ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE INFINITE CANVAS: Perpetual Immersion
                             of Sequential Narratives

                             Antonio Marco De Vittorio, Masters of
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Directed By: Professor Brian Kelly, Architecture Department

In the past century, comic books have been represented as the lowest of art forms.[1] As time progressed, the comic book as a medium evolved and became increasingly popular. The depth of the characters and the stories they enclose within their covers immerse the reader in worlds that through other mediums could not be properly depicted and experienced.

The scope of this thesis will be to design a museum to host comic book art by means of analyzing its development as a popular art form and its relationship to architecture. The mission of the museum is to create an immersive comic book experience, promote the understanding and appreciation of comic art as well as to detail and discuss its artistic, cultural, and historical impact upon society.

The city of Baltimore was selected as the site for this proposal. The ample diversity and grandeur of its history and character render it with a degree of richness and uniqueness rarely found in other cities. The duality of the setting in terms of affluent areas vs. impoverished ones helps denote it as a live example of the duality represented in the cities inside the comics.

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[1] Scott McCloud *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1993.

THE INFINITE CANVAS: PERPETUAL IMMERSION OF SEQUENTIAL
NARRATIVES

By

Antonio Marco De Vittorio.

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Advisory Committee:
Brian P. Kelly, Chair
Luis Diego Quiros, Committee member
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Dedication

Questa Tesi racchiude in sé gran parte della mia vita, passata, presente e futura. Con orgoglio la dedico ai miei genitori, ed in particolare a mio Padre che mi ha guidato ed ispirato negli studi e nella vita, grazie Papà.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my family and Gisela for your love and support. I would also like to thank my committee for their continued belief in this thesis.

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Part 1: Understanding Comics

What defines a comic?

Webster's definition of a comic:

> *"Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer."*

To put it more simply, a comic is a sequential art. You will not get the same experience looking at a single image of a cartoon. Taken individually, images are just that, images. However, if the two images are intentionally juxtaposed then the art becomes a comic (figure 1).
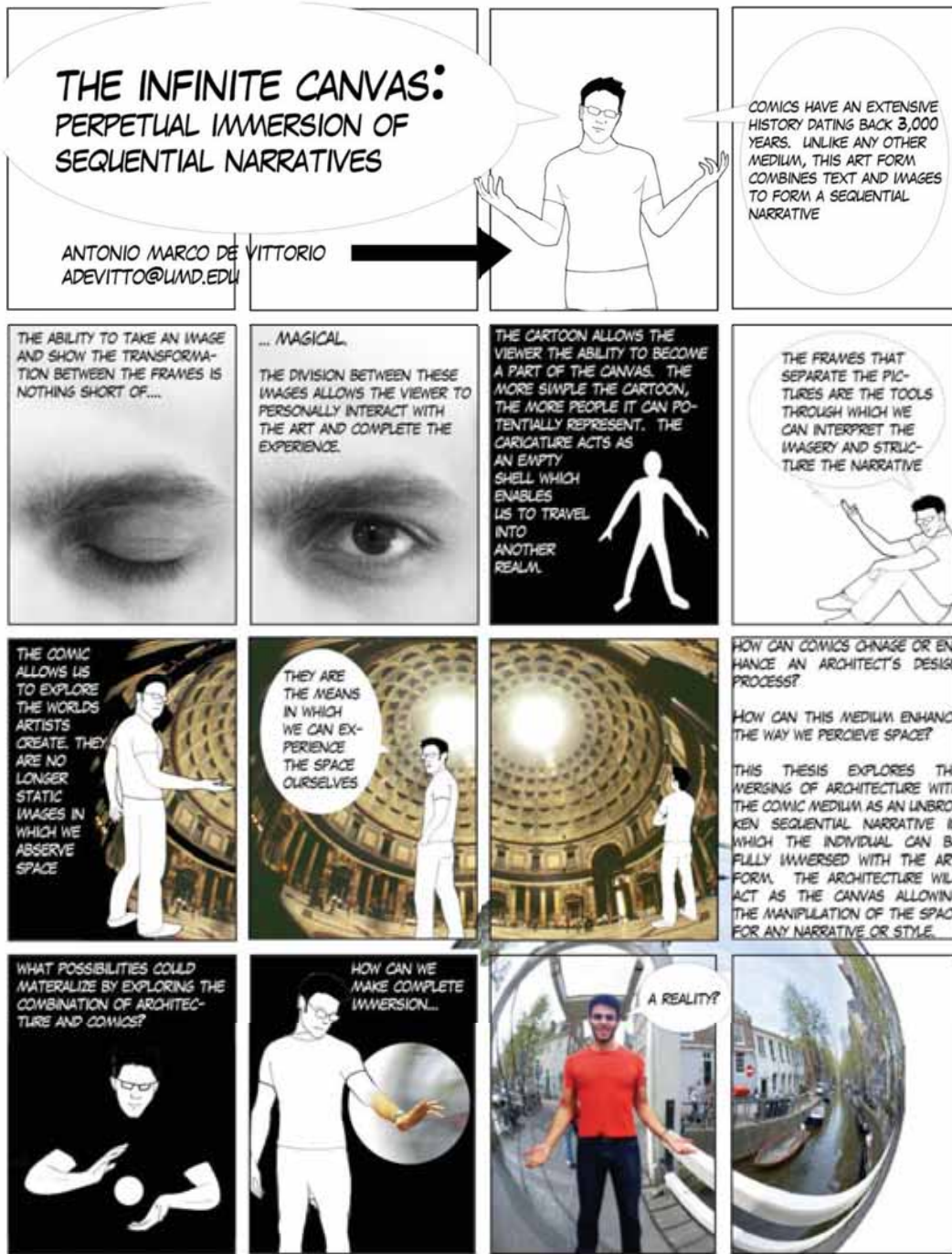
Figure 1 - Illustration explaining The Infinite Canvas abstract (by author)

Historical Significance

Our traditional understanding of comics could represent a series of illustrations printed on paper depicting superheroes or cartoons whose thoughts and ideas are expressed through speech bubbles. However, the art form described as a sequential narrative can be traced back thirty-two centuries.

Some of the oldest stories depicted in a sequential narrative can be found in ancient Egyptian paintings. These ancient Egyptians scribes told stories of farmers cultivating fields, peasants separating the wheat from the chaff, officials measuring rope to survey the land, and farmers being beaten for late payment on taxes. These paintings reported and recorded the social climate of those times.[2]

In ancient Rome, the emperors would depict their war victories in friezes that recounted the battles in a linear narrative. Trajan's column in Rome commemorates Emperor Trajan's victory and describes the Dacian Wars through a spiral bas-relief. The story is revealed to the viewer starting at the base of the column, which spirals up to the top.

With the invention of printing, the art form evolved out of a diversion of the rich and powerful into a medium, which became accessible to any class.[3]

William Hogarth developed the technique of storytelling in print during the 18th century, which gave birth to our modern day comic book. The comic medium

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[2] McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York, New York:Harper Perrenial, 1993

[3] McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*

was used to address social concerns of that period. Hogarth's first illustration named "The Harlot's Progress" accounting the story of a young woman who is forced into prostitution. The original story was told in a series of six paintings and later sold as a portfolio of engravings. These paintings were designed specifically to be viewed side-by-side as a sequential narrative. Without the sequencing of the paintings the overall story could not be understood with a single panel.[4]

The art form came into fruition when the sequential images were combined with words to create a more vivid narration. Rudolphe Toffer, credited as the father of the modern comic, combined the illustrations separated by white borders and words. Toffer's comic, depicting light satiric picture stories, demonstrated Europe's first interdependent combination of words and pictures seen in Europe[5].

The comic medium can also be explored through sculpture. Take Gianlorenzo's Bernini's "The Rape of Proserpina" for instance (Figure 1). The Baroque marble sculpture allows simultaneous depiction of abduction, arrival in the underworld, and her prayer to mother Ceres. The narrative is told through the sculpture depending on where the observer is situated in the gallery.

The medium as we understand it today began to take form in the late 19th century by American and European artists. In the early 20th century, the comic as a mass medium became standardized in the United States by using cartoons and word bubbles found in newspaper comic strips.

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[4] Hallet, Mark and Rising, Christine. *Hogarth*. Tate Publishing. Millbank, London. 2006

[5] McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*
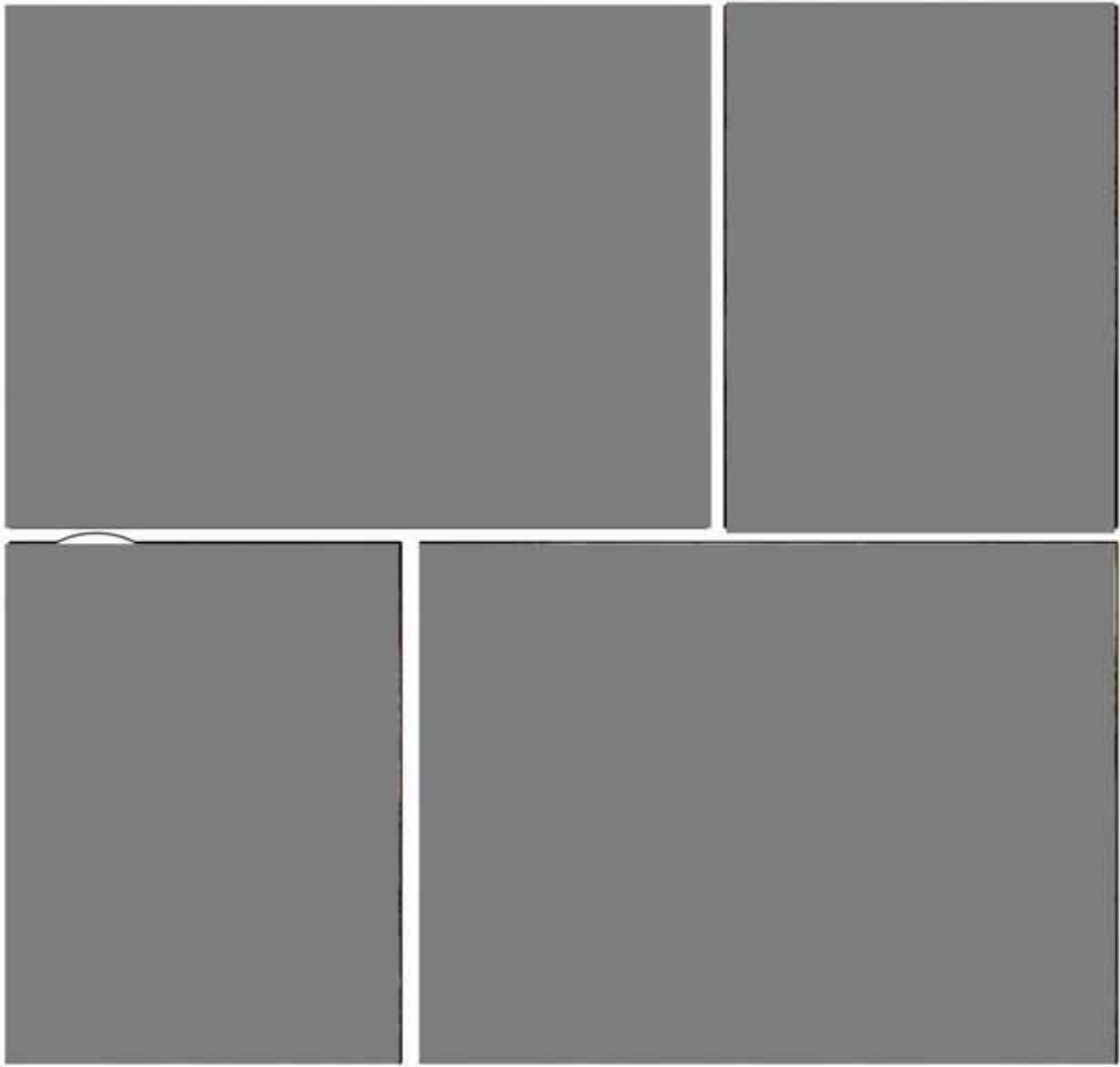
Figure 2 - "The Rape of Proserpina" illustrated (by author)

Why are comics important?

> *"I believe we all have something to say to the world. I'm a firm believer in the inherent worth of all inner truths. There's only one power that can break through the wall which separates all artists from their audience—the power of understanding." –Scott McCloud*

Ultimately, a comic is a form of communication. No amount of verbal explanation can clearly depict what one person is thinking to another. The imagery allows the participant to experience the narrative, while the text gives insight into the story. In architecture, we strive to communicate our drawings in such a way that can be understood by anyone.

Our preconceived notions about comics are a series of action novels depicting lives of superheroes and vigilantes taking a stand against crime. However, there is a whole world of genres available to the public that they rarely get to experience. We use comics in everyday life. We see ourselves interact with them in them in our daily newspapers, we become them inside photo-booths, we see them depicted in airplane manuals for safety regulations, and in stained glass windows depicting biblical stories in cathedrals.

Comics today and throughout our history serve as representations of our social and political culture. Using satirical illustrations comics have the ability to communicate ideas to society without fear of reprisals. They allow us to reflect on current events and communicate our thoughts to the world.

Part 2: The Relationship between Comics and Architecture

This thesis explores the relationship between the two mediums as a means to inform the design of the Infinite Canvas Museum. The design process and structure of the comic narrative will be used as a design queue to create the spaces within the museum. The exterior of the building and its relation the context of Baltimore will be designed using imagery of Utopian and Dystopian settings found in comic book narratives.

Comics and architecture are not too dissimilar. Both professions seek to clearly communicate their design to the public. In architecture, we strive to communicate our designs in such a way that can be clearly understood by anyone. In comics, the illustrator and writer (sometimes one in the same) work together to structure a narrative that the reader can comprehend. Both professions define and arrange space in a deliberate sequence to guide the people through the narrative. The term used to describe the narrative is known as diegesis. The structure and anything that forms the narrative is known as extra-diegesis.

Diegesis vs Extra-diegesis

Diegesis – "may concern elements, such as characters, events and things within the main or *primary* narrative. However, the author may include elements which are not intended for the primary narrative, such as stories within stories; characters and events that may be referred to elsewhere or in historical contexts and that are therefore outside the main story and are thus presented in an *extra-diegetic* situation."[6]

The term applies to any medium that acts as the narrator, which presents the audience with actions, or perhaps thoughts of the characters. The concept spans through multiple mediums include, literature, comics, film, art, dance, and so on. The term that directly applies to an architectural construct of the spaces is known as Extra-diegetic, the architectural space that binds our experiences together.

Extra-diegetic Space in Comics

"Except that diegetic space in every comic has also an extra-diegetic space, namely the space outside the fictive world of the comic. The extra-diegetic space is the material space that surrounds the individual panels: not only the whites between the panels, but also the real space in which the reader is located."[7]

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[6] Iefevre, Pascal. "The Construction of Space in Comics"

[7] Iefevre, Pascal. "The Construction of Space in Comics"

Comics are dependent on the white borders of the frames to communicate to the reader when one scene has ended and another is beginning. We perceive the structured sequence of frames as time. The author can influence how the reader perceives the time by controlling the amount of frames used in each page. The frames in comics change their form and size, which contribute to the specific emotions the reader's extract from the images. The shape and scale of the frames also enhance our visual perception of the spaces the artists create and the dictate the length of time the reader should focus on a particular scene.

Extra-diegetic Space in Architecture

"The reader knows the cues to construct the space: he recognizes in the linear perspective depth cues. He is conscious of the unseen but virtual space outside the panel borders; to link the fragments together the reader is looking for overlaps. Without the necessary overlaps, the readers can only believe that the various fragments belong to the same and consistent space."[8]

The architect has the ability to design a space that will influence peoples movements and heighten the experiences felt in the space. The constructed space becomes the invisible narrator through which we experience the space. Wall, floors, windows, and roofs are the thresholds that separate and bind our experiences. The

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[8] Iefevre, Pascal. "The Construction of Space in Comics"

scale, proportions, and arrangement of spaces influence the observer's movement from room to room. The architecture of the space can also be controlled to influence the audience's emotions and reactions to the overall experience. Manipulating the form of the certain spaces created to exhibit the artwork can also influence how people experience the artwork. There are various scales that can be explored from the various scales of the comic medium through the and through the architecture. The experiences shift in scales from the intimate hands-on reader to the larger than life frames that can be experienced by a crowd of people.

Utopia vs. Dystopia

> *Utopia* – *"the good place." An ideally perfect place, especially in its social, political, and moral aspects.*
>
> *Dystopia* – *" the bad place"*

Utopia is an idea, grounded in fictive worlds, used by authors as tool to comment on society's possibilities towards improvement. The term originated in a book written by author Thomas More in 1516. The book "Utopia" told a story about a fictional hero who discovers an island on which the city operates in perfect harmony and with tolerance towards a wide variety of people.

The early twentieth century saw the growth of many contemporary cities. "Metropolis," was Paul Citroen's depiction of how the city was changing in the twentieth century. Citroen was attempting to celebrate the "randomness of Free Style design of the noisy world."[9] However, many architects were frightened by Citroen's illustrative visions of what the city was becoming. Many famous architects rejected the visions of the congested city and sought to rationalize the city design.

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[9] Glancey, Jonathan. *Lost Buildings: Demolished Destroyed Imagined Reborn*. New York: The Overlook Press, 2008
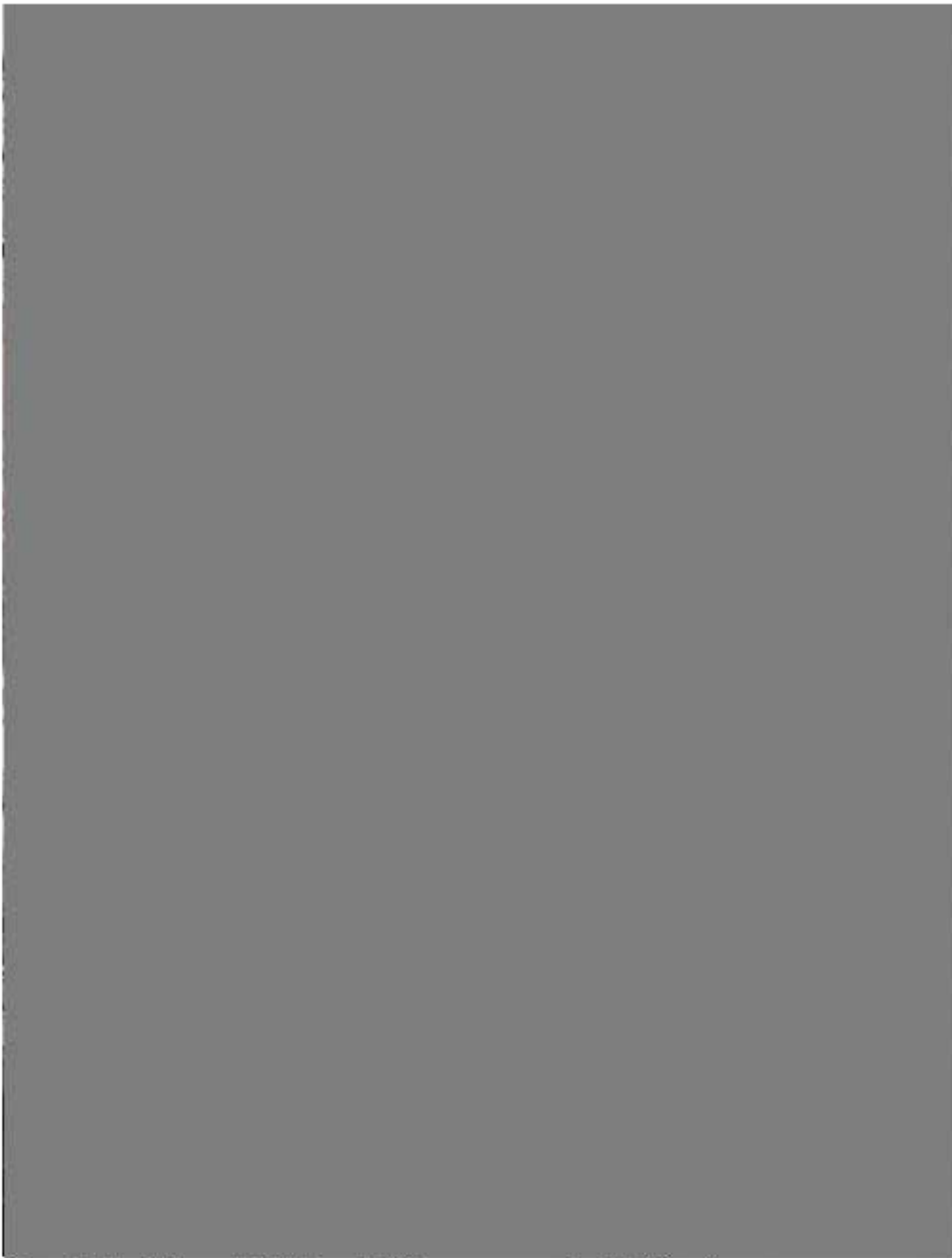
Figure 3 - Paul Citroen's "Metropolis" (Image source: _Lost Buildings_)

Figure 4 – 46ᵗʰ St. Promenade looking South to the Gardner Overpass, by Anton Furst (image source: Jimmy Stamp online article)

In the early 20ᵗʰ century, there was a strong movement known as "Modernism" that sought to make Utopia a reality. Modernists believed Utopia could be achieved by leaving the city is the hands of professionals. There have been many of these architects and planners who have attempted to rationalize utopian ideals and turn them into a reality, but only three had commanded our imagination through their visions. Dream worlds like Ebenezer Howard's Garden City, Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City, and Le Corbusier's Radiant City were subjective creations of perfect societies that could never be realized.

The "Ville Contemporaine," was Le Corbusier's response to the randomness suggested by Paul Citreon.[10] Architect's dreams such as Le Corbusier's utopian city were unrealizable. However, their ideas became the foundation for urban planning in

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[10] Glancey, Jonathan. *Lost Buildings*

the twentieth century. Each design philosophy that grew out of single-minded visions was reinterpreted into more practical uses for city design. Frank Lloyd Wright's "Broadacre City" became the blueprint for mobility and low density, Le Corbusier's "Radiant city" gave the city its high-rise aesthetic, and Howard's "Garden City" became the garden suburbs.

Comic books show similar depictions of fictive worlds as a means toward representing utopian and dystopian visions of societies. These worlds can only exist within confounds of human imagination. However, the ideas can influence design by heightening the readers' expectations and enable us to reflect on our society through their expressive nature or its architecture.

The Infinite Canvas museum seeks to express the Utopian and Dystopian qualities of Baltimore through architecture and its urban context. The museum will attempt to suspend the viewer's belief by perceptually excluding all that is imperfect in the city and reveal the true beauty and power behind the architecture.

Comic Book Representation of Utopia vs. Dystopia

Superman's Metropolis

The settings that are often described in the comic world are either the shiny utopian Metropolis or the dystopian dark, grim Gotham. The two hyper-realistic visions of comic book worlds are reflections of the utopian and dystopian qualities of all cities. They are also reflections of the characters that inhabit them. The dramatic

qualities of the two fictive worlds allow the readers to relate to cities they recognize in the real world. Gotham is if dystopian vision of New York City, Metropolis is the utopian vision of New York City.

Metropolis is more often representational of a utopian cityscape because of its pristine skyline of concrete, steel, and glass constructions, much like Le Corbusier vision for the Radiant City. The setting for Metropolis is always sunny with blue skies, surrounded by crystal blue water along the port. The tops of the skyscrapers are highlighted with gold and there are always hints of pastoral greens in the city. These elements tie together the city we often dream about.[11]

Figure 5 Superman's Metropolis vs. Batman's Gotham (Image source: DC Comics)

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[11] Olcayto, Rory. "Top 10 Comic Book Cities"

Batman's Gotham

"Batman's Gotham City is a dystopian mirror image of New York. In both Frank Miller's comic book and the earlier films of Tim Burton, Gotham is appropriately Gothic; a steaming, creaking metropolis full of dead- tech. It is a retro-futurist nightmare, an outlandish conflation of Hugh Ferris meets Alien." – Olcayto, Rory

Gotham City is the antithesis of Metropolis. Whereas Metropolis is often presented in pristine conditions, Gotham is constantly depicted during the night to heighten the grittiness of its dangerous nature. Gotham is a city infested with crime, often depicting an oppressive dark architecture as a warning to outsiders and its inhabitants. Based on the "Destroyer" storyline, the gothic architecture was designed to scare the people of Gotham into the path of righteousness. The nature of the cityscape is highlighted with gothic spires in their cathedrals and superstructures to heighten the experience of its dark settings (Figure 4).[12]

The museum will use the comic book medium's generalized vision of hat is considered utopian and dystopian and apply it to the final design for the museum

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[12] Olcayto, Rory. "Top 10 Comic Book Cities"

Architectural Representation of Utopia vs. Dystopia

**An analysis on Architectural and Urban qualities based on Hugh Ferris'
"Effect follows Form"**

*"The contemplation of the actual Metropolis as a whole cannot but lead us at
last to the realization of a human population unconsciously reacting to forms
which came into existence without conscious design. A hope, however, may
begin to define itself in our minds. May there not yet arise, perhaps in another
generation, architects who, appreciating the influence unconsciously received,
will learn consciously to direct it?" – Hugh Ferris*

As stated in his book, *The Metropolis of* Tomorrow, Hugh Ferris
acknowledges the emotional and behavioral effect's architecture can have on the
city's inhabitants. Fictional worlds, such as those represented in comic books, also
have a strong influence to our perception of cities. Famous artists like Piranessi and
Hugh Ferris sparked many architects' imaginations using art that would elicit strong
emotional responses simply by communicating the building's sheer power.

These comic book worlds influence our outlook on contemporary cities such
as New York City, Chicago, Tokyo, Dubai, and so on. Through the architecture we
can seek a more responsive and contextual approach to design. As quoted by Hugh
Ferris, buildings have a strong effect on the human mind.

"it has been our habit to assume that a building is a complete success if it provides for the utility, convenience and health of its occupants and, in addition, presents a pleasing exterior. But this frame of mind fails to appreciate that architectural forms necessarily have other values than the utilitarian or even others than those which we vaguely call the aesthetic. Without any doubt, these same forms quite specifically influence both the emotional and the mental life of the onlooker. Designers have generally come to realize the importance of the principle stated by the late Louis Sullivan, 'Form follows Function.' The axiom is not weakened by the further realization that Effect follows Form." – Hugh Ferris

PART 3: City Selection - DC vs. Baltimore

Comic books have a strong tie to American History. The world's first comic book, titled Action Comics #1 (figure 6), appeared in the United States of America in 1934. Since then, the medium has dominated the U.S. industry, producing comic in literature and film that cater to a wide audience from young to old. The strong tie to American culture makes for the most appropriate setting for the first major comic book museum.

Figure 6 - Action Comics #1 - First Comic Book(Image Source: DC comics)

The Washington DC metropolitan area, including Baltimore, attracts more than 36 million visitors per year. The tourists make the National Mall and its Smithsonian Institution a major part of their sightseeing time. As stated in the introductory paragraph, Washington DC has the single largest museum institution in the world. With so many museums related to art, history, and science, oddly the comic book medium is not among these institutions.

The decision between placing the museum in Baltimore versus DC was based on three credentials that would ultimately make the museum a more enjoyable experience. The three credentials oversaw the potential audience the comic medium would attract, accessibility, and the city character. The two cities were rated based on these criteria on a scale between zero and five, 0 signifying less preferable, 5 signifying more preferable.

The Comic Book museum will house many comic book related art from all over the world with the intent of attracting many people from various backgrounds and ethnicities. Upon selecting the site the population criteria would include the comic genre's core audience, which includes males, between ages five and twenty-five, making less than $50,000 a year.

The city with the largest density located within an accessible range to the museum, and other art institutions would be preferable. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Baltimore has the highest population living within city limits.

The final criterion the city must meet is the overall character. The city must have a strong effect on the visitors in order to reflect Utopian and Dystopian qualities discussed in the introductory chapter. Some of these qualities include a large building

height differential, which is a quality depicted in most comic illustrations in the past century. D.C. lacks the Utopian/Dystopian effect because of the height limit. Baltimore however, embraces the distinct qualities that illustrated in fictional cities such as Gotham or Metropolis. Skyscrapers similar to those seen in the fictional Metropolis overtake Baltimore's city center. Elements of Gotham city are reflected through Baltimore's industrial history and historic gothic cathedrals.

One of the biggest Comic book conventions held every year is located at the Baltimore Convention Center. Every year the event features comic-book creators, publishers, artists, charitable organizations, and vendor booths offering genre-related items including comic book back-issues, limited edition collectible items such as clothing, videos/DVDs, etc.

Based on the analysis outlined below (figure 7), Baltimore is the city most qualified to host the first major Comic Book Museum in America.

