

Entering the 115-foot-high and 500-foot-long turbine hall from the 75-foot-wide west entrance ramp, visitors catch glimpses of Louise Bourgeois' sculptures.



Galleries



Tate Modern: Collection 2000
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The Unilever Series: Louise Bourgeois
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Herzog & de Meuron's architecture of luminosity and transparency transforms an old power station on the Thames into the new **TATE GALLERY OF MODERN ART**

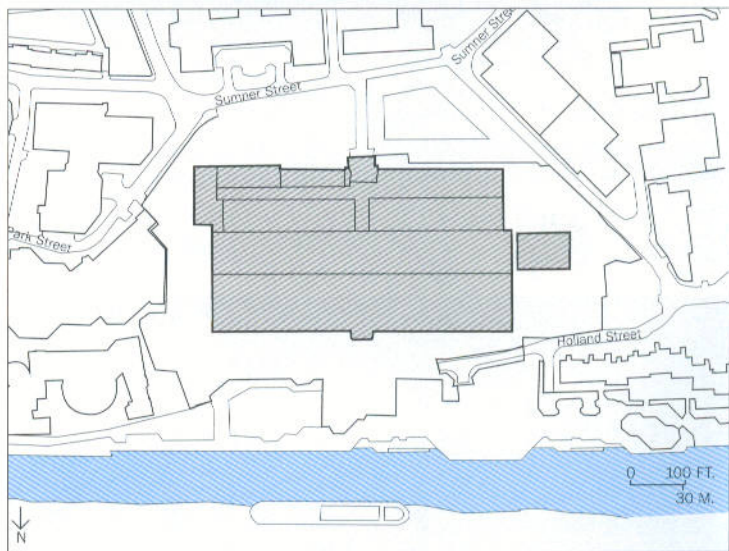
By William J.R. Curtis

For anyone who has known London over the past three or four decades, it is impossible to separate the new Tate Gallery of Modern Art from the long-standing ambition of making the South Bank of the Thames accessible to the general public. Skillfully inserted into the body of the Bankside Power Station (designed by Giles Gilbert Scott in 1947), the new institution faces St. Paul's Cathedral, to which it will soon be linked via the Millennium Footbridge by Norman Foster in collaboration with Anthony Caro, and Ove Arup + Partners. With its vast interior turbine hall now a stripped-down public space and its top rising to a new oblong glass volume that glows at night, the Tate Modern addresses the life of the river and entices the passerby. It represents one of the few real attempts since the completion of Denys Lasdun's National Theatre, nearly a quarter century ago, to provide London's South Bank with a gathering place.

The new Tate concentrates on international modern art and supplements the original Tate Gallery at Millbank, which will now focus on British art from 1500 to the present. (The museum also has satellite facilities in Liverpool and at St. Ives in Cornwall.) The Tate Modern, based on Herzog & de Meuron's 1995 winning competition scheme, is a remodel of a 370,000-square-foot industrial structure. Part of the solution's ingenuity lies in the way the four Herzog & de Meuron partners—Jacques Herzog, Pierre de Meuron, Harry Guggler, and Christine Binswanger—have preserved the feel of the old fabric while linking it to its surroundings through such transitional areas as a lower-level cafe and shop.

Penetrated at several places, the building's lower floors open up transparent zones that connect visually with a newly created riverside walk. The cafe and a shop are contained here, but there are also places where people can simply enjoy seeing and being seen. In effect, Herzog & de Meuron's intervention creates a framing device that intensifies the social theater of day-to-day life in a major metropolis. Truly a public institution, the Tate Modern will open most of its galleries to visitors free of charge. The institution and the museum imply through architecture and free offerings that art should be integral to people's existence, whatever their background or income.

William J.R. Curtis is a historian and the author of Modern Architecture since 1900 (Phaidon Press, 3rd ed., 1996). He is currently preparing an exhibition of his own drawings for the Museum of Finnish Architecture in Helsinki.



Project: Tate Modern, Bankside, London

Architect: Herzog & de Meuron—Jacques Herzog, Harry Guggler, partners in charge; Pierre de Meuron, Christine Binswanger, design team; Michael Casey, project architect

Associate architects: Sheppard Robson + Partners

Interior designers: Herzog & de Meuron with Office for Design;

Lumsden Design Partnership (retail)

Engineers: Ove Arup + Partners—John Hirst, Tony Marriott

Consultants: Kienast Vogt + Partner (landscape)

Construction manager: Schal International Management Ltd.



