

PROJECT 02

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN RELIGION

ARC 3210 | Architecture Design Studio IV | Prof. Brandon Ro, AIA, NCARB, ICAA

DESIGN BRIEF

See course website via Canvas for additional info

TOPIC



“A visit to a museum is a search for beauty, truth, and meaning in our lives. Go to museums as often as you can.”

– **Maira Kalman**, American illustrator

“To preserve the past is to save the future...”

– **Nanette L. Avery**, Writer

“Museums are the cemeteries of the arts.”

– **Alphonse de Lamartine**, French writer



“Museums are like the quiet car of the world. It’s a place you can come to escape, where there’s authenticity, there’s uniqueness, there’s calm, there’s physicality.”

– **Thomas P. Campbell**, Museum director

“Real museums are places where Time is transformed into Space.”

– **Orhan Pamuk**, Turkish novelist

“Small museums are great. Big museums are a drag.”

– **Peter Zumthor**, Swiss architect



“The task involved in bringing together the petrified remnants of yesterday and the life of today provides a vivid illustration of what tradition always means: not just the careful preservation of monuments, but the constant interaction between our aims in the present and the past to which we still belong.”

– **Hans-Georg Gadamer**, German philosopher



“All art forms – such as sculpture, painting, music, cinema and architecture – are specific modes of thinking. They represent ways of sensory and embodied thought characteristic to the particular artistic medium. These modes of thinking are images of the hand and the body and they exemplify essential existential knowledge. Instead of being mere visual aestheticization, architecture, for instance, is a mode of existential and metaphysical philosophising through the means of space, structure, matter, gravity and light. Profound architecture does not merely beautify the setting of dwelling; great buildings articulate the experience of our very existence.”

– **Juhani Pallasmaa**, *The Thinking Hand* (2009).

“Under no circumstances should you reject a good design solution for the sole reason that it is well-known, that it has been done before, or that it is not new.”

– **George Gromort**, French architect

MUSEUM TYPOLOGIES

Since museums are places where historical, artistic, and cultural artifacts are displayed for onlookers, the designer must consider the layout and type of galleries to be provided. The various methods in which artifacts are displayed is referred to as its curatorial strategy. Since this can affect the architectural design of a building, it is important that the designer understands the different types of curatorial strategies that have emerged in museum studies over the years. Each method has different views on the role of “back of house” and “front of house” programs. The various curatorial strategies and types of museums include:

- (Auto)Biographical Museum
- Black Cube Museum
- Indexical Museum
- Narrative Museum
- Unstable Museum
- White Cube Museum

When contemplating curatorial strategy, the designer must also consider whether the experience of the museum should fall into one of two categories: Should the architectural experience be treated as an event where the building takes the front stage and the artifacts are strung along for the ride? Or, should the architecture provide a more subtle (even silent) backdrop where the primary actors are the artifacts themselves? While buildings in and of themselves can serve as historical texts, the challenge is to get the architecture and artifacts on the same sheet of music. Classical architecture can provide a method where all parties can sing the same melody.

In addition to these challenges, the designer must learn to balance the shifting design priorities that arise when considering client-user needs, site planning, civic presence, socio-political values, architectural programming, religio-cultural ideals, and contextual issues.



Conceptual rendering of the National Museum of American Religion (© NMAR)

DESIGN CHALLENGE

A non-profit organization has made the strategic decision to invest in the creation of a new 100,000 square foot museum in Washington, DC. This museum is specifically dedicated to the ideal of religious freedom, as articulated in the first amendment of the US Constitution. The overarching goal is to create a nationally recognized center that “explores the impact of religion on America, and America on religion.” The museum will present, interpret, and educate the “public about the impact of America’s fragile experiment with religious freedom on the United States and the lives of people who have made this country their home. It seeks to inspire civil dialogue and debates about this complex and moving story, while also challenging assumptions and understandings about religion’s impact on history and contemporary life.”¹

In pursuit of this vision, the non-profit is actively exploring potential partnerships with various religious institutions, the Smithsonian Institution, and the American Alliance of Museums. It is also currently engaged in negotiations with the National Park Service to address site development requirements for placing the building on the far southwest corner of the National Mall.

