

The Art of the Museum

Designing the New Museum: Building a Destination by James Grayson Trulove. Rockport Publishers Inc., 2000. 192 pp., illus., \$50.

Museums for a New Millennium: Concepts, Projects, Buildings edited by Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Angeli Sachs. Prestel, 2000. 224 pp., illus., \$65.

Reviewed by Barrie Scardino

Contemporary museums can be compared to medieval cathedrals for the art they hold, their iconic architecture, their mission of enlightenment, their public function as a gathering place, and the community spirit and pride that leads to their construction. And for the first time in years, they can also be compared in terms of popularity: in the United States

alone, more than 50 new museums are currently under construction. Add on what's happening worldwide, and it's clear that museums are a booming business. Appropriately then, two new books take a serious look at museums built in the last decade. Though the authors of each chose to discuss approximately two dozen outstanding museum projects, there is no overlap. Both books examine museum buildings one by one, and both are beautifully illustrated. But beyond those surface similarities, the books are quite different. One takes us through a quick gallery tour of new museums, while the other goes further and actually helps us understand what we see.

The tour comes in *Designing the New Museum*. (The book itself is rather precisely designed. The cute graphics that sprinkle the pages are distracting, and when they contain information such as page numbers or photo captions, the type is too fine, small, and difficult to read.) The subtitle, "Building a Destination," and the publisher's statement that museums have emerged as major tourist meccas imply that *Designing the New Museum* is a travel guide, which it thankfully is not. Its appendices do include a directory of the museums shown, with addresses, information on days and times open, admission fees, and the like, but the book is more essentially a collection of lovely pictures. Descriptions are brief and don't contain consistent information, which can be frustrating. Dates of construction are missing, square footage is sometimes there sometimes not, and building materials are either detailed in an overly explicit manner or not mentioned at all.

The forward, by David Levy, director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., is an interesting, well-written piece, but one that has little relation to the rest of the book. After a concise overview of museum design since 1950, Levy talks about Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, then discusses the development of a large addition to the Corcoran, also by Gehry. Both Bilbao and Gehry, though, are missing from the text of *Designing the New Museum*.

As superficial as the book can be, it has value in the museums author James Grayson Trulove chose to examine and the opportunity it provides to "read" ample photographs, which in themselves say a lot about new museum design. Trulove has divided the book into three sections: art museums, specialized art

museums, and other museums. The inclusion of little known and small projects is a plus. Places such as the North Carolina Pottery Center, the tiny Rodin Gallery in Seoul, Korea, and the new wing of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam are worth seeing, and surely would not appear in most museum anthologies.

Trulove also includes several interesting examples of adaptive reuse, where a large addition has been made to an existing structure or a new museum is housed in an older building. William P. Brueder's Gerard L. Cafesjian Pavilion at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in Arizona is stunning in its new curving facade in front of an old theater, which was gutted, leaving exposed timber trusses and open galleries that can be reconfigured for special exhibitions. Bruner/Cott adapted and added to a 19th-century industrial complex in North Adams, Massachusetts, to create Mass MoCA, a museum campus of 13 acres. Some galleries of Mass MoCA have been left as unimaginably huge spaces, perfect for contemporary art; others combine high-tech lighting with warm, exposed brick.

Polshek Partnership Architects (which is currently designing the Clinton library in Little Rock) created a new arts center for Stanford University by blending a late 19th-century neoclassical building with new construction. As with many of the museums shown in this book, curving walls and skylights dominate the new architecture. Bohlin Cywinski Jackson created exhibition space for the Pittsburgh Regional History Center in a warehouse once used to store ice cut from Lake Chautauqua. And in Columbus, Ohio, Arata Isozaki wrapped a monumental 1920s neoclassical museum with a concrete curved shell ribbed with steel, creating what might be the most interesting and innovative building included among those Trulove presents.

The Audrey Jones Beck Building of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, is among the new museums Trulove considers worth notice. Of Rafael Moneo's creation, Trulove says, "The porticochere and elegant bronze doorframes at the entrance, in essence, bow to the original building. Pass this limestone box and wonder at the monolithic architecture. Walk inside, though, and feel exhilarated."

The Beck, however, doesn't make it into *Museums for a New Millennium*. Why? Because even while claiming to highlight "the most important and

expressive art museums designed or built in the last decade," the book limits itself to only one project per firm. For Moneo, that project was his Museums of Modern Art and Architecture in Stockholm, which was completed in 1998.

Contrasting the discussions of Moneo's Houston and Stockholm museums points up the differences between *Designing the New Museum* and *Museums for a New Millennium*. In his book, Trulove devotes four short paragraphs of discussion to the Beck, ending with, "Moneo devised a unique system of overhead lanterns to provide a consistent amount of daylight to the galleries while filtering out damaging ultraviolet rays. From the exterior the lanterns resemble old-fashioned air-conditioning units." Discussing almost identical skylights found on Moneo's Stockholm building in *Museums for a New Millennium*, writer Rita Capezuto notes that the architect's "interests seem to have been translated into an increasingly in-depth investigation of the use of natural light. And yet, paradoxically, perhaps one of the most obvious signs of his Stockholm museum's integration into the urban landscape is provided by a nighttime view of the artificial light from the lantern skylights scattered throughout the roof of the building. It is an easily recognizable lighting scheme, but it is homogenous with that of the adjacent buildings and more generally, of the city." Seven of *Designing the New Museum's* eight pages on the Beck are devoted to glitzy interior and exterior photographs. *Museums for a New Millennium's* six pages on the Stockholm museum include a considerably longer discussion, preliminary sketches, site and floor plans and sections, and an important aerial view showing the museum's urban context. Interior and exterior photographs are small, but no less informative.