Herzog & de Meuron inserted an architecture of abstraction into the old power station's existing fabric (left). The main entrance is from the west ramp (below). A new pedestrian bridge by Norman Foster and others will connect the museum to the north bank of the Thames (bottom).



The old Bankside Power Station functioned as a three-part operation with a centrally located turbine hall sandwiched between a boiler house on the north (or river) side and a switch house to the south. Herzog & de Meuron kept this organization, turning the turbine hall into an eight-story atrium, converting the boiler house into galleries, and leaving the electrical switch station for future expansion. Visitors can enter the Tate through central doorways on the second level of the north (Thames) side, or take a broad ramp at the west end down to the first level, where a museum shop and educational area are located.

Exploiting the preexisting structure's capacity for wide spans, the architects supplied a range of exhibition and circulation spaces, contrasting in kind and size. In some cases, light enters from the sides and in others, from above. Herzog & de Meuron liberated the entire volume of the old turbine hall and turned it into a species of covered public street, which may function at one end for the display of giant sculpture. The architects even retained an original gantry crane, which can move the length of the hall to install large-scale artwork.

The building's first two floors accommodate a shop, cafe, auditorium, and educational spaces. Level 3 contains a suite of galleries for exhibiting works from the Tate collection. The next level offers a break in the sequence, an area that converts into flexible loft space for temporary exhibitions. Benefitting from generous access to daylight, Levels 5 and 6 provide a rich mix of rooms of varying dimensions—the most impressive being double-height spaces with clerestory windows. Finally, at Level 7, a long, glass box contains a restaurant and meeting rooms.

The "factory of culture," is a recurrent 20th-century theme that has relied on populist rhetoric and high-tech architectural exaggerations

THE MUSEUM'S CONNECTION TO THE CITY IS CONTINUALLY REINFORCED BY FRAMED VIEWS AND HORIZONTAL OPENINGS.

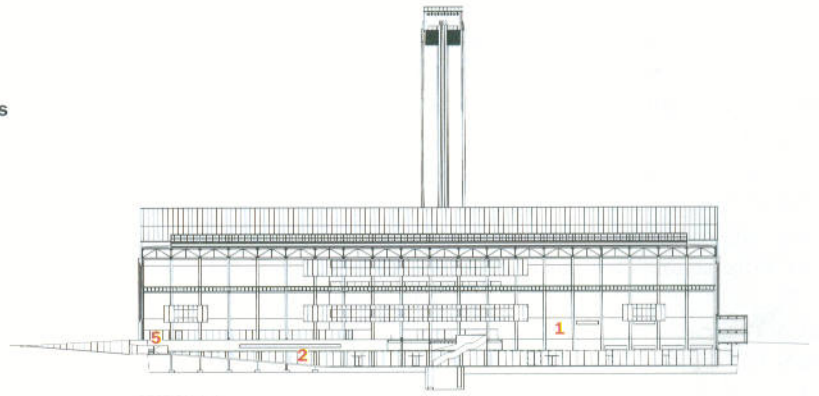
(often with splayed structures or ventilating tubes in the manner of Paris' Pompidou Center) to convey its cultural message. Such buildings sometimes require a secondary (interior) architecture to function properly for exhibitions. Beginning with a truly industrial building, Herzog & de Meuron honored the power station's original character by preserving and leaving naked the existing fabric and inserting into it a new framed structure that modulates different qualities of illumination from both daylight and fixtures. As in several of their earlier buildings (such as the Goetz Gallery in Munich), the architects reduced gallery-lighting contraptions to a minimum, preferring to rely on the translucence of sandblasted glass or the subtle, restrained effects of gauzes and screens, combined with visually weightless white walls, ceilings, and partitions. This architecture heightens perception without impeding the experience of looking at the art.

