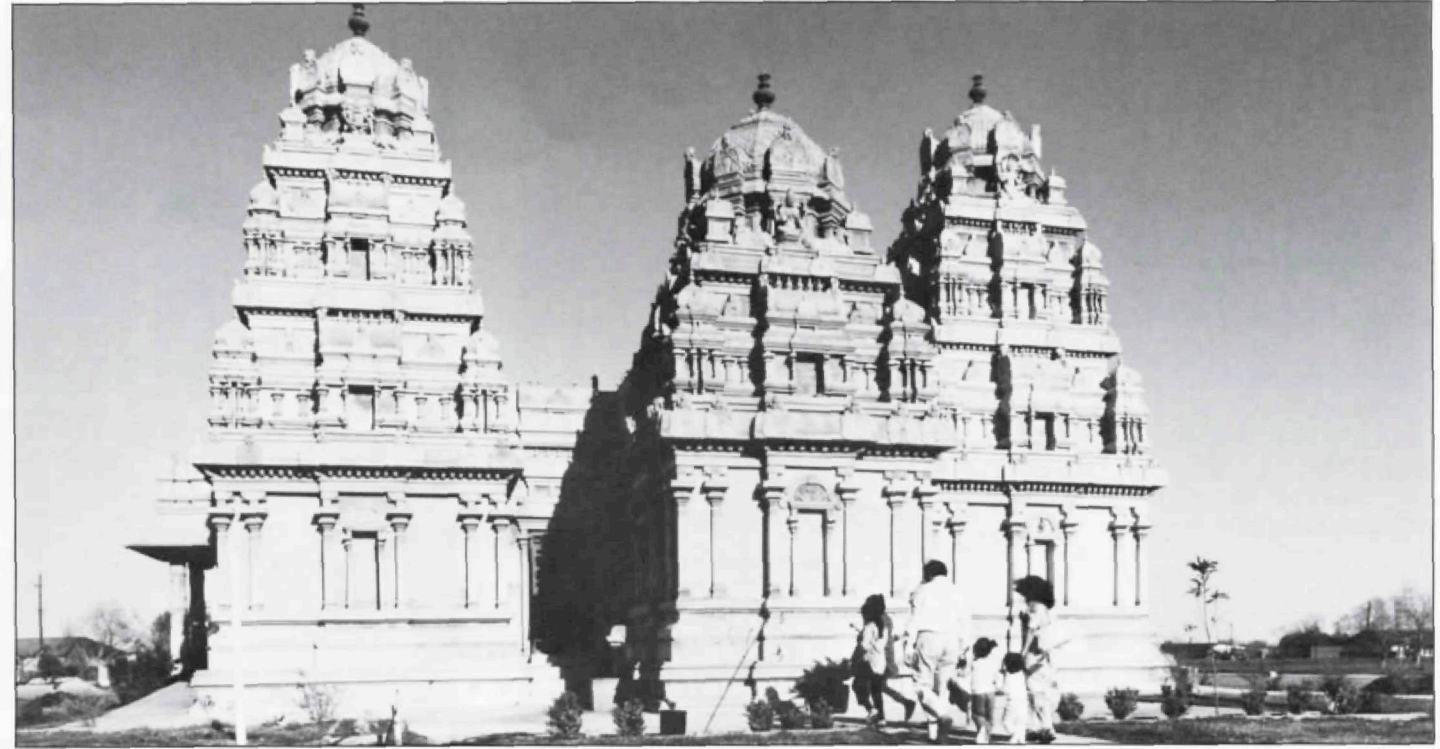


## Citesurvey

### Hindu Memories of Home American Suburban Style: The Sri Meenach Temple, Pearland

Malcolm Quantrill

On a Sunday morning in January, Bruce Webb and I set out into the uncertain Texas climate, through the certainty of the Houston suburbs in search of a Hindu temple in Pearland. As a Londoner, memories of Southall stirred in my muddled morning brain. In London, I recalled, temples have been created in old movie palaces and sometimes even disused churches. But I could remember nothing of the spectacle that the Sri Meenachi Temple promised to be. I have many Indian friends, some of them Hindu, but I have never been to India. My only guide to what I might expect at Pearland was Louis Moore's unenthusiastic article, "Hinduism in Houston" (*Houston Chronicle*, 17 August 1985), which told me all I knew about this Texas center of Hindu culture. Moore had been intrigued by the fact that the Houston Hindu community embraces the proselytizing Hare Krishnas, and disappointed that "hard statistics on the actual number of Hindus here are unavailable." Perhaps, I pondered, the local priests thought Moore was from Immigration. On the other hand, it may be difficult to count if you have to include all the incarnations.



