

1-1-1986

## Idea vs. Icon: Two Competitions

Jeffrey Clark

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/oz>



Part of the [Architecture Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

---

### Recommended Citation

Clark, Jeffrey (1986) "Idea vs. Icon: Two Competitions," *Oz*: Vol. 8. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2378-5853.1113>

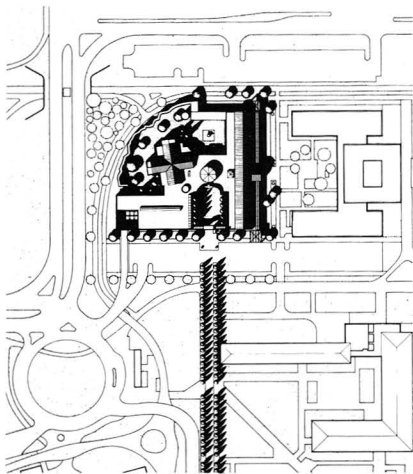
This Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Oz* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact [cads@k-state.edu](mailto:cads@k-state.edu).

## Idea vs Icon: Two Competitions

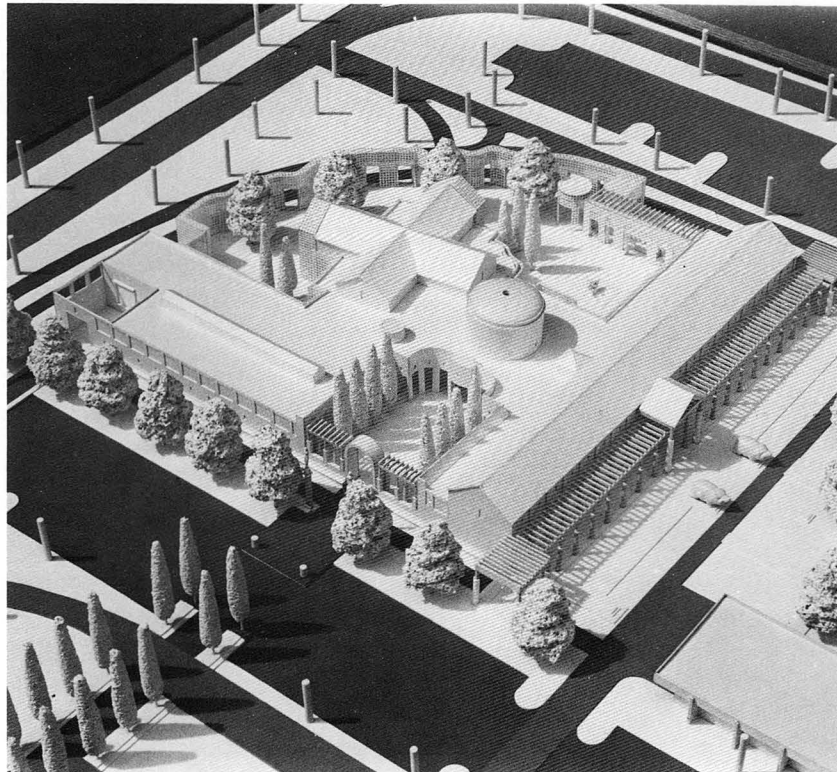
Michael Dennis, Jeffrey Clark, and Associates

Jeffrey Clark

The United States is blessed with a natural landscape that is both expansive and richly varied. Our recent attitude toward the relationship between the built and natural environment, however, has been at best a naively romantic one and at worst an instrument of private exploitation. While this may be an oversimplification of an economic and politically intricate problem, the sprawling uniformity of suburbia, the decay of urban centers produced urban renewal policies, and the demise of the garden — both public and private — are testaments to this prevailing attitude. What is advocated here is a return to both a rigorous and accommodating state of mind — a state of mind endorsed and exemplified in the works of Olmstead, Jefferson, and Wright. It is a sensibility about buildings and their surroundings and an overriding concern for their interrelationship, for their sense of “fit”.



Site plan, Santa Barbara.



Model, Santa Barbara.

