

## Under the Radar: East Oakland School of the Arts, Oakland Stoner Meek Architecture and Urban Design, San Francisco



East Oakland School of the Arts (EOSA) forms a geographic and cultural elision between a creek that connects the Oakland hills to San Francisco Bay and the tense urban jungle that is East Oakland. Supported by funding from the State of California, the former Castlemont High School campus has been divided into four “small schools,” of which EOSA is one. The project reuses an old, long-abandoned industrial arts

building at the edge of the campus. Whether industrial or fine, the arts are about making things, and the building celebrates this spirit of anticipation, of the unfinished, of evolving creative and productive energy. The design vocabulary emphasizes building as backdrop, students and their work as foreground. The architects abstracted the form of the original industrial shed into fragments of walls rather than rooms, patches of sunlight rather than institutionalized enclosures, ambiguities of interiority rather than the explicitness of inside and out.

A concrete wall formed with wave-like boards—a symbolic representation of the creek—serves for sitting, for supporting a gallery, as a table for sculpture, as an articulation of an enclosed outdoor space, and as a reflection of handcraft and material. Images of the trees along the creek are imprinted through layers of fence and building as sculpture, etching, shadow, and text.



Five narrow windows along the north wall—which has been disengaged from the five bays of the building by a swath of openings running the length of the building—offer not views but instead a more subtle relation to the outdoors, through light and a place to read. At each window is a lectern that holds a book that has become a part of the school’s curriculum. A quotation from the book’s author is etched into the window, along with images of birds, some in flight, others perched on a line of text. The architects share with the school community the belief that words carry

far greater weight than buildings in the establishment of cultural and social values, so the architecture is a backdrop for words as well as for social exchange. At the end of one of the academic halls is the complete text of Martin Luther

King Jr’s “I Have a Dream” speech, stenciled onto the concrete wall in red paint, a block of text eight feet wide and twelve feet high. Above, two skylights illuminate phrases at random as the sun moves across the sky, and at these moments one will occasionally hear a student exclaim, “Let Freedom Ring!”



*Project Team Architect: Stoner Meek Architecture and Urban Design*

*Architects: Jill Stoner and Susannah Meek*

*Project Designers: Dan Perez and Katharine Favret*

*Owner: Oakland Unified School District*

*M.E.P. Engineer: United Engineers of San Francisco*

*Structural Engineer: Santos & Urrutia Structural Engineers*

*General Contractor: Kudsk Construction*

*Tree Translation: Carla Dominguez*