everyday American life, looking to the structures of display evident in contemporary domestic environments for opportunity to make the art of our times more comfortable and accessible physically and intellectually.

A designed space, as a prototypical neighborhood branch location is proposed for two recent developments affecting the collections of the Cincinnati Art Museum: a donation of a collection of contemporary craft and a new member group devoted to contemporary art.

Parallel to the writing in this document is a creative investigation, in which I’ve made a series of objects that pursue the architectural design by splicing typical and familiar architectural representations, such as a site model, with everyday domestic objects, such as a coffee table.

This work questions the hierarchy in which the art museum’s contents are exhibited within, while reorganizing the typical experiences of architectural representations.
Living With Art

Karen Brasier
Living with Art: Framing the Everyday

A thesis submitted to the University of Cincinnati
For partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Architecture

In the School of Architecture and Interior Design of the
College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning

18 May 2010

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Bachelor of Science in Architecture, University of Cincinnati, 2007

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0.1 My workstation.
Preface

I am an artist. I work under a table. At my ceramics studio, I keep my work in progress under a table, which is then shrouded in plastic to prevent contamination by the dust of sculptures being crafted above me. For hours I sit on the floor, applying layer after layer of clay slip to hanging fabrics, which will be burned away in the kiln, leaving the fragile, fossilized artifacts I feel compelled to create. Almost every time I go in to work on my sculpture, I meet someone interested in what I am doing, and I peel back the plastic to give him or her a peek at the process. The studio space is adjacent to a gallery, which I pass through on my way in and out. I never sit down there. I never meet anyone there.

I am a homeowner. I shop at Home Depot. Almost two years ago, my husband and I purchased our first home. We were charged with 3,000 square feet of space, and it looked as though the most recent remodeling took place in the 1970s, or whenever paisley wallpaper was in. Since we moved in, I haven’t made a single drawing or model—the reality of designing my home space is an act of shopping, arranging, nesting, and full-scale trial and error.
As I’ve worked on this thesis over the past year, I’ve come to see the project as a personal, creative response to my own situation. A student of Art and of Architecture, I can’t help but be conflicted between the ways that academic study tells me to act, and the way I DO act, in the reality of everyday life, where I make art and make my home, creating spaces and things for myself. The intuitive ways that people interact with art, objects, and information in their everyday activities are ripe with potential for further investigation. I want to see what happens when everyday interactions are spliced with processes that have established themselves as decidedly NOT everyday, those things that come with capital “A’s”: the Art museum and the practice of Architecture.
0.2 My house
I. Introduction

An Everyday Museum Experience

As I write, I am sitting in a café at the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA), having a two-dollar cup of coffee. I’ve been here for three hours, and I’ve seen one and a half of the museum’s four floors. After I hit the gift shop to pick up a postcard for my husband and handle the more expensive merchandise, I’ll see how many more of the galleries I can run through before I hop on a bus back to Cincinnati, exhausted. Even though I am spending a full day at the museum, I will not even scrape the surface of what it has to offer. The only way I would be able to delve deeper into the IMA’s resources is to come back to visit again and again. This would be feasible if I lived close by, if it didn’t take so much time and resources for me to travel to Indianapolis.

Most of the IMA’s 400,000 yearly visitors do in fact live in the Indianapolis area.¹ But something about this place makes us treat it like a tourist destination. The museum is so far from residential areas, that even the “local” visitors make a special trip to get there. It is a monu-

ment, a site of pilgrimage. To maintain this status, the museum must act at a grand scale. The institution must establish a commercial value, an attractive image that draws in the requisite masses to sustain itself, as the building sits in a state of disconnect from everyday life. What if this disconnect was removed? What if the museum were free to be mundane? What if the body of visitors was already there?

The postcard I chose to purchase featured a reproduction of Robert Indiana’s *Love*, a cor-ten steel sculpture that is an iconic piece in the IMA’s collection, and is displayed as such, outdoors, as a prominent icon of the museum’s holdings. Clearly the IMA cherishes this piece in particular, for its scale and durability. *Love* can function, placed outside, as a beacon to draw in visitors. The postcard version is now proudly displayed on my refrigerator (Fig. 1.1). In this rendition, the artwork has new, and increased, value to me. It is a memory of my trip, a symbol of the love that my husband and I share, a decoration of my home, and it is something that I see and connect with several times each day. This proximity, the result of living daily life with the postcard, is the only reason I even remember the name of the artist. In this experience of taking the postcard home and living with it, the tiny reproduction of *Love* has become more important and relevant to me than any of the “great art” that I experienced in my day trip to the Indianapolis Museum of Art.
Methodology and Approach

This thesis is an investigation into the potential of domestic display tactics in the encyclopedic art museum. The research informs architectural design possibilities, suggesting a rethinking of how objects are displayed in a conceptual neighborhood branch location for the Cincinnati Art Museum, an institution that, much like the Indianapolis Museum of Art, functions as a tourist destination. This document is a compilation of research that argues for a smaller, domestic scale art museum experience that is physically integrated into everyday residential life as a counterpoint to the overwhelming magnitude of typical art museums.

This thesis regards the art museum’s historically determined mission of cultivating collections of art as an educational resource for the public as a valid, primary mission that should be continued.² My research strives to investigate what this means in the current cultural climate of art production and everyday interactions, rather than to reinterpret the actual role and priorities of the institution. It is important to note that I’m not trying to radically reinvent the art museum; instead, I

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² The American Association of Museums “Code of Ethics for Museums” defines museums as organizations that make a “unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world.”
1.1  LOVE postcard, current home on my fridge.
am taking the approach of re-framing it.

The act of re-framing involves presenting a set of information in a way in which the audience is able to glean an understanding, or come to their own conclusions. I want this project to ask more questions than it answers, to provide a glimpse, a resonance, without over determining the results. While not comprehensive, it is meant to be accessible and open. This approach recalls anthropologist Stephen A. Tyler’s characterization of postmodern research, where instead of the text acting as a “sign function,” to be decoded, real meaning happens in an encounter, or in Tyler’s words, is “evoked.” When the text is encountered, a “linking of two differences in time and place” occurs. The narrative tone of this writing hopes to leave space for such linkages. This document is a collection of stories and fragmented histories. The anecdotes are framed in five main sections that illuminate some of the problems with today’s typical art museum experience and uncover areas of discontinuity and opportunity in relation to everyday life.

The first section of this text, “The ‘Encyclopedic’ Art Museum: Framing Contemporary Life,” defines the role and function of the comprehensive public art museum in contemporary American life. The problems of monumental scale in the art museum are illuminated

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around the prototype of New York City’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, the largest and arguably oldest museum of this kind in the United States. The function of the comprehensive art museum is established as one of framing, that is, the arrangement of art in a way that allows preservation and accessibility, classification and interpretation of art. An analysis of a television interview, where Thomas Campbell, the Met’s director, was questioned by comedian Stephen Colbert, serves as a rich basis for understanding the art museum’s image or stereotype, as delivered to the public in their own homes.

The next group of writing, titled “Domestic Violence: Current Productions in the Cincinnati Art Museum,” refers to the particular history and situation of the Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM) as it fits this definition of the overgrown encyclopedic art museum. It also uncovers themes of domesticity through the CAM’s history to the present day, where new developments in the museum’s collection characterize current debates in art classification. These first two sections serve to establish a context, a collection of current issues and opportunities in large public art museums.

The following two sections are thoughts on ways of intervening into this context. “Benign Growths: Supplementary Display Structures,” provides a sampling of current architectural trends in the art display structures of ‘museum-like’ institutions, or art spaces that are
related to the encyclopedic museum but deviate in some way, such as the non-collecting contemporary art center. These examples form a set of architectural models that supplement the encyclopedic art museum, and provide a snapshot of contemporary art space. Meant to reveal incompleteness, these examples fall victim to many of the same problems of encyclopedic art museums as they also respond to them. “Domestic Display Tactics: The Art Museum and the Private Sphere,” involves a deeper investigation into the marginalized narrative of domestic display structures in the art museum’s history and contemporary practice. This section serves to define domestic display more specifically and reveal its complexity by relating examples from art spaces to examples of everyday activities. Places where the art museum space engages the private and domestic realm are presented as potential footholds to mediate the iconic power structure of the encyclopedic museum and open it for new types of engagement.

The last section, “A Neighborhood Branch” describes in more detail the conditions and implications for the architectural application of this thesis project. This takes the form of a conceptual neighborhood branch location designed to house recent developments in the contemporary art collection of the Cincinnati Art Museum. Located in a residential area in the neighborhood of Northside, Cincinnati, the chosen site’s existing vacant building provides an opportunity to weave
Exercise 1.1: LOVE cross-stitch pattern.
together an approach that mediates existing architecture with a grafted addition to the neighborhood, which serves to nest in the overflow of existing museum collections.

Parallel to the writing in this document is a creative investigation, in which I’ve made a series of objects that pursue the architectural design by splicing typical and familiar architectural representations, such as a site model, with everyday domestic objects, such as a coffee table. This series of work questions the hierarchy in which the art museum’s contents are exhibited within, while reorganizing the typical experiences of architectural representations, to posit the questions: How does architecture frame and become framed itself? Can a museum capture the tensions between art, its display apparatus, the visitor, and the artist in a way that draws people in, and keeps them there? What implications does upsetting the modernist perspective have for the experience of art and the designing of architecture?

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4. “Upsetting the modernist perspective,” entails several things. First, I seek to undermine the place of the architect, artist, curator, and other ‘authors’ in favor of individual experience and narrative as the drivers of meaning. Also, I want to address the modernist perspective through the image of the white cube gallery space, (that attempts to remove context from art, but instead becomes a powerful institutional framing device) and to chip away at the ‘aura’ of the artwork that is reinforced by this stark modernist aesthetic.
Theoretical Context

Support for the inquiry is drawn from a mix of popular media, art criticism, museum theory, archival research in the Cincinnati Art Museum, formal analysis of architectural designs, and my own observations and experiences in art museums. This problem is inherently broad and interdisciplinary, but also personal and individual. I hope to frame the project in a way that is accessible and enjoyable through personal stories and open-ended creative reflections in a discussion that emanates from contemporary culture and critical theory.

The positioning of my perspective in this thesis stems from a characterization of contemporary information culture discussed by Neil Leach in *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*. Referring to the writing of Jean Baudrillard and Walter Benjamin, Leach establishes our current state as one of a media induced stupor, where a bombardment of images has left us as mindless consumers of visual information.\(^5\) This situation is also tied to the current relevance of visual culture studies. Nicholas Mirzoeff’s *Introduction to Visual Culture* explains that visual culture “is concerned with visual events in which information, meaning, or plea-

sure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology”,
which refers to all kinds of visual media, from paintings and billboards
to television and the Internet.\textsuperscript{6} Our routine bombardment of visual in-
formation is now treated as a central aspect of everyday life, a hallmark
of contemporary times. Leach argues that exposure to this stream of
images has numbed our consciousness to deeper concerns, including the
social reality of everyday life. Mass-media culture, information society,
and technology depend on and create reproduced images that necessar-
ily remove contextual situation. Typical art museums contribute to this
by displaying singular objects in minimal, modernist gallery spaces that
attempt to deny context.

