

Revitalizing a Midwestern Landmark— The Muskegon Museum of Art

By Aaron Rubin

The Muskegon Museum of Art (MMA), one of the most acclaimed museums in the Midwest, has embarked upon a major renovation and addition that will expand space for its renowned permanent collection, more than doubling the size of the facility. This \$15.1-million revitalization will result in three new rotating galleries, two classrooms, a new gift shop, and—most notably—spaces throughout featuring the work of women artists.

With this expansion, the MMA seeks to build a facility that will serve the needs of the community for the next century. With increased spaces for larger exhibitions and events, outside art spaces, and more classrooms to offer educational activities, the museum plans to be a greater resource for our local community as well as become a destination spot for visitors.

A Midwestern Landmark

The MMA opened in 1912, and was originally known as the Hackley Art Gallery. The museum instantly became a midwestern landmark, as one of only a few galleries in Michigan dedicated to displaying prominent works of art. Architect S.S. Berman of Chicago designed the museum in the Classical Revival style, and the building remains a significant fixture within the Muskegon Historic District.

The district comprises six blocks of public and residential buildings, including the Hackley Public Library and Hackley Park. Both are named for local businessman and philanthropist Charles H. Hackley who, upon his death in 1905, bequeathed funds to construct the museum. In 1972, the district was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Over its 111-year history, the MMA has assembled a permanent collection of more than 5,000 American and European paintings, sculptures, prints, and drawings from renowned artists, including Hopper, Homer, Rembrandt, Catlett, Picasso, Degas, and Remington. The MMA organizes up to 20 exhibitions annually, while engaging with the community by offering diverse programming, events, and educational content.

Between 1979 and 1980, the museum underwent its first expansion in 67 years, when the Walker Galleries added exhibition space, staff offices, and storage. Today, however, the museum can only display between 100 and 125 works from its permanent collection at any given time, because of space limitations and commitments to rotating exhibitions. At the same time, the museum has continued to grow in



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popularity due to its distinctive collection and thriving community-engagement programs. Steadily increasing attendance from local, national, and international visitors has positioned the museum as an important contributor to the regional economy.

To meet these rising demands and display more of its impressive permanent collection, the MMA's leaders spent nearly two decades carefully planning for a major renovation and expansion, by acquiring adjacent land and establishing a significant endowment, among other steps.

Shaping the Future: The MMA's Renovation and Expansion Campaign

In 2021, the MMA selected Annum Architects (formerly Ann Beha Architects) and Mathison | Mathison Architects to lead the museum's renovation and expansion. Mueller Associates has provided the project's mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and fire-protection engineering services, complementing an engineering team that includes Silman for structural engineering and Prein & Newhof for landscape and civil engineering.

Now under construction, the project incorporates renovation of the 28,000-square-foot historical building and a 26,000-square-foot expansion. When completed in the fall of 2024, the project will have added the following:

- A 4,000-square-foot ground-level gallery
- An outdoor sculpture plaza
- A museum shop

- Classroom spaces
- An additional gallery/event space that connects the new entry to the existing museum
- A modern façade featuring glass, light-bronze metals, and a dark brick base that provides a brighter contrast to the original building's solid façade

The project reorients the museum's entrance, connecting it with the city center and providing fresh visibility and identity. The design also creates a new accessible entrance in the original building, enabling the museum to stay open during construction of the new addition, after which it will become a dedicated entrance for tour groups.

When completed, the MMA will have increased its exhibition space for works from the permanent collection by 222 percent, and temporary exhibition space by 60 percent. MMA Marketing Director Kristina Broughton says, "We're really excited to bring this into the community. We're looking to put Muskegon on the map in terms of arts and culture, and we're really glad to be growing and to offer this to the community."

Designing Around Challenges: Stormwater and Entrance Hurdles

Keeping the museum open during the renovation and new construction has presented several challenges for Mueller's engineering team.

The first hurdle involved existing stormwater discharge and HVAC utilities, such as outdoor air intakes and exhaust-discharge louvers. Mueller's engineers worked with civil engineering consultant Prein & Newhof to reroute the stormwater to a manhole location that wouldn't interfere with construction of the new building. The team also worked with Annum to reroute outdoor air intakes and exhaust louvers through the existing building to new penthouse louvers on the roof.

The new visitors' entrance also presented a challenge. The main entrance is located along the north façade, which is directly in the center of the site for the proposed new building. As a result, Mueller worked with Annum to provide the contractor with an early bid package to construct a new visitors' entrance on the south side of the property.

