



A New Building for the National Museum of Man

Background

The nucleus of what is now the National Museum of Man was originally part of the Geological Survey from 1841 and then a division of the National Museum of Canada from 1927. It was only with the creation of the National Museums of Canada in 1968 that the Museum of Man achieved a separate identity and its present name. Since 1910 the only public

spaces this Museum has had for its world-renowned collections, aside from the War Museum, have been in the Victoria Memorial Museum Building. It shares that baronial edifice with the National Museum of Natural Sciences which, once the National Museum of Man moves across the Ottawa River to Hull, will be that building's only tenant.

The Architect's Statement

The Museum will be a symbolic form. It will speak of the emergence of this continent, its forms sculptured by the winds, the rivers, the glaciers. It will speak of the emergence of man from the melting glaciers; of man and woman living in harmony with the forces of nature and evolving with them. It will show the way in which man first learned to cope with the environment, then mastered it and shaped it to the needs of his own goals and aspirations. It will depict man as a creature of the earth who knows his tremendous power to change his environment, yet understands that he must live in harmony with it.

The building itself should truly aspire to be an artifact of our time, a celebration of man's evolution and achievement. It should point optimistically to the future, promising man's continued growth to a higher form of life, exploring not just this continent or planet but outer space as well. It should endeavour to be a spiritual act, and should demand from all those contributing to its design and construction the very best of their endeavours.

— Douglas J. Cardinal,
Design Statement, 1983



Douglas Cardinal wearing a button for the National Museum of Man.

The exhibition spaces in the Victoria Memorial Museum Building have been far too small to display the great and growing collections of the Museum of Man, which are devoted to the life and history of man in Canada. As the Museum's collections, programmes, and staff have increased, it has spread to some seventeen temporary sites throughout the National Capital. The Museum needs more space for the exhibition of its collections, better space in terms of the reliability of its atmospheric controls, and more attractive space for the enjoyment of the public. Above all, it needs all its space to be at one site for the Museum's coherence and effectiveness as a public institution.

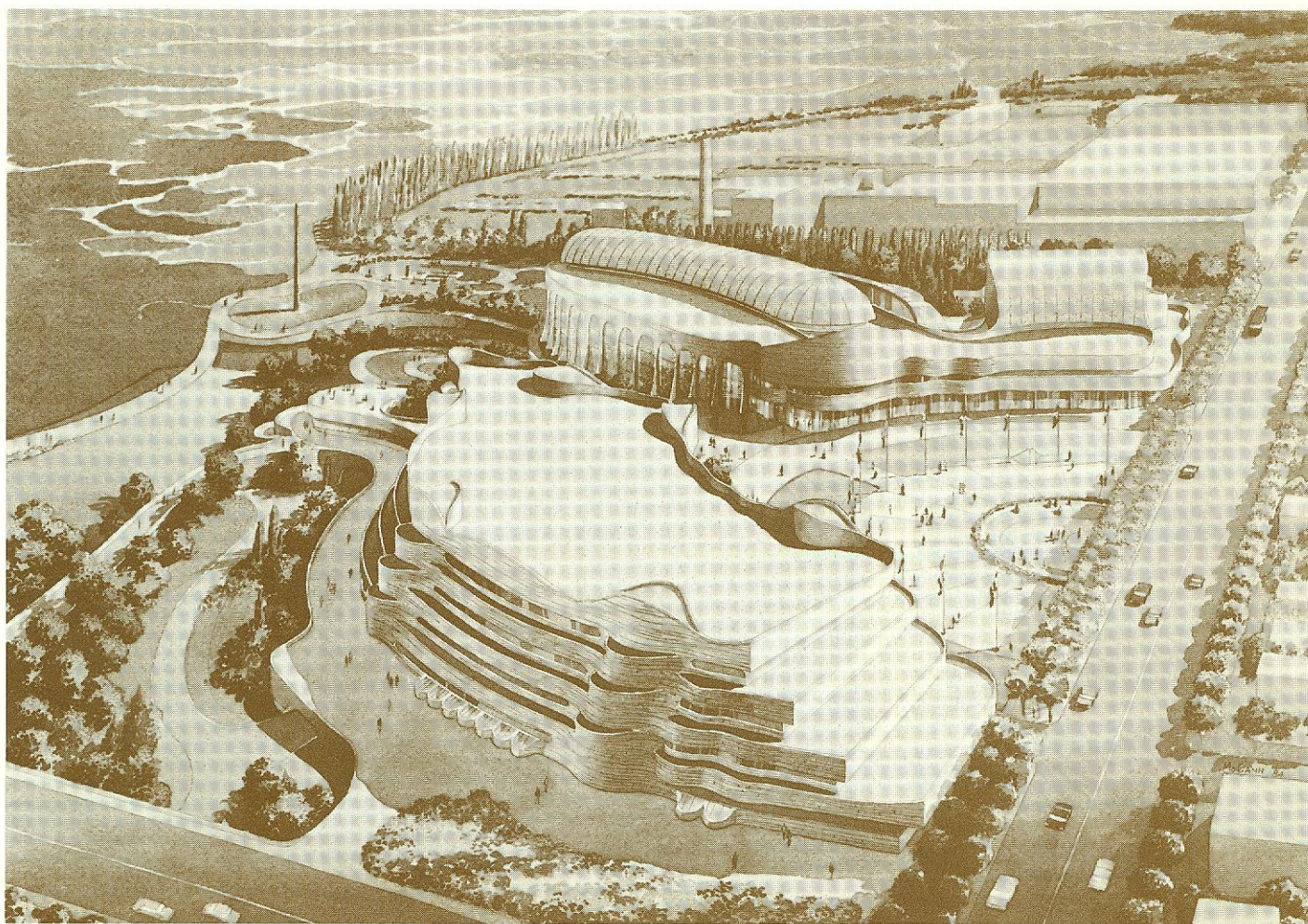
In February 1982, the Government of Canada announced the incorporation of the Canada Museums Construction Corporation to build two national museums, the National Gallery and the National Museum of Man. The Minister responsible for both institutions, the Honourable Francis Fox,

