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Reimagined Arkansas Arts Center wins Best of Design Award

Award proves transformational power of the new cultural hub for Arkansas

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. – The Arkansas Arts Center’s reimagined MacArthur Park building was named the winner of the 2019 *The Architect’s Newspaper* Best of Design Awards in the Unbuilt – Cultural category.

Designed by renowned architecture firm Studio Gang, the new building’s distinctive architectural identity signifies the Art Center’s role as a cultural beacon for the future of Arkansas while celebrating the institution’s proud legacy. Scheduled to open in 2022, the project will strengthen the Arkansas Arts Center as the region’s leading visual and performing arts institution.

The Architect’s Newspaper Best of Design award honor exceptional architecture, design and building projects throughout Canada, Mexico and the United States. The annual awards also point to trends in the building design.

“Sensitivity and subtlety were at a premium,” *The Architect’s Newspaper* editors wrote of this year’s awardees. “Winners were chosen for their contextual, tactical approaches rather than big, bombastic ideas.”

Studio Gang’s design for the reimagined Arkansas Arts Center creates where the community can enjoy all the benefits of engaging with the arts. The new building will feature two entrances – the north courtyard entrance features a nod to past in the beautifully preserved 1937 façade of the Museum of Fine Arts. The south entrance opens into MacArthur Park. Prominent glass-enclosed spaces at either entrance welcome visitors into the building from MacArthur Park at the south and downtown Little Rock at the north.

Inside, visitors will find expertly lit galleries to feature the Arts Center’s 14,000-work collection of international art. A full schedule of dynamic special exhibitions will celebrate the artistic history and current work of the Delta region while bringing world-class exhibitions from around the world to Little Rock. The Museum School will feature fully equipped studios for drawing, painting, printmaking, ceramics, glass, wood, and metalsmithing classes for children and adults, along with a gallery space for displaying student work. State-of-the-art main stage and black box theatre spaces will host Children’s Theatre programming, films and performing arts events. The innovative “Living Room” will create space for community and social gatherings, quiet reflection, and everything in between with views of downtown Little Rock. A full-service restaurant will feature indoor and shaded outdoor seating overlooking MacArthur Park. The design also includes a Museum Shop, collections research room, and a lecture hall for public programs.

The project also features a revitalized MacArthur Park landscape, designed by Kate Orff and SCAPE. The landscape, inspired by Little Rock’s unique ecologies, will expand the connections between the building

and MacArthur Park through native and sustainable planting and water reclamation. Landscape pathways, a great lawn and open areas will allow for vibrant, outdoor community programming.

“The reimagined Arkansas Arts Center will be a place that showcases art that educates, inspires, provokes and beautifies our lives,” Executive Director Victoria Ramirez said. “We imagine this project as one that will chart the future of the arts in Little Rock, and we are honored to see that it is already being recognized as such.”

The transformation of the Arkansas Arts Center into a state-of-the-art facility will be realized through a \$128 million special fundraising campaign, *Reimagining the Arkansas Arts Center: Campaign for Our Cultural Future*. The campaign will also provide transition and opening support, while also strengthening the Arkansas Arts Center Foundation’s endowment, yielding support for operations, exhibitions, acquisitions, and education and outreach programming in the new building. At the October 1 groundbreaking ceremony, capital campaign co-chairs Harriet and Warrant Stephens announced that the campaign has raised more than \$122.7 million of its \$128 million goal.

Studio Gang is an architecture and urban design practice headquartered in Chicago, with offices in New York, San Francisco and Paris. Founded and led by MacArthur Fellow Jeanne Gang, Studio Gang’s award-winning work ranges in scale and typology from the 82-story Aqua Tower to the 14-acre Nature Boardwalk at Lincoln Park Zoo, both located in Chicago. Gang has been recognized for a design process that foregrounds the relationship among people and their environments, and is the only architect named to TIME Magazine’s list of the 100 Most Influential People of 2019. Studio Gang is currently designing cultural and civic projects across the Americas, including an expansion to the American Museum of Natural History in New York, a new Center for the University of Chicago in Paris, a new United States Embassy in Brasilia, and a Global Terminal at O’Hare International Airport in Chicago. This is Studio Gang’s first project in Arkansas.

SCAPE, founded by landscape architect and MacArthur Fellow Kate Orff, is a design-driven landscape architecture and urban design studio based in New York. They believe landscape architecture can enable positive change in communities through the creation of regenerative living infrastructure and public landscapes. SCAPE works to integrate natural cycles and systems into environments across all scales, from the urban pocket-park to the regional ecological plan. They do this through diverse forms of landscape architecture – built landscapes, planning frameworks, research, books, and installations – with the ultimate goal of connecting people to their immediate environment and creating dynamic and adaptive landscapes of the future.

During construction, the Arkansas Arts Center has moved from its current facility in MacArthur Park into a temporary location at the Riverdale Shopping Center at 2510 Cantrell Road in Little Rock. Classes, education programs, and performances will continue at the temporary location from Fall 2019 through the new Arts Center’s planned Grand Opening in 2022.

GENERAL INFORMATION

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