Tour—Designed by Tabitha Schmidt-Manager, Tour Programs; Information by Barbara Justus, Planning
September 6, 2006

www.nelson-atkins.org
816.561.4000 Telephone
816.561.1011 Facsimile

Architecture and Art of Bloch

TOUR DESCRIPTION: This tour is an introduction to the new Henry and Marion Bloch building. Participants will gain an understanding of the philosophy, architecture and collections represented in this grand building while becoming familiar with the new space.

TOUR OBJECTIVE: Participants will:

- Discover the key elements of the new building and its relationship to the existing Museum.
- Gain an understanding that the Museum consists of two buildings, but is one Museum.
- Be familiarized with the collections and purpose of the spaces.
- Explore the architecture of the Bloch building.

TARGET GRADE LEVEL: General Public

LENGTH: 1 hour and 15 minutes

KEY MESSAGES:

- The Bloch building was designed with certain key elements in mind, particularly that of fusion with the landscape and with the introduction of light into the interior spaces. Steven Holl has said that the building plays light like an instrument. It is a building for our time and takes into account the beautiful elements of the existing building.

- The Museum now consists of two buildings, but is still one Museum.

- The collections housed in the new building include Contemporary Art, African, Photography and Featured Exhibitions.

- The architecture of Bloch is wholly different than the existing building, but respects the integrity of the original. The building has many unique architectural elements that make it a work of art on its own.

KEY STOPS:
Stop: Upper Plaza Entry
Lobby Overlook
Library and Cantilevered Staircase
Main lens
Glass and Light
Café

Stop: Lower Lobby
Garage entrance
Museum Bookstore
Coat Check
Visitor Services Desk
Nexus: Nelson-Atkins Bronze Doors, Sculpture Park Terrace and Bloch gallery walk

Stop: Contemporary Galleries
Ramps and Stairs
All Contemporary Galleries (stroll through)
Point out Contemporary Dec. Arts in Alcove

Stop: African Gallery and Photography Gallery
Benin Head and Beaded Throne
Photograph Free Choice
Basement Level-Underground City

Stop: Noguchi Court and Cubic Gallery
Noguchi Fountain
Sol le Witt, 1,3, 5, 7, 9, 11
Point out Featured Exhibition Space

**VOCABULARY:**

**Lens:** The term used to identify the five glass structures that comprise the portion of the building that is visible above ground in the landscape. The lenses make up only about 25 percent of the entire building space, the remainder of which is underground.

**Gallery Walk:** The Gallery Walk is the “fast track” that originates immediately south of the Lobby Nexus and terminates just north of Noguchi Court and the Featured Exhibition galleries. It runs immediately alongside the permanent collection galleries on the west side of the building. It enables the visitor to move quickly to Featured Exhibitions without passing through any permanent collection galleries. There is, however, access from it to all permanent collections.

**Cubic Gallery:** A small gallery in the far southwest corner of the building, immediately south of Noguchi Court. It is so named because it is a perfect cube, 34 by 34 by 34 feet.

**Nexus:** The crossroads space located east of the Atkins doors. This is the point at which the upper and lower lobbies converge. It is bounded on the west by the limestone wall of the Nelson-Atkins Building, formerly the east entrance to that building. This is a place of decision-making, containing two Visitor Services desks. From the nexus, the visitor may enter the Nelson-Atkins Building, proceed southward into the Bloch galleries, or exit into the Kansas City Sculpture Park.

**T-Walls and Flutter-Ts:** In each of Lenses 2 through 5, a wall runs partway through the underground gallery space from east to west, bisecting the lens. These walls, called T-Walls, begin to flare outward about midway up their vertical height. Some arch out and upward almost all the way to the defining glass walls of the lens; others extend only partway, stopping in midair. When this occurs, the resulting “breaks”
in the T-Wall are referred to as "flutters." A T-Wall that includes these flutters is a Flutter-T. The result is an asymmetrical arrangement of multi-sized curved surfaces that create stunning areas of light and shadow, sometimes presenting as many as ten different shades of light in the ceiling of a given space.

**Board-formed concrete:** The retaining walls of the building are made of board-formed concrete. Unlike smooth concrete walls, these have a roughened surface that results in a very organic character. This surface is achieved by embedding narrow wood strips in the concrete as it is poured. As the concrete cures, the strips are pulled away from the wall, leaving behind a textured pattern. These walls are used on the east side of the building, where it sits high above Rockhill Road. They are positioned in a stepped design to mitigate their overall height, with landscaped terraces in between.

