

TONY FRETTON ARCHITECTS

Camden Arts Centre

London, UK
2004

Camden Arts Centre is a publicly funded contemporary visual arts centre in North London, which has mounted a successful programme of exhibitions and education from the Victorian former library building it has occupied since the 1970s. The building was well liked by its public, but sorely in need of repair and also substantial replanning to allow Camden Arts Centre to fully realise its programme.

The centrepiece of our scheme is a public concourse in the ground floor extending from the entrance on the street to an extensive garden behind the building. The existing bookshop is given greater commercial and social strength by being situated close to the entrance and configured as part of the route.

Just inside the entrance the public art studio comes in to view, followed by the stair up to the galleries on the first floor, seen side by side with the entrance to the café that opens to the garden.

A screen wall shields the garden and café from the noise and intrusiveness of the adjacent highway. Made of glass it dramatically connects these spaces to the neighbourhood and experience of passing traffic.

For the galleries, our strategy was to make our work almost invisible, disguising it to look like the original fabric. The character of these spaces, so greatly liked by the Camden Art Centre's public, has been preserved while their functionality has been radically improved.

The project was recognised in the Camden Design Awards 2004 and was nominated for the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture Mies Van de Rohe Award 2005.

"The found spaces have been left to speak of their history and genius but it is the way in which old butts up to new and spaces are woven into one another and juxtaposed that makes this a delightful and intelligent building ... one of our finest venues for appreciating contemporary art."

Edwin Heathcote
Financial Times





“Fretton has created something that is powerful without being ostentatious, and intelligent without being precious. It is a rare triumph of substance over style.”

Rowan Moore
London Evening Standard