The Tate is one of the rare Herzog & de Meuron projects to develop an interior promenade, in this case using perspectival vistas to link foreground and background. Occasionally, the visitor may step out of the gallery sequence to discover glazed walkways projecting over the great turbine hall or above the city itself. The museum's connection to London is continually reinforced by framed views of St. Paul's Cathedral through horizontal openings on the north facade. These broad vistas (contrasting with views through the original vertical strip windows, retained elsewhere in the building) prepare the visitor for the stunning all-around views from the restaurant and public areas in the crowning glass box. Here, the theme of social transparency achieves full expression.

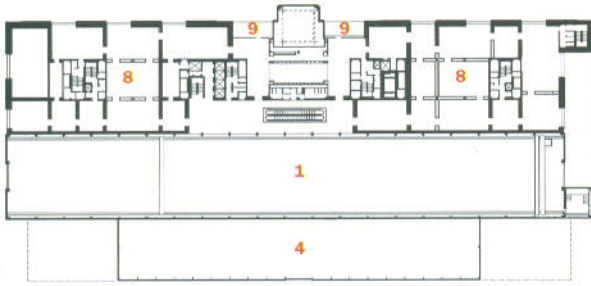
The Tate Modern is organized to avoid the usual narrative routes that run chronologically from one period to the next. Instead, the

1. Turbine Hall
2. Shop
3. Education
4. Switch House
5. Cafe
6. Auditorium
7. Seminar
8. Gallery
9. Terrace
10. Restaurant

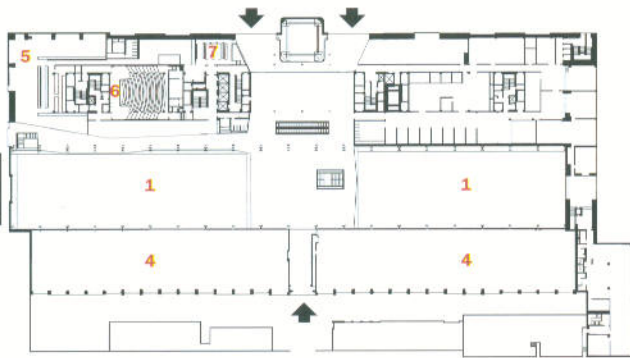
The architects worked within the power station's tripartite organization, turning its turbine hall into an atrium and converting the boiler room into modern gallery space. The old switch house remains for future expansion.



