

including *louche* depictions of nymphs and satyrs, denoted the interior as masculine space.

Increasingly, dining out expanded into entertainment, for example, in “bohemian” restaurants, which featured singers, and this occurred in tandem with the growth of entertainment generally. By the early years of the twentieth century, not only high-end theaters and concert halls but nickelodeons, early cinemas, and vaudeville theaters had become mixed-class and mixed-gender spaces, further normalizing women’s presence in public locations once considered dubious for reputable women.

In a suggestive concluding chapter Sewell contrasts the unsuccessful 1896 campaign for women’s voting rights in the state of California with the successful 1911 campaign, demonstrating how differently women used space in each. Whereas in 1896 most suffrage meetings had been held in private houses, by 1911 women made use of department store windows, street corners, entertainment spaces, public parades, and automobiles as well as running suffrage cafeterias and tearooms.

The value of this book resides in its detailed application of general analyses of gendered urban spaces to one city. Sewell’s discussion of design and of the layout of streets and districts (for example exactly where the nickelodeons were found, or where cafeterias first sprang up) is especially insightful. There is perhaps too much reliance on diary material of a very few women, yet this material is interesting and suggestive.

Overall, the book paints a vivid and accessible portrait of a particular place and time. Its analysis sheds new light on urban configurations of gender and class and will interest scholars. Its style and content should attract more general readers.

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Note

1. See for example, Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

Wanda M. Corn

Women Building History: Public Art at the 1893 Columbian Exposition

Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011, xi + 266 pages, 9 color and 144 b/w illus. \$49.95, ISBN 9780520241114

The 1893 Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition requires little introduction for readers of this journal. What Wanda Corn accomplishes with her marvelous study is to shift the emphasis away from Daniel Burnham, the exposition’s formidable Director of Works, to the women who designed and decorated its Woman’s Building. The result is an important reinterpretation of the fair and of the importance of gender for understanding public art and architecture.

Women Building History is divided into four parts that address the history of the exposition, the history of the Woman’s Building, the history and content of the mural decorations, and the critical responses to the design and decorations of the building. Two additional features of this book are notable. First, it includes short biographical entries about the women who contributed to designing the Woman’s Building. Second, it includes sidebars to tell parallel and alternative stories about topics ranging from “the feminization of the banjo” to the “skirt dance,” subjects that shed light on the content of the building’s decorations where, Corn contends, there is more to the story than meets the eye.

Designed by Sophia Hayden, the Woman’s Building was situated at the intersection of the forces of “civilization,” represented by the White City, and the forces of “savagery,” arranged into ethnological and commercial exhibits along the mile-long Midway Plaisance. Both contemporary observers and later historians have noted that the Woman’s Building represented women as agents of “civilization” and bulwarks against roiling waters of “otherness” that constantly threatened to overwhelm Burnham’s well-ordered ideal city. What distinguishes Corn’s book is that it examines the interior world of the Woman’s Building and presents one of the finest analyses of the decorative arts yet published about any exposition.

For Corn, the chief value of the decorations is that they reveal “how some women used art to visually express their politics at the same time others were using words to register theirs” (10). With demands increasing for women’s political and economic rights, Corn writes, “[t]he decorations by women artists at the 1893 Fair offer a stunning case study of what female artists had to say on the rare occasion when they were asked to ‘speak’ in public.” Unlike male artists who depicted women in terms of “virtue and perfection, youth, and beauty,” female artists endeavored “to wrest the female body from the male gaze and make it speak to woman’s work, intelligence, and emancipation” (10).

Examples of these claims abound in *Women Building History*. Corn’s interpretation of Mary Cassatt’s *Modern Woman* is a case in point. For one portion of this mural, which depicted three “Girls of Hope” (as Corn describes them) chasing a symbolic representation of “Fame,” Cassatt reworked an older allegorical form to convey the possibilities held out by women reformers in the Progressive Era, namely that women could “desire to be as famous and accomplished as men in the public sphere” (142). Artists such as Mary MacMonnies and Lydian Field Emmet gave expression to other contemporary concerns: women’s labor (in the case of MacMonnies’s mural *Primitive Woman*) and women’s pursuit of knowledge (in the instance of Emmet’s oil painting *Art, Science, and Literature*). Far from being simply ornamental, these decorations were instrumental in encouraging new ways of seeing women and the categories that had defined them.

How should we think about the Woman’s Building and its decorations? Corn notes that contemporary art and architectural critics gave the building’s design and decorations decidedly mixed reviews. Male architectural critics were generally dismissive of Hayden’s design and less than encouraging of women joining the ranks of male architects. Art critics judged the building’s decorative arts more positively, but measured women’s works of art against a standard of “femininity.” Allegedly, good art, like *Primitive Woman*, passed muster because it was read as embracing pastoral

ideals and colors, whereas “garish” art, like *Modern Woman*, was, when not ignored, criticized for breaking with prevailing standards of harmony and for deploying colors in a manner that “assaults” the eye (10). For Corn, this criticism—even the most absurd criticism—of the decorative arts in the Woman’s Building spoke volumes about a moment when women artists and a woman architect determined to struggle for parity with their male counterparts and to insist on shaping the form and content of America’s public art.