This project reflects interest in the structured norms of behavior
that happen in the museum as well as in more everyday, domestic activi-
ties. This connection echoes Michel Foucault’s critique of institutional
power-knowledge systems in contemporary life as laid out in the book
\textit{Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison}. Foucault argues that
any system that arranges people or things functions as both a “technique
of power and a procedure of knowledge,”—that people are trained, in a
way, by societal structures.\textsuperscript{7} Even our smallest gestures are conditioned

\textsuperscript{6} Nicholas Mirzoeff, \textit{Introduction to Visual Culture} (New York: Routledge, 2000).

\textsuperscript{7} Michel Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison}, trans. Alan Sheri-
by a power structure, including the tendency to devalue art as one of many images we receive in a culture of mass media. Foucault refers to the simple action of handwriting as “presupposing a gymnastics—a whole routine whose rigorous code invests the body in its entirety, from the points of the feet to the tip of the index finger…a disciplined body is the prerequisite of an efficient gesture.” We must conclude that we do not realize the extent of our conditioning to interpret things a certain way, that what seems ‘natural’ might be highly artificial.

Architecture, as something that physically arranges people and things, is easily critiqued under a Foucauldian lens. The space of the museum is readily accepted as highly controlled—the atmosphere of clean glass cases required for proper stewardship of its contents, while the home environment is more easily recognized as comfortable and free. If, as Foucault implies, even small gestures like writing require submission to a structure of authority, what is the basis for this difference of perception? Is it the belief that inhabitants of domestic space have a hand in their own arrangement that makes this structure more agreeable? It seems that a comparison of gestures that take place in contemporary art museums and contemporary homes could reveal some of these answers.

The approach of this study is in line with Michel de Certeau’s
concept of “tactics,” discussed in The Practice of Everyday Life.8 Opposed to “strategies” which describe the activities of institutions and structures of power, “tactics” are utilized by individuals to create space for themselves in environments defined by institutional strategies. The tactic cannot break free of the circumstances that create its necessity—“it must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities.’” According to Certeau,

…many everyday practices are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many ‘ways of operating’: victories of the ‘weak’ over the ‘strong,’ clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things…joyful discoveries…9

How do ordinary people subvert the rituals and representations that institutions impose upon them? What is produced when these interactions happen, in fleeting moments?

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9. Ibid., xix.
1.3 Pillow in chair.
Presentation of the Inquiry

Architecture, according to Leach, is a particularly image-based realm: architects conventionally rely on the solely visual, and therefore impoverished representation of plans, sections, elevations and perspectives. Our tendency to engage only the visual is a defense mechanism that shuts out other potential meanings. Leach mentions Damien Hirst’s artwork, which includes techniques such as preserving mutilated animals in formaldehyde, as an example where a presentation of the extreme grotesque actually shocks the viewer into a defensive state where the work can only be contemplated aesthetically. To subvert this conditioned tendency to engage only the visual, the presentation of my thesis attempts to investigate the integration of architectural images with substrates that are tactile, interactive, and forceful in being more than just a superficial image to be passed over. Instead of the expected poster with printed text denoting the title of my thesis, in my presentation, a person would come across a handmade pillow in a chair. Upon picking up the pillow to read the title, the viewer is invited to sit down and spend time with the work (Fig. 1.3). The pillow is personal, domes-

10. Leach, 10-15.
tic, handmade, and imperfect. It reflects so many of the principles of the thesis, without presenting the ideas in an articulated text or image. The pillow allows the viewer to make these, or other connections, on their own.

To summarize, this project frames a series of observations to create an evocative encounter into the encyclopedic art museum. Instead of deeply analyzing these theoretical underpinnings further in this document and attempting some sort of authoritative answer, I hope to illuminate the area around these discussions by referring to anecdotal evidence that uncovers opportunity in the relationships between people, art, architecture, and understanding. The goal of this project is to respond to my observations and experiences of everyday interactions and art production, as they converge and become lost in the established art museum institution. The following work surrounds modes of framing of artwork by art museums as they fall into alignment or become disjointed from ways that we access and sort information and objects in our daily lives. Thus, the thesis can be seen as a recuperative endeavor that reveals the intimate relationships we have with objects in our daily lives, and sanctions them in a museum display setting.
II. The Encyclopedic Art Museum
Framing Contemporary Life

Framing

The Oxford English Dictionary defines “encyclopedic” as “Of, pertaining to, or resembling an encyclopædia; that aims at embracing all branches of learning; universal in knowledge, very full of information, comprehensive.” The term’s etymology credits its first usages from 1824-1876. Encyclopedic seems like the right term to describe a type of art museum that was proliferating in the 1800s. Also referred to as universal survey museums, these institutions were attempting to collect a representative and comprehensive sample of world art as an educational resource to the public. In this Victorian time, object-based epistemology supported this museum model. Objects were highly valued as a sign of knowledge: the bourgeois in the late 1800s collected and displayed objects from other cultures in their homes as a mark of

2.1 Stephen Colbert interviews Thomas Campbell.
THE ‘ENCYCLOPEDIC’ ART MUSEUM

enlightenment and travel.\(^2\)

The encyclopedic museum attempts to be comprehensive, to provide a representative sampling of ‘World Art.’ This chapter lays out the function of the encyclopedic museum, revolving around the example of the Metropolitan Museum of Art to highlight the current problems of the typical encyclopedic art museum in today’s culture. These include museum fatigue, or exhaustion caused by the overstimulation of the enormity of the encyclopedic collection; an image of ‘tourist destination’ or spectacle created by the monumental building and the temporary exhibition, which instills a threshold fear in non-visitors; and an imbalance in the mix of accessibility, preservation, interpretation and classification. Ultimately, there is a problem of framing in the museum.

Framing implies access, but also restriction. The frame preserves art as something separate from its surroundings. It interprets the extent of art for its viewers to bite off in manageable chunks. The frame of the museum also implies a certain mode of behavior by the visitor; thus we find that the museum frames the people that enter it as well as the art it houses. These elements of framing work for and against each other in complex ways.

Historically, museums have functioned as framing devices. The

American Association of Museums defines the museum as institutions that “collect, preserve, and interpret.” Like a frame, a collection has a clear boundary between what is inside it and what is not. This deliberate container preserves what is inside it, allowing anything excluded to fall away. The museum as a frame filters the view of its contents: it becomes difficult to imagine an art collection anywhere else. Established in 1870, the Metropolitan museum was founded to compete with the great museums of Europe, rendering its function that of national icon as well. The museum puts itself on a pedestal, framing its own image.

On November 9, 2009, Stephen Colbert interviewed Thomas Campbell, the newly appointed director of New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, on his Emmy award-winning Comedy Central news satire show, The Colbert Report. In addition to suggesting that visitors should lick the pieces in the museum they like most, Colbert pushed Campbell on some poignant issues in museum practice today including the democratization and accessibility of museums.

The interview is quite interesting in light of the massive cultural influence held by news parody shows like Colbert’s. The Report consistently draws over a million viewers per episode3, while the Metropolitan

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Museum currently brings in around 15,000 visitors per day\textsuperscript{4}. Colbert is infamous for his influence on his audience, or ‘the heroes’ as he calls them. Not only was he named one of *Time* magazine’s most influential people in 2006, he recently convinced his viewers to donate over $200,000 to the generally obscure sport of US speed skating and had them vote to name part of the international space station after him. It is probably safe to say that the average American is exposed to Stephen Colbert more often than the Metropolitan Museum, or any museum for that matter, which brings up the question of how the museum institution is perceived by the non-visitor public.

Popular perceptions of the museum institution are highlighted in Colbert’s interview of Thomas Campbell. This outlet both perpetuates and breaks down stereotypes of the museum as a tourist destination, overcommercialized, exclusive, and cultural authoritarian—by simply giving a face and a voice to the museum’s administration via national broadcast. The format of the interview reveals disconnection between popular definitions of accessibility and the way the museum actually works. The TV interview becomes a bridge for talking about the historical function of the museum and its juxtaposition with the current way

\textsuperscript{4} This number was estimated, assuming the museum is open 6 days per week, as advertised on the museum’s website, and from the figure of 4,547,353 visitors in the year 2007, published in “Exhibition Attendance Figures 2007,” *The Art Newspaper*, March 2008. www.theartnewspaper.com/attfig/AttFig07.pdf (accessed November 20, 2009).
2.2 Wikipedia interface.
THE ‘ENCYCLOPEDIC’ ART MUSEUM

Americans typically interact with visual information. Here, questions are raised such as: How do people interact with information and things in today’s culture? What does accessibility mean? To whom does accessibility matter? How is art classified and framed in today’s culture? Why don’t more people visit art museums more often?

Interactions

When I was young, I woke up one Christmas morning to find a large number of heavy, rectangular packages under the tree. Unwrapping them, my brother and I found that Santa had only brought us a set of encyclopedias that year. At first we were disappointed. Not only were the presents ‘boring,’ the act of opening them became predictable. After we had figured out the pattern, we knew what we would find in the rest. In the coming years, those encyclopedias helped me complete countless homework assignments. They still live in my parents’ house, and have come to be valued by me only in repeated interactions over time—the encyclopedias just didn’t have the one-minute ‘wow’ factor that one would expect of a Christmas present as a child.

The two shelves under the encyclopedias were packed full of
yellow magazines called *National Geographic*. If I needed an image for a school project, I could surely find a related article and clip out an image with scissors to paste, with actual glue, onto a poster. I was especially proud of a poster I made for a project on sharks for my 4th grade science class. Years later, when I went to college, I got my first laptop. Now I can find 9,360,000 images of sharks, plop some in Photoshop, resize them and print a poster in less time than it would take me to just locate the shark articles in *National Geographic*.

Today’s media information culture places encyclopedic art museums in an interesting dilemma. The traditional encyclopedia no longer aligns with contemporary methods of receiving information, which has become more of a personal and self-driven endeavor. With the bombardment of information and advertisements we face every time we venture out into public space, when seeking specific information, we enjoy control of the experience. I want to make a decision to turn on the TV and put it on a specific channel to get a particular flow of information. I want to retreat to my own home and comfortably search for filtered sets of information on my laptop (Fig. 2.2). I want instant gratification, if my internet connection is too slow and I have to wait for my filtered set of information to pop up, I am frustrated.

