National Museum of Film and Photography

MARY CATHERINE McDONALD

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

Jaan Holt, Chair
John Eberhard, FAIA
Maria Karvouni, Ph.D.

February 12, 1998
Alexandria, Virginia

Keywords: Architecture, Archive, National Mall, Washington, D.C.
Between the National Gallery of Art and the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., the National Museum of Film and Photography design thesis explores issues of architecture at a scale of cultural significance. This thesis is the architectural manifestation of a museum as a research institution, separate from, yet contributing to an educational mission. It is inspired by the thin line between the two worlds, the public museum and the unseen, though often larger, private archive. In this thesis, a home for a treasury of artifacts was designed for what they could teach us, so that they might be experienced, and for their intrinsic value.

This design thesis explores the role of context, scale, and geometry in a building for the National Mall, as well as the critical requirements and specialized program of a museum. The orthogonal and radial geometry of the city are echoed in the plan. The building program, as well as the physical opportunities of the site, led to the form of the building. The simultaneous cycles of the artifact, the visitor, and the worker, and how they related to the role and amount of natural light also contributed to the form. The thesis is also developed based on the relationship between an object or a film, and a viewer.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The esteemed members of my thesis committee: Professors Jaan Holt and Greg Hunt, FAIA; Director of Research for the American Architectural Foundation, John Eberhard, FAIA; and Associate Professor Maria Karvouni, Ph.D., provided clear direction with unfathomable patience. The faculty and students of the Washington/Alexandria Architecture Consortium were supportive friends, especially Valerie Hassett, IIDA, and Yvette Niguidula Perez.

I acknowledge the community of architects, planners, engineers, interior designers, and builders.

I thank the board of The American Institute of Architects, Academy of Architecture for Health, for teaching me to lead and to do things I never thought possible.

And with thanks for all teachers who inspire and who provide the foundation for graduate school education.

Personal Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Mike Price, AIA, for his inspiration and support. Lastly, I wish to thank my family: my father, Edward James McDonald, who died with the expectation of seeing this project completed, and my mother, Joan Carter McDonald, who is both my ideal and my compass. I acknowledge my sister Sarah Sorrel-Dejerine and my brothers Carter P. McDonald and Allan J. McDonald. Generations of McDonald, Mouton, Carter, MacKinnon, Briede, and Hartel ancestors, I thank for who we are as a family and the hope for who we will be.
# Table of Contents

**Figures** ....................................................................................................................................................... 5

**Context and Scale** .................................................................................................................................... 7  
Exploring the role of context, scale, and geometry

**Prototypical Museums** ............................................................................................................................. 13  
Museums related in scale, program, or topic

**Functional Programming for the Museum** ............................................................................................ 21  
Creating a functional program for the museum

**The Search for Form** ................................................................................................................................ 24  
Building on the site

**Drawings** .................................................................................................................................................... 41

**Bibliography** .............................................................................................................................................. 52

**Curriculum Vitae** ....................................................................................................................................... 54