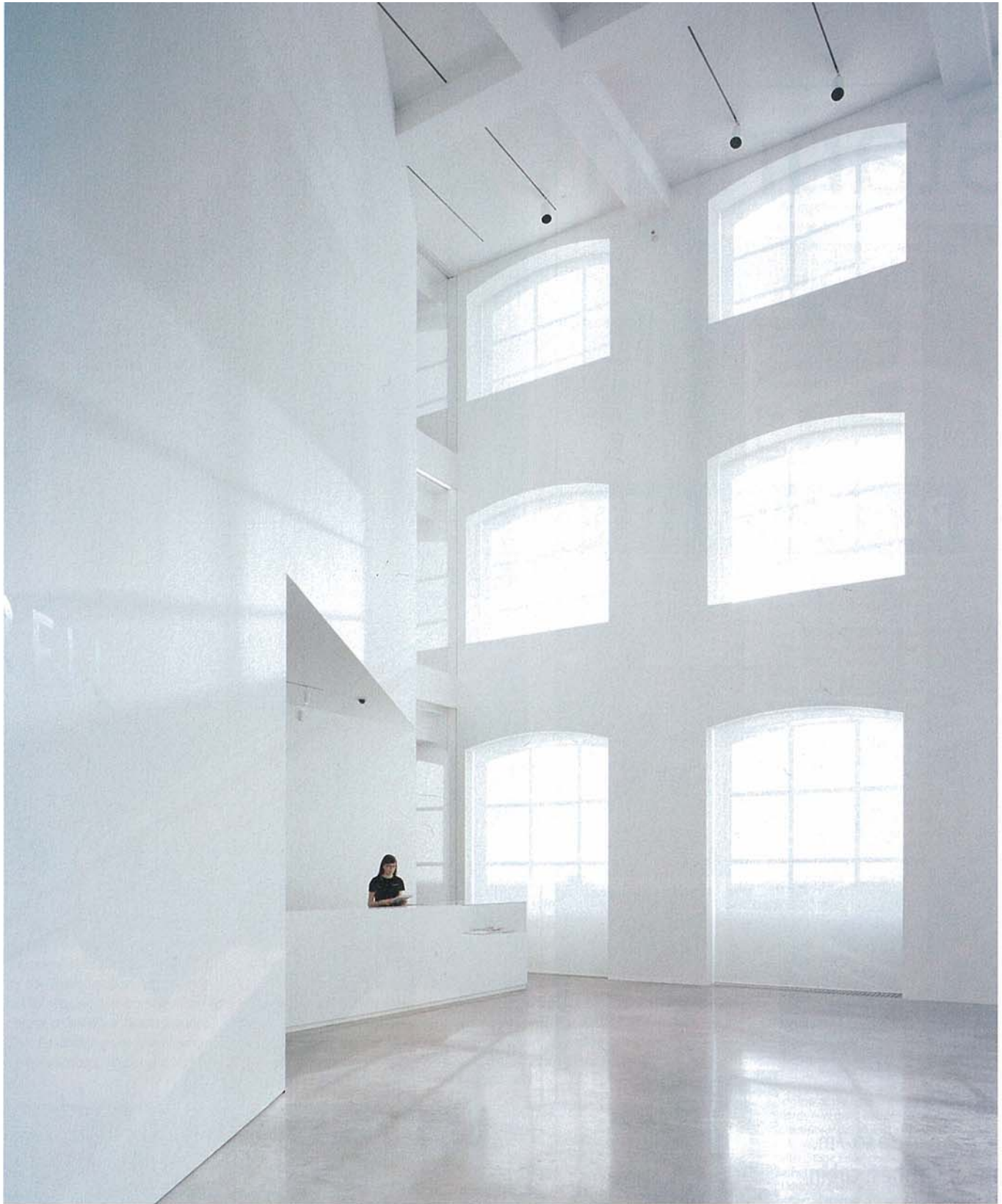


November 2006

Périphériques Architectes in Paris V Borgos Dance: Louise T Blouin Institute

Leicester Peepul Centre: Andrzej Blonski Architects
Richard Murphy on Zaha Hadid's Maggie's Centre
Van Heyningen & Haward at Suffolk Showground
Mixed use: Grafton Architects' Solstice Arts Centre
Robin Kinross reviews Domus • Tom Jestico in Oia
Floors, ceilings & partitions, Lighting