Due to the way that we are trained to gloss over the stream of information we are fed, it is a natural tendency to shut out visual in-
formation that is presented to us. In fact, “the average museum visitor spends only 1.6 seconds looking at any one work of art.” This is not an engaged or meaningful experience and it subverts understanding, especially in the contemporary climate of mindless acceptance, where we are overfed information and forced to shut off from it. This condition requires us to filter, or frame information, as we exist everyday. Every time we do a Google search, or turn the television on a certain channel, we are controlling the types of information we receive, but in a different context than it would be to travel to a museum and find an object. We are removed from the tactile qualities of objects that hold specific information, the computer screen is just one object that is an interface for ALL information. The screen, as a point of access, gives a place to this flow of information. The television screen is normally placed in a leisure setting in the home: surrounded by furniture that invites rest. The computer screen might be set on a desk in a solitary place of work. The laptop and mobile phone introduce mobility as well as takes away its importance: we can get information anywhere, yet we don’t have to go anywhere to get information.

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Destination

The encyclopedic museum model, as opposed to the keyboard at your fingertips, depends on the visitor going somewhere to get information. The Metropolitan Museum is a quintessential example of a “comprehensive,” or “encyclopedic” art museum that functions as a tourist destination or “world wonder.” Its draw is the vastness of its collection, but this is also a deterrent. Stephen Colbert asks of the Met’s director, “More people come and see the Met Museum than any other “tourist trap” in New York. Why do you think people come to see the art more than see the Statue of Liberty?” Thomas Campbell’s response is as follows:

Well, the Statue of Liberty is a great icon, but you know, it’s one object. We’re the whole world history in four city blocks. We’re literally thousands and thousands and thousands of objects from pretty much every recorded culture around the world. You can walk from Ancient Egypt to Papua New Guinea, to 18th century period rooms to contemporary painting within a few hundred yards. It’s mind blowing. No one can go to the museum and leave without having a new sense of who they are, a
THE ‘ENCYCLOPEDIC’ ART MUSEUM

whole new sense of perspective.\(^6\)

In the interview, Campbell touts the comprehensive collection as the museum’s hallmark feature. Colbert’s reference to the Met as a “tourist trap” trivializes and degrades this as a value. In those words, Colbert communicates that: while fascinating at first, the encyclopedic art collection is sometimes taken as a joke, and there is some validity to this sentiment. The encyclopedic art museum requires a large, monumental building to house and maintain the collection and to reflect its value as a cultural edifice. These buildings are so big it is difficult for visitors to see everything, and nearly impossible to really engage with the objects. The Metropolitan Museum just keeps getting bigger and bigger. As of 2007, it stands as an agglomeration of twenty-six architectural additions and measures almost a quarter mile long and occupies more than two million square feet.\(^7\) On CitySearch.com, a website that allows visitors to review tourist attractions, the negative comments about the Metropolitan Museum center around issues of monumental scale. The museum is described as ‘crowded,’ ‘too big to do in one day,’ ‘overwhelming’


and ‘hard to navigate.’ The sheer size of the museum leaves those who DO make the trek to visit the museum with only a superficial glimpse of the artwork. In a 2000 study of 150 Metropolitan museum visitors, it was found that the median time spent looking at a work of art was 17 seconds.\textsuperscript{8} Other studies of museum visitors have found this number as low as 1.6 seconds.\textsuperscript{9} Someone looking for a relaxing vacation activity or a quiet engagement with artwork would be deterred by this reputation.

The television interview has the opportunity to subvert these problems. The five-minute interview is the foreground to a stream of images of objects in the museum’s collection that numbers two million in its entirety. In this forum, the non-visitor has access to the museum in the comfort of their own home. They don’t have to fight crowds, buy souvenirs, or traipse through the collections for hours. This particular interview does capitalize on the opportunity for a more intimate experience by giving access to the director of the museum, something the visitor to the physical museum does not usually have.

However, the chance for a deeper engagement with the collection is lost. While the interview only directly refers to a few artists or


\textsuperscript{9} Carol Duncan and Adam Wallach, “The Universal Survey Museum,” \textit{Art History} 3 (December 1980): 448-469.
objects, there is no real information communicated about them—they are used as jokes. The objects specifically mentioned by Colbert, the Temple of Dendur and works by Vermeer, are some of the more high-profile objects in the collection, so this was also an opportunity missed to expose less represented works in the collection. The television delivery allows an opportunity to effectively shrink the collection by taking it outside its monumental container. However, the slide show treatment on Colbert’s set maintains the situation where people spend only seconds viewing a work. In this way, the television viewer has received a snapshot of the viewing experience at the physical museum itself.

The Non-Visitor

Museums typically engage their publics in groups—donors, members, and families for example—understanding that different demographics have their own preferred ways of engaging with the institution. Who is the non-visitor and how do they interact with the museum? They might see the museum building on their way to other places, or come across advertisements in their community. They see the branded ‘façade’ but are not intrigued enough by it to go inside. The non-visitor
might fund their local museum through tax dollars. They may see museums listed as attractions when planning a vacation. But these interactions happen on an individual basis and might be difficult to control or monitor. In Colbert’s interview, a million people were exposed to the same precise, scripted presentation of the Metropolitan Museum at the same exact time. As soon as the museum is thrust into far reaching national media outlets, the non-visitor becomes of increased relevance to the museum just due to the sheer numbers of people aware of it.

Colbert opens the interview with the statement “I don’t know much about art, but I know what I don’t like: Art.” This statement reflects a likely attitude that non-visitors might have towards the art museum. They don’t know much about the art in museums, because they don’t go see it. And they DON’T like art, they don’t feel attracted to art, or they WOULD go see it.

By bringing an interaction with the museum to the non-visiting public in their own homes, the interview intentionally reaches out and increases the value of the non-visitor. What is the value of the non-visitor? Are they potential visitors? Probably not. The viewers of The Colbert Report are largely not residents of New York; they are not in close enough physical proximity to the museum that the publicity of this interview would significantly affect the Metropolitan Museum’s atten-
2.3 The facade of the Metropolitan Museum.
dance.

In a way, the interview has in fact chipped away at access barriers by giving access to information about the museum. But it also reinforces the sometimes negative stereotypes that keep this group of people from physically visiting in the first place. What if there were a museum that mimicked the comfort and ease of the television experience?

Access

Television contributes to an image information culture that trains viewers to act in ways that value quantity and speed. But it seems clear that the medium of television could be a potential avenue to undermine this overwhelming cultural phenomenon that it helps reinforce. Colbert’s demeanor wants to be satirical, but somehow fails to be effectively so, perhaps because of this tension—in order to truly critique the overwhelming and superficial presentation of the encyclopedic collection, Colbert would have to critique television as well.

There is a similar dynamic in the interview’s portrayal of commercialism in the museum. Colbert states,
“Now one thing that upsets me about the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and about all museums actually, is that there are no price tags on the art. I want to go buy what’s on the walls but I can’t. I have to go to the gift shop and buy it on a coffee mug.”

Here, Colbert is bringing up for discussion the trends in museums to add gift shops and other income generating program elements, which is seemingly at odds with the art museum’s proclaimed mission to be an educational institution. However, museum shops and food service additions tend to make the museum more comfortable for visitors. Retail spaces are a recognizable thing to engage with—juxtaposed with the sometimes baffling Art. Corporate sponsored, and ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions have proven to increase museum attendance. There is still worry though, that the museum’s association with commercial development will take away from its potential to be a refuge from cheap material culture. Television just might be considered ‘cheap material culture’ along with the goods in the museum’s stores, so again, Colbert can’t convincingly critique it.

What is evident, however, is that while the coffee cup is accessible through purchase, the “fine art” is not. Colbert reveals that the museum is NOT becoming more accessible by adding shops—it is surrounding itself with accessible and popular activities, like shopping. Museum gift shops have revised how visitors interact with the building
and the adjacent elements to art without necessarily changing how visitors interact with the artwork itself.

Colbert highlights divergence here between Campell’s definition of accessibility and accessibility in the commercial sense. We wonder how else accessibility might be defined. Accessibility has been a stated “priority” of the museum since it became a public institution, but it struggles with an exclusive image.

SC: No art can change my view of the world. Here—I’ve got a problem for you, OK. You’re an elitist, OK. I’m blue collar Joe Six-pack. I don’t know if that’s art, I don’t know if shark’s art, I don’t know if that’s art, um. But who’s to say what is art? I mean is art only art, is art only good art, if an art critic says “yeah that’s good art”? Or can it just be good art even if nobody knows its good art? Can good art exist without an audience?

TC: Well, you’ve got a lot of experts at a museum, whose job it is to really understand the history of a time, and to collect, make careful decisions to bring forward objects that are really meaningful in the context of their periods. When you come through to the present day, where the values are still really being kind of determined, it’s kind of tricky business.

SC: That’s the business that you guys do. You elitists do. You say that’s good—that’s bad, don’t you? You do.”

In the exchange above, Campbell is essentially answering, yes, that is what we do, and that’s good, we are the best ones to do it. Some feel
that the ability of the museum to establish aesthetic norms is the reason for its endurance, even though this function can be discussed negatively in terms of institutional power.

Three conditions are defined by sociologist Paul DiMaggio in “The Museum and the Public” that are required to establish an institutionalized concept of “high art” which has supported the lasting nature of art museums: elite entrepreneurship (control by a national elite class), classification (distinguishes art and non-art), and framing (a definition of the relationship between audience and art). To the extent that the museum does serve this function of classification, how can it do it differently?

“SC: Have you ever said, “I’m the director, I’m going to lick something.”? Have you ever licked any of the paintings? No one’s around, you get to do what you want.

TC: Sounds kind of unhygienic.

SC: Yeah. I’ve licked a few things there.

TC: What have you licked?

SC: I’m not recommending you do or anyone else do, but I’ve licked a few things there, and I want to tell you, the Vermeers taste terrible.”

How the audience is allowed to interact with art in the actual museum is accepted as highly refined. It is standard that visitors are not allowed to touch, much less lick, the art. Some museums try to mediate this impression by replacing intimidating security guards with ‘visitor services’ associates that seem more approachable, but studies show that the more highly educated and higher income individual is much more likely to visit the museum than those with less education. This seems to fly in the face of the public museum’s stated mission of accessibility. The desire to lick art expresses a desire of the visitor to have ownership, to feel power to subvert this authority that is letting us look at its art.

The fact that Campbell appears on the Colbert Report is a clear statement by the museum that they are acknowledging a young, cynical audience. However, Campbell’s British accent and apt use of words like “unhygienic,” leaves the reputation of big art museums as elitist and mannered more than intact. Ultimately, this interview shows an attempt by the Metropolitan museum to be culturally relevant and appeal to a broader audience. It results in an interesting mixture of support and subversion of stereotypical public perceptions of the Metropolitan Museum’s mission, representation, and accessibility. But we are left wondering, if this museum is such an American icon, shouldn’t it look to American life for its definition of accessibility?

