

# diversions

## ARCHITECTURE

By Mark Lage  
Senior Reporter

The Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery's strong points lie in the quality of its display areas, and its details and materials, said Dale Gibbs, a professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Architecture.

"I would say that The Sheldon (Memorial Art Gallery) is a very, very good building," Gibbs said, "but not a great one."

The building was designed and built in the early 1960s under the direction of architect Philip Johnson.

"Johnson does well in designing display areas," Gibbs said, calling the architect an expert in the classical setse.

"The architecture does not interfere at all with the viewing of the art," Gibbs said.

The display areas are restful and quiet, and the lighting is good without being distracting.

"You can see the art very well, which is paramount in museum design," Gibbs said.

Johnson has designed several other galleries, including two private ones for himself, and always has been well-acquainted with the art world, Gibbs said. Among these other galleries are two which are about the same size as Sheldon -- Amon Carter Gallery in Texas, and The Williams Proctor Munson Gallery in New York City.

Gibbs described them as being "rather different in layout and style" than the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery.

Sheldon is a good example of beautiful detailing and excellent use of materials, Gibbs said. Johnson used Italian travertine, teakwood and solid brass in the building, and it is "beautifully put together," Gibbs said.

"The use of detail and material is faultless," he said.

Gibbs does not call Sheldon a great building mainly because "it doesn't satisfy the idea of a college teaching gallery. Its formality is too threatening."

It would work better as a private or civic gallery, just because of its image, he said.

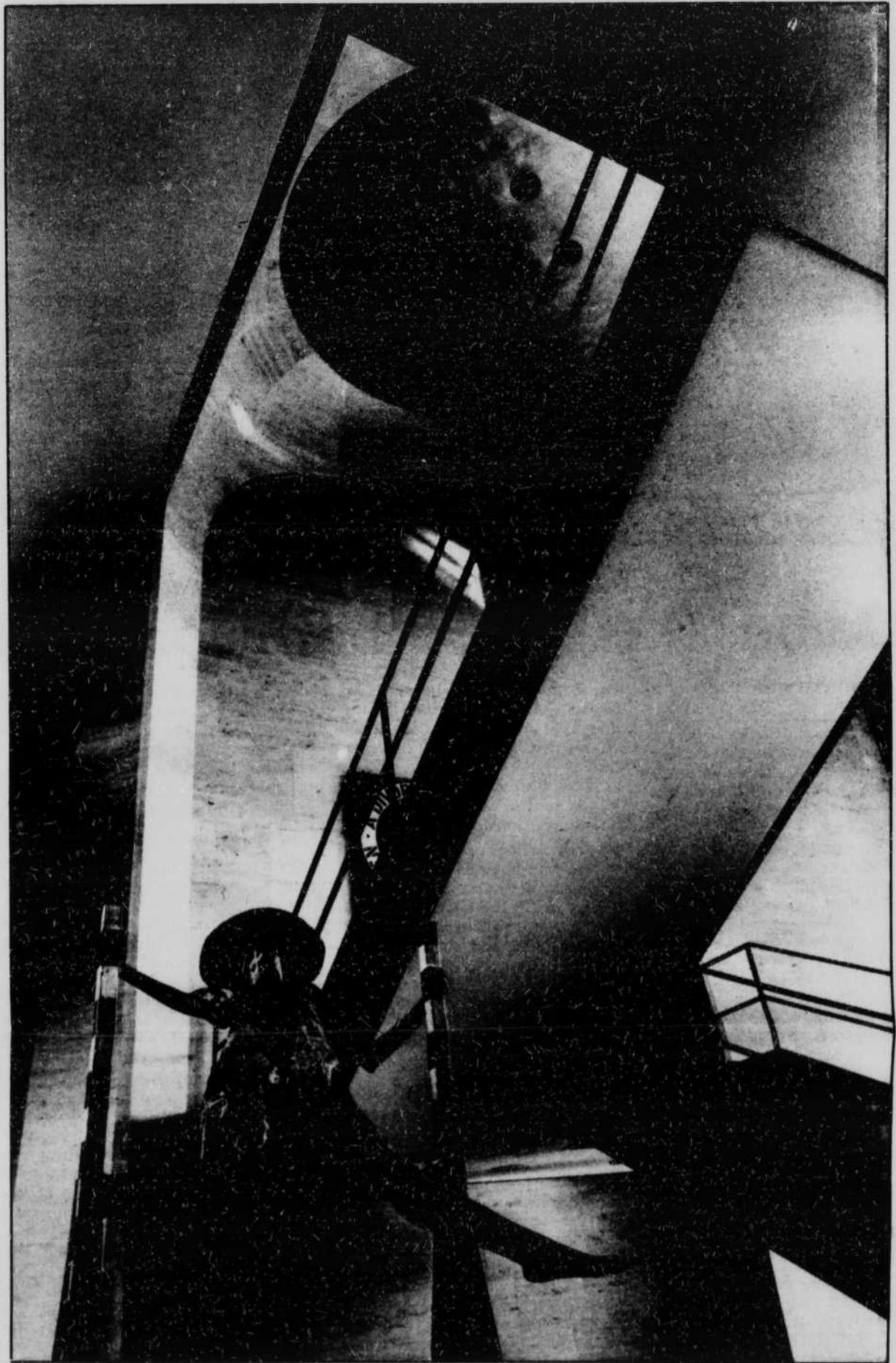
Gibbs said he hopes that previous plans made to add on to the museum are not carried through.

"It's very difficult to add to a classical-style building without doing damage to both the building and the addition," he said. "There are examples of this kind of thing, but it's risky."

For an example of this, Gibbs cites the current sculpture garden.

"It's not his (Johnson's) design," Gibbs said.

Johnson had designed a long reflecting pool on the west side of the gallery, which would terminate in sculpture, he said. The current garden was designed by another architecture firm, and is "not a good solution to the problem," Gibbs said.



Eric Gregory/ Daily Nebraskan

Robert Cremean's "Swinging Woman" in the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery.

There may be help for this situation when the Lied Plaza is completed, Gibbs said. There may be a gate built in between the plaza and the garden, which, with other minor adjustments, might provide an "escape for viewers at a certain critical point."

Sheldon is not considered to be among Johnson's best or most well-known structures, but not because it isn't a good building, Gibbs said.

"It comes from his Lincoln Center phase, which is a very classical phase," Gibbs said. "The Pennzoil

building in Texas is an example of a better piece of his work."

"In summary, I would say that the building does display the art very nicely. The sculpture both inside and out comes off very nicely, but the sculpture garden itself is not so good," Gibbs said.