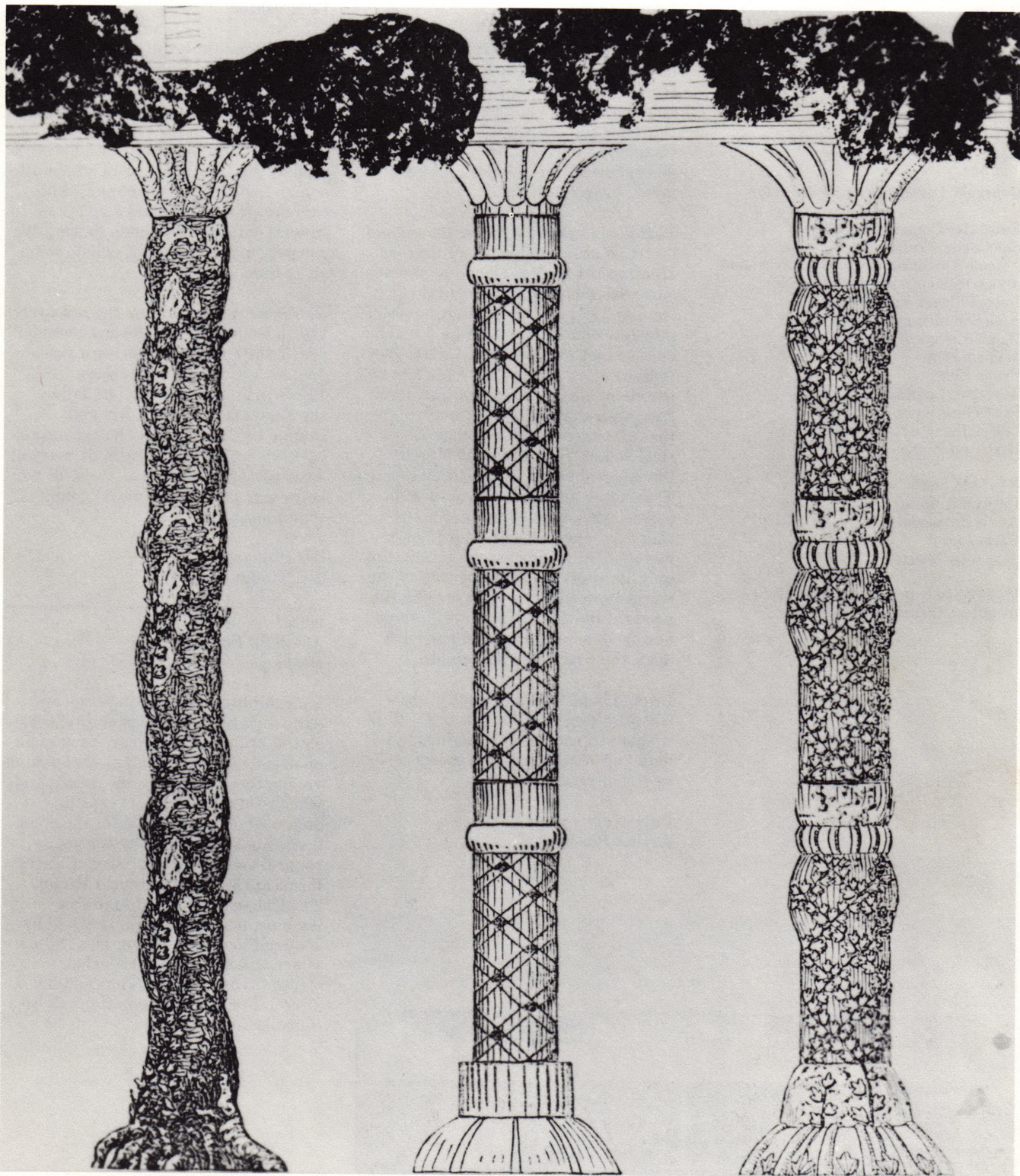


# OCULUS

on current new york architecture

The New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects

Volume 42, Number 8, May 1981



*Hugh Hardy & Jack Beal/Sondra Freckleton. Collaboration: Artists & Architects, The Architectural League of New York*



## OCULUS

## Letters

Volume 42, Number 8, May 1981

### Oculus

Editor: Andrew P. MacNair  
Managing Editor: Alexandra S. Morphett  
Staff: William Eitner

The New York Chapter of the American  
Institute of Architects  
The Urban Center, 457 Madison Avenue,  
New York, New York 10022

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Dear Editor:

I am hoping that the "Trouble in Utopia" episode of the Robert Hughes series "The Shock of the New" will not go unnoticed by the Institute. This third installment, broadcast over Channel 13 in New York dealt with the emergence of the "Modern Movement" in architecture.

