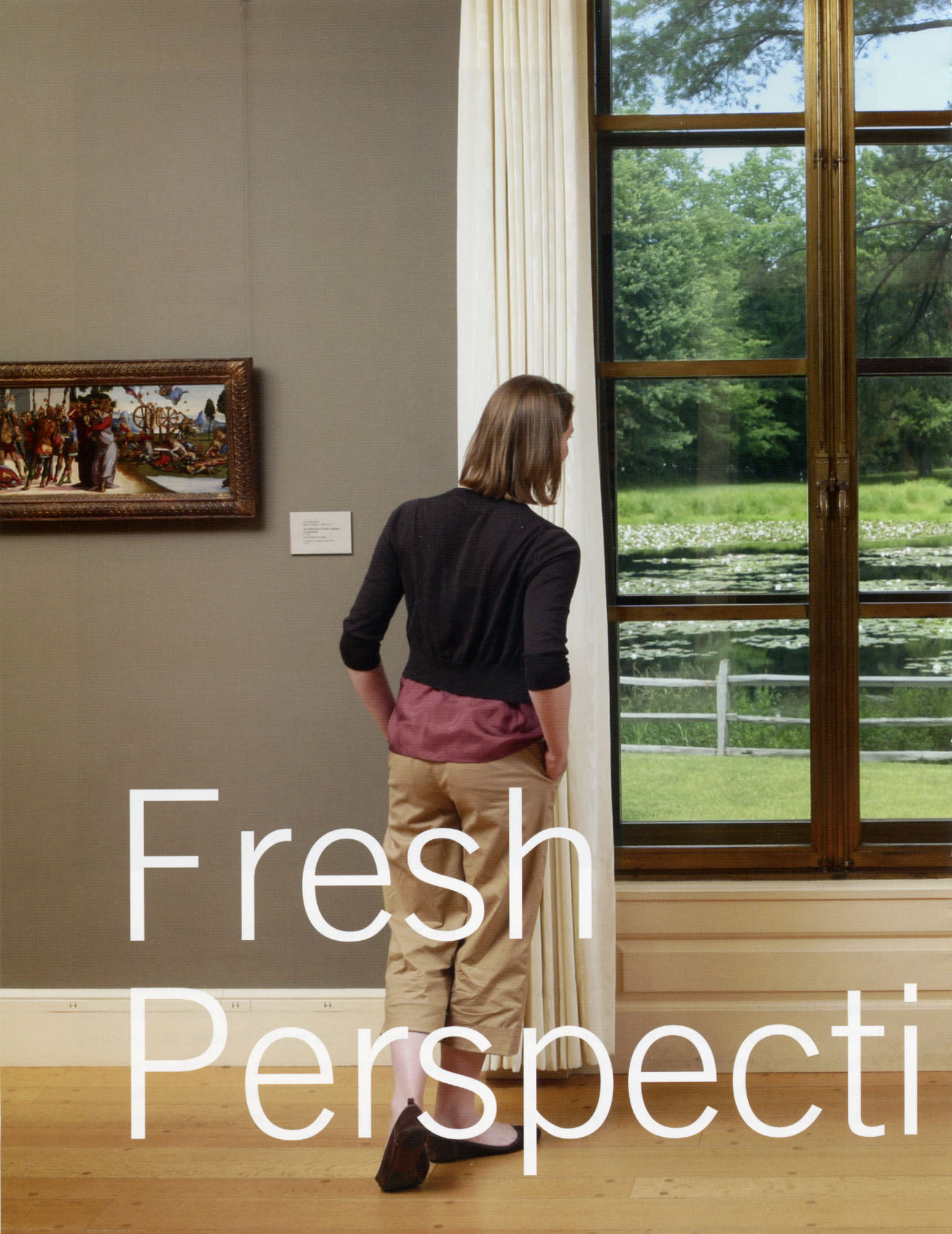
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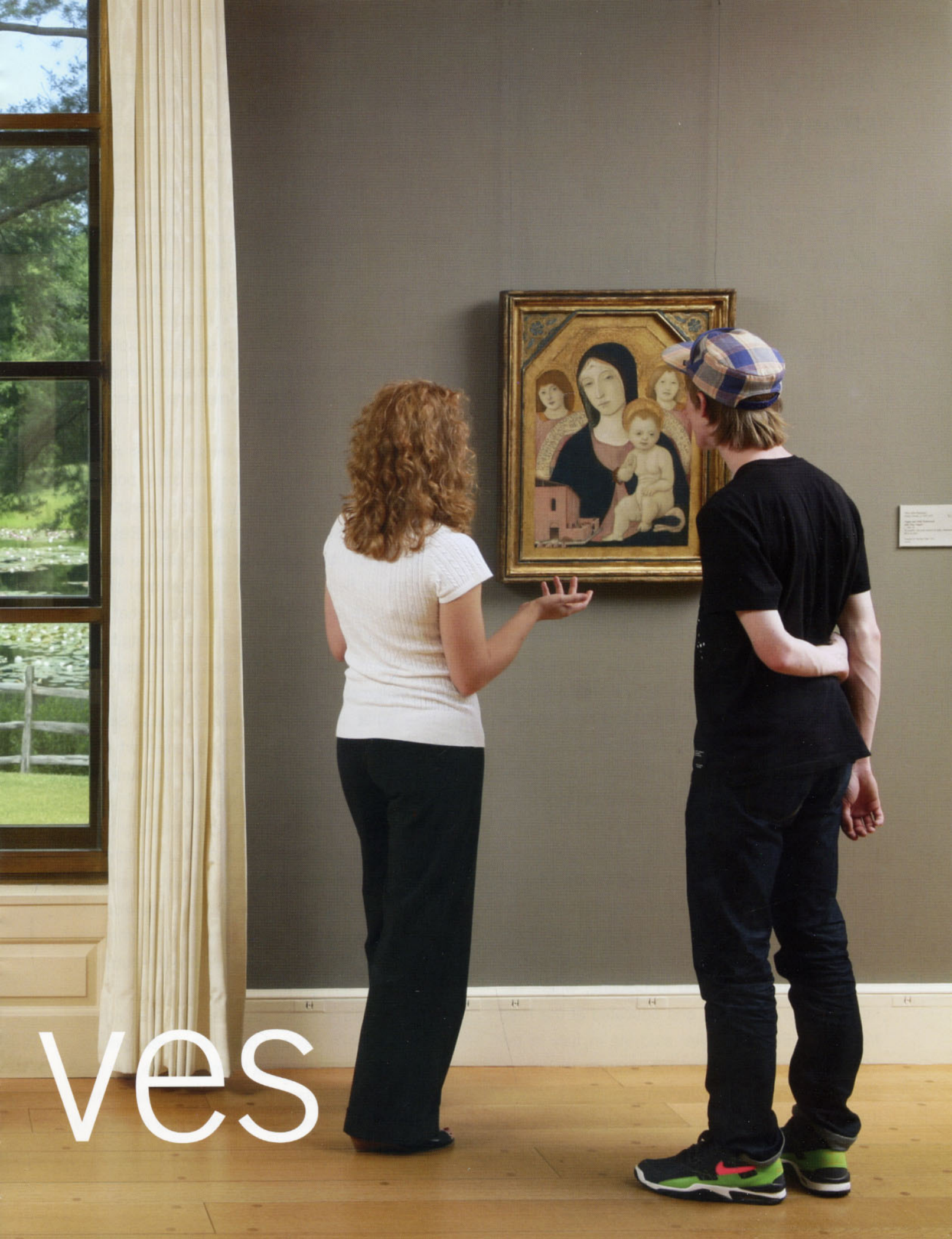
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Annabelle Selldorf is no stranger to high-profile projects. Three years ago, the architect's face stared down on Lower Manhattan from an eighty-foot-wide billboard.