11. Ibid.
THE 'ENCYCLOPEDIC' ART MUSEUM
The Cincinnati Art Museum is an example of an encyclopedic museum that exemplifies the stereotype. It has a massive collection of over sixty thousand objects. It is a monumental building atop a hill (Fig. 3.1), and it strives to remain interesting and relevant by hosting temporary special exhibitions and events that actually contribute to visitor exhaustion. This chapter discusses the particular history and situation of the Cincinnati Art Museum as it relates to privacy and domesticity as well as its reflection of the stereotype of the encyclopedic museum, revealing the contested relationship of museum space and domestic themes.

The term ‘domestic violence’ is attested from the 19th Century as “revolution and insurrection.” In 1977 domestic violence was first defined as “spouse abuse, or violence in the home.”¹ Domestic violence is something done privately and quietly; it is not immediately visible

3.1 The Cincinnati Art Museum.
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

to the public, but there are signs evident when one pays closer attention. Private influence, subjectivity and domestic display methods have been swept under the rug of most large public museum’s histories, as if these are blemishes to the great public monument of truth that museums prescribe themselves to be. Examples of current programming, or the productions, of the art museum can be seen as this made up facade. A comparison of the museum to the library reveals the contrived and unnecessary nature of these productions, and two current developments in the museum’s collections: the establishment of the 4th Floor Project and a donation of contemporary craft objects, are the bruises that reveal a deeper problem.

Current Productions

Recent programming in the museum’s galleries is an interesting mix that reveals some of the contradictions the museum houses. Starting April 13, 2010, museum visitors will be able to take a yoga class in the galleries.

Discover the ancient art of yoga at the Cincinnati Art Museum… Through meditation, breathing practices and
yoga postures, participants will learn to be more stable, still and illuminated. This monthly course welcomes all levels and will open space in the body, cultivate mindfulness and touch the soul…

It seems that the art museum’s implied decorum is in fact to be “stable, still and illuminated.” And we might agree that art experiences would ideally “cultivate mindfulness and touch the soul.” While the idea of exercising in an art museum comes off as almost ridiculous, the description of this class sounds like a wonderful break from the rushed tourist experience that most museum visitors have.

Unlike shops and restaurants that encourage longer habitation in the building, but not necessarily with the art, this yoga class is held in the galleries. How wonderful to get your exercise and be with art at the same time. To have a reason to return weekly to the museum. While confident and interested artists have long held the opportunity to return weekly for a facilitated sketching program in the galleries, the yoga class is an opening for people who are not already inclined towards art to spend time in the museum. It doesn’t require initiation through artistic training.

Another recent event that drew ‘non-visitors’ to the museum is

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

of a contrasting nature. On May 15, 2009, the Cincinnati Art Museum hosted an event called “Surreal Escape,” in conjunction with the traveling exhibition titled *Surrealism and Beyond: In the Israel Museum, Jerusalem*. This was the single stop in the United States of this exhibition. Advertising for the event presumed that the “exclusive Surreal Escape cocktail” available at the cash bar would be more attractive than the art exhibit. Mailings and web advertisements for the event listed information about the entertainment at the event before mentioning the art. “Surreal Escape” packed the museum with attendees who paid twenty dollars plus each for entry. The layout of the party was setup such that visitors hit the dance floor, food and drinks first thing before coming across the entry to the exhibition. Clearly meant to be a fund raising event, “Surreal Escape” had the charge of making people feel good about paying twenty dollars to see an exhibit that they could visit for free another time. This is reflective of the extent that museums must go to establish the commercial value necessary to sustain their massive scale. While the CAM has embraced this large-scale commercial connection, the following sections of this chapter discuss the roles of contemporary art and craft as they support smaller, domestic scale display as a suppressed history with rich potential in the Cincinnati Art Museum.
3.2 Architectural additions to the Cincinnati Art Museum.

1886 Original building opens, designed by James McLaughlin in the Richardson Romanesque style.

1887 Art Academy of Cincinnati opens, also designed by James McLaughlin.

1907 Scmidlapp Wing opens, designed by Daniel Burnham in the Classical Revival style.

1910 The Ropes Wing opens, designed by Cincinnati architects Garber and Woodward.

1930 Emery, Hanna, and French Wings open, designed by Garber and Woodward, connecting the two buildings and forming the sculpture garden.

1937 The Alms Wing opens, designed by Cincinnati firm Rendigs, Panzer & Martin in the style of the original building.

1965 The Adams-Emery Wing opens, designed by Cincinnati firm Potter, Tyler, Martin & Roth.
Library Building

The encyclopedic art museum has parallels to the public library system. The Cincinnati Art Museum building and Cincinnati’s first public library building were even designed by the same architect, both standing as edifices to public enlightenment. But since their establishment, the two systems have diverged in their architectural execution. The architectural history of the Cincinnati Art Museum reinforces its function as a monument, an image of cultural status that shapes an experience for visitors that may not accurately reflect the institution’s history or even its stated goals. During the museum’s history of over one hundred years, the CAM has grown from a single building to a huge complex of seven interconnected structures (Fig. 3.2).

The original CAM building, opened in 1886, was designed by local Cincinnati architect James McLaughlin in the Richardson-Romanesque style, a style widely used in churches, civic buildings and libraries at the time. The style, characterized by heavy stone construc-
tion, strong picturesque massing, round-headed “Romanesque” arches, often springing from clusters of short squat columns, recessed entrances, and richly varied rustication, came to convey a status as a public resource. One year later in 1887, the Art Academy wing opened as a separate building, designed by McLaughlin as well.

Practicing in Cincinnati from 1857 to 1912, McLaughlin designed major public buildings including the former Public Library (1870-71), and the first Cincinnati Zoo buildings, the oldest surviving in this country (1874-75). McLaughlin is also the architect of the Shillito’s department store building (1878). Libraries, zoos, and department stores all have historical and contemporary connections to the art museum institution, and it is interesting to think that the architecture may have been put in place at the institution’s birth for these connections to pervade.

The library is a loaded analogy when considering the art museum. Libraries, like museums, are collections of objects that are meant to be a public resource. Like the encyclopedic museum, main libraries are usually housed in monumental buildings that serve as civic icons. But some libraries take the form of neighborhood branch systems that


use multiple, smaller scale buildings to serve local communities. The Cincinnati library system has over forty branch locations in addition to the central building downtown. The art museum, in contrast, has a large central location, and apart from an off-site storage facility that is not publicly accessible, no additional locations. At one time, the CAM owned a warehouse downtown (now renovated as the new Art Academy building) and held some public programming there. “The Big Brushoff” was one such event where visitors participated in large scale painting projects.\textsuperscript{5} The separate location allowed these types of interactive programs that would be seen as a threat to the high quality finishes and the valuable art work that the main location houses. In the weekly sketching session in the galleries of the main building, only dry media such as pencil are allowed to avoid damaging the building and the artwork.

Rather than spreading out into neighborhoods, the art museum has historically added space at the main site. The museum underwent five more major expansions after the initial two buildings. In 1907, the Schmidlapp Wing opened, designed by Chicago architect Daniel Burnham, in the Classical revival style. The Ropes Wing, a bequest of Eliza O. and Mary P. Ropes, designed by the Cincinnati architecture firm of Garber and Woodward, was opened in 1910. In 1930, the Emery, Han-

\textsuperscript{5} Harry Geimeier, interview with author, November 11, 2009.
na and French Wings were opened, also designed by Garber and Woodward, and served to enclose the Garden Court. In 1937, the Frederick H. and Eleanora C.U. Alms Wing opened, designed by the Cincinnati architectural firm Rendigs, Panzer & Martin in the Richardson Romanesque style of the 1886 building. In 1965, The Adams-Emery Wing opened as the most recent major expansion, designed by the Cincinnati firm of Potter, Tyler, Martin and Roth, to honor the Museum Association President John J. Emery and Director Philip R. Adams. Each of these additions to the building were made as a bequest or in honor of particular individuals, however, the architecture stands as almost a time line of popular architectural styles in a massive scale. This institution is built on individuals, but the massive, fashion driven architecture is incongruent with this personal history. It seems that the architecture could choose to reflect this in a way that gives visitors a personal connection as well.

In a visit to the Northside Public Library, I am greeted by Alice as I return a borrowed book. Around me, kids are waiting to use the computers, as they do everyday after school. The small scale of the branch library architecture allows these relationships, which are missing from the experience of visiting the art museum, to occur. In repeated

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visits to the Cincinnati Art Museum, an anonymous person hands me a parking receipt from behind a glass barrier, and I have no reason, or opportunity to learn their name.

Feinberg Freakshows

The Cincinnati Art Museum’s history establishes the institution as a result of public and private, domestic and commercial forces. Before the CAM was established in 1881, Cincinnati was home to a rich mix of factors that were brewing the ideas that informed the CAM’s establishment. Dr. Daniel Drake, a pioneer, scholar, and physician, founded a combined natural history and art museum in 1819. At this time, it was common for museums to collect art alongside more historical or scientific objects. The division of “high art,” as of special status was less clear than it is today, and its division from everyday things was not so clear cut. In 1854, an organization called the “Ladies’ Fine Art Academy” was making progress towards establishing a serious art school and gallery. The roots of the Cincinnati Art Museum are embedded in domestic production, and this theme has pervaded throughout

its history—but it is not evident in the display methods used by the museum.

In 1876, a group of Cincinnati women art potters and craftswomen exhibited work at the Women’s Pavilion of the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. In 1877, the Women’s Art Museum Association (WAMA) was formed of the same group. WAMA’s goal was to collect and exhibit art and provide art classes. The group did so well in establishing the arts in Cincinnati, that in 1880, Charles West donated $150,000 to found a permanent art museum. From this we can see that the history behind the arts in Cincinnati is heavily craft practice, contemporary industrial practice, and female influenced. In 1881, the Cincinnati Museum Association took over the WAMA, which disbanded, and these influences have been continually downplayed ever since, as the museum adopted the classic authoritarian display structures that it uses today. Today, one of CAM’s most internationally acclaimed collections is still the Rookwood pottery. The galleries holding these examples, however, are very similar to the galleries holding other types of art. These pieces are held in showcases that are highly controlled by the museum building, and do not reflect the use of the objects.

In 2005, the CAM planned a 50,000 square foot expansion to their campus in keeping with their history of adding space to the exist-

ing location. Expansions allow the museum to avoid issues of classification that come to the fore when space is limited. Since 2005, changes in the current economic climate and the politics surrounding the naming of a new director have left the museum to delay the new construction indefinitely. In this condition of limited space, the question of “what is allowed in and what is kept out?” boils to the surface.

The planned expansion included 4,500 square feet for contemporary art, which is no more than the museum currently allocates. The Cincinnati Art Museum is an institution that currently engages contemporary art mostly in a temporary exhibition format, maintaining a small collection and permanent exhibition space. The museum has historically had an on-again, off-again relationship with contemporary art. This conflict refers back to the early years of art museums in America, where current industrial production was fighting for a place in the art museum, and was largely stamped out. Considering that the CAM was established on the momentum surrounding Rookwood pottery production in its heyday—it seems that current production would be more highly valued by the museum.

