

Luma Arles Art Center – Arles, France

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Having been completed in 2013, the Luma Arles Art campus repurposed a 16-acre train yard into a public park and contemporary art center – right in the heart of Arles, France. Parc des Ateliers was once a industrial site that serviced the rails in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Now adays, it is a sprawling campus for art, research, and exploration.

The most notable attraction to the art center is the 56-meter-high tower designed by Frank Gehry. Gehry states that the tower takes elements of Van Goughs “Starry Night”, the nearby mountains and Arles’ historical roman architecture. The tower itself is clad with as many as 11,000 unorthodoxly shaped and aligned stainless steel panels. Each panel is slightly different than the one preceding it, yet they all remain similar enough to give the entire tower a consistent flow and shape. The tower is also notably tall so that it can act as a beacon to the Alpilles hills nearby. The structural design of the tower also requires the implantation of a network of inclined tubular steel columns. These steel columns in turn transfer the load to the foundation. This allows for the twisty and angular nature of the façade to persist, whilst still maintaining structural integrity. The tower also was designed with sustainability in mind, as natural ventilation is possible. Furthermore, reversible radiant floors and double floor ventilation optimize the heat recovery. The architects behind the tower have even thought of the glare reflecting off the stainless steel and possible blinding motorists. As a result, the towers façade is specially treated, hammered and textured to give a linen-like effect. This allows for the stainless steel façade to capture light, without reflecting it back into the surrounding area.

Nearby, Selldorf Architects have taken the industrial buildings and renovated them into art exhibition centers. Since the site was previously a train yard, many building are long and low in construction. Selldorf Architects were able to use these building dimensions to leverage suitability. For example, the roof of one of the larger buildings are blanketed by solar panels. Many of the buildings renovated by Selldorf follow a very simple and efficient gravity structure plan. There are simple columns in a square grid pattern throughout many of the buildings. The simplicity in the construction intentionally corresponds to the minimalist feeling that Selldorf intended to reflect about the interior of the exhibits. Furthermore, indoor mezzanines allow for the near doubling of the showroom floor. Skylights in each building also offer a natural source of lighting as well as means of suitability.

Bas Smets, a Belgian landscape architecture firm, renovated the outdoor space across the campus. A café, communal gathering space, and exhibition space for concerts and presentations were all added through this redesign.

Sources:

1. <https://www.dezeen.com/2021/06/25/luma-arles-the-tower-frank-gehry/>

2. <https://www.selldorf.com/projects/luma-arles>

3. https://digital.bnpmmedia.com/publication/?i=715456&article_id=4080013&view=articleBrowser&ver=html

4. <https://www.terrellgroup.net/en/parc-des-ateliers-arles/>

5. <https://www.luma.org/en/arles/frequently-asked-questions/project.html>