Museums for a New Millennium initially served as the catalog for an exhibition initiated by the Art Centre Basel. However, its scholarly tone and illustrative materials stand on their own. This book contains thoughtful essays by eminent architectural historians and critics on each museum selected for inclusion, providing a good deal more text and, consequently, more information. In his introduction, Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani presents the idea that museums should be designed to show art, adding that, "Looking at museum architecture of the 1980s, it becomes obvious that the

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Christof Spieler examines the appeal of adaptive reuse. Claudia Kolker digs through the city's Spark Parks program. David Theis surveys the past and present of historic preservation in the Sixth Ward. Margaret Culbertson and Mitchell J. Shields check out the Houston Public Library's master plan.

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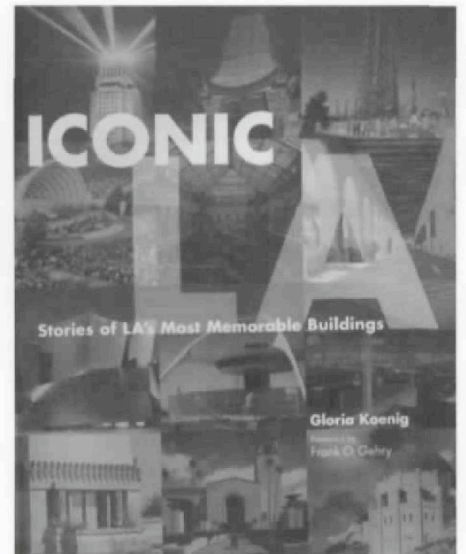
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requirement of creating space for exhibitions was often treated as the poor cousin next to the primary importance of architecture as urban, typological, and form-giving experiment." As projects in this book show, such neglect may not have ended with the '80s.

And as at least one of the book's essays make clear, not everybody thinks that's such a bad thing. Kurt Forster's piece on the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is particularly fascinating in its argument that Gehry's giant circus-tent sculpture, standing at the most recent end of a continuum of museum design, is everything it should be. Gehry's museum appears to be a good example of what Lampugnani complains about; it has been criticized as a terrible place to show art even while being a wonderful piece of art itself. Forster, though, suggests that such an argument is no longer relevant. He argues that the Guggenheim has ushered in a new era of "franchise" museums, museums designed not for collecting and hoarding, but for showing and telling in a continually transforming way. He calls museums the "unsuspecting heirs of the theater," a view that echoes Trulove's ideas about cultural tourism. Forster also claims that Gehry's Guggenheim revives an architecture of excess that has lain dormant since the Borromini's lavish Renaissance buildings. "Overweight, overdone, and overwhelming" become compliments to this theatrical architecture.

Museums for a New Millennium's final few highlighted projects are still in design or under construction. Computer simulations and drawings, though, give a good idea of what they will likely become. Tadao Ando's Fort Worth museum, Steven Holl's museum in Bellevue, Washington, and, finally, Zaha Hadid's plans for the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, while all very different, illustrate new geometries made possible through computer design, a tool that will continue to transform monumental architecture in the 21st century.

Museums for a New Millennium manages to include work of many of the most celebrated architects of our time, and concludes with brief but relatively complete biographies. This volume, then, doubles as a cogent analysis of new museum design and a general reference work as well. *Designing the New Museum* may be an attractive publication, but it should be considered a supplement to *Museums for a New Millennium*, the current standard on recent museum design.



Knowing Los Angeles

Iconic LA by Gloria Koenig. Balcony Press, 2000. 120pp., illus., \$29.95.

Reviewed by Barry Moore

Iconic LA is not exactly the book its title and appearance might lead one to expect. Though at first glance it seems to promise little beyond slick photos of the city almost everybody loves to visit displayed in a coffee-table array, *Iconic LA* turns out to be more than that, more than just a splashy presentation of the cool, the weird, and the kinky. What it is instead is a carefully focused look at 13 notable buildings spanning two centuries, well illustrated with pictures both current and historical, and topped off with succinct text sufficient to whet the appetite of the Los Angophile and architectural historian alike. Koenig, a former editor and writer at the University of California Los Angeles, has selected buildings that represent different eras and architectural types: the mission San Fernando Rey, the Bradbury Building, the Hollyhock House, Watts Towers, Hollywood Bowl, Los Angeles City Hall, Grauman's Chinese Theatre, Griffith Observatory, Union Station, LAX Theme Building, Case Study House #22, the Getty Center, and Disney Concert Hall. Each project is broadly described and documented, and the photographs — many of them rare — are sublime.

My first question was, why these particular 13? Why not include the Wayfarer's Chapel, the Los Angeles Public Library, or the surprising Max Factor building in Hollywood? But after some thought I think I understand the rationale behind Koenig's choices: the criterion was