

EVOLVING AND
BECOMING
THE NEW
WHITNEY MUSEUM
OF
AMERICAN ART



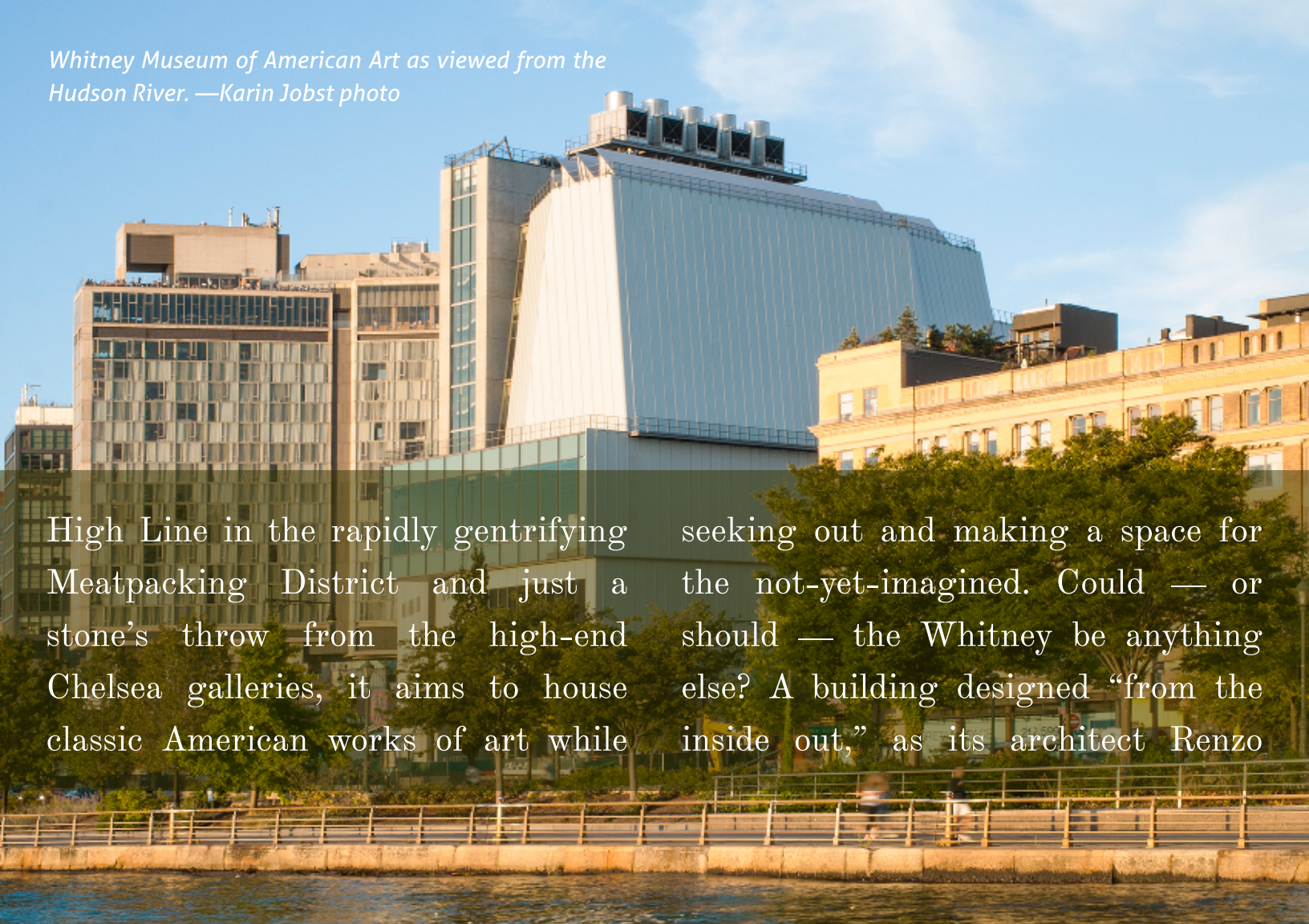
Previous Page: Whitney Museum of American Art, the view from Gansevoort Street. —Karin Jobst photo