The nature of current art production is elusive. Its attempted placement into typical museum display and categorization structures

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reveals difficulties that may contribute to its marginalization. Looking at the recent history of the museum’s gallery arrangement, we can see how art legitimizes its place in the museum through specific classification. In 1983, CAM’s visitor map showed one hundred and ten separate gallery spaces, but only used twenty descriptions of the contents (such as “African Art” or “American Painting”). In 1994, the guide showed only eighty-five separate gallery spaces, but seventy different labels were used to classify the art. This reflects an inclination towards increasingly neutral architectural spaces, larger scale galleries, along with a trend towards more specific classification systems. In order to justify a place in the museum’s cavernous space, art must lend itself to specific categorization. In both maps, the few galleries dedicated to contemporary art were simply titled “Contemporary Art.”10 The top-down classification structure of typical encyclopedic survey art museums places work into categories usually geographic, chronologic or based on media and material. Contemporary art production does not fit well into any of these classification structures: with the ease of travel and access to information, geography is less and less relevant. Materials and methods are increasingly hybrid and unique to a particular artist, resulting in a

proliferation of artworks that are multi- or cross-media, and unable to be classified as such.

In the 1930s-40s, The Modern Art Society, now a separate institution called the Contemporary Arts Center, was housed in the basement of the Cincinnati Art Museum. Decades later in 1967, Mary E. Johnston donated a collection of modern and contemporary art to the museum, an event that was notably excluded from a 1981 catalog documenting the history of the museum, titled the “Art Palace of the West.” Until the 1990s, the CAM had no consistent advocacy for contemporary art. From 1991-1998, Jean Feinberg was the first acting Curator of Contemporary Art at the CAM. She struggled to get the museum’s publications to acknowledge the institution’s own history in relation to contemporary art, submitting a list of events, including the Johnson donation, to be added to the published chronology of the CAM in “Art Palace of the West.” After Feinberg left the museum in 1998, there was no Curator of Contemporary Art until 2000-2001 when Tom Collins made a brief stint at this title and again in 2007, when new director Aaron Betsky (hired in 2006) appointed Jessica Flores as Associate Curator of Contemporary Art.

Jean Feinberg is, thus far, the most influential figure in the CAM’s contemporary art programming, as she was at the museum longer than the other two curators combined. Programs and initiatives
started by Jean Feinberg are revealing of the potential and the obstacles of dealing with contemporary production in a historically established encyclopedic survey museum. Feinberg instigated acquisitions programs designed to fill the gaps in the museum’s contemporary collection. In 1991, she established the Contemporary Collectors Circle (CCC), a member group dedicated to contemporary art collection and programming. The CCC published a document titled “Contemporary Art and the Cincinnati Art Museum” which established the CAM’s definition of contemporary art and an approach to collecting and education. The definition of contemporary art is, according to the document, art made by living artists. It outlines staff and resource requirements and establishes short and long term goals, especially around acquisitions. The CCC was responsible for several important acquisitions, funded by its members dues. These included Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ *Untitled Portrait of the Cincinnati Art Museum* (1994) which is painted on the wall of the main lobby.

From 1993-1998, Feinberg organized the New Art series, a series of small contemporary art exhibitions of which there were ulti-

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mately eight shows. Visitor comments recorded ranged from “Another Feinberg Freakshow” and “This is not art” to “dynamic and interactive” and “delightful young art,” reflecting the controversy that surrounds contemporary art in a traditional museum.13 Expecting this type of response, Feinberg established principles for the contemporary art exhibitions: that they would be small scale, repeated experiences. She felt that introducing the public to contemporary art in small doses (requesting 1500 square feet of gallery space), repeated over a length of time, would help them to become more comfortable with it. The small scale shows would also be more quickly organized and financially conceivable.14

Of particular interest is the New Art #6 exhibition in 1996, in which Feinberg commissioned artist Andrea Zittell to build a unique A to Z Comfort Unit for the museum. Feinberg used the A to Z Comfort Unit, a modular living system, as a container for some of the historical craft objects in the CAM’s collection. In its exhibition, Feinberg actually used the A to Z Comfort Unit to hold other pieces from the museum’s collection, pottery, manuscripts and other objects from many historical


This exhibition allowed Zittell’s work to function as both art-object and functional-object, by functioning as a domestic display apparatus. The work, on its own a response to the mobility of contemporary domestic life, became a critique of both domestic environments and of museum environments. Feinberg also effectively highlighted that so much of the art museum’s collection is actually utilitarian craft items, and that the typical showcase display of these items in other parts of the museum does not frame them in an informative way.

Today, the *A to Z Comfort Unit* is on display in the museum’s contemporary gallery, but it is allowed to function as a sculpture only, rather than reveal its potential as a domestic display apparatus. It is one of several contemporary pieces on display in the penthouse gallery. The contemporary art is separated as its own category, on its own floor of the museum, but is not displayed much differently from any other type of art in the museum. Of the fifty-one contemporary art pieces acquired since 1985, 30% are on display in the museum. 25% are on display in traditional galleries. Three pieces are in other spaces in the museum. *Powell Crosley Jr.*, a sculpture by Nam June Paik, stands on the staircase leading to the 3rd floor contemporary gallery. A glass piece by Dale Chihuly marks the lobby space, hanging like a chandelier over the main

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entry space. And in the café, *Night Spiral II* by Ana England hangs on the wall in the form of forty-three ceramic elements.¹⁶

Although its history is fragmented, the current state of the Cincinnati Art Museum is full of possibility in relationship to contemporary art exhibition. A new director (Aaron Betsky, named in 2006), a newly appointed Associate Curator of Contemporary Art (Jessica Flores 2009), indefinitely delayed plans for an expansion to the building, and new contemporary art programs such as the 4th Floor Project are only a few of the factors to consider. “We’re limited in space now and we’re going to continue to collect contemporary art,” Flores says. “We need a building that supports that.”¹⁷

The 2009 Report to the Community published by the Cincinnati Art Museum identifies several themes related to the Cincinnati Art Museum’s mission that might help to characterize programming goals. The Cincinnati Art Museum exhibitions claim to present both its own collection and international work to relate local issues to the global commu-

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nity. The current contemporary art programs and recent acquisitions include both international artists and those with strong Cincinnati ties. The museum set for itself the revised mission of “bringing art and people together to encourage deeper learning and connection with art, both by inviting the community to the museum and going out into the city.” The museum hosts programs such as lectures and tours as well as community programs such as the NAACP convention. The Art for Life Initiative hosts programs throughout the Cincinnati area, bringing art to underserved audiences. Adopted in March 2009, a new Strategic Plan, influenced by director Aaron Betsky, “moves the Art Museum forward into the twenty-first century, aiming to serve the greater Cincinnati community by promoting art experiences that are at once both a mirror and a lens to the world beyond us.” These themes imply the Cincinnati Art Museum’s desire to integrate art with the life of the city of Cincinnati, serving as a framework through which to experience art.

Clearly, the Cincinnati Art Museum wants to engage the outside world and community and to be a reflection of contemporary life but it


20. Cincinnati Art Museum, Annual Report to the Community, 9, emphasis added.

21. Ibid., 10.
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seems that the monumental art museum building is not a good reflection of these aspirations to “go out into the city.” The museum needs to have a physical presence that is integrated into the everyday lives of its users. If we allow that the monumental, authoritative presence of the museum is in fact not appropriate for all instances, or all types of art, we are left in a place of opportunity to explore further the marginalized domestic and private elements that run through the history of the CAM, and assumedly, other similar museums. The new contemporary art programs and collections at the CAM are an opportunity to do so.

The Fourth Floor & The Wolf Collection

Two recent developments affect the collections of the Cincinnati Art Museum: the summer 2009 bequeath of the Wolf Collection of Contemporary Craft and the establishment of the 4th Floor member group which can be seen as a resurrection of the Contemporary Collector’s Circle which was active in the 1990s. These two bodies of work are a place to begin to discuss issues in current art criticism that are not reflected in the museum’s space.

The 4th Floor is a member group that “fosters the knowledge and understanding of contemporary art in Greater Cincinnati by encouraging
energetic young adults to contribute to the future of the Art Museum.”

Established in 2008, the 4th Floor has already established an award for local artists, the 4th Floor Award, which gives its recipient an exhibition at the art museum and purchases one of the winning artist’s pieces for the museum’s collection. Don Lambert was the winner of the inaugural award and his exhibition *Supernova Terra Firma* was on view at the CAM’s Vance-Waddell gallery from September 5—November 29, 2009.

In an artist talk on September 19, 2009, Lambert expressed a frustration with the museum institution’s established rules, in that he WANTED viewers to touch his work. Lambert is interested in individual, and engaged experience. The exhibition consisted of a series of wall mounted pieces made of artificial turf called “Lawn Jobs,” which were a response to the artist’s suburban existence, where he found himself caring deeply about the appearance of his lawn and his neighbor’s lawns, and realized how artificial the whole production of yard work is. Lambert wanted visitors to be able to touch and feel the texture of

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these pieces. “Changing Landscape” is a sliding block puzzle that has
to do with the artificial nature of drawing borders and boundaries on
maps, and the piece is designed to be interactive. The gallery was then
filled with the sound of a kinetic sculpture called “Flatland: VL Array,”
which coincidentally, was NOT to be touched. The anticipated confu-
sion surrounding these new museum behavior ‘rules’ was addressed in
the informational pamphlet available to visitors labeling each work in
capital letters “PLEASE TOUCH” or “PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH.”25
In reality, it seemed that the sanction to touch the work was not strong
enough to overcome the trained museum visitor’s conduct—very few
attendees at the gallery talk dared to hesitantly touch the pieces even in
the presence of the artist’s encouragement.

Additionally, Cincinnati collectors Nancy and David Wolf prom-
ised a collection of over 200 contemporary craft objects to the Cincin-
nati Art Museum in summer 2009 along with funding to preserve and
expand the collection. This acquisition “will establish the Art Museum
as a major center for the exhibition, study and research of contemporary
craft.”26 This collection is currently housed in the home of Nancy and

25. “Super Nova Terra Firma,” Pamphlet accompanying exhibition, Cincinnati Art

26. “Nancy and David Wolf Present Major Gift of Contemporary Craft to the Cincin-
October 21, 2009).
David Wolf, and in the tradition of the Cincinnati Art Museum’s donations: it is a privately cultivated collection. The nature of the collection as one of products of current artists exemplifies the conflicts that the typical encyclopedic museum experiences in relation to craft or utilitarian items in general (as opposed to ‘high’ art) and those conflicts experienced with the placement of contemporary art in relation to historically established art. Revealing of this nature, a summer 2009 exhibition of the Wolf collection was titled *Outside the Ordinary: Contemporary Art In Glass, Wood and Ceramics*, instead of entitling it ‘Contemporary Craft.’