Paul Hester, Houston

In fact, Hindus regard themselves as the manifestation of the world's oldest religion, and believe as such that it is pointless to make converts since all other religions stem from Hinduism and owe their existence and ritual practices to Hindu origins. So the Sri Meenachi Temple has to be seen as a representation of 4,000 years of uninterrupted form and content. That surely is the meaning of replicating in miniature in Pearland a celebrated temple of India, the Hindu homeland. So we must be dealing with the ancient rather than the modern here. And yet the result is postmodern in a most astonishing way. Of course, in part it has to do with the confusion of scale, with what is vast and monumental in the original being rendered as a suburban miniature. Once inside the temple there is nothing of the intended magnificence of the exterior, which in fact is only

impressive from the middle-distance, since this brick-and-concrete reproduction of history is neither true to size nor material. For on removing our shoes and entering this holy place, we find ourselves inside a flat-ceilinged suburban box, an impression unchanged by the profusion of household gods. The holy water and incense might remind me that these Catholic practices have a Hindu root, but the overall effect is of a Tupperware party in Tomball, so difficult is it today to distinguish one kind of kitsch from another. The social center, which now masks the original shrine on the site, is undeniably postmodern classic, and the site model for the master plan reveals more of the monumental dolls' house approach. What it really needs is the masterly touch of someone like Edwin Lutyens. ■

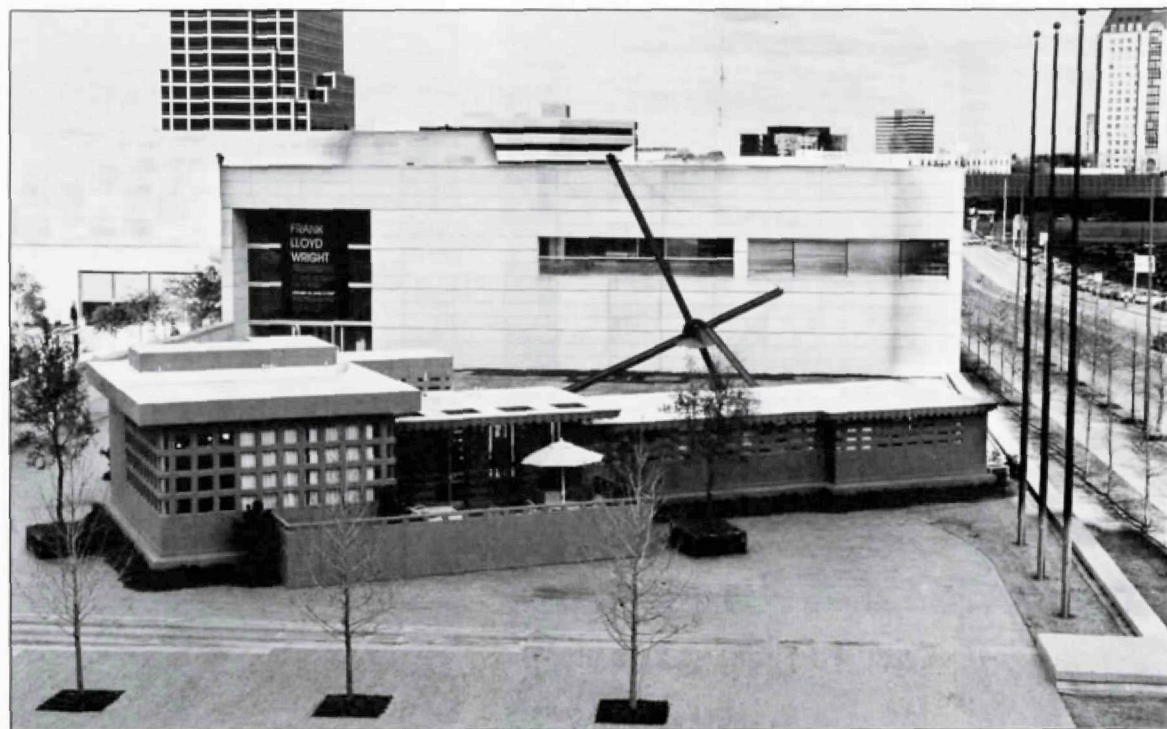
## Citations

### Frank Lloyd Wright: In the Realm of Ideas

An exhibition organized by the Scottsdale Arts Center Association and the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation  
The Dallas Museum of Art and The Trammel Crow Center Pavilion, Dallas  
19 January - 17 April 1988

