

Museum of Nebraska Art (MONA)

Type: Museum

Size:

Addition: 23,000 SF

Renovation: 31,000 SF

Total: 54,000 SF

Cost PSF: \$480

Construction Cost: \$26,000,000

The reimagined Museum of Nebraska Art (**MONA**) supports its mission to preserve and promote Nebraska art through a thoughtful blend of exhibition, education, and community-centered spaces. Located in a restored 1911 Federalist Revival structure with a 23,000-square-foot contemporary addition, the program integrates heritage and innovation into a cohesive, accessible whole.

Galleries: New and renovated exhibition spaces include flexible contemporary art galleries, a reconfigured permanent collection gallery, and a dedicated works-on-paper gallery—all designed to maximize curatorial flexibility, daylight, and visitor engagement.

Visible Art Storage: A new visible art storage area allows the public to glimpse behind the scenes, offering access to rarely seen works and demystifying collection stewardship.

Community Studio: A multipurpose, daylight-filled studio for workshops, school visits, and artist-led programming reinforces MONA's educational and civic mission.

Support Spaces: Upgraded art preparation and storage suites, staff offices, and service areas meet modern climate and security standards while supporting long-term institutional resilience.

Retail & Gathering: A welcoming new lobby connects visitors to the museum store, ticketing, and lounge areas, with visual and physical continuity to the landscape beyond.

Landscape: The former parking lot has been transformed into a 43,000-square-foot sculpture garden with native prairie, accessible paths, shaded courts, and outdoor artworks—creating a public green space open year-round.

Completion: February 2025

Location: Kearney, NE



The Museum of Nebraska Art (**MONA**), located in Kearney, Nebraska, is the steward of the state's official art collection and a leading advocate for the work of Nebraska artists. Originally constructed in 1911 as a federal post office, the building was adapted into a museum in 1986, followed by additional renovations in 1993. Despite its historic status on the National Register of Historic Places, the facility could no longer meet the museum's expanding aspirations—ranging from curatorial excellence and educational outreach to long-term preservation, accessibility, and environmental performance.

The transformation of **MONA** reimagined the institution's role in the state's cultural and civic life. The project introduces a 23,000-square-foot expansion and a 43,000-square-foot sculpture garden, replacing a former surface parking lot with a vibrant public landscape. The new addition creates a universally accessible entry sequence and integrates seamlessly with the historic structure, stepping back from the original façade to maintain its prominence while establishing a new civic threshold.

Internally, the expansion is organized around a central circulation spine that connects the existing galleries with new public amenities, including a museum store, a multipurpose event space, and a naturally lit community studio for hands-on learning. A special exhibition gallery on the ground floor provides curatorial flexibility, while three second-floor galleries feature 18-foot ceilings and exposed mass timber framing. These upper galleries accommodate **MONA's** permanent collection with expanded capacity and adaptable formats.

Natural light filters into galleries through carefully placed voids, while glazed thresholds frame views to the garden and Nebraska's horizon. The use of mass timber, zinc cladding, and local materials reflect both sustainability goals and regional vernacular traditions. Public spaces emphasize transparency and inclusion, fostering a welcoming environment across seasons and visitor types.

Art handling and storage functions are significantly enhanced. A new basement level houses a climate-controlled vault, art preparation areas, and visible storage, giving visitors a glimpse into the behind-the-scenes care of the collection.

The adjacent sculpture garden transforms the eastern edge of the site into a year-round civic landscape, open to the public at all times. Composed of native grasses, permeable pathways, shaded seating, and integrated sculpture, the garden invites gathering, reflection, and daily use.

Through expanded programming, public accessibility, and architectural continuity, **MONA** reaffirms its mission: to preserve, present, and celebrate Nebraska's artistic legacy. As a cultural anchor for both Kearney and the state at large, the reimagined museum offers not only expanded capacity but renewed purpose—rooted in place, shaped by community, and open to all.

"Few building types rival the complexity of a museum, yet [Firm Name] approached MONA with exceptional skill, sensitivity, and a clear design vision—delivering a beautifully integrated, high-performance cultural landmark."

-**Jon Maass**,

Owner's Representative,
Maass Works

"Their design translated a cacophony of voices, requirements, and aesthetics into a singular vision that feels considered, authentic, and lasting."

-**Karissa Johnson**,

Curator,
Museum of Nebraska Art



Framework for Design Excellence

Design for Integration

The **MONA** project is not a museum addition—it's a reweaving of architecture, landscape, art, and civic life. From the mass timber structure to the native gardens that flow into downtown Kearney, every element of the project is deeply integrated into a holistic vision. Historic preservation, sustainable materials, community programming, and spatial openness are not separate goals—they are intertwined in the building's form and spirit.

Design for Energy & Resources

MONA's triple-pane glazing, high-performance envelope, and right-sized mechanical systems dramatically reduce energy use. Passive daylighting strategies minimize artificial lighting demands. Meanwhile, mass timber construction lowers embodied carbon and honors local building traditions. By preserving the original 1911 post office and avoiding demolition, the project retains embodied energy while extending the life of an important civic structure.

MONA's structural system replaces typical steel decking with cross-laminated timber (CLT) and uses timber columns and beams throughout. Even when accounting for steel connections and miscellaneous steel elements, the embodied carbon of the structural system is approximately 1.0 kgCO₂e/sf—representing a **97% reduction** compared to a conventional steel frame.

When the entire building is considered—including the enclosure, substructure, and interior finishes—the total embodied carbon is 17 kgCO₂e/sf.

Design for Well-Being and Discovery

The reimagined **MONA** fosters a sense of calm, curiosity, and connection. Natural light, warm materials, and strong acoustic performance create contemplative environments that support both art and people. Views to the landscape and Nebraska's horizon offer moments of quiet reflection, grounding visitors in place.

At the same time, the architecture invites discovery. Flexible galleries are layered along intuitive circulation paths that reveal glimpses of art, light, and activity. Spaces once hidden—such as the art vault and preparation rooms—are now partially visible, offering transparency into the museum's inner workings. Exterior sculpture gardens and native landscaping extend the visitor experience outdoors, providing places for respite, walking, and informal gathering throughout the year.