BUILDING ■ The Louise T Blouin Institute by Borgos Dance

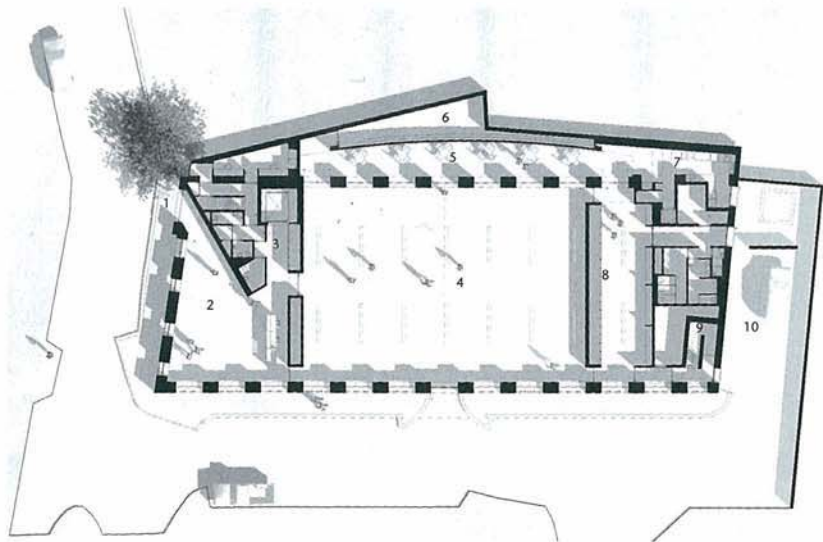
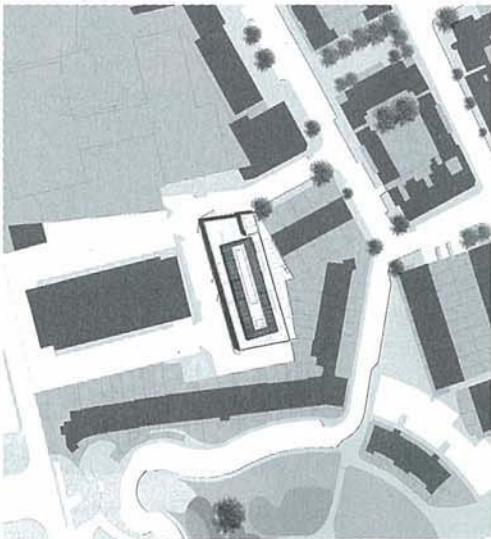
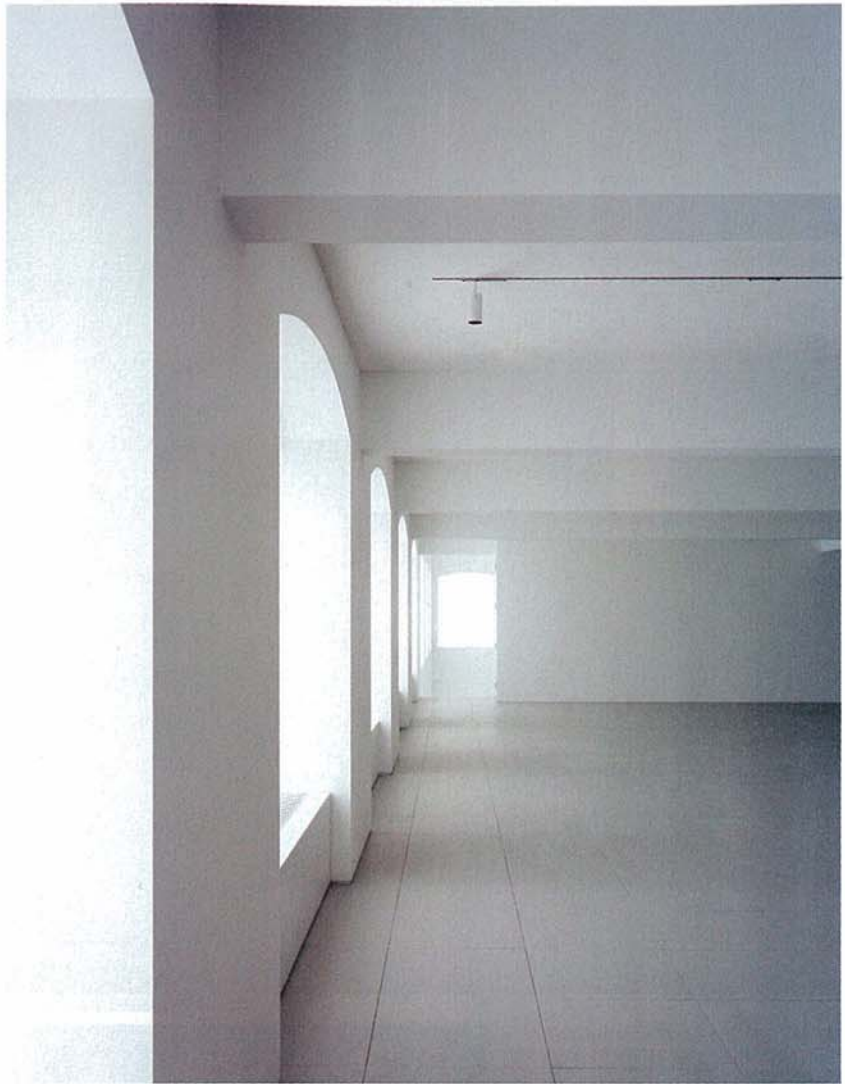
A converted warehouse in west London successfully combines life and art. Critiques: Chris Foges and Charles Saumarez Smith. Photos: Hélène Binet, Tom Miller and Richard Davies.

