

MUSAC, the building, designed by architects Emilio Tuñón and Luis Mansilla

- The architecture of MUSAC, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, has become one of the Spanish projects with wide international recognition due to its winning in 2007 of the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture Mies van der Rohe Award and its participation on the exhibition *On-Site: New Architecture in Spain*, that the MoMA New York devoted to the most important recent architectural projects in Spain. The MUSAC also represented Spain at the Venice Architecture Biennial in 2004.



Three years of work and an investment of 33 million Euros have led to the creation of the spectacular building that will house the MUSAC. The architects from Madrid, Luis Moreno Mansilla and Emilio Tuñón, winners of the 2003 National Architecture Prize awarded for their Ciudad de León Auditorium, have planned the museum as an extensive cultural area built in diversified adjoining spaces that aims to emphasize the interest on contemporary expression that art and architecture share. Designed by the architects **Luis M. Mansilla** and **Emilio Tuñón**, authors of emblematic buildings such as the Museo de Bellas Artes de Castellón, Museo de Zamora, Museo de Cantabria—under construction—or the Ciudad de León Auditorium, for which they were awarded the National Architecture Prize in 2003, the MUSAC is located in a residential area in the west of the city of León.

MUSAC Chronology

Since the **first stone was laid on May 2002**, and while construction of the building shows its original façade made up exclusively of panes of glass, this museum has always aroused the curiosity of the people of León. However, the history of this ostentatious building traces to almost ten years back. It was in **1995** when artists and architects from León reclaimed a museum of these characteristics for their city. At first, the museum project was related to that of the Ciudad de León Auditorium. One sole building called *Centro de las Artes* would house the exhibition halls as well as the auditorium itself. In 1995 the joint proposal of the Auditorium and Museum presented by the team formed by the architects **Luis M. Mansilla** and **Emilio Tuñón** won First Prize in the open competition

held by the regional and local governments. In 1998 the two administrations signed an agreement by which the Museum would pertain to the regional government, while the Auditorium would be administered by the local government. Finally, the city council handed over the terrain of more than 21,000 square meters, in the residential district of Eras de Renueva, to the west of the city, on which now stands the museum. On **February 2001**, the then Councillor of Culture of the Castile-León government, Tomás Villanueva, presented the definite project of the MUSAC in the Hostal San Marcos of León.

First official presentation in ARCO 2001

The presentation of the first scale model of the Museum on a national level took place in the Contemporary Art Fair, ARCO 2001, in a ceremony in which the then Minister of Culture, Pilar del Castillo, was present. The presence of the MUSAC in ARCO has been constant ever since. On March 2002, the public company, Gesturcal, was in charge of the concession of construction works of the MUSAC for a total value of 24.33 million euros to the temporary fusion of companies formed by *FCC Construcciones* and *Teconsa*. On **May 2002** the then Councillor of Finance of the Castile-León government, Isabel Carrasco, laid down the **first stone** of the future MUSAC.

On December 2002 the *Fundación Siglo para las Artes en Castilla y León*, governing body of the Museum, named **Rafael Doctor Roncero** (Calzada de Calatrave, Ciudad Real, 1956) its Artistic Director. Art Historian, photographer and exhibitions curator, his trajectory has been marked by the administration of various artistic spaces in Madrid, such as the Canal de Isabel II (1992-2000) and Casa de America (2002). From 1996, he has been responsible for various activities related to photography for the ARCO Art Fair and from 1997-2001 he created and directed the programme of the Espacio Uno in the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

The MUSAC, in the 9th Venice Biennial

The MUSAC, as well as the Ciudad de León Auditorium, together with other three projects represented Spain in the 9th Venice Biennial for Architecture, which took place last September 12 to November 7, 2004. It was the first time that a building in the city of León was present in this International Event that, under the name *Metamorfosis*, gathered together an extensive panorama of recent projects. The other projects that represented our country were the Museo de Cantabria, also by Mansilla+Tuñón, or the esplanade of the Forum of Barcelona by Martínez Lapeña and Torres. The MUSAC was present in the “*Surfaces*” category, while the Auditorium formed part of the exhibit, “*Great Auditoriums*”.

MUSAC at the exhibition in MoMA *On- Site: New Architecture in Spain*

From 12 February to 1 may, 2006, the MoMA of New York programmed an exhibition around 53 architectural projects developed recently in Spain, under the title *On- Site: New Architecture in Spain*. The MUSAC, by Tuñón and Mansilla was one of the selected projects, together with works by other Spanish architects such as Moneo, Enric Miralles, Navarro Baldeweg, Campo Baeza, Zaera, Abalos&Herrerros or Mateo.