Two projects, the Art Museum for the University of California at Santa Barbara and the competition entry for the Arizona Historical Society Museum, address the above concerns. The projects have similar programs, and although their sites are prototypically American, they may be seen as inversions of each other. The Santa Barbara site is a contained, quasi-urban setting with lush vegetation, while the Phoenix site is open, arid, and austere. Our proposals employ common themes to exploit contrasting situations and to achieve in each a heighten-

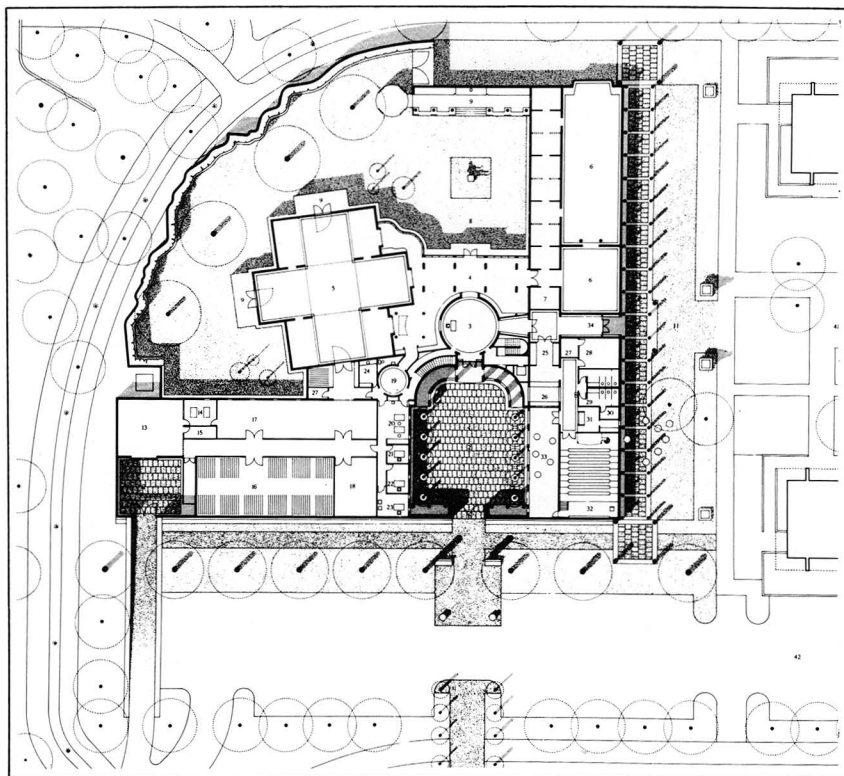
ed sense of the relationship between the project and its site.

The landscape of the Santa Barbara region is a powerful and seductive one. Its idyllic quality is largely due to three factors: the Mediterranean climate, the early settlement of the area by Hispanic culture, and a recently instigated civic program of horticultural and stylistic control. These influences are seen in the terra cotta roofs, and stucco-walled structures that dot the hillsides. Eucalyptus, acacia, and bougainvillea, imported from abroad, now flourish in

what was once a rather sparse landscape. Everywhere one sees a rich vocabulary of garden elements — colonnades, trellised pergolas, terraces, shaped hedges, shaded courtyard spaces, and fountains. The predominate styles of building are the Mission style and the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The latter of the two is significant in that it also promoted the development of formal gardens in the area.

The UCSB campus is located about ten miles from downtown Santa Barbara on an 800 acre promontory on the Pacific seashore. It is bounded on the south by a lagoon and the Pacific Ocean, with views to the Channel Islands on the horizon. There are spectacular views of the Santa Ynez mountain range to the north across Goleta Valley. The main campus comprises some forty buildings loosely organized around lush vegetation — a kind of architectural petri dish — and is laced by an extensive system of separate pedestrian and bicycle paths. The dormitories and student services are to the south, while classroom buildings, the administration building, the auditorium, and the new museum site are to the north.

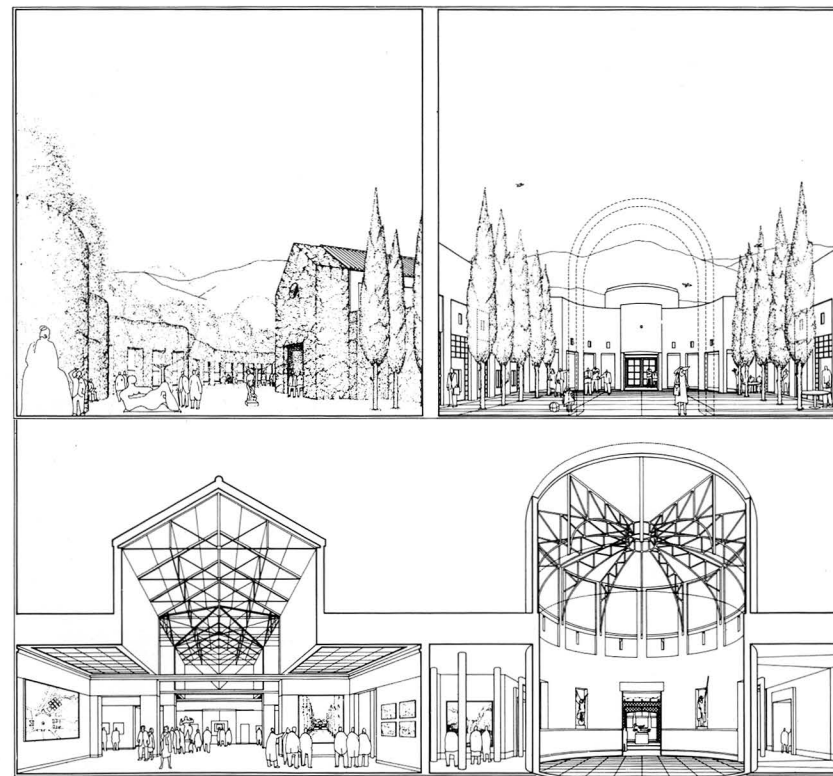
The site for the new museum is at the extreme northern edge of the campus between the administration building and the main campus entry road. A major north-south pedestrian route terminates at the site and an important east-west route passes by the staff parking lot on the south side. Mature trees exist on all



