

Tate modern essay sample



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As one of the most celebrated architectural buildings in UK, Tate Modern is the finest example of adaptive reuse. Conceived by Pritzker Prize winners Laureates Herzog & de Meuron, Tate Modern, the truly grand art gallery in London was fashioned from the old building of an unattractive Bankside Power Station situated on the Thames River.

Nearly a decade ago, the present site of one of the most contemporary art galleries in the world was an abandoned huge power plant that presented a now unimaginable scene of ugly bricks along London's South Bank. The plant designed in 1947 was shut down thirty-four years later. The transformation took place when Herzog and de Meuron were selected for their concept of reusing a major portion of the old building to build the new museum.

Putting the concept into reality resulted in the 500-foot turbine hall becoming a spectacular entry for the museum. The industrial taste of the building is replicated in the light brown walls and black iron girders. The new ceiling of the building, made of glass, provides enough of natural light and creates perfect surroundings for appreciating the art. The complete job of restoration required an additional three thousand seven hundred fifty tons of new steel. Five hundred and twenty four glass panes illuminate a hundred and fifteen foot high ceiling of the Turbine Hall that runs almost the full extent of the structure.

The liveliness of the Tate Modern over powers the senses of the visitors the minute they stride down the slope cross the intensely lit bookshop and over the escalators go past semi-transparent green glass sections. Every half-floor has around sixteen galleries with absolutely white walls and concrete or

fragmentary wood floors. The fifth floor raises two stories to a cafe shop and auditorium. A lightweight incandescent roof, made up of translucent panels, fills the galleries with enough light and provides spectacular sight of London.

In the words of an architecture critic

“ It’s a space you never could ever have achieved with a new building...For one thing they’d never get the money for it, but even if they did it would seem like a bombastic gesture because there’s all this empty space here.”

Moore (2000)

Revealing their strategy, Herzog & Meuron stated,

“ Our strategy was to accept the physical power of Bankside’s massive mountain-like brick building and to even enhance it rather than breaking it or trying to diminish it...This is a kind of Aikido strategy where you use your enemy’s energy for your own purposes. Instead of fighting it, you take all the energy and shape it in unexpected and new ways.”

The Tate Modern is possibly one of the world’s most renowned illustrations of adaptive reuse. Adaptive reuse is based on the principles of “ historic preservation, urban renewal and sustainable development”. It is a process of giving a new lease of life to old structures. Undoubtedly, rebuilding makes a better sense instead of demolishing however, preserving old structure is never an easy job and putting them into reuse is equally difficult.

There is every possibility that the rebuilding and putting an old structure to reuse is more expensive exercise than demolishing it and then building a new structure. Considering the usage of old building and the usage after

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restructuring it, there may be requirement for certain structural changes. It's not possible to move many of the walls or pillars in the middle because they provide the essential support at crucial points. In addition to that, the new structure must meet the most recent fire and safety regulations. Easy access needs to be provided to the physically handicapped persons. An enormous twenty percent of the total building budget may be used up by the expenditure towards removal of deadly materials for example asbestos and lead-based paint. To add to the woes, an old industrial building might not be suitable for initiating non-industrial activities such as museums, multiplexes, shopping malls or schools.

Many of the critics of the Tate Modern complain that the new design of the building completely overshadows the works of arts that it contains. People who visit the museum are awestruck by the structure of the building and art collects become secondary for them. Nevertheless, the artists who have put on display their art at Tate Modern have actually liked being there. According to artist Cornealia Baker,

“ You get all the spectacle of perhaps this amazing cathedral-like space and then you go into these more intimate galleries, so you get the best of both worlds.”

Herzog and de Meuron, while talking about their concept said,

“ You cannot always start from scratch...we think this is the challenge of the Tate Modern as a hybrid of tradition, Art Deco and super modernism: it is a contemporary building, a building for everybody, a building of the 21st century.”

In a short period of eight years, Tate Modern has altered London and rejuvenated the South Bank of the Thames. Tate Modern has changed the landscape of an area that was earlier poorly developed and has helped in giving London a new status as a foremost center of modern culture. Tate Modern has become an important attraction in London, while its programs and structural designs have won worldwide compliments.

Tate Modern has contributed towards development of London in more than one way:

- Rejuvenated Tate Modern has become one of the Britain's top tourist places
- Over Two million people have participated in its education programs
- An economic contribution of £100m per annum
- Four Thousand new jobs mostly around the newly developed area
- Nominated as favorite London building by *Time Out* readers

During the last eight years, more than thirty million people have visited the museum. Initially, it was estimated that 1.8 million visitors would be coming to the museum annually, but since last two years there have been more than five million visitors. Needless to mention that such a large in flow of the tourists has put additional strain on the public utilities and resources.

Further keeping in view the next Olympics, there is further need to initiate a development program.

Accordingly, the plans are underway to initiate the second phase of the Tate Modern. Over the past two years the creators of Tate Modern Herzog & de Meuron have put their heads down and have developed the project aimed at

Transforming Tate Modern and realizing the full potential of the entire site along with its surrounding areas. It is expected that the work will start by mid 2009 and as per plan the new building will be completed well in time for the London Olympics in 2012.

References

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