

## HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY - BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

Please send completed form to: National Register and State Register Coordinator,  
State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Economic and Community Development,  
One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hartford CT 06103

\* Note: Please attach any additional or expanded information on a separate sheet.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Building Name (Common) Yale Center for British Art

Building Name (Historic) Yale Center for British Art

Street Address or Location 1080-1104 Chapel Street

Town/City New Haven Village \_\_\_\_\_ County New Haven

Owner(s) Yale University, PO Box 208280, New Haven, CT 06520-8280  Public  Private

### PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: EDUCATION: University museum; COMMERCE & TRADE: Retail shops

Historic Use: EDUCATION: University museum; COMMERCE & TRADE: Retail shops

Accessibility to public: Exterior visible from public road?  Yes  No

Interior accessible?  Yes  No If yes, explain During business & museum hours

Style of building MODERN MOVEMENT: New Formalism Date of Construction 1972-1975

Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate):

- |   |   |   |                                       |  |
|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clapboard  | <input type="checkbox"/> Asbestos Siding        | <input type="checkbox"/> Brick                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Shingle | <input type="checkbox"/> Asphalt Siding  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fieldstone                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Board & Batten         | <input type="checkbox"/> Stucco                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Cobblestone  | <input type="checkbox"/> Aluminum Siding |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concrete (Type <u>Cast-in-place</u> ) | <input type="checkbox"/> Cut Stone (Type _____) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other <u>Steel panels</u> |                                       |  |

### Structural System

- Wood Frame  Post & Beam  Balloon  Load bearing masonry  Structural iron or steel
- Other Reinforced concrete frame

### Roof (Type)

- Gable  Flat  Mansard  Monitor  Sawtooth
- Gambrel  Shed  Hip  Round  Other Grid of square skylights

### (Material)

- Wood Shingle  Roll Asphalt  Tin  Slate  Asphalt Shingle
- Built up  Tile  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Stories: 4, B Approximate Dimensions 200' x 120'

Structural Condition:  Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated

Exterior Condition:  Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated

Location Integrity:  On original site  Moved When? \_\_\_\_\_

Alterations?  Yes  No If yes, explain: Conservation & maintenance: 1995-6, 1998, 2008-2015

**FOR OFFICE USE:** Town # \_\_\_\_\_ Site # \_\_\_\_\_ UTM \_\_\_\_\_

District:  S  NR If NR, Specify:  Actual  Potential

**PROPERTY INFORMATION (CONT'D)****Related outbuildings or landscape features:**

- Barn     Shed     Garage     Carriage House     Shop     Garden  
 Other landscape features or buildings: Lower Court (restaurant - west side); parking (rear / south side)

**Surrounding Environment:**

- Open land     Woodland     Residential     Commercial     Industrial     Rural  
 High building density     Scattered buildings visible from site

## • Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The building is located on the south side of Chapel Street between York and High Streets in downtown New Haven. It is in the Chapel Street Historic District, listed as non-contributing. To the north is the Yale University central campus. To the west is the Dwight Street Historic District, and nearby to the east is the New Haven Green, a National Historic Landmark District. Numerous examples of the Modernist architecture of New Haven's Redevelopment Era of the 1960s are located nearby.

• Other notable features of building or site (*Interior and/or Exterior*)

See continuation sheet.

Architect Louis I. Kahn; Marshall Meyers, Pellechia & Meyers Builder George Macomber Company  
 2000s conservation: Knight Architecture LLC

## • Historical or Architectural importance:

See continuation sheet.

## • Sources:

Brown, Elizabeth Mills; *New Haven: A Guide to Architecture and Urban Design*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976.  
 Carley, Rachel D., *Tomorrow is Here: New Haven and the Modern Movement* (Privately printed by the New Haven Preservation Trust, New Haven CT) June, 2008.  
 Ryan, Susan. 1980. HRI 127. *New Haven Architectural Survey*. Map/block/lot: 261/0231/00120.  
 See continuation sheet.