Reviewed by Jay C. Henry

Contrary to the prevailing popular conception of modern architecture as an avant-garde phenomenon, Frank Lloyd Wright was a populist, essentially in harmony with the basic currents of American culture. He is probably the one modern architect known by name to the average American citizen, something of a folk hero whose work might be expected to attract popular, as opposed to professional and critical, attention. The exhibition at the Dallas Museum of Art caters to this populist image. This is profoundly apparent in watching the visitors moving with reverent curiosity through the three rooms of photographs, drawings, models, and furniture pieces which comprise the exhibition, culminating in the visit to a Usonian Automatic House reconstructed on the museum's Ross Avenue Plaza. Although the primary objective seems to be the cultivation of this popular hagiography, the exhibition is not without stimulus and reward to professional architects and serious students of architecture, for although many of the items are familiar parts of Wright's corpus of work, there are sufficient new or little-known artifacts to reward even the most



Barth Tillotson

Usonian Automatic House installed on the Ross Avenue Plaza of the Dallas Museum of Art, 1988, Frank Lloyd Wright, architect

informed cognoscenti. Unfortunately, however, the organization of the exhibition does more to foster reverent appreciation of Wright's presumed genius than a critical understanding of his work.

The exhibition is organized around four themes from Wright's writings: "The Destruction of the Box," "The Nature of the Site," "Materials and Methods," and "Building for Democracy." As Wright's discourse was more romantic poetry than systematic exposition, these themes provide at best a highly subjective schema for organizing the work. Within each section, work from all periods of Wright's career is juxtaposed without explanation, and with only his own words for commentary. The lay observer is given no instruction in the chronology of

the master's practice, and doubtless comes away impressed but confused by the plenitude of riches. Projects are not distinguished from executed work, nor are changes in the course of design development described.

More disturbing is the uniform presentation of all of Wright's work as equally reflective of genius. In fact, of course, most dispassionate critics find serious faults in much of his late work, when his advancing age and the obsequious deference of the Taliesin Fellowship blunted his critical faculties. The Marin Civic Center and the Arizona Capitol Project are both badly flawed in detail if not in basic conception, coming off as ornamental aberrations of his late Disneyland period. The effect is to

pander to the public's taste for kitsch rather than to cultivate its appreciation for Wright's legitimate masterpieces.

The Usonian Automatic House is clearly the *pièce de résistance* of the exhibition. The Usonian paradigm of the 1930s was altered little in Wright's post-war practice, and usually avoids the bizarre geometry and eccentric ornament that disfigure much of his late work. Visitors will find the Usonian Automatic to be small in size and - as typical with Wright - small in scale; almost cozy, in fact, which is not an inappropriate perception for a populist architect to cultivate. ■



## In Pursuit of Quality, The Kimbell Museum: An Illustrated History of Art

Produced by the Kimbell Art Museum, Ft. Worth; New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 344 pp., 371 illus., \$75.

Reviewed by Peter J. Holliday

Since its founding, the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth has pursued its policy "to form collections of the highest possible aesthetic quality, derived from any and all periods in man's history, and in any medium or style." Louis I. Kahn's building for the Kimbell collection opened its doors to the public in 1972, and is recognized as one of the premier art-gallery facilities in America. The museum decided to document the history of that building and the growth of its collections; the result is *In Pursuit of Quality, The Kimbell Art Museum: An Illustrated History of the Art and Architecture*.

Patricia Loud has done a superb job of documenting the architectural history of the museum in chapters dealing with the donor and the inception of the Kimbell, the program for the museum building, Kahn's conception of a museum (form and influences), and the evolution of the design and construction of the Kimbell, including developments up to the present.