In the tribal London art world, geography matters. Mayfair belongs to the exclusive, established private dealers; the avant garde has prospered in the wild east. In Charles Saatchi's progress from Boundary Road to County Hall and on to Chelsea, and Jay Jopling's peregrinations from Duke Street to Hoxton Square and back into the fold with White Cube Masons Yard, one can read shifts that are as much about social and cultural acceptance as commercial considerations.

The Canadian publisher and philanthropist Louise T Blouin MacBain is new to the city, and has set up camp on the outskirts of Notting Hill. It is in a marginal area, but on the right side of the tracks, separated from the works and warehouses of White City by six lanes of the West Cross Route, which rises from Shepherd's Bush to meet the elevated Westway to the north. Mario Testino is the neighbour on one side; a housing co-operative is on the other. The building was found by

project partner Simon Dance with property agent Pilcher Hershman, and the neighbourhood seems appropriate for Blouin's Foundation. On the one hand it aims to be firmly of the establishment (its star-studded advisory board includes princes and plutocrats as well as artists and scientists), but on the other it has a laudable, ambitious and slightly vague mission to bring the combined powers of art and science to bear on the ills of the world.

The Louise T Blouin Institute is both an arts venue and the headquarters for Blouin's Foundation. A 1920s coachworks has been comprehensively reconfigured to provide two striking ground floor spaces – one offering height, the other area – that can be used for exhibitions and events, and two floors above which can be used either for the foundation's arts programme or its administration, as the need arises. The interior was stripped back almost to nothing before being rebuilt, and while its apparent simplicity at first suggests a kind of 'honesty to materials' reconstruction, closer inspection tells another story. The exterior wall, whose thickness has doubled, now contains a secondary steel structure in the triple-height lobby, tying the brick outer skin together, and a busy service zone around each window. A pair of 27 metre trusses span between the north and south risers, from which the floors below are suspended. The ground floor, consequently, is column-free, and what look like columns on the upper



floors are actually clusters of Macalloy bars in tension. To the casual eye, this great inversion is never revealed: on the inside, the trusses take the form of two rooflights to the second floor; outside, the skylight enclosure is hidden behind a polycarbonate screen.