Photographer Charlotte Hitchcock, also see photo captions Date 8/7 & 12/11/2016

View Multiple Views Negative on File NHPT

Name Charlotte Hitchcock Date 12/30/2016

Organization New Haven Preservation Trust

Address 922 State Street, P.O. Box 8968, New Haven, CT 06532

## • Subsequent field evaluations:

Latitude, Longitude: 41.307888, -72.930876

**Threats to the building or site:**

- None known     Highways     Vandalism     Developers     Renewal     Private  
 Deterioration     Zoning     Other \_\_\_\_\_     Explanation \_\_\_\_\_

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Other notable features of building and site (*Interior and/or Exterior*):

The building is a four-story 120' x 200' rectangle with an exposed reinforced concrete frame composed of 20-foot square bays, 6 bays deep by 10 bays wide. Entry to the building is at the northeast corner, where a four-bay square recessed portico is open to the streets on the east and north.

Exterior:

The ground floor perimeter is occupied by commercial spaces facing east and north. Along the west side is the outdoor Lower Court at the Basement level, with dramatic stairs leading down (and an elevator at the west end of the rear wall) to a commercial restaurant space with outdoor seating in the courtyard. At the south side, parking extends through the block from High to York Street. The parking lot is shaded by honey locust trees, planted on the same column grid as the building, and there is access to a loading dock at the southwest corner of the building.

The exterior of the upper three floors is formed by the exposed grid of the concrete frame, in-filled by matte-finished stainless steel panels and large-scale windows. Between the ground and second floors, a concrete beam carries the upper frame over a ground floor where there are columns only every second bay. These wider structural bays frame the commercial spaces, and the facades of these are set back slightly to the inner face of the columns.

The roof is covered with banks of square skylights in groups of four to each typical bay. Coffers framing the skylights are formed by pre-cast concrete “V-beams” which cant inward. The skylights have baffles designed to optimize lighting for the particular latitude of the building. Light is maximized when the solar angle is low, and minimized when the angle is highest.

Interior:

The interior plan revolves around two courts open to the skylit roof. One, the four-story high Entrance Court, is 40 feet square, located inside the entry at the northeast corner. It serves as a large-scale vestibule and sculpture court. Openings look into it from the upper levels, with concealed fire shutters that will close in case of need. The second, the three-story high Library Court, is a 40' x 60' space beginning at the second floor and located in the western part of the building. It functions as a gallery, concert space, and access to the surrounding spaces: Reference Library & Archives to the south, Rare Books & Manuscripts to the west, and Prints & Drawings to the north. The cylindrical volume of the stair forms a visual feature at the east end. Openings from the fourth floor look into the space, where large-scale paintings are hung on the walls.

Above the fourth floor, the concrete V-beams form light wells in each bay, covered by groups of four skylights with sophisticated light filtering and diffusing systems to ensure consistent light in each gallery space. The gallery floors are open lofts with partitions known as “Pogo panels” for the spring-loaded legs that support them. One exception to this pattern is the Long Gallery on the south side of the fourth floor where, in emulation of English country houses, a gallery extending through seven bays, for a length of 140 feet, contains a densely mounted display of works from the museum’s collection. This last was fully realized during the building conservation project of 2015, along with the conversion of space to a seminar room at the east end.

Interior finishes include the exposed concrete frame, infill walls of white oak paneling, and wall finishes of Belgian linen for displaying art works. Sliding oak slatted shutters cover the windows. A significant interior feature is the cylindrical stairwell, which is a sculptural and functional form projecting into the Library Court. Its central location adjacent to the elevators makes walking particularly appealing to the visitor.

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The building has been eloquently described in several publications by art historian and Yale professor Vincent Scully, and by former museum directors Jules Prown, and Duncan Robinson (see Sources). In preparation for the work from 2008-2015, a Conservation Plan was prepared, and published in book form. The plan resulted from a decade of research on the history of the design, construction, and prior renovations of the Center. The Center maintains its own institutional archives, the official repository for all historical documentation, recording its development from its inception in the mid-1960s to the present. Several video presentations are available on the Center's web site. Thus the Yale Center for British Art has been carefully documented throughout its existence.

Historical or Architectural importance (*continued*):

The Yale Center for British Art (YCBA) was the final work of architect Louis I. Kahn, who died while the building was under construction. Kahn was recognized in his lifetime as among the most significant American architects of the Modernist period, and his reputation persists at a time when the work of some other Modernist designers is suffering neglect, alteration, or demolition.

