



Educator's Guide
Everything but the Art:
Brief Descriptions of the Des Moines Art Center,
Architects, Acquisition Process, and Jobs

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Disclaimer

1. *As with all architecture and artwork, optimal viewing is in person.*
2. *To schedule a guided tour please see*
<http://www.desmoinesartcenter.org/visit/guided-tours.aspx>

Table of Contents

1. Brief History of the Des Moines Art Center
2. Brief Biography of the Des Moines Art Center's Architects
3. Brief Description of the Acquisition Process and Breakdown of the Permanent Collections
4. Brief Descriptions of Jobs at the Des Moines Art Center

Brief History of the Des Moines Art Center

The Des Moines Art Center opened its doors to the public on June 2, 1948 but its history began long before. The Des Moines Association of Fine Arts was founded in 1916 with the purpose of bringing exhibitions to Des Moines and to buy artworks for a future museum.

In 1941 the name changed to the Des Moines Art Center and in addition to exhibitions, art classes for adults and children were introduced. These art classes became an important part of the institution and the reason for naming the organization the Des Moines Art Center not the Des Moines Art Museum.

The Des Moines Art Center was housed in many temporary locations, the first being the second floor of the Des Moines Public Library located at 1st Street and Locust Avenue. The Des Moines Art Center was interested in having a permanent location and was fortunate to receive a large sum of money, half a million dollars, from James D. Edmundson when he died in 1933. James, who was a lawyer, real-estate investor and scholar, was born in a log cabin near Burlington in 1838 when Iowa was still a territory.

James stipulated that his money remain untouched for 10 years, because he died in the middle of the Great Depression and knew that the economy would improve and therefore his money would gain interest over time. The money was meant to be used for the creation of a permanent building, maintaining the building, buying artworks, and having free admission for at least three days a week and all holidays.

Additionally, James determined that the permanent building must be built east of 14th Street because the smoke from burning coal was a nuisance and would damage artwork. With all of these conditions in mind, in 1940 the City of Des Moines designated land in Greenwood Park for the Des Moines Art Center.

The Rose Garden was already established in Greenwood Park so the Board of Trustees (see description on page 6) of the Des Moines Art Center created some rules for the building. The building “must blend in with Greenwood Park, be low so as to hug the ground and become part of the existing landscape.” Also, the outside of the building must be covered in Lannon limestone, which matched the limestone columns in the Rose Garden.

After an architectural design competition in 1944, the Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen was selected. Eliel’s design was chosen due to the flatness of the buildings and roof lines, which fit nicely into the park setting.

See images of the Des Moines Art Center in the accompanying image document.

Brief Biography of the Des Moines Art Center's Architects

As explained in the history on page one, Eliel Saarinen was selected to build the permanent home for the Des Moines Art Center. As the Des Moines Art Center collected more and more artwork, the building needed to expand. Two architects were selected to create additions. The first is I.M. Pei, whose building opened in 1968, and in 1985 the second addition by Richard Meier opened.



Eliel Saarinen



Exterior of Eliel Saarinen's building (photography © Cameron Campbell)

Eliel was born in 1873 in Rantasalmi, Finland, he died in 1950 in Michigan. Saarinen was educated at the Helsinki University of Technology. After graduating he worked in an architecture firm designing buildings and worked on city planning – designing entire cities from roads to buildings. He even designed the Finnish bank notes (like the United States Dollar) introduced in 1922.

He moved to the United States in 1923 after he entered the Chicago Tribune Tower design competition, and was awarded second place. In 1925 he was asked to design the Cranbrook Educational Community, which includes the Cranbrook Academy of Art and Art Museum, located near Detroit, Michigan. He was also a professor at the University of Michigan in the Architecture Department. Eliel believed that architects should “always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context - a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan.”

Eliel's U-shaped building contains gallery and office space, courtyard with reflecting pool, and the museum shop. Additionally, there is a wing for the important studios for adult and children's art classes. He also included an auditorium; however, in 1968 the auditorium was moved into the first addition created by I.M. Pei (see description on page 4) and the space was converted into galleries.

In 2004, Eliel's Des Moines Art Center building was elected to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. It is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources.



I.M. Pei



Exterior of I.M. Pei building (photography © Cameron Campbell)

I.M. Pei (I.M. stands for Ieoh Ming) was born in Canton, China, in 1917. He was raised in Hong Kong and Shanghai. When he was 18 years old he moved to the United States to study architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, but quickly transferred to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I.M. was interested in modern architecture with its straight lines and use of glass and metal.