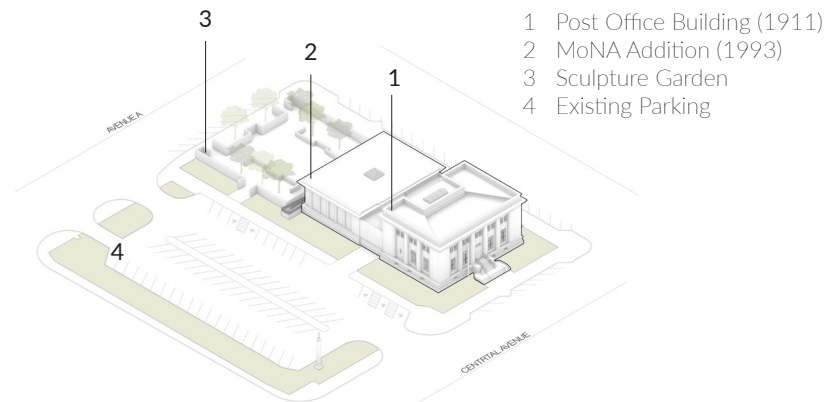


MUSEUM of NEBRASKA ART

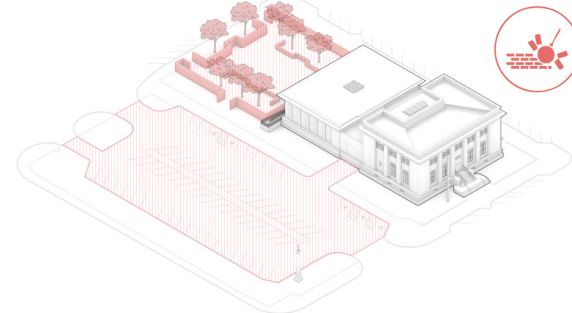


MATERIALITY & IDENTITY

The architecture of MONA draws from Nebraska's agrarian vernacular—both in spirit and in form. Locally familiar soft woods evoke the warmth and humility of rural life, while repetitive geometries recall the ordered rhythm of planted fields. Sunlight hits the facade, casting shifting patterns across its surface and animating the building with the quiet drama of passing time—echoing the slow, deliberate cadence of the surrounding landscape. In embracing these everyday references, the design amplifies the prosaic to the honorific—elevating the familiar textures and rhythms of working land into a place of cultural memory, civic pride, and quiet reverence.

