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As Seen in 2016: Tel Aviv Museum of Art

Rick Meghiddo · Wednesday, May 11th, 2016

The new wing of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, designed by architect Preston Scott Cohen as an addition to the museum's Main Building, is the latest development in a process that started in the 1930s, when the city's first mayor, Meir Dizengoff, created a municipal art museum in his own house. It evolved through the creation of the Helena Rubinstein Gallery in 1959, the austere main building designed by architects Dan Eitan and Itzchak Yashar in 1971, and the Herta & Paul Amir Building, inaugurated in 2011.

Tel Aviv Museum of Art from Rick Meghiddo on Vimeo.

The new addition and the museum's main building are connected by a sculpture garden created in 1999. Although the language of the two buildings is totally different, and are part of a wider area that includes the Opera House, the Cameri Theater, the Beit Ariela Central Library and the Tel Aviv Court House, designed at different times by different architects, the whole maintains the kind of integrity that one may find in a garden in which different type of plants coexist.

The program for the new addition was demanding. Rectangular neutral galleries had to fit into a triangular site, which also had to accommodate a new art library that takes one third of the total 200,000 square feet, or about 18,000 square meters. The project's main concept was the creation of an 87-foot-high atrium, called "the lightfall," which brings natural light deep into the building.

One may argue whether the design belongs to the trend triggered by the "Bilbao Effect," which resonates in the works of Zaha Hadid and Daniel Libeskind, or whether it appropriately responds to functional needs, or whether fifty-five million dollars have been well spent. Social agendas, important as they are in decision-making, must also the intangible artistic value that a building can provide.

In spite of the building trendy aspects, the atrium's space and light positively touches the visitor's emotionally. This works unquestionably brings a poetic contribution to this vibrant city full of contrasts.

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