The location of the existing air-cooled chiller posed a third mechanical engineering challenge, requiring close coordination with the architects and civil engineers to relocate the chiller to an acceptable location for the museum and its neighbors. While re-engineering the chilled water system for the new location, Mueller's team took advantage of the situation to provide the museum with some much-needed redundancy in its pumping system.

According to Steven Gerrard, AIA, LEED GA, principal at Annum, the project's design will "create a prominent welcoming entrance; provide large climate-controlled galleries for touring exhibitions; expanded classroom spaces for educational programs and collections storage; and improved art loading, movement, and exhibit preparation."

Cost-Effective HVAC Solutions Enhance Climate Control and Energy Efficiency

From the beginning of the project, the MMA expressed the need to ensure that the temperature and humidity in its collections and gallery spaces were kept at an appropriate level throughout the year, as well as during various tours and events. Mueller's engineers considered several options, including a fully customized air-handling unit, a modular-type unit, and a packaged rooftop system. The team ultimately engineered a packaged system with a separate humidification system downstream of the three new air-handling units. This approach meets the building's temperature and humidity requirements, while minimizing costs and reducing the complexity of the building's controls system.

Another central design element that required close coordination within the design team involved determining



A modern façade featuring glass, light-bronze metals, and a dark brick base provides a brighter contrast to the original building's solid façade. The expansion also incorporates a new outdoor sculpture plaza.

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the best way to heat the open corridors and clerestory, where a large glass façade will take visitors from the first floor to the second. Engineers considered several design options, including recessed finned-tube radiators in the floor, versus free-standing radiators and linear air devices in the ceiling instead of the wall. The team considered several iterations in design before determining that the best and most economical approach was a mix of free-standing radiators at the stairwell, linear air devices in the ceiling, and small hidden-from-view air grilles at the clerestory to prevent condensation from forming on the windows.

On the plumbing side, Mueller opted for a hybrid hot-water approach. Instead of having a single large natural-gas water heater, the team engineered a smaller gas water heater dedicated to the second-floor bathrooms, with individual instantaneous electric water heaters at other locations throughout the expansion. With this approach, the total amount of piping in the building was significantly reduced, by not having domestic hot water and hot water recirculation lines reach these other locations. This solution also reduces the amount of natural gas needed at the expansion.

From Stopover to Destination: Featured Spaces for Women Artists, Contemporary Glass Collection, and National Touring Exhibitions

Due to generous donations from two of the country's leading art collectors, the MMA will soon be one of only a dozen or so museums in the world with a focus on the work of women artists.

In 2022, art collectors Steven Alan Bennett and Dr. Elaine Melotti Schmidt of San Antonio, Texas, contributed to the MMA's project with a cash donation and, more significantly, the donation of their \$10-million art collection, featuring 150 works of art painted by women in the figurative realist style. The donation includes paintings by artists such as Artemisia Gentileschi, Mary Cassatt, Agnes

Martin, Elaine de Kooning, Harmonia Rosales, Julie Bell, Andrea Kowch, Katie O'Hagan, and other contemporary and historical women painters.

The MMA renovation and expansion project will transform this midwestern gem from a stopover to a destination museum, from a one-hour visit to an all-day experience. The existing wings of the museum will showcase its permanent collections of Renaissance prints, Edward Curtis photographs, and paintings spanning more than 500 years. Of particular excitement to curators, the museum will finally be able to showcase its contemporary glass collection. A new 5,000-square-foot grand gallery will also allow the MMA to host national touring exhibitions. Two new rotating exhibition galleries and additional vault storage will have the capacity to accommodate new works of art for the next century of collecting.

Most importantly, these new facilities will sustain the MMA and serve the needs of the community for many decades to come. The expansion will include new educational classrooms, community and family activity areas, improved programming spaces, improved functionality for school tours, barrier-free entry, and a workshop and storage space, while also making it possible to grow and adapt to future community needs.

"With today's major structural expansion and new artwork, the Muskegon Museum of Art will continue attracting tourists from across the state and uplifting the local economy," Governor Gretchen Whitmer said last year, in anticipation of the project's completion. "For 110 years, the museum has been an anchor of this community, and I am proud that it will remain a cultural destination for decades to come. I am especially proud that the expansion will create and dedicate space for women artists. Projects like this are helping us grow our economy and build vibrant communities where people want to live, work, and play." 🏛️

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New galleries will ensure that the museum can display a greater number of works from its permanent collection of more than 5,000 American and European paintings, sculptures, prints, and drawings.