Beside innumerable misstatements of fact, this program dismisses modern architecture for its "alarming obsession with social hygiene" and the "miles of jerry-built, platonic nowhere, infested with Volkswagens." A reference to Le Corbusier's *Villa Savoye* as "ruined after a few years exposure to the elements" equates poor maintenance with worthless architecture. By that standard we may dismiss Classical Sculpture because, as Martin Pawley points out in the RIBA Journal (December, 1980) the Venus de Milo has no arms. Pawley further notes that it is "one of the great ironies of history that modern architecture, the only architecture in the history of the world avowedly based on serving the needs of the mass of humanity, should now be denounced as inhuman with not a voice raised in its defense."

I would hope that members of the Chapter would not let this letter pass without introducing a long delayed dialogue on the very real issues raised by the program and book.

Very truly yours,  
Arthur Rosenblatt

Dear Editor:

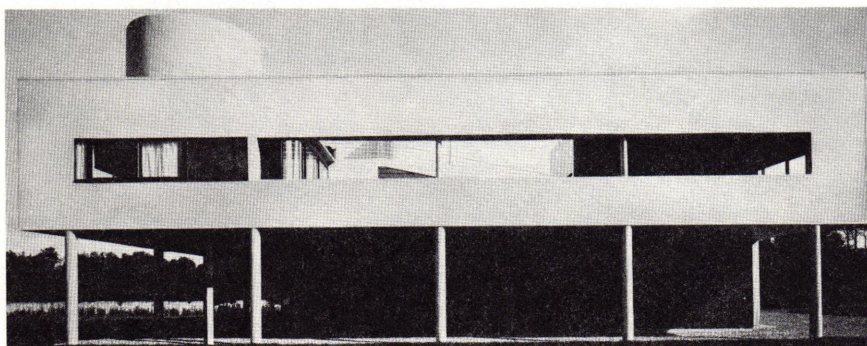
OCULUS might be interested to know that the Federal Hall National Memorial (the Old Sub-Treasury on Wall Street) is going to show my exhibition *America's Architectural Heritage* from May 12th to June 10th. This is an exhibit that I ran up for SITES (Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service) a few years ago. Its several editions have been touring the country, and apparently, will do so for some time.

The show stemmed from the research I have been doing for the last twelve years, the end product being a three-volume 'guide' to Architecture USA. This will be published in late fall by the Museum of Modern Art and Doubleday Inc. You may have seen an early spinoff in my Pictorial History of Architecture in America (I will let you know when the guide-encyclopedia comes out.)

Best Regards  
G E Kidder Smith

Note:  
**A Call for Projects**  
*Responses to the City*

An exhibition of work by young architects is being sponsored by the Architectural League of New York as an open invitation to architects who think young, think that they are young, and who are also under 35; excepting students, who are ineligible for the open invitational, due to being too young, regardless of their age. Pick up entry forms at the Architectural League, The Urban Center, 457 Madison Avenue. A special committee will be selected to review the entries in June, which will be hung in the Urban Center in September. The deadline is June 1. For more information call Lisa Senauke at 753-1722.





# Chapter Notes

George Lewis

## Forty-Second Street Development Project

UDC and Alexander Cooper of Cooper/Eckstut Associates presented plans at an open meeting April 23rd. It is expected that Requests for Proposals/RFP's will be issued shortly.

## Residential Design Awards/AIA Convention Matters/Prospective Members

A meeting and reception, announced in an earlier mailing, should make an exceptionally interesting evening. At this writing Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer are expected to be present, and there will be refreshments.

## Large City Chapters

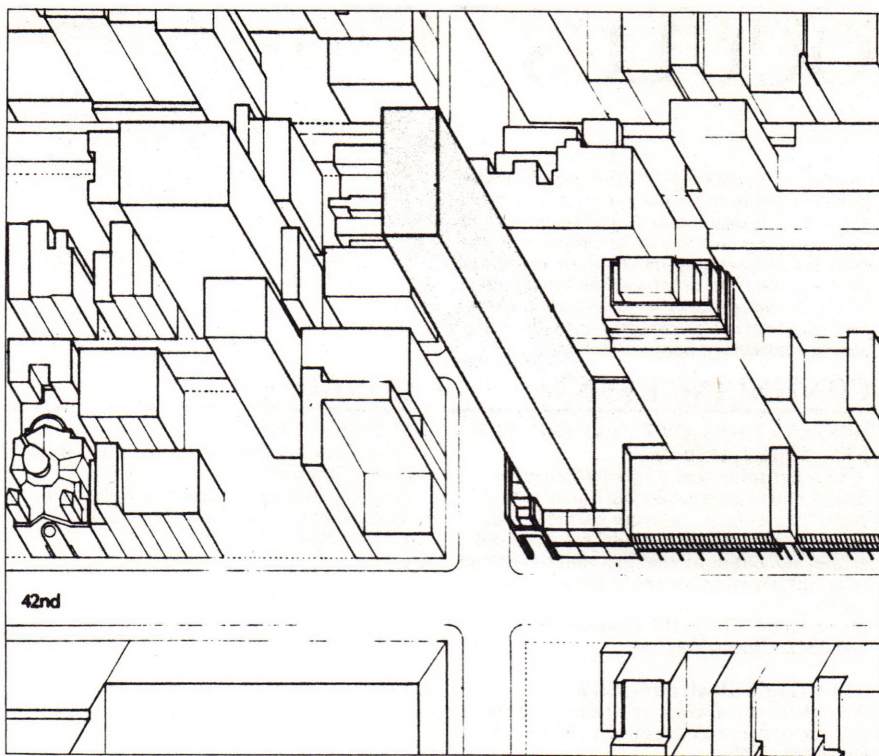
George Lewis attended a meeting of representatives of large city chapters in Chicago March 23. Such chapter's concerns and activities are in many ways quite different from those of national AIA and state components, and there will be a continuing effort to exchange ideas and experiences and to make national AIA more aware and supporting of what we do.