Ground floor plan, Santa Barbara.

sides, helping to screen the main roads to the north and west and the public parking on the north. Students approach the site primarily from the south and east, while the main public access is from the north and east. The site is characterized by a lush and loosely organized configuration of buildings and vegetation and presents no pronounced formal qualities or site pressures. Indeed, it is quite insular and introverted. Our strategy for the project was to clarify and emphasize the existing site elements through the invention and elaboration of new events.

The program for the new facility called for a building to house four major areas: a permanent gallery and changing exhibits gallery, a service and storage area, an administration area and a program/research area. The last would contain the print room, the architectural drawing collection, and an auditorium for one hundred persons that would be accessible after hours. The program requested that both galleries be as flexible as possible and that an outdoor space for sculpture be provided between the new building and the administration building. Future expansion is accom-

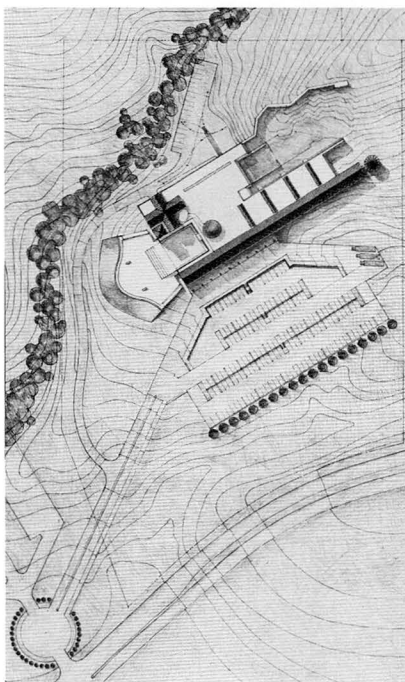


Top, garden and entry court; bottom, changing exhibits gallery and rotunda.

modated through internal modification and the addition of distinct building pieces.

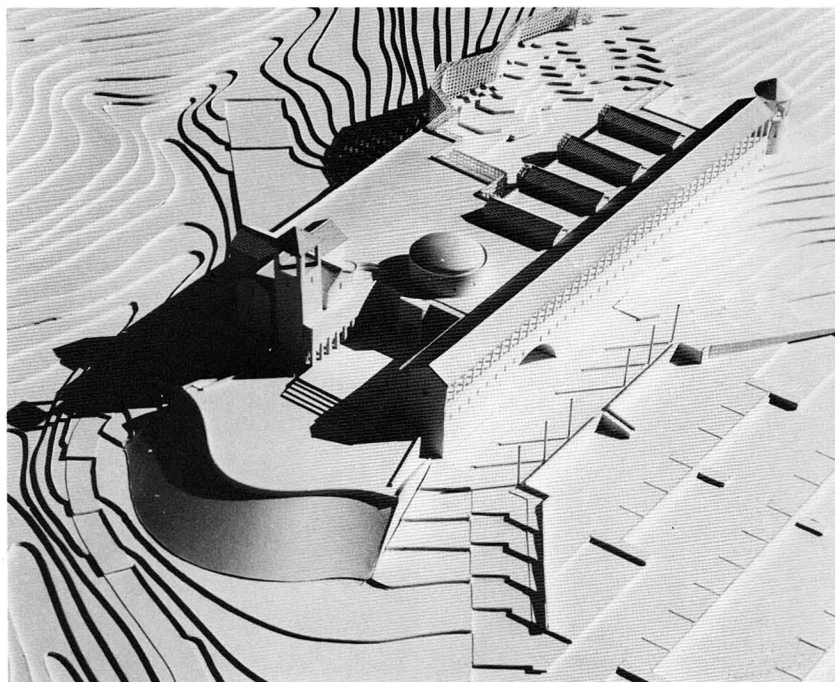
A university art museum should be an effective structure for the display of art, a campus and civic center, and perhaps a good place to be even without its art. It differs from a public museum because it fulfills a didactic role as well as a social function. It is a place to be visited frequently — a place that is inviting, comfortable, and intimate. Like a public institution it should also reflect the uniqueness of the setting — both the im-