Minister of Communications, spoke eloquently of how "both the Gallery and the Museum have become symbols of our national pride." The seriousness of the Government's intention was apparent in the presence of the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who stated: "Just as the Government's efforts in the past year on the Constitution and the development of energy have attempted to strengthen Canadian identity, the new project shall enhance those values that make identity possible." A year later the Government approved sites and architects for both projects. The site of the new Museum of Man will be Laurier Park in Hull, with the commanding view of the Parliament Buildings shown on the Canadian one-dollar bill. The design architect is Douglas J. Cardinal of Edmonton, working in collaboration with the Montreal firm Les architectes Tétrault, Parent, Languedoc et Associés. At the same time the Government authorized an equal division of the

allotment, \$186,600,000, between the two projects. Cabinet approved Cardinal's conceptual designs for the building in November 1983, and work on the site has already begun. Actual construction will begin in the spring of 1984. It is estimated that the fabric of the building will be finished by December 1986, and that the Museum could open to the public by 1988.

In the end, the character of the building will depend on three important factors: the architect, the site, and the needs of the Museum as expressed in the architectural programme. The programme was prepared by Museum staff under their Director, Dr George MacDonald, and his predecessor, Dr William E. Taylor, Jr, with the assistance of the Architecture & Planning Division of the National Museums of Canada, under the direction of Michael Lundholm.

Artist's view of the building along Laurier Street.