## History of New York Architects, 1900-1941

This history of architects and their practice in this area is surprisingly sparse, especially in the early twentieth century, and the New York Committee for Preservation of Architectural Records, NY/COPAR, and the Chapter have joined forces to collect such information as may have once been common knowledge before it is irretrievably lost. This will be a pilot project in hopes that similar efforts will be made nationally through the AIA. Forms detailing the kind of information being sought are available at the Chapter office, and it is hoped that many people will cooperate in documenting the unwritten history of architectural practice in New York. Catha Grace Rambusch, John C.B. Moore and Daniel Brunetto are directing the project.

## Battery Park City

UDC and Stanton Eckstut of Cooper/Eckstut Associates discussed RFP's at a meeting for Chapter firms on April 8.



## "Design for Moving People" Conference

This important meeting concerned with design excellence in transportation facilities May 14-15 at the Biltmore will be co-sponsored by the Chapter, Public Technology, Inc., the American Public Transit Association and AMTRAK. Detailed information will be mailed to Chapter members about this ambitious examination of how transportation environments can be improved.

## Energy Awards Program

The Energy & Environment Committee, William Meyer, chairman, is planning an awards program for the Fall to seek out examples of well-designed buildings incorporating considerations of energy conservation.

## AIA Convention

### Minneapolis May 17-21

New Yorkers are impressively represented among those who will receive awards. Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates has won the Architectural Firm Award, the second straight year (last year it was Edward L. Barnes Associates) that this prestigious award has come to New York. Marcel Breuer will receive the AIA/ACSA Award for Excellence in Architectural Education. Medalists include Paul Goldberger, Edison Price, Ken Smelson and Herman Miller, Inc. We are delighted that Doris Freedman, recently President of the Municipal Art Society and active in so many other ways, will be made an Honorary Member, as will Martin Schaum, NYSAA legislative consultant.

The principal agenda item will be discussion of Resolution A-1, passed a year ago, which called for a reevaluation of the AIA at all levels; a Chapter paper on this subject is being prepared at this writing.

Bill Rose of White Plains, currently a Director, is a candidate for Vice President and will receive New York support. Of the three candidates for President-Elect — Jay Barnes of Austin, Texas, Robert Broshar of Waterloo, Iowa, and George Notter of Boston — it was the sense of the Executive Committee at its April 2 meeting that Notter should be supported.

Members who expect to attend the convention should call the Chapter office concerning appointment as delegates. A Chapter meeting Monday, May 11 will deal with convention matters.

## Compensation Survey

A special committee of the Chapter will conduct a survey of firms to ascertain information about staff compensation — salary ranges, fringe benefits, etc. The survey begins in May. Frank Munzer, head of this committee, believes that if everybody cooperates, the committee hopes to have its results out by the fall. The survey will be useful for employers in the management of their firms.



MAY 1981

# OCULUS

Oculus welcomes information for the calendar pertaining to public events about architecture. It is due by the 7th of the month for the following month's issue. Because of the time lag between information received and printed, the final details of the events are likely to change. It is recommended, therefore, that events be checked with the sponsoring institution before attending.

## CONTINUING EVENTS

### OBSERVATIONS ABOUT LIGHT IN THE NEW YORK LANDSCAPE

A photographic series by Phyllis Dukes, documenting and exploring linear reflection, mirror-image, glaring surfaces that alter our perception of multi-colored landscape, and daylight changes that determine what information we see in the environment.

Amos Eno Gallery, 101 Wooster St., 226-5342. Closes May 14

### ARCHITECTURAL IMAGERY

An exhibition of work by Francoise Schein. Greene Space, 105 Greene St., 925-3775. Closes May 27

### COLLABORATION: ARTISTS AND ARCHITECTS

The Architectural League, in celebration of its 100th anniversary, commissioned 11 teams of American artists and architects to present a project that addresses the most significant architectural problem of the decade ahead.