However important, the success of women decorative artists at the 1893 exposition was bittersweet. As Corn puts it: “Not only was it the *first* occasion on which MacMonnies, Cassatt, and other women were able to work on a grand scale, but it was their *last and only* opportunity to fulfill a public commission.” “Not until the feminist revolution of the 1970s,” Corn insists, “when Judy Chicago and her many coworkers . . . in Los Angeles opened a contemporary Woman Building (1973–91), did other all-woman endeavors take place on a similar scale” (9–10). Perhaps, but how then should we explain artist Sara Ward Conley? As Elizabeth Israels Perry explains in a recent essay, Conley, inspired by the 1893 Woman’s Building, designed the Woman’s Building for the 1897 Nashville Tennessee Centennial.¹ This was a relatively large-scale building, crafted and managed by women, with two heroic sculptural representations of *Maternity* and *Women in Art* standing at its entrance. For at least some women artists and designers, it would seem that the effects of the 1893 Woman’s Building may not have been deferred for as long as Corn suggests. But Corn’s larger point about “parity” with male artists and architects is surely well taken, as is her insistence that the 1893 fair marked a watershed for women artists and their engagement with public art.

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Note

1. Elisabeth Israels Perry, “Memorializing the 1897 Tennessee Centennial Woman’s Building,” in *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and*

Gender at World’s Fairs, ed. T. J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 149–65.

Robert Alexander Gonzalez
Designing Pan-America: U.S. Architectural Visions for the Western Hemisphere

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011, 280 pp., 204 color and b/w illus. \$65, ISBN 9780292723252

The notion of a unified, politically integrated, Western hemisphere, removed from the corruptions and agitations of the Old World, has haunted the American imagination since the early nineteenth century. Simultaneously an idealistic dream, a diplomatic tool, an ideological vehicle, and an economic engine, the Pan-American idea has, along with many other constructs, endured cyclical phases and weathered stale interpretations, waxing and waning along with the policy needs of its dominant enforcer, the United States. Occasionally a subject for historians of politics, international relations, and cultural diplomacy, it has served historians of art and architecture only rarely.

Robert Alexander Gonzalez addresses this deficit by exploring what this protean notion has meant for architects and designers over the last 125 years. In four long chapters he moves through a quartet of case studies to invoke an array of practitioners, promoters, politicians, and businessmen, some of them almost entirely forgotten today, who sought to objectify Pan-Americanism for a larger public. The course of this odyssey uncovers a set of evolving visual conventions and familiar clichés, alongside some heterodox challenges that, all together, say something about the continuing contradictions hovering around this intercontinental “contract.”

Gonzalez begins by considering what he calls “The Birth of Pan-American Architecture” at several of those turn-of-century expositions that dazzled tens of millions. Whether summary or originating, world’s fairs showcased statements of aspiration and architectural salesmanship. With an era of mass international travel

still on the horizon, they introduced Americans to corporate declarations of identity and nationalist proclamations of achievement. Starting with New Orleans in 1884, continuing in Chicago in 1893, and climaxing in Buffalo in 1901, the South and Central American republics penetrated these pageants of progress in some numbers, despite the fact that expositions often served as props for the mercantile ambitions of their municipal hosts. While nothing like a distinctive Pan-American architecture emerged from these eclectic settings, some early schemes for Chicago’s urban competitors contained arresting suggestions. And although Buffalo’s 1901 exposition explicitly assumed a Pan-American theme, Gonzalez concludes that architectural interpretations had “varied so drastically from city to city that no one theme or style could be isolated as the most appropriate expression of the concept” (65).

A second chapter on the creation of Washington’s Pan-American Union Building (1910), designed by Albert Kelsey and Paul Philippe Cret, seems to offer more hope of definition. In a carefully detailed recounting of the project’s history (and in later chapters as well), Kelsey emerges as the most energetic and committed architectural promoter of Pan-Americanism, referencing, in the materials used, the landscaping, and the art and decorative details, a compound of indigenous traditions, Spanish colonialism, the exotic tropics, and Columbus’s voyage. In essence Kelsey, through an “Orientalizing tactic,” sought to “tropicalize” the beaux-arts shell envisioned by his colleague Cret (69). The end result, Gonzalez argues, was to align the United States, in this home for the formal organization of the American republics, with the great colonizing empires of the past. “The installation of a tropical stage at the center of the Pan-American Union Building was an ideological provocation,” Gonzalez charges (70). In the thinking of John Barrett, its director-general, the Union would serve as a giant hospitality suite for delegates, diplomats, and visitors. Gonzalez explores some of the “perplexing” features arrayed “to construct multiculturalism from a European perspective.” Again, there was little clarity about the larger concept. Was Kelsey’s aim