NEW MUSEUMS

Intentions, Expectations, Challenges

Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève
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MUSÉES D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE DE GENÈVE

VILLE DE GENÈVE

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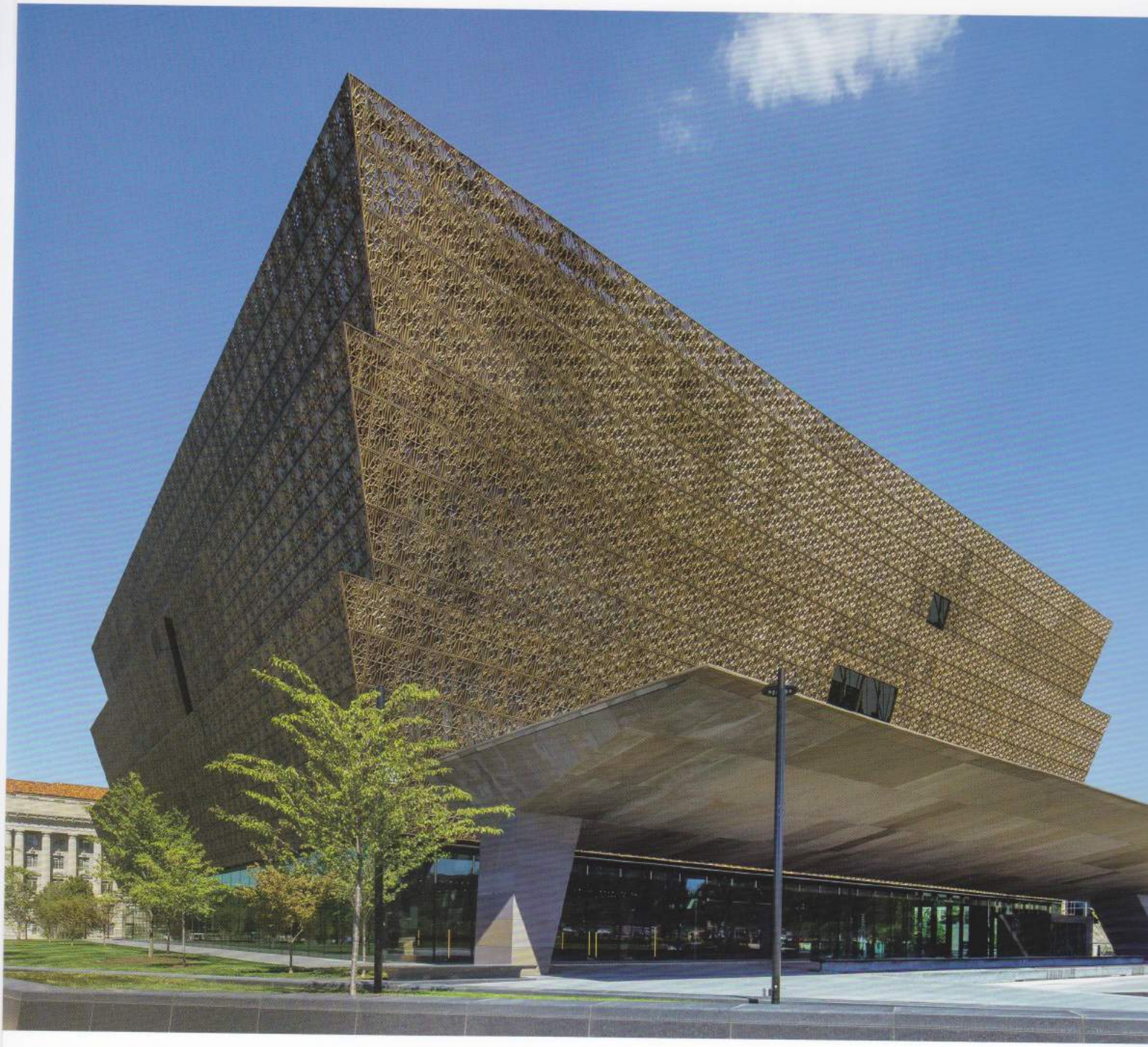
HIRMER