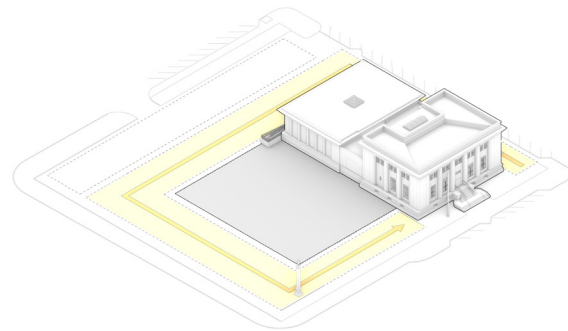


1 Existing Conditions



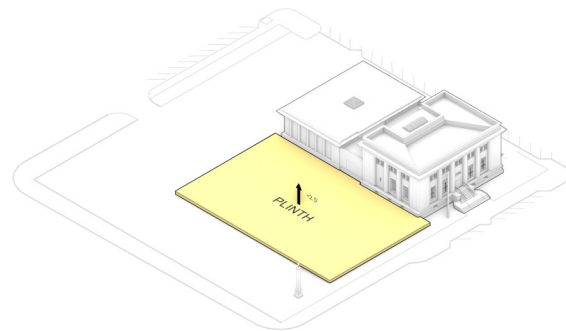
2 Demolition

Removal of parking lot and walled sculpture garden



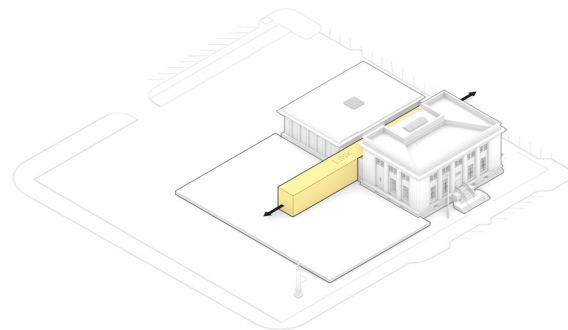
3 New Site

New building site is surrounded by a sculpture garden



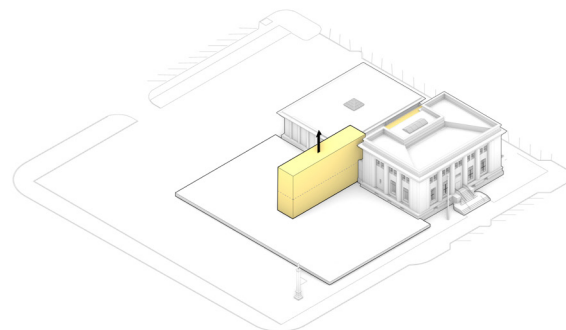
4 Plinth

A new plinth negotiates the grade between sidewalk and existing floor elevations



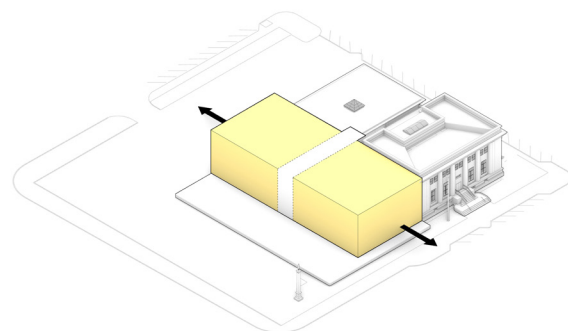
5 Link

The former 1950s addition is reimagined as a connective link



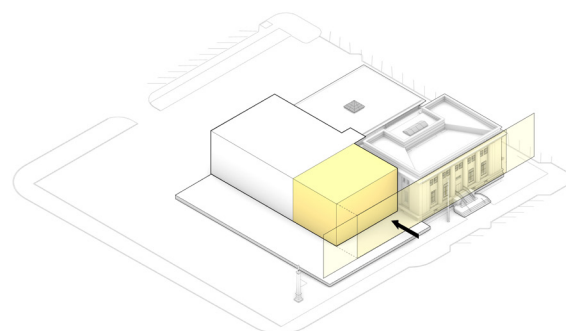
6 Link Extrusion

The link is extruded to accommodate a two-story addition



7 Extend

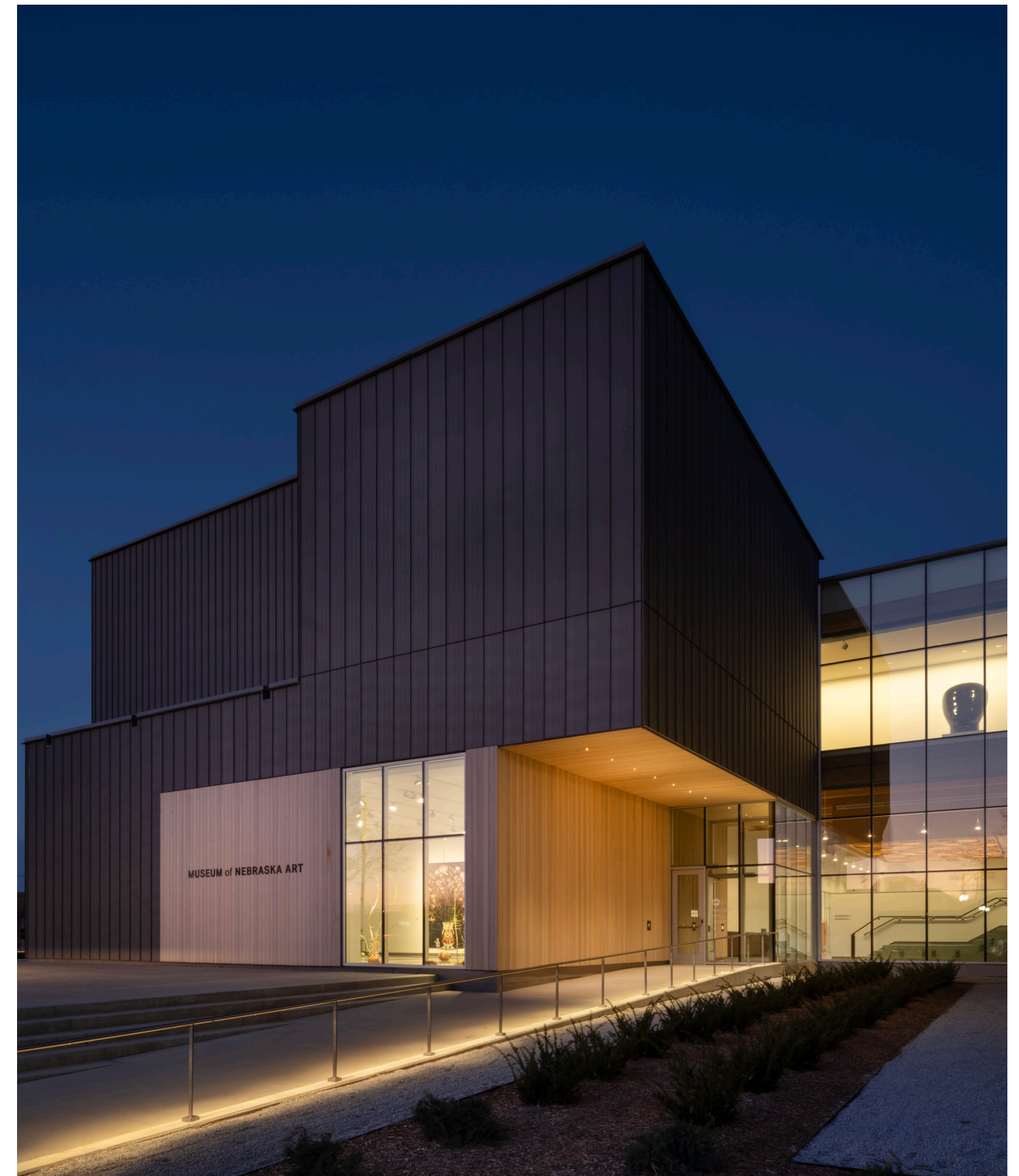
Massing constraints are informed by the scale and proportion of the historic building

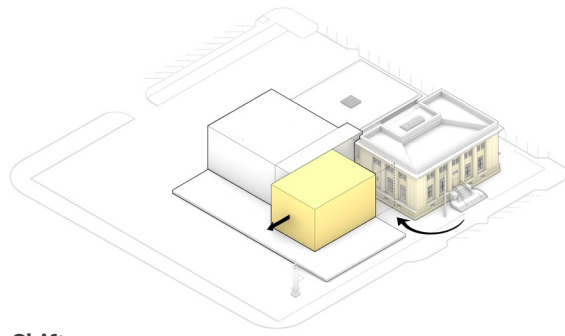


8 Push Back

The prominent west façade of the addition recedes in deference

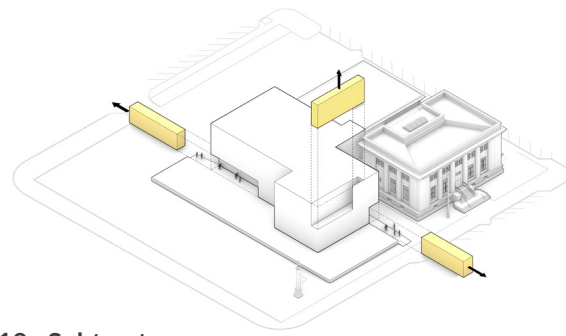
The design of the Museum of Nebraska Art is rooted in deep respect for its natural and cultural surroundings. Through a thoughtful process of site analysis, form generation, and material selection, the building was conceived as a direct response to its context. Every step in its development—from initial massing to spatial organization—was guided by the desire to create a space that feels both grounded and open.





