transformation: 1908 schoolhouse

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abstract

this thesis is an exploration of how the existing site and structure of a 1908 schoolhouse can be transformed and given a new life as a community arts center in marion, virginia.

existing geometry, structure and openings are examined in order to design a project which integrates old and new elements.

the design strives to create indoor and outdoor gathering spaces that promote creativity and arts education.
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what if imagination and the arts are not frosting at all, but the fountainhead of human experience?

rollo may
a 1908 brick schoolhouse in Marion, Virginia, a small town in southwest Virginia.

The building is located at one of the highest points in town at the intersection of Church Street and Strother Street, two blocks from Main Street and the courthouse.

The schoolhouse has been used as a high school and elementary school, as well as a school administrative building and a museum, but is currently vacant.

downtown Marion has minimal public green space, other than the courthouse lawn.
site - existing conditions

view at southwest corner

view at northwest corner

view at southeast corner

existing exterior brick
what does it mean to challenge the original architectural idea?

can the architectural idea remain the same, while the means are challenged?

what are the basic architectural elements of the existing building? should they be preserved? demolished? modified?

how do you activate elements that have become fixed symbols?

what connections are made between old and new? does a trace of the old remain?

should new openings be created? should existing openings be infilled?
schematic exercises

brainstorming – writing... geometry... proportion... alignment... connections... openings
new roof

beam & curtain wall above

roof terrace

new translucent glass floor

new steel structure attached to existing brick
-glass on top horizontal surface
-see plans & elevations for vertical glass locations

roof plan
south elevation
west elevation
east elevation
the existing structure is activated by engaging the new structure.

A steel and glass structure creates an enclosure over the existing brick and becomes a graphical frame relating to the geometry of the old building. It is made as thin as possible by mounting the glass within the steel, flush with the outside face of the frame.

The steel provides the support for 12' deep boxes that extend from existing openings in the exterior brick wall, both to the outside and inside, at varying dimensions. The connection continues to interior spaces through aligned openings in the interior walls adjacent to a new east atrium.
allow a window to be more than just a punched hole in the exterior wall...create a new extension that corresponds to the existing holes.

embrace the idea of occupying openings.

a change in materials and color signals the passage through the old wall. you are suspended in a new environment, looking down on, up at and back through the old.

infill of opaque material or glass is determined by orientation and view, as well as desired conditions for the corresponding interior space.

movable “steps” allow access to raised window boxes on the first floor. these can be configured in multiple ways and locations as steps, seating, tables.

existing brick is removed down to the floor level in the openings on the second floor, allowing the window boxes to enlarge the existing rooms as they become extensions.

facade - extensions - openings

occupying the window box
the new north and south end walls and roof of the central atrium are pulled away from the existing enclosure, creating a void that allows light to penetrate through translucent glass.

a circular window in the new south wall references the arch of the old strother street entrance and designates the new ground floor entrance, accessed from the street level by a ramp.

existing openings remain at multiple levels throughout the atrium although some are no longer connected to the floors as they once were. remaining portions of the existing floors form new bridges.

the main arch in the west wall, formerly only on the first floor level, is extended down to the ground floor.
connections to the exterior

an amphitheatre, community garden and roof terrace provide outdoor gathering and performance spaces.

large glass doors slide vertically to open the east atrium to the exterior.

a rolling stage moves out from the east atrium into the amphitheatre.

window box extensions provide elevated performance balconies.
yellow = sunshine, energy, happiness

yellow wall inside window box

Veron Primary School, Dominican Republic, March 2009
all images by author.