Since its opening, the museum building has been the subject of numerous critical assessments by specialists in various fields (see the series of articles, including a critical bibliography edited by Loud, published in *Design Book Review*, 11, Winter 1987). However, being given access to the museum's archives, correspondence, contracts, drawings,

photographs, and interviews with the surviving parties has enabled Loud to write a factual and absorbing account surpassing all previous assessments. Numerous illustrations in color and black and white, chosen with care and sensitivity, illuminate her arguments.

Loud's text (and the accompanying documentation) give a vivid account of the relationship between the architect and his client. Illustrations, most of them sketches, demonstrate how Kahn and Richard Brown, the Kimbell's director at that time, worked through the evolving problems of the program.

In his pre-architectural statement (1966), Brown emphasized the importance of an environment that would enhance the engagement of an individual with the work of art. Kahn's final solutions to problems of space, light, and traffic all flow from his consideration of this end, although some critics have suggested that the building represents inherently elitist (and therefore evil) ideals. However, in a world in which art museums are still recovering from the dubious legacy of the Hoving years at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Kimbell provides a refreshing respite from the marketing of art in museums. The Kimbell (recently joined by The Menil Collection in Houston) is one of the few public institutions where one can look seriously at art.

The exhibition record of the Kimbell is also impressive; shows of aesthetic significance and historical importance have been the norm. The same can be



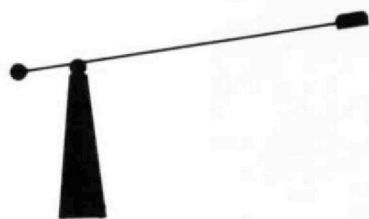
Michael Bodycomb

North Portico with reflecting pool and waterfall, Kimbell Art Museum, 1972, Louis I. Kahn, architect

said for their acquisitions, and the remainder of the volume demonstrates the range and quality of the permanent collection with 246 chronologically arranged color plates. William B. Jordan and members of the curatorial staff have prepared the accompanying texts which stress historiographical and aesthetic concerns. The Kimbell's recent acquisitions represent a rational and sensitive reaction to the realities of the contemporary art market: among the most exquisite works are examples of the Spanish school and an unusual yet stunning early landscape by Monet.

Rather than the self-congratulatory and self-aggrandizing book this so easily could have been, *In Pursuit of Quality* provides a model for other museums to emulate both in publications and policies. ■

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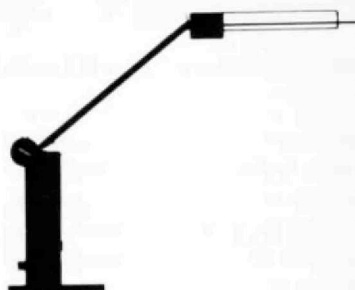


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# Danny Samuels: Portraits of Buildings

Farish Gallery, Rice University, Houston  
4 February - 6 March 1988

Reviewed by Joanne Lukitsh

Danny Samuels describes his color photographs of buildings in the southern United States and Italy as "portraits" and his images are distinguished by his attention to how the two-dimensional façade of a building is represented in the two-dimensional space of the photograph. Samuels's approach invites the viewer into a physiognomic reading of the façade, a reading made more attractive by his choice of building. Samuels's fascination with buildings not designed by architects has led him to photograph vernacular structures: both commercial buildings in the southern and southwestern United States, and small churches and chapels along the back roads of northern Italy. His exhibition at Farish Gallery included these photographs of vernacular buildings, as well as photographs of major architectural landmarks from Rome and Paris.

Samuels, a principal in the firm of Taft Architects and the Smith Visiting Professor of Architecture at Rice University, initially combined his interest in vernacular buildings and photography in a series of photographs of storefronts, "Little Buildings," photographed in the southern United States between 1976 and 1979. The prints from this series exhibited at the Farish Gallery were unified by Samuels's repeated use of head-on camera position, symmetrical composition, and bright, even light. This

photographic approach facilitated the comparison of variations in form among the different storefronts and an appreciation of the extent to which such two-dimensional elements as signs, lettering, and areas of color frequently reinforce the structural design of the storefronts.