¹ See the National Museum of American Religion’s “Mission, Vision, and Values.” <https://nmar.org/who-we-are/>

The National Museum of Religious Freedom will serve as a dedicated space for the display and interpretation of religion in American history. The ultimate aim is to offer an immersive, inclusive, and interactive museum experience. Through this experience, the museum seeks to explore and highlight the profound impact of religion on America by emphasizing the ongoing narrative of religious freedom.

As an architecture student, your challenge is to design a space that not only fulfills the organization's mission and vision but also engages visitors in meaningful ways. Your design proposal should strive to foster a deeper understanding of the historical and contemporary significance of religious freedom in the United States.



Conceptual renderings of the National Museum of American Religion (© NMAR)

DESIGN OBJECTIVES

Inclusivity and Accessibility: Create a space that welcomes individuals from diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and abilities. Ensure that the design is accessible to all visitors, including those with disabilities.

Narrative Flow: Develop a cohesive narrative flow that guides visitors through the history of religion and religious freedom in America. The design should facilitate a journey of discovery, appreciation, examination, and understanding.

Interactive Engagement: Incorporate interactive elements that encourage visitors to actively engage with the exhibits, fostering a deeper understanding of the role of religion in America. Consider the use of technology, hands-on activities, and multimedia displays.

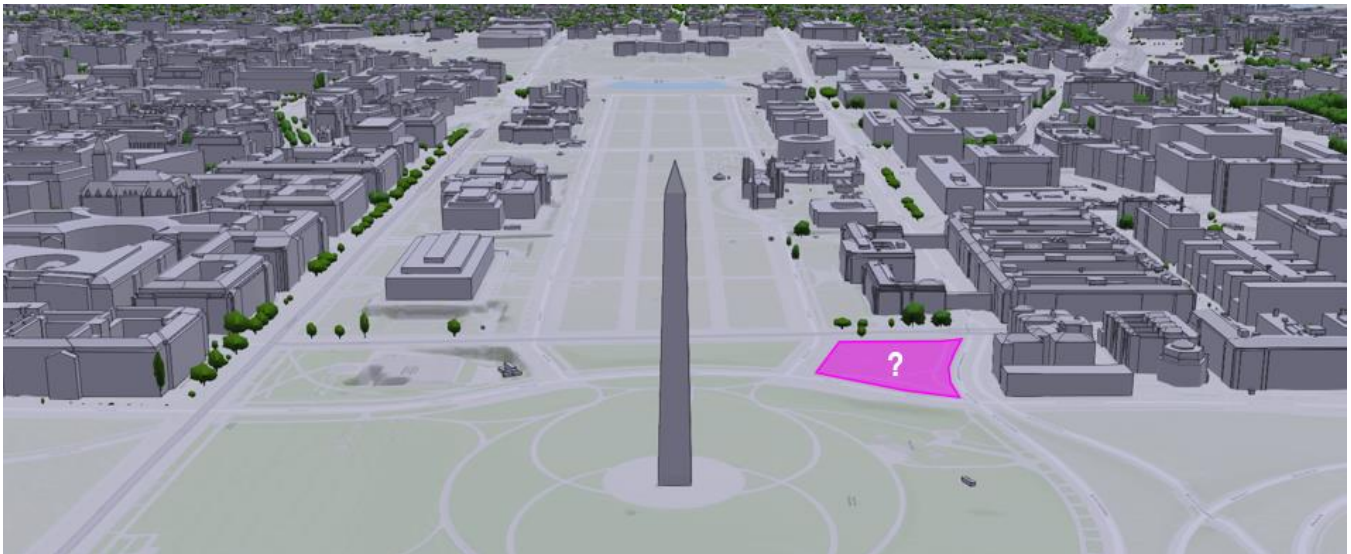
Reflect Values and Mission: Infuse the design with the values of honesty, thoughtfulness, empathy, and relevance that align with the organization's mission. Ensure that the architecture itself communicates the commitment to preserving religious freedom.