mediate physical context and the imagery of the general area. Inspiration was found in such models as Spanish missions and French and Roman courtyard houses. The format of these building types — their aggregate form — demonstrates a range of both articulate spaces (gardens, courtyards, rooms) and solids (buildings, pavilions, loggias) as well as fragmentary and ambiguous elements. These models offered strategies of order, scale, and adaptability appropriate to site and program demands, therefore the project was conceived of as a large courtyard house.



Site plan, Phoenix.

There are three major exterior spaces: a formal entry court that aligns with the major north-south pedestrian way, a pergola and sculpture terrace to the east facing the Administration Building, and a picturesque private garden with concomitant exhibition temple to the north and west. Entrance is from the south or east into a central rotunda and then through security control into an inner hall facing the garden. To the left is the changing exhibit space — a large rectangular volume with a cruciform superimposed on it; to the right is the permanent collection — a long, high gallery bounded by small *cabinets*. A service court and the service spaces connect directly to the changing exhibits



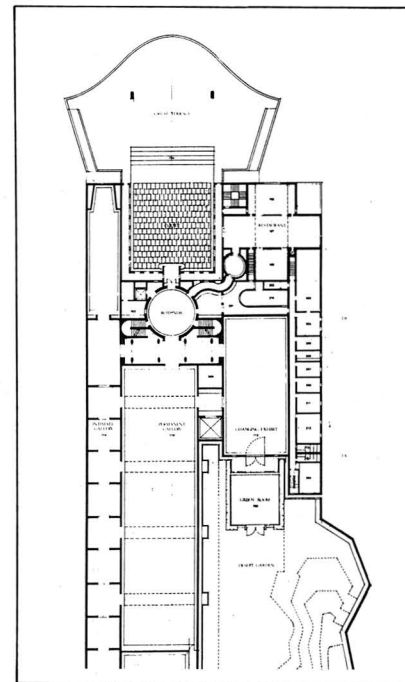
Model, Phoenix.

area, and the adjacent administration area overlooks the entry court. The fourth quadrant is occupied by the research areas on a mezzanine, and by the auditorium and a cafe outside the security area on the ground floor. If the galleries are independently secured, the public sequence of court, rotunda, hall, and garden may be used when the museum itself is closed.

The building is composed of elements from the long tradition of museum architecture: court, colonnade, *cabinet*, gallery, garden, and rotunda. Since these are also part of the local typology, the resultant ensemble was intended to suggest connections between remote places

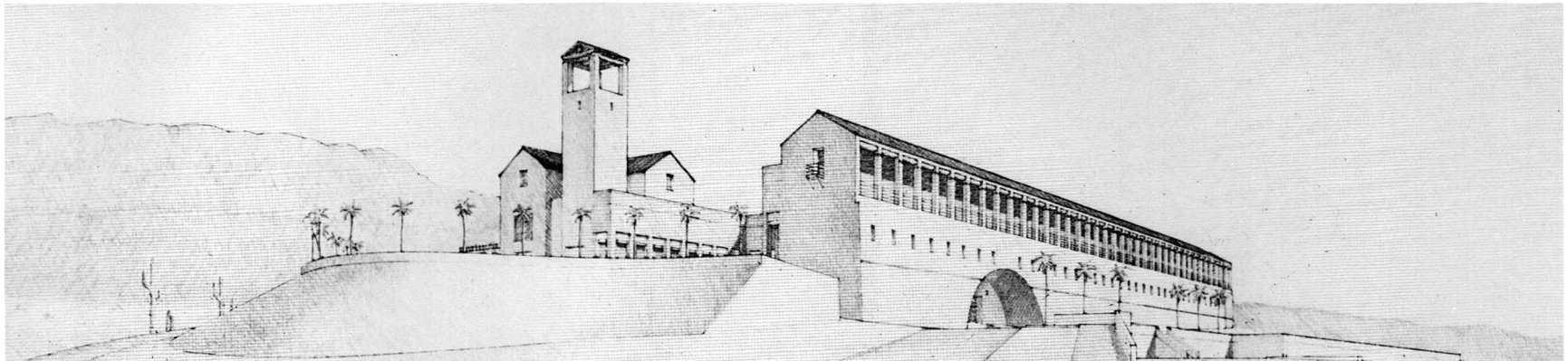
and between past and present as well.