(The sign advertised a condominium building called the Urban Glass House, its interiors designed by Selldorf with a nod to Philip Johnson.) A newer Selldorf-designed residential building, this one under construction on West Twenty-fourth Street, features a car elevator that will allow owners to "drive" to their front doors. (The developer is pitching the building to celebrities who want to evade paparazzi.) And yet Selldorf's work is anything but glitzy. At forty-seven, she has become one of the city's most respected architects by quietly attending to the details that make buildings feel right, often in subtle ways. Some of her contemporaries—including Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, and Daniel Libeskind—have developed signature styles. Selldorf, by contrast, says her architecture "is rarely about grand gestures. It's about clarity of thought." If you spend time in a Selldorf building, you might not know who had designed it, but you would know that someone had gotten the intangibles, including proportions, color, lighting, and circulation patterns, just right.

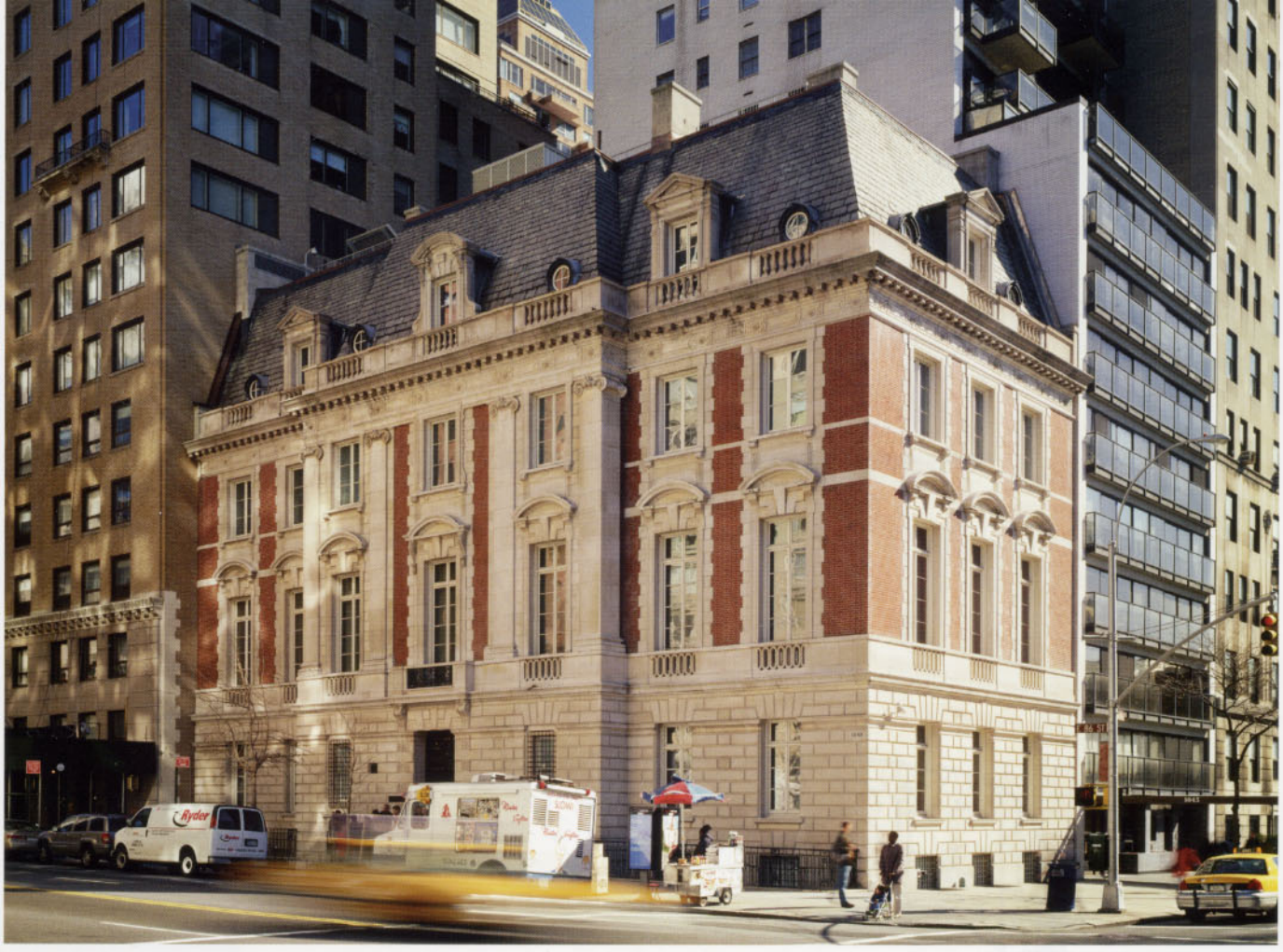
Selldorf was raised in Cologne, where her father was an architect, and educated at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. After studying in Italy in the 1980s and working for the architect Richard Gluckman, she founded her own firm in New York in 1991. She became known for designing environments for art, including studios (the artists David Salle and Jeff Koons are among her clients), galleries, and homes for prominent collectors. The success of those projects led to Selldorf's most public commission: transforming a brick and limestone mansion, designed in 1914 by the beaux-arts masters Carrère and Hastings, into the Neue Galerie, a museum of German and Austrian art founded by Ronald S. Lauder. When the Neue Galerie (at Fifth Avenue and Eighty-sixth Street in Manhattan) opened in 2001, one *New York Times* critic said the building was "nothing short of superb," explaining that Selldorf "has taken full advantage of what was already there" and at the same time "seamlessly added what was needed."