I.M. designed many well known structures in the United States and abroad, such as the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, Massachusetts, the pyramid at the Louvre Museum in Paris, France, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio, and the Mesa Laboratory for the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado. I.M. believes that architects must work with their clients, "It is not an individual act, architecture. You have to consider your client. Only out of that can you produce great architecture."

I.M.'s design for the addition to the Art Center was simple: a wing built across the open end of Saarinen's U-shaped building on a slope. Because of the gently sloping site, he was able to design a two-story gallery without overwhelming Eliel Saarinen's low-lying building. In fact, most visitors don't notice the addition when walking up the Art Center. The addition is made from concrete that has a rough finish created from a technique called bushhammering. This addition holds large paintings and sculptures. The auditorium was moved to the lower level of this structure.

On a lighter side, though I.M. has always denied it, it has been observed that the windows on the south face of the addition appear to spell out the architect's name, Pei.

In 1983, I.M. won the Pritzker Prize, sometimes called the Nobel Prize of architecture.

In 2004, I.M.'s Des Moines Art Center addition was elected to the National Register of Historic Places (see description on page 3).



Richard Meier



Exterior of Richard Meier building (photography © Cameron Campbell)

Richard Meier was born in 1934 in Newark, New Jersey. He earned a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Cornell University in 1957. After graduating he worked for two architecture firms before starting his own practice in New York in 1963. Richard has not deviated too far from his personal design beliefs – he uses white forms, often squares, made from enameled panels as well as glass. Additionally, he uses long handrails and ramps to create graceful lines. Richard talks about his use of white: “White is the most wonderful color because within it you can see all the colors of the rainbow. The whiteness of white is never just white; it is almost always transformed by light and that which is changing; the sky, the clouds, the sun and the moon.”

In addition to designing a wing of the Des Moines Art Center, Richard has also worked on several other museums including the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, and the Getty Center in Los Angeles, California. He’s designed private homes in places like Florida and Michigan to China and Malaysia. He even designed an elementary school in Indiana.

Richard’s design for the second addition utilized his signature sweeping curves and white porcelain-coated metal panels on the exterior of the building. He combined this with granite for the first time to offset the white panels and to complement Eliel’s use of Lannon limestone. The space includes a restaurant, galleries, offices, and storage areas for artwork not on public view.

In 1984, Richard won the Pritzker Prize.

Brief Description of the Acquisition Process and Breakdown of the Permanent Collections

The Des Moines Art Center is privileged to receive money from many sources to buy artworks; the Art Center also accepts donations of artworks. Both methods of acquiring (obtaining) artworks require approval from two different groups associated with the Art Center.

The Art Center's Director (see description on page 7) makes artwork purchase recommendations to the Acquisition Committee. If the Acquisition Committee approves the purchase, the Chairperson of the Acquisition Committee presents the artwork to the full Board of Trustees for final approval. Donations of artwork are subject to the same process as purchasing an artwork.

The Art Center is focused on collecting paintings, sculpture, works on paper, and photography made after 1945, although special consideration will be made for older artworks and artworks that don't fit into the listed categories.

The Acquisition Committee is made up of 16 people who are knowledgeable about art and the Art Center. The committee members are selected and approved by the Board of Trustees.

The Board of Trustees is made up of a maximum of 29 people who oversee all of the activities at the Art Center and the Director reports to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees at the Art Center is like the School Board for any school district.

The following is a list of objects that are a part of the Art Center's permanent collections as of July 2011.

- Paintings: 352
- Sculpture: 259
- Prints: 2,888
- Works on Paper: 609
- Video: 7
- Photography: 409
- Textile: 6
- Tribal: 124

At any given time, only 4-7% of the permanent collections are on view in the galleries.

Brief Description of Jobs at the Des Moines Art Center

There are many people that work at the Des Moines Art Center, below are descriptions of six departments. To work in any of these departments you need a college degree, for some departments you need a master's degree.

1. **Administration:** this department is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Art Center and includes the Director, who is like a school principal.
2. **Curatorial:** this department is responsible for deciding which artworks are displayed in the galleries. This department also researches and decides the theme/artist for special exhibitions and writes labels and exhibition catalogues.
3. **Development:** this department is responsible for raising money and exposure for the Art Center through memberships, special events, and grant writing.
4. **Installations:** this department is responsible for placing, or installing, the artwork in the galleries and at the Pappajohn Sculpture Park. This department works closely with the curatorial and registration departments.
5. **Museum and Studio Education:** this department is responsible for educating Art Center visitors. The museum education department educates people about the artworks in the galleries. The studio education department educates people about making art through hands-on classes.
6. **Registration:** this department is responsible for the care of the artwork. Before and after an artwork is moved either within the museum or across an ocean, this department takes careful notes to make sure the artwork remains safe and in the same condition.