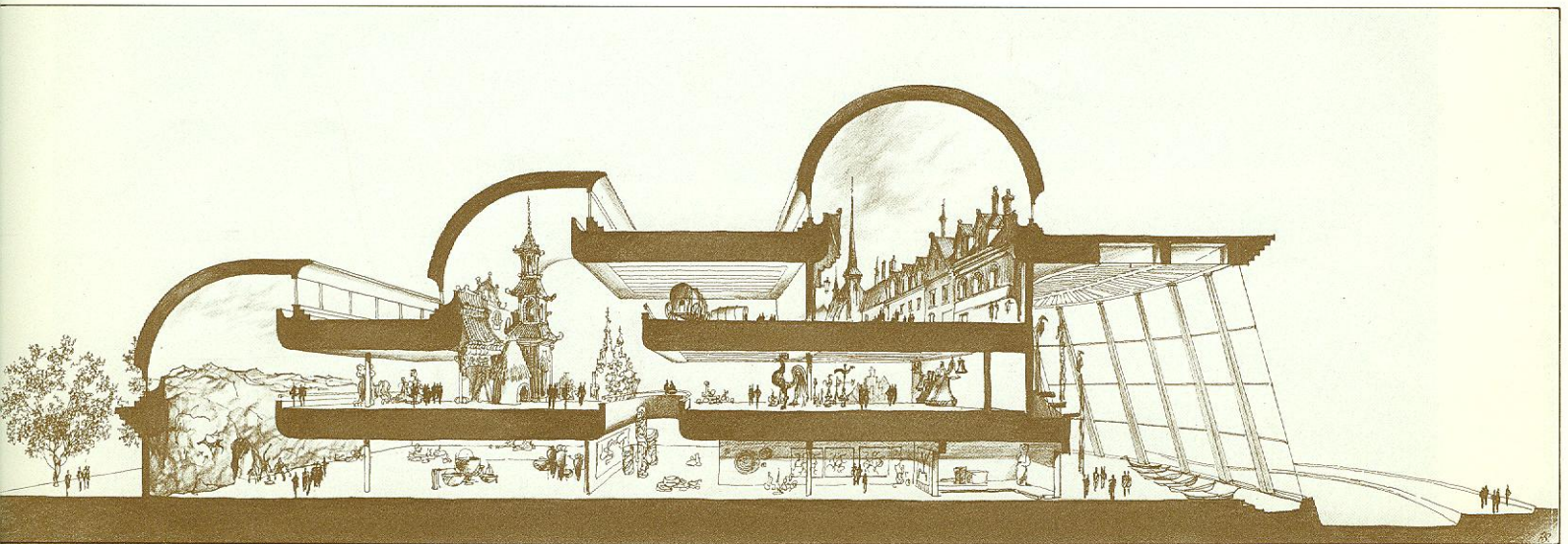
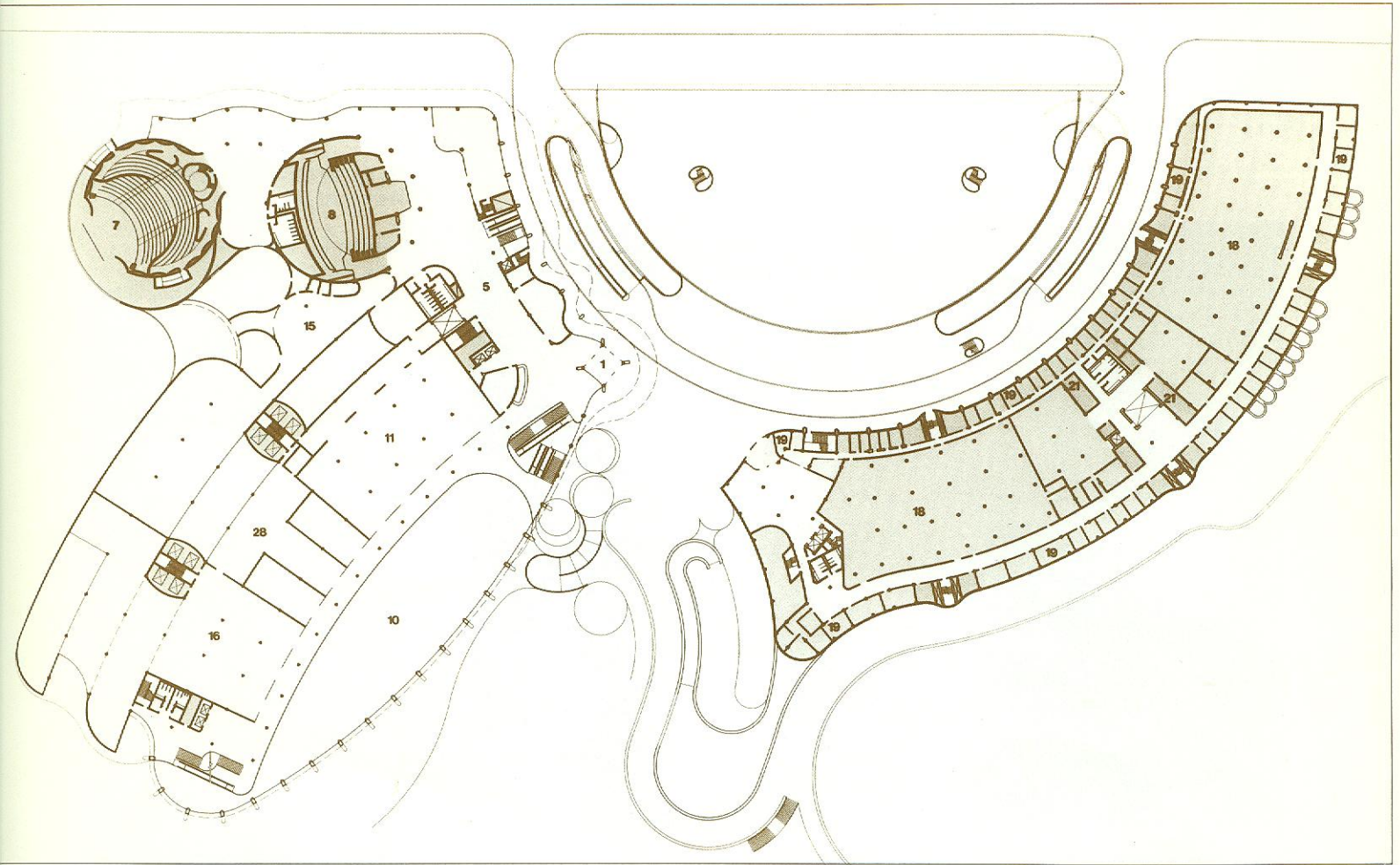
Design Architect