Site Selection Guidelines		Baltimore	Washington D.C.
POPULATION	**Population Density** The higher density in the city will determine the possible visitors to the exhibit	5	3
	Age Population (5-25 yrs) The majority of comic book readers are within this age limit.	4	2
	Income (below $50,000) People with a low income salary are more likely to purchase this type of medium because of it's affordibility	5	4
	Male Population (5-25 yrs) Males are the biggest customers to this medium.	3	3
ACCESS	**Access to Educational/Art Institutions** The proximity to these institutions could draw more visitors to the museum	4	5
	Access to Popular Museums The proximity to other museums could draw in more visitors	5	5
	Accessibility The potential for anyone to access the site from anywhere in the city	3	5
CHARACTER	**Building Height Differential** Drastic height changes can heighten the charactersitics of the museum's location	5	3
	City Character The city should evoke the feeling of being in a city	5	3
Total (45 possible points)		39	33

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Figure 7 - City Selection Analysis (by author)

Baltimore City History

Baltimore is the located is located in Central Maryland along the tidal point of the Patapsco River, the arm of water branching off of the Chesapeake Bay. The image below (figure 8) shows the city boundaries. At its founding, Baltimore served as an important U.S. seaport which connected to the entire Midwestern markets along the Eastern shore. Baltimore was a heavy industrial city before the early 1900's until the decline in manufacturing turned it into a service sector-oriented economy.
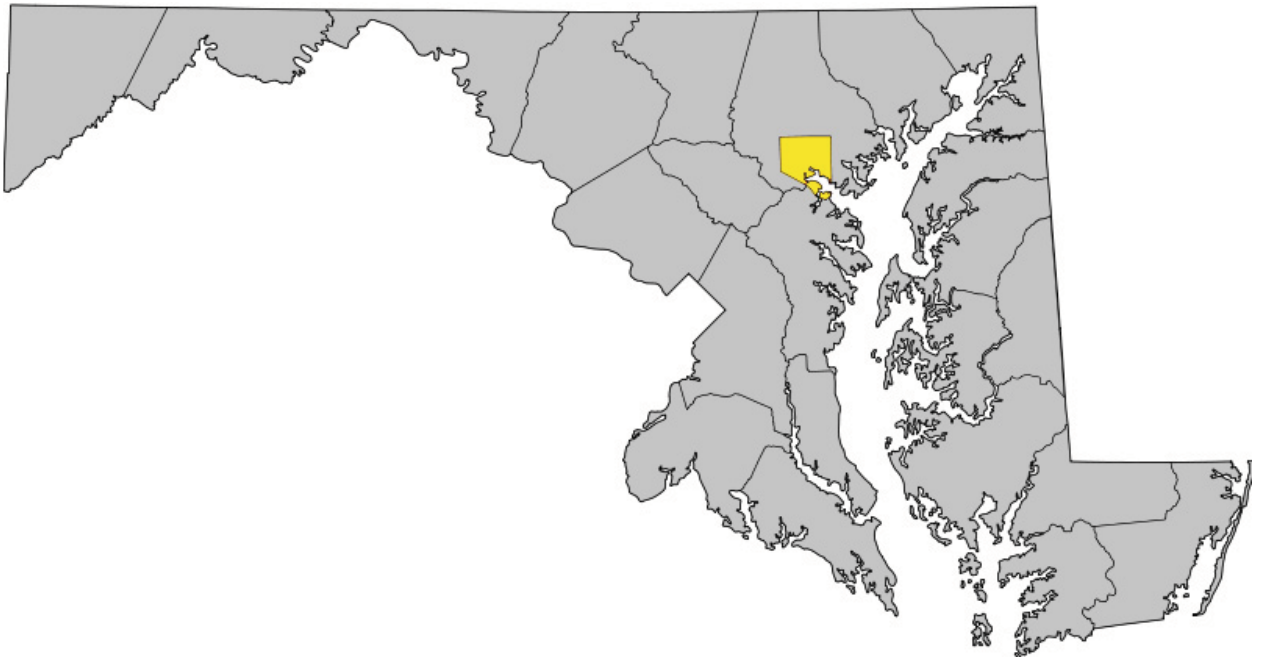
Figure 8 Baltimore City (by author)

Site Selection

Three potential sites were surveyed during the selection process. Site one is located North of Baltimore along North Charles Street Corridor. Site two is located further South of site one along North Howard Street.   The final site is located on the inner harbor across from the city center. (figure 9)
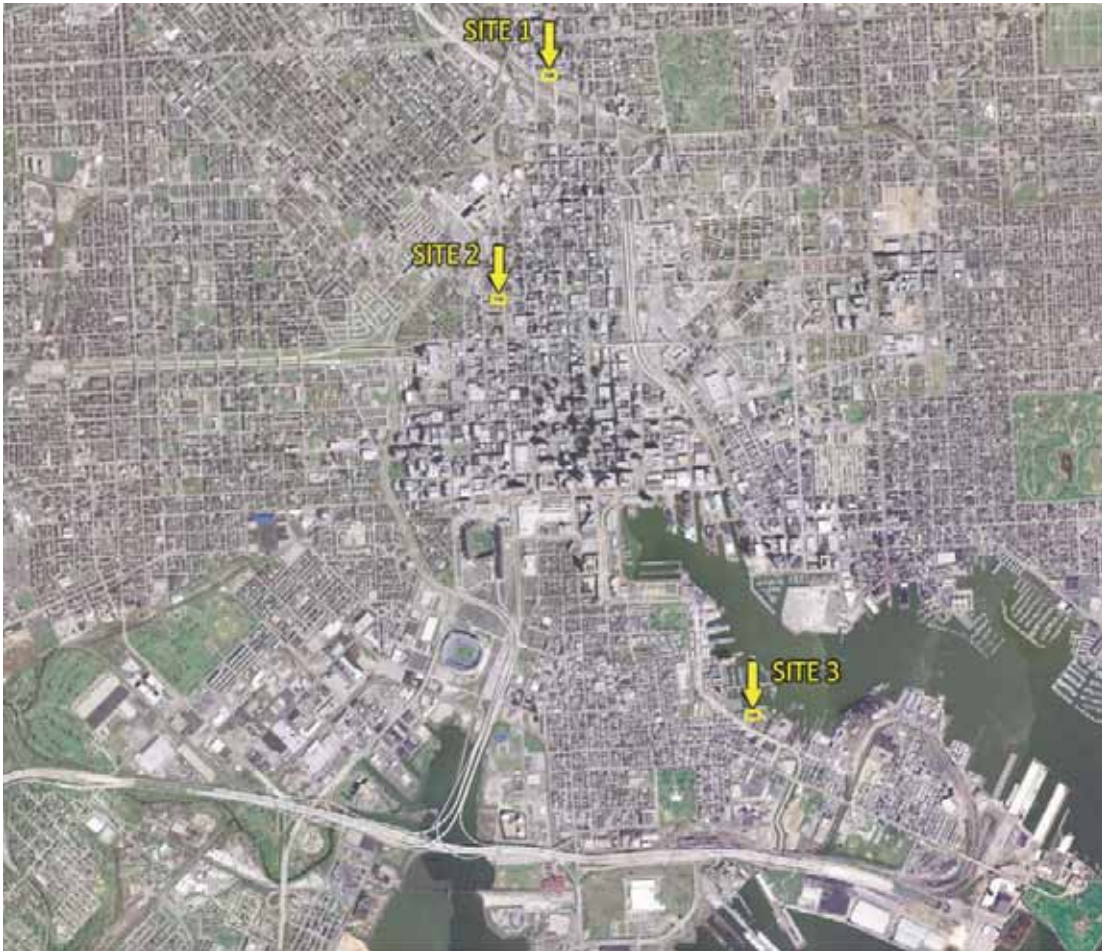
Figure 9 - Three potential sites in Baltimore (by author)

Site Selection Guidelines		Site 1 North Charles St	Site 2 North Howard St	Site 3 Key Highway
NEIGHBORHOOD	**Family Residential** The higher density in the city will determine the possible visitors to the exhibit	5	4	3
	Age (5-25 yrs) The majority of comic book readers are within this age limit.	4	2	2
	Active Street A street with high pedestrian traffic is preferable. The people must experience the museum as well as the city	4	1	2
	Healthy People with a low income salary are more likely to purchase this type of medium because of it's affordibility	5	1	2
ACCESS	**Proximity to Educational/Art Institutions** The proximity to these institutions could draw more visitors to the museum	5	3	1
	Proximity to Popular Museums The proximity to other museums could draw in more visitors	5	5	5
	Accessibility The potential for anyone to access the site from anywhere in the city	5	3	2
CHARACTER	**Allowable FAR** A high FAR is preferable because it will allow some felxibility to the museum design	5	3	3
	Views to City Open views to the Baltimore skyline will heighten the experiential aspect of the Museum	4	2	5
Total (45 possible points)		39	33	33

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Figure 10 - Site Selection Matrix (by author)

Site Location

Figure 11 Baltimore - Site is located in North Charles (by author)

Station North District

This arts and entertainment district is located in the heart of Baltimore

(highlighted triangle North of map in Figure 12). This was the first area in the city of

Baltimore to receive the state designation as an arts and entertainment district.

Spanning the communities of Charles North, Greenmount West, and Barclay, Station

North is a diverse collection of artist live-work spaces, galleries, row homes and

businesses. All just steps away from Penn Station and Mount Vernon.[13]

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[13] www.stationnorth.org

Charles Street Corridor History

The site is located along N Charles street part of a twelve mile corridor connects the city's most eclectic mix of urban and suburban neighborhoods, including key historical architectural structures. Charles Street is rooted to the history of our nation predating the existence of Baltimore City. The historical value of Charles Street will serve as an ideal location and a symbolic link between the Comic museum to and the social, political ties to the city.

Charles North Neighborhood History

The Charles North District developed during the 1880's as a suburb to downtown Baltimore. After WWII the area changed its large suburban housing and turned them into apartments. Today there is an effort to revitalize Charles North into a commercial district with art galleries, theaters, and dining.

STATION NORTH

CHARLES THEATER

SITE

MICA

PENNSYLVANIA STATION

MIDTOWN "HEALTHY" NEIGHBORHOODS

N CHARLES STREET

BELVEDERE

WASHINGTON MONUMENT - MOUNT VERNON HISTORIC DISTRICT

BASILICA OF THE ASSUMPTION

S CHARLES STREET

GEPPI'S ENTERTAINMENT MUSEUM

REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM

BALTIMORE CONVENTION CENTER

INNER HARBOR

CAMDEN YARDS

NATIONAL AQUARIUM

INFINITE CANVAS - Connections
SCALE: 1"=400'

Figure 12 Charles Street Corridor Analysis and Amenities (by author)

INFINITE CANVAS
SCALE: 1"=100'

Figure 13 – Site highlighted in yellow (by author)

Site Description and Amenities

The site for The Infinite Canvas Museum is located along N Charles Street in the North section of Baltimore city. Charles Street is one of the most scenic avenues in the city of Baltimore filled with a variety of places to live, work, dine, recreate, and shop. Locating the museum on Charles Street will promote unique qualities to the Charles street corridor. The Zoning ordinances designate the North Charles area as an Arts District containing various art galleries, theaters, and other commercial venues.

At this location, the regularized city grid carries over past the tracks. Charles Street is a one-way street that runs north from Baltimore's Inner Harbor, through the Mount Vernon historical area.

Pennsylvania Station

Located directly south of the site and within walking distance is Pennsylvania station, U.S.'s eighth busiest train station. Penn station services Amtrak, MARC, and Maryland's Transit Administration's light rail system. The station is one of the stops along the train lines that connect major cities along the East coast from Washington D.C. to Boston. The train station's proximity is an opportunity to attract more people to the proposed comic museum.

High Elevation

The site sits on a higher elevation, which acts as an ideal location offering views back into the city. By taking advantage of the site's FAR, the museum could offer extraordinary views back to the Baltimore Skyline and historic avenue.

MICA

The Maryland Institute of College Arts Ranked in the top 4 of 220 graduate programs in the visual arts. With less than a five-minute walk from the campus, the Infinite Canvas Museum hopes to have a fruitful relationship with all the young aspiring artists from this most prestigious institution.

MICA is recognized as an important cultural resource for the Baltimore/Washington region, sponsoring many public and community-outreach programs-including more than 100 exhibitions by students, faculty, and nationally and internationally known artists annually-as well as artists' residencies, film series, lectures, readings, and performances.[14]

Geppi's Entertainment Museum

Located North of Camden Yards Baseball Stadium. This museum exhibits nearly 6,000 pop culture artifacts including comics, toys, dolls, games and memorabilia of every conceivable category.[15] The Infinite Canvas Museum will have the potential to develop a relationship with Geppi's Museum Curator.

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[14] www.mica.edu

[15] www.geppismuseum.com

Figure 14 Facing South on North Charles Street (by author)

Figure 15 - Elevation change south of site (by author)
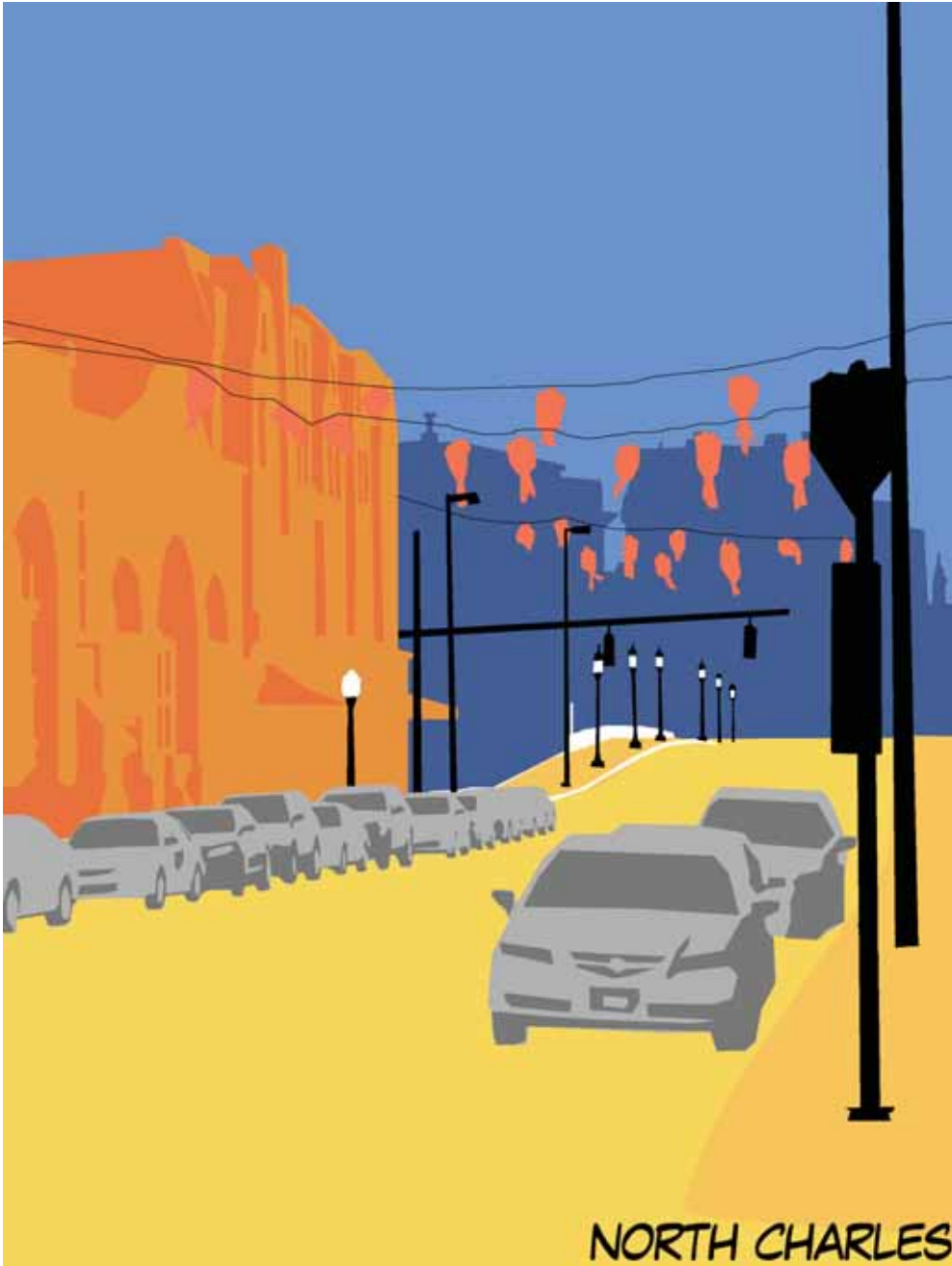
Figure 16 - North Charles Illustration (by author)

North Charles district is a lively environment filled will various dining and arts experiences. The general atmosphere of the area is vibrant with spectacular views into the city, seen from a high altitude on the site.

Baltimore – Utopia vs. Dystopia

Figure 17 - Utopian Comic Illustration of Baltimore (by author)

Figure 18 - Dystopian Comic Illustration of Baltimore (by author)
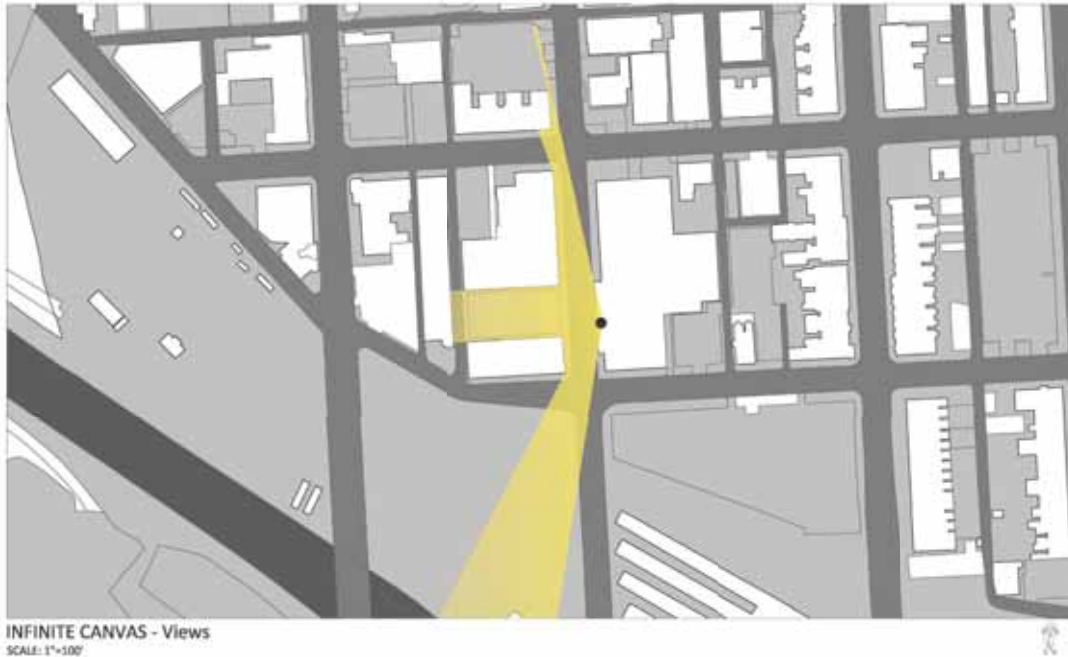
Figure 19 – view towards west elevation (by author)

Adjacent to the site is an existing gallery, a Laundromat cleaner, and a parking garage that services the blocks facing N Charles Street. The public parking garage currently services the buildings that are located within the block and could potentially service the Comic museum. There is the possibility of overtaking the Metro Gallery and Metro Cleaners building to accommodate the Comic Museum program. Overtaking the Metro Gallery building would be an opportunity to enhance the

approach to the building and offer more views towards the city.
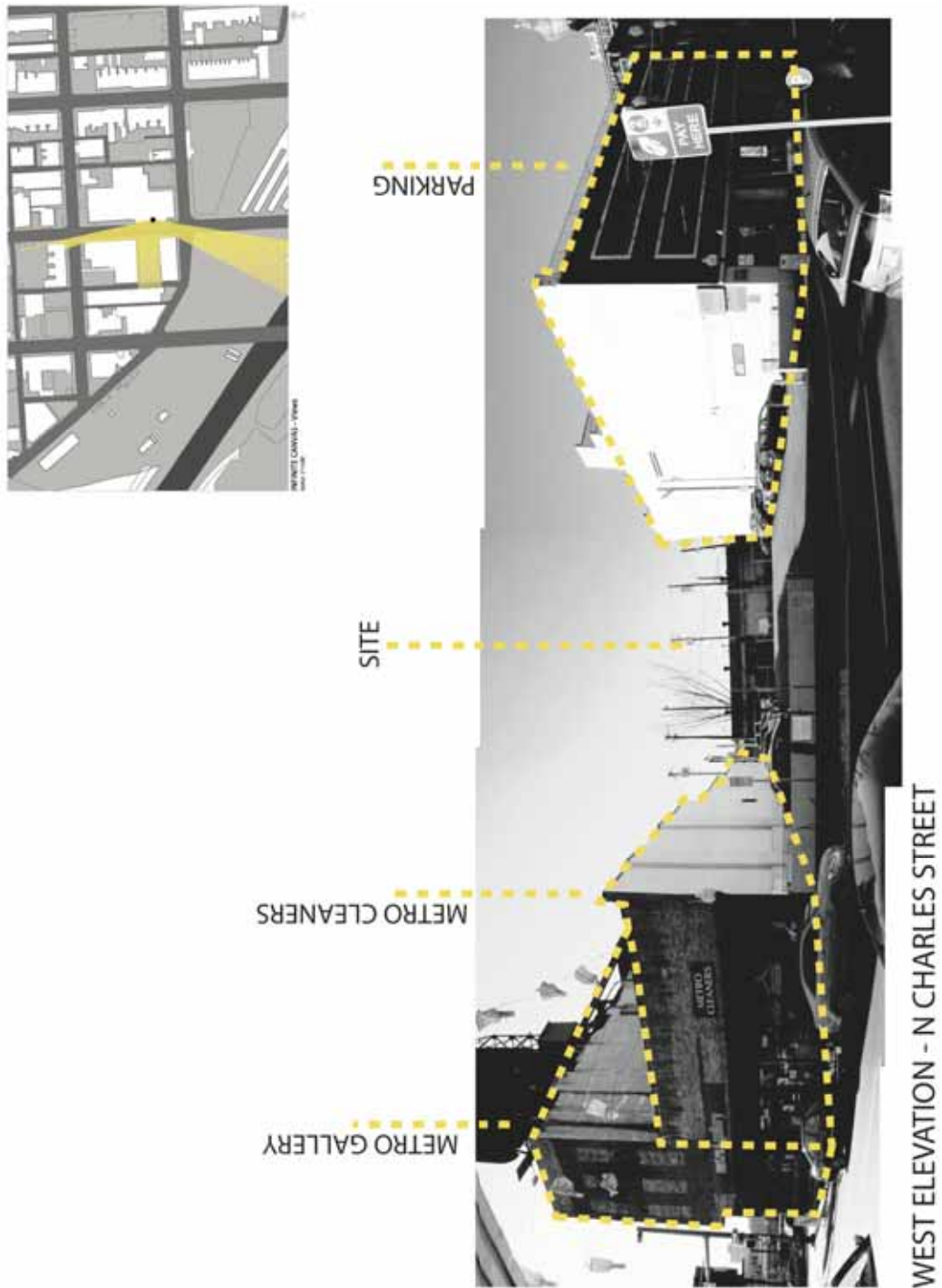
Figure 20 North Charles Street - West Elevation (by author)
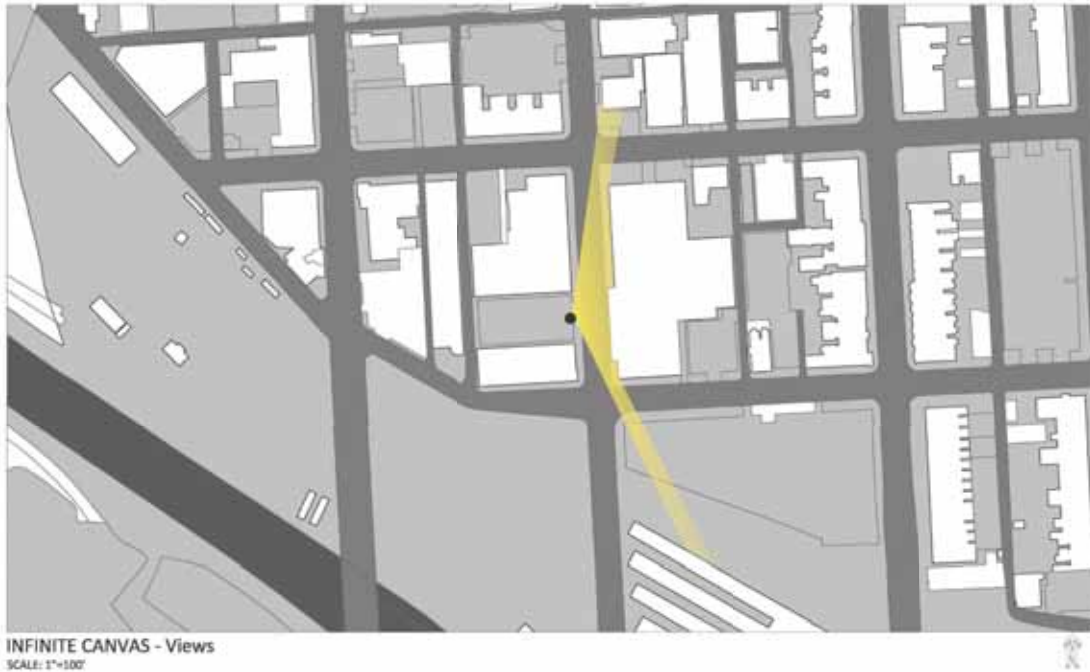
Figure 21 - View towards east elevation (by author)

Across the street are three popular city theaters, one of the theaters with an adjoining Tapas restaurant, and a small crepe shop. The Charles theater, located directly across from the site, is marked by the zoning ordinance as a historic landmark. The theater is still in use today, and retains much of its long popularity. The Infinite Canvas Museum will hopefully benefit by attracting many of the dedicated Charles theater visitors.
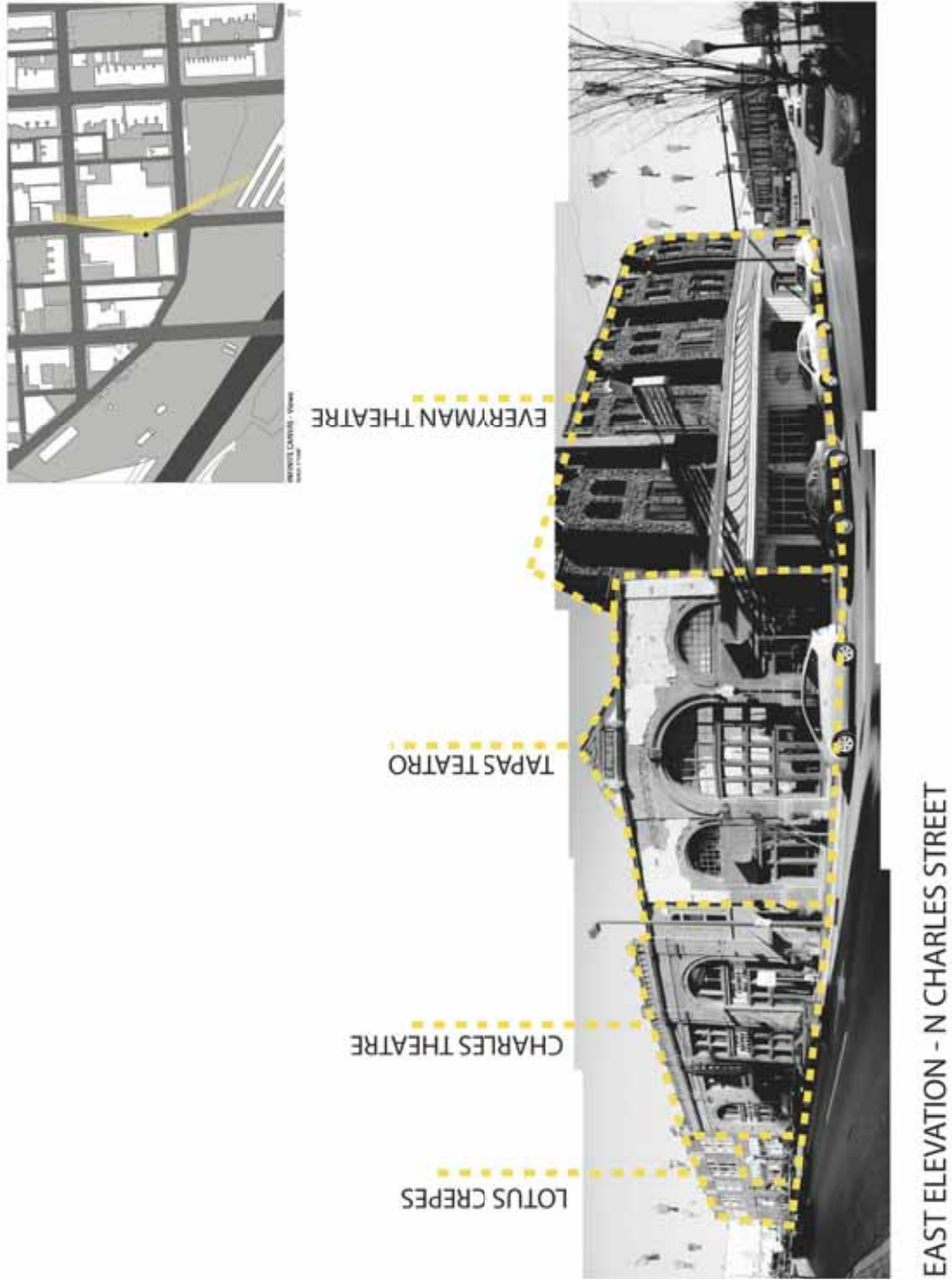
Figure 22 North Charles Street - East Elevation (by author)

Figure 23 Site Dimensions (by author)

The empty lot is approximately 12,000 square feet with access to both North Charles Street and an alley along the rear. The site is currently being used for surface parking that services all the commercial and businesses within the block.