**Incandescent lighting:** A system of artificial lighting in which a filament is heated by an electric current to the point where it gives off light.

**Fluorescent lighting:** A system of artificial lighting, usually comprised of glass tubes, whose inner walls are coated with a material that gives off light when an electrical current causes a vapor within the tube to discharge electrons.

**Terrazzo:** Terrazzo is a flooring material made up of a binding matrix that houses a mixture of minerals. In the Bloch Building, the binder is black-pigmented epoxy and the materials embedded in it consist of granite and recycled glass.

**Cantilevered:** A projecting structure, such as a beam, that is supported at one end and carries a load at the other end or along its length.

**KEY FACTS:**

- The other five architectural firms asked to submit a design were:
  - Machado and Silvetti-Boston
  - Carlos Jimenez-Houston
  - Christian de Portzamparc-Paris, France
  - Tadao Ando-Osaka, Japan
  - Gigon and Guyer-Zurich, Switzerland

- The percent expanded overall museum space is 71%.
- 44% increase in total exhibition space

- Seven different glass systems in Bloch:
  - Exterior channel glass
  - Interior channel glass
  - Interior laminated glass wall
    (These first three are the primary glass systems.)
  - Pressure glazed steel and glass curtain wall
  - Structurally glazed steel and glass curtain wall
  - Steel and glass canopy
  - Storefront glazing at airshaft

- Elevators for the Museum now include:
  - Seven in the original building
  - Six in the Bloch building
  - One in the parking garage
  - One in the central plant
• Number of parking spaces prior to the new parking garage was 232. With the new garage parking spaces number 453. 95% increase in parking space.

• Grand Stair leading to library is 96 feet long and supported in one place on the wall. It is **NOT** cantilevered. The terrazzo treads cantilever off of the east side of the metal stair, but the stair itself is not a cantilever since it has one support column on the west wall.

  The *Piranesi* stair at the north end of the building, between the Café and the elevator, **IS** a cantilever. It has earned the name *Piranesi* from its reminiscence of the series of etchings by Giovanni Battista Piranesi entitled *The Prisons*.

• The floor is a highly-polished terrazzo consisting of a black-pigmented epoxy binder containing chips of granite and recycled glass.

• Handrails are bead blasted stainless steel.

• The walls of the lobby are a hand-troweled polished plaster, a contemporary version of Venetian plaster. Gallery walls are a Level 5 drywall finish. The upper portion of the T-Walls and Flutter-Ts are plaster.

• The largest plank of glass is 22 feet in height and 16 inches wide and is used in limited areas of the interior wall of Lens 1.

• The building glass underwent extensive testing prior to placement of the first glass order. At a specialized test site in Florida a mock-up characteristic of one of the lenses, measuring 28 feet wide, 7 feet deep and nearly 30 feet high, was erected for the purpose of conducting a rigorous series of tests that would simulate and measure absolute design condition extremes and real-life conditions under which the building would operate.

• There is no art in the first lens, but the building IS ART.

**TOUR INTRODUCTION:** (to be used at all first stops)

The Bloch Building, designed by American architect Steven Holl, is an integration of art, architecture and landscape. It is a stunning example of Holl’s signature design style—cathedral-like ceilings and the intriguing use of natural light. Seventy-five percent of the building is underground, with five glass structures rising above grade to form “lenses.”

The first and largest of these is situated north to south; the other four are oriented east to west, resembling fingers that reach into the surrounding Kansas City Sculpture Park. The grassy areas between the lenses form much of the roof area above the underground galleries.

Steven Holl was one of six architectural firms asked to present a plan for the expansion project. The north side of the Nelson-Atkins Building was thought to be a likely site for the expansion, with a parking garage located beneath. Holl instead chose the site east of the building. By doing this, he allowed the great neoclassical building to remain visible and it lent itself well to the landscape of the Kansas City Sculpture Park. He compares it to “stone and feather.” The original is firmly rooted in the ground while the new building appears to float within its surrounding landscape.

The building is the equivalent of a 67-story building laid on its side, measuring 840 feet in length. The original is 310 feet long. The overall square footage is 165,000. The original building is 234,000. **Lens 1** of the Bloch Building measures 41 feet in height measured from the J.C. Nichols Plaza. The height of the Nelson-Atkins Building, from this same vantage point, measures 55 feet.
Stop: Upper Plaza

(Use tour introduction if first stop)

Key Points:

Lobby Overlook/Main Lens
Glass and Light
Library and Cantilevered Staircase
Café

Note to Docents: At this stop make sure you talk about the main key points. This is your opportunity to show the tour the lobby overlook as well as the outside entrance with the original building and reflecting pool.