Louis Kahn was hired in 1969 by Yale University, as the architect for a public museum and research center to hold the donation by Paul Mellon of his art and rare book collection. Professor Jules Prown, the first director of the YCBA, worked to recommend possible architects to the university and to Paul Mellon. In the search, visits were made to a number of recent museums. Once Kahn was selected, Prown represented the university in working with the architect. Kahn was known for free-standing projects which expressed formal connections with ancient monuments – particularly works such as the Salk Institute for Biological Studies (1962), Phillips Exeter Academy Library (1965-71) and the Bangladesh Parliament (1961-1982). In New Haven, he had a site in the fully built-up center of a city and close to his own earlier work of 1953, the Yale University Art Gallery.

There was a concept important to the donor – as described by Jules Prown:

Although [Paul Mellon] was keenly interested in the architecture of the building, his perspective was shaped by his love for his art and books. A major factor in the choice of an architect would be the ability to create a sympathetic environment for the collection rather than a signature architectural statement. The architecture was to serve the art, not the converse (Baskett et al 2007, page 16).

In response to this element of program, Kahn created a building that is contextual and modestly creates a setting for the works of art. Yet at the same time, the refined detailing transforms industrial materials like concrete and stainless steel into elegant surfaces that go well with white oak, Belgian linen, and priceless works of art. In Kahn's design there are intimations of lessons learned from Italian palazzos with their urban street facades, private interior courtyards, and commercial spaces on the ground level; English country estates with long galleries; and factory lofts with their regular grids of exposed structure. And the building is in conversation with its predecessor across Chapel Street, where there is the cylindrical stair tower and the muscular concrete ceiling grid of the Art Gallery. As part of the dialogue, the glass of the YCBA reflects the architecture of buildings, both traditional and Modernist, that sit across the street.

Another significant feature of the YCBA is the use of day lighting with skylights. Interior courts had been an important way to bring light into buildings, for example the Fogg Art Museum of 1927 at Harvard University. The use of skylights protected the interior space in cold climates, but fragile works of art must not be exposed to the damaging sunlight. By the mid-twentieth century museums had turned to artificial light, which could be fully controlled. Kahn, with lighting consultant Richard Kelly, planned skylights with a system of baffles, ultra-violet light filters, and diffusers. For Kahn, light was most important and essential to the existence and perception of buildings; the poetics of light was an essential component of the spiritual quality of his designs.

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In contrast to the bravado of some “starchitects” who made their names in the twentieth century, the Center is a work of architecture that is both modest and remarkable. In the recent conservation efforts, numerous features of Kahn’s design that were compromised in the original, have been replaced as he imagined them, including for example the Long Gallery and the Pogo panels. The campaign has set a high standard in creating a conservation plan for a Modernist building, and in following the plan to restore the building while bringing it into conformance with current and future requirements for use, enjoyment, and safety.

### Architects:

**Louis Isadore Kahn** (1901–1974) is widely recognized as one of the most important American architects of the twentieth century. Kahn emigrated from Estonia to the United States with his family at age four, becoming a citizen in 1914. Also a gifted artist, he chose to study architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. Kahn earned his Bachelor of Architecture in 1924; he learned in the Beaux-Arts tradition, under the mentorship of Paul Philippe Cret (1876-1945). He worked for Cret before going out on his own in 1935. In the early years of his practice, he collaborated with Modernists George Howe (1886-1955) and Oscar Stonorov (1905-1970).

Kahn began his teaching career at Yale University, where he served as a professor and design critic at the Yale School of Architecture from 1947 to 1957. During that time, he was also a Fellow at the American Academy in Rome and traveled through Italy, Greece, and Egypt, recording ancient ruins and historic architecture in sketches and drawings. The experience of the ancient monumental forms significantly influenced his philosophy of architecture. Following his tenure at Yale, Kahn returned to Philadelphia to teach at the University of Pennsylvania. He was appointed Paul Philippe Cret Professor of Architecture, a position he held until his death in 1974.

From the mid-1950s onward, Kahn’s architecture was notable for its simple geometric forms and the complex play of natural light on materials. Kahn’s first significant commission was the Yale University Art Gallery, completed in 1953. Kahn received important national and international commissions in his last two decades. He was elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1953. He was awarded the AIA Gold Medal, the highest award bestowed by the association in 1971. He also received the Royal Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 1972.