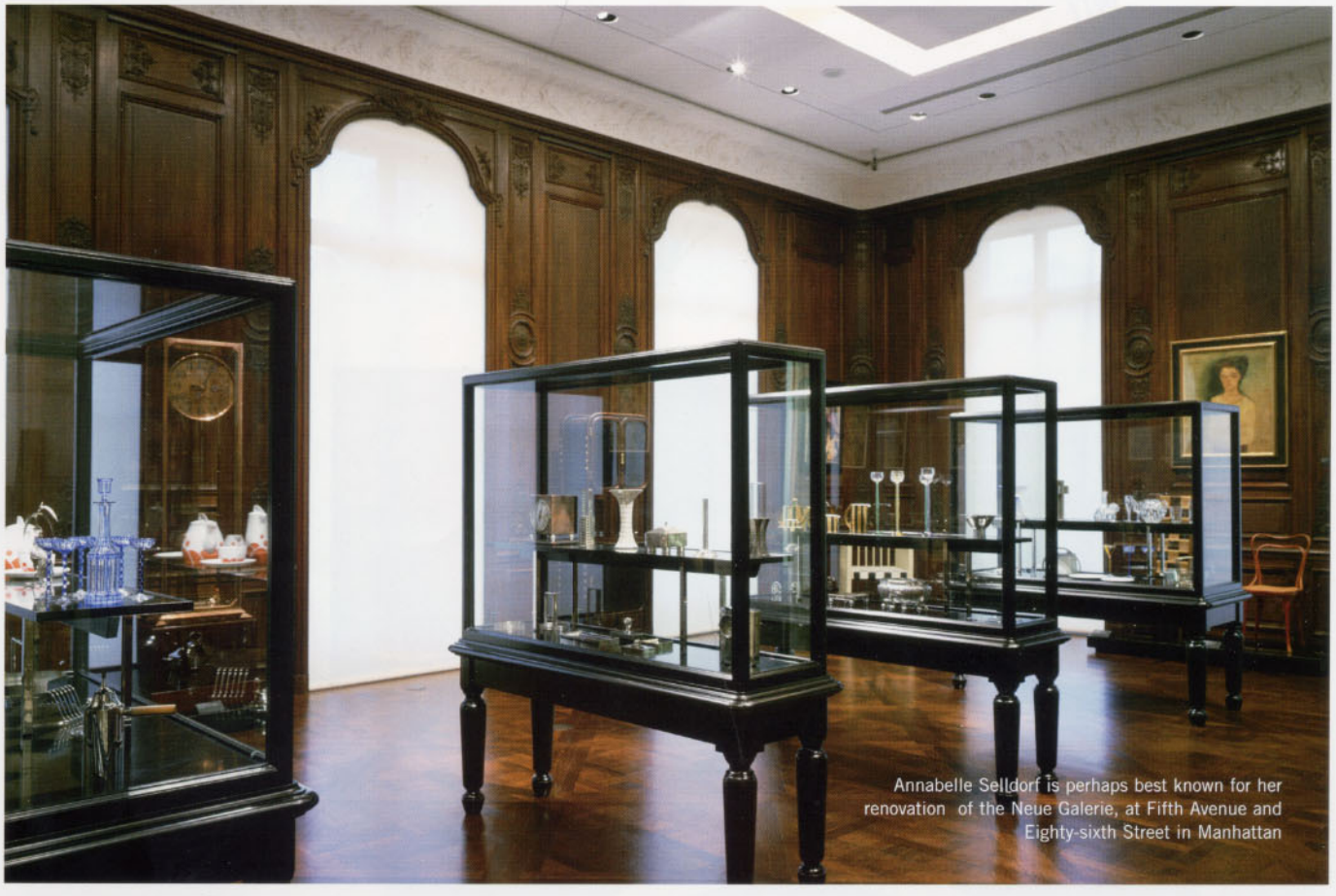
That sounds like a formula for her assignment at the Clark, where she will bring both the original white marble building (1955), designed by Daniel Perry, and the red granite Manton Research Center (1973), by Pietro Belluschi, into the twenty-first century. Selldorf has spent a great deal of time studying both structures. "It's not about what I like or don't like," she explains. "It's about taking inventory of what each building does and doesn't do. Being judgmental just gets in the way."