Site Conditions
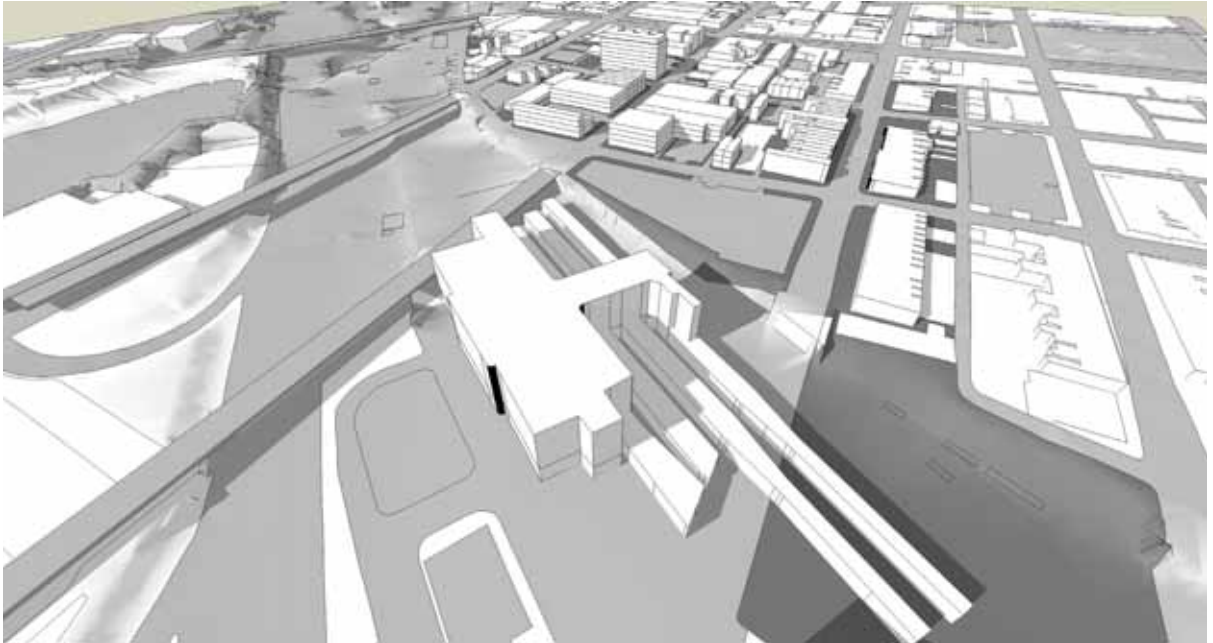
Figure 24 - Aerial Perspective of Charles North District (by author)

The North Charles area presents some interesting site conditions for the museum. There is a sharp 20-foot drop directly south of the site where all the train tracks are located. The site topography continues a steady decline towards the city. These conditions present the museum with a visual opportunity to connect with the city of Baltimore.
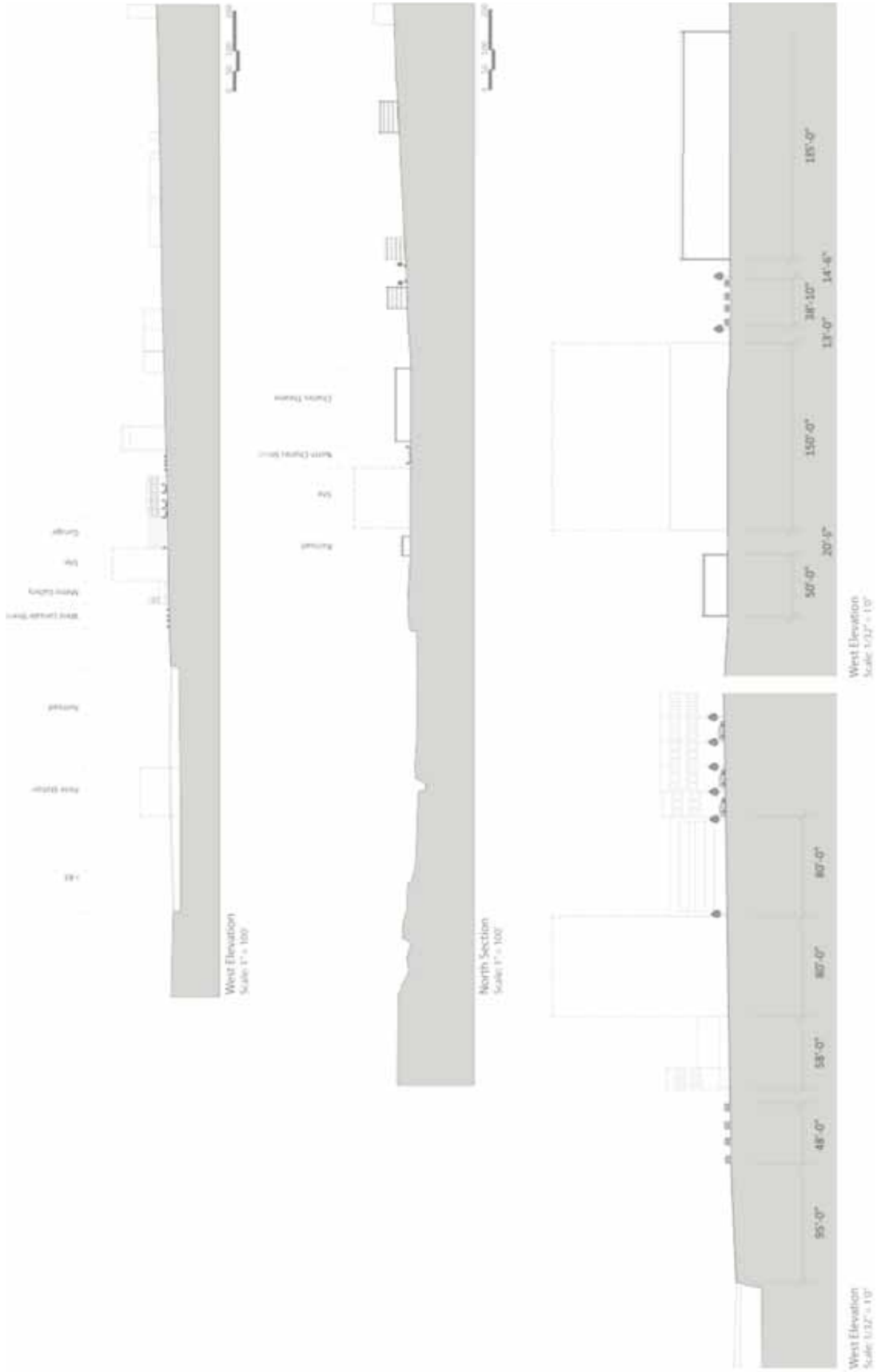
Figure 25 - Site Section (by author)

Proximity to Art and Educational Institutions

INFINITE CANVAS - art institutions
SCALE: 1"=600'

Figure 26 Art Institutions within Walking Radius (by author)
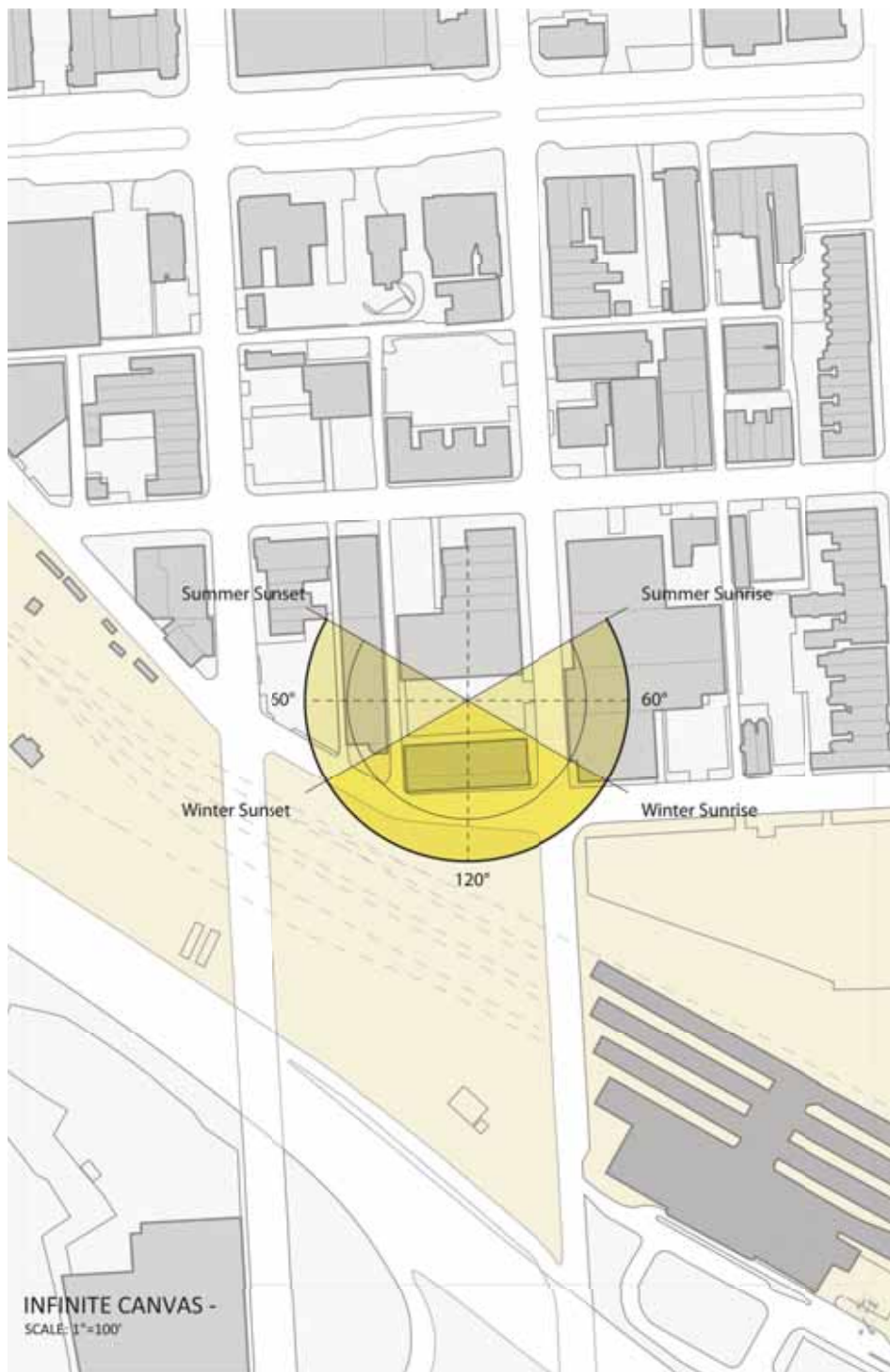
Figure 27 - Solar Analysis (by author)

Summer Solstice: **14** hours of daylight   Altitude of Sun: **74** degrees
Winter Solstice: **9** hours of daylight   Altitude of Sun: **28** degrees

Zoning

Zone: Central Commercial (B-5-2) - provides for those uses and activities that are generally associated with and support downtown uses – this district

Permits use of: Permitted uses in this district include non profit or publicly owned educational and cultural institutions, art galleries, and museums.

Floor area ratio: 8.0 (Proposed FAR of 14.0 for urban renewal)

(a) *In general.*

The maximum floor area ratios in a B-5 District are as specified in this section.

(b) *B-5-1 District*.

The floor area ratio in a B-5-1 District may not exceed 8.0.

(c) *B-5-2 District*.

The floor area ratio in a B-5-2 District may not exceed 14.0.

(City Code, 1976/83, art. 30, §6.5-2a.) (Ord. 99-547.)

Setback: 10 ft from lot line

Zoning FAR – Max Bulk

Typ. Floor = 12,000 sqf

Lot = 12,000 sqf

WEST LANVALE STREET

NORTH CHARLES STREET
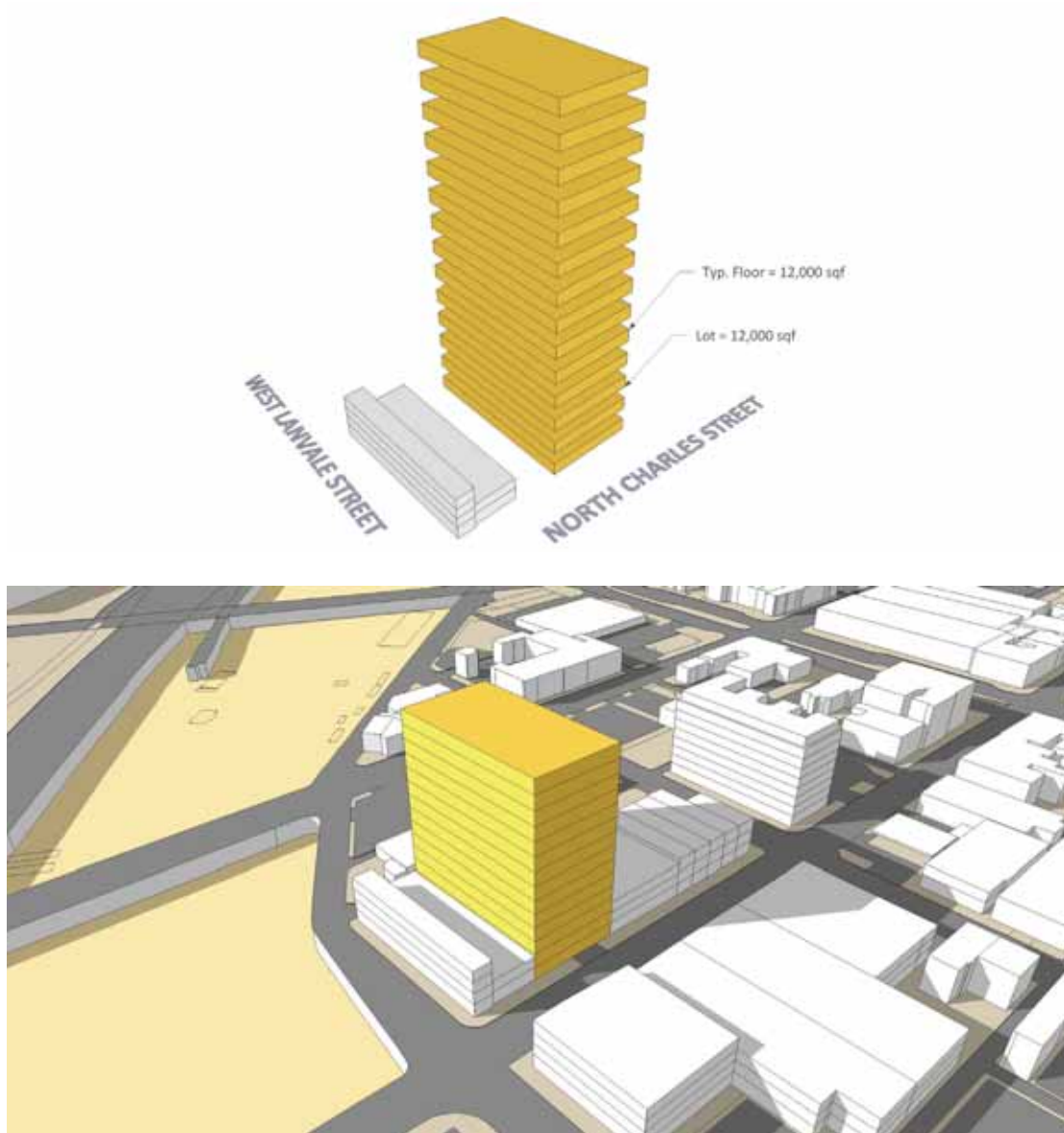
Figure 28 - Maximum Bulk for site FAR (by author)

The diagram above demonstrates the maximum allowable bulk for the site.

Zoning FAR – Scenario 1
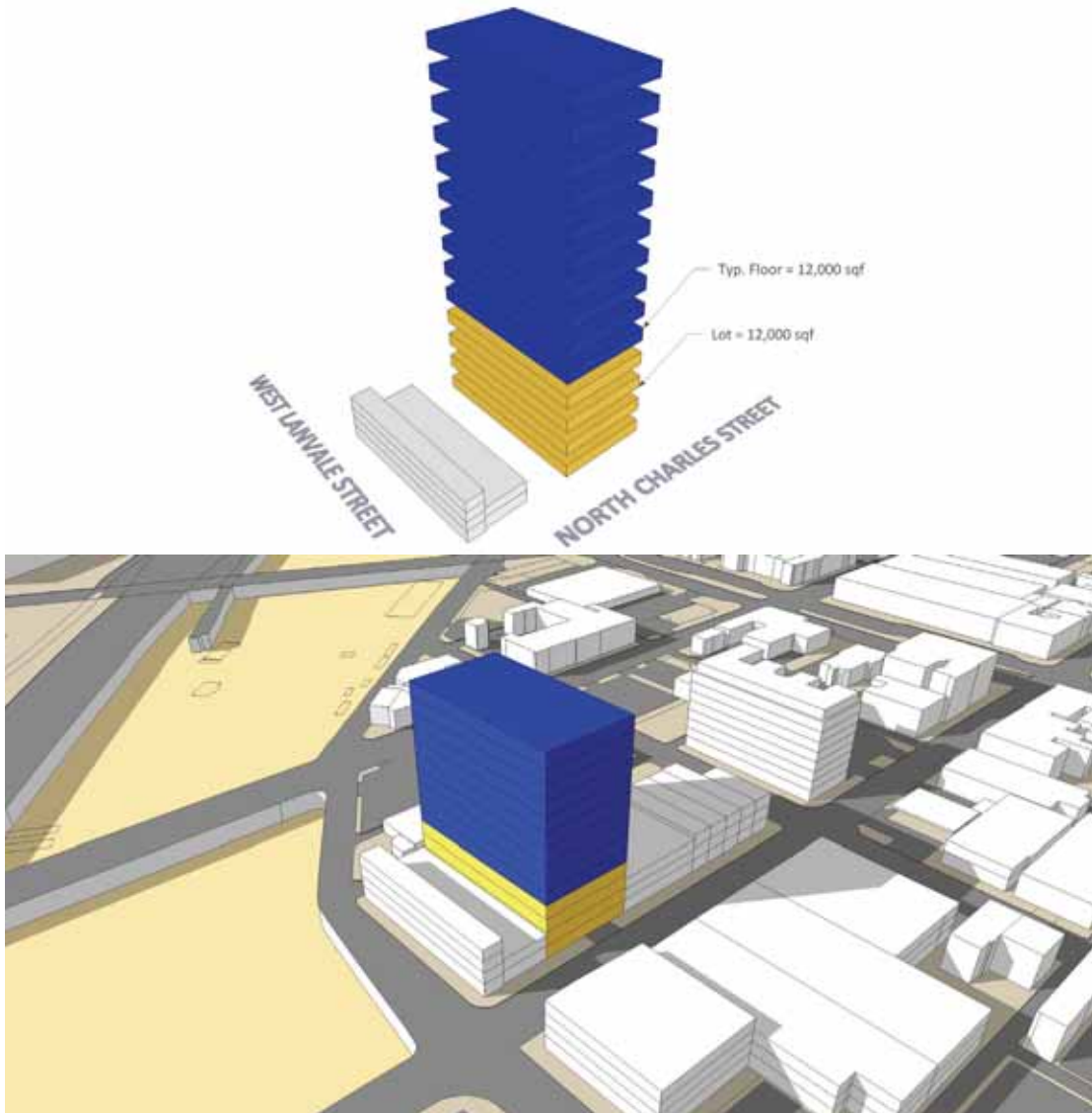
Figure 29 - Scheme 1 for max allowable FAR - Museum in yellow, Publishing Office in blue (by author)

In this scenario, the bulk of the museum program will be located on the first three floors of the structure. The rest of the bulk will be given to a Comic book publishing establishment. This scheme may present some issues to access the top floor from the museum level.

Zoning FAR – Scenario 2
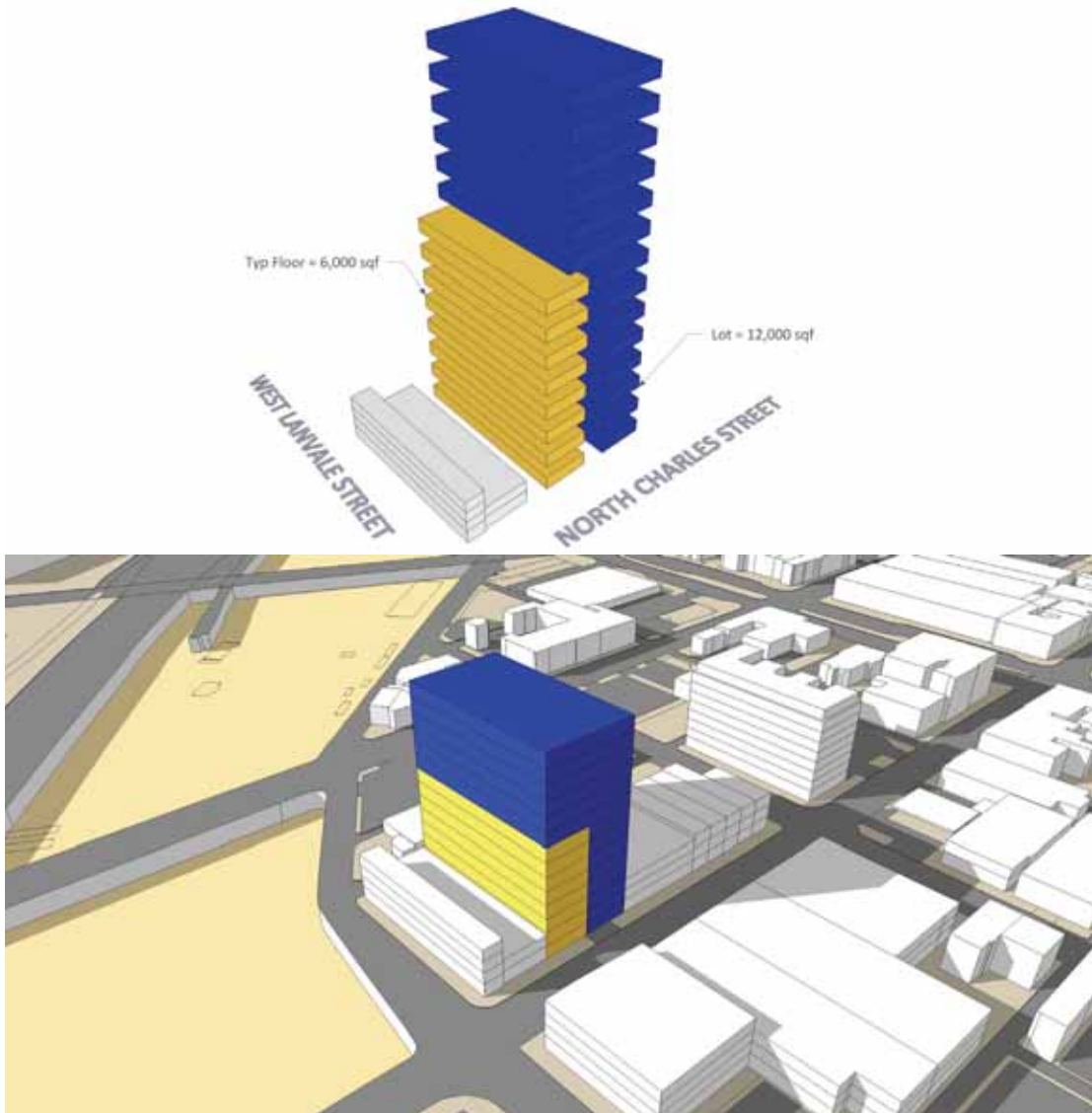
Figure 30 - Scheme 2 for max allowable FAR - Museum in yellow, Publishing Office in blue (by author)

In this scenario the bulk of the museum is taking the southern portion of the site. The first eight floors are divided between the museum and the Comic publishing establishment making it easier to access both departments from the ground floor. The Comic book museum is also taking advantage of southern exposure towards the center of Baltimore.

Zoning FAR – Scenario 3
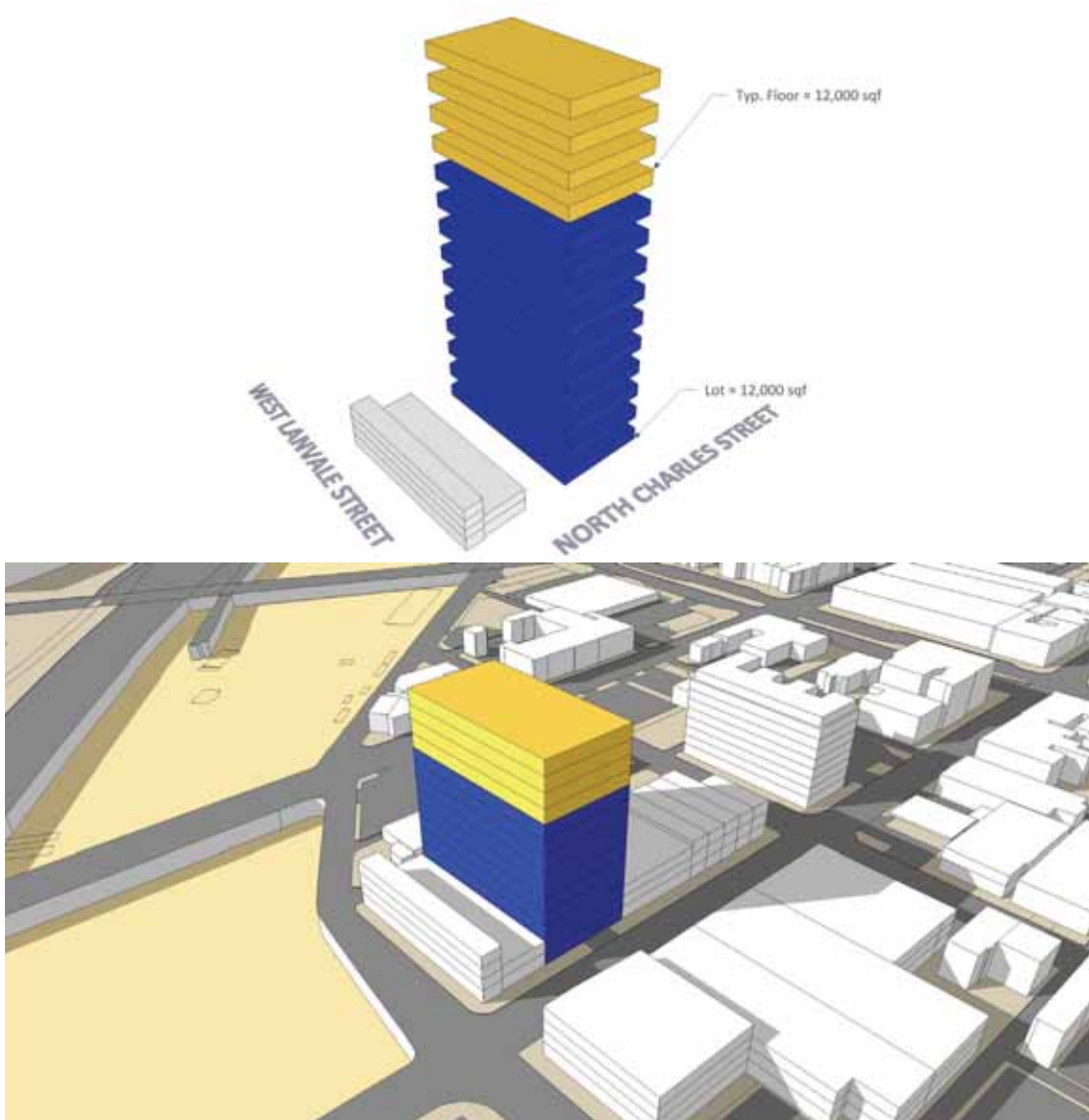
Figure 31 - Scheme 3 for max allowable FAR - Museum in yellow, Publishing Office in blue (by author)

In this scenario, the museum takes the top four levels of the allowable bulk. This scheme takes full advantage of the views to the city and visibility of the Museum from the city.