**Pellechia & Meyers** was a firm formed by Anthony Pellecchia (b. 1940) and Marshall Meyers, who had both been project architects in the office of Louis I. Kahn. Marshall D. Meyers (1931-2001) studied industrial design at Pratt Institute and then architecture at Yale University, where he was editor of *Perspecta 4*, the school’s architectural journal, in 1956-57. Meyers worked for Louis I. Kahn from 1957-65 and again from 1967-72, after which he formed a firm with Pellecchia.

As described by Jules Prown:

At the time of Kahn's death in March 1974, the building frame had risen to the second floor level. Completing the building as Kahn would have wanted it became a matter of primary importance. Fortunately, Yale had earlier engaged Marshall Meyers, Kahn's project architect at the Kimbell Art Museum who had launched his own practice, to make field decisions when Kahn ... was not available (Baskett et al 2007, page 22).

After Kahn’s death in 1974, the firm completed the Yale Center for British Art. The partnership was dissolved in 1979. Meyers subsequently worked for several Philadelphia firms before moving to California in 1993. He also taught at Temple University, the University of Pennsylvania, and other schools.



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### Sources (continued):

AIA Historical Directory of American Architects. Accessed 1/30/2016 at:

<http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/What's%20here.aspx> .

Maps and aerial views:

Google Maps accessed at: <https://www.google.com/maps/>

UConn MAGIC 1986 Aerial Photography Index, accessed 12/30/2016 at:

[http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/connecticut\\_data.html#indexes](http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/connecticut_data.html#indexes)

Baskett, John, et al. Essay by Jules David Prown. 2007. *Paul Mellon's Legacy: A Passion for British Art*. New Haven: Yale Center for British Art & Royal Academy of Arts, Yale University Press.

Inskip, Peter, and Stephen Gee, Constance Clement. 2011. *Louis I. Kahn and the Yale Center for British Art: a Conservation Plan*. New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, Yale University Press.

Lesser, Wendy. 4/28/2016. "Whispers of Louis Kahn's Vision at the Yale Center for British Art." *New York Times*. Accessed 1/15/2017 at: [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/01/arts/design/whispers-of-louis-kahns-vision-at-the-yale-center-for-british-art.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/01/arts/design/whispers-of-louis-kahns-vision-at-the-yale-center-for-british-art.html?_r=0)

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Metz, Don and Yuji Noga. 1966. *New Architecture in New Haven*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

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84001123. National Park Service. Accessed at: <https://focus.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/70000838>

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[https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/23929](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/23929)

Prown, Jules David. 1977 (Third edition, 2009). *The Architecture of the Yale Center for British Art*. New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, Yale University Press.

Robinson, Duncan. 1997. *The Yale Center for British Art: a Tribute to the Genius of Louis I. Kahn*. New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, Yale University Press.

Scully, Vincent et al. 2004. *Yale in New Haven: Architecture & Urbanism*. New Haven: Yale U. Press.

Whiffen, Marcus & Frederick Koeper. 1981. *American Architecture: 1607-1976*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Wright, Gwendolyn. 2008. *USA: modern architectures in history*. London: Reaktion Books.

Yale Center for British Art web site, accessed 10/08/2016. Overview: <http://britishart.yale.edu/about-us>

Architecture: <http://britishart.yale.edu/architecture>

Building Conservation Project: <http://britishart.yale.edu/gallery/building-conservation-project>

Louis I. Kahn: <http://britishart.yale.edu/architecture/louis-i-kahn>

Publications and Resources. Access at: <http://britishart.yale.edu/architecture/publications-and-resources>

Video. 2016. *Conserving Kahn*. Lecture by George Knight on 10/08/2016 for symposium "A Beautiful Role: Architecture and the Display of Art." At: <http://britishart.yale.edu/multimedia-video/26/3921>

Video. 2016. *Conserving the Yale Center for British Art*. At: <http://britishart.yale.edu/multimedia-video/27/3401>

Yale University Manuscripts & Archives Digital Images Database. Figures from Architecture of Yale Center for British Art accessed 12/30/2016 at:

<http://yaleinsight.library.yale.edu/madid/showThumb.aspx?&q=&q1=&q2=&qc1=&qc2=&qf1=&qf2=&qn=&qo=&qm=&qs=&sid=565812203&qx=#1808980>