What the original building does, Selldorf says, is provide the opportunity to enjoy art in an almost domestic setting amid parklike surroundings, which was the intention of founders Sterling and Francine Clark. To maintain that intimacy while reorganizing the galleries, Selldorf will add some elements that look like they have always been part of the building. (At the Neue Galerie, she installed several arched openings to create a symmetrical arrangement, previously lacking, around the building's monumental stairway.)

There's a myth, says Selldorf, that vintage buildings, unlike modern buildings, "were perfect, and all we have to do is put them back the way they were." In fact, she says, "It's quite interesting when you dig deep and see that they're flawed in some of the same ways as modern buildings."

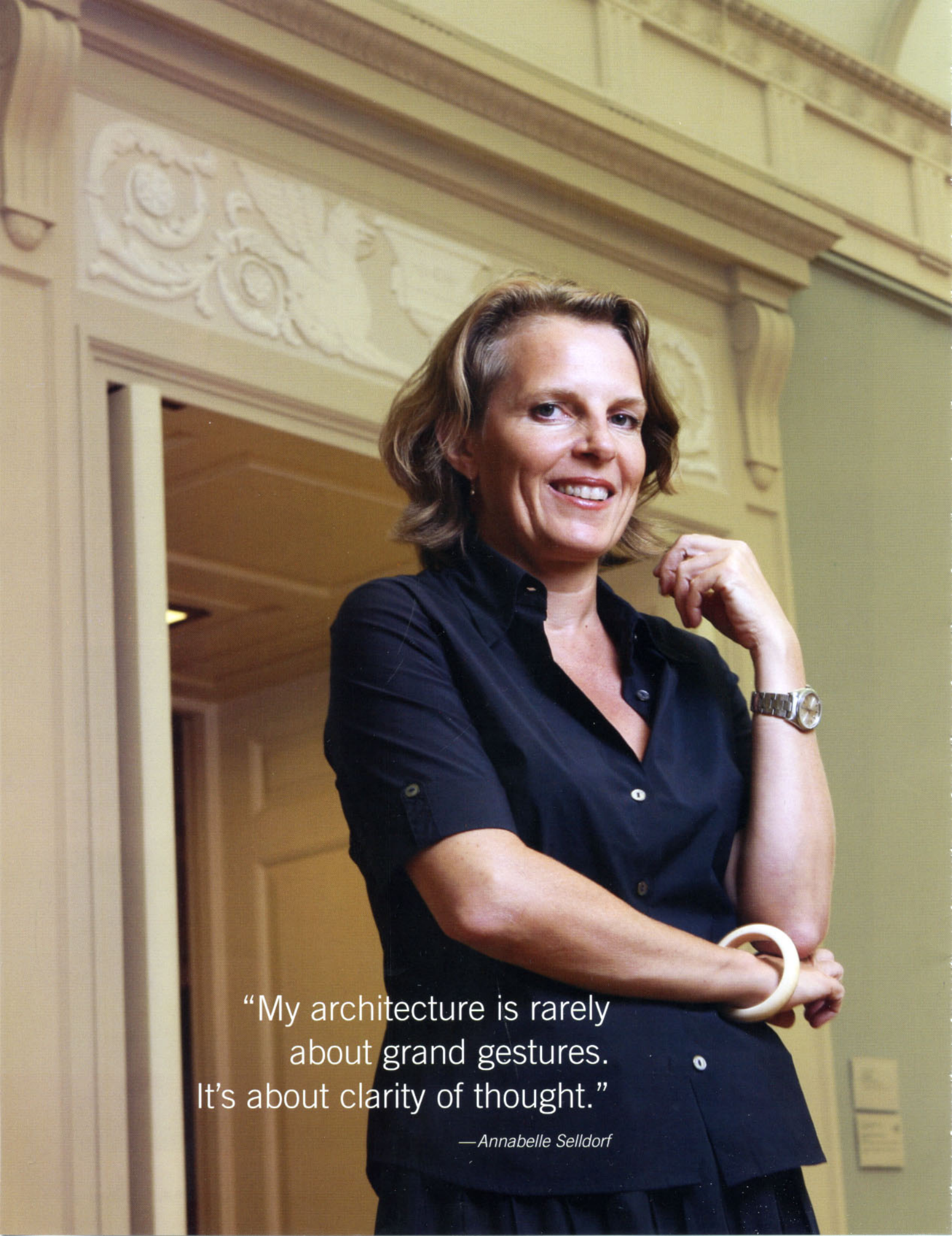
Selldorf's design for the Neue Galerie included several arched openings to improve the symmetry of the space around the main staircase





