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**THE ART OF
INDUSTRY:
ARCHITECTS
ROMANCE THE
MACHINE**

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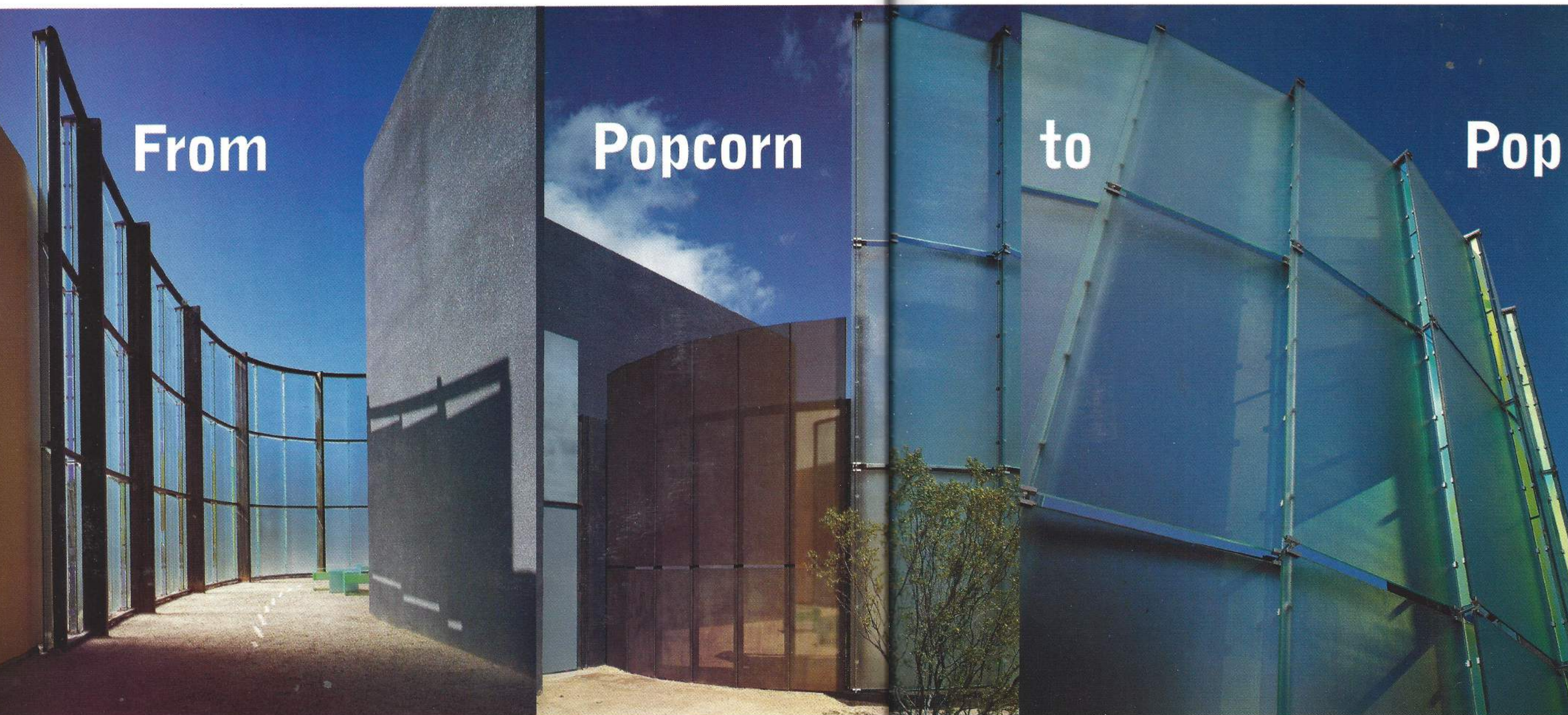
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From

Popcorn

to

Pop Art



Will Bruder transforms a Scottsdale, Arizona, cinema into a cultural landmark.