In 1985, Samuels received the Rome Prize in Architecture at the American Academy in Rome. His initial aspirations were to photograph the works of Italian Renaissance and Baroque architects, and the Farish Gallery exhibition featured such subjects as Tempio Malatestiano (1987) and S. Andrea, Mantova (1986). Samuels's move to Italy was accompanied by a change to a 6-by-9 view camera; the prints of his Italian buildings are approximately twice as large as the prints of "Little Buildings." Travel in the northern Italian countryside provoked Samuels's interest in churches and chapels found in small villages and back roads, equivalent to the American storefronts in their lack of architectural pedigree and their idiosyncratic application of stylistic elements. He also photographed courtyard farmhouses in the vicinity of Mantova and Cremona. Photographs of ecclesiastic and secular façades, as well as occasional interior views, were displayed in the exhibition.

Unlike the "Little Buildings" series, the photographs of Italian buildings do not exhibit a consistent approach in subject, point of view, composition, or disposition of the building in space. If a generalization could be made about the Italian images, it would pertain to



Chiesa Rivarolo d. Re (Mantova), 1987

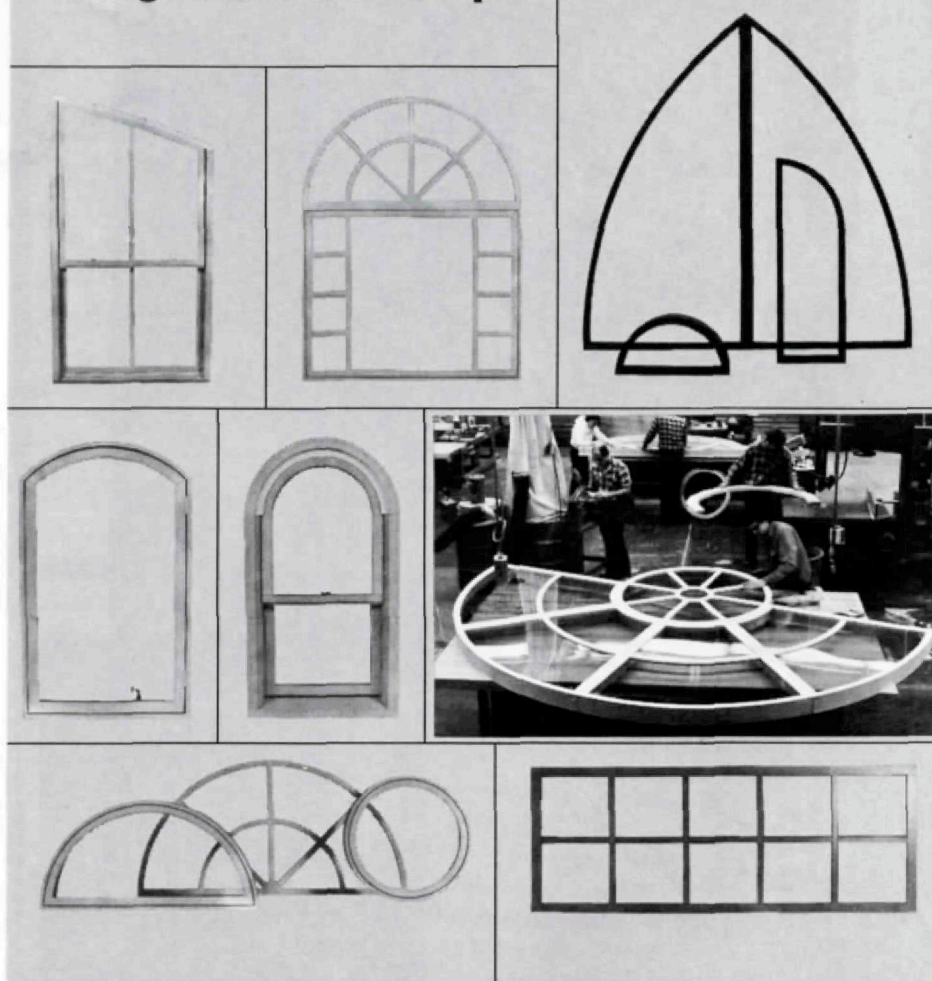
Danny Samuels

Samuels's distinction between the photographic representation of two-dimensional versus three-dimensional space, discussed in his exhibition statement. Samuels distinguishes between the easy translation of the two-dimensional building façade into the two-dimensional photograph, and the camera's comparatively ineffective representation of the unfolding experience of movement in three-dimensional space.