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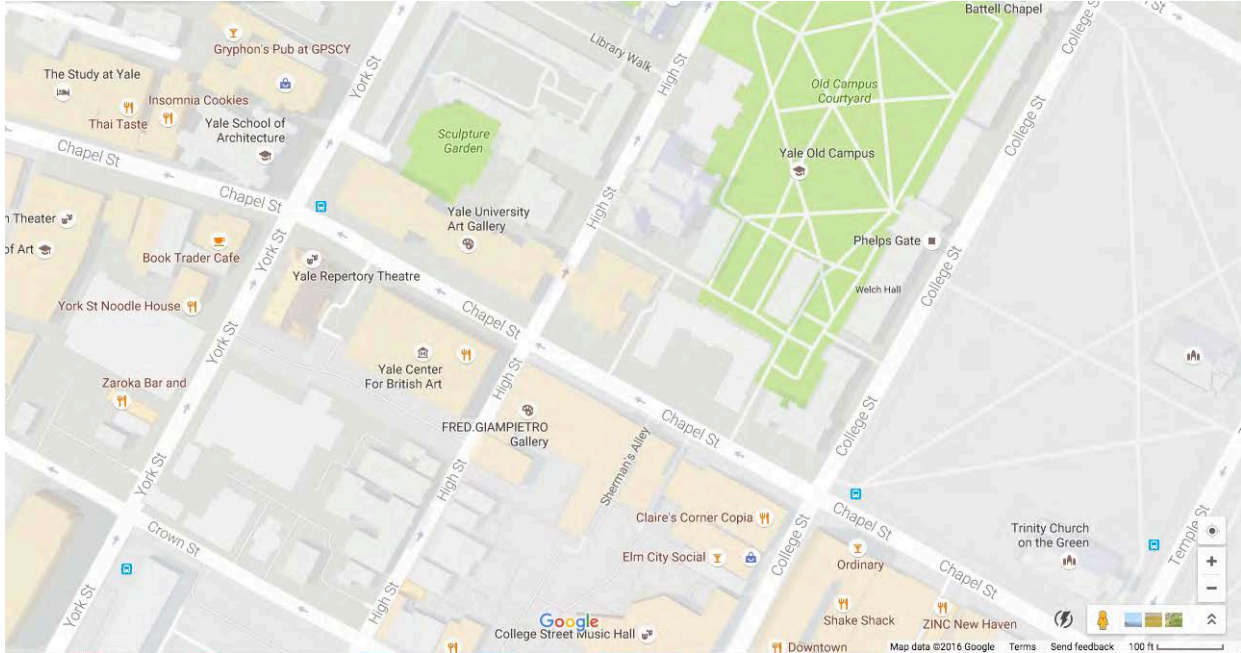


Figure 1. Location map of the Yale Center for British Art. Image from Google Maps accessed 11/13/2016.



Figure 2. 1986 aerial context view of Yale Center for British Art (YCBA) showing Chapel Street from York Street to the New Haven Green. Image from UConn MAGIC 1986 Aerial Photography.



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Photo 3. Northeast view of YCBA, camera facing southwest from High Street.



Photo 4. Southeast view from High Street, camera facing northwest.



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Photo 5. Southwest view, camera facing northeast, showing loading dock and parking.



Photo 6. North view of the Lower Court; camera facing south. Elevator lobby for lower level is at right rear.

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Figure 7. Louis Kahn sketch of the Yale Center for British Art. Image No. 10522. Louis Isadore Kahn collection, 1951-1978 (inclusive). MS 1345. Manuscripts & Archives, Yale University.



Photo 8. West detail view, camera facing east along Chapel Street, showing commercial space.

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Photo 9. Interior view of Entrance Court at fourth floor level, camera facing northeast.



Photo 10. Interior view of Entrance Court at first floor (ground) level, camera facing northeast toward the entry portico and Chapel Street.



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Photo 11. Interior view into Library Court at fourth floor level, camera facing southeast, showing stair tower.



Photo 12. Interior view of Library Court at second floor level, camera facing east. Richard Caspole photograph, used with permission of Yale Center for British Art.



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Photo 13. Interior view of stair tower and stair at the fourth floor level, camera facing east. Richard Caspole photograph, used with permission of Yale Center for British Art.



