Michael Wilford & Partners
The Lowry Performing and Visual Arts Center
Salford, England
1992 - 2000

The Lowry is a landmark catalyst building located on the Manchester shipping canal. Its program includes galleries for touring exhibits and Salford's Lowry collection, two performance theaters with supporting spaces, bar/restaurant/cafe facilities, and hospitality suites. The building of the cultural center was the first step taken towards the redevelopment of Salford’s old shipping docks.

Total Area: 24,000 sq. m
Cost: $94 Million

Program and Plan

Galleries, and public spaces flank a central bar of performance spaces. The main circulation of the building runs along its perimeter, taking advantage of water views. Additional programming includes suites, offices, and generous promenade and foyer spaces, all situated along the grand circulation path. The plan is organized so that everyone can make use of and enjoy the building's facilities, not only those who pay to see performances.

www.michaelwilford.com
Wilford describes the Lowry as “A collage, a mass, broken down to express what’s inside, which has the quality of an abstract sculpture, but which remains a logical, formal expression of its varied functions.” The application of various materials and color to different programmatic spaces enforces this idea.

Structurally, the Lowry is built as five separate buildings. The superstructure for each element is composite steel/concrete. Internal steel frames and cantilevered floor tiers support pre-cast concrete floor units in the theaters. In the gallery space, a full-depth structural truss supports both roof and floor.
Detail: Foyer

The foyer of the Lowry has a 16m high curved glass facade. The Lyric Theater rises behind it. The foyer has a stainless steel insulated roof supported by a series of painted 350x350 mm cruciform steel columns and tapered I-section beams and purlins. The facade which leans forward is formed of 25 mm single-glazed laminated glass panels set between composite I-section stainless steel nullions. The facade is faceted at the mullions to form the curve. The I-sections are made of flat plates to accommodate the changes in angle. Because the foyer is an interstitial space, the facade is single-glazed and uninsulated, consisting of 2.9x2.4m glass.
Diagrams:

Program:
blue - theaters
yellow - public spaces
red - galleries

Circulation
Path vs. building mass
Diagrams:

Glazing:
Opaque vs. Transparent

Color:
Application of various colors and materials

Phasing Diagrams