Contents



National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC)

Washington, D.C., USA

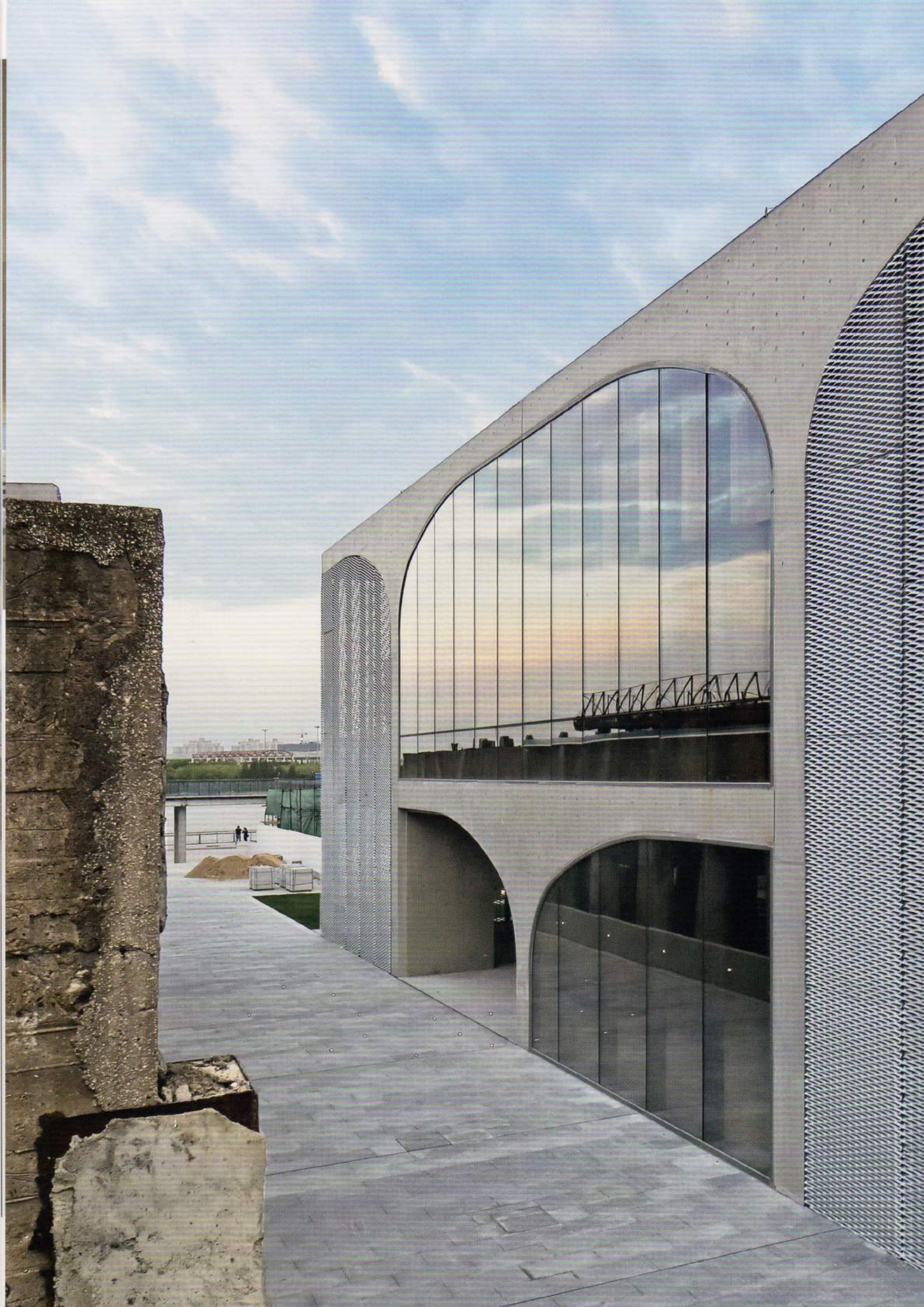
Adjaye Associates, New York / London
Construction 2009–2016, opened 2016
Building 39,000 sq. m
Permanent and temporary exhibitions about African American history and culture

