

Press Release

Local Architect's Mingei International Museum Project Wins National Honor for Excellence *Luce et studio Honored with Prestigious AIA Architecture Award*

JULY 8, 2024, SAN DIEGO, CA – Last month, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) proudly announced the winners of its AIA Awards 2024 at an event in Washington DC at the National Building Museum. Distinguished architects, industry professionals, and supporters attended to honor outstanding achievements in nine award categories.

Local architect Jennifer Luce, FAIA of Luce et studio architects was recognized with a prestigious Honor Award for Interior Architecture for Mingei International Museum. The honor, celebrating the most innovative and spectacular interior spaces in the country, was given for the architect's work transforming the Museum in Balboa Park. This is only the fifth time the award has been presented to a San Diegan since the awards were founded in 1949.

<https://mingei.org/transformation>

“This award is a celebration of the collaborative efforts that infused this remarkable project with social vibrancy and community spirit. The Museum, its leadership, generous donors and our entire design team worked tirelessly to transform Mingei for Balboa Park and for our city,” said Luce.

For more than 40 years, the Mingei International Museum has exhibited and commissioned folk art, craft and design, celebrating human creativity and a diverse range of objects from around the world. Originally planned as a refresh of the entry experience, this \$55 million transformation has made its collection of nearly 30,000 objects from 146 countries more accessible and repositioned the Museum to create a more lively and engaging visitor experience.

The transformation revealed a new and dynamic Museum with enhancements and improvements to the 1915 Spanish Colonial-style House of Charm including adding 10,000 square feet of space for exhibitions and programming, a new theater and education center and amenities including a cafe, gift shop and coffee bar. The total finished square footage is now over 50,000 square feet. In partnership with Mingei, the nationally recognized LUCE et studio envisioned the Museum's physical transformation focusing on artist collaborations, accessibility, functionality, well-crafted and inspiring design.

“The Luce et studio designed transformation of Mingei has achieved its visionary goals,” said Jessica Hanson York, the Museum's executive director. “With increased space for gathering and programming, improved connections to the outdoors, and examples of Mingei's commitment to craftsmanship evident throughout the building, we are a more accessible, dynamic and welcoming museum.”

The project began as an RFP shortlist of operational renovations aimed at enhancing daily work and storage spaces and updating floors and lighting systems. After numerous conversations, the design team uncovered an opportunity to not only provide functional change but also adjust the building and its programming to open its wealth of cultural history to the communities it welcomes.

Following six months of studying the museum's craft collection and understanding how its wisdom could be shared more widely, the team used the surrounding historic Balboa Park as a catalyst for the extensive, respectful change that would open the building to the landscape. Programming also expanded to include a new education center, demonstration gallery, and theater that offers space for the Museum and community-driven events. Outdoor terraces and courtyards provide space for public gatherings, while a new arts library draws the public in to learn and study. The Museum's entry level has quickly become Balboa Park's new living room.

The Museum erases the boundaries between indoors and out, art and craft, and gallery and community space. Throughout, artist commissions and objects inspire curiosity and welcome visitor interaction. It's not uncommon to observe teenagers sitting on a George Nakashima bench or visitors pondering the stamped metal ceiling that floats above the Museum's cafe. The architecture now plays a significant role in the visitor's journey through Mingei.

Construction was completed successfully despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Museum reopened to the public in September, 2021. The annual attendance has more than doubled since that time. Memberships, revenues, and use of the theater space by community groups have also dramatically increased, cementing Mingei's vital role in the community.

For more information on the 2024 AIA Awards and to view the winning projects, visit [AIA Awards](#).

Interior Architecture Awards: Celebrating the most innovative and spectacular interior spaces across a range of projects. See the winners [here](#).

<https://www.aia.org/about-aia/press/aia-awards-2024-winners-announced-nine-project-categories>

Photo caption: Kei Tsukamoto, Luce et studio; Maureen King, Chair Emerita, Mingei Board of Trustees; Lori Krause, Luce et studio; Jennifer Luce, FAIA Luce et studio; Jessica Hanson York, Executive Director & CEO, Mingei International Museum.

ABOUT MINGEI INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM

Located in San Diego's Balboa Park, Mingei International Museum collects, preserves and exhibits folk art, craft and design from all eras and cultures of the world. Within a newly reopened facility that includes an education center, theater, shop, restaurant and plenty of free, accessible public space, the Museum offers inspiring exhibitions and diverse community and educational programs to more than 100,000 visitors a year. As the presenter of San Diego Design Week and a partner to over 50 local artists and art and cultural organizations, Mingei puts celebrating creativity at the core of its mission through workshops, film festivals, lectures and more. Mingei is a nonprofit institution funded by admission, individuals, and institutional support.

ABOUT Luce et studio

Designer Artist Architect Jennifer Luce established LUCE et studio in 1990, since building a practice that merges the languages of industrial manufacturing and refined minimalism to create architecture distinguished by material innovations and spatial transitions. Her own artistic influences and discoveries stem from her family's background in textile design and art, evident in each carefully composed work.

LUCE et studio routinely uses new technologies to innovate while seeking an authenticity that speaks to the tactility and narrative of handcraft. The threshold between the two worlds is a conversation explored at each level of execution, from concept and precise detailing to final construction. The studio has garnered 32 American Institute of Architects (AIA) awards and a Business Week "Design Excellence Award" and was honored as "Design Vanguard of the Year" by Architectural Record Magazine. www.lucestudio.com

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