By Lawrence W. Cheek



New black paint on museum's boxy south elevation (facing page, top) has insinuation of purple, like colors of surrounding mountains' shadowy fissures at twilight. Curving steel screen (facing page, top, at left) conceals loading dock; glass wall at opposite end of building (facing page, top, at right) encloses sculpture garden. Shimmering, galvanized steel addition at west side of former theater (facing page, bottom, and below) contains new entrance to museum. Industrial metal cladding has few precedents in stucco-covered Scottsdale, but takes on artistic polish as it reflects desert light. Indented front door (below) relates to adjoining civic center complex.

Enough Will Bruder buildings are sprinkled around Phoenix, Arizona, that people almost know what to expect from the 52-year-old architect: subtle calligraphy of light, sly manipulations of scale, the exaltation of industrial materials and mechanical giblets. What's unexpected in the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMOCA) is Bruder's role as archaeologist. Here, he has excavated and exhibited the bones of a 25-year-old workaday building as if they were the precious artifacts of a vanished culture.

The building that now houses the 20,000-square-foot museum was a five-box dollar cinema in Scottsdale's downtown civic center complex. The city snapped up the building for \$1.5 million and gave Bruder a \$3 million design and construction budget, along with an exhausting list of functional demands. "We wanted the building to have a sculptural and architectural presence," explains SMOCA director Robert Knight, "but we also needed to be able to drive a 10-foot cube on a forklift anywhere inside, while maintaining a constant temperature and humidity. Frankly, I didn't expect a lot of architecture."

Bruder kept the old building's concrete block shell and stucco jacket, and also the interior walls that had divided it into five assorted-sized theaters. He transformed the formerly beige stucco with a coat of "Curtain Call" black paint. Inside, Bruder opened up the theater's flimsy 2-by-4 wooden ceiling trusses as if to reveal just how Sun Belt developers did things in the 1970s.

Whether or not museum-goers consciously dig Bruder's archaeology, the galleries provide a welcoming harbor for contemporary art. The nearly 17-foot-high ceilings accommodate large-scale sculpture and contemporary-art quirkiness, such as a wall sculpture of matchsticks and a dynamite fuse that was set on fire at the museum's inaugural show in February. Linking the backs of four galleries, a slightly curving plywood and drywall partition subtly infuses the space with energy. Eleven rectangular skylights above galleries provoked Bruder to enthuse about his memories of magic light in Istanbul, Turkey, and Granada, Spain. "Pragmatism had to drive the horse," he says. "Then we found ways to wrap the poetry into it."

More of that poetry comes in a hot dog bun-shaped addition grafted onto the theater's west side. It incorporates the museum's entrance, an information booth, gift shop, planned cybercafé, sculpture garden, and a sculptural glass wall by artist James Carpenter. It also provides a transition from the lingering ambience of old Scottsdale—the international mecca of high-end cowboy art—into a hip, provocative space.

The bun's exterior is a crust of galvanized steel panels that begins to sip the color of the sky in late afternoons, then virtually vanishes into it. This is classic Bruder—convincing ordinary industrial materials to make artistic gestures. The portal resides in a graceful indent, nodding to the adjacent Scottsdale Civic Center buildings. Inside,

space flows fluidly from the information booth through the store to the café, then funnels visitors logically toward the galleries.

Carpenter's curved glass "Scrim Wall" succeeds in advertising the museum to the street but unfortunately doesn't do enough with the sunlight. Throughout the day, panes of patterned and dichroic glass refract sunlight into spears of color that fall on a nearby earth wall, but with such intense light available, it's disappointing that the show isn't more dramatic. Behind Carpenter's wall is an open sculpture court, which will be a solar oven through the six-month Arizona summer.

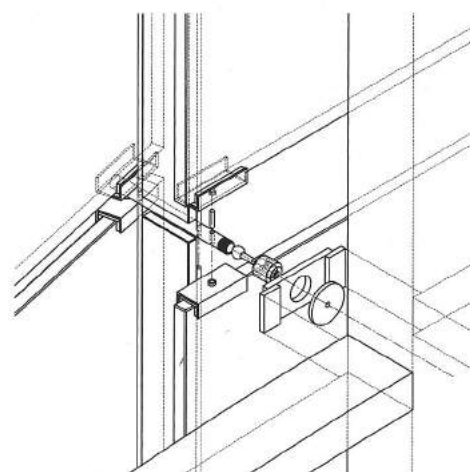
Elsewhere in the museum, Bruder's usual attention to detail appears repeatedly. Steel fins soar from the museum store bookshelf dividers. Bruder even bestows a work room with an elegantly curved concrete block wall and a window slit. "If you respect the staff, they do a better job," Bruder insists.

