

American Academy of Arts and Letters
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NEWS RELEASE

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Drawings & images available upon request

GLASS LINK

This project shows how the most up-to-date building technologies, if sympathetically employed, can be effective instruments for honoring historic landmarks. Taken together, the Academy Building, its recently acquired Annex, and the Glass Link that now joins them, constitute a "combined work" (the late Paul Byard's phrase) in which the new intervention makes it possible to understand and enjoy two historic buildings in ways hitherto unimagined.

Henry N. Cobb



Glass Link from Terrace. The former American Numismatic Society is on the left; the Academy is on the right; Trinity Cemetery beyond.

New York, March 10, 2009 — The American Academy of Arts and Letters has completed construction of a Glass Link connecting its exhibition galleries in its Administration Building to those in the former headquarters of the American Numismatic Society, which the Academy purchased in 2005. The buildings are adjacent to one another on West 155 Street and are part of the Audubon Terrace Historic District.

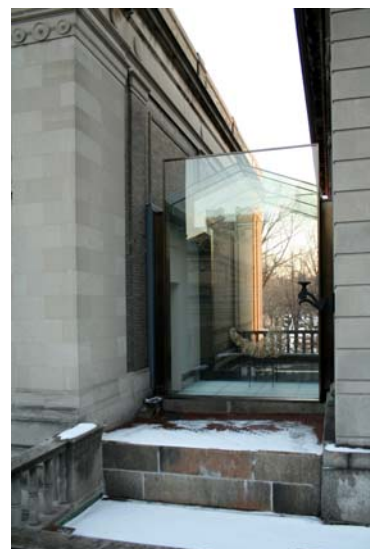
The Glass Link, designed by James Vincent Czajka, in consultation with Henry N. Cobb and Michael Flynn of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, is 16' high and spans a 12' side-terrace between the exterior walls of the Academy's Administration Building and the former Numismatic Society. The walls, floor, and roof, including three support trusses, are constructed entirely of low-iron laminated glass.

The proportions and shape of the Link reflect architectural elements of the existing buildings, and the choice of low-iron laminated glass increases the Link's transparency, revealing details of a previously overlooked section of the Terrace.

The architects chose to reuse materials from the original site, lessening waste and preserving existing signs of age and weather. The granite steps that formerly led up to the side-terrace were upended to form a retaining wall. A balustrade covering a decorative archway that was cut through to create the opening for the Link was relocated further down the Administration Building's sidewall. Graffiti and weather stains were left untouched.

The placement of the Link extends circulation pathways already present in each building and creates a new view corridor that extends from the Administration building's main staircase, through the Glass Link, and into the galleries of the new building.

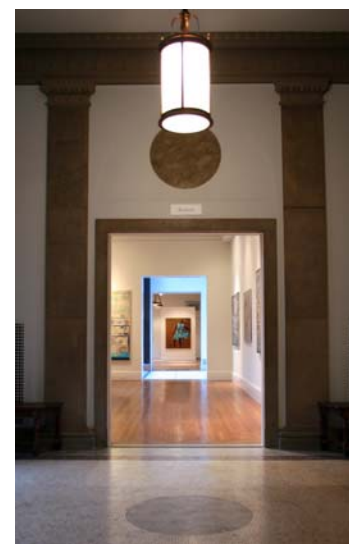
In addition to the Link, the project included significant renovations to the galleries located in the new building.



Glass Link as seen from the Terrace.



Interior view of Glass Link with a sculpture by Stephen Talasnik.

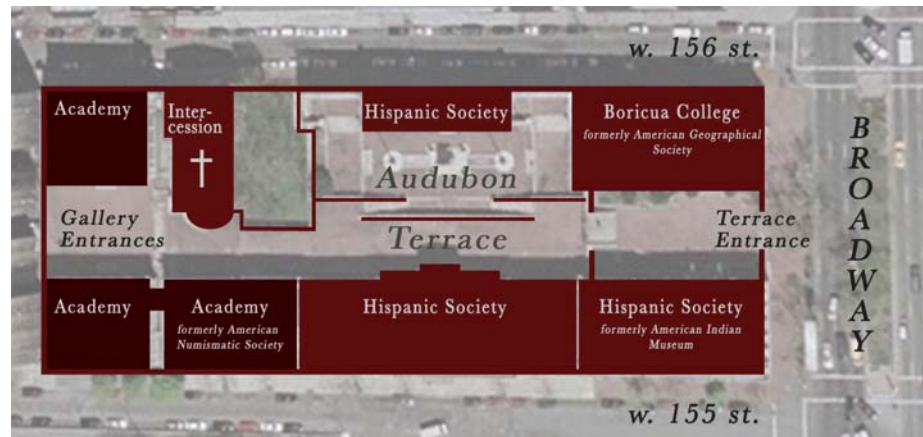


View corridor to new galleries.