Douglas Cardinal has spent most of his life in his native Alberta, although he did take his architectural degree at the University of Texas. It was in Red Deer, the town where he grew up, that he built the church of St Mary's, designed for the new liturgy, which first brought him into prominence. Its curving forms, the dramatic lighting

over altar and lectern, and his imaginative use of brick prompted critics to note that his surprising architecture combines the contemplative and the sensuous. Since then, in buildings such as Grand Prairie Regional College, the Ponoka Government Services Centre, and St Albert Civic & Cultural Centre (this last under construction in 1983), he has continued

Below. Ground plan of National Museum of Man at Laurier Street level:

- 1 Main Entry
- 5 Lobby
- 7 Auditorium
- 8 Imax-Omnimax Theatre
- 10 Grand Hall
- 11 Special Exhibits
- 15 Children's Museum
- 16 Folk Halls
- 18 Collection Holdings
- 19 Offices and Support
- 21 Service
- 28 Indian-Inuit Halls



Cross-section showing the relationship of the exhibition halls.

to design and build beautifully undulating shells, each shaped, however, to the nature of the activities within.

The Site

Douglas Cardinal, who has always had a deep sense of harmony with nature, has been given a site that would arouse the poet in any architect, but particularly in one who is an author as well (*Of the Spirit*, published 1977). Laurier Park is a low, sloping site by the Ottawa River used as an encampment by Indians and explorers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it has picturesque views, not just of the Victorian Gothic Parliament Buildings but also of the cascading terminal locks of the old Rideau Canal. To the north the Alexandra or Interprovincial Bridge links the site with Ottawa. The main approach, however,

is from Laurier Street in Hull which the new building will animate with its theatres, its café, a museum shop, and its welcoming entrances and dramatic esplanade. On the south-west of the site will be a direct link with the Maison du Citoyen (a city hall and community centre), with extensive underground parking. It is even possible that there will one day be a campus of the University of Quebec to the west across Laurier.