Spatial Innovation: Explore innovative spatial configurations that enhance the museum experience. Consider how the layout and design elements can evoke emotions, prompt contemplation, and create a memorable journey.

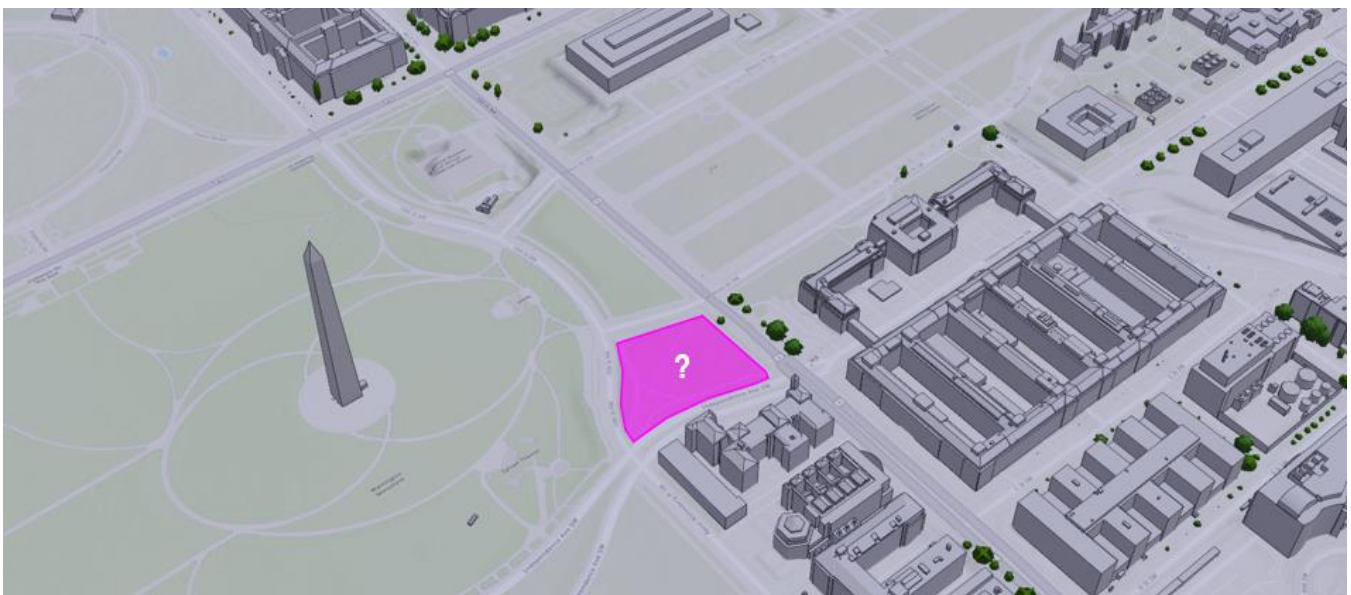
Environmental Responsiveness: Integrate sustainable and environmentally friendly design principles. Consider energy-efficient systems, use of natural light, and sustainable materials to align with the organization's commitment to responsible practices.

Community Interaction: Design spaces that facilitate meaningful interactions among visitors. Create areas for group discussions, workshops, and community events that encourage dialogue about religion's impact on American history and contemporary life.

Students are encouraged to visit the National Museum of American Religion website (<https://nmar.org/>) for additional insights into the client's goals and values.



Bird's eye view looking east towards US Capitol (Imagery from <https://maps.dcoz.dc.gov/3d/>)



Bird's eye view looking northeast (Imagery from <https://maps.dcoz.dc.gov/3d/>)

SITE

The project site is located in Washington, DC on the National Mall near the Washington Monument. The site sits just south of the new National Museum of African American History and Culture and is just north of the United States Holocaust Museum and US Department of Agriculture. The open lot belongs to the federal government and falls under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. The site sits between Jefferson Drive and Independence Avenue as well as between 14th and 15th Streets SW. The lot size is approximately 86,700 square feet (1.99 acres).

