The Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art opened to the public in 1933 with a large collection of “Oriental Art” donated by the collector and advocate of art education, Gertrude Bass Warner. Warner’s interest in “presenting to the students and the public the ideas of fellowship, friendship and love toward our neighbors across the Pacific” was progressive for the 1930s. However, as scholars have pointed out, art museums have developed in conjunction with racism, imperialism, and colonialism.

The recent movements of decolonizing the museum (or decolonizing this place) all around the world recognize such ongoing institutional legacies and calls for rethinking museum practices. In line with this movement, many of JSMA’s temporary exhibitions and activities directly and indirectly challenge the traditional Eurocentric model. How can the building contribute to this effort?

This project is the renovation of JSMA which responds to both physical needs (such as acoustics and circulation) and cultural needs to respond to contemporary values. Mainly focusing on the lobby area, courtyard, lecture hall, and a new café, we will work closely with JSMA leaders to identify the needs and explore design solutions. Throughout the term, we will combine design explorations with reading, discussion, case study, and analyses. We will engage with ideas from other disciplines, especially art. Teamwork in encouraged.