On March, 21, 2010, the Decorative Arts Society of Cincinnati hosted a lecture at the Cincinnati Art Museum by David McFadden, the director of the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. McFadden characterized the state of contemporary art practice as “the blur zone.”

Until recent years, he argues, the areas of Art, Craft (or Decorative Arts), and Design were like three points on a triangle: they were distinct and hierarchical. In current practice, however, this has changed. We see increasing numbers of works that fit all three of these or none at all. The Oxford English Dictionary defines craft as “Intellectual power;

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skill; art” and elaborates on its etymology: “In these and the follow-
ing senses, art and craft were formerly synonymous and had a nearly parallel sense-development, though they diverge in their leading mod-
ern senses.” The divergence of art and craft is a modern construction,
something falsified and enforced by the monumental scale of modern museum spaces. McFadden points out that post-modern production is effectively re-converging ‘art’ and ‘craft.’ If this is true, a re-evaluation of art museum display space is also in order.

The Wolf Collection currently resides in the home of Nancy and David Wolf (Fig. 3.4). The objects are displayed on coffee tables, bookshelves, or in custom casework built around windows. Contrast-
ingly, in the catalog published for *Outside the Ordinary: Contemporary Art in Glass, Wood and Ceramics*, the objects are presented in an iso-
lated physical context, with glossy reproductions of individual works, each on its own page.28 This removal of physical context is refilled with textual context. The works are labeled with dimensions, medium, art-
ists and dates, all tidbits that are less important when we see the object displayed in a home. An article published in *American Style Magazine* depicted the works in their home context, as components of an interior

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3.3 The Wolf Home.
This contrast of display in the home to display in a museum is nothing new to the Cincinnati Art Museum. Mary M. Emery and Mary Hanna were two philanthropists that made major donations to the CAM. Mary Emery collected art, primarily European Master paintings, with the intention of donating the work to the museum’s collection. However, the collection was housed in Emery’s own home, a mansion called Edgecliff, until her death in 1927, for her personal enjoyment. Edgecliff, as a long time home to this collection, is now demolished. The Emery collection of art is now available for viewing in the CAM’s galleries, but given its historical context, we wonder what it was like to live amongst those paintings—at the museum the visitor is only allowed an uncomfortable bench to sit with the work, and the periodic check by a security guard is disconcerting enough to move anyone along to the next room. Mary Hanna’s donation was also of European paintings and it essentially completed the Emery collection. Both women donated money to build expansions to the museum to house their collections,


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which took the form of sparse, over-scaled gallery spaces.

It is interesting to note that the museum is and always has been a privately incorporated institution whose chief support comes from “endowment, membership and Cincinnati Institute of Fine Arts allocations, and gifts and bequests of art objects and monies from local, national and international patrons.” The museum is clearly founded and supported through individuals, with personal interest in having art as part of their private lives. However, the subsequent publication of these private art collections for the use of museum visitors loses the personal experience that the art was valued for in the first place. The two developments discussed here, the 4th Floor Group and the Wolf Collection, encapsulate many poignant contemporary debates that seem to favor an individual and private experience, as opposed to the established modernist gallery that expects art to be autonomous, untouchable, and authoritative. Isn’t it high time to re-frame the museum’s collections to reflect the domestic contexts that they were once a part of?

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
We have seen from the examples of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Cincinnati Art Museum that encyclopedic museums tend to amass architecture as they hoard objects, and also that these structures cause tension in some areas such as the integration of contemporary art, and the display of utilitarian crafts, sets of work that don’t fit neatly into the standard geographic and timeline based classification systems encouraged by the monumental containers. In response to this point of tension, other types of art space are necessary and have popped up, but current trends in exhibition space still do not adequately answer the problem. This section shares examples of the Denver Art Museum, the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) in Cincinnati, and Manifest Gallery and Drawing Center, also in Cincinnati, as characterizations of recent trends in art space design, responding to the unique conditions of current art practice and American culture. The Denver Art Museum is a typical example of an encyclopedic museum’s attempt to remain relevant in contemporary life. The CAC is an institution that also prides itself on its relevancy to both contemporary life and to current art
practice, however, it does not hold a permanent collection, so it doesn’t quite fit the definition of a museum proper. Manifest Creative Research Gallery and Drawing Center is an example of a small gallery that is, perhaps accidentally, integrated into everyday living in some interesting ways that supplement the larger systems of display.

Vertigo

Recent construction at the Denver Art Museum (DAM) is a typical example of where the encyclopedic museum ‘tacks on’ extra space for contemporary art. Opened in 2006, the Hamilton Building expansion for the DAM was designed by signature architect Daniel Libeskind (Fig. 4.1). The DAM expansion highlights the difficulty of integrating contemporary art functions with the encyclopedic museum in that it acts essentially as a separate building, connected only by a small enclosed bridge to the 1971 Gio Ponti building which houses mostly the more historical work in the museum’s collection.

Libeskind’s design is formally radical and attention grabbing, advertising that the museum is no longer a quiet place where stodgy
academics dust off representational oil paintings. The DAM wants to show that they recognize that the nature of contemporary art, and the expectations of contemporary visitors, are changing, and so is the way that architecture relates to art. “This is a new type of space. The 21st century expects the space to interact with art in a new way,” states architect Daniel Libeskind.\textsuperscript{2} It is recognized that the museum must now incorporate performance space and a variety of installation spaces to adapt to changing temporary exhibitions where artists are pushing the limits of scale and media.

The program of the contemporary art museum also incorporates expanded public space, dining, and retail, in line with the idea that this building typology is now a destination for entertainment. The DAM exemplifies a trend in museum buildings to add comfortable programming like food services and gift shops, to make visitors feel welcome to stay longer. However, these additions do nothing to change the visitor’s relationship to the art in the galleries, they are simply surrounding traditional display space with comfortable and commercial activities. The art experience becomes proximate to everyday life activities, but not integrated with them.

The two major formal moves manifested in Libeskind’s design

are the sharp, angled geometry, and the large atrium core. The acute angles of the geometry in plan create a forced perspective in the gallery spaces, pulling the visitor off the main circulation path into the deep space of the gallery, expecting to discover something precious there. Although some critics question the functionality of these gallery shapes in terms of displaying art, Heather Nielson, DAM educator says, “The dynamic, non-box gallery spaces inspired us to think about art and visitors in new ways.” Libeskind’s design also incorporates double height space for special exhibitions and outdoor exhibition space. While defended by the institution and the designer, the angular spaces are so disorienting that they have even been reported to cause vertigo. Also, the perceived random nature of the shapes lends no deeper meaning that “this is not your grandmother’s museum.” The glossy image of the architecture can be read quickly and then discourages further habitation—so even if there were a deeper understanding to be had, the visitor would not likely stick around long enough to get it—due to the disorienting character of the space.

The other main design element, the atrium core, reinforces the goal of bringing the energy of the outside plaza to the inside of the


building with a glass ceiling lighting the lobby to give it an open, welcoming feel. The atrium also signifies the vertical circulation core. The main stair spirals up through the galleries within this open space. Its prominence and hierarchy in the design might beckons users to circulate through the building, inviting the activity in the lobby up into the galleries. However, this central space seems to function better as an escape from the uncomfortable gallery spaces than an invitation. It is the one place in the building where the visitor doesn’t feel like they might get lost if they are not careful.5

Interestingly, the glass roof of the atrium has had problems with leaking since the building opened, requiring relatively constant repair and maintenance. In my visits to the building I noticed workmen on the roof, caulking and patching. I’ve lived in two different homes that had skylights, and both of them leaked constantly. While the architecture of the DAM attempts to appear upscale and cutting edge, it falls victim to the same cracks and leaks that more everyday, “lower quality” architecture is known for. Seeing this mundane maintenance of the iconic building was both reassuring and disconcerting. The image and reputation of the building’s architecture had led me to believe this architecture

was “better.” It was nice to see a glimpse of where it might not be so; but that contradiction turned me into a skeptic, wondering what else this facade was attempting to conceal.

The cavernous display spaces and the atrium core in the DAM’s Hamilton expansion encourage an increase in the scale of artwork, that conceivably would make the audience want to view it from even farther away. The spaces effectively distance contemporary visitors, who are already trained by mass-media to passively view images, even further from the art. The scale increase also further distinguishes ‘Art’ from ‘craft’ in that smaller, handmade, and human scale objects feel out of place and are presented in smaller display cases that contradict the expansive volumes.

The CAC Experiment

The Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati is an indicative example of the non-collecting, museum-like institution. Its functions are highly similar to a museum, with the major exception being that it does not maintain a permanent collection. It is host to an ever-revolving door
of temporary exhibitions, which function as entertainment more than an educational resource. The advantage gained by shirking the responsibility to maintain collections is the freedom to experiment and take risks. But the CAC does not even take full advantage of this flexibility, recently reducing the number of shows they have per year. And there is a risk to exhibiting controversial art, as evidenced in the controversy over a 1990 Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition where the CAC’s director was indicted on obscenity charges.6

In 2003, the CAC opened a new building designed by Zaha Hadid (Fig. 4.2), which propelled the institution to new prominence. Consequently, shortly after it opened, this building was physically altered, adding exterior bollards to prevent skateboarders from using the “Urban Carpet” design feature as a ramp. However, in 2010, the CAC hosted an exhibition of Shepard Fairey’s work, titled Supply and Demand, which includes a large collection of skateboard graphics. It was one of their most popular exhibitions ever hosted, and the opening drew so many visitors that the building filled to capacity, and a line waited outside for the requisite number of people to leave so they could enter (Fig. 4.3). Perhaps the museum should consider the unexpected everyday event, like skateboarding on the building, as some sort of clue as to

4.3  *Supply and Demand* opening party.
how people want to connect to the institution.

*Supply and Demand* was interesting for several other reasons. Like the “Surreal Escape” event at the Cincinnati Art Museum, the focus was moved from the artwork to the music, food, and other atmospheric elements that transformed the art gallery into a space where you would actually want to hang out. What if we could take for granted that we want to hang out at the museum? What if it didn’t take a special event to know that there is more than the art to keep us there? Unlike the twenty-dollar toll to enter Surreal Escape, the CAC opening party was free admission. However, on an everyday basis, one would pay five dollars to enter the CAC’s galleries. The exhibition showed an interesting contrast between the spectacle of the museum (which was so full of people for the opening, it was nearly impossible to see the art) and the potential of more everyday settings and access. Along with the museum exhibition, the artist executed a multi-location mural project that thrust art throughout the city, making the exhibition something that the viewer did not have to intentionally go to see—it could be driven by or walked past in everyday life.

The “CAC Experiment” is another revealing activity of the CAC that shows discrepancy between the institution’s programs and the people who actually do interact with the museum daily as they commute downtown. Based on the presumption that “a tiny change in routine
can bring new perspective,” staff of the CAC decided to surprise bus riders with a free bus fare.\(^7\) Reactions to this were actually quite negative. The bus riders approached on the video seemed offended that these assumedly “richer” people were trying to make their day with a handful of change.