Glass and Light: (you can take them to the back side of the elevator to discuss this)
The Bloch building is a building for our time just as the original was a building for its time. Materials available today give architects the ability to be very creative. The glass in the building is a major component. There are seven glass systems, with three being primary. The building consists of two walls throughout, with a cavity between the two walls that contains the building’s artificial lighting, and in Lenses 2 through 5, light control shades as well. Catwalks in the cavity allow access to the space. The building’s interior uses incandescent and fluorescent lighting in a track or cove configuration.

During the day, natural light is used with interior lighting to light the space. At night, the lenses appear to glow from within.

Lobby Overlook/Main Lens:
Lens 1 is by far the largest of the lenses. It has five distinct levels and houses a good portion of the day-to-day-activities of the Museum including arrivals, departure, information, stores and food service, library, etc... 

- Basement level which includes library stacks, restrooms, mechanical rooms and Museum Store storage.
- Lower Lobby: Museum store, public restrooms and coat check.
- Upper Lobby: (where we are standing) Café, visitor seating, grand stair and elevator leading to the library.
- Mechanical Mezzanine: operations
- Upper Level: Executive Offices for Director and Chief Operating Officer, Library Reading Room, Meeting room and restrooms

Library:
The library has been moved from its underground level in the original building to a new space in Bloch. The stairs before you or the adjacent elevator take you to the new Library Reading Room where you can request books and articles from the stacks. The library stacks are located on the lowest level of the building and can be reached by authorized personnel via an elevator. The library’s hours have also expanded to accommodate the public.
**Café:**
The café is an additional food service space. Rozelle Court is still open and operating. The café specializes in sandwiches, coffees, etc. . . . and includes an outside terrace.

**Stairwell, Elevator and Ramp:** (docents, you can go down the stairs or ramp to move to the next stop)
You can access the lower lobby level by using the stairwell located between the elevator and café; the elevator; or the ramp. The stairwell goes by the largest public bathroom area.

**Stop Lower Lobby:**

(Use tour introduction if first stop)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Points:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garage entrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coat Check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor Services Desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nexus: Nelson-Atkins Bronze Doors, Sculpture Park Terrace and Bloch gallery walk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note to Docents:** Begin this stop in front of the garage entrance and Museum Store.

**Parking Garage Entrance:** This is the main entrance to the Museum. If you entered from the garage you would have seen a beacon of light pulling you into the Museum. The Parking Garage is also connected to the *One Sun: 34 Moons* sculpture by Walter de Maria. If you are in the garage on a sunny day you can see the moons reflected on the garage floor. The water and light dances across the concrete.

**Museum Store:** The Museum Store went from 710 square feet to 1804 square feet. With this increase in space, the Museum is able to add higher end items as well as the traditional books and cards they had originally.

**Public Coat Check/Group Coat Check:** The Museum also has two new coat check areas. The one on the right is the general coat check area and the one on the left is for groups. Schools use this area a lot during the cooler months.

**Visitor Services Desk/Kiosks:** The Museum has upgraded their customer service areas. We have LCD screens announcing opportunities and events and more terminals and kiosks to aid in decision-making. The desk and kiosks can sell memberships and tickets as well as tell you what’s on view or what you should see while you’re at the Museum that day.
**NEXUS:** The nexus is the decision-making point of Bloch. At this moment, you have a choice: you can go down the gallery walk into the Bloch building; you can go into the original building through the bronze doors; or you can go outside to the Kansas City Sculpture Park.

The bronze doors and original lighting have been preserved to represent the marriage of the two buildings.

The gallery walk is one continuous ramp that connects to the Bloch galleries.

**Sculpture Park Terrace:** (docents, if the weather is nice take your group out to the Sculpture Park Terrace to see the view and the front of the original building)

**Stop: Modern and Contemporary Galleries**

(Use tour introduction if first stop)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Points:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Ramps and Stairs
Key Artwork: (chosen from Jan Schall and Catherine Futter’s Top Ten)
- L3-Duane Hanson, *Museum Guard*
- L5-Elizabeth Murray, *Art Parts* AND Kerry James Marshall, *Memento #5*

Project Space
MACA Dec. Arts in Alcove

**Ramps and Stairs:** The galleries are connected in two ways. Visitors can access the galleries through the staircases that connect them or the gallery walk/ramp that runs along side. The galleries also have doors that can be closed when an event is happening in the main lens to protect the art.