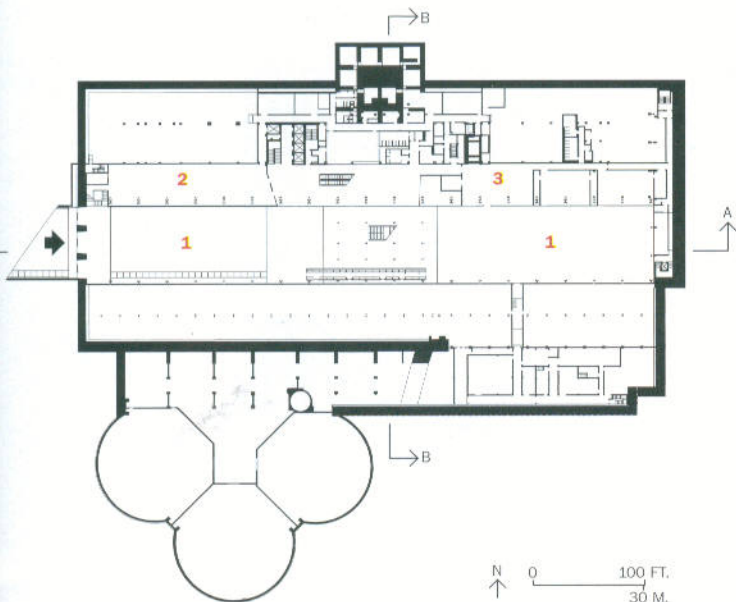
SECTION A-A



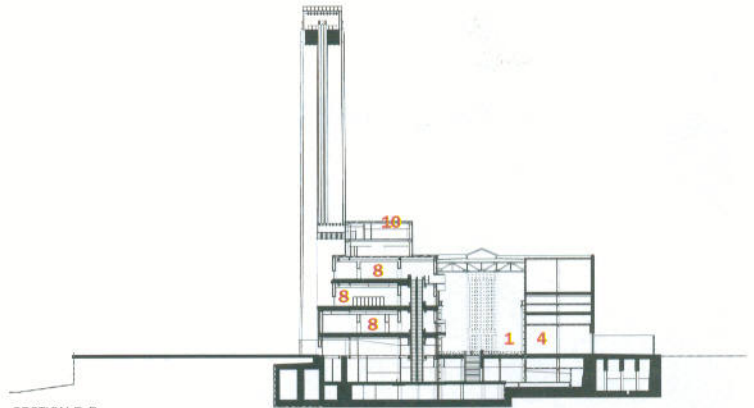
LEVEL 4



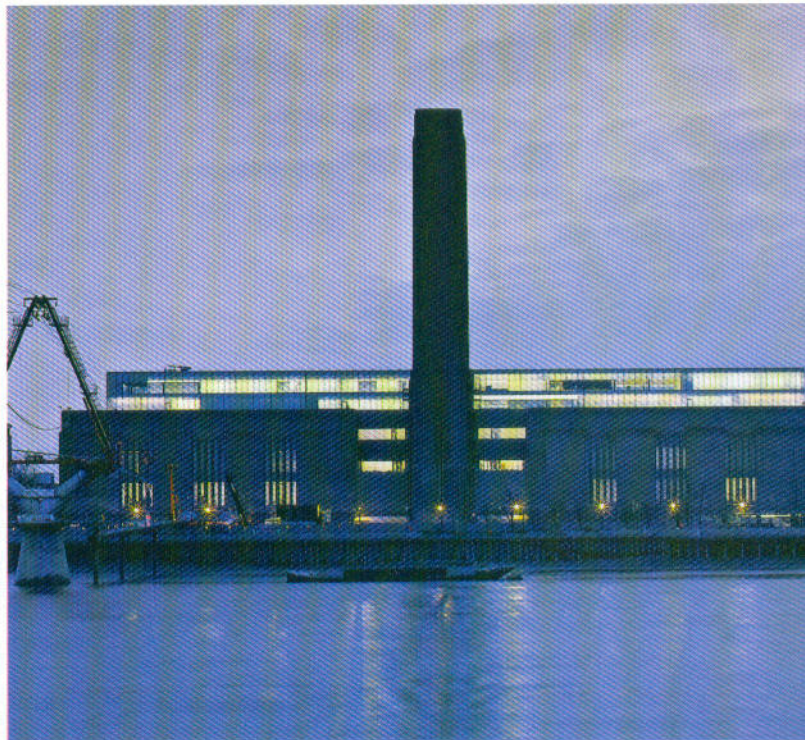
LEVEL 2



LEVEL 1

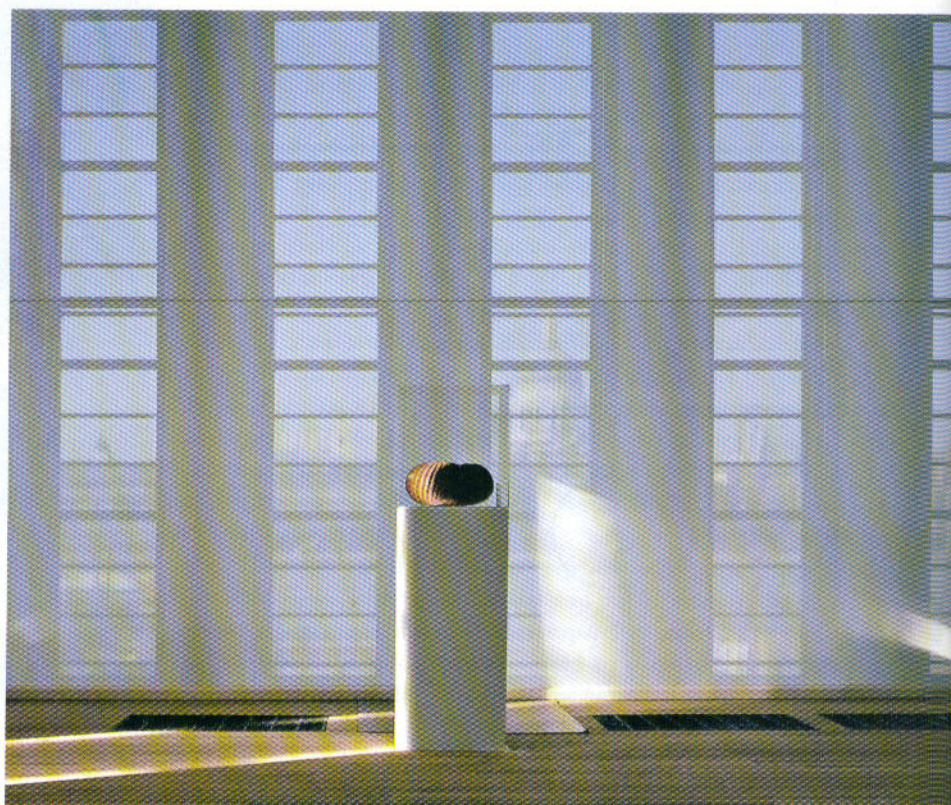


SECTION B-B





The \$214 million project includes a new glass addition on the seventh floor for a restaurant and meeting rooms (top). Escalators (above) lead to the galleries in the former boiler house (right). The sculpture is by Barbara Hepworth.



groupings correspond loosely to such genres as the human figure, still life, and landscape. Comparison and analogy are central to this method, and the rooms are well placed and proportioned to admit lateral visual links and interesting juxtapositions. The walls have no moldings, and interior skylight surfaces are set flush with the ceilings. Planarity is a constant characteristic, which paradoxically becomes almost too insistent, despite the intended restraint. Among the works now on the walls, large paintings, drawings, and hangings seem to gain most from this treatment, while smaller ones risk being swallowed up by the vast areas of white above them.

Until now, London has been without public exhibition galleries truly suited to the display of large 20th- and 21st-century works of art. The intention at the Tate Modern has been to create viewing conditions ideal for several scales of art, while also supplying many more neutral places for performance art and other avant-garde installations. The aesthetic of Herzog & de Meuron's architecture resists an atmosphere of "official" art and cuts art-museum rhetoric to a minimum (even the entrances are so downplayed as to be almost invisible), but, in some strange way, the building still ends up evoking standard conventions for the display of recent art. The cool, white surfaces of the walls, the deliberately unfinished and scuffed oak plank floors, and the glimpses of bare girders above the old turbine hall suggest a middle ground between the sanctioned world of artists' lofts (often occupying old industrial structures) and the up-to-the-minute marketing spaces of minimalist commercial galleries. In spite of the puritanical stance, the atmosphere still suggests that the consumption of art is an obligatory feature of modern mass society.