The dimensions of the lot, setbacks, maximum building height, floor area ratios, etc. are to be investigated by the student. Occupancy for the museum is A-3. All design proposals for the building must meet general accessibility requirements.



Streetview from southeast corner from Independence Ave and 14th Street SW (Google Earth)



Streetview from northeast corner from Jefferson Drive and 14th Street SW (Google Earth)

PROGRAM

The program for the Museum is broken down as follows:

Entrance and Lobby: 7,500 sq ft

- Entry vestibule
- Main lobby / Information Desk
- Ticketing
- Admissions / Tickets

- Museum gift store – 3,500 sq ft
- Storage for Store

Exhibition Galleries: 25,000 sq ft

- Permanent Exhibits – 20,000 sq ft
- Temporary Exhibits – 5,000 sq ft

Program/Event/Educational Spaces: 8,000 sq ft

- Classrooms
- Lecture Halls
- Workshop Rooms

Auditorium: 5,000 sq ft

- Theater / Auditorium
- Stage area & Storage
- Banquet / Reception Hall
- Small Kitchen for Catering

Cafe: 3,500 sq ft

- Cafe Seating Area (could include outdoor seating)
- Loading dock (can be shared with museum)
- Reception / Host Station / Waiting Area
- Kitchen / Kitchen Prep Area
- Cafe Manager Office

Administrative Spaces: 7,000 sq ft

- Reception / Waiting
- Offices
 - Executive Director's office
 - Curator's office
 - Office Manager's office
 - Bookkeeper office
 - Store Manager office
 - Museum Educator / Event Coordinator
- Support staff open office area
- Copy / Work Room / Mail
- Staff Lounge / Break room
- Storage / Filing / Supplies
- Small Meeting / Conference room
- Larger Executive Conference room

Library and Research Center: 3,500 sq ft

- Reception / Waiting
- Copy / Work Room
- Open workspace (tables / chairs)
- Library Stacks

Storage and Conservation: 19,000 sq ft

- Artifact Storage
- Conservation Labs
- Workshops for preparation of exhibitions, conservation, and minor repairs

Museum total net square footage (78,500 SF)

Gross square footage - 1.35 multiplier for circulation (105,975 GSF)

Gross Square Footage Areas include:

- Loading dock with controlled access for the transfer of collection material; temporary secure storage
- Minimum two or more fire stairs required for egress
- Restrooms as required per level
- Freight and passenger elevators
- Mechanical room
- Circulation
- Janitorial / Supplies storage

Outdoor Exhibition Spaces: 3,500 sq ft

READING / VIDEOS

“The National Museum of American Religion,” <https://nmar.org/>

“Who We Are – The National Museum of American Religion,” <https://nmar.org/who-we-are/>

“Join us in the cause of the National Museum of American Religion,” National Museum of American Religion, Nov 2, 2020.
<https://youtu.be/nC7HdMr7NZI?si=2zqKyYfID2t02Pj8>

“The History of Religious Freedom as a Governing Principle in the United States,” National Museum of American Religion, May 30, 2020.
<https://youtu.be/bEUoT9EsFN4?si=1Qoye23DmAyVDTPw>

"The Prayers of Both Could Not Be Answered" Official Trailer (Lincoln's Religion in His Second Inaugural) - The National Museum of American Religion,” Dec 18, 2023.
https://youtu.be/AIUv_Vf06N0?si=8K09jNFu_90BEHuQ

“Build an American national museum of religion,” *Deseret News*, Christopher Stevenson. Dec 19, 2010.
<https://www.deseret.com/2010/12/19/20161268/build-an-american-national-museum-of-religion>

“In our opinion: It's time for a National Museum of American Religious History,” *Deseret News*. May 28, 2017.
<https://www.deseret.com/2017/5/28/20613163/in-our-opinion-it-s-time-for-a-national-museum-of-american-religious-history>

ASSESSMENT

The weight of each of the projects and assignments will be broken down as follows:

PROJECT 02: National Museum of American Religion

Pre-Design (Site, Precedent, Programming Analysis)	10%
Esquisse / Schematic Design (Interim Review)	20%
Design Development (Final Review)	30%