**Ceilings T-Walls and Flutter-Ts:** (docents, do this between L2 and L3) The ceilings of the gallery spaces are one of the most extraordinary elements of the Bloch Building design. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the internal walls that run east and west in the center of each of the Lenses 2 through 5-called T-Walls. The tops of these walls curve outward to the north and south. Some reach all the way to the glass walls and some stop in mid-air. Where a T-Wall stops in mid-air, it creates what is called a “flutter.” Some flutters break toward the north, others toward the south. This arrangement creates stunning areas of light and shadow.

**Contemporary Artwork:** Organization of these galleries includes the many “isms” of the collection including Abstract Expressionism, Realism, and Minimalism. (docents, take your group through the Contemporary galleries-as you walk through point out the above key works and note that they are on the list of the curator’s top picks. Feel free to point out other, more well-known, works of art like Warhol and Rauschenberg; however you will not have time to talk at length about any art. Note that there are two Modern galleries in the original building that really begin to tell the story of this collection.)
- L3-Duane Hanson, *Museum Guard*
- L5-Elizabeth Murray, *Art Parts*
- L5-Kerry James Marshall, *Memento #5*
- L6-Alexander Ross, *Untitled*
- L6-Ron Arad, *London Papardelle*
**Project Space:** This is a flexible exhibit space that will be ever-changing and can showcase a lot of new and different types of art.

**Contemporary Decorative Arts:** The Museum’s expansion has also placed the Decorative Arts department front and center. When you visit the original building you will see decorative arts installed with the paintings and sculptures. This alcove is a sampling of Contemporary Decorative Arts. The Arad chair we saw in gallery L6 is also part of our MACA Decorative Arts collection.

**Stop: African and Permanent Photography Galleries**

(Use tour introduction if first stop)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Points:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African Gallery:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <em>Benin Head</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <em>Beaded Throne</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography Gallery-Independent looking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basement Level-Underground City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceilings/Flutter T-Walls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**African Gallery:** This gallery replaces the third floor installation in the original building. The includes representations of the human figure, shrines and reliquaries, pattern and surface design, status and prestige objects, textiles, animals, masks and power objects. Two key pieces include the *Benin Head* and *Beaded Throne*.

**Photography Gallery:** This gallery houses the newly acquired Hallmark Photography collection. This collection is one of the world’s premiere American photography collections. The installation features works of various medium and technique as well as subject matter including daguerreotypes, Civil War, social/documentary, and late 20th century to name a few.

I invite you take a quick walk around the gallery before we move to our next stop. (While your visitors are looking around, tell them about the “underground city” contained within the building.)

**Basement Level “Underground City”:** The lowest level of the building contains a virtual city. The Library stacks, Museum Store storage and Collection Management facilities are all contained below. Collections Management includes a design and preparation area. This is where the casework, wall mounts, etc. . . . are created. It also houses a new art loading dock that can enclose a semi-truck so the art can be loaded and unloaded in a secure environment. This division also includes collection photography, an object viewing room for art and some conservation offices as well as art storage and operations spaces.
**Stop 5:**

(Use tour introduction if first stop)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Works:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noguchi Court:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Noguchi Fountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cubic Gallery:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sol Le Witt, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point out Featured Exhibition Space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Noguchi Court:** This unique space with its west wall of clear glass offers a sweeping view of the KC Sculpture Park and the south façade of the Nelson-Atkins Building. It provides a permanent home for the Museum’s collection of sculptures by Isamu Noguchi. The Fountain consists of two large chunks of basalt that act as fountain heads which rest in a bed of river rock from Japan. The rock extends beyond the wall of the Court into the surrounding landscape, Noguchi Plaza.

**Cubic Gallery:** This space is a perfect cube. The dimensions are 34 x 34 x 34 (a Fibonacci number) and it has become the home of many Sol Le Witt sculptures who is known for his creations in conceptalist art. The large sculpture before you is called 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 and is on the curator’s top picks list.

**Featured Exhibitions:** The original building had 7, 290 square feet of featured exhibitions space. The Bloch building has 11, 648 square feet increasing the Museum’s space by 60%. The shows are ticketed and you can purchase tickets at the Visitor Services Desk or kiosks. Currently, there are two shows: Manet to Matisse: Impressionist Masters from the Marion and Henry Bloch Collection ending in early September and Developing Greatness: The Origins of American Photography, 1839-1885 running into January 2008

**CONCLUSION:**

Docents, when concluding the tour mention the following things:

- Excitement over the new building
- Other tours available
- Special Exhibitions
- Come back