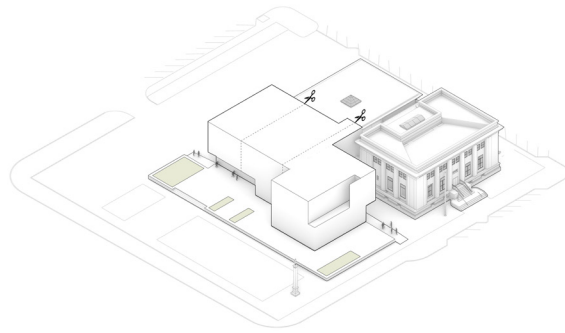
9 Shift

Massing is strategically shifted to honor the historic façade



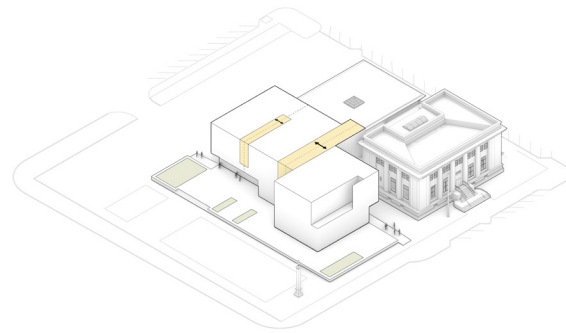
10 Subtract

Subtractions in the form create entry points for both people and natural light



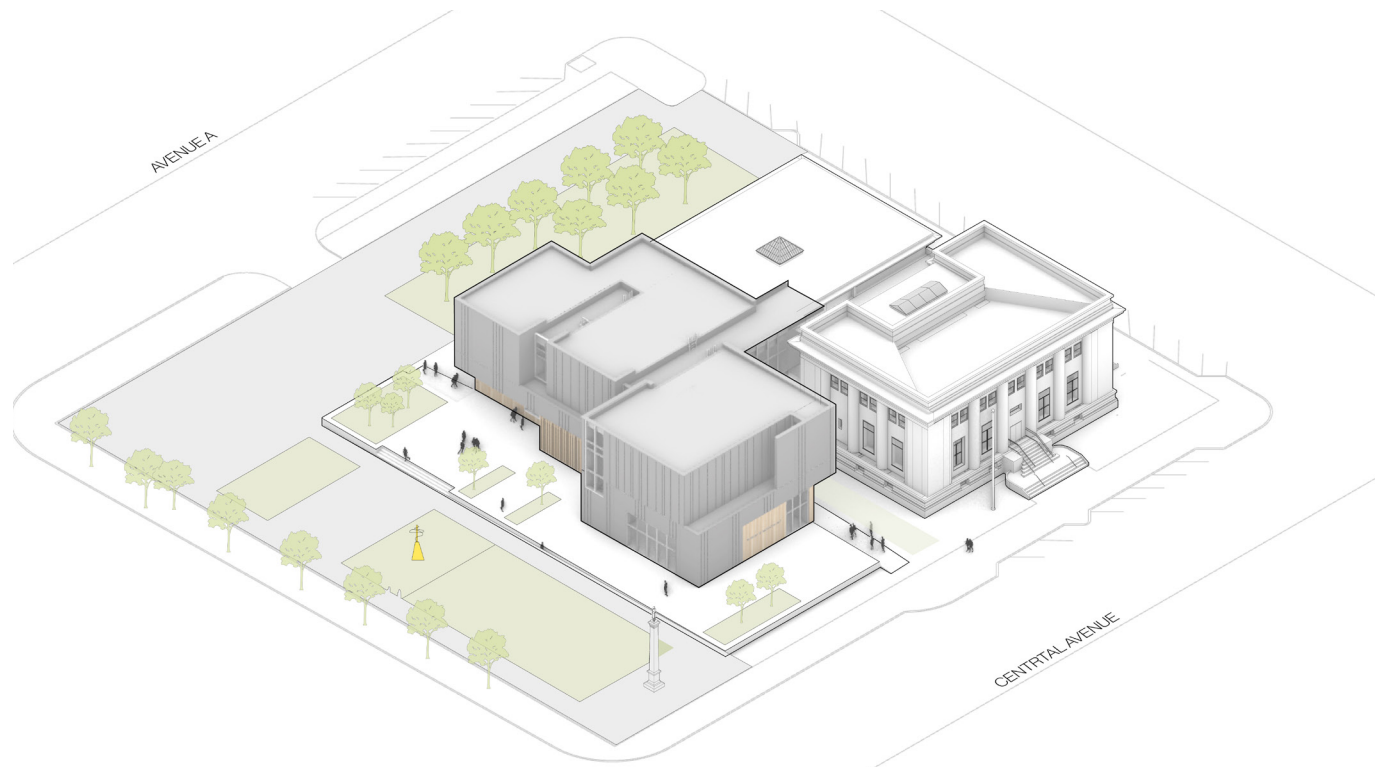
11 Cut

The massing is divided to establish distinct spatial zones



11 Open

The resulting articulation creates moments for natural light to enter and offers places of respite between galleries.



13 Completed Massing

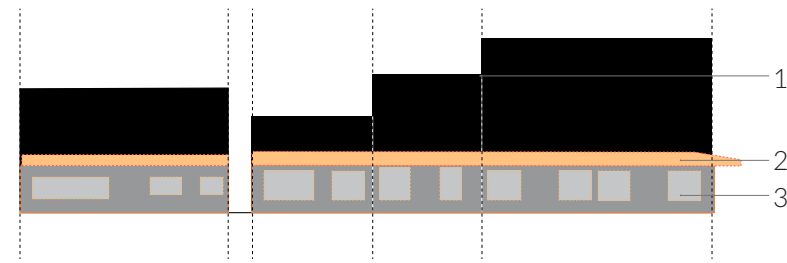




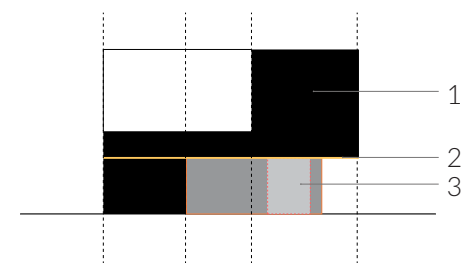
CONTEXT



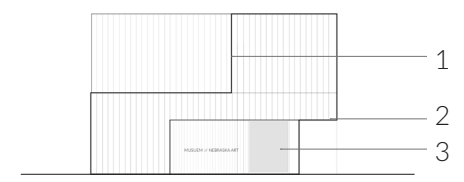
Building Typology
Central Avenue (looking East)



Building Typology
Central Avenue (looking East)



Building Typology
MoNA (looking East)



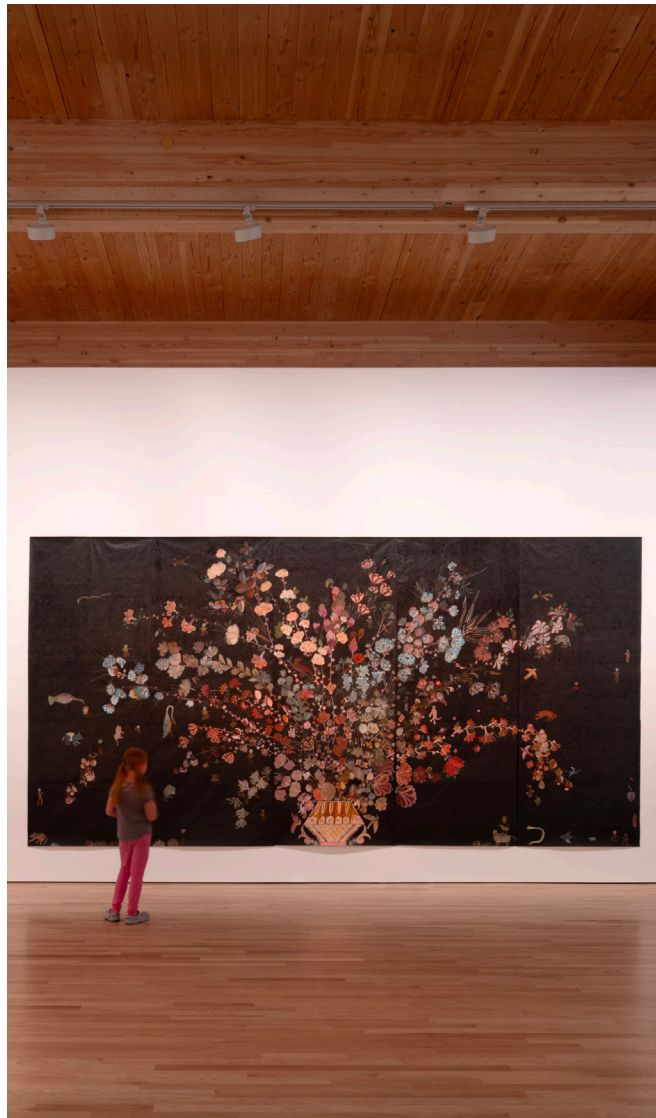
Building Typology
MoNA (looking East)