The thick walls and arched windows give the building a slightly monastic air – 'Cistercian' is the word Simon Dance uses. The notion of the temple was evoked in Brian O'Doherty's influential critique of the contemporary gallery,

Inside the White Cube (1976): 'Some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory joins with chic design to produce a unique chamber of aesthetics.' The supposed neutrality of the white cube, suggested O'Doherty, is actually a powerful device by which 'art' is elevated from everyday life and spaces, charged by its environment so that even a standing ashtray 'becomes almost a sacred object'.

Facing The triple-height lobby (ph: HB).

Top Glazed screens on each floor provide views into the lobby (ph: HB).

Location plan A new headquarters for the retailer Monsoon is currently on site to the north-west of Olaf Street. To the south and east is co-operative housing. To the west is a WH Smith depot.

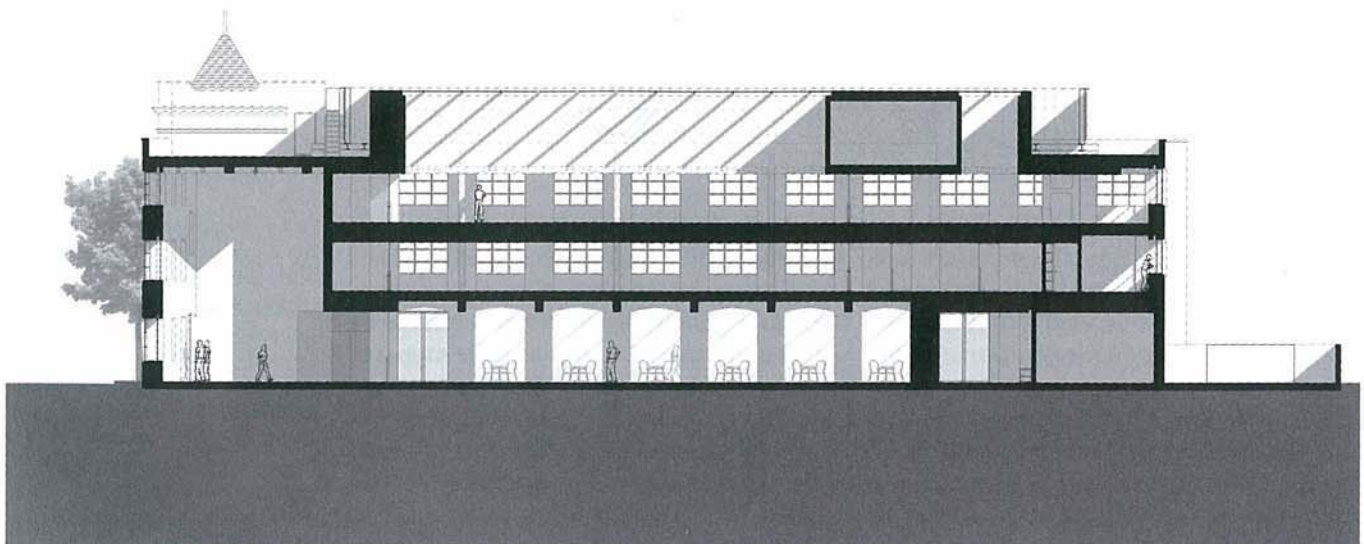
Plan Ground floor: 1 entrance, 2 entrance lobby, 3 north stair core, 4 exhibition space, 5 courtyard cafe, 6 store, 7 kitchen, 8 meeting room, 9 south stair core, 10 car park.



Above The renovation of the building included subtle but important adjustments to the facades. The height and spacing of windows was regularised, and large areas of masonry rebuilt. A proposal to use single sheets of glass in the windows was rejected by planners (ph: HB). **Right** The building before renovation. Built as a coachworks, it had more recently been used as offices by design and advertising agencies (ph: RD). **Below** North-south section, showing the trusses from which the upper floors are suspended. The two trusses also form the sides of two rooflights to the second floor.