History of Site

The American Academy of Arts and Letters and the former American Numismatic Society are located in three buildings that are part of the Audubon Terrace Historic District, a museum complex in upper Manhattan between West 155 and 156 Streets. The land that comprises the Terrace was donated by Academy member Archer M. Huntington, and was the former property of the naturalist and artist John James Audubon.

Development of Audubon Terrace as a cultural complex started in 1904 when construction began on the Hispanic Society of America, which opened its doors to the public in 1908. It was followed by the American Numismatic Society (1908), the American Geographical Society (1911), the Church of the Intercession (1912), the American Indian Museum (1916), and, finally, the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1923). Of the original tenants, the Hispanic Society, the Church of the Intercession, and the Academy remain.



Map of Audubon Terrace showing current configuration.

The Academy moved to Audubon Terrace in 1923 upon completion of its Administration Building, which was designed by William Mitchell Kendall from the firm McKim, Mead & White, and houses the Academy's offices, members' room, portrait gallery, library, and exhibition galleries, including the South Gallery. In 1930 a second building, designed by Cass Gilbert, was completed. It houses a 730-seat auditorium and the North Gallery, a large sky-lit exhibition space.

In 2005 the Academy nearly doubled its space by purchasing the neighboring building on Audubon Terrace that had belonged to the American Numismatic Society, and which was actually two structures that had been integrated into one in 1930. Previously, the Numismatic Society had occupied a smaller structure that dated from 1908 and was the work of Charles Pratt Huntington, the designer of the Hispanic Society, Geographical Society, and American Indian Museum. In 1930 the Numismatic Society reconfigured its exterior façade and entrance when it completed construction of a west wing, which was designed by H. Brooks Price. It is to the sidewall of the west wing that the new Glass Link connects.

Architect Statement

When the American Academy of Arts and Letters acquired the neighboring American Numismatic Society Building in order to increase exhibition, curatorial, and administrative space, a connecting link was required at the main gallery level. The AAAL building is the only structure on Audubon Terrace set apart from its neighbors by a 12' gap, giving it a sense of autonomy and providing a satisfying conclusion to a block-long architectural ensemble. The new link was designed to fit within this gap and needed to respect its original purpose, while being appropriate in scale, design, and detail to the buildings it would join.



Glass Link, looking up.

The design solution was the Glass Link, a rectangular prism 12' square and 16' high with glass walls, roof, and floor. The main walls are 2 single panes of 1" low-iron laminated glass, 10' wide (the largest width available for manufacture) and over 16' high. The roof panels are 2 panes of similar glass with a 50% white dotted frit pattern. These panels are supported by 3 structural glass beams, 1 1/2" wide, that bear directly on existing walls. The floor consists of 16 translucent glass panels that allow uniform lighting from below. The Link is completed at either end by a steel and bronze frame that supports the glass walls and roof, acts as rain gutter and leader, and sets the Link off visually from the buildings it connects.

The exact location and detailing of the Glass Link were strongly influenced by contextual considerations. The Link was sited to create a view corridor from one building to the other. The glass beams take their shape, slope, and vertical dimension from the adjacent pediment and architrave detail at the rear of the Academy building. The main glass walls themselves are "golden rectangles" reflecting the "divine proportion" so important to many of the arts celebrated by the Academy: painting, sculpture, music, and architecture.

James Vincent Czajka

Credits

Architect	James Vincent Czajka, JVC Architects
Consulting Architects	Henry N. Cobb and Michael Flynn, Pei Cobb Freed & Partners
Structural Engineer	Robert Silman Associates
MEP Engineer	D'Antonio Consulting Engineers
General Contractor	Scordio Construction
Glass Contractor	W & W Glass