



American Friends of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art

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Tel Aviv Museum of Art Breaks Ground on The Herta and Paul Amir Building Designed by Preston Scott Cohen

The American Friends of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art is pleased to announce that construction on the Museum's new addition, The Herta and Paul Amir Building, will commence on May 15, 2007 and is slated for completion in 2009, in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of Tel Aviv's founding. The budget for the new building is \$45 million with \$41.5 million raised to date. The new 195,000 sq. ft. building will double the Museum's exhibition space and serve as the centerpiece of a bold strategic plan to enhance and expand the Museum's capacity to serve as a dynamic international center for art and culture.



The building was designed by American architect Preston Scott Cohen, a rising new star known for his inventive use of light and geometric forms. Cohen won the international competition to design the building in 2003. The demands posed by the ambitious scale of the program, coupled with the limitations of the site, presented a design challenge particularly suited to Cohen's capacity for invention. "Scott Cohen's plan became the clear choice both in terms of architectural achievement and as a physical extension of the Museum's philosophy. His sensitivity to our mission has resulted in a work of architecture that succeeds on numerous levels, masterfully balancing the curatorial standards we uphold with the growing programmatic needs of the community we serve," said Mordechai Omer, Director and Chief Curator of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

Cohen's design for the new building has garnered international attention and awards including the Progressive Architecture Award and the Academy Award in Architecture from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. According to leading architectural critic, Jeff Kipnis, "Scott Cohen champions, as few before him, the power of architectural geometry to register the historical, cultural and technical forces that define the present while revealing a strong sense of optimism for the future. His project for Tel Aviv is one of contemporary architecture's most keenly anticipated buildings."

The six-level building will feature three galleries comprising 21,884 sq. feet of exhibition space dedicated to the Museum's extensive holdings of Israeli art from 1920 to the present. The collection represents the largest of its kind in the world and includes artists Arie Aroch, Nahum Gutman, Manashe Kadishman, Lea Nikel, Reuven Rubin and photographers Michal Heiman, Miki Kratsman, Motti Mizrahi, Orit Raff Guy Raz, Pavel Wolberg, and Sharon Ya'ri among others. In addition, the building will include galleries for architecture and design, drawings, prints, photography, and an 8,900 sq. ft. gallery for contemporary exhibitions. The building's many other programs include a new bi-level Art Library, a 400-seat auditorium, a restaurant, classrooms, conference rooms, curatorial offices and storage areas.

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The design features a remarkably curved facade of faceted stone and a spiraling atrium of reflecting light. Its distinctive form was derived directly from Cohen's response to the fundamental challenge of the project: to accommodate rectangular, flexible gallery spaces within a nearly triangular site. Moreover, the total area of the ambitious program, including spaces of different heights and atmospheres, greatly exceeded the site's tight zoning envelope and required a large part of the program to be located underground.

Cohen's solution assigned key programmatic elements to a series of stacked and rotating levels and connected them to a continuous circulation space that spirals around a dramatic central open atrium. This space, aptly coined the "Lightfall" by Omer, is topped by a skylight and reflects light to the lowest reaches of the building, endowing the building's interior with a unique quality of progression and motion while, at the same time, making the structure cohesive in formal terms. The plan of rotated boxes produces open, fluid, interstitial spaces that are distinct at each level. On the exterior, the geometrical facade stretches and twists in order to smoothly envelop the multitude of angled spaces enmeshed within.

According to Cohen, "Today, museums are caught in a double bind between a need for the classic white box that provides the optimal arrangement for displaying art, and a desire for new forms and spectacular social spaces. The Tel Aviv Museum of Art is fortunate to have a director who is also a chief curator capable of engaging in the architectural challenge to solve this problem. Mordechai Omer, who is strict in the best sense of the word, nevertheless had the courage to support an unprecedented solution, one which carves out a new territory within museum architecture."

From the plaza facade, visitors will be drawn into the new building through a clear glass triangular-shaped entrance portico. The lobby space is envisioned as a transitional zone, giving way to cascading bridges, cantilevered stairs and escalators leading to the various exhibition spaces above and below.

On the exterior, visitors may also proceed from the plaza level down a ramp to the Garden Terrace of the restaurant. This descending space offers an unusual procession along the twisting stone façade as it conforms to the path. Overlooking the garden, visitors will recognize how the entire building, meticulously integrated with its environment, produces a gateway to the sculpture garden thus allowing for the garden to become the centerpiece of the museum campus.

Cohen has designed an integrative series of galleries, liberated from columns by means of remarkably hidden structural trusses. As a result, the spaces will ensure the capacity to support a wide range of exhibitions. The top floor will feature flow-through galleries of Israeli Art and a separate gallery dedicated to photography. The plaza level, immediately below, will house the Architecture and Design Galleries, each of which is positioned along its own axis according to the rotational geometry of the overall plan. On this level, visitors are guided by the Lightfall as they move from one gallery to the next. Proceeding toward the end of the axis that originates from the plaza lobby, visitors will arrive to the upper level of the art library.

The half-level below the plaza features a conference room, classroom, restaurant and a glass-paneled enclosed passageway that runs along the edge of the Museum's Sculpture Garden connecting the new building to the eastern end of the Museum's existing 1970s Brutalist structure. Finally, by descending either by means of the open escalator or elevator to the subterranean levels of the building, visitors will find the multi-purpose exhibition space and a 400-seat auditorium, along with a Museum café.