The contrast between Samuels's photographs of façades and his photographs of such three-dimensional spaces as the courtyard at Corte Castiglioni is telling, and shows the extent to which Samuels uses color and

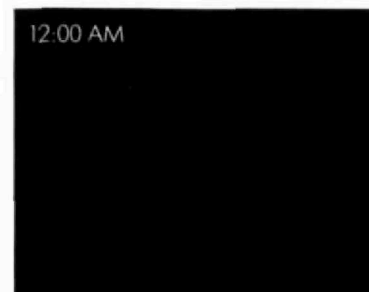
lens depth-of-field to suppress the representation of façade elements as volumes projected into space. A dramatic, if somewhat atypical, example is the photograph of S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (1987): the façade is bisected into areas of dark and light, casting the lower half of the building into gray-brown tones. The undulations of the lower façade, despite their proximity to the viewer, seem constrained to the surface of the building, while the distance of the upper half of the façade from the viewer minimized the representation of its volumes in space. Samuels's approach facilitates a reading of the building façade which Samuels compares to reading the human face, which can either express or disguise what lies within. ■

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# Chicago Architecture, 1872-1922

*Edited by John Zukowsky, Munich, Prestel-Verlag in association with The Art Institute of Chicago, 1987, 480 pp, \$60.*

*Reviewed by Stephen Fox*

*Chicago Architecture, 1872-1922: Birth of a Metropolis* is a hefty compendium of essays, black-and-white photographs and drawings, and sumptuous color plates reviewing architectural developments in Chicago between the Great Fire of 1871 and the Chicago Tribune's international design competition for its new headquarters building of 1922. It is issued in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title, held between October 1987 and January 1988 at The Art Institute of Chicago and organized by the Art Institute's curator of architecture, John Zukowsky, who edited the book. The book is intended as a document in its own right, rather than simply as an adjunct to the exhibition. Therefore, in addition to Zukowsky's catalogue of the contents of the exhibition and an extensive annotated bibliography on Chicago architecture, edited by Stephen Sennott, it contains 19 essays on a wide range of topics. Zukowsky, in recognition of the book's simultaneous publication in English, French, and German and of the collaboration in its production of Henri Loyrette of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris and Heinrich Klotz of the Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt, designates the theme of the book as internationalism in Chicago architecture. But the essays that follow blur that focus considerably. Cumulatively, they do not clarify the concept of internationalism; some, as Zukowsky indicates in the introduction, do not even address the theme.

Gerald R. Larson's contribution, "The Iron Skeleton Frame: Interaction Between Europe and the United States," ought to have served as a model for the other studies in the book. Larson scrutinizes a favorite, much written about topic in Chicago architecture in the light of greatly expanded historical research and, in so doing, displaces earlier, less complete historical analyses and - critically - the mythologizing, ideological conclusions deduced from these earlier studies. Although less compelling than Larson's, other essays - Henri Loyrette's on late 19th-century French journalistic accounts of Chicago, Richard Guy Wilson's on the impact of the Arts and Crafts movement, Robert Brueggemann's on the radically different assumptions about tall buildings evident in the European and American submissions to the Tribune competition, and David Van Zanten's on the democratic vision of Walter Burley Griffin's winning submission to the international competition for the design of Australia's capital city, Canberra - adhere to Zukowsky's theme by detailing exchanges of ideas and influence between Chicago and Europe.

Roula M. Geraniotis's essay on Chicago's German-American architects is extremely disappointing: it reveals little about the impact of German architectural notions and professional attitudes on American architectural practice. Geraniotis does not discern any consistent formal strategies that German architects in Chicago might have displayed in adapting to American architectural currents, and there is no investigation of the German community in Chicago and the distinctive building commissions that might have emanated from it. Meredith Clausen's piece on typological and formal similarities between Burnham & Root's Rookery lobby court and the department stores of Paris is a footnote observation inflated into an essay, to which the Chicago connection is merely incidental.

Discussions of the work of S.S. Beman by Thomas J. Schlereth, H.H. Richardson's Glessner House by Elaine Harrington, and Louis H. Sullivan's ornament by Lauren S. Weingarden and Martha Pollak make of extra-national exchange either a peripheral issue or one so internalized in an architect's development that thematic unity is strained.

One of the most rewarding contributions to this collection bypasses internationalism entirely: C.W. Westfall's essay on the typological development of industrial and warehouse buildings from the 1850s to the 1920s. A second essay by Westfall on the development of tall hotel and apartment buildings is not quite as riveting, perhaps because of greater complexity within the sequence. Heinrich Klotz's exploration of the attempts to formulate compositionally a multistory office building type also dispenses with the collection's theme, as do two far from satisfying essays: Neil Harris's on the development of the department store and Sally Chappell's on the Wrigley Building.