- 1 Stepped Building Profile
- 2 Continuous Datum
- 3 Transparent Urban Threshold



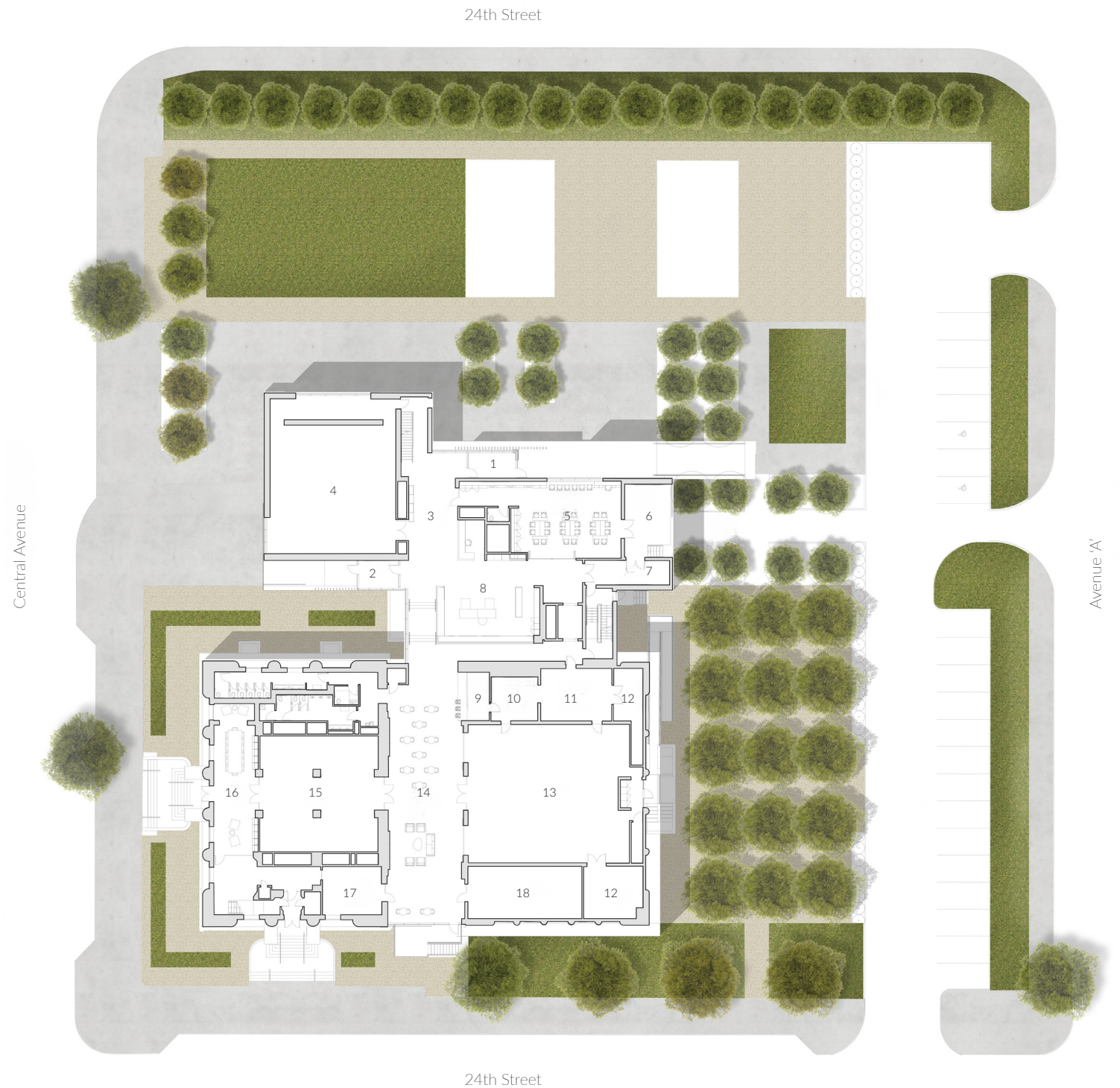
the Weaver
DNA

- ← Elevator
- ← FNBO Community Studio
- ↑ Restrooms
- ↑ Coffee Shop
- ↑ The Link
- ↑ Hoffman Gallery
- ↑ Zankov Library
- ↑ Founders Gallery
- ↑ Cope Gallery
- ↑ Yarnway Gallery



A BUILDING FOR ALL

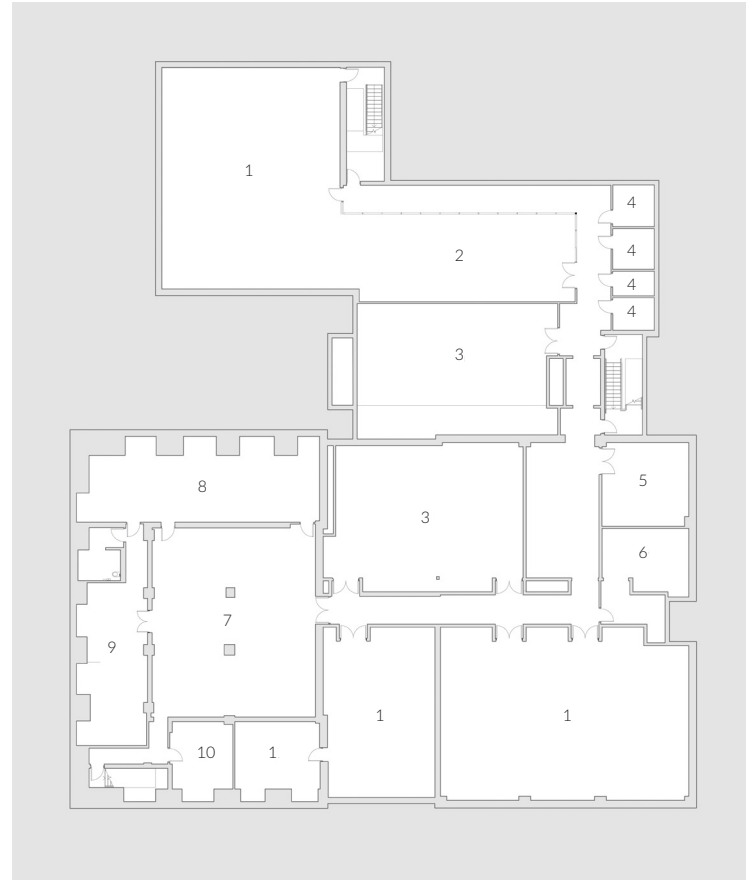
The reimagined Museum of Nebraska Art is a building for all—open, inclusive, and rooted in community. Free admission, universal access, and a variety of gathering spaces—including a community studio, flexible galleries, and a public sculpture garden—invite people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with art, place, and one another.