David Adjaye's works are more than buildings, they are something between public spaces and social projects. Adjaye begins his structures with the hope that as long as future visitors linger in them, they will constitute a small civil society.[1] The National Museum of African American History and Culture, the newest branch of the Smithsonian Institution on the National Mall in Washington, intends to realise that hope.

Standing near a row of other branches of the Smithsonian, which serves as a national – predominantly white – archive, the NMAAHC, with its focus on the history of black America, sees its function as an urgently needed supplemental or competing archive.[2] Although its design is in distinct contrast to the architecture of the Smithsonian's other buildings, in subtle details it expresses the desire of America's ethnic minorities to belong. For example, the angles of the façade, the so-called corona that forms the above-ground portion of the museum, repeat that of the pyramidal tip of the Washington Monument next door.[3]

In various spots the design employs water as a symbol of African American history: the broad basin one has to cross before entering the building recalls the "middle passage", the transport of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic.[4] Inside, however, water stands for protection and catharsis. From the aboveground basin it flows through a circular opening into a smaller one in the lower floor. Here, in an underground court illuminated from above by this "eye", it creates a pleasant micro-climate that visitors find refreshing and invigorating. At the same time, it is an emotionally charged symbol of the tears shed by African Americans in centuries of pain, mourning and rage.

But the building is above all a celebration of their own special history and strength. The filigree metal shell of the corona recalls African handicrafts, and is expressive of self-confidence and pride. Inside, rough concrete and fine woods provide varied textures. These materials are also keyed to history: slaves were forced to survive with very little and everything which was of use was kept. The museum honours this tradition by incorporating recycled materials,[5] and plantings on the roof reduce the cost of insulation. The façade grille allows visitors to look outside, and passers-by on the National Mall can look in. A dialogue is created, and when you think of David Adjaye's notion of a museum fostering a civil society, there is the hope that thanks to this transparency people will feel encouraged to enter the museum and help to shape society anew.



Long Museum West Bund

Shanghai, China

Atelier Deshaus, Shanghai
Construction 2012–2014, opened 2014
Building 33,007 sq.m
Contemporary art and Chinese ancient art

The architect Liu Yichun recalls: "The first time I arrived at the spot where the Long Museum now stands, it seemed surreal: I had just been in the throbbing inner city, and now, only a few kilometres away, I was standing in front of an old conveyor belt in an expansive, empty space with water in front of me and a world of decay all around me."[1] This world was once a wharf, and the conveyor belt, 110 metres long, once transported coal. Today it is the visual centrepiece of the largest private art museum in China.[2]

Ten metres tall, eight metres wide, erected in the 1950s of steel and concrete and showing its age – this is the structure that Liu used as an exciting point of departure for the museum. In addition, he had to integrate an already existing underground parking garage. He managed to do so with a simple yet ingenious solution of thin, movable concrete walls. The bearing walls are positioned in such a way that they align with the underground construction, and with them additional lightweight walls of metal grilles, glass and concrete comprise the new aboveground structure. The nearly square museum bridges the conveyor belt in one spot, otherwise it appears to acknowledge the primacy of the older structure and draws back from it. The belt is allowed to extend eastward unhindered before it is enveloped by the museum. But it not only serves as an excuse to spectacularly break through the new building's smooth outer shell, it also functions as outdoor exhibition space, and so has been given a new assignment without obscuring its original function.