Photo 14. Interior view of stair tower at fourth floor level, camera facing west, showing the light pattern filtered through glass block from skylights above.

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Photo 15. Interior view of Long Gallery at fourth floor level, camera facing west.

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Photo 16. Interior view of the northeast corner “Turner bay” with J. M. W. Turner’s painting *The Dort Packet-Boat from Rotterdam Becalmed*, 1818; camera facing east.

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Photo 17. Construction photograph showing installation of skylight well “V-beams,” camera facing south.  
Image No. 3520. Construction of Yale Center for British Art. Louis Isadore Kahn collection, 19511978 (inclusive), 19621977 (bulk). MS 1345. Manuscripts & Archives, Yale University.



Photo 18. Construction photograph.

Image No. 3501. Louis Kahn & Paul Mellon, discussing construction of Yale Center for British Art. Louis Isadore Kahn collection, 19511978 (inclusive), 19621977 (bulk). MS 1345. Manuscripts & Archives, Yale University.



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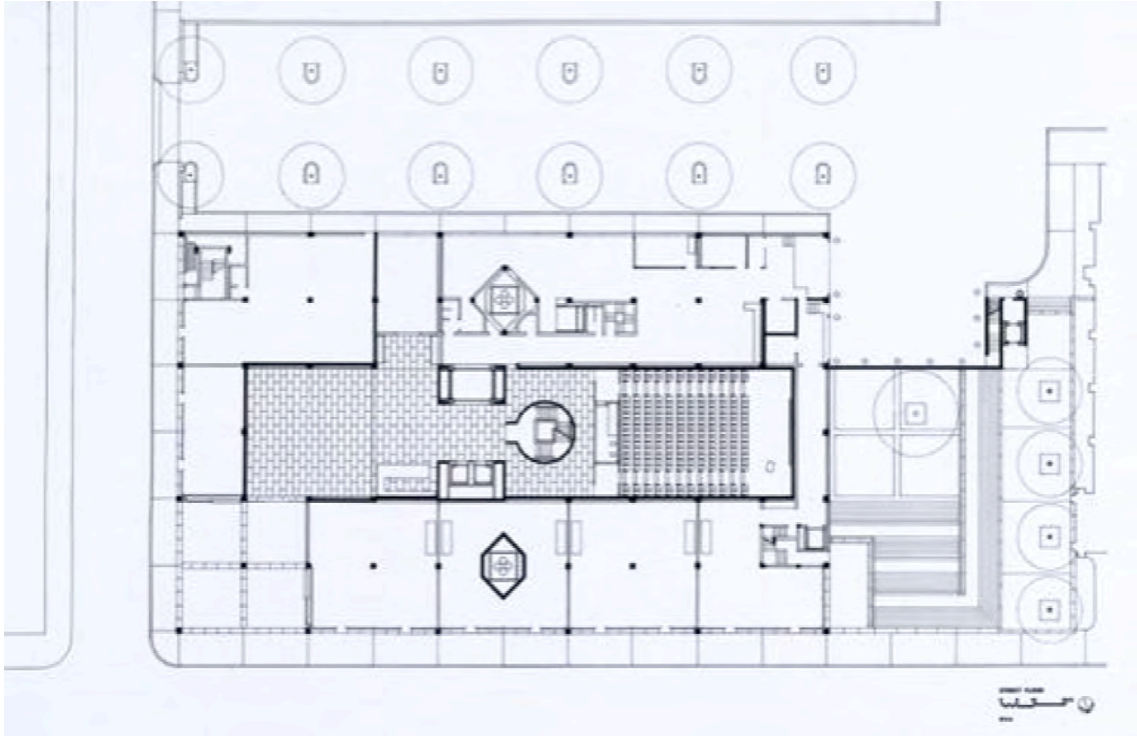


Figure 19. First (ground) floor plan.

Image No. 43255. Yale Center for British Art, floor plan. Louis Isadore Kahn collection, 1951-1978 (inclusive), 1962-1977 (bulk). MS 1345. Manuscripts & Archives, Yale University (source for all floor plans).