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Throughout the building, light-filled passages create dramatic spatial views and expansive vistas. "Cohen's project", according to leading architectural scholar and critic Sylvia Lavin, "is suffused with a broad spectrum of affects: calm, turbulent, generic, refined, cool, hot, stretched, straightened, curved, and ordinary. Only Cohen's work is multiple in this way, which gives it its particular contemporary complexion."

Ultimately, the new building's synthesis of radical and conventional geometries, combined with the layered and lyrical interplay between light and space, tranquility and dynamism will produce a new type of museum experience, one that is rooted in Tel Aviv's long-standing progressive spirit.

Project Background

Initiated in 2003, the Herta and Paul Amir Competition for a new building at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art consisted of three stages. The first stage was anonymous and open to architects registered in Israel, of which seventy-seven participated. The second stage included three invited international firms — Gigon-Guyer Architects, Zurich; Preston Scott Cohen, Boston; and Sanaa Ltd. (Kazuyo Sejima), Tokyo — and two invited Israeli offices — Ada Karmi-Melamede & Ram Karmi Architects and Chayutin Architects — along with four finalists from stage one. For stage three, the competition jury selected three finalists: Ada Karmi-Melamede & Ram Karmi Architects, Gutman and Ortega, and Preston Scott Cohen. In July 2003, the jury unanimously selected Preston Scott Cohen.

In 2005, following the completion of the schematic design, Cohen invited an Israeli Architect, Amit Nemlich, to join his firm in Cambridge and work with a team of assistants on the construction documents. This fall, Nemlich will return to Tel Aviv to oversee the construction process.

The project for the New Building has been featured in numerous exhibitions including, "The National Design Triennial", Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum (2006-07); "Skin and Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture", Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (2006-07); "Metamorph", the 9th Venice International Architecture Biennale (2004); and "Drawing by Numbers", Altria Gallery of the Whitney Museum of Art (2004).

Preston Scott Cohen

The work of Preston Scott Cohen, Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts, encompasses architectural and urban commissions that range in scale from free standing houses to educational and cultural institutions. Recent commissions include a Student Center for Nanjing University, a 150,000 sq. ft. educational facility in Xianlin, China (2007-09), the Robbins Elementary School in Trenton, NJ (first prize in the National competition, 2006), and the Fahmy residence in Los Gatos, CA (2007-2008).

Cohen is the recipient of three Progressive Architecture Awards and the author of *Contested Symmetries and Other Predicaments in Architecture*. His work has been widely exhibited and published internationally and is in the permanent collections of several museums including The Museum of Modern Art in New York, The Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and the Fogg Museum of Art at Harvard.

Cohen is the Gerald M. McCue Professor of Architecture and Director of the Master in Architecture program at Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

Images captions:

The Herta and Paul Amir Building
View from the Sculpture Garden
Courtesy of Preston Scott Cohen, Inc.

The Herta and Paul Amir Building
Interior view of Lightfall
Courtesy of Preston Scott Cohen, Inc.

About the Tel Aviv Museum of Art

Established in 1932, the Tel Aviv Museum of Art has grown to become an international cultural center with an extensive series of exhibitions which attract over half a million visitors and education programs that serve over 90,000 adults and students each year. Led by Mordechai Omer, Director and Chief Curator since 1995, the Museum organizes roughly 25 new temporary exhibitions yearly of Israeli and international art, permanent and loan collections spanning the major movements in international Modern art, Israeli art from the 1920s on, and a selection of 16th through 19th century art.

The Museum's permanent collection and long-term loans focus on the major trends of modernism, from Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, through to the main avant-garde streams of the early 20th century, the School of Paris, the New York School, and up to the art of the 1960s, including masterpieces such as Friedericke Maria Beer, 1916, by Gustav Klimt and Untitled Improvisation V, 1914, by Wassily Kandinsky, as well as renowned works by Pierre Bonnard, Paul Cézanne, Marc Chagall, Henri Matisse, Joan Miró, Amedeo Modigliani, Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso, Pierre Auguste Renoir, and Chaim Soutine, among others.

A leading advocate for Israel's artistic legacy, the Museum's Israeli Art Collection reflects the history of Palestine and the State of Israel, tracing its development from the 1920s — which marked the beginning of the Modernist style of painting in Israel — to recent paintings, sculpture and installation works by contemporary artists.

Several temporary exhibitions each year, curated by the Department of Israeli Art, feature group shows, major retrospectives of established artists, one-person shows of established and young artists and exhibitions of historical or thematic topics, such as "The Seventies in Israeli Art", "Portraits" "Virtual Reality" and many others. Museum awards are presented annually and serve both to encourage local artists and to enhance the Museum's collections: the Dr. Haim Gamzu Prize for the Advancement of the Arts - from the Gamzu and Aptowitzer Funds; the Leon Constantiner Photography Prize for a Young Israeli Artist; the Mendel and Eva Pudnik Prize for Israeli Art; the Eugen Kolb Prize for Israeli Graphic Art; Isracard and Tel Aviv Museum of Art Prize for an Israeli Artist and the Nathan Gottesdiener Prize for an Israeli Artist. For more information on the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, please visit www.tamuseum.com

About the American Friends of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art

The American Friends of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art (AFTAM) is a non-profit organization founded in 1978 for the purpose of raising financial support, securing works of art for the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, and raising awareness of the Museum nationwide.

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