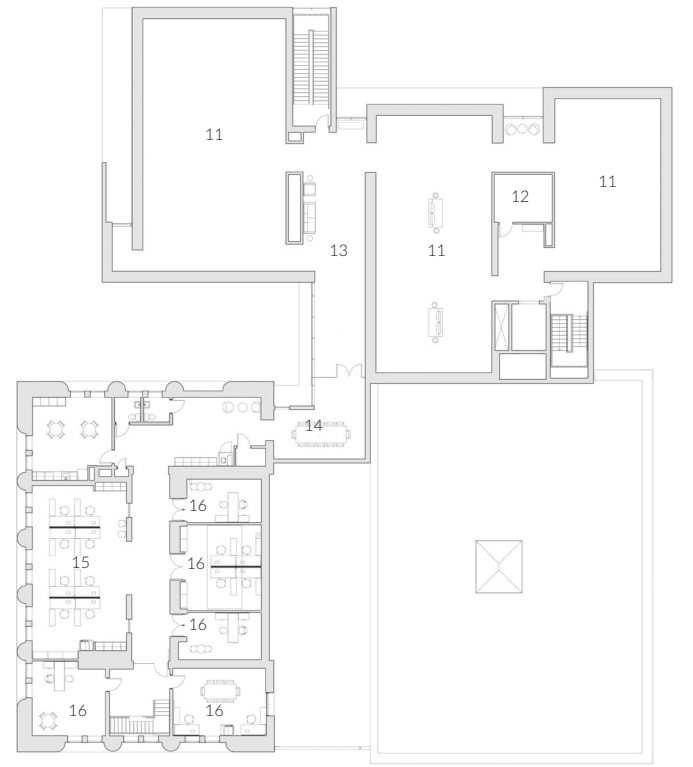
FIRST FLOOR



- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 North Entrance | 11 Kitchen |
| 2 West Entrance | 12 Storage |
| 3 Lobby | 13 Multipurpose Room |
| 4 Special Exhibit Gallery | 14 Lounge |
| 5 Community Studio | 15 Rohman Gallery |
| 6 Exterior Dock | 16 Library |
| 7 Receiving / Holding | 17 Postmaster Gallery |
| 8 Retail Shop | 18 Nebraska Now Gallery |
| 9 Cafe | |
| 10 Cafe Storage | |



BASEMENT



SECOND FLOOR



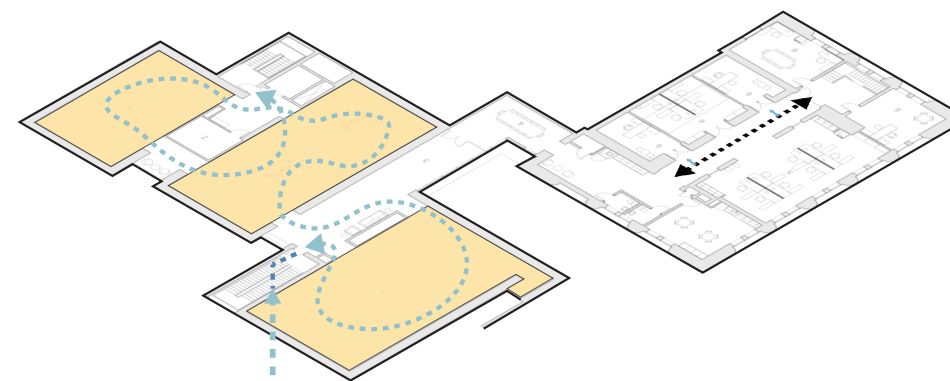
- 1 Art Storage
- 2 Visible Art
- 3 Mechanical
- 4 Electrical / Fire Service
- 5 Uncrating
- 6 Retail Storage
- 7 Art Preparation
- 8 Exhibit Storage
- 9 Workshop
- 10 Frame Storage
- 11 Permanent Exhibit Gallery
- 12 Feature Gallery
- 13 Link / Overlook Gallery
- 14 Conference Room
- 15 Staff Workstations
- 16 Staff Office

HONORING THE LEGACY

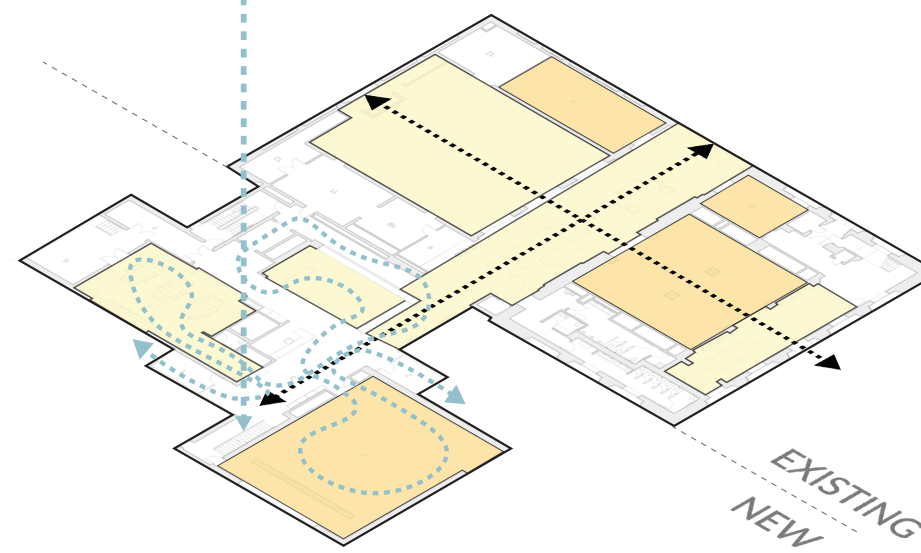
Existing museum spaces were thoughtfully reused to preserve MONA's historic character while improving functionality. Original galleries were refreshed to better support the permanent collection, while support spaces were reorganized to improve circulation and visitor flow. The adaptive reuse balances preservation with performance, extending the life and relevance of the historic structure.