Luminosity, transparency, and materiality are the guiding concepts of Herzog & de Meuron's design, but these qualities are fused by means of a pervasive abstraction. The Tate Modern makes much of contrasting effects of glass. In this building, glass is usually detailed to read as uninterrupted plane. In places, it is sandblasted to take on a glowing translucence.

Elsewhere, it appears transparent, dissolving barriers between spaces. In others locations, the glass becomes a semireflective surface: a substance that is both there and not there. As the eye moves around the interiors, it grows used to seeing other parts of the building through actual or implied layers. At times, these layers and lenses heighten the sense of things, as when one glimpses people moving up the main escalators through a surface that also reflects oneself. Inevitably, the varying degrees of luminosity affect the sense of visual weight. Carefully adjusted details give the impression that the new structure is hovering and illuminated: an ensemble of suspended volumes of light.

Herzog & de Meuron does not articulate materials for purely visual effect but rather to reveal something of their mystery and ambiguity. While optical and tactile qualities, fused with geometry, often enhance the presence of their surfaces, these qualities can also invoke the imma-

SMALLER WORKS OF ART RISK BEING SWALLOWED BY THE GREAT EXPANSES OF WHITE ABOVE THEM.

rial. "Almost nothing" was Mies van der Rohe's phrase, and Herzog and de Meuron, too, seems drawn to an aesthetic of extreme reductivism. But theirs is a simplicity that relies on distillation. Clearly their architecture has been nourished by a range of influences from late-20th-century visual culture, including conceptual and minimalist art. This makes them particularly well suited to providing a framework for recent artistic production. Nonetheless, they have taken some pragmatic risks in the material translation of their ideas. The intentionally unfinished, rough oak floors will take on every splash and stain and, over time, may wear unevenly, in a distracting way revealing the paths traced by the majority of people as they wander from gallery to gallery. For the moment, the plain