Zoning FAR – Scenario 4
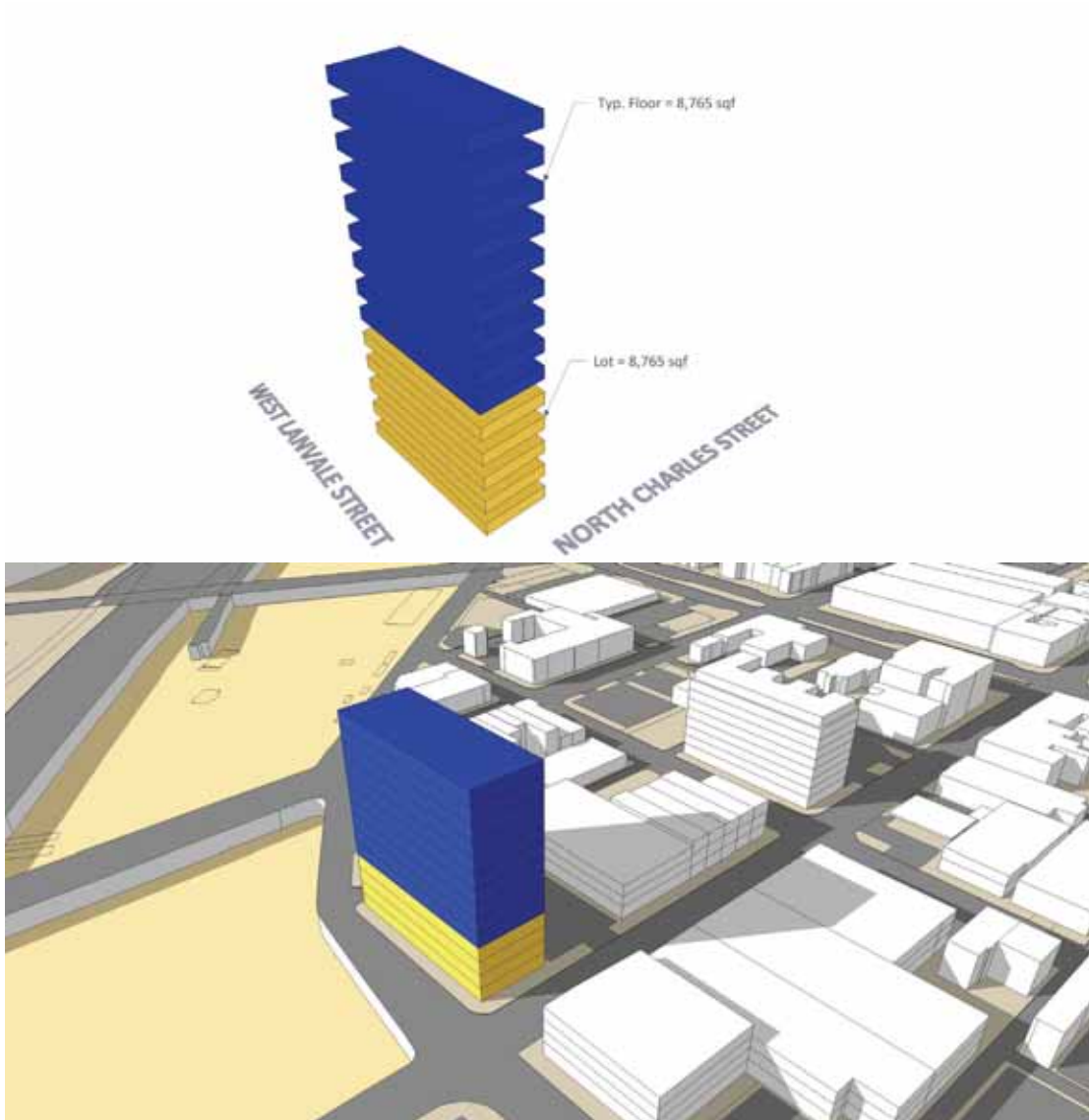
Figure 32 - Scheme 4 for max allowable FAR - Museum in yellow, Publishing Office in blue (by author)

In this scenario, the existing Metro Gallery building is being taken over by the Infinite Canvas Museum. Placing the building on this site will offer unobstructed views toward the city of Baltimore if the museum were to be located on the first five floors. The existing building will be demolished and the museum will take full advantage of the allowable FAR.

Zoning FAR – Scenario 5
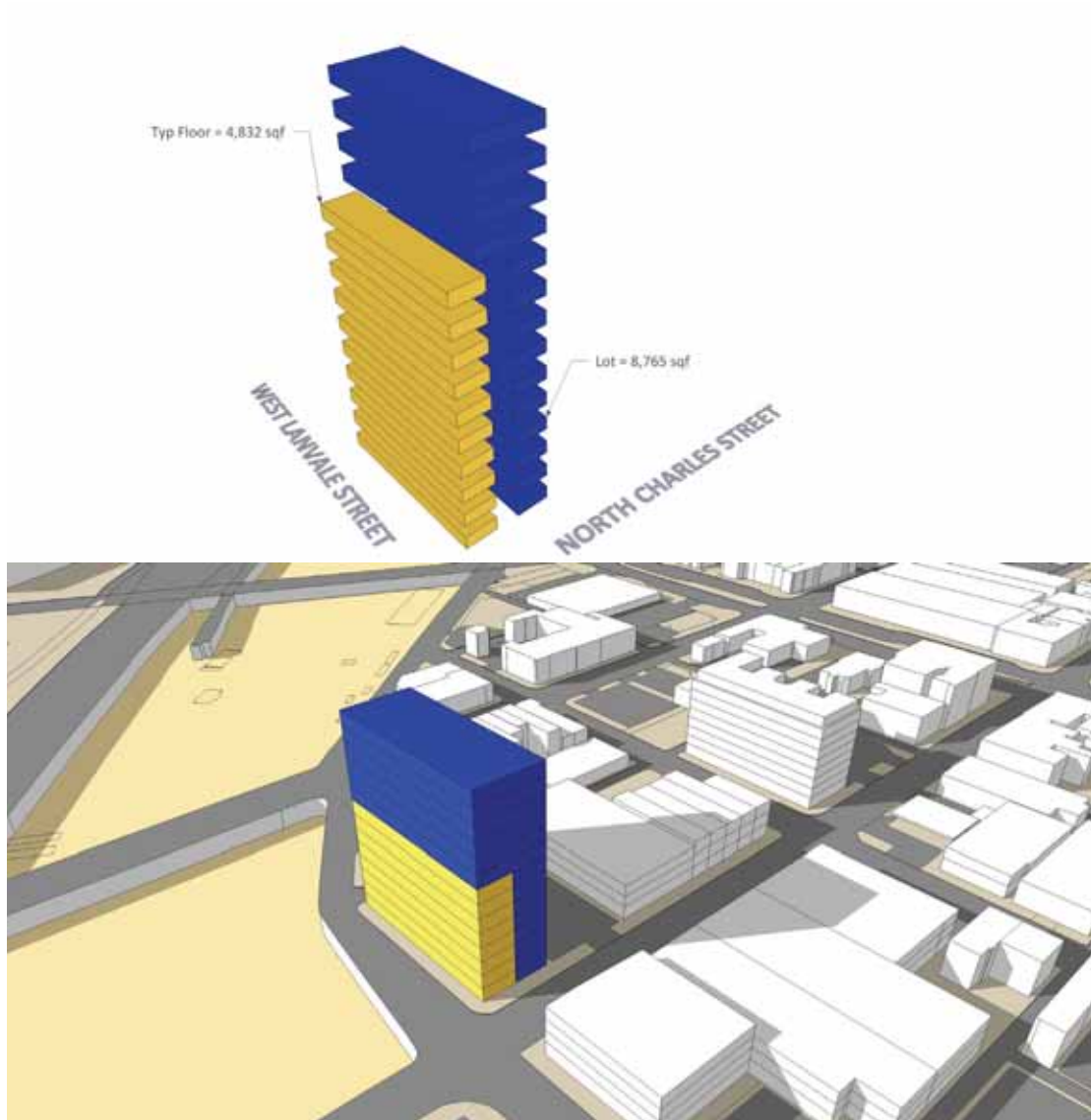
Figure 33 - Scheme 5 for max allowable FAR - Museum in yellow, Publishing Office in blue (by author)

I scenario 5 the museum and the publishing offices share half of the first ten floors.

This enables the museum to take advantage of views towards Baltimore at different

elevations.

Zoning FAR – Scenario 6

Typ. Floor = 8,765 sqf

Lot = 8,765 sqf

WEST LANVALE STREET

NORTH CHARLES STREET
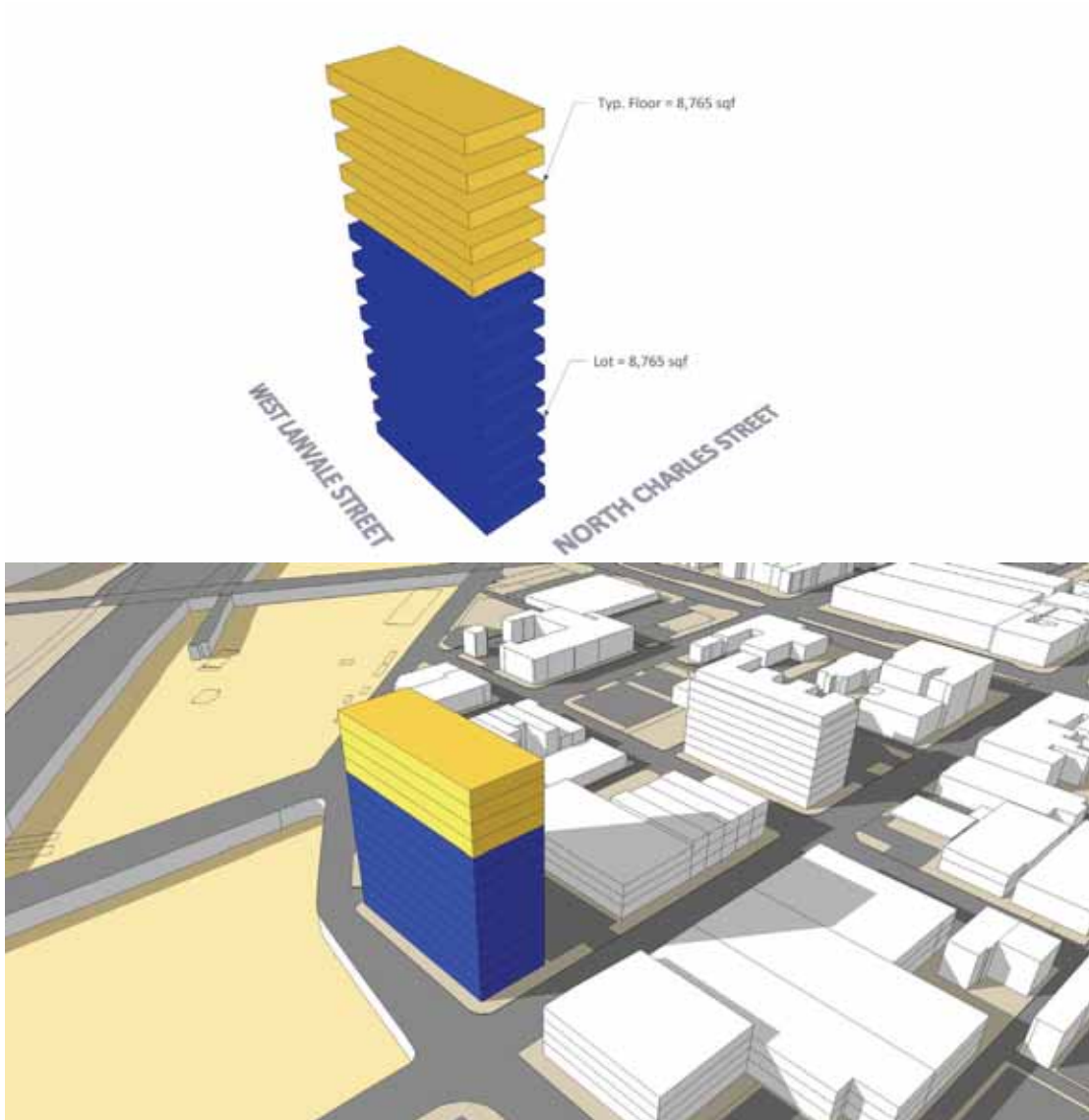
Figure 34 - Scheme 6 for max allowable FAR - Museum in yellow, Publishing Office in blue (by author)

Part 4: Precedents

Folk Art Museum, New York City

Figure 35 - Approach to Folk Art Museum (by author)

Figure 36 – Façade of Folk Art Museum (Image source: www.flickr.com/photos/laurenmanning/)

The Folk Art Museum is located on 53rd Street in New York City. The building is not immediately noticeable when approaching it along the street level (Figure 29). Despite the unique façade, the museum blends well to the urban context. The folded façade shifts inward, recalling an abstracted open hand.[16] Permanent and Temporary Exhibits occupy the top four floors of the Folk Art Museum. Natural light washes through penetrations along the ornamental stair (Figure 31), where the

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[16] A+U article

53

artwork is integrated with the main circulation.[17] The glass wall that stretches

through all the floors emanates a glow that helps distribute natural light from the

skylight (Figure 31). The main purpose of the glass ornamentation is purely aesthetic

but can be used as a technique to filter light through the narrow exhibit.
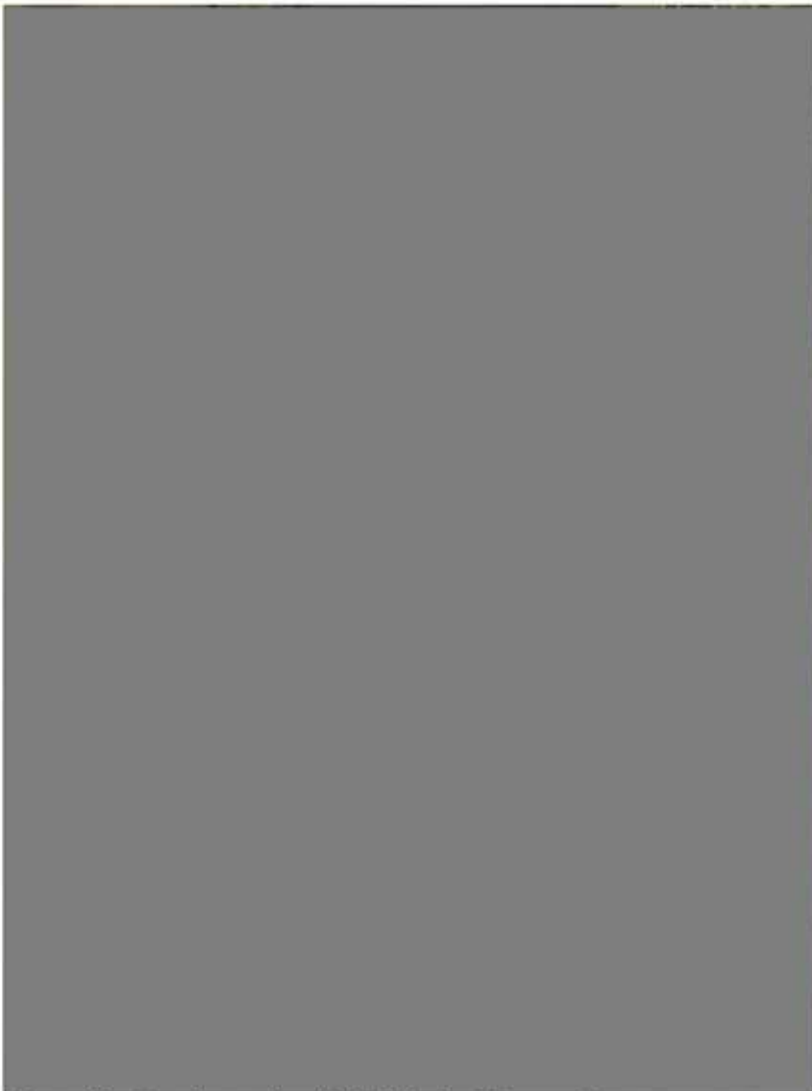
**Figure 37 – Interior stairwell of Folk Art Museum (Image source:
www.flickr.com/photos/aaronplewke/)**

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[17] A+U article

Program Analysis

2,287 sqf   1,818 sqf   1,818 sqf   1,818 sqf

2,565 sqf   2,565 sqf   2,174 sqf   2,174 sqf

7,700		circulation/gallery
1,740		administration
350		storage
470		facilities
1,050		education
470		mechanical
350		store
3,726		vertical circ.

16,000 total sqf
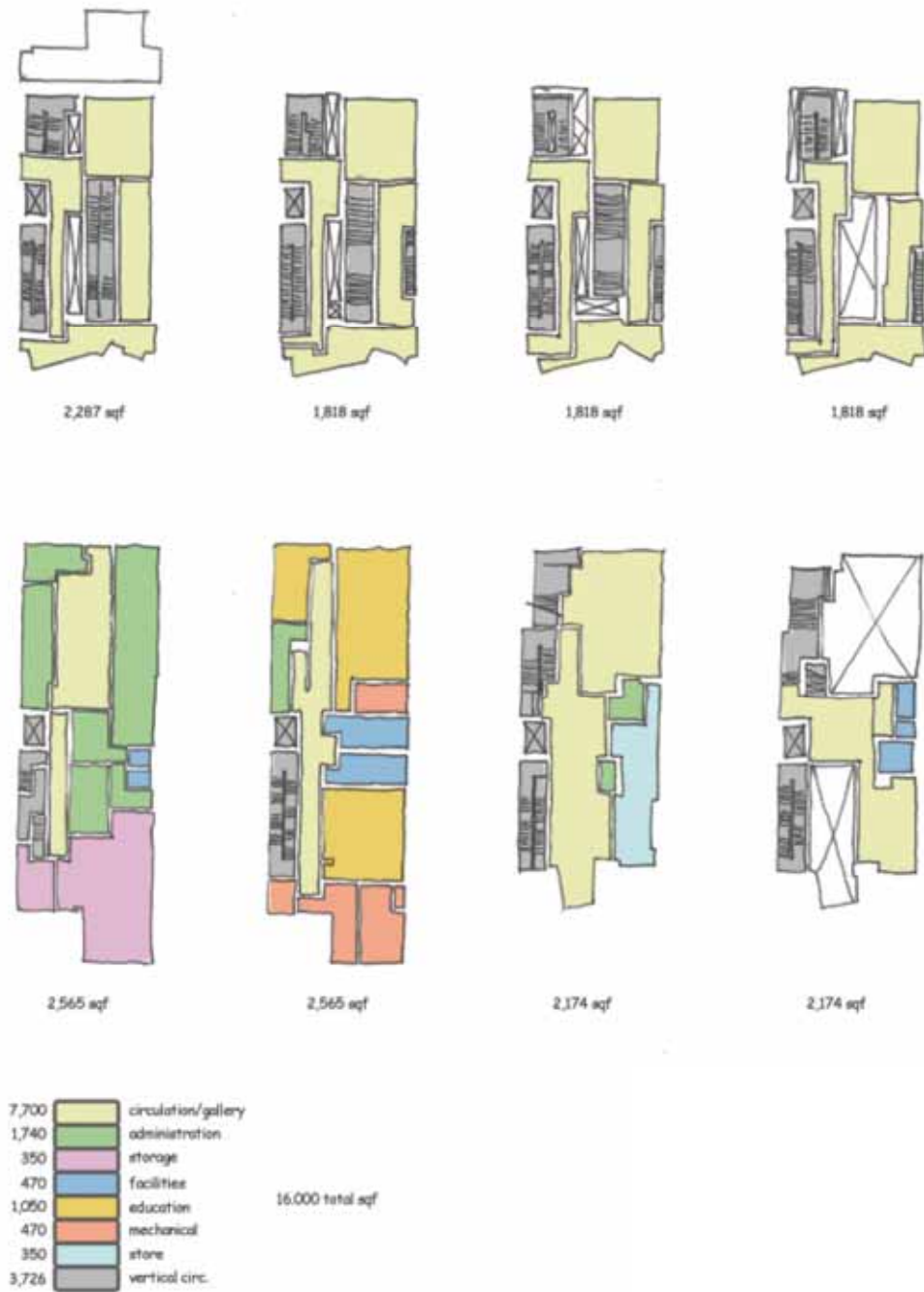
Figure 38 Folk Art Museum Program Breakdown (by author)

This precedent was selected for its programmatic relationship the Comic book museum and the technique of filtering natural light through multiple levels of the narrow building. The unique façade of the museum is a gestural statement of an abstracted palm of a hand. The façade is made from a metal called Tombasil, which is a form of white bronze that shifts appearance depending on the time of day and the type of weather. On a dark, rainy day they faced can appear moody and dark, during the brighter months it appears light and jubilant. The façade is also used as a means to reflect natural light back into the spaces where some of the art is displayed on walls (Figure 32). The bronze façade diffuses the natural light that washes across the surface of the artwork.
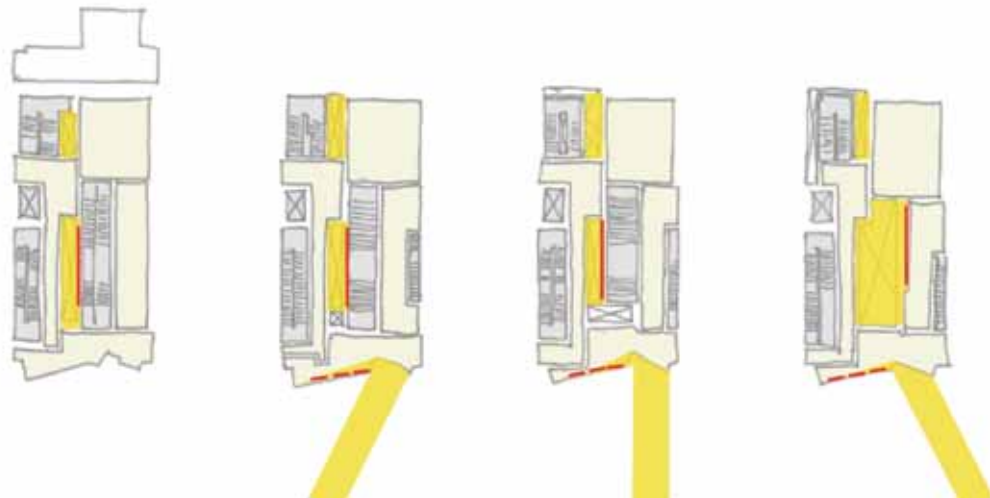
Figure 39 – Natural Lighting Study of the Folk Art Museum (by author)

Almost half of the building's program is devoted to the circulation through the spaces. The small site restricts the programmatic functions of the galleries. To accommodate for the small space the museum design integrates the artwork along the

main circulation. The penetrations between the floors allow for dramatic visual

connections between the spaces and also allow most of the natural light from the roof

to trickle down.

Caixa Galecia Foundation
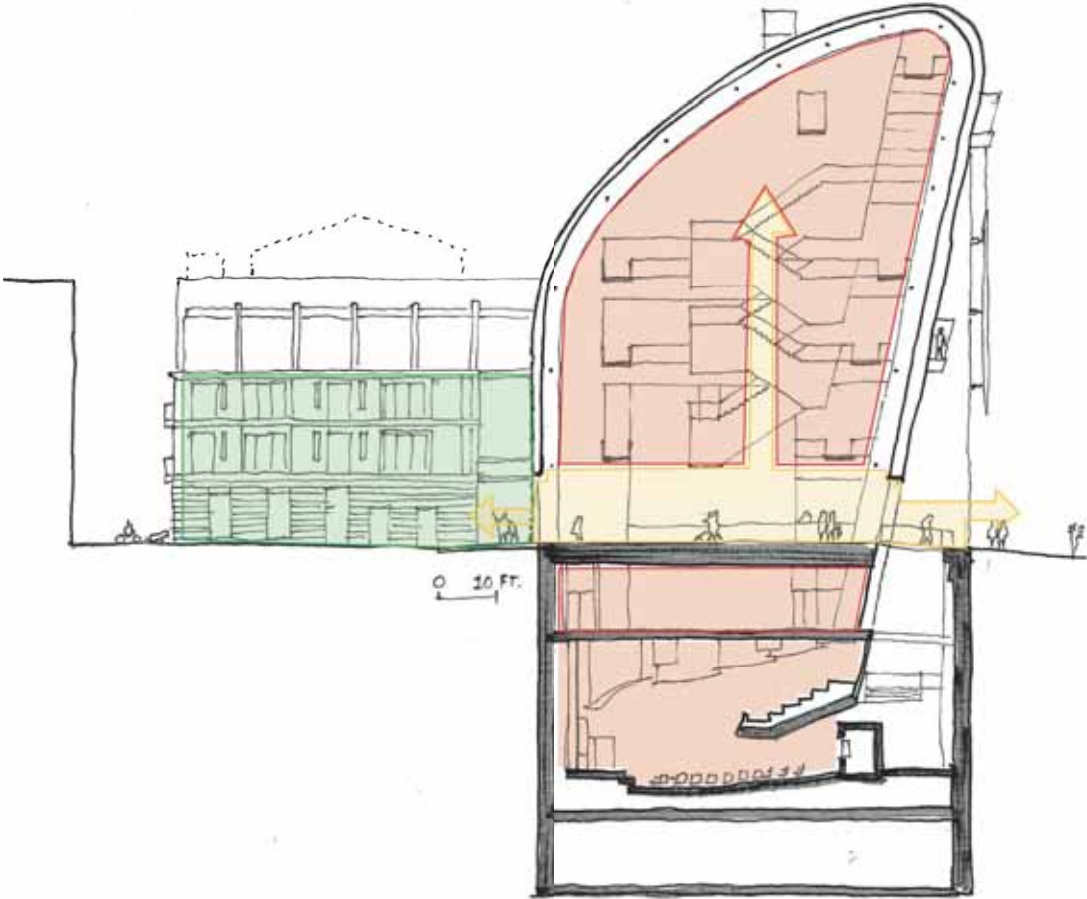
Circulation	30,000 sqf	50%
Lobby	720 sqf	1.2%
Atrium	-	-
Auditorium	2,000 sqf	3.3%
Foyer	1,800 sqf	3%
Gallery	11,000 sqf	18.3%
Auditorium balcony	775 sqf	1.3%
Bookshop	200 sqf	-
Internet cafe	720 sqf	- 1.5%
Cafe	600 sqf	1%
Pressroom	600 sqf	1%
Reception	660 sqf	1%
Offices	1,600 sqf	2.7%
Dining Room	1,300 sqf	2.2%
Total	60,000 sqf	

Figure 40 - Section through the Caixa Galecia Foundation (by author)

The museum is a regional culture center in the northwest Atlantic coast town of La Coruña, Spain. The 82,000-square-foot structure is inserted in a lot that is only 72 feet wide. A large program for a limited site added complexity for the overall design. The curving, unbroken façade wraps from the back alley to the street level and into the auditorium.

This precedent was selected for because it's relation to the comic book galleries and theater programmatic design. In relation to the rest of the program the circulation takes up more than have the square-footage. The gallery's curved metal facade creates a strong connection throughout the building, unifying all the spaces in the exhibit. The façade reveals a clear understanding of the interior functions of the galleries. The retail is retail shops are kept at the ground level, which encourages people to use the building.

Burrell Collection, Glasgow, UK

Figure 41 - Visual Connection to Galleries (image source: Psarra, Sophia. *Architecture and Narrative*, author enhanced)

This precedent was selected because of the relationship between the architectural design and the exhibit. The Burrell collection houses historical artifacts dating back two thousand years and up to the present. The layout of the gallery tells the history through time starting from the oldest. The viewer experiences this sequential narrative from the beginning of his or her arrival to the museum. Standing at the Northwest corner of the building the visitor has a clear visual connection through each gallery. The visitor then proceeds to circulate around the edges of the building until he or she arrives at the south corridor. From there the visitor is able to gaze back at the earlier galleries but with a more direct visual connection to the historical artifacts and the exterior of the building.[18]

The sequential arrangement and the shift in visual perception of the historical artifacts could help inform the arrangement of the Comic book galleries.

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[18] Psara, Sophia. *Architecture and Narrative: The formation of Space andCultural Meaning*. Milton Park, Abington: Routledge, 2009

Tower of Winds, Yokohama

Figure 42 - Tower of Winds transformation using light (image source: Spiers, Jonathan. *Made of Light*)

This example was selected for its lighting attributes and characteristics. Such, hold relevance to possible exterior treatment and character of the comic book museum's façade design. An architecture that is responsive to the context of the site also relates to the concept of fantasy depicted on the cities in comic book art. The transformative qualities presented on the façade of the Tower of Winds building could reveal the duality of utopian and dystopian traits found in every major city including Baltimore.

The facade of the Tower of Winds building is made of a translucent material, which allows light to partially permeate and reflect off the surface. During the day, or when light washes along the exterior of the tower, it gives off a solid appearance. During the night, the building is lit from the inside revealing the skeleton of the structure.

Villa Stein

Figure 43 - Ville Stein's front and rear facades (image source: en.wikiarquitectura.com)

This precedent was selected for its relevance to the duality concept. The exterior of the building is based on the functionality of the program and structure of the house. The front façade is very flat except for three protrusions from the entrance canopies and the balcony. The horizontal bands wrap around the sides of the house

towards the back where the window bays grow wider. The transparency of the rear

façade reveals the complexity of volumes that is otherwise disguised by the front

elevation of the home.

The formal duality used in Ville Stein's design can be implemented in the

design for the Infinite Canvas Museum. The more rigid rationalized façade could

represent the utopian theme and the organic façade could represent dystopian

qualities of the museum.

Part 5: Program

Program Description

Total 48,000 sqf

Museum Mission Statement

The mission of The Infinite Canvas Museum is to educate, inspire, and challenge our audience about the visual art and its creative, intellectual, and culturally diverse aspects. The museum invites our audience to take a personal journey through alternate universes crafted by renowned comic book artists. The museum will broaden public perception and cultural understanding through the eyes of professional and aspiring illustrators.

Core Audience

The goal is for The Infinite Canvas to become an integral part of the Baltimore community. The audience should feel welcomed and comfortable by having this museum be part of their community and they should get the most out of the experience.