According to Terence Riley, curator of the show, “*this exhibition documents the most recent architectural progress in a country that has been recognized during the last years as one of the international centres in innovation and excellence of design. The projects*

represented in this exhibition capture the geographic and generational diversity of new projects and their architects(...)"

MUSAC, European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture Mies van der Rohe Award 2007

The European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture Mies van der Rohe Award is granted every two years by the European Union and the Fundació Mies van der Rohe, Barcelona, to acknowledge and reward quality architectural production in Europe.

In this way, the Award draws attention to the major contribution by European professionals to the development of new ideas and technologies. At the same time, it offers both individuals and public institutions an opportunity to reach a clearer understanding of the cultural role of architecture in the construction of our cities. Furthermore, the Award sets out to foster architecture in two significant ways: by stimulating greater circulation of professional architects throughout the entire European Union in response to transnational commissions and by supporting young architects as they set off on their careers.

The jury granted the MUSAC, Contemporary Art Museum of Castilla y León by Mansilla + Tuñón the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies van der Rohe Award 2007

In making their decision to grant the Award to the MUSAC the jury praised the tectonic clarity of the building and the intelligent realisation of the programme. The jury appreciated how the conceptual basis of a series of flexible interior spaces can deal effectively with the challenges of exhibiting contemporary art. At the same time, and for the first time in this award's history, a *Diploma to the task of the Client* was granted to Mrs. Silvia Clemente, Tourism and Cultures Counsellor of the regional Government of Castilla and León for her support to the project.

Among the buildings who have received the prize in the last years are the Netherlands Embassy in Berlin by Rem Koolhaas and Ellen van Loon (2005), Car Park and Terminus Hoenheim North in Strasbourg by Zaha Hadid and the Kursaal Centre in San Sebastián by Rafael Moneo (2001).

MUSAC, a space for culture

The MUSAC project intends to constructively resolve—according to its architects—a *space for culture, understood as that which makes visible the ties between man and thought*. The building proposed by the architects, in its expanse as a building of a single storey, allows the materialization of *a space where art feels comfortable and helps to erase the borders between art and life*.

A complex geometry, taken from certain roman pavements

The geometry of the floor plan is one of the peculiarities that stand out in the museum. A complex geometry that is taken from **certain pavements of roman origin** that, by means of two polygons (square and rhombus), unfolds onto a continuous regular or irregular surface on a plane. In this way a reticule made of squares and isosceles rhombi of 11 meters wide is formed. This geometric disposition allows the resolution of the program in a flexible manner, qualifying in its movement the different areas and spaces by its capacity to admit variation and difference. In the confrontation of this geometry with the program of

the Museum, a construction whose fundamental quality is the configuration of an expressive system, is obtained, inasmuch as it establishes a system of modular behavior between the figures and, however, allows the incorporation of emerging points (skylights, vestibules) or singularities (courtyards, mezzanines), that add expressiveness to the whole without altering the norms of local behavior.

A homage to the stained glass windows of the León Cathedral

The movement that characterizes the floor plan of the building contrasts with the subtleness of its **façade**, composed of more than **3351 Stadip glass** panes (of which almost 300 are translucent), supported by 500 iron beams.

In the main entrance of the building with its more urban front, the MUSAC configures a wide **public plaza** of 1500 m² that has a concave form to permit the celebration of activities and gatherings, a space where homage is paid to the city as a place for relations between people.

The **glass mosaic of 37 colors** that greet the visitor in the main façade is obtained from the digitalization of an image of the stained glass *El Halconero (The Falconer)* of the León Cathedral. It is one of the oldest stained glass windows of the Cathedral (13th Century) which shows scenes of a hunt. The museum evokes the heritage of the city of León at the same time that it reminds us of its contemporary cathedral character. Through this great multicolored façade—that makes up one of the flashiest parts of the museum—one enters the main hall. Two huge adjoining skylights (of 18 meters in height) illuminate this square surface of 450 m², deformed according to the geometry of the complex. Along the angled perimeter of the main hall, the ticket booth, information, cloakroom, access to multi-purpose hall, exhibit area, didactic workshop, project room, library and commercial area, are located.

The nudity of the white concrete stands out

The nudity of white concrete stands out in the interior and allows for a continuous homogeneity. Together with its high ceilings and exposed beams, the play of the angles of its walls and the openings to interior courtyards create a potent visual poetry. The absence of circulatory elements such as hallways or corridors lets the visitor plan his or her own route of the museum, of the spaces that flow within. The simple and clean combination of white concrete in the interior and the large panes of glass in the exterior, marked by the horizontality of laminated steel, transmit a contemporary image, while the façade that faces the public plaza, made up of colored glass, evokes the heritage of the city.