Annabelle Selldorf is perhaps best known for her renovation of the Neue Galerie, at Fifth Avenue and Eighty-sixth Street in Manhattan

Above and inset: Selldorf designed Hauser & Wirth London, a gallery located in a landmark building in Piccadilly by Sir Edwin Lutyens


"My architecture is rarely
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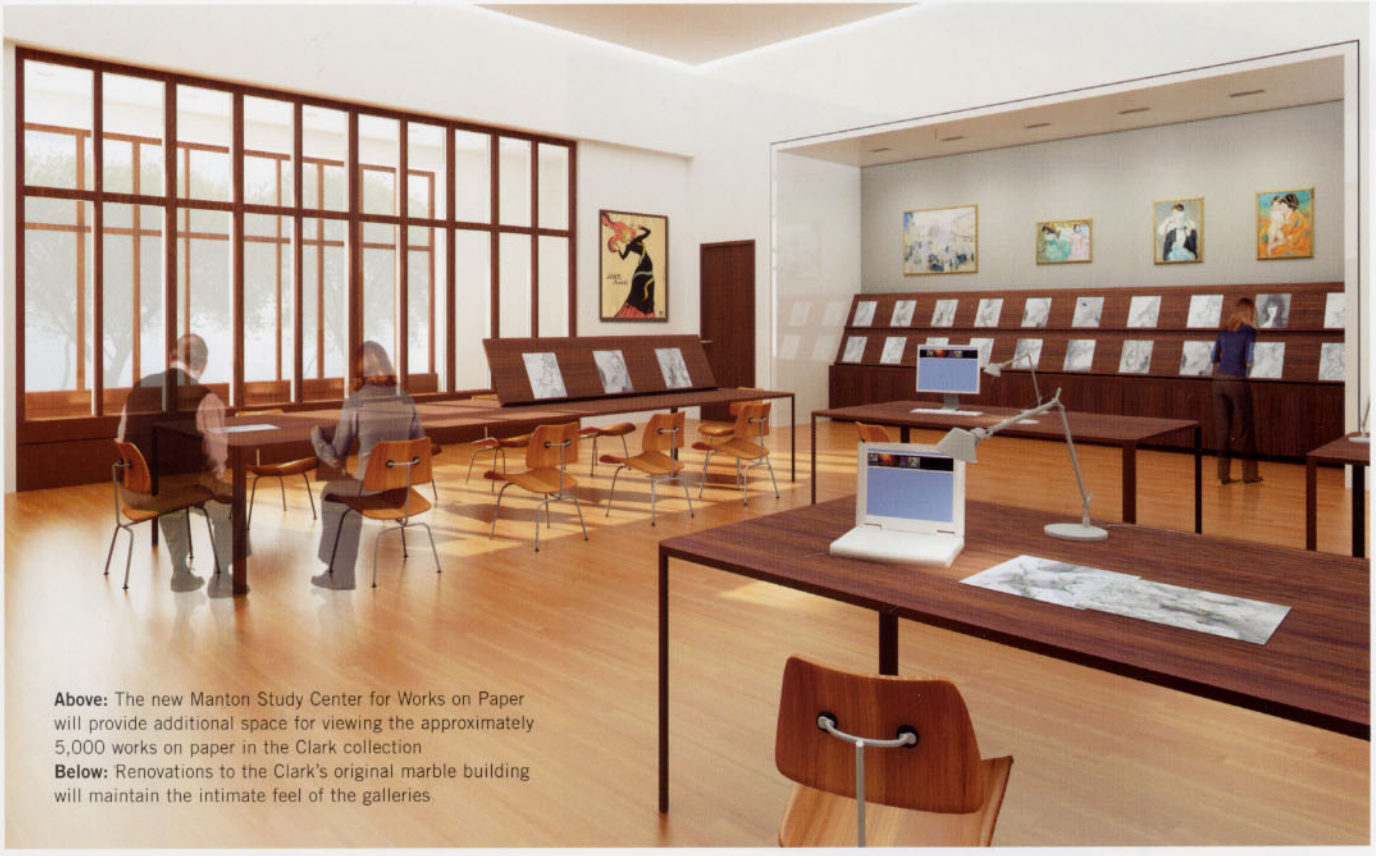
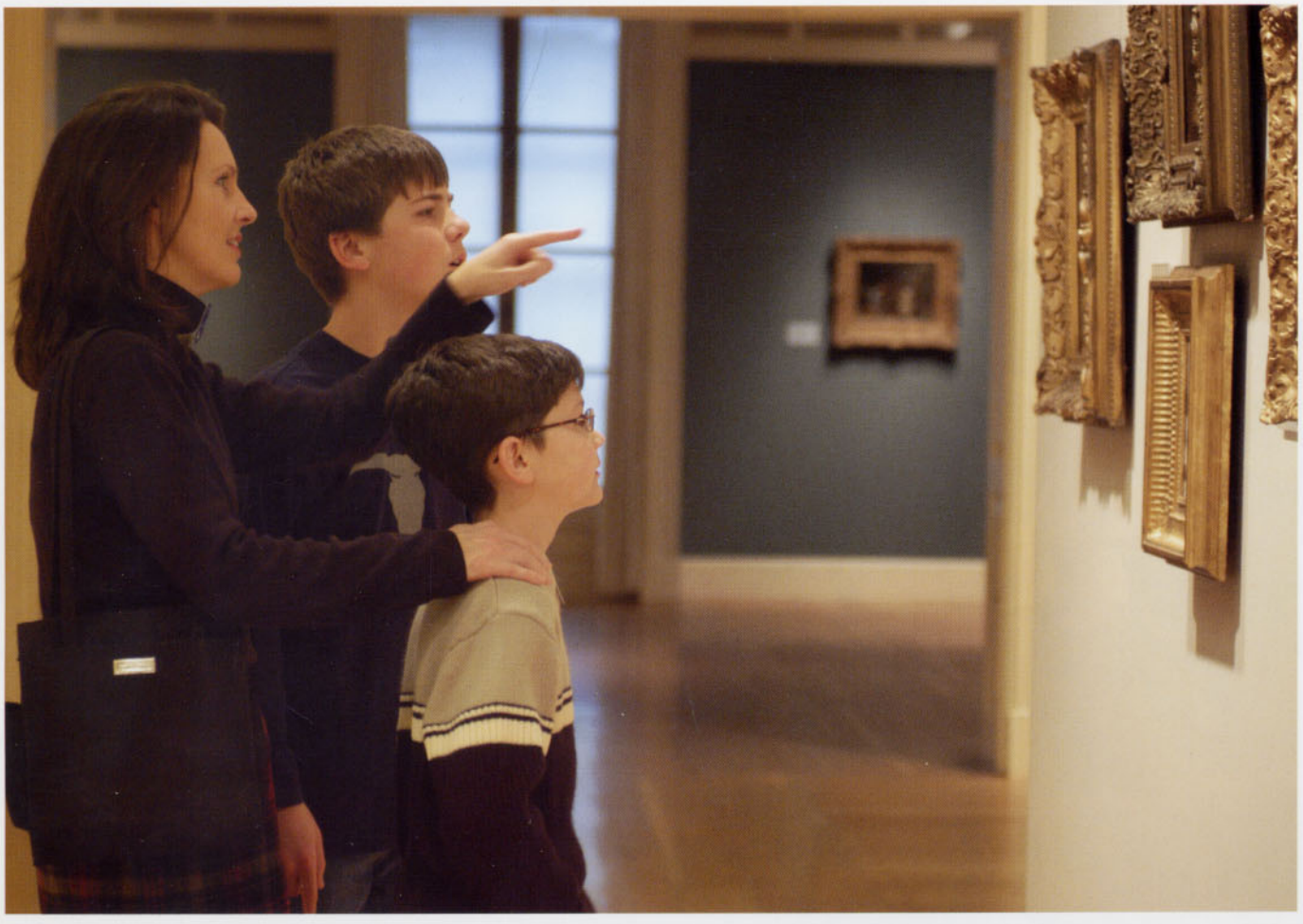


