Four Museums + A Monument

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In 1921 Kansas City held a national design competition to produce a design for a memorial to those who fought in World War I. Harold van Buren Magonigle’s prize-winning entry contained a tall shaft placed at the edge of the promontory and rising high into the sky, symbolizing the Flame of Inspiration, guarded by the Spirits of Courage, Honor, Patriotism, and Sacrifice, represented as engaged figures at the top. Flanking the shaft were two stripped classical pavilions. These three elements sat on a broad plinth, on the north face of which was inscribed the purpose of the Memorial, visible from Union Station to the north. Two winged sphinxes symbolizing Memory and the Future flanked the approach to the Memorial from the north. A mall, framed in trees, was placed to the south of the Memorial, allowing the future cultural buildings to be sited at its edge. The function, size, and number of those future structures could remain indeterminate and could be added over time without compromising the essential features of the Memorial itself. These “future cultural buildings” were the subject for the fall semester of the Kansas City Academic Program. Students were asked to examine the Liberty Memorial, propose a master plan containing four new museums, choose one of the museums, program that museum, and finally to design and develop it. Presented here are representative drawings and models from the semester. The four museums include a botanical garden, an aquarium, a planetarium and a museum of contemporary art.