New York Historical Society, 170 C.P.W., 873-3400. Closes June 7

### RARE PHOTOGRAPHS

An exhibition of approximately 40 calotype prints from the mid-19th century by British amateur photographer, Alfred Capel-Cure. His work is imbued by a recognizable personality, and he has succeeded in capturing the lyricism of his native landscape and the beauty of its architecture.

Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd St., 956-6100. Closes June 28

### SIAH ARMAJANI

"Office of Four," an exhibition of new work by Mr. Armajani and Cynthia Carlson. Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, 914-963-4550. Closes July 5

### ARSHILE GORKY, 1904-1948: RETROSPECTIVE

The most comprehensive exhibition ever mounted of this artist's work traces the Armenian-born Gorky's career from his emigration to the U.S. in 1920 until his tragic death in 1948; and includes 250 paintings and works on paper.

Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Ave., 860-1300. Closes July 19

## MONDAY 4

### ALVAR AALTO

"The Future of Modernism." A lecture by David Pearson.

The City College, Townsend Harris Hall Auditorium, Amsterdam Ave. & 139th St. 6:30pm. May 4

## MONDAY 11

### RECEPTION AND AWARDS PRESENTATION

RESIDENT DESIGN AWARDS PRESENTATION HONORING HARDY HOLZMAN PFEIFFER, ASSOCIATES, 1981 ARCHITECTURE AWARD RECIPIENT.

NYC/AIA, CHAPTER HEADQUARTERS, THE URBAN CENTER, 457 MADISON AVE., 838-9670. 5:30PM. MAY 11

## MONDAY 18

### 4TH ANNUAL GOODSON SYMPOSIUM ON AMERICAN ART

This symposium for graduate students and scholars beginning careers in the study of American art, is designed to identify new talent in the field of American art studies. Various forms of cultural production, including architecture will be analyzed.

Whitney Museum, Madison Ave. at 75th St. For more information call 570-3633. May 18

## MONDAY 25

## TUESDAY 5

### WORK IN PROGRESS: LECTURE

A lecture by Charles Gwathmey and Robert Siegel.

Architectural League, The Urban Center, 457 Madison Ave., 753-1722. 6:30pm. Members free, nonmembers \$5.00. May 5

## TUESDAY 12

### AMERICA'S ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

An exhibition by G.E. Kidder Smith from twelve years of research on the pictorial history of architecture in America. The Federal Hall National Memorial The Old Sub-Treasury Building, Wall Street Opens May 12, through June 10

## TUESDAY 19

## TUESDAY 26

### ARTISTS MAKE ARCHITECTURE

A group show of constructions by artists. Rosa Esman Gallery, 29 West 47th St., 421-9490. Opens May 26, closes June 27

### THE END OF THE ROAD

John Margolies looks at seven decades of roadside architecture and artifacts. Architectural League, The Urban Center, 457 Madison Ave., 753-1722. 6:30pm. Members free, nonmembers \$5.00. May 26



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## WEDNESDAY 6

### ANTHONY WALMSEY LECTURES

Part of the lecture series about landscape architecture, coordinated by M. Paul Friedberg.

Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 2 East 91st St., 860-6868. 6:15pm. May 6

### INTERIOR DESIGN: THE INSIDE STORY

As part of the Van Day Treux Lectures, Angelo Donghia will lecture from 5:00 to 6:15pm. Massimo and Lela Vignelli, from 6:30 to 7:45pm. Barbaralee Diamonstein is the moderator.

Parsons School of Design, 66 West 12th St., 741-5610. \$7.00. May 6

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## WEDNESDAY 13

### DESIGN FOR MOVING PEOPLE

An exhibition of design innovations in mass transit transportation throughout the country, coordinated by Public Technology, Inc. Municipal Arts Society, Urban Center, 457 Madison Ave., 935-3960. Opens May 13

### NICHOLAS QUENNELL

Part of the lecture series about landscape architecture.

Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 2 East 91st St., 860-6868. 6:15pm. May 13

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## WEDNESDAY 20

### INTERIOR DESIGN: THE INSIDE STORY #8

The last in the series of the Van Day Treux Lectures, with Ward Bennett as guest lecturer. Moderated by Barbaralee Diamonstein.

Parsons School of Design, 66 West 12th St., 741-5610. 5:45-7:15pm. \$7.00. May 20

### ROBIN WATSON LECTURES

Part of the lecture series about landscape architecture

Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 2 East 91st St., 860-6868. 6:15pm May 20

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## WEDNESDAY 27

### VANISHING ROADSIDE ARCHITECTURE IN AMERICA

"The End of the Road." John Margolies talks about his recently published book. Urban Center Books, 457 Madison Ave., 935-3595. 6:00pm. May 27

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## THURSDAY 7

### THE PARLIAMENT BUILDING IN CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA

A lecture by the architect, Romaldo Giurgola. The last in the Spring Lecture Series. Pratt School of Architecture, Higgins Hall, St. James & Lafayette Ave's, Brooklyn, 636-3600. 5:30pm. May 7

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## THURSDAY 14

### DESIGN FOR MOVING PEOPLE

A SPECIAL TWO DAY CONFERENCE ABOUT IMPROVING TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES CO-SPONSORED BY NYC/AIA, AMTRAK AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION. BILTMORE HOTEL. CALL ALEXIA LALLI FOR DETAILS 741-2099.

