Not All White Walls
Deploying Color Spatially in Exhibition Design

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Abstract

This exhibition design was commissioned by California College of the Arts to showcase a wide range of work from different creative disciplines without sacrificing a cohesive attitude towards the space, a legible overall organization, and an equitable distribution of exhibition space among the disciplines.

The design sought to eliminate spatial hierarchies created by the existing architecture, which consists of a 343'-long by 33'-wide central Nave and smaller adjoining rooms, typically considered less desirable exhibition real estate. With cost being a major limitation in this project, the proposed intervention focused on working with existing architectural elements such as movable partitions and three-dimensional framing devices and repurposing existing objects such as pedestals.

In the final design, the four 26'-square immersively colorful rooms that punctuated the exhibition footprint not only mitigated the grand scale of the existing architecture and eased way-finding but also functioned as gateways between the central Nave and the adjoining rooms. By drawing visitors into a sequence of interconnected smaller spaces they fostered a fluid, intimate, and integrated viewing experience.

The use of color was controversial as the white wall remains the default "neutral" in exhibiting most forms of art. A major part of the success of the design was its ability to deploy color spatially to define enclosure, all the while providing a vibrant background that complemented certain artworks without significantly reducing the white wall space needed by others.

Figure 1. *Not All White Walls*: Project Overview. Photography: Palmyra Geraki
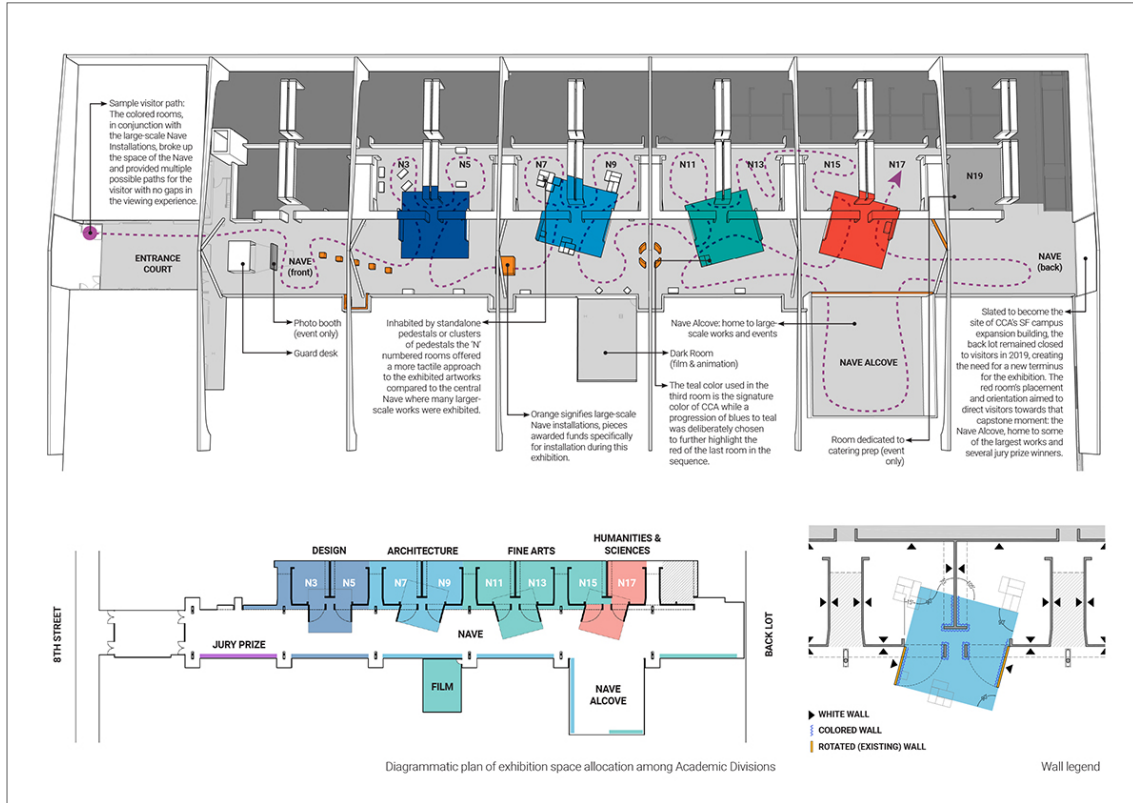
Figure 2. *Not All White Walls*: Spatial and Programmatic Organization

Figure 3. *Not All White Walls*: Views of Completed Project (May 2019). Photography: Palmyra Geraki.