In the three principal exhibition spaces – entrance lobby, ground floor gallery and the second floor – Borgos Dance has adopted some of the conventions of the white cube. Most obviously, the interior is emphatically white (although of course white is never just white. Here it has all sorts of colours – soft and creamy where the gauze blinds soften the glare from 78 warehouse windows, sharp and crisp where direct light catches the deep reveals, and infused with a purply grey where the walls reflect the polished concrete floor in the main gallery). From the entrance one





steps into a corner of the triple-height, triangular entrance lobby; two sides of the triangle are exterior walls, with windows. The third is formed by a smooth, white-painted concrete wedge – the north core. This space, powerful and unexpected, plays an important role in effecting a complete separation with the world outside the door. An angled niche in the diagonal wall opens onto the open-plan exhibition space. The top floor brings a final

Above Looking north-east through the main exhibition space on the ground floor to the top-lit courtyard cafe. The gallery is serviced via elegant precast grilles in the poured concrete floor. An acoustic ceiling counteracts potential echoes (ph: HB).

Right Study model of the main exhibition space arranged for the display of wall-hung works (ph: TM).

Below The top-lit second floor will be used both as offices and as exhibition space (ph: HB).

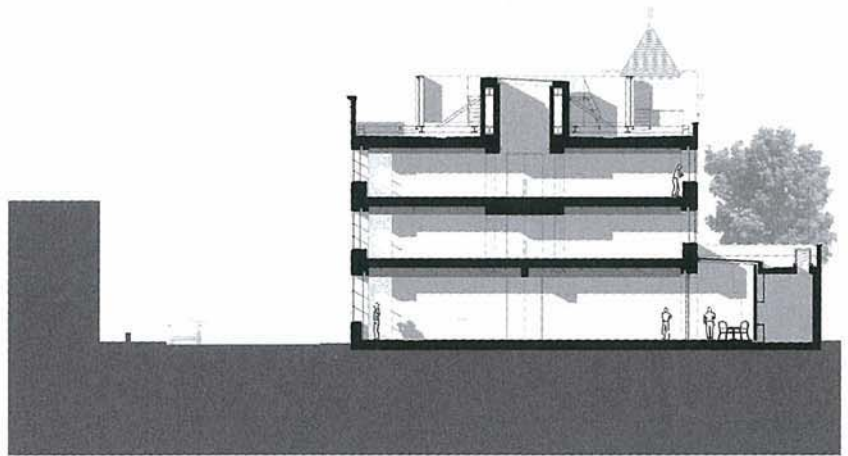


surprise: a large room with a long, deep roof light running its full length. Unlike O'Doherty's paradigm, however, there remains a grounding connection to the non-gallery spaces within the building. A row of glazed arches separates the top-lit cafe from the ground floor gallery space; offices and meeting rooms sit next to the open-plan room on the top floor; and a full-height glazed screen in the north-west corner of each floor provides views into the lobby.

This duality – gallery/office – is one of several 'tensions' that animate the building. One gets the sense that Borgos Dance wrestled to make spaces that are dramatic without



disturbing the calm. Likewise, the detailing and finish throughout is both sober and sensual: a cast concrete hand washing trough in the chairman's office is both special and utilitarian. Like many galleries, it has the sort of luxurious simplicity that only lots of money can buy, but its white-walled warehouse aesthetic originates in crude conversions born of necessity. The danger of too refined a treatment is that the fundamental qualities will be lost. The Foundation stays on the right side of the line (although the lighting installation to all 78 windows, designed with James Turrell, is perhaps too showy for a back street).



Turrell is also the subject of the institute's first exhibition. A show of sculptures by Marc Quinn is next. It is intended that artists will be invited to produce work specifically for the spaces of the building, and the responses generated will be a great test. It will also be interesting to see how the institute copes with works originally planned for elsewhere. The indeterminacy of the building – which perhaps derives from the dizzying, disparate aspirations of the foundation – could be a great strength; it would be nice if its 'white cube' and office functions are allowed to overlap a little. Despite necessary concessions to 'flexibility', Borgos Dance has provided a series of rooms with a strong and distinct character, that offer great potential. What happens next is in the hands of the foundation, but with cash in the bank and a proven determination, the building's future looks promising.

Top/below Looking south towards offices and meeting rooms on the top-lit second floor, which will be used as both office and exhibition space (ph: HB).
Above West-east section. A polycarbonate screen conceals the skylights formed by deep trusses and plant on the roof. The screen is illuminated at night, one of two permanent installations on the exterior of the building on which Borgos Dance collaborated with artist James Turrell. The column-free ground floor is achieved by suspending the lightweight upper floors from the two roof-level trusses with Macalloy bars that are grouped around the locations of existing columns. On the upper floors the structure that appears to be conventionally in compression is in fact in tension.