Architecturally, the building attempts to connect to the surroundings as well. The urban carpet is the design concept Hadid uses to tie inside to outside and draw visitors into the CAC building. The flow of the urban carpet signifies the flow of the circulation by pulling the concrete of the sidewalk up through the building. It starts at the street, goes through the public lobby where the retail and cafe spaces are also located, and rolls up the back wall of the building echoing the vertical circulation. The “carpet” curves up from horizontal to vertical as the user ascends the stairs. The building’s plan is organized around the atrium, where long ramping stairs cut through the building, providing the vertical circulation core, which is given hierarchy through the bold graphic cuts of the ramp and the light of the open atrium. Expressing circulation or movement as a key element of the building’s design reinforces the conclusion that visitors are expected to move quickly through

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the entire building rather than staying in one place for very long.⁸

The architecture of the Contemporary Arts Center is more practical than that of the Denver Art Museum’s Hamilton Building but the two structures are actually very similar functionally, encouraging movement and massive scale, allowing visitors a passing glance, and keeping out smaller scale art that does not do the same. The architecture of the CAC reflects the flexibility valued by the non-collecting institution, which apparently, so does the Hamilton Building, which is unsettling. Why is there no difference architecturally between an institution that holds a permanent collection and one that does not?

The CAC’s Mission Statement is to:

provide the opportunity for all people to discover the dynamic relationship between art and life by exhibiting, but not collecting, the work of progressive artists. It will continually increase its regional, national and international influence by providing changing visual and interactive experiences that challenge, entertain and educate.”⁹

The DAM’s mission reads: “The mission of the Denver Art Museum is to enrich the lives of present and future generations through acquisition,

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4.4 Manifest Gallery, Cincinnati.
presentation, and preservation of works of art.”10 These two statements specifically address opposite attitudes towards collecting. In support of this, at first glance, the architecture seems visually different, but upon closer look, both buildings use an atrium core and large scale geometries for the galleries as the driving design decisions. Furthermore, this surface level difference reflects the superficial brush with art that visitors to these spaces are encouraged (intentionally or not) to experience by the way the architecture controls their movement.

Manifest

Manifest Creative Research Gallery and Drawing Center has a small, three room gallery in the East Walnut Hills neighborhood of Cincinnati. They occupy a storefront space (Fig. 4.4) in a mixed-use building that shows the potential of overlapping residential space and exhibition space. Along these same lines, Manifest is a self proclaimed

“neighborhood gallery for the world.”\textsuperscript{11} It is a non-profit organization that curates and hosts exhibitions of contemporary art, and can be seen as a gesture towards domestic integration as the space becomes activated with traffic from both the gallery and the homes. The gallery shares a wide common hallway with the twelve residential apartments in the same building. For openings and events, the hall is set up with food and drinks, and the crowd includes a mix of artists, residents, and gallery visitors. During gallery hours, building residents will often knock on the hall door for a peek into the gallery on their way home.\textsuperscript{12}

Trends in recent exhibition space design in larger art institutions have fragmented off large scale and superficially visual spaces and designated them for contemporary art. But as seen in examples like Manifest Gallery, contemporary art interactions are happening on smaller scales and in other places, such as neighborhood business districts and residential areas. It seems that if encyclopedic museums like the DAM are going to build a fragmented expansion like the Hamilton Building, they might consider building a fragment that captures other, smaller, human scale moments in contemporary art practice as well—if they are to remain “comprehensive” museums.


\textsuperscript{12} Based on the author’s observations as a student intern at Manifest Gallery. Manifest is located at 2727 Woodburn Avenue, Cincinnati, OH and the director is Jason Franz.
V. Domestic Display Tactics
The Art Museum and the Private Sphere

Art spaces can be related to home spaces through scale and activity. The act of collecting occurs when going to the grocery store and acts of display or exhibit occur in the home, where refrigerators are decorated with children’s drawings or a photo album is carefully placed on the coffee table. The public museum is an institution that originated from private collections, housed in homes. This is a history which establishes a rich relationship between domestic space and museum exhibition space.¹ This section seeks to uncover modes of exhibition that happen in both the museum and the home as both are dealing with an abundance of objects and information. What is the potential and future of domestic environments in the museum?

I have been assuming that the word “domestic” means something to do with a smaller, personal scale and a natural, intuitive way of interacting with objects. A look at the word’s etymology suggests that “domestic,” first used in the 1520s, stems from the Latin domesti-

The term *domestic* also finds root in the Old English *dem-*/*dom, meaning “build,” which implies an ability to create, a level of modifiability. This activity of home-making is also reinforced by its product—the noun form of the word, “domestics,” originally defined as “articles of home manufacture.”

A domestic environment would be oriented around physical products. The word domestic does not simply refer to the comfortable; it is contentious, but paradoxically has strong ties to the idea of proximity and familiarity. In reference to nationality, domestic could also mean ‘American.’ If encyclopedic museums are national icons, why is their accessibility not defined by, and set up for, current, everyday, domestic (American) life?

Two models of private display emerged during the Renaissance: the gallery and the cabinet. Germain Bazin, former curator of painting at the Louvre, characterized these as follows:

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3. Ibid.
"The gallery was a long grand hall lighted from the side and came to signify an exhibition area for pictures and sculptures. The cabinet was usually a square shaped room filled with stuffed animals, botanical rarities, small works of art such as medallions or statuettes, artifact and curios...Both types of collections were rarely open to the public and remained the playthings of princes, popes and plutocrats.\

The gallery model described here, a grand hall for paintings and sculptures, is where we can see connections to a contemporary, over-scaled display space. The cabinet model seems to be more personal. It is eclectic and small scale, and it seems not easily translated into a museum as we know it today, where large numbers of people must circulate through. The cabinet was arranged in a way that encouraged a smaller number of people to spend more time there, as it conceivably held a greater number of objects than the gallery, while allocating less space for people.

To this day, private collections of art are a primary source for the objects displayed in public museums, but the private experience of these collections is barely alluded to in their display. In the mid-20th century, an area of research called ‘visitor studies’ came to have relevance in museums, which began studying the experience of their visitors.


As museums began to understand themselves as one of many ‘leisure’ activities that their visitors have to choose from, they responded by trying to present an image of being a relaxing and enjoyable place, taking more measures to incorporate resting places for the comfort of visitors, that also might serve to slow the pace of the exposure to art. This usually takes the form of placing minimalist benches in the center of galleries, and then adding more comfortable lounge spaces in the lobbies and cafes, the non-art spaces of the museum. The implementation of these stark and inadequate gestures towards comfort highlights the conflict the museum sees in its integration. Comfort is historically opposed to the educational edifice of the encyclopedic museum AND opposed to the commercial aesthetic of the modern gallery. The reintroduction of comfort, or domestic scale into the art experience has been suggested in many examples, but has not managed to significantly alter perceptions of the monumental museum. The following stories are three concepts that allude to domestication of the art experience: drawing on the walls, visible storage and the window as a frame.
DOMESTIC DISPLAY TACTICS

Drawing on the Walls

A wall drawing by Sol LeWitt was on curator Jean Feinberg’s wish list for the Cincinnati Art Museum’s contemporary art acquisitions in the 1990s. LeWitt’s wall drawings are seen in art history as a step towards ‘dissolving the white cube’ in the 1960s and 1970s conceptual art movement, where artists took a special interest in the institutional structures that their work was displayed in. More specifically, artwork that specifically addresses institutional structures like the museum has been called “Institutional Critique.” For example, in William Anastasi’s West Wall (1967) the artist took a photographic image of a museum’s interior wall and turned it into an artwork on display, on that very same


5.1 Wallworks Exhibition.
wall, for critical review. This piece took the physical wall of the museum space and framed it with itself, stating that the white cube gallery is NOT a neutral container and it DOES filter the artwork for the viewer. A more recent example is a work by Spanish artist Santiago Sierra, who in a 2004 exhibition removed all the artworks from the space, removed all the glass from the windows and doors, and left the building of the Museum Dhont Dhaens in Belgium to fend for itself.8

Interaction of art with the museum’s architecture does not have to be in attack mode; instead, it can have a symbiotic, positive relationship. The Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco hosted an exhibition titled *Wallworks* in July 2009, where artists were commissioned to create site specific works that engaged the surfaces of the museum’s architecture. This exhibition was the curatorial debut of Betti-Sue Hertz, YBCA’s newly appointed Director of Visual Arts. Hertz commissioned artists to use the literal aspects of the architectural space as a starting point to create new large-scale works directly on the walls of the galleries and public spaces.

The Yerba Buena Center building was opened in 1993 and designed by architect Fumihiko Maki. Like many contemporary art museums, Maki’s building provides a huge range of gallery sizes and

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It started with basic doodles: turtles, butterflies, and the like. Then, he began diagramming string theory and spouting principles of quantum physics. His parents were horrified.

(Photo: Sharon Risedorph; Dwell)
DOMESTIC DISPLAY TACTICS

shapes to accommodate the current proliferation of multimedia and expanded scale contemporary art practices. The building tries to allows mental and physical space for intervention and imagination, and even has a programmed space called the “room for big ideas.”

*Wallworks* asked artists to not just ask the building to accommodate their work, but to try to push the limit of what the architecture can house and exploit what it allows. The show is also unique in that it was open to the public during the two-week installation period. Visitors could interact with the artists and see the production of work, lending an intimacy to the often-secretive workings of the art world and highlighting the ‘contemporary’ making of these works. The resulting work was, not surprisingly, a collection of very large scale works. Given a three story height space, and the requirement to be active in it for two weeks, artists had little choice but to create massive works that activated the space and framework that they were given. A review of the exhibition concluded that “*Wallworks* is a brave experiment in exploring the symbiosis between art and space, and, like biological creatures engaged in this type of relationship, both stand to benefit from mutualism and shared consideration,”9 However, it is not clear how the architectural space in this case mutually considered the art, it seems that the art was

dictated by the physical and institutional structure.

There is something subversive to this idea of “drawing on the walls.” Drawing on the walls is a childhood activity that many of us were scolded for. Products like “Magic Eraser” are created and marketed on their ability to remove undesirable wall drawings. “Unhappy Hipsters” is a blog that takes images from *Dwell* magazine and presents them with a cynical caption.10 A recent post featured a child drawing on a wall painted with chalkboard paint. Chalkboard paint and other “writable” wall surfaces are now commonly available, and these products essentially sanction drawing on the walls as an acceptable activity. Now that this surface modifiability has been allowed, could the wall be interactive in three dimensions?

