



2011 was vital year in the visual arts in Northeast Ohio

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By

Cleveland continued to show admirable vitality in all of the arts in 2011, and especially in art and architecture, despite its status as a perennially shrinking city.

The biggest gauge on the city's urban dashboard — its population level — continued a long downward trend as the U.S. Census Bureau reported in March the dispiriting news that the city dropped below 400,000 inhabitants for the first time in a century.

The slide might exert some serious negative pressure on the city's cultural health if it continues. But that hasn't happened yet.

Here's a quick look at outstanding developments in art and architecture in Cleveland and in Northeast Ohio in 2011.

Reviving midcentury modern: Developer and entrepreneur Michael Chesler and Dimit Architects of Lakewood completed a \$7 million renovation of the ASM International headquarters in Russell Township. In July, ASM, a global clearinghouse for research on advanced materials, reoccupied a curving, 50,000-square-foot office pavilion designed in the late 1950s by Cleveland architect John Terence Kelly and surmounted by a vast geodesic dome designed by Buckminster Fuller.

The project, aided by \$2.5 million in federal and state historic-preservation tax credits, was a model for the revival of midcentury modern buildings around the country.



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The restored ASM International complex in Russell Township served in 2011 as a national example of the rising interest in preserving outstanding mid-century modern architecture.

Hospitals expanding: 2011 saw the completion of a bumper crop of new and renovated hospital buildings around the region, including the expanded and renovated Cleveland Clinic Hillcrest Hospital in Mayfield, a new Clinic hospital in Twinsburg, the University Hospitals Monte Ahuja Medical Center at Chagrin Highlands in Beachwood, the UH Seidman Cancer Center in University Circle and the new CARES Tower at the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center, also in University Circle.

As presences on the urban and suburban skylines, the hospitals varied in the quality and impact of their designs. But they all shared a similar attitude toward interiors, with lobbies, patient rooms and public amenities that emphasized light, views and, in many cases, lots of art.

The latest crop of buildings shows that hospital administrators now understand that the physical environment in which patients are treated can have an impact on how well they respond.

MOCA rising: The Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland broke ground in February for its \$26.7 million building in the University Circle Uptown development, designed by Farshid Moussavi of London.

By year's end, construction was well under way. Scheduled to open late this year, the building marks a new era for the city's leading institution devoted to contemporary art, and perhaps for the city's cultural climate overall.

The project is also a triumph for museum director Jill Snyder, who has devoted 15 years of her career to MOCA, and to Cleveland.



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Gus Chan

MOCA Cleveland Director Jill Snyder is framed by the structure of the new MOCA museum director in November.

Busta breaks loose: Speaking of contemporary art, dealer William Busta firmly established his expanded gallery at 2731 Prospect Ave. as perhaps the city's leading commercial gallery devoted to contemporary art by holding a string of strong, overlapping exhibitions.

Important regional artists who showed work at the gallery in 2011 included Mark Howard, Brinsley Tyrrell, Andrea Joki, Derek Hess, Kate Budd, Lorri Ott, Darice Polo and Dexter Davis. The level of work at Busta was often museum-quality.

Waterfronts: By the end of 2011, the downtown Cleveland waterfronts had become the focus of not one or two but three new plans aimed at pumping life into one of the city's greatest and most underperforming assets: its frontage along Lake Erie and the Cuyahoga River.

In May, the Cleveland Browns proposed a redevelopment of acreage directly north of Cleveland Browns Stadium with 600,000 square feet of office space, a Cleveland Clinic wellness center, an athletic field and new parking.

Will Friedman, the Port of Cleveland's new director, followed in July with an outstanding plan for waterfront redevelopment that included the proposal that the port spearhead efforts to stabilize the collapsing hillside at Irishtown Bend on the river. Fixing the 25-acre slope could unleash a wave of new development in the Flats.

And in November, Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson put forward a new plan showing how dozens of acres around North Coast Harbor, including the area targeted previously by the Browns, could be redeveloped. If only a small portion of these plans is realized — especially the port's vision for Irishtown Bend — the city would be vastly better off.