SMOCA is a swirl of old and new, cheap and sophisticated, industrial and artistic; consequently, it reflects the unpredictable and improvisational nature of contemporary American art. You wouldn't hang a Monet here, just as you wouldn't ignite a wall of matches at New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art. SMOCA isn't a museum for the ages, but an inexpensive and dramatic beachhead for contemporary art. As the opening of this museum proves, Scottsdale is trading in its image as the home of sentimental Western art for that of a sophisticated and progressive city. ■





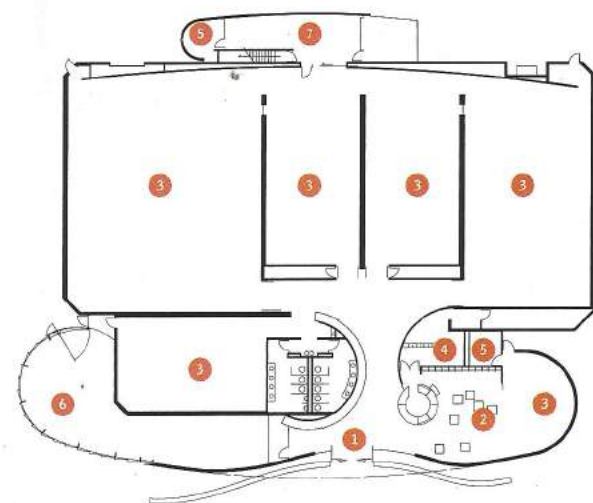
Artist James Carpenter's "Scrim Wall" (above left) encloses open, sun-washed sculpture court that adjoins museum entrance. Steel armature supports individual panes of laminated, patterned glass (above right and detail) that refract sunlight into bright shards of color.



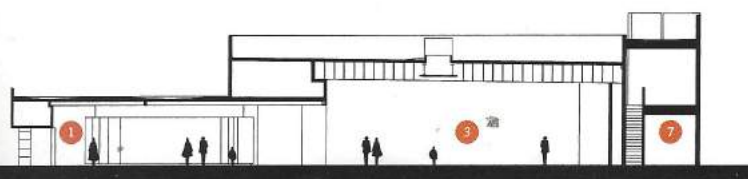
Detail of glass wall assembly

- 1 entrance
- 2 bookstore
- 3 gallery
- 4 workroom
- 5 office
- 6 sculpture garden
- 7 holding/delivery area

GERARD L. CAFESJIAN PAVILION,
SCOTTSDALE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART,
SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA
CLIENT: Scottsdale Cultural Council
ARCHITECT: William P. Bruder-Architect, New River, Arizona—Will Bruder (principal), Rob Gaspard (project manager), Donna Barry, Tim Christ, Saskia Harth, Ben Nesbeitt (project team)
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Steve Martino & Associates Design
ENGINEERS: Rudow & Berry (structural); Baltes/Valentino Associates (mechanical, electrical)
CONSULTANTS: Lighting Dynamics (lighting); Wardin-Cockriel & Associates (acoustics); Construction Consultants (cost)
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Howard S. Wright Construction
COST: \$2.1 million
PHOTOGRAPHER: Timothy Hursley



Main-floor plan 1"=22'/7m



East-west section 1"=16'/5m



Bruder transformed interior of former cinemas into galleries, maintaining original divisions between theaters and exposing existing 2-by-4 wooden trusses (top left and right). Exposed structure provides support for hanging sculptures above 17-foot-high galleries. Bruder designed colorful fiberglass benches (top left). Curving wall of entrance addition encloses bookstore (above left). Recent exhibit that displayed Bruder's work (above right) included elements of architect's tough-but-sleek material palette.

COURTESY OF JAMES CARPENTER DESIGN (ABOVE RIGHT)