In contrast to the Santa Barbara site, the Phoenix parcel is open and extroverted. Phoenix is located in the Salt River Valley, a flat plain punctuated by formations of mountains and buttes. The Arizona Historical Society Museum is situated on a ten-acre parcel overlooking this valley. It is a bald, undulating topography with native, Sonoran Desert vegetation — saguaro cactus, creosote bush, palo verde, and brittlebush. It is abutted by Papago Park to the north, a small public park to the east, low rise commercial offices to the west, and low-rise residential to the south.

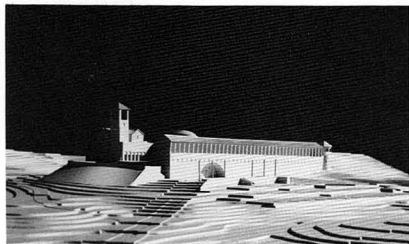


Partial second floor plan, (main floor).

The intention of the project was to make an economically compact and volumetrically assertive freestanding building and to preserve the natural features of the site. This had two effects: an elevated sense of the site, and the advertisement of the museum as a cultural oasis and civic icon. Accordingly, the images of an Acropolis or a reconstituted, secular version of St. Francis of Assisi served as catalytic agents for the design (as did indigenous adobe courtyard houses and churches). These models were seen as a formal hybrid, a pliable architectural tissue into which significant figures/spaces of the program could be carved or embedded. Further, the models' envelopes might



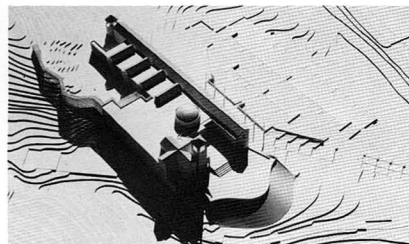
Approach view, Phoenix.



Southeast view.

exhibit properties of "hardness" and "softness" commensurate with the publicness or privateness of the orientation.

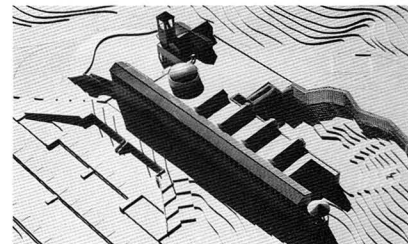
The project is composed of four distinct pieces formed about the basic body of the building: a two story elevated, colonnade forming a public facade to the south, a great public room and terrace orientated to the west and the principal view, a cruciform shaped structure containing public amenities at the north, and a natural garden to the west engaging building and hillside. These elements are concentrated along a plateau at the back of the site, which gives varied courts and gardens



Southwest view.

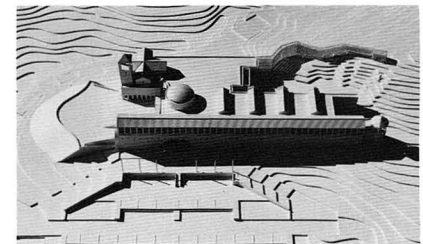
panoramic views. The landscaping is minimal, with controlled areas confined to the immediate vicinity of the building, and the rest of the site left as native desert. Parking is organized along low terraces that form a base for the building and screen the cars from College Avenue.

Both the public and group entrances are on the lower level off the entry terrace. The gift shop, classrooms, auditorium, and multimedia auditorium are located here. Circulation then rises to the rotunda on the main level. This central space leads to the colonnaded court, the amphitheater, and the great terrace overlooking the southern vistas. The



Northeast view.

rotunda also grants access to the temporary and permanent exhibit areas, which may be experienced independently or as a loop. Secure outdoor courts terminate each gallery sequence, and the desert garden is visible from the changing exhibit area. An outdoor gallery (above the intimate galleries) complete the exhibition sequence and provides both protected display space and spectacular views of the landscape. Service is at the rear of the building on the lower level. The service elevator connects directly to the collections loading dock and rises between the temporary and permanent galleries. Curatorial and service areas are on the lower level, and the museum administration is on the main



East view.

level and mezzanine overlooking the wash to the southwest. Thus both the building's functional arrangement and its formal disposition are directly related to the landscape.

The competitions might be seen as solutions to contrasting prototypical problems, but in both cases the salient characteristics of the site and the context had to be understood and translated into decisive formal events. It is only through intensifying the characteristics of the landscape that our awareness is heightened and enriched.