



Opus 36

**Rafael Moneo, Audrey Jones Beck Building, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston**

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The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, is a unique collection of architectural works – the Caroline Wiess Law Building, comprising the original William Ward Watkin Building of 1924 and the 1958 and 1974 additions designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe; the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden created by Isamu Noguchi in 1986; the Central Administration and Glassell Junior School Building designed by Carlos Jimenez in 1994; and now the Audrey Jones Beck Building by Rafael Moneo.

Moneo, winner of the 1996 Pritzker Architecture Prize, has proposed a four-story facility directly facing the Law Building and connected to it via an underground walkway. The limestone building occupies the whole site, thereby reinforcing its urban character. On the inside, visitors can assemble in the dramatic atrium before proceeding to the upper level galleries to begin their itinerary.

The Beck Building is a natural progression of some of the ideas put forth by the architect in previous museum projects, especially the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid and the complex of the Moderna Museet and the Arkitekturmuseet in Stockholm. A collection of rooms is the underlying concept for the gallery spaces. The galleries may seem conventional, but their organization within the building is guided by the desire for freedom. The exhaustive studies undertaken to help design the skylights allow for optimum lighting conditions combining natural and artificial light. Climate, light, circulation through the space, dialogue between the building and art, and simplicity and elegance of materials are once again concerns that the architect has addressed thoughtfully and successfully in the new Beck Building.

Martha Thorne is curator of architecture at The Art Institute of Chicago. After receiving a master of city planning degree from the University of Pennsylvania she resided for many years in Madrid, where she collaborated with architectural publications and curated exhibitions for the Spanish Ministry of Public Works and Urbanism, including *Museums and Architecture: New Perspectives and Building in a New Spain*. Joe C. Aker and Gary Zvonkovic specialize in architectural photography. Aker graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology with an honors degree in professional photography. He taught architectural photography at RIT before establishing his own firm in 1978. Zvonkovic, a graduate of Stephen F. Austin University in Nachodoches, Texas, holds a bachelor of arts and science degree in photography and joined the firm in 1986.

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