Architecture/Design

MODERN ART MUSEUM OF FORT WORTH, TEXAS
LEWIS KACHUR

Surprisingly, the first building in the United States by well-known Osaka-born architect Tadao Ando (b. 1941) is the new Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, which opened last December. Ando’s spare understated structures, featuring smoothly finished custom-poured concrete, have been widely commissioned in Japan for over two decades. Now this museum can be considered the latest volley in the intra-city rivalry between Fort Worth and Dallas. The Nasher Foundation for modern sculpture under construction in Dallas will be the coming response. (Both carrying a $65 million price tag.) It is also part of the unabated museum boom, and the latest must-see for the culture tourist, drawing stopovers on cross-country flights.

This Modern remains part of Fort Worth’s unique cultural district ‘campus,’ but is no longer adjoining the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, designed by Philip Johnson. Now its near neighbour is Louis Kahn’s beloved Kimbell Museum that is, as Jean Martin recently wrote, ‘one of the most beautiful museum buildings in
the world' (The Art Book, issue 2, 2003). Gallery space is now 53,000 square feet, five times the area of its former Herbert Bayer-designed building.

Ando’s long and low, unremarkable façade needs the towering new Richard Serra vertical steel plate Vortex out front to signal it as an art museum. Thus it is rather the opposite of the semaphore-like pavilion of Santiago Calatrava in Milwaukee. Ando’s design pleasures lie inside, with a huge two-storey entry atrium, and even more so with a quiet pool of water ringing its three rectangular wings at the back. Their projecting flat roofs seem to float above glass walls, with a simple yet striking Y-shaped support, which is mirrored in the pool. It is thus a ‘pavilion museum,’ set in a park, in Peter Schjeldahl’s recent taxonomy (New Yorker, 13 January 2003). It is symptomatic of current museum practice that the soaring atrium leads first to museum offices to the right, museum store and bookshop to the left. The galleries are tucked away to the left and further back.

The inaugural show of the collection filled the two floors of 20-foot high top-lit galleries with art from the New York School to the present. (Despite the museum’s name, there is nary an early twentieth-century modernist work in sight.) The permanent collection is supplemented by extensive loans, providing a projection of what it could become if local munificence materialises. Meanwhile, it seems another instance of the ‘if you build it they will come’ museum, which will be considerably shaped by curatorial initiative and acquisitions.

It is good to see the focus is not exclusively New York art, with interesting examples of French and Californian Pop, for instance. Very effective site-specific spaces have been built in: a two storey stairwell for Martin Puryear’s ascending Ladder for Booker T Washington (1996), on extended loan, and a curved niche for an Anselm Kiefer winged palette sculpture. