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52 Broad Street, Boston, MA 02109  
617.951.1433  
bsa@architects.org  
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“The Harleston Parker Medal”

Pages 24–27

# 2007

# HARLESTON PARKER MEDAL

Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

DILLER SCOFIDIO + RENFRO

WITH PERRY DEAN ROGERS | PARTNERS



## JURY: JURY COMMENTS:

### Josiah Stevenson AIA

Leers Weinzapfel Associates  
Boston  
Chair

### Anthony Consigli

Consigli Construction Co.  
Milford, Massachusetts  
President, AGC Massachusetts

### Dan Gainsboro

Genesis Planners  
Waltham, Massachusetts

### Randa Ghattas AIA

Payette  
Boston

### David Hacin AIA

Hacin + Associates  
Boston

### Ellen Leopold

Author/journalist  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

### Tacey Luongo AIA

Renny Corp.  
Boston

### Ann Pendleton-Jullian

Knowlton School of Architecture  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, Ohio

### Laura Solano

Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

### Francoise Violic AIA

Kennedy & Violic Architecture  
Boston

The architects and the client understood that the function and meaning of museums require re-examination if they are to remain relevant in this era. Until recently, the museum, as a building type, was a civic but introverted warehouse for viewing art. At the ICA, the architect/client team created a building that feels like a cultural and educational center, open and welcome to the public, which also serves as a showcase for modern art. The ICA determined that involving the community in new outreach programs is a way for a museum to be more viable today.

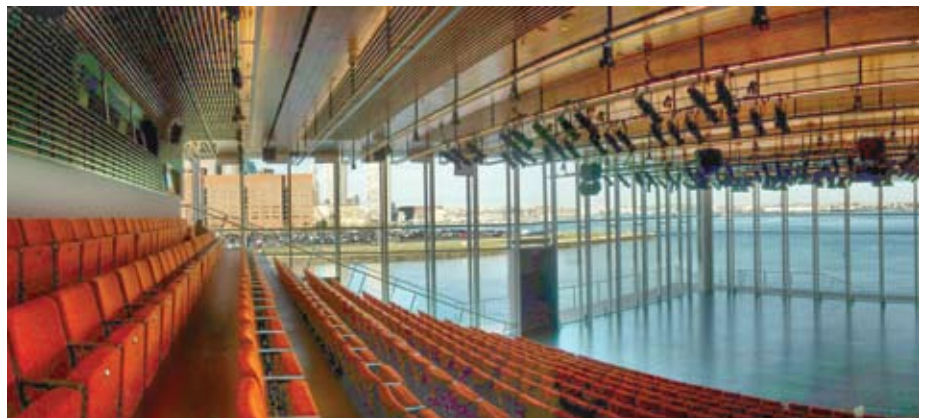
In the context of Boston, it is especially refreshing to see a new civic building that has such a close relationship to its site, in this case Boston Harbor. One approaches the ICA, soon to be surrounded by more buildings, by a side entrance that treats the public approach to the water and the building entry evenhandedly. One can enjoy the public waterfront or enter the museum, where there are occasional views of the harbor as one moves through the galleries. Each major space — the theater, the “mediatheque” room, and the harborfront gallery — reveals different controlled views of the water and of the city.

The risks taken by the designers were rewarded. No other building in greater Boston has this form or this gesture to the harbor. The gallery, clad in translucent channel glass, illuminated at night and still somewhat ephemeral during the day, is elevated above the surrounding context, suggesting even from afar that it is a destination of importance. Once there, it is an internal space, intended for the visitor’s exclusive focus on the art. Occasionally, one can leave the gallery for a glimpse of the water in the mediatheque room or a view of the city on the top floor.

A museum of this stature and location requires a certain level of finish and quality of materials. With their relatively limited budget, the architects needed to be inventive in their use of materials while maintaining an overall economy. Evidence of this economical approach is apparent in the polished concrete floors of many rooms, simple drywall-clad galleries, and the mechanical systems in their most cost-effective location on the roof. The architects chose to direct their energies to the creation of a large room-size glass elevator that takes visitors up to the galleries, an enclosure system that can slide completely out of the way to open the restaurant out to the boardwalk, and a theater that has a curtainwall on two sides but that can be fully darkened as needed for performances. The descending steps of the theater continue outside the building, becoming a teak seating area facing the harbor and the outdoor performance space.

The decision to recommend the ICA for this award was a polarizing one for the committee. The dissenting voices found the building to be an unnecessarily showy effort that happened to benefit from a beautiful site. The galleries, which were purposely understated to avoid competition with the art, were perceived by some jurors as lost opportunities. Nevertheless, the building’s powerful relationship to the water and its inventive economy of means give it a special quality.

**Editor’s note:** The full text of jury comments may be found at [www.architects.org/awards](http://www.architects.org/awards).





**2007 HARLESTON PARKER MEDAL**

**Institute of Contemporary Art**  
Boston

**Client:**

Institute of Contemporary Art  
Boston

**Architect:**

**Diller Scofidio + Renfro**  
New York City  
[www.dsny.com](http://www.dsny.com)

**Project team:**

Elizabeth Diller, Ricardo Scofidio AIA, Charles Renfro AIA (principals); Flavio Stigliano RA (project leader); Deane Simpson, Jesse Saylor, Eric Höweler AIA

**Associate architect:**

**Perry Dean Rogers | Partners**  
Boston  
[www.perrydean.com](http://www.perrydean.com)

**Project team:**

Martha Pilgreen AIA (principal-in-charge); Gregory C. Burchard RA, Mike Waters RA (project managers); Henry Scollard RA (project designer)

**Consultants:**

Arup (structural/mechanical/electrical/plumbing/lighting); Fisher Dachs (theater); Jaffe Holden Acoustics (acoustical); Seamus Henchy Associates (project management)

**Photographers:**

Iwan Baan (page 24); Diller Scofidio + Renfro (page 25 and page 27 bottom left); Nic LeHoux (this page and page 27 top, bottom right, and center left); Christian Richters; Peter Vanderwarker