DOMESTIC DISPLAY TACTICS

Visible Storage

No modern 21st Century home is complete without an IKEA bookshelf. We are always looking for furniture that “maximizes space” and allows us to keep more and more things. Open shelving and other “visible storage” systems are popular in today’s homes. The commercial nature of modern living means that we collect objects to form our identities, that we feel good about having things on display as we store them in our home environment. This concept of visible storage is also gaining momentum in museum practice, as a way for museums to show more of their collections. The American Association of Museums published a manual of best practices for visible storage implementation. The tone of the document was defensive, an argument for the desirability of this display model, as if they expected museums to be resistant to it:

There is also no reason why a visible storage facility cannot be interesting architecturally. Open spaces, intimate areas, two-story rooms, stairs, mezzanines, big things, and little things—all can be part of the design vocabulary. In addition, the variety of traditional storage
LIVING WITH ART

5.3  Typical Ikea Shelving, visible storage in the home.
equipment will be much greater than the limited assortment of display furniture usually found in a public gallery. Three-dimensional objects can sit on open shelves. Paintings can be hung floor-to-ceiling, salon style. Small objects and textiles can be placed in accessible drawers or in tilt-top display cases. Normal storage equipment varies greatly, from painting racks, closed storage cabinets, and rolled textile racks to huge drawer units, shelves full of archival boxes, and pallet racks with huge and heavy objects. Some objects can be displayed without physical protection at all if viewable only from a secure distance. The sheer variety of storage methods can be fascinating and instructive.11

This description advocates mixing different types of art on display, and the display of the storages systems themselves, in a way that sounds both cluttered and interactive. However, it encourages museums to continue the tradition of monumental display, through “interesting architecture” such as two-story rooms and open spaces. The “intimate areas” and “little things” become lost in the presence of these larger spaces—the two types of display are just not compatible.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art uses a visible storage display model in its American Wing. The space was described by one visitor as:

Seemingly endless rows of furniture and flatware are arranged in ceiling-to-floor cases in the back of the gallery. The collection is so large it’s easy to get lost among the

5.4 Visible Storage in the Brooklyn Museum.
DOMESTIC DISPLAY TACTICS

colonial chairs... 12

This space, like many implementations of visible storage systems, such as in the Brooklyn Museum (Fig. 5.4), becomes a display of the collection as a whole. The visible storage takes the scale of the ‘cabinet’ display system, and puts it in a space that has the vastness of the ‘gallery’ model, effectively overwhelming the visitor with the mass of the collection, eliminating the potential for engagement with individual objects.

Picture Windows

The Museum of Contemporary Art Denver (MCA), an institution established in 1996, is housed in a building just opened in 2007, designed by architect David Adjaye. As a recently established institution, the MCA exemplifies some of the current trends in museum design, one of which is the adaptations required for interactive and time based media. Two programmatic spaces: “The Idea Box” and “The Whole Room” are domestic space concepts to accommodate art that requires longer habitation by the visitor.

LIVING WITH ART

When visiting an exhibition at the MCA, I was surprised to come across a gallery in which an artist was actually working on an installation. I knew that this was something special—an expanded experience to which most museums would not invite the visitor to be a part of. The entire experience of the museum had the feeling of being let in on a secret.

After moving all the way through the building, I stumbled upon the top floor, where there is a roof deck, a rock garden, and a cafe, all finished in wood, and other tactile materials that are missing from the white galleries of the building. The movement through the buildings lower floors is like being inside a foam core model—there is no human scale to the materials, texture, or detailing. But here, on the top floor, the visitor discovers a precious, habitable environment.

Somewhere in the MCA, a hidden window is the perfect place for contemplation and viewing. The building’s upper floor includes an educational space and lounge that integrate viewing, learning and leisure spaces. In this “Idea Box,” visitors can grab some materials and make something—paper and other art supplies are available for free use. It is also a place where educational programming happens. Up a long sloping ramp from the Idea Box, there is a window. The ramp is filled with huge pillows. The window is placed on the bottom half of the wall, such that the visitor is actually rewarded for sitting down and
5.5 Window View at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Architect David Adjaye, opened 2007.
allowed a view of the city from this upper floor frame.13

The window has so many connotations in the home: window-seat, window box, a place to look out and look in. It is a frame, a comfortable scale and way of framing that we know intuitively how to engage with. The frames of artwork found in museums seem to be more detached than this: we can’t plant flowers on the ledge of a display case. In the Cincinnati Art Museum, windows in the main hall have been covered up (to protect the art from sunlight, but it seems that the denial of this simple and accessible frame might be a mistake).

There is something to this secret discovery of a window, when we decide to make the time to sit down at the museum. There is a desirability of locality, proximity, and privacy, of belonging. In an article titled “Another Exclusivity Paradox,” museum experience designer Nina Simon writes:

A few weeks ago, I gathered a group of creative folks in San Francisco and asked them, “what makes a social venue feel welcoming and friendly to you?” To my surprise, secrecy and exclusivity were at the top of the list. One effused about the bar Bourbon and Branch, where

you need a secret code word to gain entry. A woman gushed about Wild Side West’s hidden backyard garden area, which includes eclectic statues and cozy corners to curl into. And then there’s the Berkeley Ace hardware store, which has a basement lair devoted to model trains. I had specifically asked about places that feel welcoming, and the responses were about exclusive experiences. What’s going on here?14

Simon goes on to argue that exclusive places actually reinforce our identities powerfully, secret places are a pleasure to discover and share, secrecy introduces novelty to the visit experience, and in a world of over-advertised experiences, understatement can go a long way. Visitors WANT public spaces to feel more like home, somewhere that they belong. In The Practice of Everyday Life, de Certeau explains:

> The territory where the basic gestures of “ways of operating” are deployed and repeated from day to day is first of all domestic space, this abode to which one longs to “withdraw” because once there, “one can have peace.” One “returns to one’s home, to one’s own place, which, by definition cannot be the place of others.”15

These examples show the complexity of the relationships between museum space and our everyday domestic existence. In these cases, the place of the domestic frame in museum exhibition serves to question


access, classification, proper behavior and interactions, and viewpoints. In this way, it can be seen as an opportunity where many visitors and artworks typically excluded from the museum might find an entry point.
DOMESTIC DISPLAY TACTICS
A Neighborhood Branch
Design Implications

A Northside Streetcorner

After studying what the possibilities of living with art in a museum setting could be, this thesis subsequently presents opportunities for testing some of the findings derived from the study. The site chosen for this design problem is at a street corner in a residential neighborhood. At the intersection of Fergus Street and Chase Avenue in the Northside neighborhood of Cincinnati there is a convergence of neighborhood activity. A school bus stops at the Northwest corner; across the street to the South is a playground. To the East are two identical brand new houses, a sign of gentrification, the covering up of a decaying urban fabric. This street corner has changed dramatically in recent years. This block is an area taken a special interest in by the Cincinnati Northside Community Urban Redevelopment Corporation (CNCURC), a Northside-specific non-profit community development corporation established in 2005 with the purpose of “addressing blighted and va-
6.1 Vacant building at Chase Avenue & Fergus Street.
cant property conditions; promoting homeownership; encouraging new business development; and deterring crime.”¹ In the past five years, two buildings have been demolished in the adjacent block, two new houses have been built, and one has been completely renovated into a wheelchair accessible unit.

On the Southeast corner lot stands a vacant building, a ghost of past residential life. The building appears to have been a mixed-use structure, with storefront below and residential space above. About half of the windows are covered with plywood. One of these has been painted with a mural, which was installed during the Northside porch tour in 2009. The porch tour is led by Northside architect Tim Jeckering. Participants met at the corner of Fergus and Chase for a ride on a horse–drawn carriage, touring the eclectic architectural styles in the area. Behind the adjacent playground, there is a “Community Canvas” installation, a reproduction of artwork woven into the chain link fence, installed by Happen, Inc., a Northside organization “founded for children and adults to share creative experiences that strengthen today’s family structure.”²

This intersection is exciting both for the state of its architecture,


which is in a volatile time of re-visioning, and for the evident glimpses of art-related programming that occurs near this corner. In addition to these conditions, the corner is also a place where kids throw rocks at cars, birthday parties meet, dogs are walked and people are arrested. It is such an interesting mix of the exciting and mundane, wholesome and subversive events that happen in many neighborhoods, everyday.

**Spliced Objects, Framed Views**

The vacant building on the southeast corner of this intersection is the chosen site for the hypothetical museum branch design pursued in this project. The proposed intervention will fragment this existing building, treating it as an object to be exhibited, at the same time that it is a container which frames and exhibits art, other objects, and people in relation to each other. Along these lines stated by Adam Weinberg, director of the Whitney Museum:

“Architecture is the most public of art forms. To see it requires no special admission fee as do a theater or a museum. It is available for all and taken for granted by many. The front of a building, its “face” or facade, is its
formal presentation to the world. The term facade has also come to mean “a superficial appearance or illusion.” A facade often hides as much as it reveals about the form and function of a building.”

The project takes the building, as an art form and as a frame, to play with its ability to reveal and conceal, toward the goal of providing a smaller scale art space that truly engages visitors.

The first response is simple: to just place the art in a space that has comfortable furniture and scale. By surrounding art with furniture and other objects that are natural to spend time with, the building will encourage the visitor to spend time with art. Specific architectural elements will support this. A ‘visible storage spine’ runs the length of the space, adding a layer through which people and art are filtered. This wall is interactive: full of drawers and cabinets, cubbies that house art as well as other objects.

To investigate what it means to design a domestic display space and make it more comfortable, my investigation took the form of architectural representations spliced with familiar domestic display models, such as a coffee table that holds a site model at a low level to the ground. It is something to be with, to sit with and have a cup of coffee, not to be passed by in a gallery.

Conclusion

While the topic and strategies of this exercise critique the encyclopedic art museum, this thesis, was, for me, a tactic to make space for myself within the structure of architectural training. Besides being architectural spaces, art museums present ideas about organizing objects created, such as those made in studio design problems. It occurred to me that a critique of the display methodologies of art museums required a critique of the exhibition strategies of design presentations. I have always been frustration with the limitations of conventional methodologies which require the designer to overstate their position, filling empty space with words and images that don’t mean anything to the uninitiated observer. The experience of a design proposal should reinforce as much as possible the intended experience of the design proposed instead of detailing the construction of components that the building’s future inhabitants will not even see. I hope that this document and the accompanying project hold onto these contradictions, accepting problems as they solve them, existing in-between and around categories such as art, architecture, interior design, object, display system, experience, furniture...
6.2 Coffee Table / Site Model
I would like to thank my thesis committee, Nnamdi Elleh for the confidence and positive support, Aarati Kanekar for the reality checks, and Vicki Daiello for swooping in with her enthusiasm this spring,

also my family, husband Chris Young for making me take breaks and helping me move heavy things, mother Anne Brasier for listening to me vent, father Allan Brasier, for showing me what dedication and hard work looks like, brother Rob Brasier, for the memories,

and anyone and everyone that helped me in this research, especially the Cincinnati Art Museum archives and Rebecca Hosta, for retrieving carts of documents for me to sift through, the DAAP college library, and whoever decided to allow students to bring coffee into the libraries at UC.
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