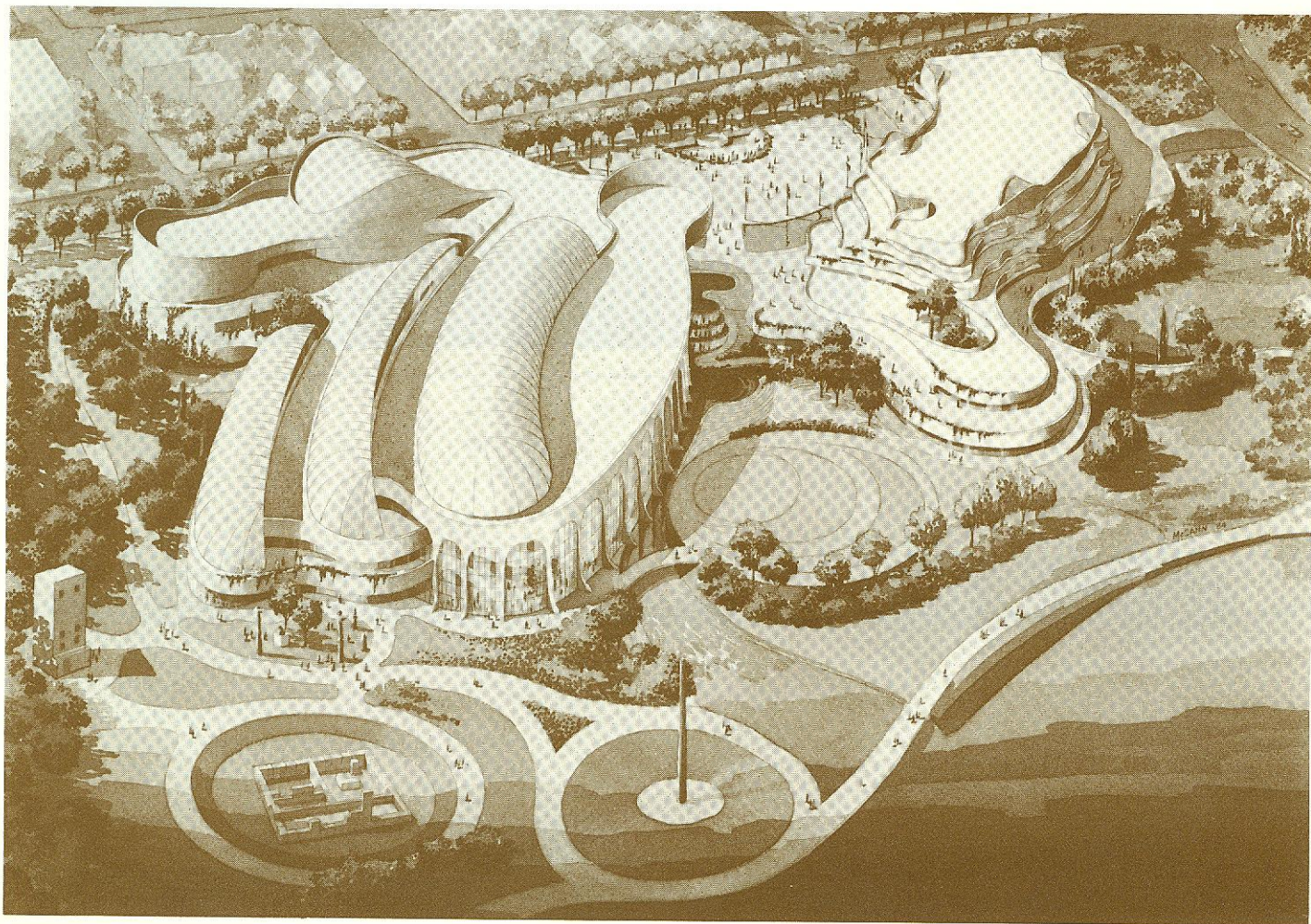
In designing for the site, Cardinal had to give an urban presence on Laurier Street while providing views across the river both from the intersection of Laurier and St Laurent, north-west of the site, and through the building by fanning it open mid-way along its façade to create the entrance esplanade. The forms of the river-front open up like a flower. Since the Museum will be seen often from heights — the escarpment of Parliament, the Interprovincial Bridge, Nepean Point with the new National

Gallery, and office buildings in Hull and Ottawa — Cardinal has made of the roofscape a harmonious but varied combination of forms.