Museum Entrance   **400 ft sq**

To entice the visitors to move forward into the museum, a small part of the weekly exhibited comic gallery should be clearly visible in the lobby. Previewing a small portion of the artist's exhibit may encourage the visitors' curiosity.

Visitor Circulation

The public circulation flow should be apparent throughout the exhibit. The comic artist's exhibit should be intergraded with the main circulation to drive the narrative forward. At any time during the progression through the exhibit, the visitor should be allowed to return directly to the main lobby without having to complete the exhibit.

Administrative

General Description

> **Reception**   **70 sqf**
>
> **Coat Closet**   **40 sqf**
>
> **Director Office**   **400 sqf**

W.C.   **100 sqf**

Not for general public. Male anf Female wash closet is solely for use of administration and exhibit designer, located at the base level. Another set of male and female facilities will be for the use of the students.

Studio

Exhibition Spaces

Admission/Atrium   **1500 sqf**

A museum comic book shop is capable of bringing in significant revenue and should give comic book readers some incentive to continue coming back to the museum. The location of the comic book store should be in close proximity of the museum lobby and other public, high-use areas of the museum. Delivery packages for the comic book shop tend to be small. Deliveries from a service entrance would be preferable, however front door deliveries should not cause any problems.

Temporary Exhibit -   **10,000 sqf**

The vistas are a crucial aspect for understanding the comic exhibit. Part 1 argues that in order to understand a comic there needs to be a juxtaposition of at least two images. Therefore, the person's cone of vision must encompass two images at one time for the entire exhibit.

Traditional museums offer flexibility and provide opportunities for the visitor, which encourages repeat visits. The Infinite Canvas will encourage repeat visits by continuing the story illustrated in the temporary exhibit.

Permanent Exhibit -   **10,000 sqf**

The permanent exhibit will include historical art pieces that will remain in the galleries for a longer period than the temporary exhibition. The artworks include of ancient Egyptian paintings, historical works from William Hogarth, Rudolphe Toffer, and any other artists that contributed to the comic's evolution.

> **William Hogarth Collection**   **500 sqf**
> There will be two sets of Hogarth collections. "The Harlots Progress" will contain a series of six (6) plates. "A Rake's Progress" contains a series of eight (8) plates.

Rodolphe Töpffer Collection   **500 sqf**

Histoire de M. Vieux Bois, The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck,

Exhibit Storage / Preparation

Coat Closet –   **36 sqf**

Public W.C.   **400sqf**

For general public use. Should be located on the main floor for easy access to exhibits and museum comic store

Study Center   **5000sqf**

The study center will be used by students for educational purposes. The comic media has strong links to other educational curriculums, such as history, art, writing, and math.

Vestibule 100sqf

Patron Coat Closet   **10 sqf**

Patron W.C.   **40 sqf**

Study Area   **550 sqf**

Service

Janitor's Closet   **20 sqf**

Supply Storage   **400 sqf**

H.V.A.C.
Provide a single fire proofed space for the efficient installation of H.V.A.C. apparatus.

Trash Room
Trash pickup in this part of the city is once a week. Adequate ventilation is desirable. Proximity to the service entrance is desirable.

Freight Elevator

Theater

The theater will seat 300 individuals. Movies have strong ties to the comic media through storytelling, framing the story, cinematography and so on.

Foyer   **600 sqf.**

Auditorium   **2,000 sqf.**

Auditorium Balcony   **4,000 sqf.**

Control Booth   **200 sqf**

Part 6: Design Goals and Strategies

Manipulating Space and Light for Comic Mediums

The following series of studies show the various comic book related artwork that will be included inside the Infinite Canvas Museum Collection. The study was to relate the scale of spaces, how they may be organized around the spaces, and the type of lighting that would be appropriate for each artwork.

	Comic Medium	Medium in Section	Movement in Plan	Lighting
Comic Book				

Figure 44 - Diagram for Gallery Design - Comic Book Scale (by author)

The relationship between the person and the comic book is at a very personal and intimate level. The space closes itself around the observer giving the person a sense of privacy.

Comic Medium	Medium in Section	Movement in Plan	Lighting

Comic Sketch
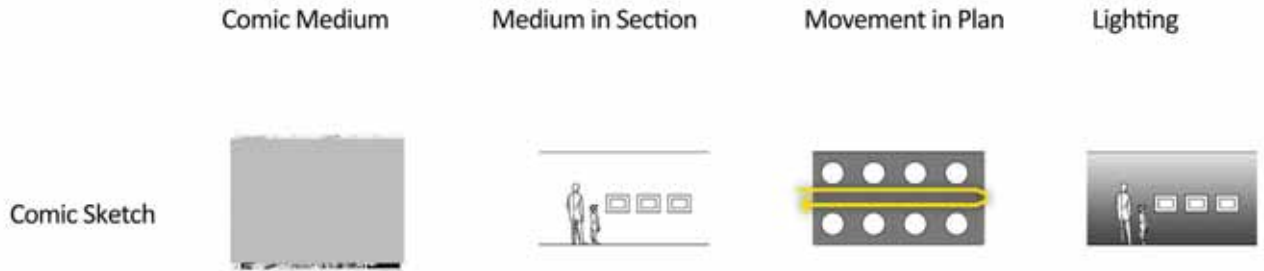
Figure 45 - Diagram for Gallery Design - Comic Book Single Panels scale (by author)

The relationship between the person and the original comic book art is less personal. The movement through the space becomes more fluid. The lighting will use linear diffusers to fill the wall with ambient lighting giving the person the impression to move through the space more rapidly.

Comic Medium	Medium in Section	Movement in Plan	Lighting

Hogarth Plate
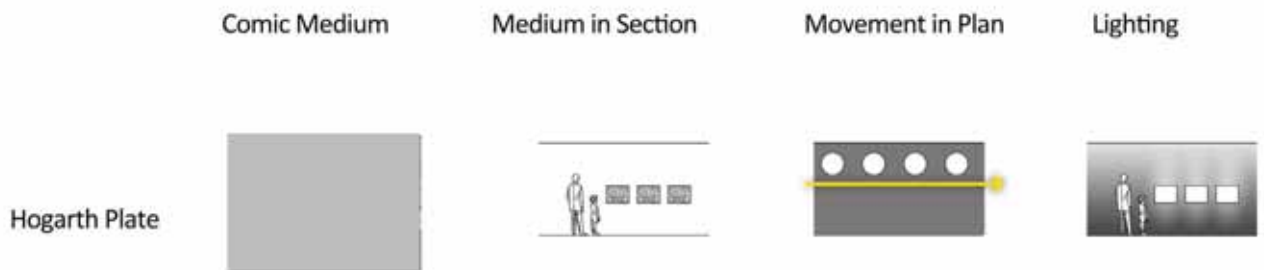
Figure 46 - Diagram for Gallery Design - Hogarth Etching scale (by author)

The Hogarth etchings require the observer to observe them in a sequential pattern. The first Hogarth etching must be placed near the entrance of the space so that the person understands the artwork must be observed in a deliberate sequence. The person requires more time with each plate because of the large amounts of subtlety in the compositions. Linear diffusers will be used for this exhibit wall as well as spotlighting for each plate. The linear diffusers are to suggest that the series

of plates must be observed as a whole while the spotlighting suggests that the

observer should spend more time studying each plate.

Comic Medium	Medium in Section	Movement in Plan	Lighting
Vintage Comic			
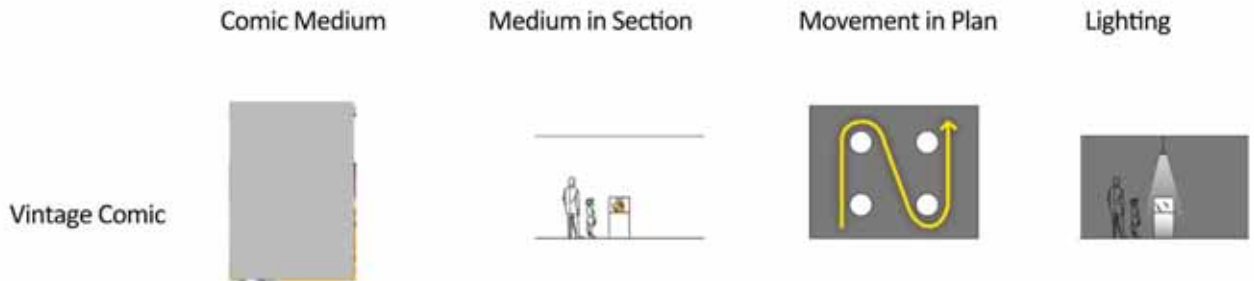
Figure 47 - Diagram for Gallery Design - Vintage Comic Book scale (by author)

Vintage material is more precious to a comic book admirer and must be given

individual attention. The two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks can be

placed in a clear-top case to give an all-round viewing experience. Each vintage set-

piece can be organized around a closed space to break up the person's movement

through the museum. The spotlighting gives more importance to the object.

Comic Medium	Medium in Section	Movement in Plan	Lighting
Lichtenstein			
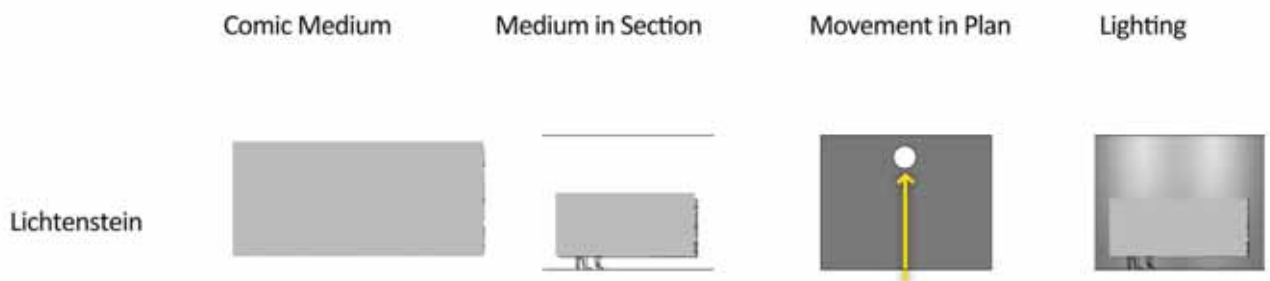
Figure 48 - Diagram for Gallery Design - Lichtenstein Painting scale (by author)

The Lichtenstein paintings command attention from the observers. More

space is devoted to each painting so that the observer knows to move directly towards

the painting.

| Comic Medium | Medium in Section | Movement in Plan | Lighting |

Costume

Figure 49 - Diagram for Gallery Design - Costume Wardrobe scale (by author)

The hero costumes from the "Comic-Book Movie Genre" are offset from the person's path. Some people may want to stop and admire the costumes but it does not slow the movement through the space. The lighting used for the costumes will be with low ambient illumination.

| Comic Medium | Medium in Section | Movement in Plan | Lighting |
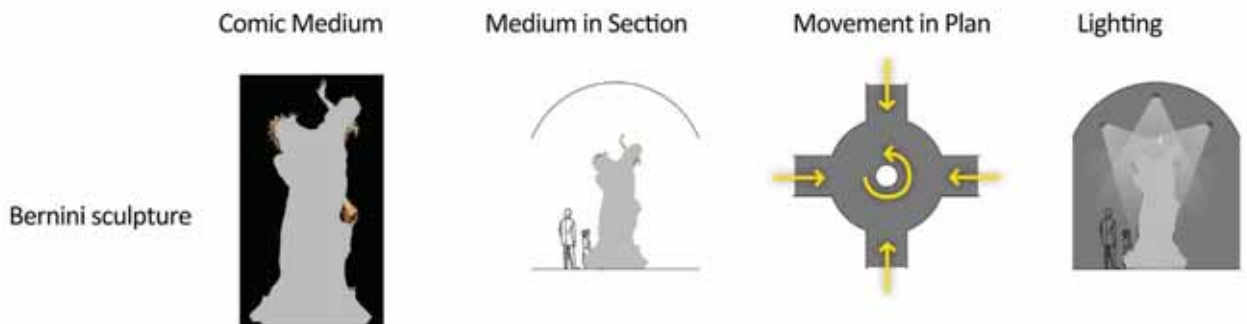
Bernini sculpture

Figure 50 - Diagram for Gallery Design - Sculpture scale (by author)

The Bernini sculpture is a three-dimensional comic book narrative that can be interpreted from different angles. However, like a comic book narrative there is a sequence that the observer must follow in order to understand the story. For the Proserpine statue in figure _ the observer must approach the statue from Pluto's side. Then the observer can move around the statue in a counterclockwise movement to

study the different perspectives.   Spotlighting the sculpture from various angles will give off strong shadows in order to accentuate the form.

Figure 51 - Diagram for Gallery Design - Artist Panel scale (by author)

For the temporary exhibit, the artist has complete freedom to adjust his or her comic artwork around the skeleton of the museum gallery.

Manipulation of the Space to create a heightened Comic Book Experience

The following study experiments with the temporary gallery exhibit and how to enhance the comic book narrative experience for the visitors. A single sequence was taken from a comic book. The individual frames were exploded into the three-dimensional space and organized sequentially around the exhibit.

Comic Artist Design Concept_01
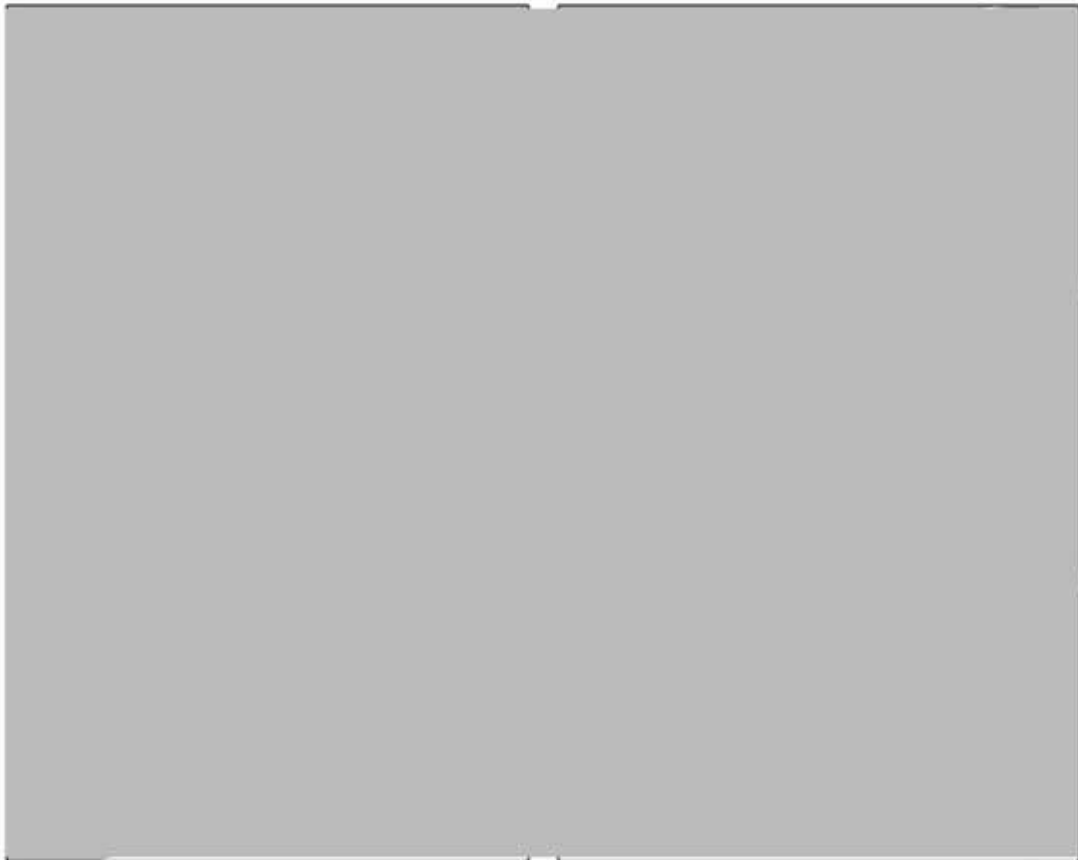
Figure 52 - Gallery Sequence Concept 01 (by author)

The conceptual narrative presented through this Temporary Exhibit demonstrates the *Extra-deigetic* space that exists between the observer and the individual comic book frames. Each frame is exploded from the comic book pages to

be arranged sequentially in a three-dimensional space thus guiding the person through the exhibit. The person must maintain a visual connection with two or more frames at a time. The visual connection rule applies to all comic book compositions.

Comic Artist Gallery Design Concept_02

Figure 53 - Gallery Sequence Concept 02 (by author)

Concept 2 demonstrates how the comic artwork can extend through multiple levels of a gallery to reveal a portion of the narrative. The disjoint between the levels creates the *extra-deigetic* space that frames the narrative. The central art piece is known in comic books as a *splash image* because it bleeds into other frames and signifies its importance to the narrative. The visual connection to the frames is

maintained throughout this experience. This concept gives the artists freedom to

explore the narration of their comic book to the audience.

Comic Artist Gallery Design Concept_03
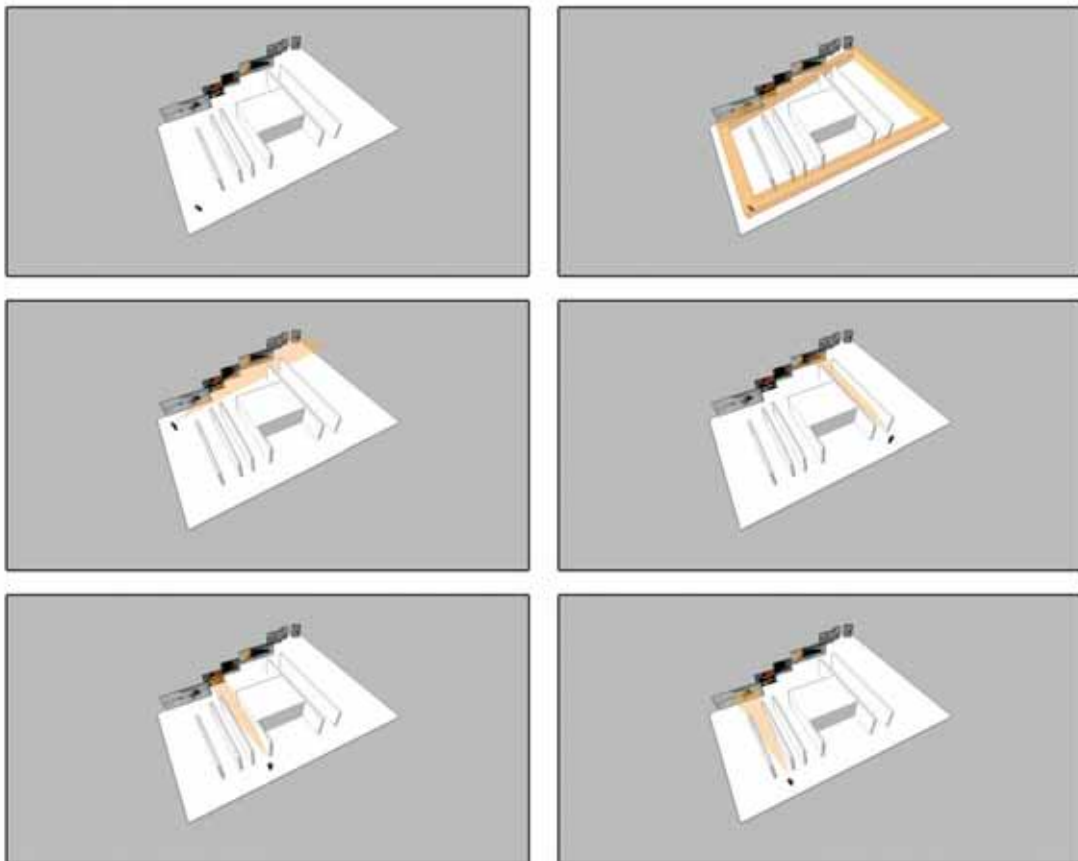
Figure 54 - Gallery Sequence Concept 03 (by author)

Concept 3 demonstrates how the person begins to run the course of the gallery

from an overall perspective of the gallery images. The person then circulates

clockwise around the exhibit to fine him or herself staring at the same exhibit through

a series of hallways. The hallways frame the artwork differently to reveal certain

information the person missed from the first walkthrough. The shift in perspective

also changes the overall composition to give new insight to the detail of each image.

Comic Artist Gallery Design Concept_04

Figure 55 - Gallery Sequence Concept 04 (by author)

Concept 4 is designed to heighten the hyper-realistic qualities of the comic book art by manipulating the museum space. The splash image of the narrative is place at the end of the hallway past a series of small rooms. The observer passes through each room while maintaining a visual connection to the final image. Each room reveals more about the comic book story as the image at the end of the hall comes into focus. The partitions break apart as the story progresses to shed more light in the small spaces.

Preliminary Design Sketches

Design Concept 1
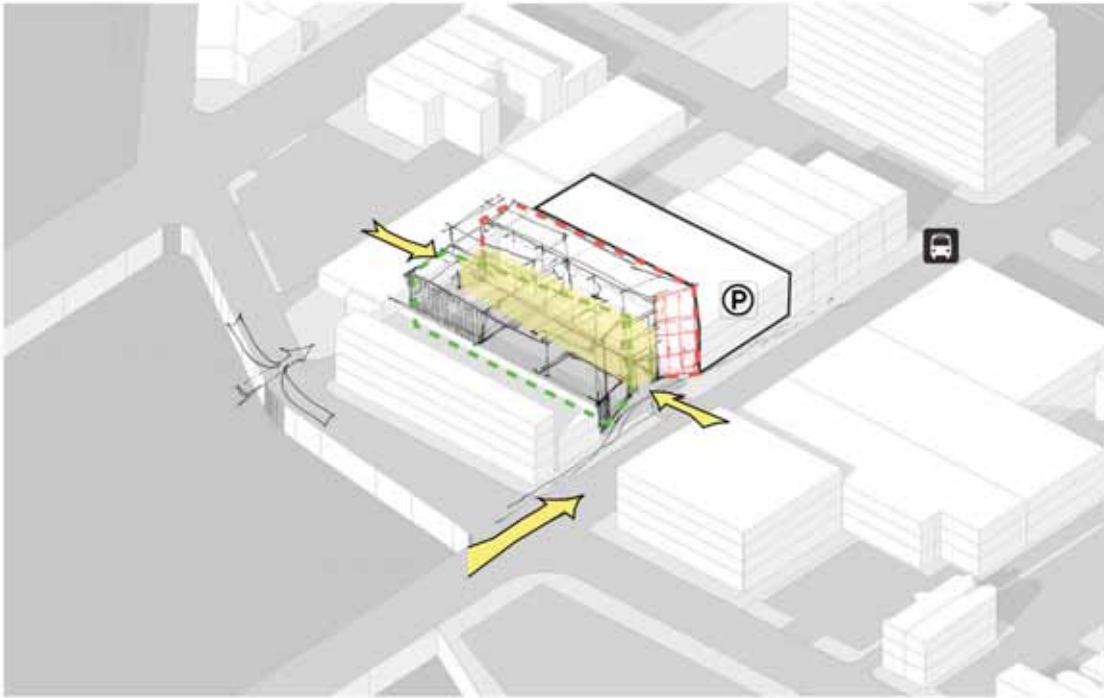
Figure 56 – Preliminary concept sketch 1 (by author)

The program is divided into three bars on the site. The division pushes the administrative functions and the galleries to both edges allowing people to circulate through the center bar. The public will access the building through the North Charles street corridor and the alley.

Design Concept 2
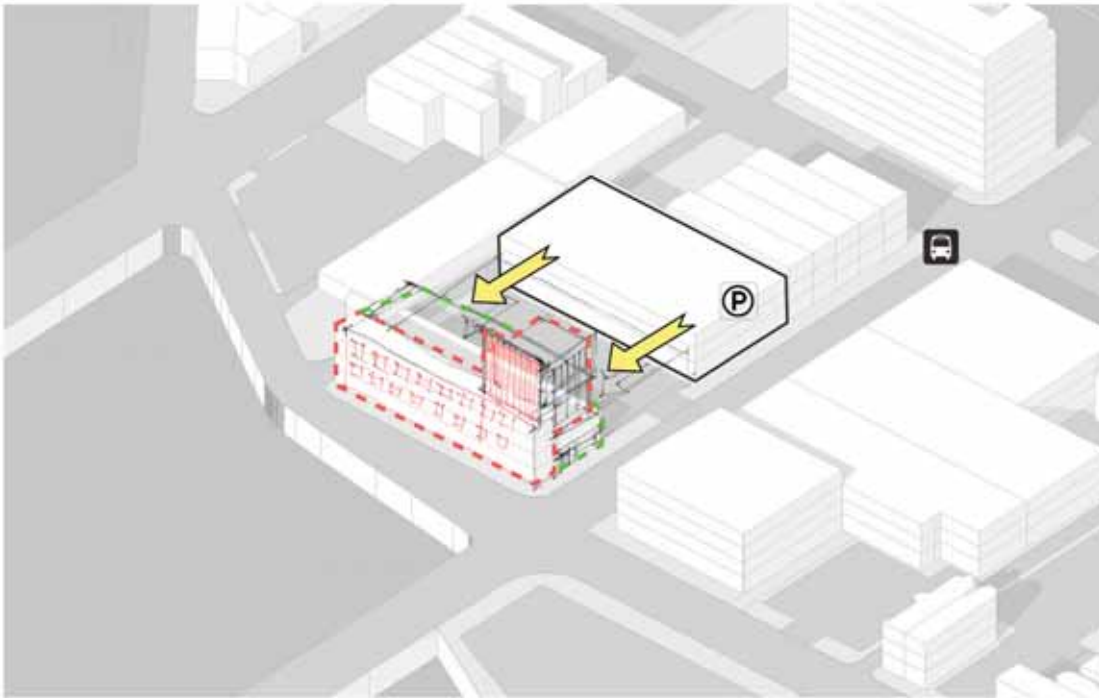
Figure 57 – Preliminary concept sketch 2 (by author)

This concept scheme overtakes the Metro Gallery and Metro Cleaners building's shell. The shell will be programmed to include all the gallery functions for the museum. The south-facing wall will give the museum the opportunity to showcase the artist's artwork and it will allow giving a stronger presence in the Baltimore community. The galleries will also build above the existing structure, offering views back to the city. The entrance of the building will be accessed along the side of the structure facing the parking garage directly north of the site.

Design Concept 3

Figure 58 – Preliminary concept sketch 3 (by author)

The concept for this scheme pushes all the galleries to the edge of North Charles corridor. Access to building will occur from the alley or the parking garage adjacent to the site. All the administrative functions in this scheme gets pushed back to the alley corridor, which allows come privacy for the staff quarters.

Design Concept 4
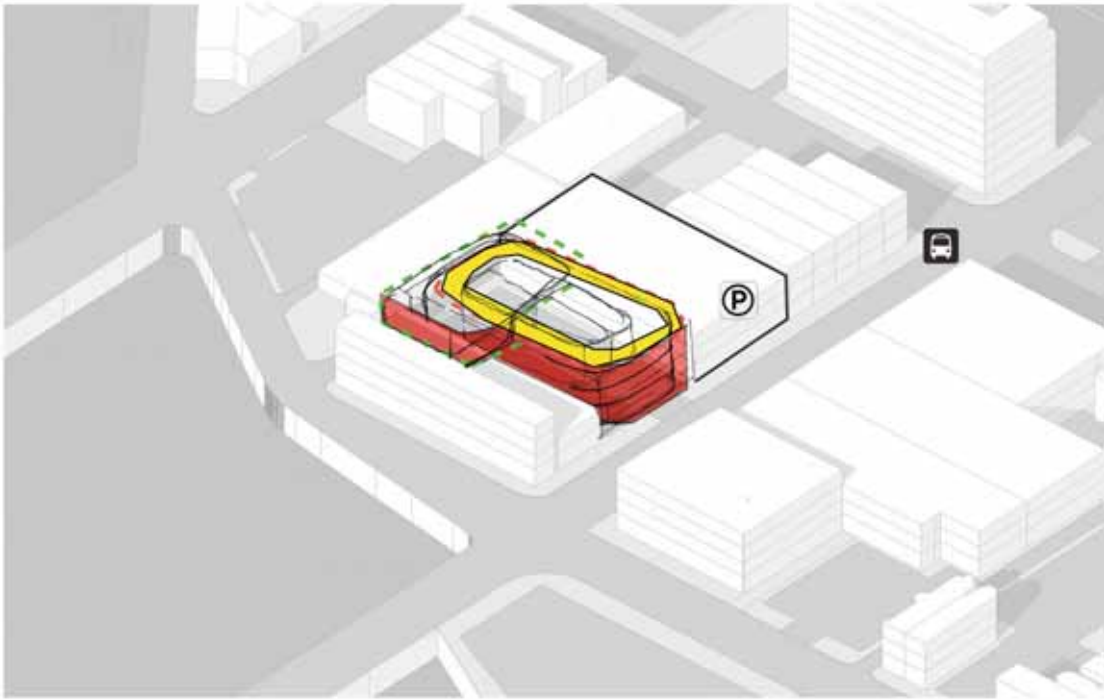
Figure 59 – Preliminary concept sketch 4 (by author)

In this scheme the program will occur on the site and overtake the Metro gallery building. The gallery exhibits will wrap around the edges of the structure along with most of the building's circulation. This will offer views into the building from the street level as well as views out into the city from inside the building. The administrative functions will happen at the core of the structure. The building will be accessed from the street, alley, and the parking structure.