By James D. Balestrieri

NEW YORK CITY — This is going to sound like an insult, but it is not. Quite the opposite, in fact. The new Whitney Museum of American Art looks like an enormous extinct invertebrate, a complex arthropod that took a detour down one of evolution's myriad dead-end roads in order to fill a gap between disparate ecosystems. Situated at the southern foot of the

The view from the eighth floor terrace is echoed in selections from the museum's collection of Modernist paintings, prints and photographs.



A photograph of the Whitney Museum of American Art, a modern building with a prominent white, curved facade and a glass-enclosed section, situated in the Meatpacking District of New York City. The building is viewed from the Hudson River, with a walkway and railing in the foreground. The sky is blue with some clouds. The text is overlaid on the top left of the image.

Whitney Museum of American Art as viewed from the Hudson River. —Karin Jobst photo

High Line in the rapidly gentrifying Meatpacking District and just a stone's throw from the high-end Chelsea galleries, it aims to house classic American works of art while

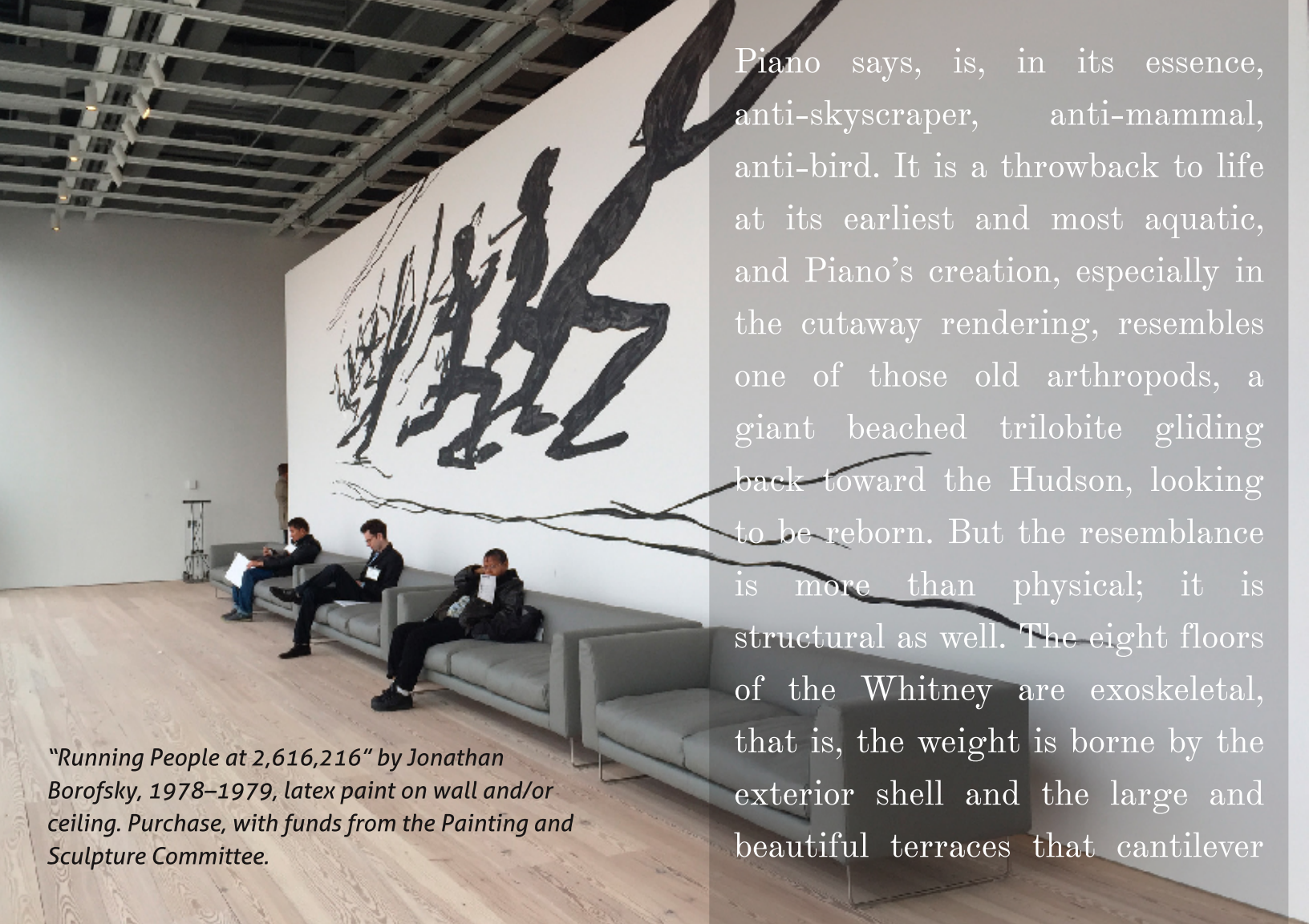
seeking out and making a space for the not-yet-imagined. Could — or should — the Whitney be anything else? A building designed “from the inside out,” as its architect Renzo