Some of the walls bend forward at the top to form wide projections, creating a sort of umbrella structure that not only protects the contemporary art and its viewers but also the old conveyor belt. The structure does not want to deny its past or even destroy it, which is unusual in present-day China. The right of use of industrial buildings is fixed at fifty years – tearing it down would not have been a problem.[3]

Inside, the umbrellas cause a similar effect: among the massive fragments of suggested barrel vaulting and simple, grey concrete walls you never feel small, oppressed or uncomfortable. On the contrary: here, too, you feel enclosed and safe – and at the same time unexpectedly free. Liu considered this important: from the start his concept included a "free wall plan" – no inflexible rooms, but walls that penetrate each other, appear to overlap, interrupt a floor here, open up the view of another one there. "Viewing an art piece [then] is to allow the body to move with a consciousness, to realize a sense of freedom, which is the critical reason why we choose the free wall plan."[4]

When leaving the Long Museum, one looks afresh at the conveyor belt. It has become a harmonious component of the museum experience, part of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that is the city.[5]

Naga Site Museum

Naga, Sudan

David Chipperfield Architects Berlin
In the planning phase
Building 1,400 sq. m
Excavations from the site

The museum in Naga in Sudan's Butana steppe will be small. Compared to most museums we know, even tiny. It will measure exactly twenty metres wide and sixty metres long, and will no doubt see very few visitors a week. But they are not what is most important. Most important are the excavated objects protected from the sun and disintegration in this museum.

The ancient city of Naga, which flourished around AD 250, encompassed a full square kilometre; today fifteen of its temples survive, including the Hathor Chapel and the Amun Temple with its avenue of rams, both UNESCO World Heritage sites since 2011. Since 2013 excavations have been under the patronage of Munich's Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst (Egyptian Museum). Archaeologists have measured the Hathor Chapel, which is threatened with collapse, with digital 3D scanning, and now portions that cannot be salvaged are being replaced with copies, while the originals are meant to remain on site.[1] These, along with other artefacts, will be found in the Naga Museum which will lie a good two kilometres north of the excavation site and barely interact with it. To the architects, David Chipperfield Architects Berlin, it was important that the historic site remains undisturbed, and many museum directors and caretakers of monuments have praised the practice's considerate treatment of ancient structures[2] as well as the architects' feeling for the landscape and surroundings.[3] The architects themselves see architecture as having a stabilising and protective function.[4]

The Naga Museum will be built of tamped concrete, using sand from its surroundings, and with its warm ochre tones blending with the hilly desert landscape. The roof will be constructed of prefabricated concrete slabs, forming a series of flat steps sloping downward from the entrance to the back of the building, and from the side simply looking like wind-blown sand. It is only when viewed from above that the roof's concrete-grey structure will be seen, and how it lets light into the interior.

The building design quotes the layout of the ancient Amun Temple, with its columned entrance and two rows of columns inside. In order to structure the building and in imitation of the Roman cella, the practice created a few separate spaces that serve as offices and storerooms. The building has no windows; light only enters from the side in the loggia in the entrance area and in the small central courtyard. Additional light streams down from between the offset roof slabs, whose slope is taken up by a ramp running through the building's interior. The museum does completely without glass.

The architects see their job as mediating between material and what can be done with it. They first consider a structure's surroundings, then draw on their accumulated knowledge to create something new.[5] Their respectful treatment of the terrain makes them less modern, less contemporary than many of their colleagues. But in return they can free themselves from the constraints of Modernism, and were able to design a tiny museum in the desert that almost looks as if it has stood there for 2,000 years.

Notes to the Catalogue

p. 17
National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), Washington, D.C.