Design Concept 5
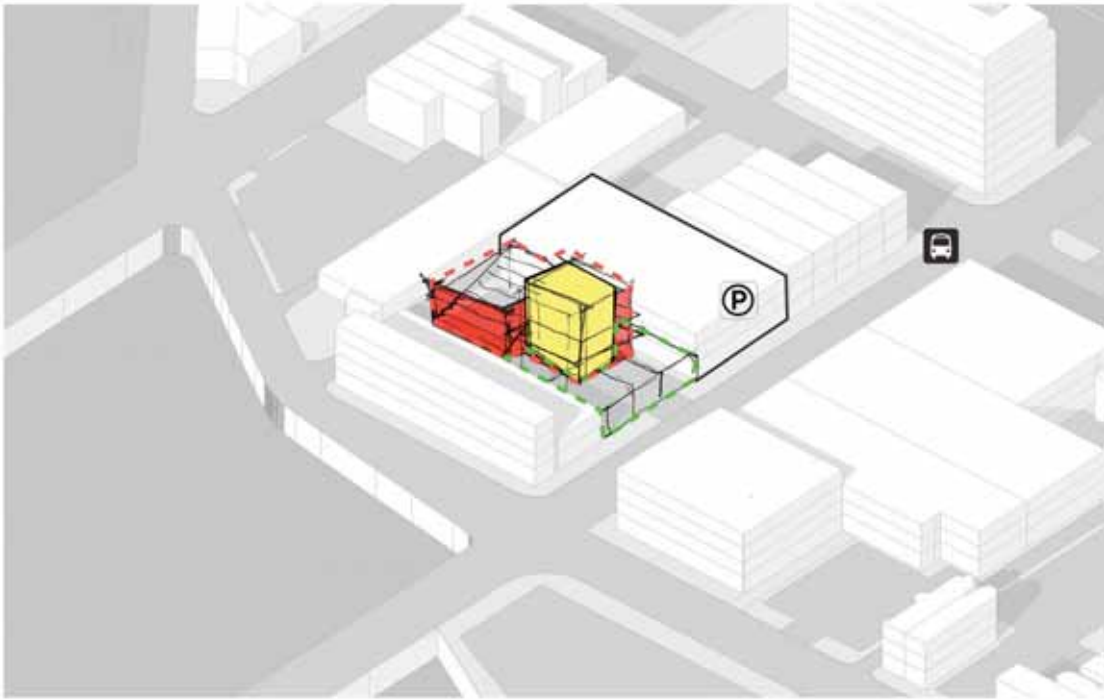
Figure 60 – Preliminary concept sketch 5 (by author)

This scheme centralizes all the galleries and public circulation through the building's core. All of the administrative functions will occur at the base of building. The educational functions are adjacent to the galleries.

Program Adjacencies Diagram

Figure 61 - Program Adjacencies Diagram (by author)

Program Design Schemes

Artist studio is located on the top floor adjacent to the Temporary Gallery. A freight elevator will give the artist access to any gallery production materials

The galleries run along the egde of the building's facade at various levels. Their location at various levels will offer different views to the city

Entrance of the museum will be located on the alley side of the building. The lobby, reception, and administrative will be adjacent to the entrance.

Classrooms will be connected to the galleries to enhance the historical and productive learning experience with the medium

The comic book store and the theater will be located at ground level. This gives access to pedestrian traffice alon N Charles Street

Program Scheme_01

Figure 62 - Program Perspective 01 - Engaging multiple levels of site FAR (by author)
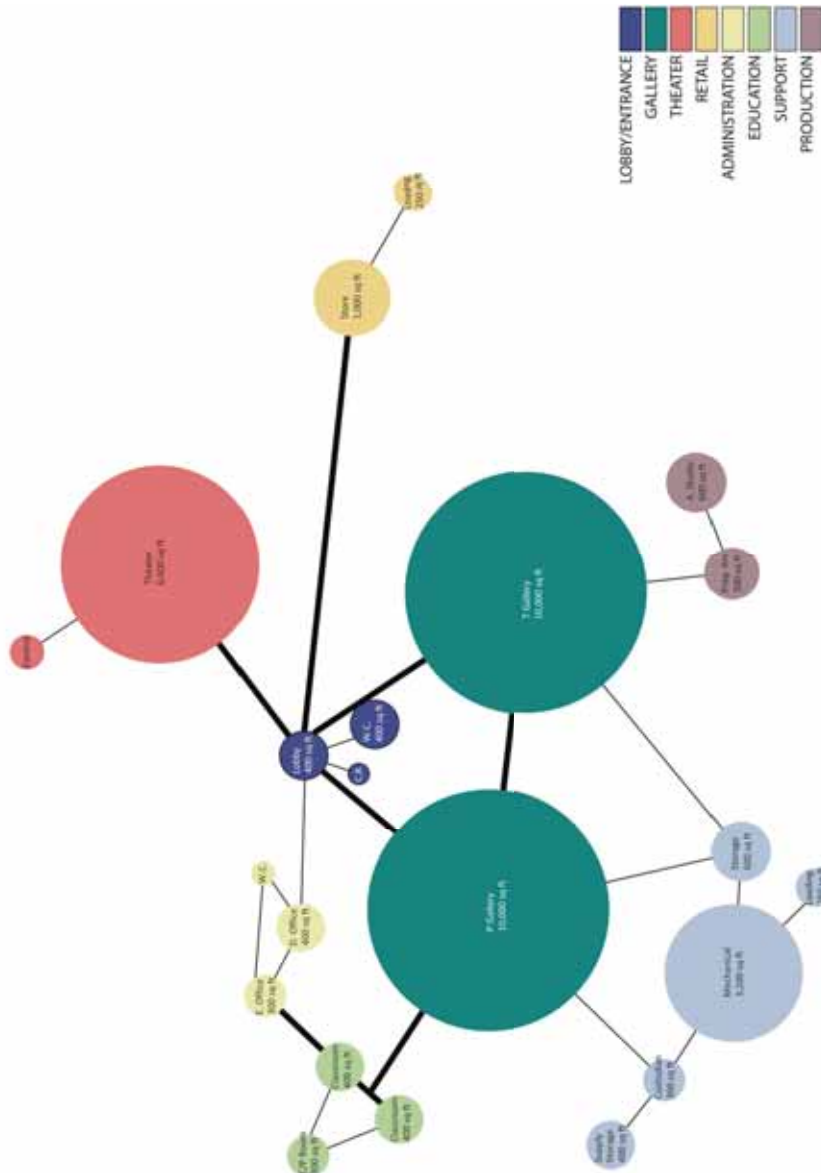

Artist studio is located on the top floor adjacent to the Temporary Gallery. A freight elevator will give the artist access to any gallery production materials

The galleries run along the egde of the building's facade at various levels. Their location at various levels will offer different views to the city

Classrooms will be connected to the galleries to enhance the historical and productive learning experience with the medium

The lobby is located at the street level for the museum and the corporate office. The comic book store and the theater is accessed underground.

The permanent gallery is located below ground and extends to the railroad tracks. The level change gives the public more exposure to the different levels of the city.

Program Scheme_02

Figure 63 - Program Perspective 02 - Engaging the underground level of Metro Gallery building by connecting to the train yard (by author)

Theatre is located at the top level alongside the galleries. The progression from gallery to movie theatre will reinforce the medium's diverese scales.

Two elevators located at the core of the building. One is a public elevator to all the museum functions. The other is private to the corporate offices.

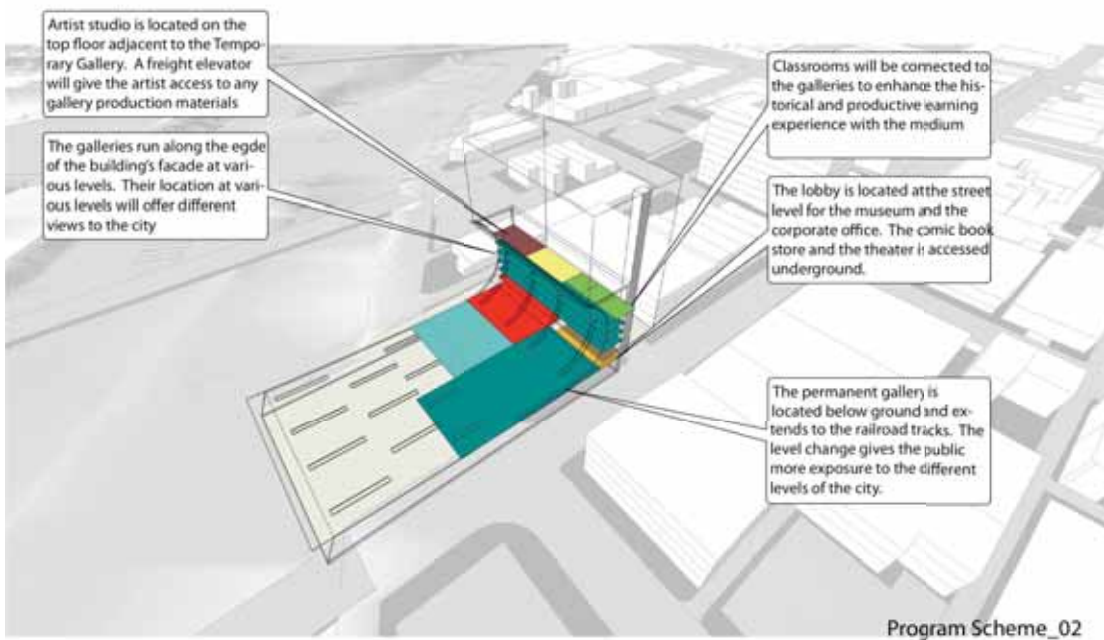Galleries take most of the south wall surface to expose the public to the city skyline.

Lobby is located at street level where the public can access the museum at the top levels by elevator. The top levels offer the best possible views to Baltimore's skyline. The comic book store is adjacent to the lobby.
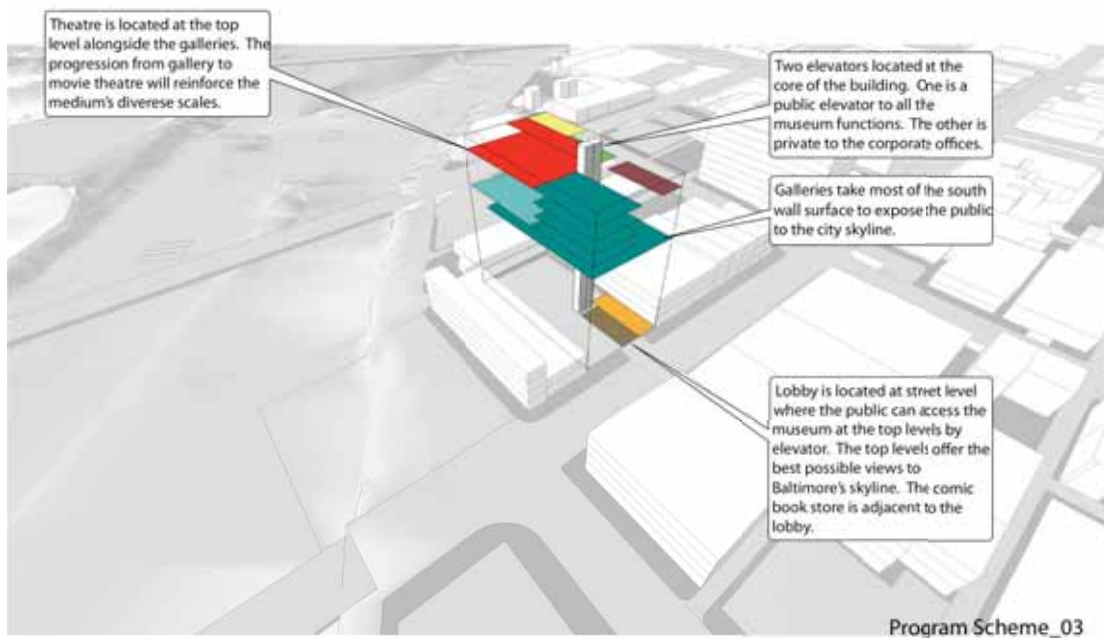
Program Scheme_03

Figure 64 - Program Perspective 03 - Placing the museum gallery program at the top levels of the building - Engages the museum visitors with views out to the city (by author)

The artist's gallery steps back:
1) To offer views to the city
2) Allow natrural light to filter to the gallery below grade

Portions of the galleries protrude from the facade to create moments where the viewers can gaze back at Baltimore's skyline.

Lobby can be accessed through N Charles Street and the Morton Street alley. Administration, classrooms, and the comic book store are accessed alongside the lobby corridor. These functions separate the two galleries.
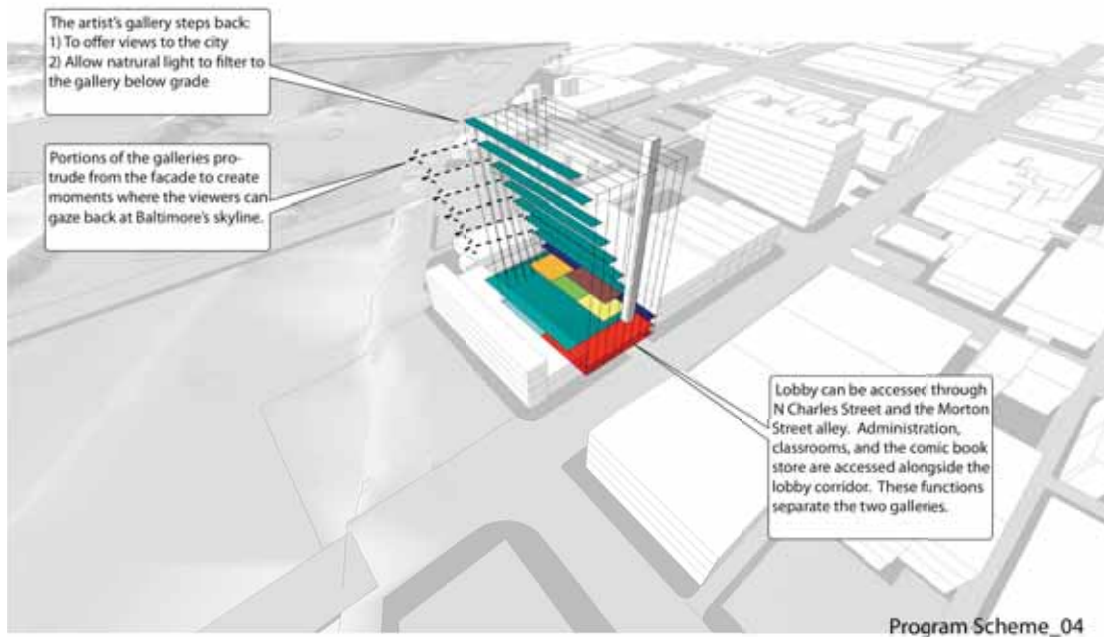
Program Scheme_04

Figure 65 - Program Perspective - Places most of the program at the bottom levels of the building - Engages the museum's galleries at various levels (by author)

Program Design Scheme Selection

Based on the data listed in the matrix below, the museum will combine

elements of program design schemes 1, 2, and 4. The museum will take full

advantage of the allowable site FAR of 14 by placing the artist gallery and the artist

studios in the top three floors of the new construction. The second gallery will be

located underground, beneath the existing Metro Gallery building, and will open to

the train yard. The ground level floors will consist of the museum lobby, theater,

comic book store, and tenant entrance.

Parti Selection Guidelines		Scheme 1	Scheme 2	Scheme 3	Scheme 4
CONTEXT	Promotes Activity on West side of Street West side of N Charles Street lacks the amenities of the East side.	5	3	1	3
	Prominence in Site Must stand out from the rest of the buildings within block.	5	2	4	3
	Offers Vistas of City The building must offer multiple viewpoints towards the city Center. The views must be dynamic and unique from one another.	5	4	5	5
ACCESS	From Main Street Access from the main street will bring the heaviest pedestrian traffic	4	4	2	5
	From Alley Access from the alley will play up the Dystopia theme	3	4	1	5
	Between Tenant and Museum Could offer tours through the studios or work areas.	4	5	0	4
	Natural light Take advantage of the southern exposure.	3	4	2	3
CIRCULATION	Clear Movement Between Spaces The circulation should be clear to the visitors. The entrances and exits from the galleries need to be clearly accessible	5	4	3	5
	Clear Narrative Between Inner Spaces the person must understand the intended paths	5	2	2	5
	Creates Options Based on Public's Preferences The visitor should be offered options when deciding between galleries	1	2	1	5
	Direct Access From Charles St. The lobby, museum, theater, comic shop, and tenant must have direct access from N Charles St.	3	5	0	3
Total (55 possible points)		48	39	33	46

Figure 66 - Parti Selection Matrix (by author)

Building Core Design

The new museum structure will become a mixed-use facility between the museum and rental space for tenants. Therefore, this thesis studied various core types (figures 56-57) for the museum, which will allow separate access for both parties. Listed below are a series of core studies.

Core study 6 (figure 57 – bottom plan) was selected for the museum design. A central core is the best solution given the site restrictions and the limited floor plate. Centralizing the core exposes the museum to various vistas o the city. The open floor plate will also allow the visiting comic book artists the freedom to design the exhibit in their own way.
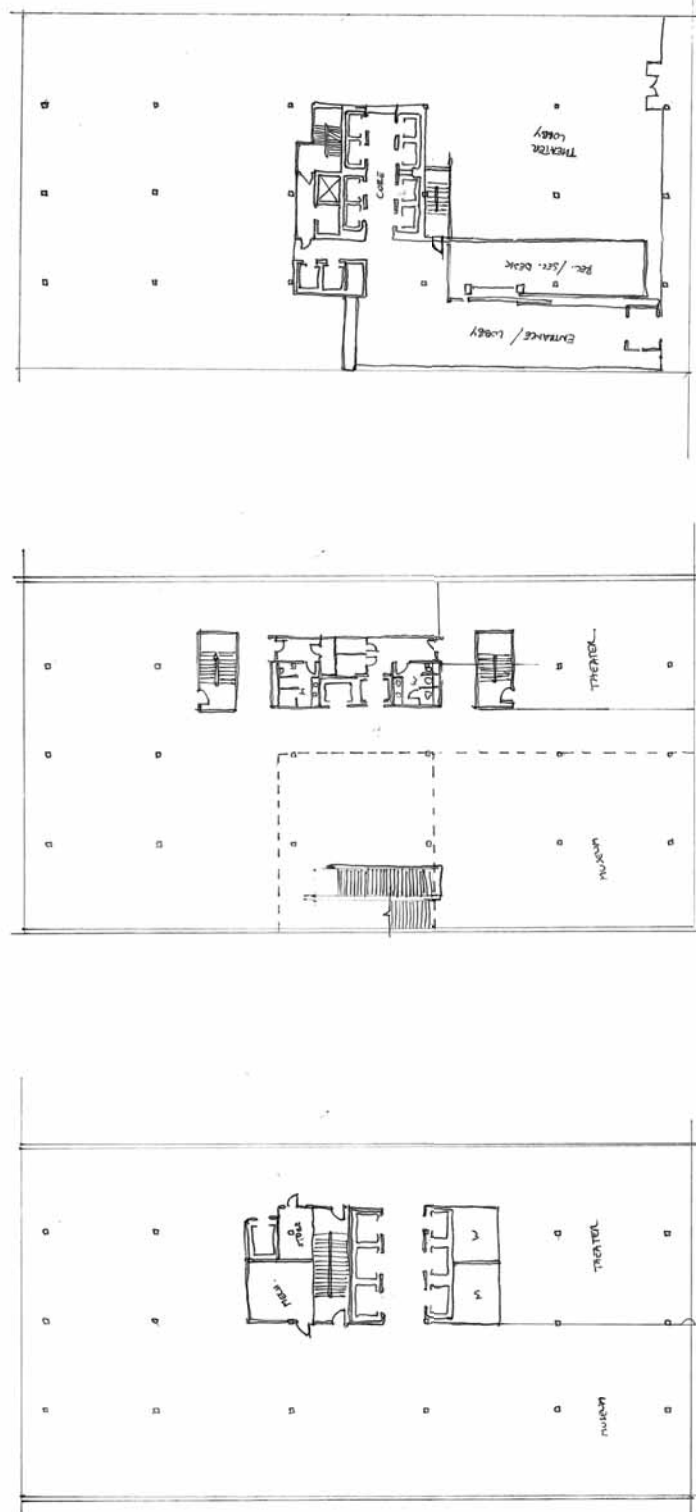
Figure 67 - Core studies (from top to bottom) - Core type 1, Core type 2, Core type 3 (by author)
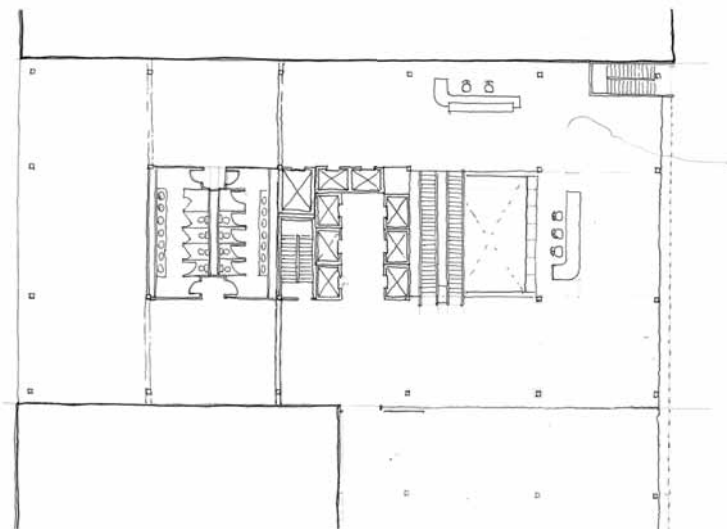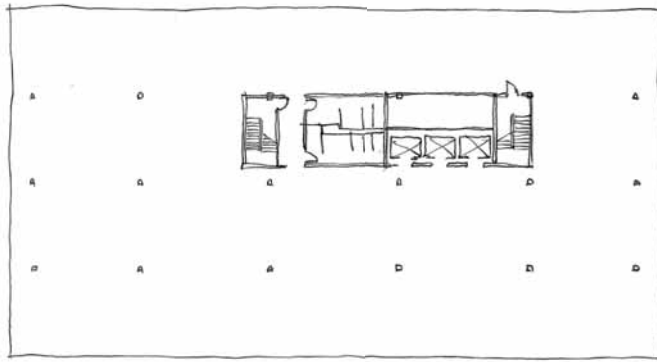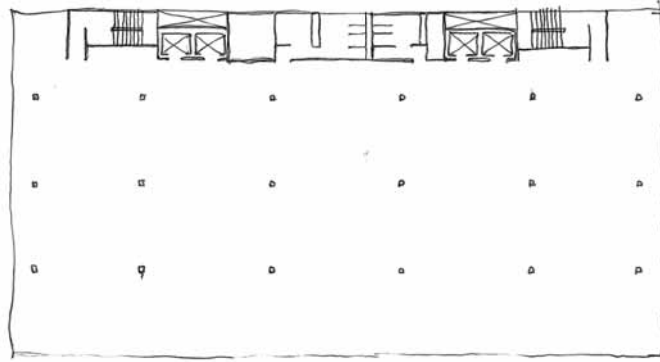
Figure 68 - Core studies - (from top to bottom) Core type 4, Core type 5, Core type 6 (by author)

Design Inspiration

As mentioned earlier, Hugh Ferris drawings were an enormous inspiration to the design process. Therefore, the following charcoal images (figures 58 – 63) served as a driver to the final museum form. The power exerted from the building is demonstrated through the abstraction of space and light from the building. The hyper-realistic imagery of the charcoal drawings creates a sense of movement within the composition and breaths life into the building form.
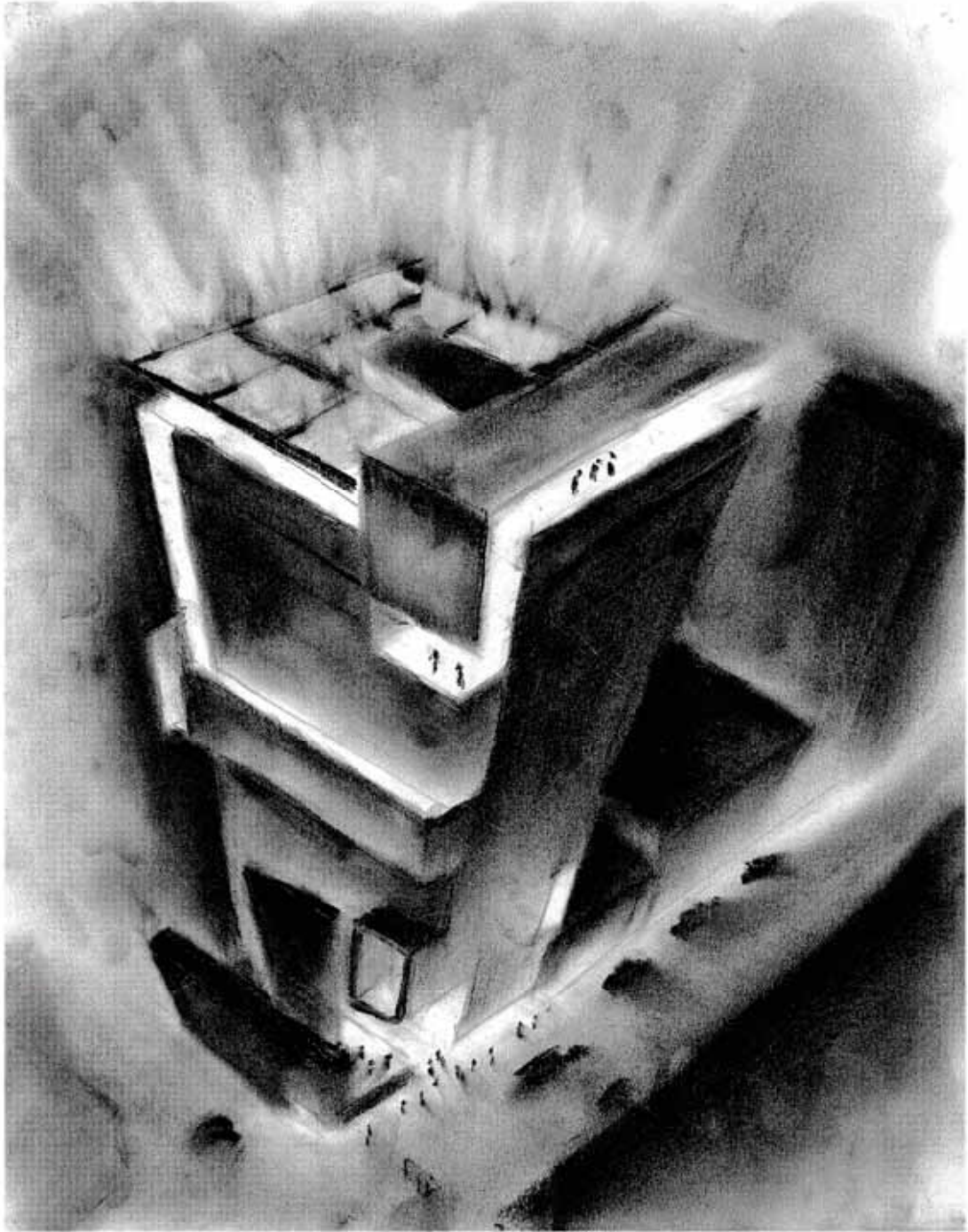
Figure 69 - Charcoal drawing of museum (by author)
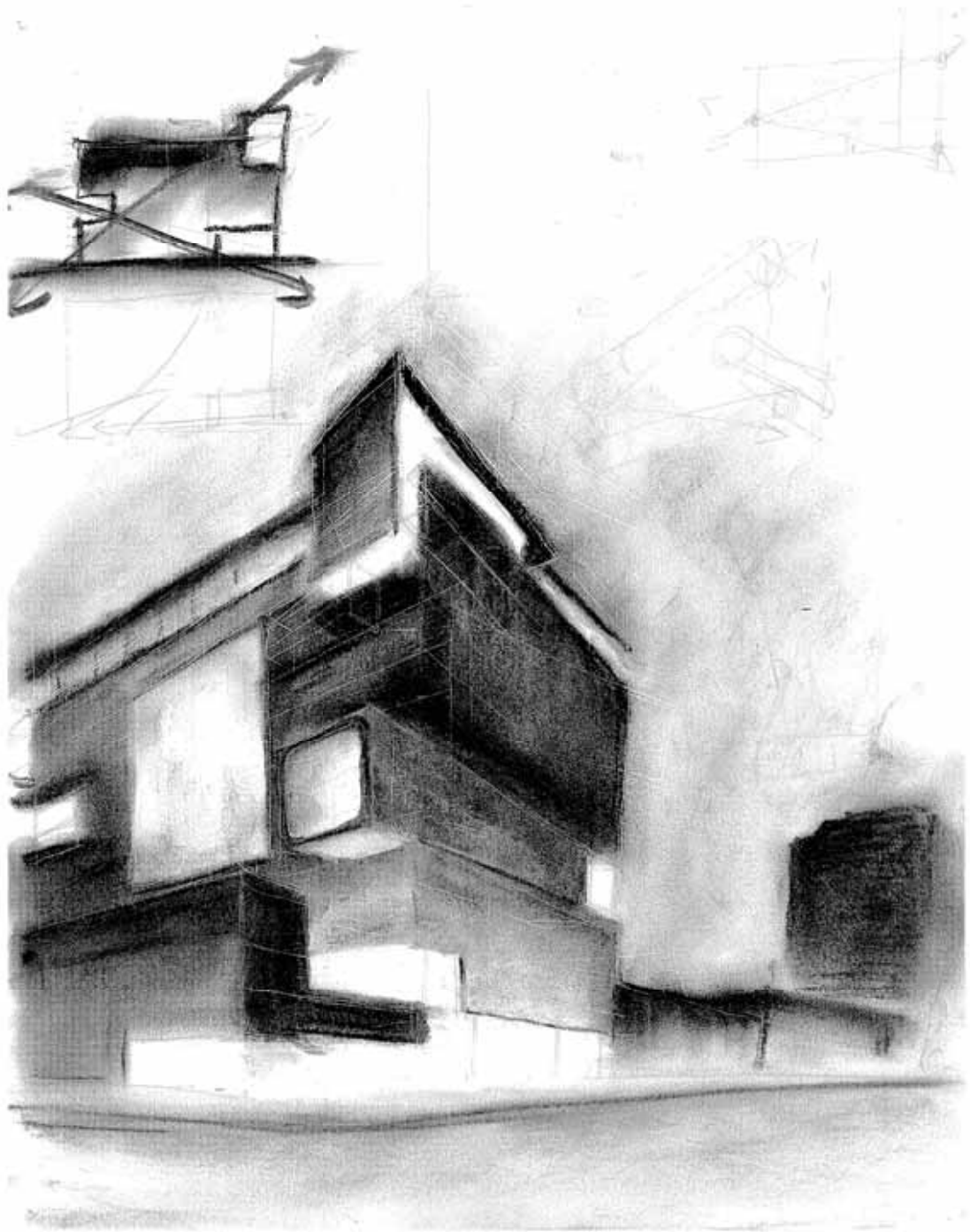
Figure 70 - Charcoal drawing of building (by author)

