



Contributed by Ennead Architects

Yale University Art Gallery renovations have included the building designed by Louis Kahn, at left, and the 1926 building, at right, designed by Edgerton Swartwout.

Yale Art Gallery makes past available to all in the present

HERE in New Haven, a rarefied part of a rarefied institution, the Yale University Art Gallery, is about to be reborn.

It is in the last year of a 15-year effort that shows the upside of the 99-to-1 percent dynamic so much in the news these last months.



DUO DICKINSON More than a political or socio-economic reality, the most obvious split between the top 1 percent and the remaining 99 in our culture happens in the arts.

The artistic tradition is, by definition, cutting-edge and wrought by a tiny minority who feel both compelled by insight, and enabled by skill and focus to show the 99 percent an inherently personal view.

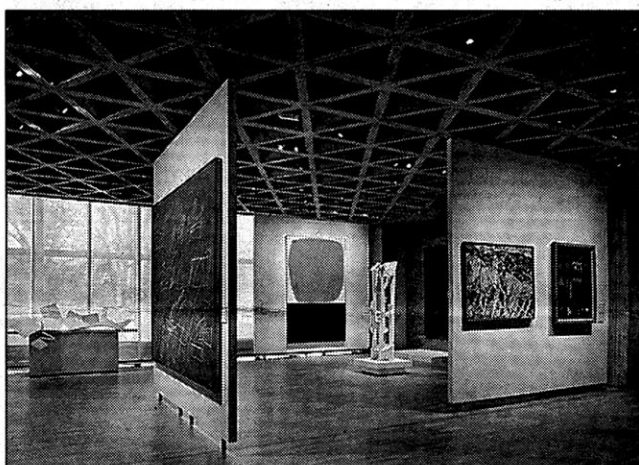
Yale University is populated by, and its core mission is focused on, a tiny minority who excel academically.

In Yale's temples to the arts, its art museums, the potential for unique gifts to slide into elitism is turned on its head by the institution's open door policy — the galleries are open and free and the public schools are embraced in a facility that is fully funded by the 1 percent.

The meticulous renovations take that fact to the next level where the area open to the public is greatly increased and much more of the collection is available for viewing.

Yale sits on 10 percent of New Haven's 17 square miles and educates or employs about 20 percent of the city's population. Of the 439 buildings at Yale, it has the gallery's three interconnected buildings, and the Center for British Art that are solely dedicated to the display of the visual arts.

The Center for British Art was given a new roof and a complete fine-tuning over a decade ago, but it is



Contributed by Yale University Art Gallery

Restored gallery in 1953 Louis Kahn building of art gallery.

the triad of museum structures on the north side of Chapel Street that have undergone a rebirth and restoration that is virtually transformative.

These three architectural bedfellows are a unique combo. The old brownstone building called Street Hall was built in 1866. It accommodated the first art school in America and was dedicated to housing the patriot-artist John Trumbull's collection, donated to Yale in 1832.

The next building down Chapel Street was built in 1926 and is called "Swartwout." It is one of the few buildings named after its architect, Edgerton Swartwout.

By 1953, the Swartwout gallery was full and Yale commissioned the true modern master, Louis Kahn, to design its new art gallery that completed the westerly movement of art up Chapel Street.

In December, there will be a full opening of this completely renovated triplex. The effort commenced in 1998, and is incredible not only because of its scale — \$135 million worth of stem-to-stern restoration and adaptive renovation — but the intricate quality of the final product.

Ennead Architects of New York has taken an extraordinary amount of care and diligence in creating new space and doing the kind of museum-quality architectural restoration seldom seen anywhere.

The 1 percent financed

the \$135 million it took to restore and reinvigorate part of a similarly elite institution, Yale University.

The net result is that 100 percent of us can benefit from the extreme gifts that very few of us have: financial for the donors, but also the creative and aesthetic gifts of the artists who have filled these three buildings with their exquisite work and the architects who designed them.

The schisms that the 1 percent paradigm represents are real. The needs and concerns of the many are typically ignored when the vanities of the elite few are served.

However, there are two mindsets, independent of social status, talent and wealth — one that hoards and focuses inward and one that shares and offers itself outward.

While any Ivy League institution can legitimately be called "exclusive," in this particular case, Yale's 300-plus years of exclusivity has created the resources to make an all-inclusive open gift for all of us — the renovation of the Yale Art Gallery complex — one that not only preserves and protects the past, but offers up beauty for any who happen to wander in, or just walk by.

.....
Duo Dickinson, an architect, writes about architecture and urban design for the Register. Readers may write him at 94 Bradley Road, Madison 06443. Email: duo.dickinson@snet.net.