Green building: Cleveland attracted attention with two significant eco-friendly projects in 2011.

The Cleveland Museum of Natural History constructed a model passive house designed by Doty & Miller Architects of Bedford with consultant Mark Hoberecht of the NASA Glenn Research Center. The house, designed to stay warm in a Cleveland winter without a furnace, was part of an exhibit on climate change. In October, the museum moved the house to a permanent site in the Wade Park neighborhood nearby, where it is being offered for sale.

The U.S. General Services Administration, meanwhile, announced plans in January 2011 for a \$121 million project to enclose the existing glass-and-metal facade of Cleveland's vintage 1967 Anthony J. Celebrezze Federal Building in a new glass skin designed to improve energy performance and safety. The designers, from Interactive Design Eight Architects of Chicago, believe it's the first major project of its kind in the

United States and a harbinger of what may happen to midcentury modern towers on skylines across the country in coming years.

Public space: As developers moved ahead with construction of the city's \$465 million medical mart and convention center and renovated the Higbee Building to house a new \$400 million Horseshoe Casino, civic, business and political leaders collectively showed more interest in improving public spaces downtown than they have in years.

Mayor Jackson's Group Plan Commission proposed \$90 million worth of enhancements to the plan for the downtown Mall, which will serve as the green roof of the new convention center, and the mayor also proposed closing the cross streets in Public Square to create a new central park for the city.

These ideas have yet to bear fruit in terms of concrete and detailed designs, but the mayor's stated goal of making downtown greener, more attractive and more pedestrian-friendly is downright exciting.

A bridge too far: Rock Gaming LLC, the developer of the Horseshoe Casino, pulled a switcheroo on the city by announcing in May that it intended to attach an overhead walkway to the landmark Higbee Building's southeast corner to connect it to a garage and valet parking complex diagonally across the intersection of Ontario Street and Prospect Avenue.

In August, the National Park Service ruled that the walkway would compromise the building's listing on the National Register of Historic Places and thus require the "recapture" of millions of dollars of preservation tax credits granted to the building. Rock Gaming now says it will wait at least several years before considering the walkway.

CMA wakes, slowly: Director David Franklin completed his first full year at the helm of the Cleveland Museum of Art after moving to Cleveland from the No. 2 position at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. Franklin vowed to wake the Cleveland museum from the relative slumber imposed by a nine-year, \$350 million expansion and renovation.

The museum mounted a series of enjoyable exhibitions on Asian art, including an eye-opening retrospective on the communist-era Chinese painter Fu Baoshi. It also announced plans to



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Nanjing Museum

establish a permanent satellite in Ohio City on Cleveland's West Side in a former transit transformer station in collaboration

with Akron collectors Laura and Fred Bidwell, the latter of whom also serves as a Cleveland museum trustee.

Fu Baoshi paintings such as "Gottwaldov," painted by the artist during a trip through communist Eastern Europe in the 1950s, cast a fresh light on artistic conditions under the regime of Mao Zedong in China.

At year's end, the museum was looking forward to the opening of a major Rembrandt exhibition in February, but it also ended December on a strange and sour note caused by the retirement of Michael Horvitz, a longtime trustee, donor and former board president, chairman and co-chairman.

Horvitz said he had hoped to remain in a leadership position but was leaving when it became clear that was no longer possible. He also said he had no plans to involve himself in museum affairs in the future.

Recognition: Cleveland received a hefty salute in September from Rocco Landesman, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, who said during a tour of the city's rising cultural districts that he viewed the Forest City as a national example of how to blend historic preservation, community and economic development, and the arts.

He called areas such as Collinwood, University Circle, Detroit-Shoreway and PlayhouseSquare examples of the kind of projects he hoped to launch with a new neighborhood-development program called ArtPlace. "What we've been talking about since my first day on the job two years ago is how artists can change places," Landesman said during his tour. "We're talking about it; you're doing it."



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Rocco Landesman, right, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, raved about his visit to Cleveland in September, during which he chatted with local officials such as Art Falco, left, president and CEO of PlayhouseSquare.

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