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## THURSDAY 21

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## THURSDAY 28

RECEPTION FOR GOLD MEDALIST RECEPTION HONORING 1981 GOLD MEDALIST JOSEP LLUIS SERT. NYC/AIA, CHAPTER HEADQUARTERS, THE URBAN CENTER, 457 MADISON AVE., 838-9670. 5:30PM. MAY 28

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## FRIDAY 1

### LANDMARK DECISION

An exhibition designating the proposed landmarks coming before the landmarks commission at its May 19 public hearing. Municipal Arts Society, Urban Center, 457 Madison ave., 935-3960. Opens May 1

### METALS IN AMERICA'S HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Margot Gayle and John C. Waite discuss their book. First in a series of lectures where authors discuss their recently published books.

Urban Center Books, 457 Madison Ave., 935-3595. 4:30pm. May 1

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## FRIDAY 8

### BEFORE PHOTOGRAPHY

"Painting and the Invention of Photography." An exhibition of mostly landscapes and views of architecture, that represent the emergence of a fundamentally modern artistic outlook that had begun to value individual, contingent perceptions of the world over publicly sanctioned expressions of universal truths.

Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd St., 956-6100. Opens May 9, closes July 5

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## FRIDAY 15

### HOW TO SAVE YOUR OWN STREET

Raquel Ramati talks about her recently published book.

Urban Center Books, 457 Madison Ave., 935-3595. 4:30pm. May 15

### FRIENDS OF CAST-IRON ARCHITECTURE TOUR

A moonlight tour of the SoHo Historic District with its world famous assembly of iron front buildings.

Meet N.W. corner Broadway and Howard St. 7:30pm. \$2.50. For more information call 369-6004. May 16

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## FRIDAY 22

### BUILDINGS BY WOMEN

A joint walking tour with the Alliance for Women in Architecture, showing the buildings in midtown Manhattan designed by women. For reservations and further information call the Municipal Arts Society, 935-3960. May 16 and May 23

### TOUR OF CAST IRON ARCHITECTURE

Walk through New York's Pre-Civil War commercial district and see the iron-front buildings south of Canal with the Friends of Cast Iron Architecture.

Meet at small park, intersection of W. Broadway and Chambers St. 2:00pm. \$2.50 For more information call 369-6004. May 24

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## FRIDAY 29

### A FIELD GUIDE TO AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE

Carole Rifkind talks about her recently published book.

Urban Center Books, 457 Madison Ave., 935-3595. 4:30pm. May 29

### TOPOGRAPHICAL PAINTING: LECTURE

"The Bird's-Eye View in English." A lecture by John Harris from the Royal Institute of British Architects, London. The Frick Collection, One East 70th St. 4:00pm. May 30



# Playing with Plagiarism, Paraphrases and Puns

James Marston Fitch

Ten horsemen of the post-modernist apocalypse (and one woman, presumably an innocent recruit) are staging a rodeo in the galleries of the New York Historical Society on Central Park West. Organized by the Architectural League to celebrate its first centenary, the show is called Artists and Architects: Collaboration. It is devoted to the proposition that they have historically collaborated and should be encouraged to do so again. Generously financed by Philip Morris, the tobacco people, the League invited eleven teams to develop projects of their own choice, real or imaginary. The League should have been uniquely qualified to stage such an event but, unfortunately, it has slipped up this time. The results of that slip are hallucinatory.

*Collaboration* is a difficult exhibition either to visit or to describe because it is fundamentally a hoax, a jolly put-on, whose putative "wit" lies in the elitist assumption that only a literate in-group can participate in its visual and textual puns. There is certainly no doubt about the collaborators' literacy: puns abound; the air is thick with paraphrases, allusions, oblique references to defunct artists and dead styles. But, on the evidence in this show, it appears that old-fashioned historicizing eclecticism is no longer the vogue. We've now moved on to outright plagiarism, where the real game is guessing what the collaborators have stolen and from whom. No moral obliquity attaches to such piracy: on the contrary, it appears to be regarded as the pinnacle of creative action. (There is, after all, good precedent for such a posture. Jasper John's fame and fortune are based on the repeated cold-blooded cribbing of Old Glory; and a single can of tomato soup, appropriated with photographic accuracy, formed the pedestal of Andy Warhol's career.)