SECOND FLOOR



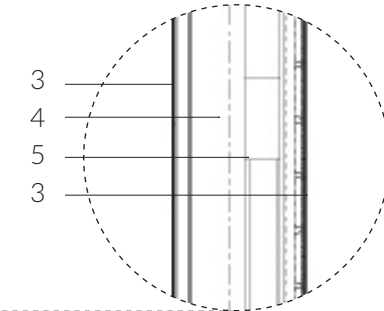
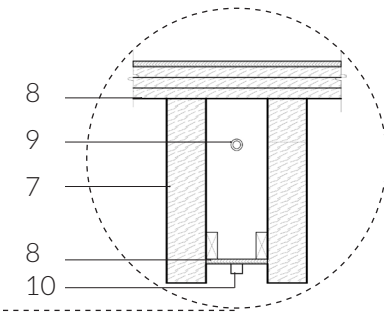
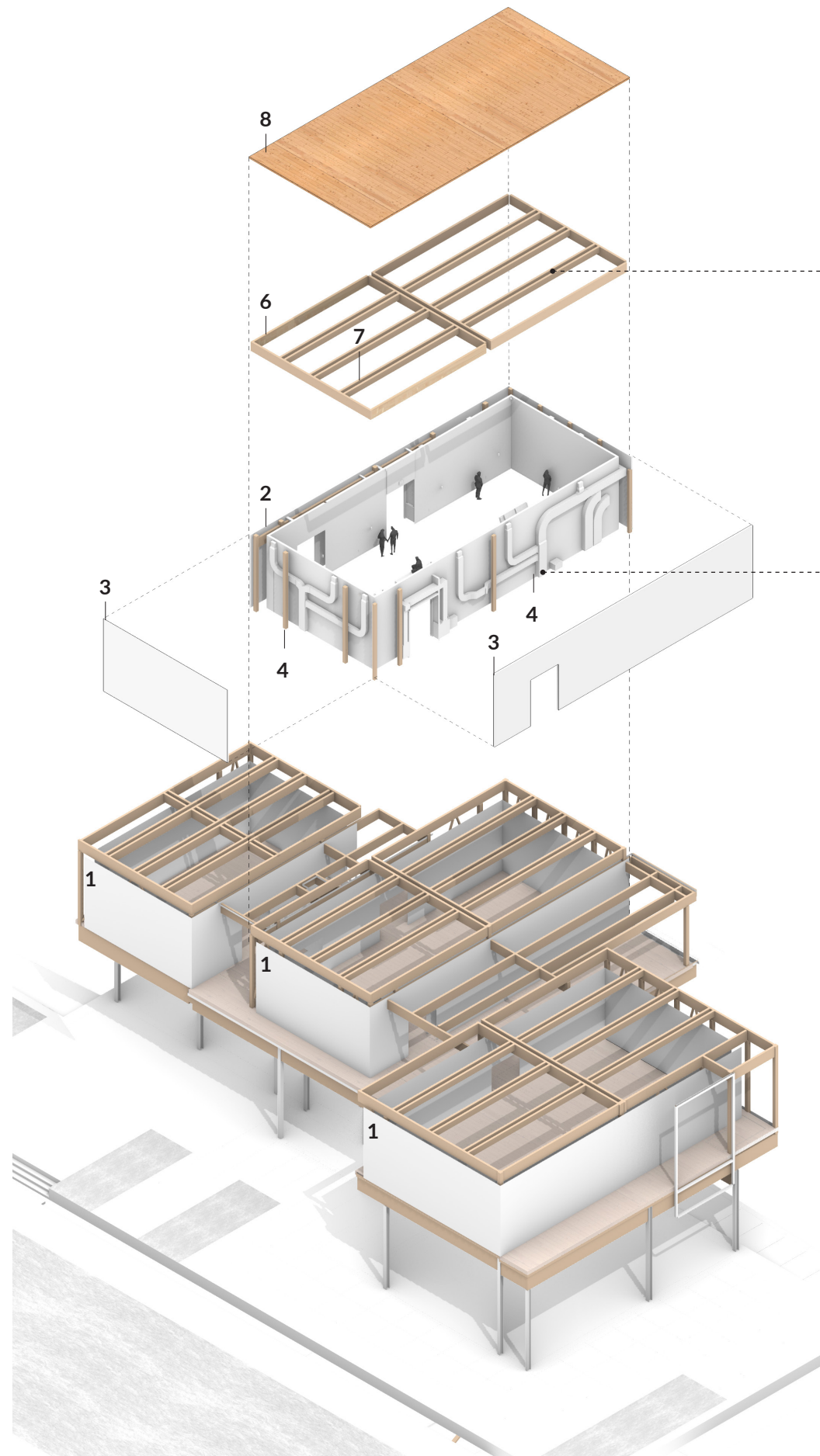
FIRST FLOOR



- Gallery
- Community
- Meandering Circulation Path
- Linear Circulation Path

CIRCULATION

The circulation in the new addition contrasts with the axial, formal layout of the original museum. While the historic building offers a clear and predictable path, the new addition invites discovery—layered, indirect, and punctuated by views, thresholds, and light. This shift encourages exploration, creating a dynamic experience that unfolds gradually rather than all at once.