As a book (rather than an exhibition catalogue), *Chicago Architecture, 1872-1922* suffers from being compelled to address the material displayed in the exhibition in terms of a theme that was perhaps not as flexible or as comprehensive as it might have seemed when selected. Therefore, the book is less than a history of late 19th- and early 20th-century architectural developments in Chicago, without yet being an incisive critical analysis of a distinct facet of the city's architectural culture. It is particularly disappointing, given the internationalism theme, that in this city of European immigrants practically all

the buildings discussed, if located on a map, would line up along Chicago's lake shore, with a few clustered in satellite suburbs: precisely the commercial and residential districts associated with the native-born and the most assimilated immigrant elite. The rich array of inner-city Chicago churches and synagogues that Father George A. Lane documented in his guidebook of 1981 suggests that there is an entire city beyond the north and south branches of the Chicago River, yet Westfall on warehouses is the only

essay in which this condition is implicitly acknowledged. The consistency of the contributions to this book is also disturbing; there are instances of superficial analysis and amateurish writing that do not belong in so ambitious a publication. In view of these observations, it is ironic to note that the book's most concentrated reserve of scholarship lies in the catalogue portion of *Chicago Architecture, 1872-1922*, the plates, the list of items in the exhibition, and the bibliography. ■

## Tropical Landscapes

*Organized by the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston  
27 February - 3 April 1988*

*Reviewed by Deborah Jensen*

*We grope among shadows towards the unknown. - A.B. Walkley<sup>1</sup>*

If Sally Gall's exhibition *Tropical Landscapes* had a voice, it would be a deep, velvety contralto: sensual, earthy, and seductive - a voice that could elicit a human *physical* response, equal to its metaphysical call "towards the unknown." While threads of her photographic lineage can be traced from the male domain of mid 19th-century landscape photography to the poetic pictorialism of the century's last decades, Gall's photographs are introspective landscapes of intense clarity: intimate, private "inscapes" fused to the unfocused, tangled architecture of nature.

All of Gall's lush, tropical scenes are paradoxically shot in black-and-white, reminiscent of the misty tonalities of early King Kong and Tarzan films; several recall the Amazon's literary image between the 1920s and 1950s:

*Tomorrow we set off into the Green Hell of the Mato Grosso territories, into which many have penetrated but from which so few have returned. . .* - Jorgen Bisch, *Across the River of Death*

Like tracks on a disappearing pathway, Gall's photographs lead us through steamy jungle and lurking dangers to an inner focus, metaphoric and highly personal. The landmarks of her journey - water, skin, vegetation, and statuary - are interchangeable in their physicality and implicit sexuality. As curator Marilyn A. Zeitlin notes in her thoughtfully written exhibition statement, Gall "does not erase reference to the material world in search of a poetic equivalent of