The works of art and architecture exhibited here are all nostalgic, backward-turning. Except for Frank Stella (q.v.), there is not a single form, motif or decorative device that is less than half a century old. The architects contribute Tinker Toys (Gehry) and Erec-

tor Sets (Freed); doll houses (Pelli) and toy theatres (Ambasz); and Stanley Tigerman gives us the world's first necrophiliac *creche*. The artists likewise are transfixed by the past of limp-wristed Aubrey Beardsley and lily-toting Oscar Wilde: Beal and Freckelton give us highly-polychromed echoes of Louis Comfort Tiffany and Maxfield Parrish; Graham's Hollywood-type nude stands on Stern's Walgreen-Modern base; Bailey's still-lives are tasteful take-offs on Morandi's jugs and bottles; Anderson's mural is in the soft-core erotic mode of Puvis de Chavannes.

The text which supports, explains and generally runs interference for these visual materials is suffocatingly obscure and evasive. The Freed-Aycock project for a clock-work fountain in Times Square is titled *Fantasies of a Mythical Waterworks* and has this explanation: "the collaborative process was initiated by two preliminary fantasies—speculations on the nature of the Times Square intervention and the echoes of its emanations forward and backward in time. Once upon a time an Omphalos existed on the island now called Manhattan . . ." The Ambasz-Meritet collaborators on *Four Gates to Columbus* explain their methodology thus: "Emilio constructed the *myth*, wrote the *tale*, and illustrated it by means of sketches he called *designs*. Michael then conceived the *images* which give depth and body to the project." To make this process entirely clear, the collaborators elaborate: "you might say that one wrote the lyric and whistled the tune, while the other wrote the music and gave resonance to the text."

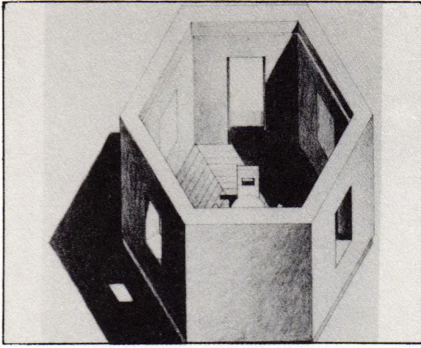
But even the attentive gallery goer, confronting the Ambasz-Meritet display, will find it difficult to tell what Emilio and Michael are proposing to collaborate on. If, as their drawings suggest, there really is a Columbus in Indiana and it really does have four tree-lined highways leading to four tree-framed gates, then what tune remains for them to whistle? Do Michael's elegant cut-outs, like stage scenery at the Met, represent trees

*already* in place? Then why not simply give us photographs of them? If they represent new, ideal trees, what will they have done with the originals? In fact, is this not just another of the exhibition's pretty put-ons? Why go to Columbus at all?

Charles Moore, master punner of the post-modernist crew, comes on with a blast calculated to blow the careless spectator right off his feet and out the window: "*The Stratford Fragments: Extravisionary Perception Based on Articulation, Definition and Wheels*." This time, Moore is playing tag with the ladies of Virginia's historic house museum, Stratford Hall. Climbing now onto the preservationist bandwagon, he proposes to save the old house by destroying it. He dissects, rotates and scrambles the parts of the old mansion. In front of it he places a classic portico (half out of Kaiser's Brandenburg Gate, half out of Mussolini's unfinished World's Fair) and tops it off with empty, gold-leaved men's work clothes instead of the conventional nude warriors. Erudite, skillful and gay as a cricket: but what will happen to this toy, once the show is over? The Stratford ladies cannot use it. It will not last the winter out-of-doors, even in Moore's own genial Berkeley. Too small for grown-ups, perhaps it could be sold to F.A.O. Schwarz, the toy people, as a play house for normal-sized children.

The imagery employed by Richard Meier, in his project *Tinted Shades*, is comparatively up-to-date in its plagiarism (Corbu, 1930, give or take a year or two). But his collaborator, the painter Frank Stella, is right up in front with the latest subway-window graffiti artist. There is nothing inherently wrong with putting painted window shades in the Meier house, the Edwardians were mad for them: but they would have decorated their shades on the *inside*, for their own delectation. Would Meier-Stella have us understand that the tenants in their houses are never at home in daytime? Or that they are home, like Marcel Proust, with the shades down for our benefit and the lights on, for theirs? Or do they come

