

Mimi Zeiger

NEW MUSEUMS

CONTEMPORARY
MUSEUM
ARCHITECTURE
AROUND
THE WORLD

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UNIVERSE

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Nevada Museum of Art Reno, Nevada 2003

William Bruder

Located at the meeting of the eastern edge of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the expanse of the High Desert, the "Biggest Little City in the World" has an uneasy relationship with its landscape. Gold rush mineshafts riddle the foothills, while Reno's casino strip boasts storefront wedding chapels and nickel slots. Against this eclectic backdrop stands the Nevada Museum of Art (NMA), Donald W. Reynolds Center for the Visual Arts, E. L. Wiegand Gallery, designed by Arizona architect Will Bruder. A swooping gesture in black zinc, the building sits like an artifact in a grid of office buildings and porch-fronted houses.

The formal design of the museum was inspired in part by the black rock formations located a couple of hours outside of Reno in the High Desert. The NMA's curving, striated wall resembles the geologic layering of a dark convex mesa. Rising out of a ground-level sculpture garden, the folded zinc wall, supported by nine steel columns, dramatically tilts from 5 to 12 degrees depending on the viewer's location. "The building is a sculpture, part of the museum's collection," says Bruder of the four-story metal facade. "I knew it had to be black, because we were in a town of ephemeral, pale, and turquoise buildings."¹⁸

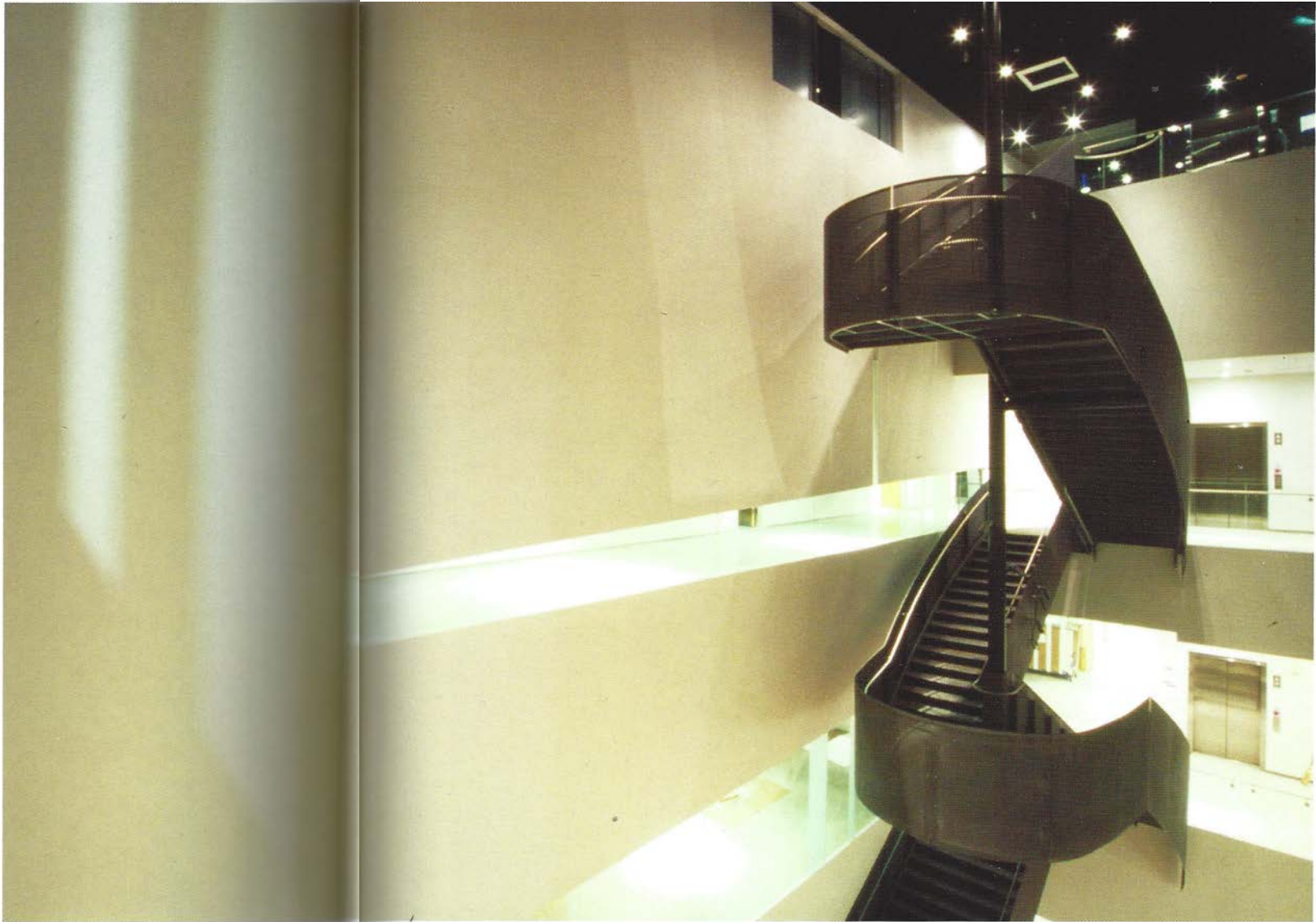
Less severe than the exterior, the interior is shocking in its lightness. A white atrium allows for the play of bright spots and shadows. Galleries spiral around a metal stairway suspended by a single beam in the atrium ceiling. Transitions from floor to floor and between galleries are surprisingly casual. Interior windows and openings give the space a fluid transparency. "The building is like a camera that the photographers use on the landscapes," explains Bruder. "The surrounding buildings respond to the museum, each talking about its own time in history." Each floor offers a different view of the city. The second-floor windows frame details of nearby houses and panoramic views of the neighborhood. At the third level, the rake of the windows mimics the rake of the mountain range on the horizon.

"The Altered Landscape," a large piece of the NMA's permanent collection, provided rich conceptual material for the architect to draw upon. The collection, begun in 1998, features contemporary landscape photography whose imagery describes the topography of the West: nuclear test blast sites and mine shafts, military bases, and sprawling suburbs. The parapet walls of the 8,000-square-foot Nightingale Rooftop Gallery rise and fall to block or reveal that landscape. The largest opening offers an idealized perspective of Reno, while another outdoor room frames nothing but the sky. Bruder's sensitivity to context allows for a building that is an object, a gestural sculpture, but one that is also connected to the Wild West mythology of its haphazard landscape.





Page 175: Facade viewed from sculpture plaza with Nancy Dwyer's *Inhale/Exhale* (2002)
Above: Permanent gallery designed for Robert Beckmann's *Body of a House* (1993)
Right: Atrium





Above: Entrance to museum offices with Frederic Tchobardjian's *Stainless Spin* (2003)
Opposite: Nightingale Rooftop Gallery with Ilan Averbuch's *Shadow of the Sun* (2003)