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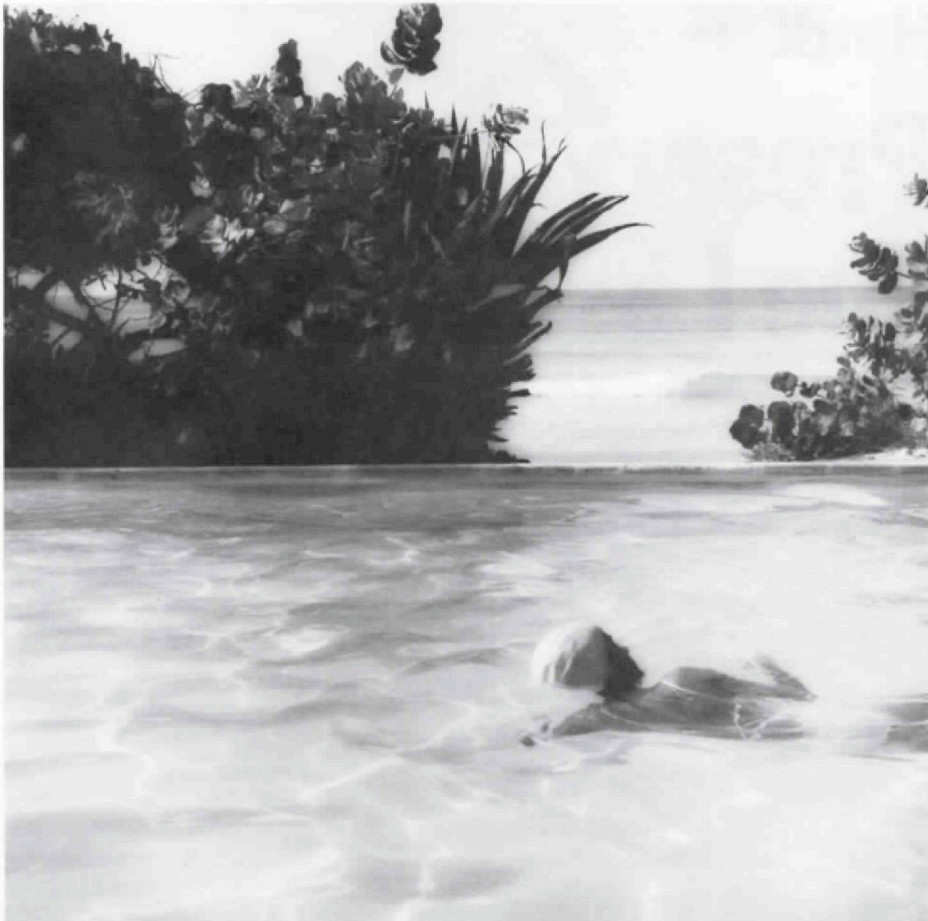
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Sally Gall, courtesy of Texas Gallery, Houston

*Linda, Tortola, 1985*

thought . . ." Indeed, it seems that she heightens the reference through exaggerated contrasts – light and shadow, water and terra, inside and outside, stone and vegetation, focused and unfocused. Then, with subtle shifts of emphasis, Gall invokes the metaphysical.

*Brazilians call them [dolphins] botos and they are enchanted creatures of the Amazon . . . The river people revere the boto for his magic – much of it sexual.*<sup>2</sup>

In *Cherub*, a stone dolphin and boy share a sun-dappled pond with real fish. Distorted by movement and shallow water, the swimming fish seem elusive and illusionistic, more the creatures of a

visionary dream-state and mythic past than the textural tangibility of the statuary. Beyond pond and fish, past and present, a darkened pathway leads into the jungle.

In three other photographs, *Linda, Tortola*; *Torso*; and *The Baths*, human forms are either fully or partially submerged in water, a condition charged with sensuality and religious significance, at once seductive and baptismal. Backs are turned to camera and viewer as the figures look out and away – a metaphorical device used often by German romanticist Caspar David Friedrich.

*I saw orange birds, yellow birds . . . macaws, toucans and tapiers, deer and snakes. Trees of two hundred feet dwarfed me, and mosquitos overwhelmed me.*<sup>3</sup>

The most precarious balance is found where the contrasts are greatest. *Bamboo Forest* presents an aggressive environment vaguely threatening to the vulnerable human in its shadows. Conversely, *Vertical Palms* conveys the encroachment of civilization on a receding jungle, its carefully manicured space occupying the foreground.

Gall never takes us far from uncontained and uncontrolled nature: rampant, overgrown jungle encroaching on statuary, swimming pools and cultivated gardens close to ocean and jungle, stone carved to imitate leaves and vines, and vegetation trained to follow the symmetry of stone walls. The unruly and unknown, shot in soft focus or shadow, provide visual and metaphorical contrast to the corporeality of skin and stone, static focus, contained space, and growth. Gall's camera reflects and reveals, its lens both a "window and mirror" of reality.<sup>4</sup> In both, we find extreme contrasts and tenuous balances. If, as Marilyn Zeitlin points out, Gall's photographs are "springboards for going somewhere else," their point of departure is also a point of arrival: the junction of two journeys, internal and external, through tropical landscapes and inner vistas. ■

Notes

- 1 A.B. Walkley, introduction to *Treasure of the Humble*, by Maurice Maeterlinck, p. xi.
- 2 Brian Kelly and Mark London, *Amazon*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983, p. 307.
- 3 Ibid, p. xiii.
- 4 John Szarkowski's concept of photographs as windows or mirrors was outlined in his exhibition catalogue, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960*, distributed by the New York Graphic Society, 1978.

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