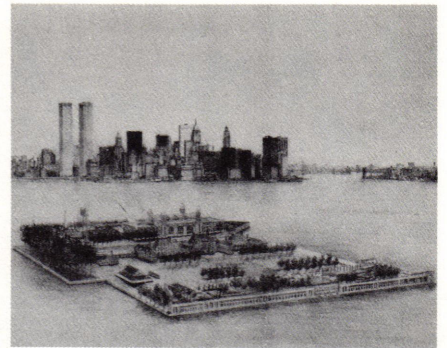




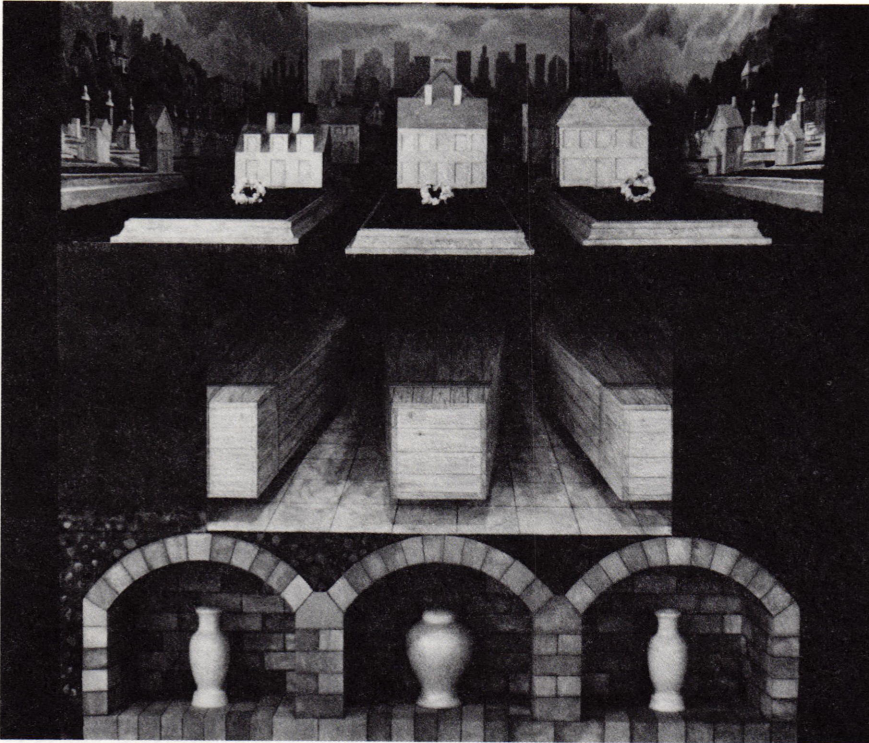
Cesar Pelli & William Bailey, "The Hexagonal Room: A Door, Two Windows, and Three Paintings".



Michael Graves & Lennart Anderson, "Bacchanal".



Susanna Torre and Charles Simonds, "Ellis Island."



Stanley Tigerman & Richard Haas, "The Great American Cemetery".

out only at night, to enjoy Stella's contemptuously minimal squiggles, along with the rest of us voyeurs? But if so, are the shades illuminated? And from outside or in? But then . . . but then, perhaps we are being treated to another game of mud pies, with grown men behaving in ways that any well run kindergarten would frown on.

Michael Graves is here, too, collaborating with the artist Lennart Anderson on a project called *Bacchanal*. This artifact takes the form of a piece of furniture, a full-scale painted hardboard model of an Empire console. Redolent with imagery and allusion, it is literally built in the distorted geometry of a De Chirico painting, one drawer artistically jammed open. It uses the skim-milk Baroque of Park Avenue decorators like Elsie de Wolfe (c. 1919). Draped across its top are an artists smock (real) and a theatrical mask (fake); these make explicit reference to Beaux Arts ateliers and fancy dress balls. Anderson's framed painting helps us further pin down the date

when he does a skillful takeoff on the androgynous pastorals of Puvis de Chavanne (d. 1898).

Only two projects in this show make any pretense of a real-life context: Hardy-Holzman-Pfeiffer's design for a hypothetical restaurant in Bryant Park; and Susanna Torre's scheme for a park on Ellis Island. The H.H.P. scheme is presented in head-on, deadpan plans and elevations, heavily rendered in their best Beaux Arts manner. They give us no information on what the pavilions might look like internally or from the cross streets; nor any convincing evidence that the pavilions can contain the exuberant tastelessness of the collaborating artists, Beal and Freckelton. On the other hand, Ms. Torre — as the only woman architect in this raging tempest of masculine whimsy — is a model of rationality and serious concern. Deserted in mid-flight by her artist collaborator, Charles Simond (who, we are told parenthetically, "has worked in the streets of various cities for the

