

Art Ship

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The Santiago Calatrava addition to the Milwaukee Art Museum sits perched on the Lake Michigan shoreline demanding attention like a glissading white ship. The space age structure looks as if it could take flight at any second. Even though the entire building is constructed from poured, molded concrete forms, it appears to be light and only resting there. The spacey nautical appearance does not end with the exterior. The hallways and main exhibition room are ribbed like the inner frame of a ship. The main exhibition hall especially exudes this theme with a center keel running down the center of the ceiling and down the entire length of the room and beyond into following rooms. The underground parking structure is reminiscent of a ship's hold, only better lit. The area is open but feels like you are in the belly of the beast.

Everything is clean and white just as one would expect from an interior from one of [Gene Roddenberry](#)'s creations from Star Trek. One is compressed while entering and led into the grand interior. Looking out the large curved windows to Lake Michigan, the framing of the windows help contain you with in the structure but constructs fantastic views of the large expanse of water. The feeling is similar to looking out the bridge of a ship, only on a ship you look down at your bow, and with the Calatrava you look up at a 90 foot projection of concrete that closely resembles a ship's nose. The structure feels larger than life, but also as if man has conquered the elements, but precariously. One sits in awe of the Calatrava much as one would a new sea or space fairing vessel. Man has conquered Mother Nature, but nature could swallow up our creations. This delicate

balance is reflected not only by the nautical theme structure, but the large and delicate wings and suspension bridge over Lincoln Memorial Drive.

The wings are massive but just as a ship could founder in high seas and winds, the Calatrava's out stretched wings could not survive sustained winds of 25 miles per hour in the open position. The suspension bridge uses a large mast with steel cables that works as a counter balance to keep the structure elevated over the bustling city street below.

Although the Calatrava expansion of the Milwaukee Art Museum has limited exhibition space considering the size of the structure, it is the structure itself which is the art. The Calatrava connects the viewer to the water and to the sky, a reflection of the city which has become a lasting landmark and symbol for this post industrial sea-going metropolis.

Work cited:

Milwaukee Art Museum, Art Lives Here. 2010. Web. 17 July 2010.

<<http://www.mam.org/>>

Stevenson, Jim. "Starship Schematic Database - Star Trek." Starship Schematics Database. SSDB, 1997-2010. Web. 16