Charles Saumarez Smith writes: Over the last few years, Louise Blouin MacBain has been causing a flutter in the art world, owing to the fact that she made a lot of money in trade magazines in Canada and arrived in Europe to replicate her business model in the resolutely uncommercial world of art magazines. The model is to integrate all back-of-house activities in order to maximise profitability. She has already bought Art & Auction, Art Review and Modern Painters and has established a new magazine, Travel & Culture.

Alongside her business activities, Blouin has set up an arts foundation (I am a member of its advisory council). The idea is to sponsor activity which integrates art, science and creativity in an increasingly globalised world. She has so far had a depressingly negative response from the British press, owing to the fact that we tend to be pathologically suspicious of any form of idealism, assuming that it is either self-interested or ditz. But there are not many people in the United Kingdom who are prepared to back their utopian ideas with hard cash and I have always taken the view that her dreams should be encouraged and judged not in advance, but once they have begun to be realised.

The first test of the foundation has been the opening of its new headquarters in the borderlands between Shepherd's Bush roundabout and Westway, not at all a salubrious area

and as far away as it is possible to be from the art world's headquarters in Hoxton. Away from the genteel grandeur of Holland Park, one finds a scruffy area of old commercial premises, where Blouin was able to buy a large, old warehouse to convert into a brand new, pristine art space. She commissioned Borgos Dance as architects, a small arts-oriented practice whose style of architecture represents exactly the combination of sleek youth and technocratic polish that Blouin was seeking.

On first encounter with the building, the experience is slightly bizarre. It's a three-storey commercial warehouse, completely lucid and comprehensible from outside, converted in order to provide utilitarian art spaces. As one enters from the north, there is a grand, triple-height triangular atrium. It's an interesting space, into which one can look from the different floors and from which one can view an enfilade on the ground floor. When I visited, the ground floor was like a Spanish labyrinth, owing to the fact that it is currently converted into a series of discreet viewing rooms, filled by a series of lightwork installations by James Turrell, making navigation difficult. Of course, this is temporary and will be dismantled. Perhaps the most interesting space is a curved cafe area on the ground floor, with polished concrete floors and metal detailing.

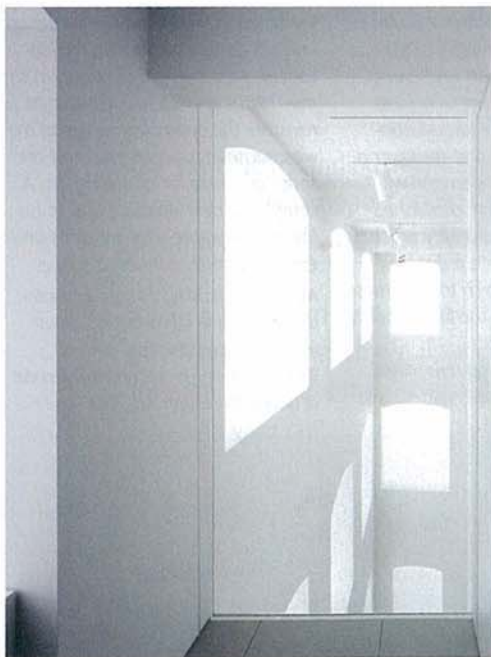
What everyone who attended the big party for the foundation's



opening agreed is that the space is smart and interesting and likely to change the dynamic of the London art world. It's out in the far west. It's new and chic and slightly unpredictable and outside the standard bureaucracies of the art world.

It's built with private money, like the Prada Foundation in Milan. It is going to offer tremendous scope to artists, like Marc Quinn, to undertake new projects. It feels like a new world.

Charles Saumarez Smith is director of the National Gallery.



Top The courtyard cafe next to the main exhibition space. A storage area is behind the curved wall (ph: HB).

Above Model of the angled niche connection with 3.5 metre high double doors between the entrance lobby and the main exhibition space (ph: TM).

Far left View into entrance lobby area from the second floor (ph: HB).