The Museum's Specifications

Perhaps the greatest need for the National Museum of Man is effective exhibition space. The new building will give four times the exhibition space now available in the Victoria Memorial Museum Building for its vast archaeological, ethnographic, folk-art, and history collections, which contain some of the finest Northwest Indian and Inuit artifacts in existence. Cardinal has provided what the Museum staff have requested: vast, broadly-defined halls, varying in heights, within which curators and designers can create and recreate lively contextual settings for the collections. Cardinal is also shaping the walls of the halls like a sculptor, piercing them occasionally for natural light or views outward to the world so that they will not lack

Artist's view of the building as if seen from Parliament Hill.



architectural vitality. He has also provided imaginative solutions for special areas: a Children's Museum, a special exhibition gallery for large touring exhibitions, an orientation centre, a gallery that will demonstrate how the museum works, and an overview gallery that will provide an introduction to the collections as a whole. The access to the collections of the National Museum of Man will be immeasurably easier than it has been in the past.

But exhibition halls are not all. There will be comfortable and inviting spaces for rest and relaxation, and there will be several places to eat: a restaurant with spectacular views reaching out to the river, a café on Laurier, a lunchroom to which visitors

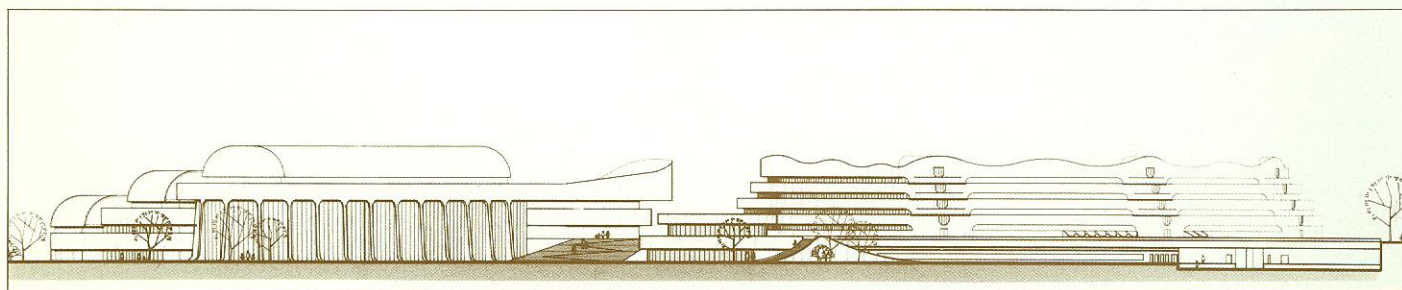
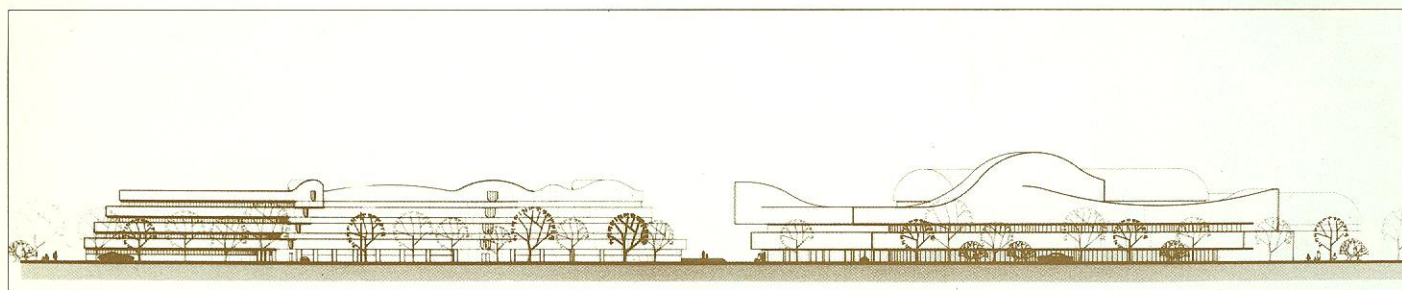
may bring their own food. And besides these places to refresh the body, there will be other places to stimulate the mind: an auditorium for lectures and films, an Imax/Omnimax theatre using the latest Canadian film technology, and a resource centre where children and adults may consult books, tapes, and other sources of information about the life and history of man in Canada — and may also use the new computer technology to gain access to information about the Museum collections.