◀ *"Chinese Restaurant" by Max Weber (1881–1961), 1915, oil, charcoal and collaged paper on linen, 40 by 48 1/8 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, purchase. ©Estate of Max Weber*

"Pittsburgh" by Elsie Driggs (1895–1992), ► 1927, oil on canvas, 34¼ by 40¼ inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney.





Piano says, is, in its essence, anti-skyscraper, anti-mammal, anti-bird. It is a throwback to life at its earliest and most aquatic, and Piano's creation, especially in the cutaway rendering, resembles one of those old arthropods, a giant beached trilobite gliding back toward the Hudson, looking to be reborn. But the resemblance is more than physical; it is structural as well. The eight floors of the Whitney are exoskeletal, that is, the weight is borne by the exterior shell and the large and beautiful terraces that cantilever

"Running People at 2,616,216" by Jonathan Borofsky, 1978–1979, latex paint on wall and/or ceiling. Purchase, with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee.



magnificently from the upper floors. Piano's design makes it possible for the exhibition spaces inside to be open, to be free of pillars, I-beams and interior walls. There are no rooms in the new Whitney. There is only room, and lots of it. This will allow for an impressive and radical flexibility on each floor, and will accommodate all manner of exhibitions and works. Large windows at the west end of some

Installed in a stairwell, Felix Gonzalez-Torres's untitled (America), 1994, consists of 12 light strings, each with 42 15-watt light bulbs and rubber sockets, dimensions variable. Purchase, with funds from the Contemporary Painting and Sculpture Committee.

"Noise Number 13," by e.e. cummings, 1925, oil on canvas, 59 5/8 by 42 3/4 inches. Purchase, with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee.

of the floors connect the museum to the city. Large windows to the east connect the museum to the Hudson River and, as Piano observed at the press preview, "to the world beyond." Outdoor spaces that are and will be filled with art and a gallery of works on the first floor open to the public, free of charge, confirm Piano's



intention that there should be “no barrier between the city and the building.” For the first time, the Whitney will have a place for educational outreach for all ages, the Laurie M. Tisch Education Center, as well as a dedicated theater for live performances. Inside, the space has the feel of a downtown or outer-borough industrial warehouse converted to artists’ studios. The walls are factory gray and the floors, made of wide, reclaimed pine boards, shush under your feet as if they have been lightly sanded but not varnished. The smell



Fifth floor of the Whitney Museum of American Art. —Nic Lehoux photo



of freshly sanded wood is all that is lacking. With luck, some sculptor in residence will soon remedy that. Best of all, when you stand in front of one of the works of art, the building vanishes around it, just as the right

frame for a painting vanishes, enhancing the experience without making its presence felt.

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