1 Okwui Enwezor, "Popular Sovereignty and Public Space: David Adjaye's Architecture of Immanence", in *David Adjaye: Making Public Buildings. Specificity, Customization, Imbrication*, ed. Peter Allison (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 9.
2 Mabel O. Wilson, "Other Monumentalities", in *David Adjaye: Form, Heft, Material*, ed. Okwui Enwezor et al. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2015), 268.
3 Ibid., 279.
4 Kinshasha Holman Conwill, "To Reap the Harvest Wonderful: On Sustainability at the National Museum of African American History and Culture", *American Art* 3 (2014): 24.
5 Ibid., 23.

p. 39
Long Museum West Bund, Shanghai

1 Liu Yichun, Atelier Deshaus, "When Structure Meets a Place: Design Thinking of Long Museum West Bund", 1.
2 Claire Jacobson, *New Museums in China* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2014), ix.
3 Eduard Kögel, "Mit Geschichte aufgeladen. Ein historisches Museum als Reflexion über den Abrisswahn in China", *werk, bauen + wohnen* 5 (2013): 10. In the last few decades China has developed a sense of its own history that had been buried by the Cultural Revolution. One can now assume that an awareness of the more recent past will gradually prevail. See Marzia Varutti, "The Aesthetics and Narratives in National Museums in China", in *National Museums: New Studies from around the World*, ed. Simon J. Knell et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 307.
4 Liu Yichun, "When Structure Meets a Place", 3–4.
5 Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 32.

p. 47
Kunstmuseum Basel Extension

1 Nikolaus Meier, *Kunstmuseum Basel. Die Architektur* (Basel: Christoph Merian Verlag, 2003), 23.
2 Bernhard Mendes Bürgi, "Die Wechselwirkung zwischen Kunst und Architektur. Zu den inhaltlichen Aspekten des Neubaus", in *Kunstmuseum Basel, Neubau*, ed. Kunstmuseum Basel (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2016), 69.
3 Emanuel Christ, "We look at examples. Ein Gespräch mit Emanuel Christ, Christoph Gantenbein, Diogo Lopes, Kersten Geers und Patricia Barbas", *Baumeister* 8 (2013): 79.

p. 55
Naga Site Museum

1 Jan Hamann, "Naga-Projekt Sudan. Archäologie und Restaurierung im Sudan – Restaurierungsethische Überlegungen zur Hathor-Kapelle", in *Kulturgut erhalten. Standards in der Restaurierungswissenschaft und Denkmalpflege*, ed. Uwe Peltz and Olivia Zorn (Darmstadt: Philipp von Zabern, 2009), 176. This procedure is in accord with UNESCO's policy of wishing to see artefacts exhibited as close to their find spot as possible.
2 Ursula Baus, "David Chipperfield und die Bauherren seiner Museen", in *DAM Jahrbuch*, ed. Deutsches Architektur-Museum (Frankfurt am Main: Prestel, 2005), 22.
3 Fulvio Irace, "Simple, Ordinary, Complex", in *David Chipperfield Architects*, ed. Rik Nys (Cologne: Walther König, 2013), 8.
4 David Chipperfield, *Theoretical Practice* (London: Artemis, 1994), 19.
5 Rafael Moneo, "The Architect's Profession Today: An Alternative in Globalised Times", *El Croquis* 174/175 (2014): 359.

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Munchmuseet, Oslo

1 Jill Lloyd, "Van Gogh and Munch: A Question of Style", in Munch: Van Gogh, ed. Maite van Dijk et al. (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2014), 143.
2 For more information about glass as a building material in modern architecture, please see: Iñaki Ábalos and Juan Herreros, *Tower and Office: From Modernist Theory to Contemporary Practice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 99.

p. 71
MONA Museum of Old and New Art, Berriedale

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p. 79
Zayed National Museum, Abu Dhabi

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2 Peter Buchanan, "The Urban Room", in *On Foster … Foster On*, ed. David Jenkins (Munich: Prestel, 2000), 429.

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Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeitz MOCAA), Cape Town

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2 Tom Banks, "Heatherwick to 'Carve Out' Grain Silo in Ambitious African Gallery Project", *Design Week*, February 28, 2014, accessed July 19, 2016, http://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/february-2014/heatherwick-to-carve-out-grain-silo-in-ambitious-african-gallery-project/.

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