Left View through the lobby towards the main entrance. Stairs, a lift and wcs are behind the diagonal wall (ph: HB).

Project Team:

Architects: Borgos Dance; design team: Simon Dance (project director), Giles Reid (project architect), Etienne Borgos, Vidal Fernandez-Diez, Javier Ampuero Ernst, Holger Leibmann, Rita Baltina, Dua Cox, Tea Puric; project manager: Mitchell Price; building engineering: Arup; qs: Davis Langdon; lighting design: Campbell Design; planning consultant: Atis Real and CGMS; catering consultant: King Design; contractor: Lancs Construction (soft strip), Delcon Construction (structural and fit out); client: Louise T Blouin Foundation.

Selected suppliers and subcontractors:

Brick and block: F-Ten; blinds: Bowden Tollit; ceramic tiles: Harper and Edwards; concrete flooring: Steyson Granolithic Contractors; plant doors/shutters: Ascot Doors; demolition: Chiltern Demolition; dry-lining: Rosguill Developments; electrical: Jets Electrical; fall arrest: HCL; fireproofing: Fire Delay Contractors; sub floor construction: Metsec Floors; raised floor panels: Mero; rooftop and cafe skylight: Mero; glass doors: Optima; ground works: Les Crawford; joinery: Cheesman Interiors; passenger lift: Patron

Lifts; goods lift: Stannah Microlifts; lead workers: Complex; metal doors: Bassett and Findley; concrete grilles: Natural Stone and Design Quality Marble; roofing tiles: Barrett Roofing; roof: Durable Contracts; specialist metalwork: Elite Metalcraft; sliding internal doors: London Wall; sliding plant doors: Jewers Doors; structural steel: On Site Services; structural metal decking: SMD; suspended acoustic ceilings: Pacy & Wheatley; tarmac: Spadeoak; waterproofing: Cemplas; vinyl flooring: TC Carpet Flooring; ceramic tiling: Walton Ceramics; blind and dimming control

system: Lutron; roof hatch: Bilco; ironmongery: Abloy, Allgoods; lighting: Light Corporation, Cord, PJR, Litelab, We-ef; paint: Dulux (decoration), Leighs (intumescent); polycarbonate screen: Rodeca; power assist mechanisms: Woodward Doors; pull handles: Door Tech Solutions; raised floor tile: Axia; rooftop glass: Eckelt; roofing membrane: Derbigum; safety system: Latchway; sanitary-ware: Armitage Shanks, Duravit, Grohe, D Line, Vola; tiles: Lafarge Redland Rosemary; windows: Mag Hansen Millennium System; vinyl flooring: Altro.



Simon Dance writes:

We have worked with Louise T Blouin MacBain's media company and arts foundation since 2002, first creating small-scale modular exhibition stands

for use at international art fairs and later completing an interior fit-out for the LTB Media office in New York. We were asked to source a site for the Louise T Blouin Institute, and in April

2004 began a feasibility study into the possibility of converting a former coachbuilding works in Olaf Street, west London. The Institute opened in October 2006, and houses exhibitions, lectures, seminars and events.

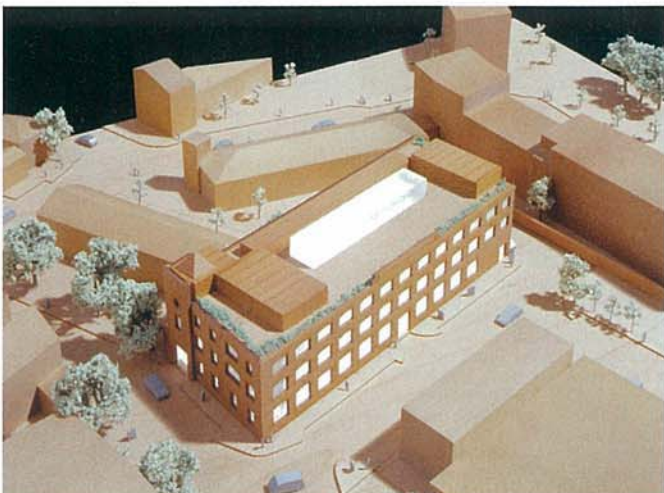
The Institute is unique as an arts centre. It is one of the largest non-government funded, non-commercial cultural spaces in London and will provide a showcase for established and emerging contemporary artists. Our brief was to create a dynamic backdrop against which to view these works, and to house the foundation's London headquarters.