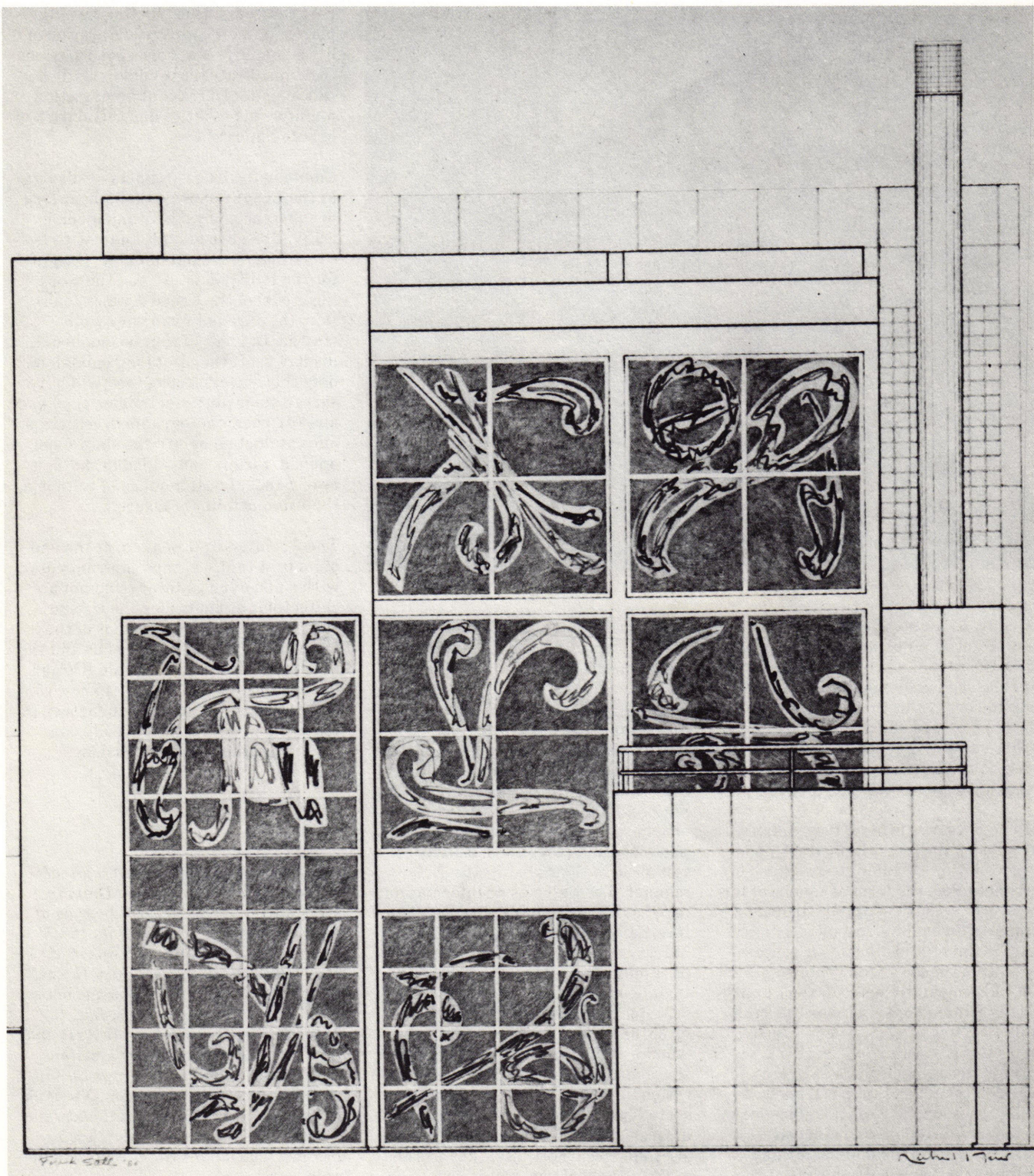
past ten years, constructing dwelling places for an imaginary civilization of little people"), Ms. Torre goes on alone to demonstrate quite convincingly how this abandoned relict of immigration might be made into a delightful park of leisure and rest.

Common to all the artifacts on display at the League show is their sheer lack of substance, physically and ideologically. They are unbuilt and — with few exceptions — are unbuildable. Except for the Pelli doll house and the working model of the Freed-Aycock fountain, they are not even very well crafted. But this of course should not dismay us. If they last long enough for only this one exposure, they will have served their purpose. Indeed, they had already been photographed, criticized and catalogued before the show even opened. Firmly embedded in the Tower of Babel of post-modernist criticism, their immortality is assured.

The Architectural League, at the end of its first century, thus confronts us with a non-event, literary and not architectonic at all. Under the circumstances — what with the ruins of the Lower Bronx to the north of us and the impending disaster of Ronald Reagan to the south — this New York show can serve no other purpose than further to confuse and distract an already confused and distracted profession.

*"Collaboration: Artists & Architects" was curated by Barbaralee Diamonstein for the Architectural League of New York in celebration of its 100th anniversary, and is on exhibition at the New York Historical Society until June 7, 1981. The exhibition has been sponsored by Philip Morris, Inc., the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council for the Arts. A catalogue with essays by Vincent Scully, Paul Goldberger, Stephen Prokopoff, Jonathan Barnett and Jane Livingston, with an introduction by Barbaralee Diamonstein, is also available.*





Richard Meier & Frank Stella, "Tinted Shades".