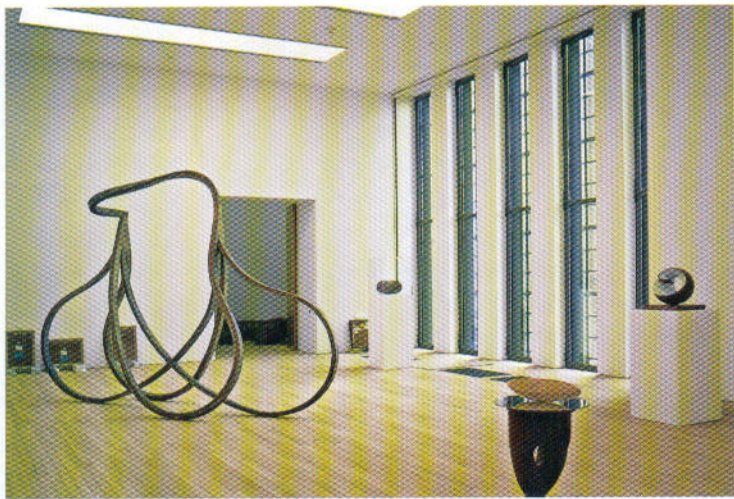


A vivid contrast to the dark metallic surfaces and fluorescent lighting of the circulation areas is the auditorium on the second level. Totally drenched in red, the conference space seats 260.



Some 65,000 square feet of gallery space is for the collection, 32,000 square feet for special exhibitions. Tall windows of the power station and stringent

detailing dramatize works by Joseph Beuys (above); Richard Deacon (opposite, top), Richard Long (opposite, bottom), and Jean Tinguely (opposite, right).



white walls and occasional smooth concrete floors are impressive in their “silence,” but one hopes they will not reveal fissures as the building settles and ages. The neatly detailed skylights on the exterior—especially those that are laid into flat roofs and continue the theme of planarity—will need to withstand years of insistent London rain.

Herzog & de Meuron’s solution is valuable, in part, for its capacity to respect the old power station while ingeniously transforming it into

HERZOG AND DE MEURON USE LIGHT AS ONE OF THEIR PRIMARY MATERIALS IN THE GALLERIES AT THE TATE.

a vast hangar for cultural and social functions. The idea of treating the new structure as a relatively neutral secondary framework distinguished this scheme from the majority of competition entries in 1995, which took a more aggressive approach. But even Herzog & de Meuron’s quiet transformation of the old building left the firm with the problem of unifying its insertion in a coherent manner. Here, it must be said, the results are mixed. The galleries work well on the inside, but their glazed boxes projecting into the void of the old turbine hall seem forced, even precious, without sufficient presence to stand up to the hall itself. They seem relatively feeble in expressing the project’s crucial idea of floating volumes of light. By contrast, the glazed oblong volume atop the building is more successful. Even an architecture devoted to planar surfaces and the per-

ceptual character of materials may need to deal more cogently with questions of overall order, and even hierarchy, of spaces and forms.

In recent years, Herzog & de Meuron has succeeded in creating alluring building skins and surfaces, sometimes touching on hermetic connections between geometric order, materials, and features of the natural world. The firm has explored a stark aesthetic, which owes something to the industrial vernacular and something to the “new objectivity” of the 1920s. But it has not always shown itself to be so interested in the larger physical sense of architectural form or in the power of circulation as a generating force in a design. The Tate Modern seems to reveal these hesitations. It is sensitive to the very act of looking, but less so to the act of moving about from place to place within a larger form. While the galleries afford interesting perspectives and even *(continued on page 242)*

Sources

Curtain wall: Bug AluTechnic AG and Felix UK Ltd.

Glazing: Eckelt Glas, Saint Gobain Glass

Sliding doors: Geze Doors

Acoustical ceilings: Astec Projects

Interior ambient lights: T. Clarke

Elevators, escalators: Otis

Resilient flooring: MPG

Demountable partitions: R & S

Metal doors: Martin Roberts (Ingersoll Rand)

Wood doors: Timbet

WWW For more information on the people and products involved in this project, go to **Projects** at: www.architecturalrecord.com