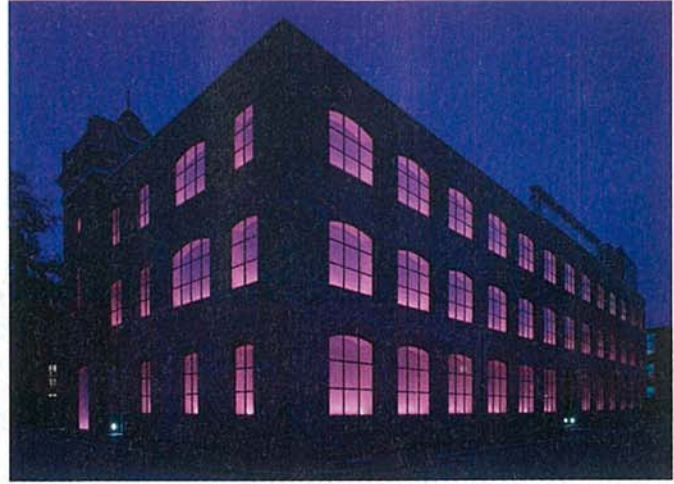
The existing 3,250 square metre, three-storey warehouse building was

built in the 1920s for Barker & Co, coachbuilders for Rolls-Royce, Bentley and Daimler. More recently, the building has been used by design and advertising companies, which carried out a number of fit-outs in the mid-1980s and 1990s. We sought to reinstate the open plan nature of the warehouse in order to maximise the space available for exhibiting art. A completely new structure had to be inserted to create new generous and environmentally controlled spaces

Above The building during construction and arranged as offices before its most recent transformation (ph: RD).

Below Planning model and study model of reception area (ph: RD, TM).





required in the brief. In particular, the reconstruction of floors and internal structures supported by new internal foundations required considerable care in the design and execution. With Arup, the team removed all columns from the ground floor, using Macalloy steel bars to suspend the two lightweight concrete floors above from two 27-metre long by 2.5-metre deep roof trusses. Load transfer to these new structures was achieved by jack stressing the hanging structure into position and retrieving the load from the ground floor columns. Load-bearing masonry piers and arches over the windows were rebuilt to create more balanced elevations.

The main entrance at ground floor is situated at the north of the building. It leads into a triple-height lobby, naturally lit on two sides and covered by a grid of beams from which heavy artworks can be suspended. A diagonal wall forms the third side of the triangular space. Passing through 3.5-metre high double doors, one enters a four-metre high, 465 square metre gallery space, book-ended by two large walls intended for the display of artworks. To one side there is a sky-lit cafe, where formerly there

Top The opening temporary exhibition is a retrospective of works by American artist James Turrell. In addition, Borgos Dance has worked with Turrell on two permanent building-wide lighting

was a little-used and derelict outdoor courtyard. The first and second floors include the offices of the foundation, but will also be used for other activities relating to the foundation's projects. Two large, deep rooflights are surrounded by an opaque polycarbonate screen that will be lit on all four sides at night and provide natural light during the day. The building's plant is concealed behind this screen.

One of the challenges in creating such an open and flexible space was incorporating all of the elements necessary for an exhibition space such as lighting, acoustic treatment, power, data, heating, cooling and humidity control. In this sense the project has been an exercise in discretion and concealment. A new ground floor displacement floor has been constructed which incorporates an air conditioning supply system through specifically manufactured concrete floor outlets; the acoustic requirements have been met using a special ceiling render system; the services and facilities (including AV equipment) are fed through riser cores, and fan-coil ventilation units on the upper floors have been incorporated beneath each window.

installations, the first illuminating all the external windows and the second lighting a translucent screen at roof level, which will be visible from as far away as BBC White City (ph: RD).

A purpose-made window treatment using architectural light fittings, black-out and glare blinds has been designed to give a discreet but effective lighting and environmental

control solution which continues throughout the building. All the blinds are automated and respond to the sun, with every window having black-out capability.

