
December 28, 2003

ARCHITECTURE: THE HIGHS; The Buildings (and Plans) of the Year

By **HERBERT MUSCHAMP**

1. **WALT DISNEY CONCERT HALL, LOS ANGELES** -- Just go. And be happy that you don't have to write about the most unreviewable building it's been my very great pleasure to be stumped by. Frank Gehry's masterpiece is architecture without boundaries. It is inseparable from the music performed inside it and from the kinetic energy of the city outside its bodacious walls. A building that is to 21st-century Los Angeles what Garnier's Opera House was to 19th-century Paris: the empathic center of the world.

2. **McCORMICK STUDENT CENTER, CHICAGO** -- For his first American building, located on the Chicago campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology, Rem Koolhaas puts Mies van der Rohe on the couch. What follows is a free association of colors, patterns, photo murals and other graphics, set within a kaleidoscope of diagonally organized spaces. No Oedipal dramas here: just the familiar pattern of the child who lives out the subconscious fantasies of the parent.

3. **PERRY STREET APARTMENT BUILDINGS, NEW YORK** -- Two exquisite conversation pieces by Richard Meier, in dialogue with each other and with their surroundings, the historic fabric of Greenwich Village. Forty years ago, Jane Jacobs's anti-modern architecture movement was launched from this neighborhood, and a good thing it was, too. But the crusade also led to a contempt for architectural values, a reactionary climate that has benefitted no one. As much art as they are architecture, the towers use a vocabulary that evokes the early years of Minimalist sculpture. What you see is where you live.

4. **SOLDIER FIELD, CHICAGO** -- If so many bright people think a building is bad, it must really be bad, right? Not in this case. Extreme sports stadium: that's what we get with Wood & Zapata's dynamic remodeling of an existing stadium in downtown Chicago. Clients need to be less fearful of provoking criticism. It is inherently aggressive to move things forward. Those with the courage to do so should not be surprised if they become targets of others' aggression in return.

5. **ROSENTHAL CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, CINCINNATI** -- With each completed project, it becomes clearer that Zaha Hadid is not designing for space aliens. This museum is meant for curious people with bright, attractive lives. The acceleration of contemporary life is represented here, but so is the desire to get off the treadmill and catch your breath. The Rosenthal is an urban oasis in every way that it's possible for built form to be.

6. **ARK OF THE WORLD, COSTA RICA** -- The centerpiece of Greg Lynn's show at the Museum of

Applied Art in Vienna, this as yet unbuilt design for a museum and visitor's center in the National Park of Costa Rica is a brainy piece of work by a maestro of software-based design. If there is to be an architectural convergence of biology and information technology, this design points the way to it.

7. 1 COLUMBUS CIRCLE, NEW YORK -- Faint heart never won fair critic. Brad Cloepfil's proposal for remodeling Edward Durell Stone's mid-20th-century campanile at 2 Columbus Circle is an unwelcome exercise in caution. A quarter-turn around the circle, though, things are looking up and up, with David Childs's design for Time Warner's sleek new headquarters at 1 Columbus Circle. A comparison between the new headquarters and the Art Deco pastiche Mr. Childs proposed for this site in the 1980's might actually restore your faith in progress. Welcome to New York's first metrosexual towers.

8. THE NEW MUSEUM, NEW YORK -- In November the New Museum unveiled the plans for the building it intends to occupy at 235 Bowery. Designed by Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa of the Tokyo firm Sanaa, the project is a seven-story building clad with zinc-plated steel. Each floor is articulated as a distinct container, shifted horizontally around a central axis. The set-backs will enable skylights to bring natural light into the galleries below.

9. 9/11 MEMORIAL COMPETITION, NEW YORK -- The ground zero memorial competition, much maligned, was not a failure after all. Not if you can accept that the point of the competition was not necessarily to produce success. The undertaking revealed a plain truth: not enough time has passed for any mere design to surpass in emotional power the pure void that extends from earth to sky. That revelation was worth something. So what if it was inadvertent? What alternative was possible, given the politically driven timetable that been hustling the design process rapidly toward the abyss?

10. ARCHITECTURE CENTER, NEW YORK -- What will 2004 bring for this storefront space for meetings and exhibitions, sponsored by the American Institute of Architects? Handsomely designed by Andrew Berman, the bright, open site has great potential. As the issues swirling around the planning of ground zero have shown, there's a pressing need for a platform for serious discussion of contemporary architecture. Will the center become a place of cultural discrimination or just another outpost for conflict avoidance?

11. CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK -- Happy Birthday, Central Park. We've loved you for every one of your 150 years. We loved you 40 years ago, when you were frankly looking a little shabby, and we admire you today, looking in your prime, as the standard against which all our efforts to animate public space must be measured.