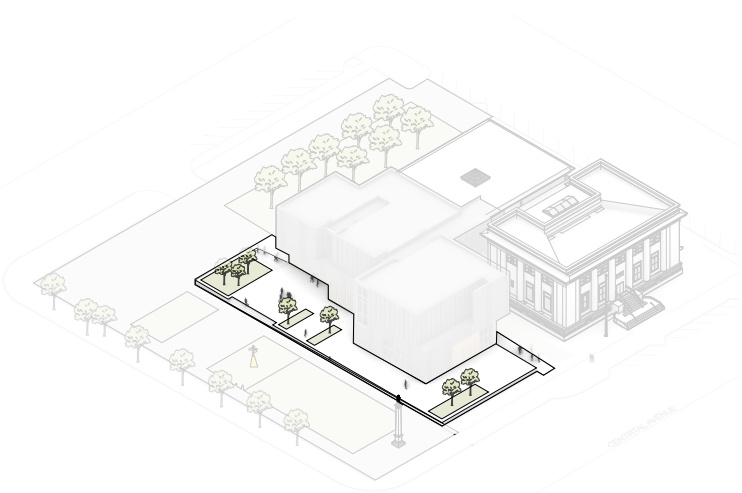
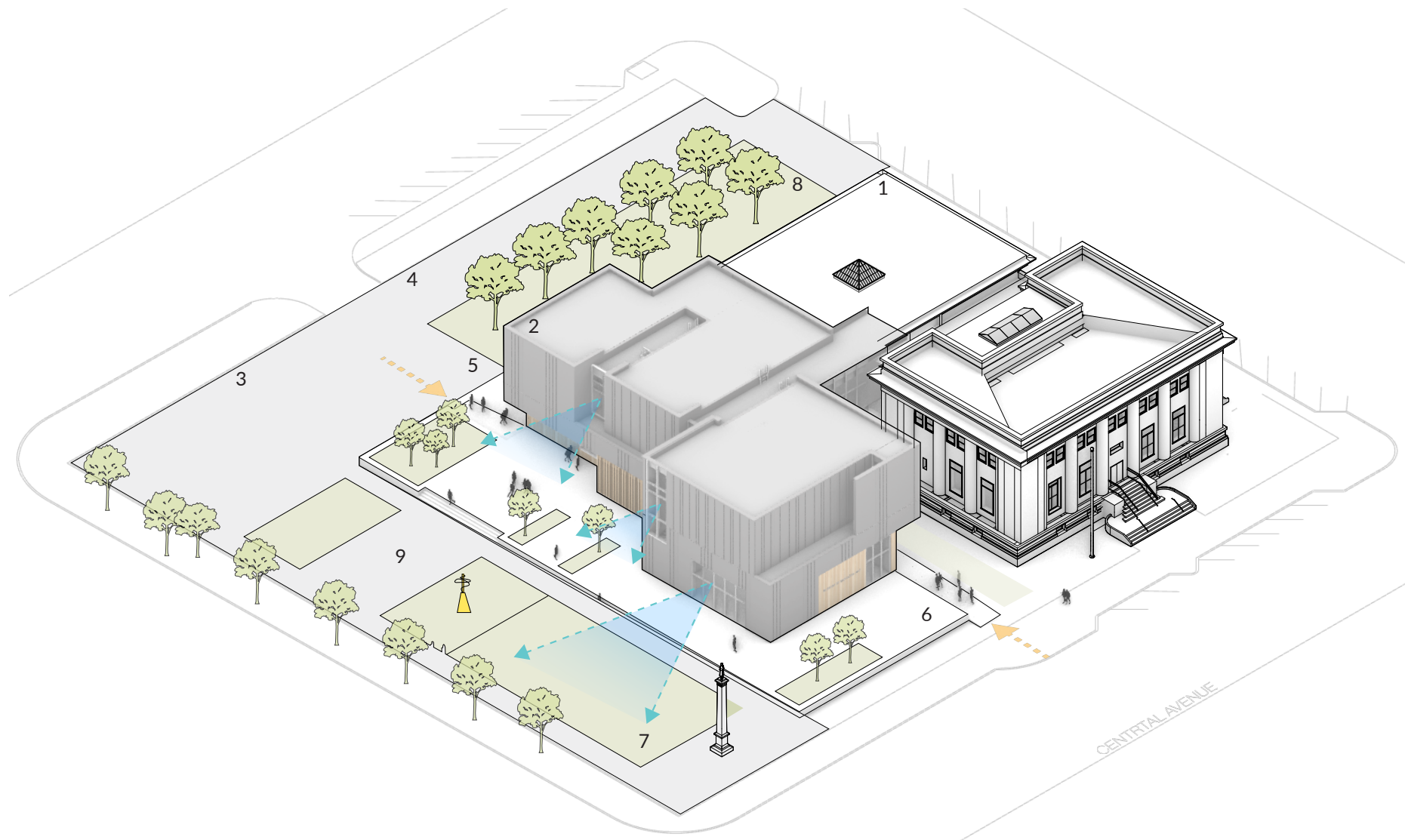


STRUCTURAL ASSEMBLY

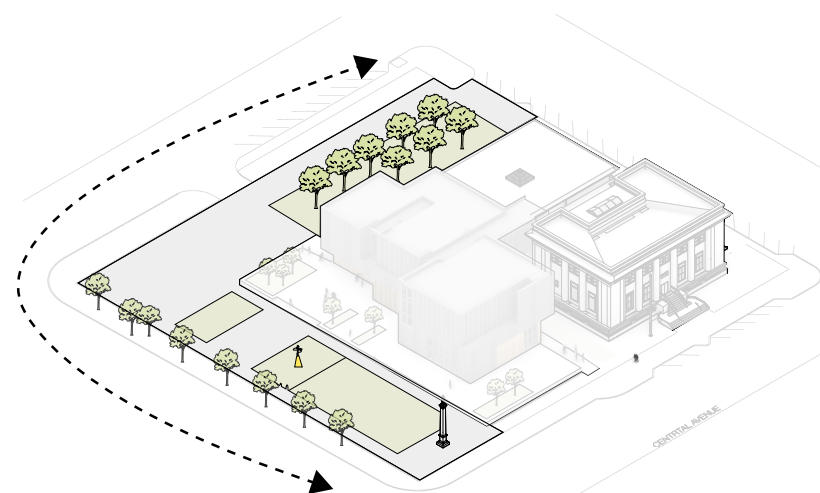
- 1 Permanent Exhibit Gallery
- 2 Gallery Enclosure
- 3 Gypsum Wall Board
- 4 Glulam Column
- 5 Mechanical System
- 6 Glulam Beam Assembly
- 7 Double Glulam Beam
- 8 CLT Panel
- 9 Fire Suppression Piping
- 10 Track Lighting







PLINTH



SCULPTURE GARDEN

LANDSCAPE

The Museum of Nebraska Art is set within a curated landscape where sculpture, architecture, and planting converge to create a unified cultural experience. A new 43,000-square-foot sculpture garden replaces the former walled courtyard and parking lot, transforming the site into an open, 24/7 civic space. Organized as a series of distinct outdoor rooms—a public lawn, shaded courtyard, and elevated terrace—the landscape invites reflection, movement, and gathering.

At the center, a raised plinth bridges the historic building and new addition. More than a connector, it serves as a flexible platform for programming—a stage, gathering space, and place of pause. Native grasses and Nebraska limestone paths ground the museum in its regional context, while seasonal change animates the site. Here, the boundaries between art, architecture, and environment dissolve, placing the museum at the heart of a living, evolving outdoor gallery.

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Existing Building | 5 Service Drive |
| 2 Expansion | 6 Exterior Plinth |
| 3 Drop Off | 7 Main Lawn |
| 4 Parking | 8 East Sculpture Garden |
| | 9 North Sculpture Garden |



MUSEUM of NEBRASKA ART

TATTOO