Above: The new Manton Study Center for Works on Paper will provide additional space for viewing the approximately 5,000 works on paper in the Clark collection
Below: Renovations to the Clark's original marble building will maintain the intimate feel of the galleries



The new central reading room in the Manton Research Center will offer a comfortable place for visitors to peruse the library collection

When her renovation is complete, the marble building—currently approached by way of a bridge from the Research Center—will have a new entrance. Though the task of designing the entrance has gone to Tadao Ando (architect for the new Exhibition, Visitor, and Conference Center), Selldorf welcomes the change. As she explains, visitors will now enter the building along its central axis (a partial reprise of the original scheme, when visitors walked through the front door, which faces South Street). From the central starting point, Selldorf will work to provide what she calls "a greater sense of ceremony in how one moves around the building." While her focus will be the main level, she will also annex several lower-level rooms now set aside for support functions. Those rooms will be reached via a stairway that Selldorf promises will be grand enough to entice people to make the trip (these galleries will be accessible via a new elevator as well). She will also be adding skylights to bring more natural light to the building and upgrading all of its lighting and mechanical systems.

At the same time, Selldorf will be making changes to the Research Center. No longer required to function as the Clark's lobby, the building will be reconfigured to provide a generous new reading room where visitors can take advantage of the many resources in the renowned art history library. As always, Selldorf hopes to reveal what is best about the building. "There are some wonderful spaces there, but you don't see them now," she says. "When the renovation is over, you will."

To Selldorf, architecture is, like politics, the art of the possible. Her practical approach is a result of a childhood spent observing carpenters, upholsterers, metalworkers, and other craftsmen at close range. Her father, Herbert Selldorf, designed interiors, then supervised the fabrication of the necessary elements in workrooms directly below the family's loft-like living quarters. Though Selldorf was fascinated by what she saw, she grew up determined not to become an architect—because, she says, her father worked too hard. But eventually, she says, "I discovered that architectural thinking came more naturally to me than any other kind of thinking." Like her father, she cares about each of the pieces that goes into her buildings, which is one reason she launched her own furniture company, called Vica. The pieces she designs are neither traditional nor modern but embody the best of both.

"There are some wonderful spaces there, but you don't see them now. When the renovation is over, you will."

—Annabelle Selldorf

The same can be said of Selldorf's architecture, which is meant not to show off, but to satisfy. Of the Clark, she says, "I really sincerely hope, when we're done with it, this is an even better place to look at art than it is now."

Fred Bernstein