Cardinal's design will also bring artifact storage, workrooms, laboratories, and offices into the same complex. This concentration of staff and activities from some seventeen sites in one place will not only contribute to

staff efficiency but enhance staff awareness of the public they serve. Cardinal has adroitly wrapped the offices and workrooms, which should have natural daylight, around the storage areas, which should not. These work and storage areas for the collections, about fifty percent larger than the spaces they now occupy, are in a single autonomous zone and will provide the Museum staff with the quarters their world-wide reputation for scientific work deserves.

Right. General view of the model from Laurier Street.

Below. Elevations of the Museum: Laurier Street and river side.



The Grand Hall

The most memorable of the spaces Cardinal himself has contributed to the overall plan is undoubtedly the Grand Hall. This will be a long, sinuous concourse reached from the main entrance off the esplanade. The visitor will see on the left, through breath-taking, undulating glass curtain-walls, the river and Parliament Hill; and on the right, entrances to halls for archaeology, ethnology and special exhibitions — and a passageway that will lead to halls for folk art and history looming above. Here more than in any other place in

this spectacular building the visitor will sense the relationship between the Museum and its environment, as natural as the link the river makes between the Capital and Hull.

National Museum of Man: 39,000 net square metres (420,000 net square feet)
Design Architect: Douglas J. Cardinal, Edmonton

Architects: Douglas J. Cardinal Architect Limited et/and Tétreault, Parent, Languedoc et Associés, Inc., Edmonton/Montreal

Electrical Engineers: Les Consultants Dessau Inc., Laval

Mechanical Engineers: Bouthillette, Parizeau et Associés, Montreal

Structural Engineers: Asselin, Benoît, Boucher, Ducharme, Lapointe, Inc., Montreal

Construction Managers: Concordia Management Co. Ltd., Montreal

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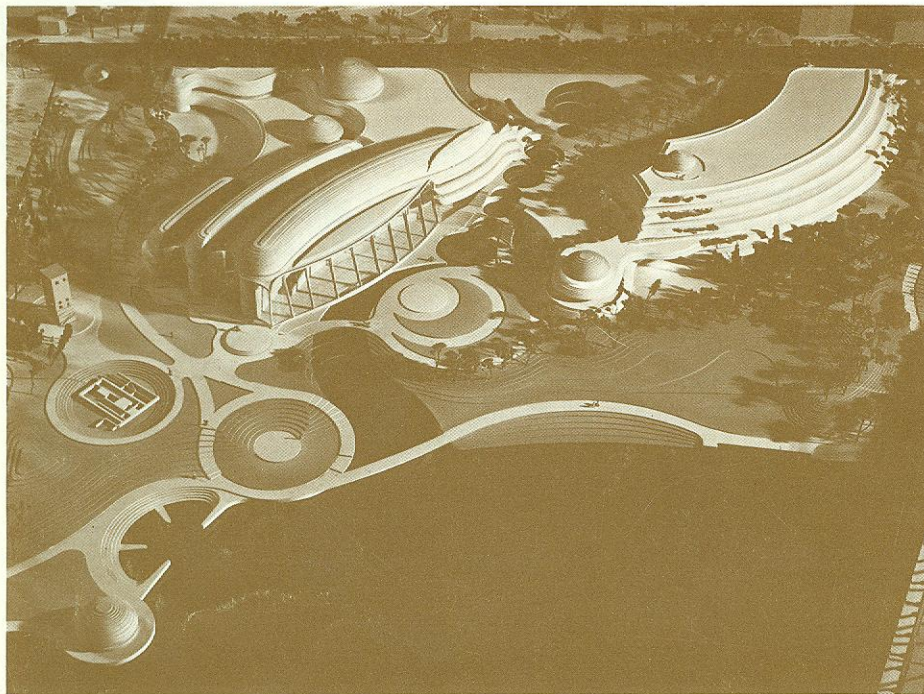
Photography: Hans Blohm

Model: Leonid Margulis

Renderings: Michael McCann, Peter Schwartzman

Designer of brochure: Eiko Emori

Canada



Left. View of the model as if seen from Parliament Hill.

Below. Night view of the model as if seen from under the Interprovincial or Alexandra Bridge.