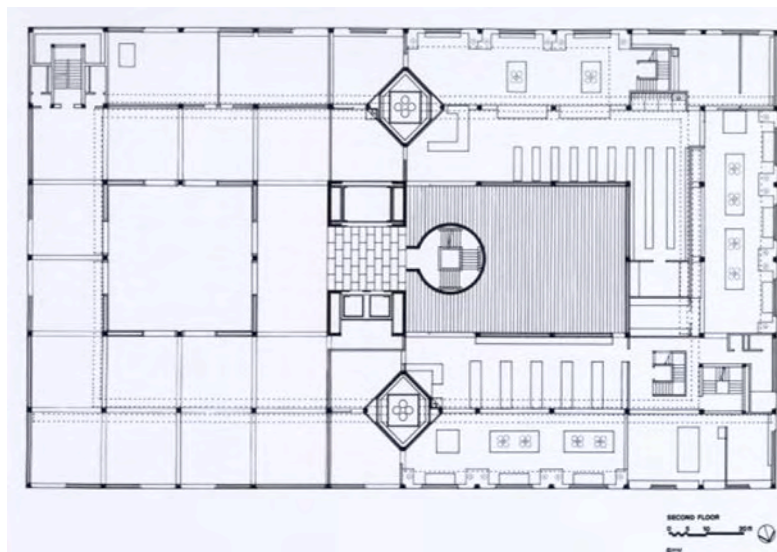


Figure 20. Second floor plan.

Image No. 43258. Yale Center for British Art, floor plan.

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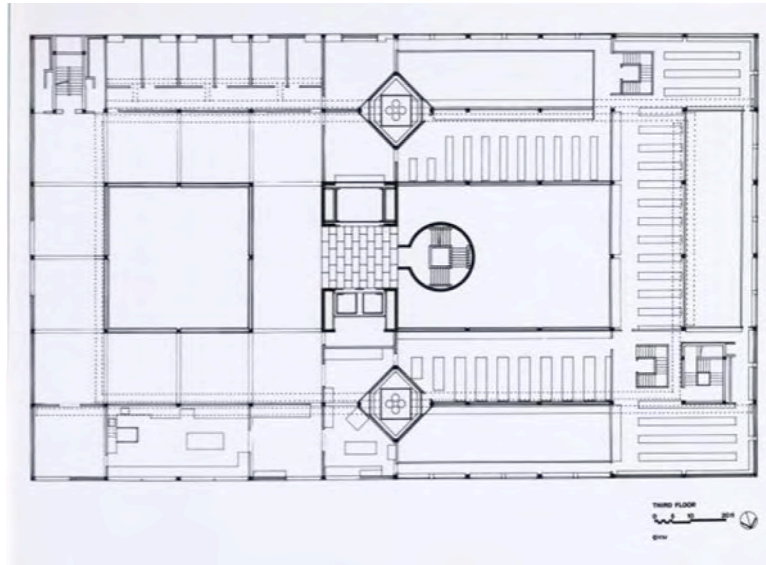


Figure 21. Third floor plan.  
Image No. 43259. Yale Center for British Art, floor plan.

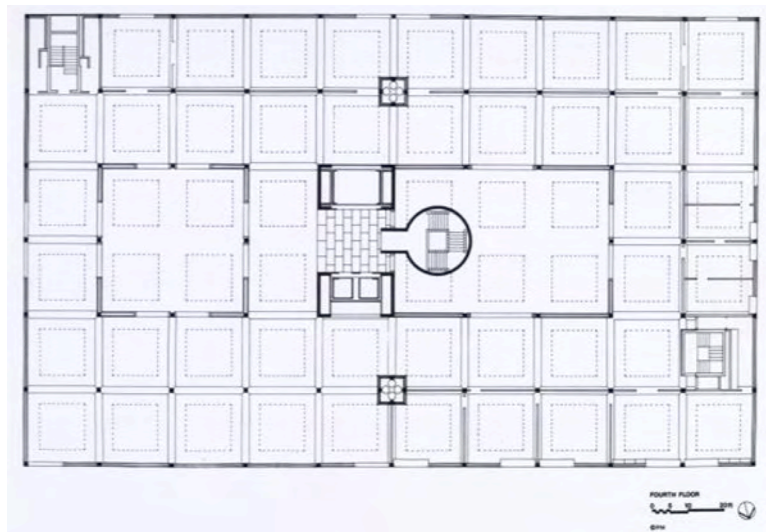


Figure 22. Fourth floor plan.  
Image No. 43260. Yale Center for British Art, floor plan.