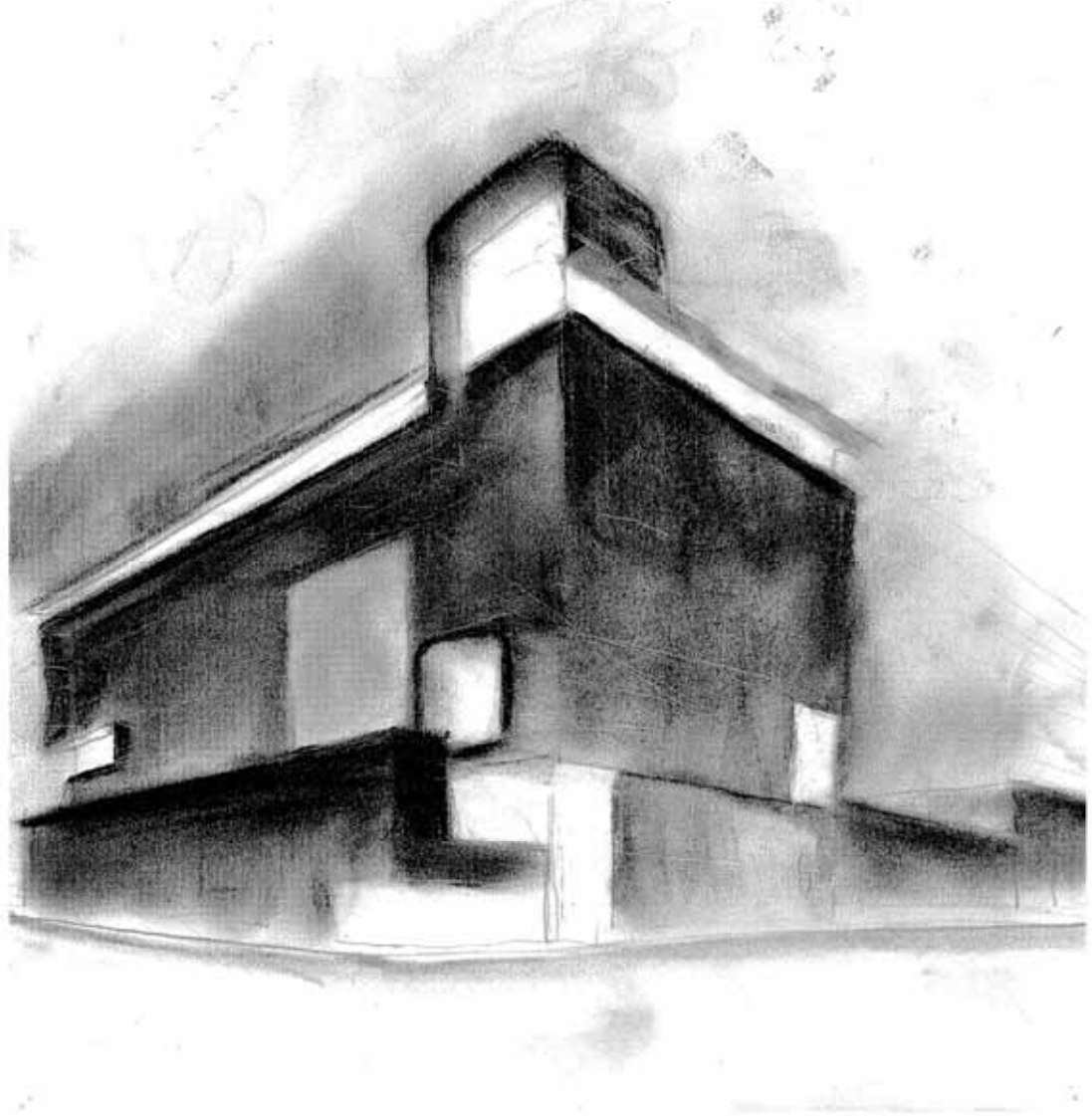**Figure 71 - Charcoal drawing of building exterior (by author)**

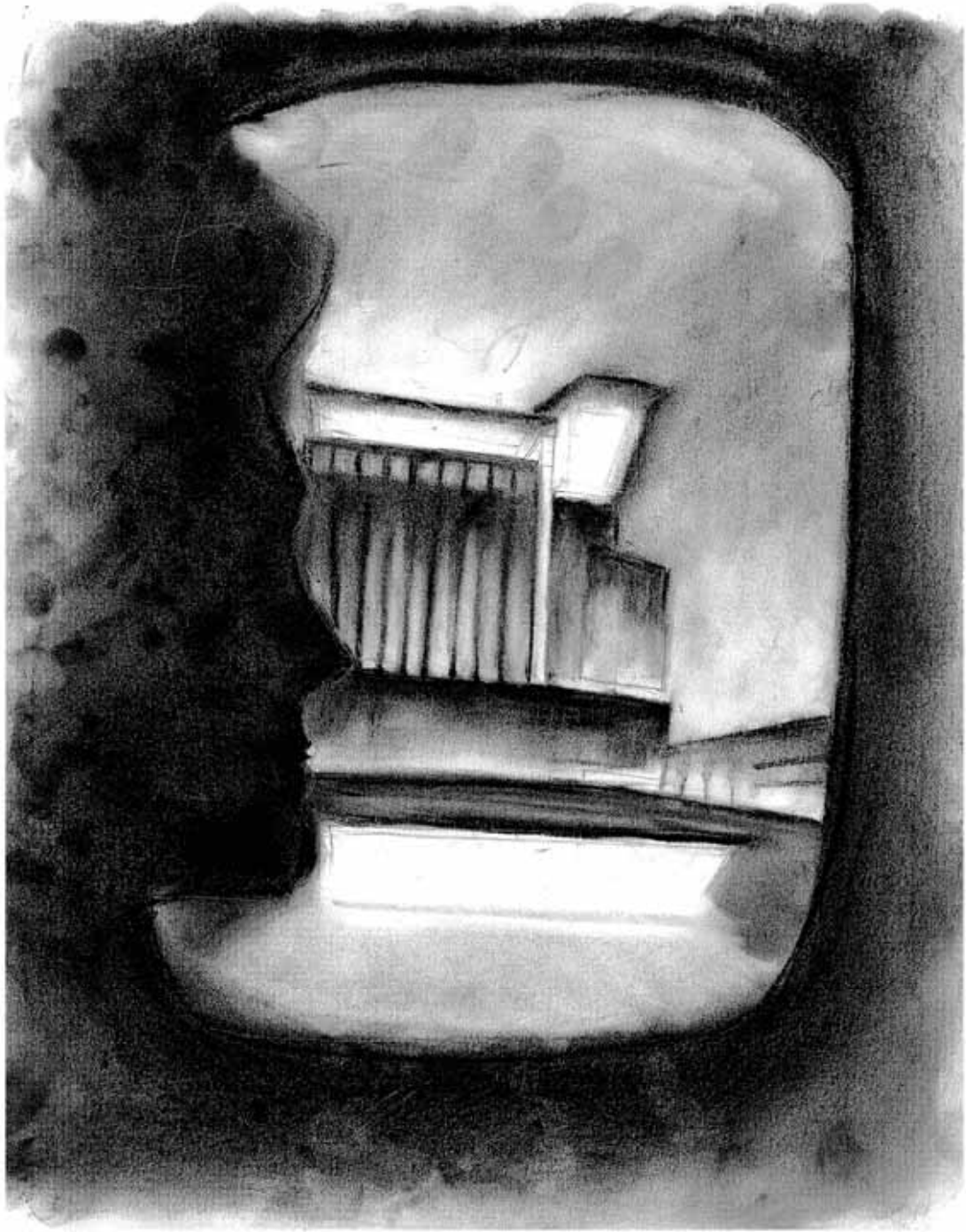**Figure 72 - charcoal drawing of building exterior 2 (by author)**

Figure 73 - charcoal drawing approaching building by train (by author)

Figure 74 - charcoal drawing approaching entrance of building (by author)

Part 7: Final Design

Final Design Diagrams

The image below depicts a man (figure 67), or rather a superman, breaking free from the confined volume. The man is pulling layers of the volume by thrusting his weight upwards toward the sky. The charcoal is an illustration of the concept behind the building's form. The man is a representation of the dystopian human figure breaking free from the city. The piercing light from the volume is representing the utopian qualities of the city by being set free from the box and breathing new air. The skin of the building reacts in the same manner as the skin of the volume depicted in the charcoal drawing. The metal skin breaks down to allow more glazing to be exposed as the visitors move up through the building.

Conceptual Diagram

Figure 75 - charcoal drawing of conceptual sketch of man thrusting out of a volume (by author)

Ideal, Mundane, Underworld

The building is divided into three main sections; the underworld realm, the mundane realm, and the ideal realm (Figure 66). The museum is separated between the underground levels of the site and the top levels of the building. In between the two levels are tenant floors that are representative of the mundane 'office' world that most people experience everyday.

The underworld realm is where the visitor's experience begins. The visitor descends down a long narrow ramp (figure 76) that takes them into the first art gallery that houses historical artwork that influenced comic book art throughout it's history. The 'underworld' opens to the train yard that is located directly south of the site (figure 77). This exposes the visitors to the dystopian qualities of the city.

The visitors will move from the underworld galley into a glass elevator shaft (figure 78) that will take them to the upper levels of the museum. The people will exit onto the level before the museum gallery. This level serves as the interstitial layer between the world of the mundane and the utopian world. On this level, a ramp zigzags up and peels through the outer surface of the building frame. This portion of the museum experience is known as the "leap of faith," which challenges the visitors to abandon their "mundane" lives and prepares them to enter the "idealized" world of comic books. The intention is to make many people feel uneasy about this event, but if the visitors choose to take a leap they will be rewarded with an incredible view of the Baltimore skyline. From this point the visitors will proceed into the "ideal" realm, which houses a temporary gallery created by the comic book artist of the month.

The ideal realm is located at the top two levels of the building. At this point the visitors will feel much like a superhero, having already overcome the "leap of faith" challenge. The luminous gallery space will consist of exploded comic book frames of the artists' choosing. The visitor will accept the artists' creations as a new reality.

ideal

mundane

underworld
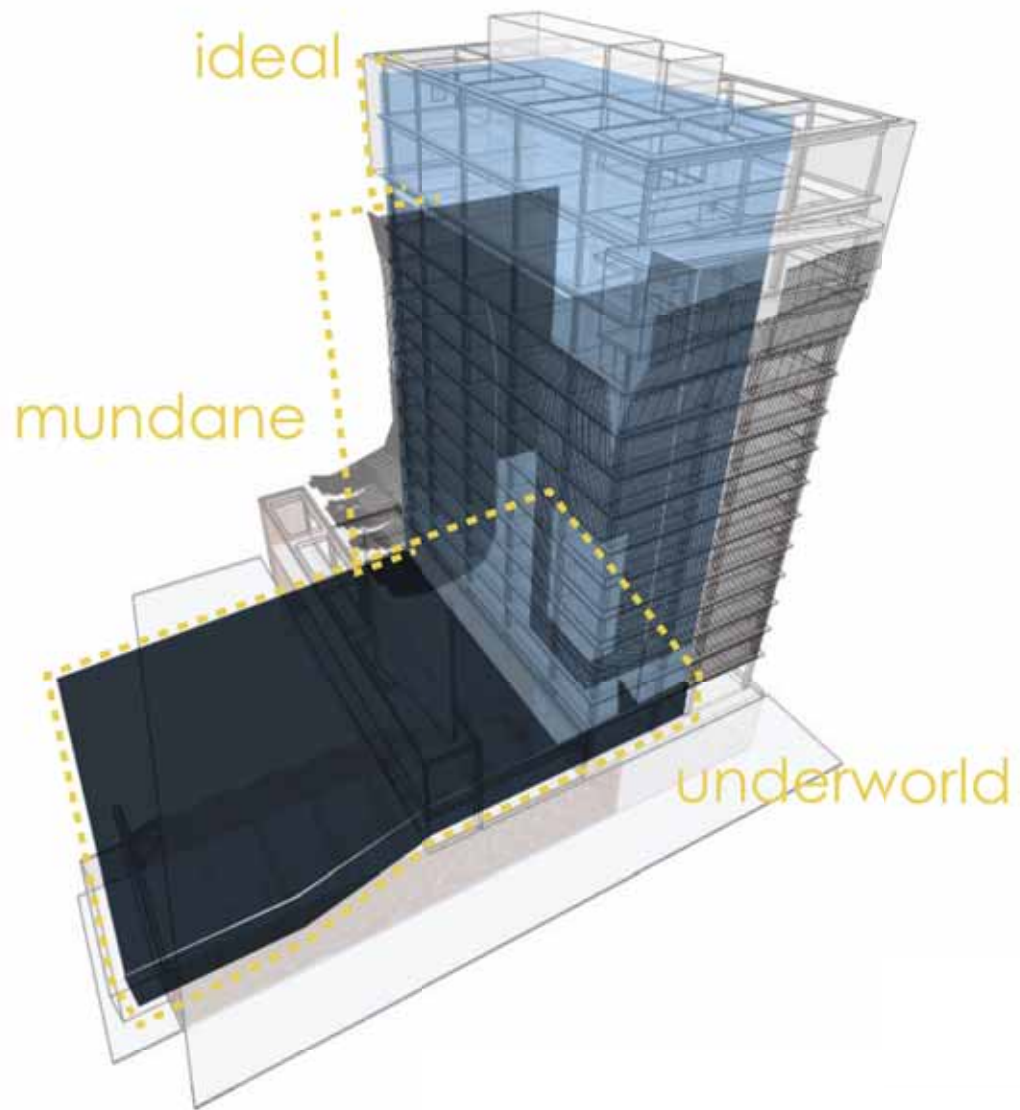
Realm Diagram

Figure 76 - diagram of three realms within museum (by author)
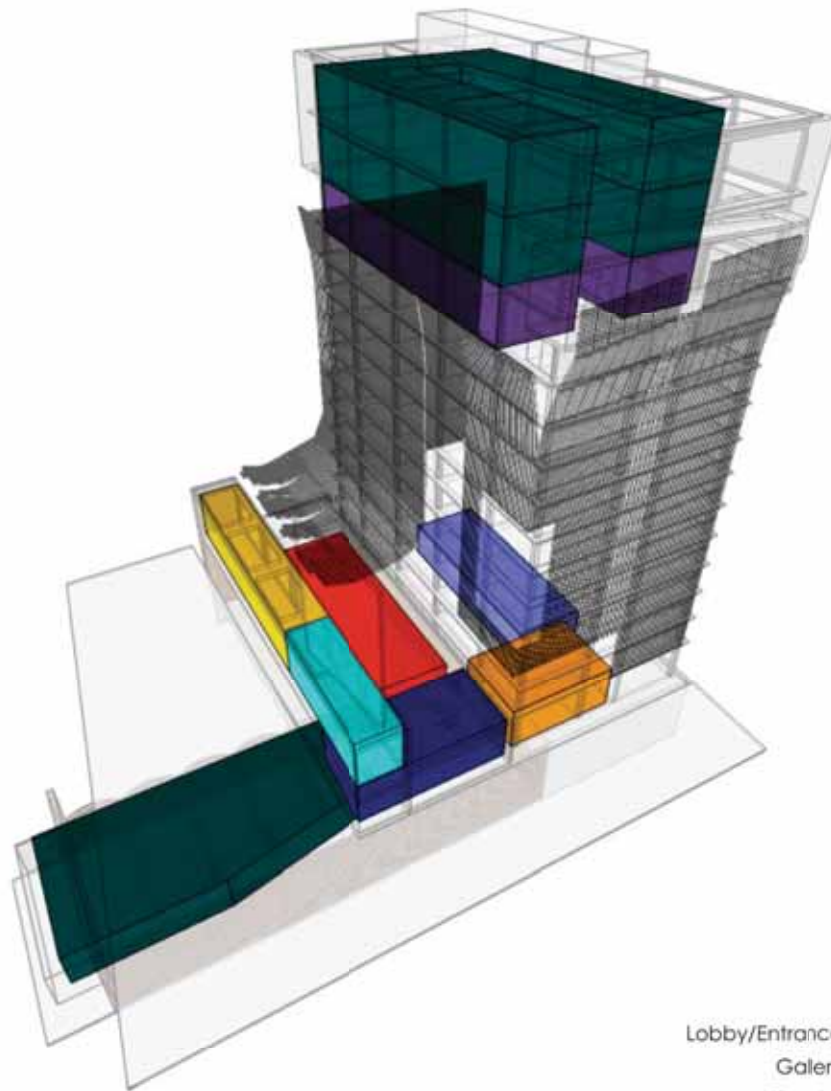
Program Diagram

Lobby/Entrance ●
Galery ●
Theater ●
Retail ●
Administration ●
Artists' Studio ●
Cafe ●
Support ●

Figure 77 - diagram of program within museum (by author)

Circulation Diagram

The museum circulation (figure 68) is intended to guide the visitors along a set path much like a comic book guides the reader in a linear narrative. The path represents the 'journey' that the visitors must embark on in order to transport them from the regular world and into a comic book world. People who choose to deviate from the set path will not embrace the full potential of the museum experience.
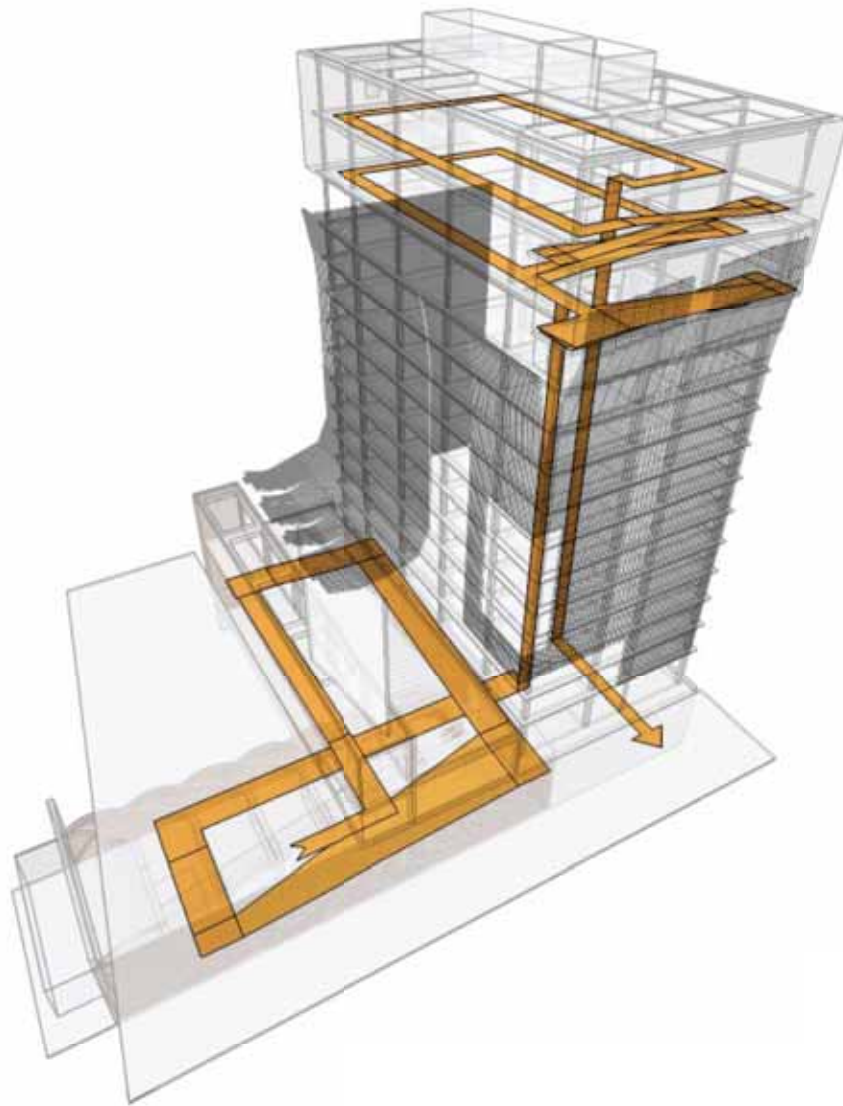
Circulation Diagram

Figure 78 - diagram of circulation within building (by author)

Final Drawings

Gallery Level scale: 1/16"=1'

Terrace Level scale: 1/16"=1'
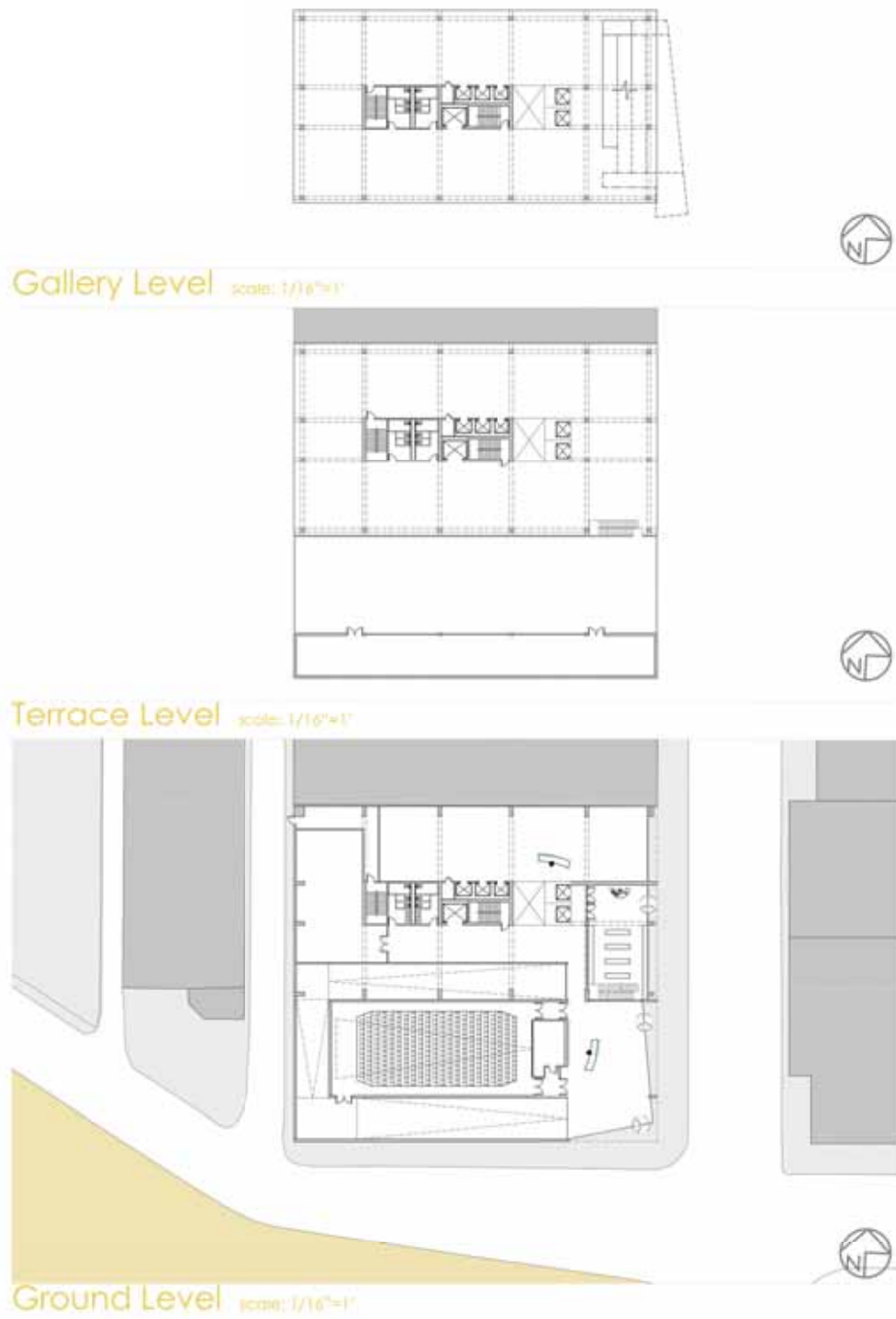
Ground Level scale: 1/16"=1'

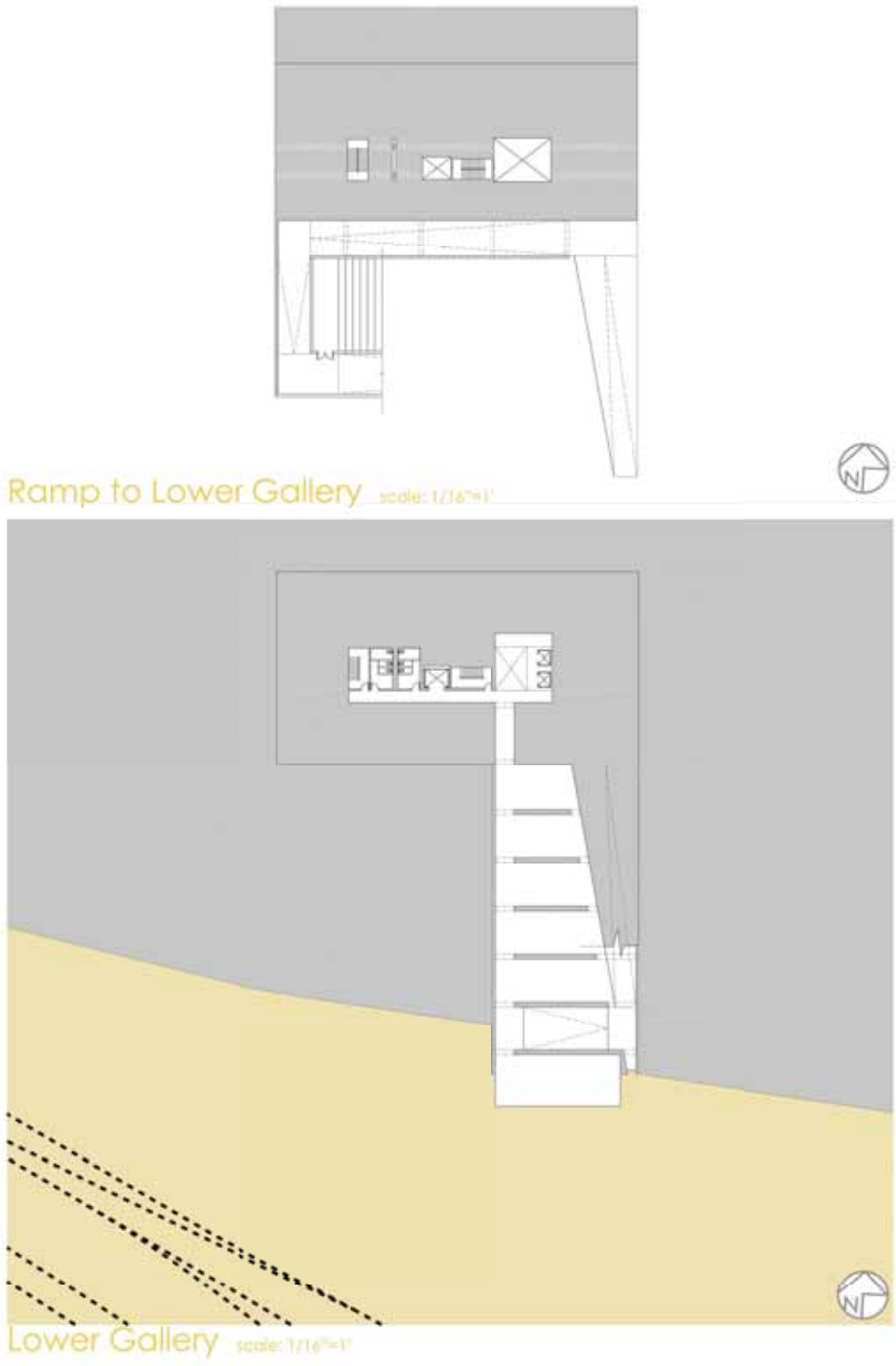**Figure 79 - plans of museum - top floors (by author)**