Exhibition Halls

In the western half of the complex, five exhibition halls can be found. Its versatility allows the subdivision or amplification of spaces, in accordance to the needs of the different exhibits. With a total surface area of 3400 m², the exhibition halls are organized as a series of six irregular interlocking bands, leaving open spaces within to create a flexible complex of exhibition halls and courtyards. These different halls have a constant width of 10.30 meters and a total height of 6.80 meters. To this exhibit surface area, 180 m² of the project room must be added. Natural light comes from three skylights and windows open to courtyards or onto the street. The three courtyards—with a total surface area of 1300 m²—as well as the garden that surrounds the building and the public plaza, allow for open air exhibitions.

Commercial Area

The shop, coffeeshop and restaurant are located on a lateral wing, on the southern side of the site. The **shop** is of a single storey of 200 m², with display windows that face the interior of the MUSAC. The **coffeeshop** of 100 m² is located beside the shop, while the **restaurant**, with a total area of 380 m², is located in the mezzanine. With the objective of offering a more ample service to the city, access has been provided to this area from the exterior, as well as from the interior of the museum. For security reasons, a large metal door separates the commercial area from the rest of the building.

Internal Areas

In the eastern wing of the complex, the internal areas—with security access and limited circulation—can be found: the storage spaces (three warehouses with a total area of 650 m²), the loading and unloading bays, offices, conservation and documentation. The office and documentation areas have two floors with a total area of 500 m².

Public Areas

From the main hall, the library, didactic workshop, multi-purpose hall and project room, can be accessed: all of them spaces for public use. The library is organized in 2 floors with a surface area of 250 m². In the mezzanine the bookshelves can be found, while consulting tables for audiovisual works can be found on the ground floor. The project room, with a programme of four temporary exhibitions a year, is distributed in one floor with a total surface area of 180 m². The multi-purpose hall, with a projection screen, seats 110.

Construction Details and Installations

The halls—as in the rest of the building—is made of **huge walls of white concrete** built on-site with joint board framing, that give it its characteristic rugged aspect. The ceiling is supported by prefabricated concrete beams of 0.80 m wide and with a distance of 1.20 m between each. The pavement is of continuous industrial flooring separated by aluminium joints. The illumination of exhibits is resolved by means of projectors of different types that are hung from electrified rails located in the ceiling and with a distance of 2.40 m between each one. This system allows the adaptation of different lighting needs for each exhibit.

One detail that must be mentioned is that all exhibit halls possess a **perimeter gutter** that houses all installation requirements (electricity, voice, data, audio-video signal and fiber optics) with mechanical boxes every 3 m. In this way, the adaptation of the exhibition spaces to the different technical needs of contemporary art can be guaranteed.

Mansilla+Tuñón Arquitectos

In **1992** Luis Moreno Mansilla (1959) and Emilio Tuñón (1958) set up the office **MANSILLA+TUÑÓN ARQUITECTOS**, dedicated to the confrontation of theory and planning and building practice. Since 1986, Luis M. Mansilla and Emilio Tuñón give classes in Project Design as Full Professors in the Architectural Projects Department of the Madrid School of Architecture, and have been Guest Professors at many universities: the Städelschule in Frankfurt (1997-1998), the Navarra School of Architecture (1998–1999), the ETSAB in Barcelona (1999-2000), the New School of Architecture in Puerto Rico (2000), the Fundación San Pablo CEU Arquitectura (2000-2001) and the Barcelona International School of Architecture (2001- 2002).

In recent years Mansilla + Tuñón have been the winners in various **competition**: Lalín Town Hall, Pontevedra (2004), The cultural complex in Logroño (2003), the Museum of Cantabria (2002), the Royal Collections Museum (2002), The San Fermín Bull-Run Centre (2001), the Brescia Center of Contemporary Culture (2000), The Fine Arts Museum in

Castellón (1998), the City of León Auditorium (1996) and the Community of Madrid Documentation Centre in the former El Águila brewery (1995).

Among the **Awards and Distinctions** they have received the most noteworthy are: the 2003 National Architecture Prize for the Ciudad de León Auditorium, the 2001 FAD Prize for the Museo de Castellón, the 2000 COACV Prize, the 2000 Building of Excellence Award, a Special Mention in the 1997 Spanish Architecture Prize, the 1997 CEOE Foundation Prize and the 1996 Premio Arquitecto for the Museo de Zamora. At present Mansilla+Tuñón are working on the following projects: Museo de las Colecciones Reales en Madrid (Palacio Real de Madrid); a residencial project in Naijing (China), Urban replanning of the Valbuena area in Logroño and the new office of the Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza in Vigo.

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