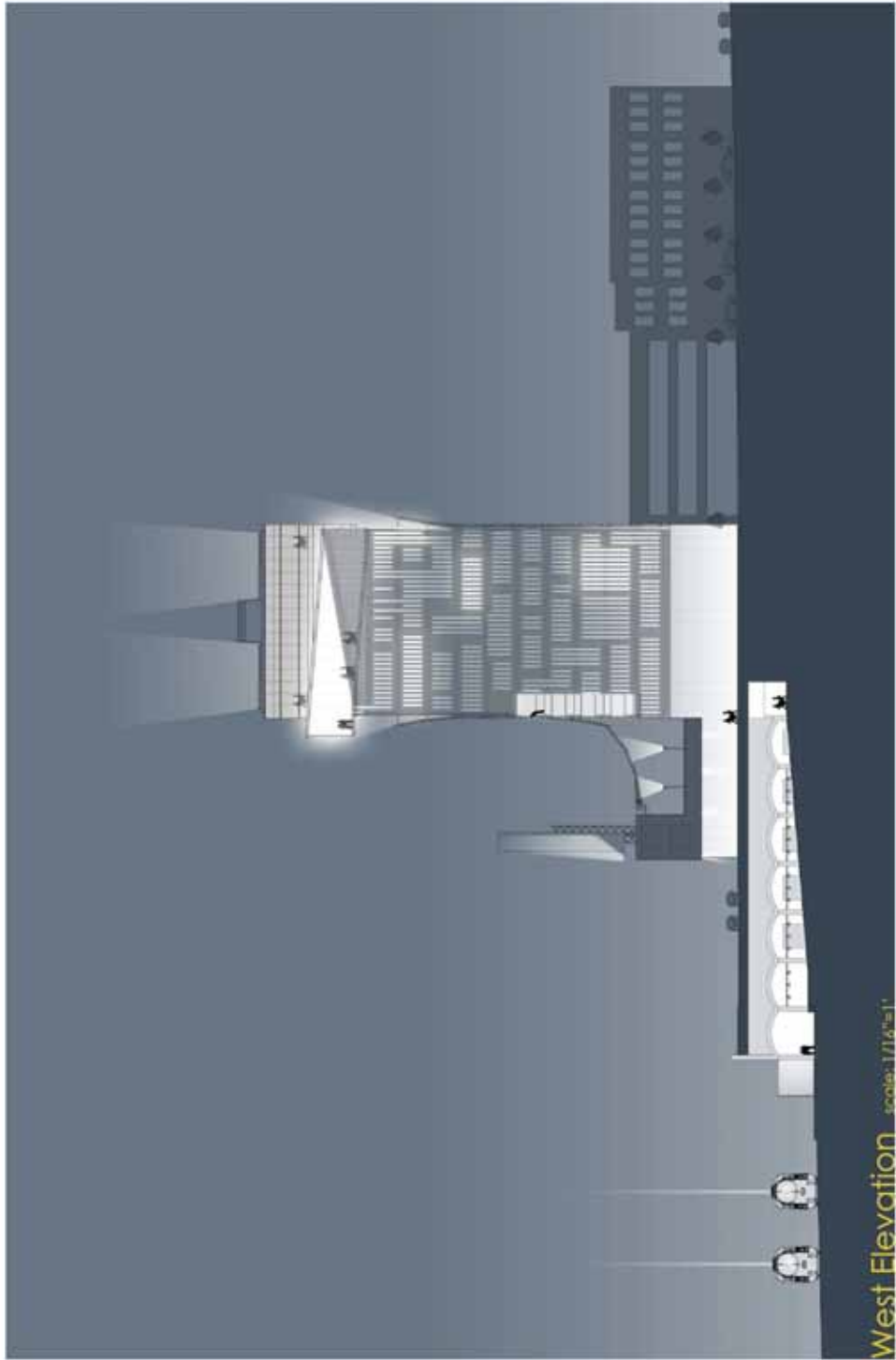**Figure 80 - plans of museum - bottom levels (by author)**
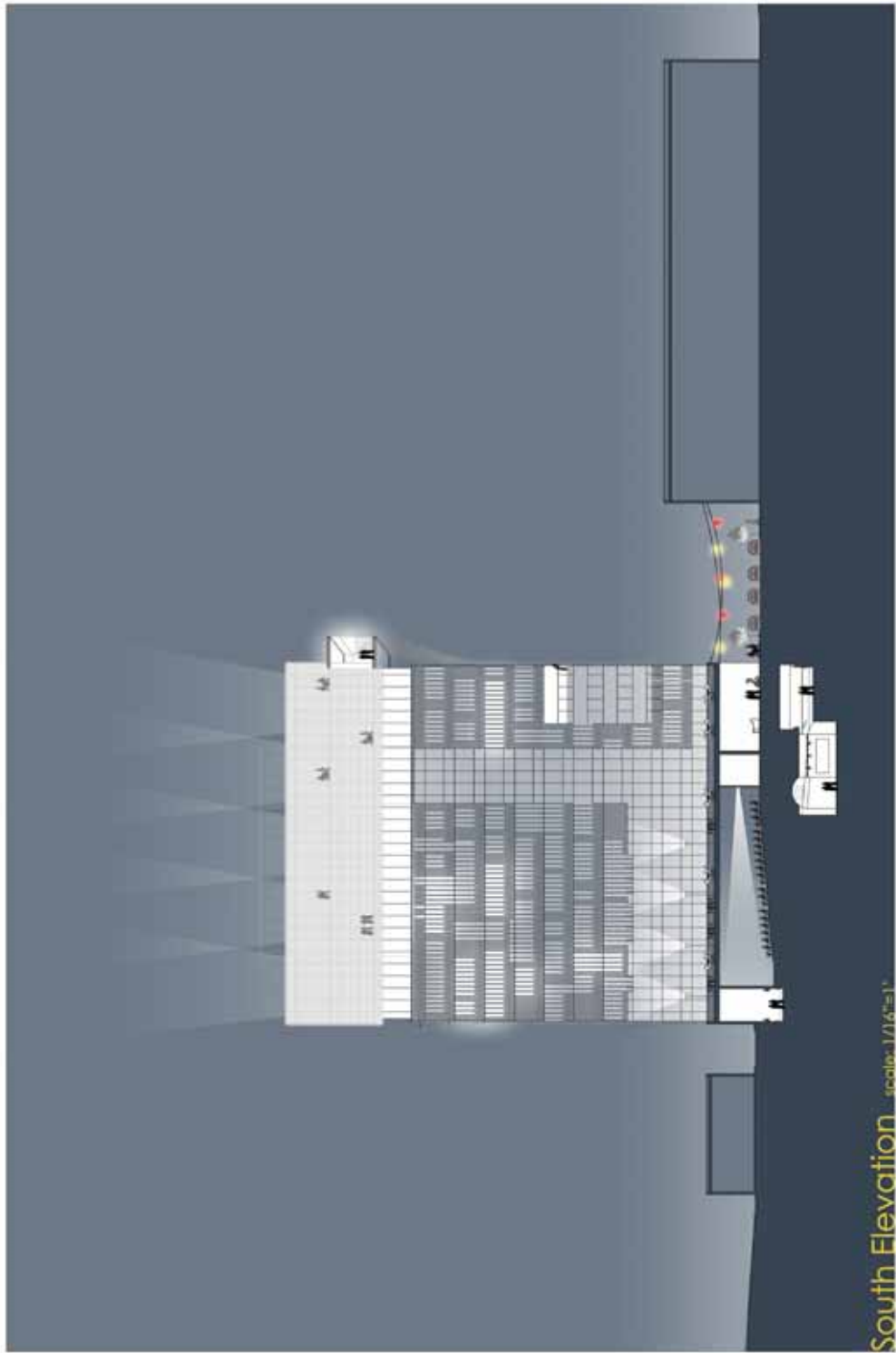
Figure 81 - West Elevation (by author)

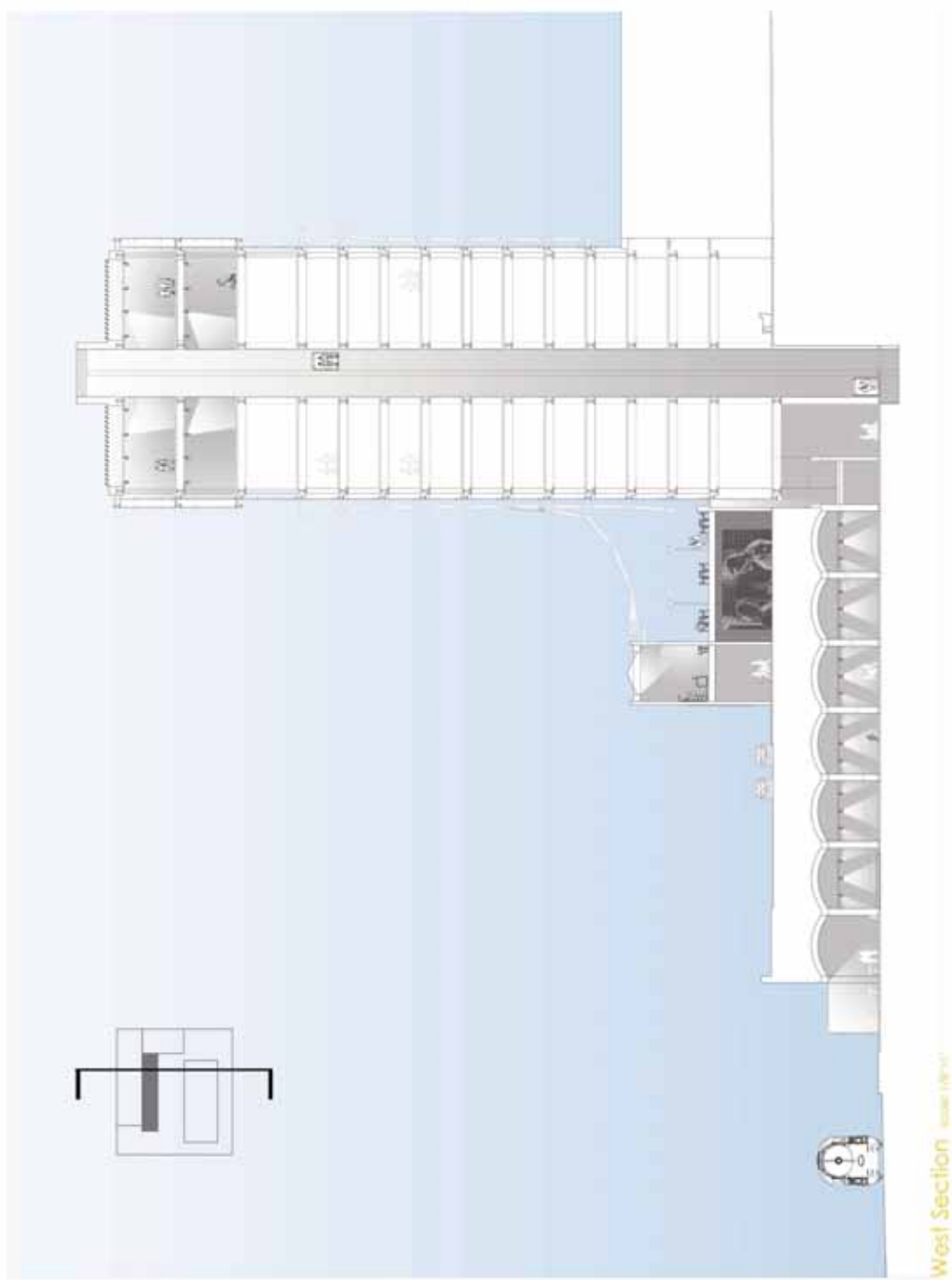**Figure 82 - South Elevation (by author)**

Figure 83 - West Section (by author)
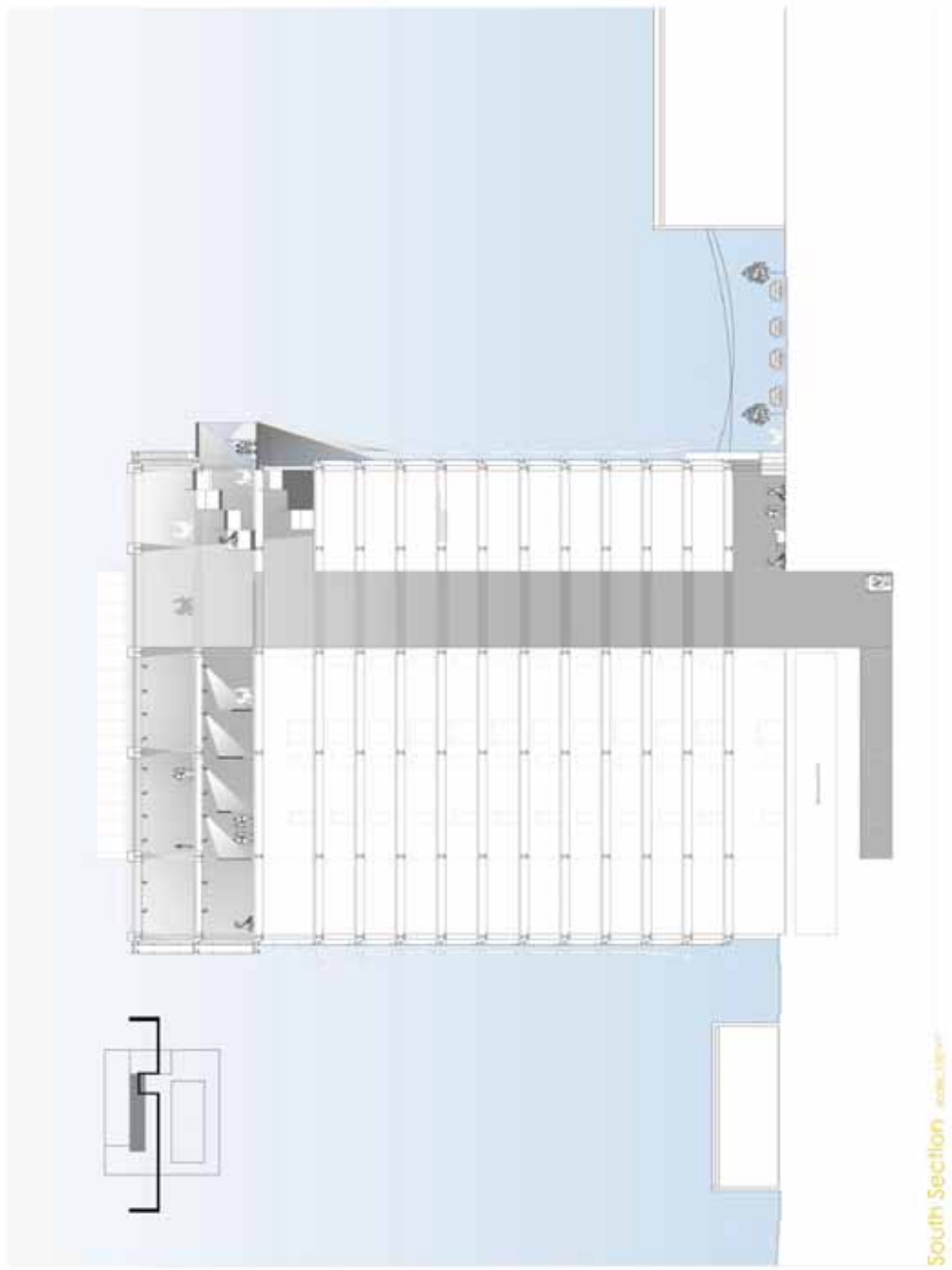
Figure 84 - South Section (by author)

Final Walkthrough Perspectives

Figure 85 - Walkthrough perspective - Approach to building (by author)

Visitors will approach the site form the South along North Charles Street.

They will be confronted with the once Metro Gallery building (figure 74) that has

been converted into the new museum entrance. The angled cut into the façade is an

expression of the descent into the underground gallery. The enormous billboard will

remain above the brick building to advertise the current month's comic artist.

Towering over the brick building is the new building structure with the skin that pulls

apart on the top levels of the gallery. Protruding out of the West elevation is the

ramp, which leads toward the "superman lookout" mentioned earlier. This is a

premonition of what awaits for anyone who decides to embark on the comic book

journey.

Figure 86 - Walkthrough perspective - descending ramp to underworld gallery (by author)

At this point of the museum, the visitor has moved past the theater and is continuing to descend down the museum and into the first gallery (figure 75). Light is an element used to guide the person's experience through the Infinite Canvas museum. The end of the ramp reveals a small opening into the train yard. In order to build a sense of mystery and surprise, a small amount of information is being revealed to the visitor. Comic book artists frequently use this technique in order to build excitement and anticipation for their readers.
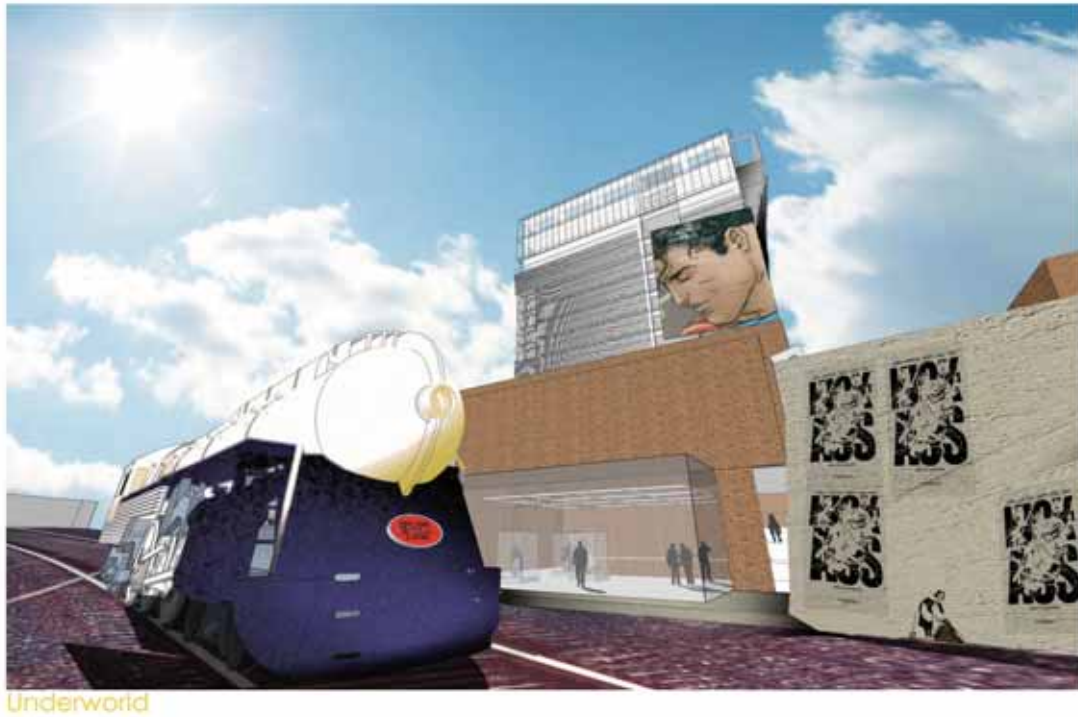
Figure 87 - Walkthrough perspective - Underworld gallery opens to train yard (by author)

The ramp leads the visitors to a glass room and the train yard becomes completely exposed. By extending the space (figure 76) into the train yard the visitors are becoming fully immersed in the city's dystopian underworld. The trains, the metal, the dirt, the congestion, all these elements are combined to make the person feel the under works of the city.

Figure 88 - Walkthrough perspective - Underworld galleries looking towards glass elevator shaft (by author)

The visitors will continue their journey through the underground exhibit (figure 77). The heavy brick vaulting is designed to express the underground nature of the place. The artworks being exhibited are influential artwork from artists such as Hugh Ferris, William Hogarth, and Roy Lichtenstein.

Light is again being used to guide the visitor through the museum. In this perspective the light is being emitted from the main buildings' glass elevator shaft. Before entering into the elevator core the visitor will pass under a small reveal of the ramp they had previously used to descend into the gallery. The small revel is connected to the frames used in comic books. The visitor is looking back at a comic book frame of other people descending down into the gallery.

Figure 89 - Walkthrough perspective - looking up through tenant and gallery floors (by author)

At this moment of the museum journey, the visitors should feel surprised to discover that they are no longer in the tiny structure where they first bought their admission tickets. The image above (figure 78) depicts the glass atrium that connects through the tenant floors and into the upper galleries of the new building structure. The visitors will enter into a glass elevator that will transport them to the interstitial floor between the tenant floors and the artist gallery. The visitor is being propelled away from the dystopian world and into the world of the ideal.

Figure 90 - Walkthrough perspective - "Superman lookout" - On ramp looking south toward the Baltimore city skyline (by author)

In this moment of the museum tour, the visitor has conquered the "leap of faith" challenge. Taking the ramp to get to the artist gallery requires the visitor to step outside the building 170 feet above street level. By doing so, the visitor is rewarded with a spectacular view towards Baltimore.

On this perch over the city (figure 79), the visitors become enveloped with light. The visitor is connected to the city. The utopian vision is realized at this momentous occasion. The visitor has become a superhero. Now, we are ready to enter into the artist's world.

Figure 91 - Walkthrough perspective - Artist gallery proceeding off the ramp (by author)

The artist gallery is the enveloped with natural light. The artist gallery is the exact opposite of the underworld gallery. The artwork is suspended in a dynamic fashion to help immerse the visitor into the experience. A double-glazing system filters the light through small circular reveals in the glass. The pixelization is an abstraction of the comic book artwork to make the visitors feel as if they have become part of that world. The visitor is also viewing the city through the same pixelized glazing. The journey is a truly surreal experience for the visitors.

After moving through two levels of artwork, the visitors will circulate back to the elevator shaft that will take them to ground level. The visitors will exit through the comic book store, an opportunity to buy a comic book and take a piece of the experience home.

Part 8: Conclusion

  The Infinite Canvas Museum manifested itself from a love and dedication to comic book art. The intention of this project was to create a unique museum experience that would immerse the visitors into the comic book world and allow them to become part of the stories exhibited through them. As a result, the museum takes the visitors on a journey that allows them to experience such artwork simultaneously with the city's comic inspired nature. Baltimore's dystopian underworld is portrayed through views of the train yards while the utopian qualities of the city are showcased through aerial views of the city skyline.

  The final design made full use of the allowable building height set forth by code regulations. Placing the galleries at the lowest and highest elevations of the site gave visitors the opportunity to engage the city like never before. The program of the museum allows for continued use of the building. By placing commercial functions on both the ground and terrace levels of the building, the program can continue to gain revenue even after "museum hours."

  The Station North District location makes the Infinite Canvas Museum an extremely accessible popular destination. Located at a high elevation, along one of the most historical streets in Baltimore, the Infinite Canvas will become another iconic landmark in the continuation of the city's rich and vibrant history.

  When designing the *Beyeler Foundation Museum* in Switzerland, Renzo Piano stated, "A museum must attempt to reflect the quality of the collection and define its

relationship with the outside world."[19] The Infinite Canvas Museum continually

connects the people to the city throughout their visit. Visitors experience the diverse

levels of the city of Baltimore as they descend into the "underworld," as well as

during their ascension to the "ideal world."

        What is the Infinite Canvas? The Infinite Canvas is the experience that takes

the visitors away from their mundane lives and into the exciting imaginary worlds of

today's most creative minds. The entire museum is part of an "infinite" composition

that begins and ends with us. Our full immersion signals the transformation of our

own self into something far greater, what we all ought and want to be: a super hero.

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[19] Rosenblatt, Arthur. *Building Type Basics for Museums*. Canada: John Wiley & Sons, 2001
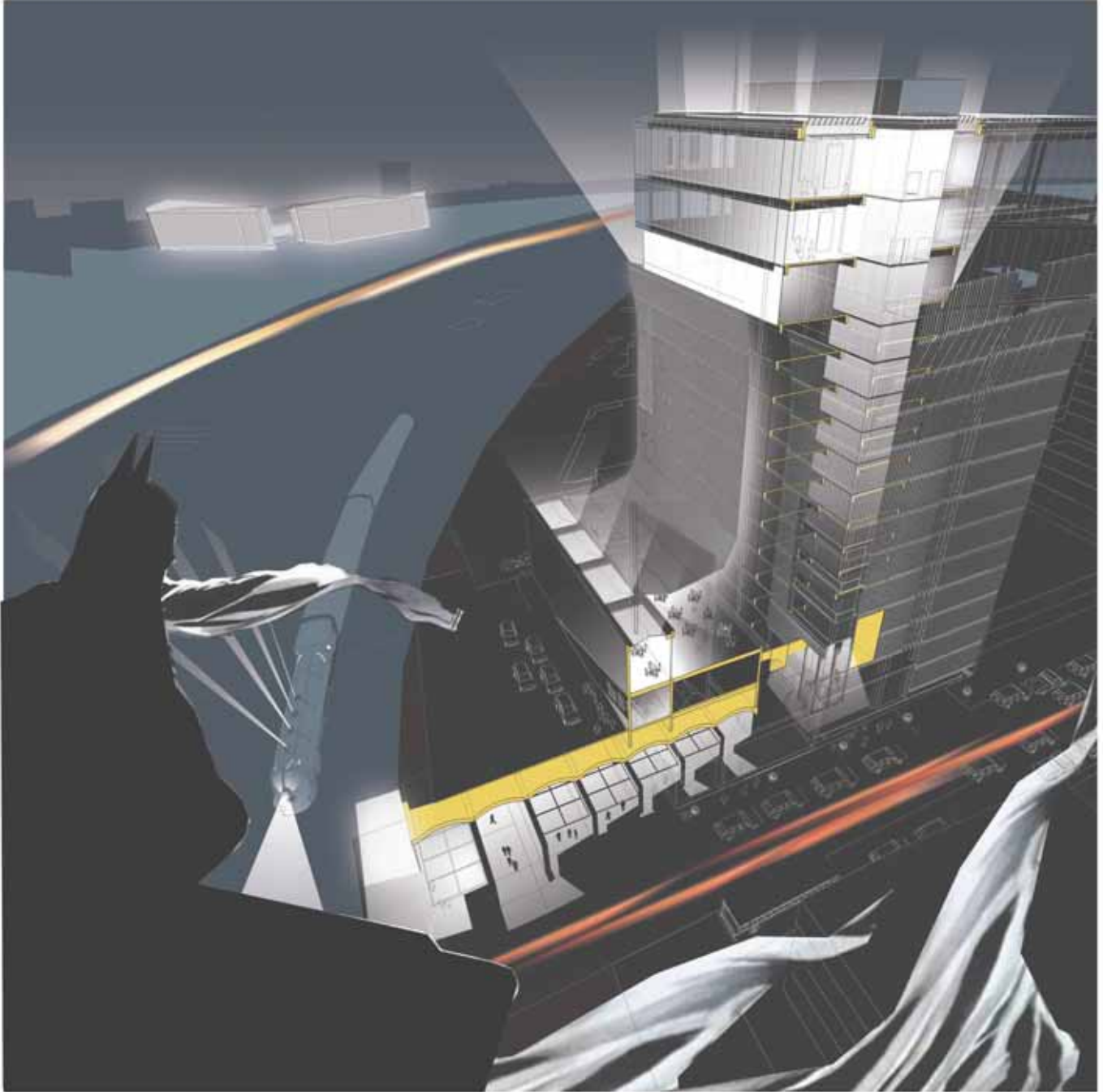
Final Section Perspective

Figure 92 - Section Perspective (by author)

Appendices

BALTIMORE CITY CODE

§ 6-108. Floor area ratio.

(a) *In general.*

Floor area ratio requirements, as set forth in this title for each subdistrict, determine the maximum floor area allowable, for both principal and accessory structures, in direct ratio to the gross area of the lot.

(b) *Open space reduction.*
If the front, side, or rear lot line of a lot adjoins or is directly across a street or alley from a permanent open space that is at least 1 acre and at least 200 feet deep perpendicular to the lot line, the floor area ratio may be increased by up to 15%.

§ 6-606. Permitted uses.
In a B-5 District, permitted uses are as follows:
(1) As in a B-3 or B-4 District.

(2) Amusement arcades — located at least 500 feet from the boundary line of a church or
school.

(3) Convention halls.

(4) Marine terminals: freight.

(5) Newspaper publishing establishments.

(6) Pool halls and billiard parlors.

(7) Railroad rights-of-way and passenger stations.

(8) Rescue missions.

(9) Science centers.

(10) Trade centers.

*(City Code, 1976/83, art. 30, §6.5-**1b.**) **(Ord. 99-547.)***

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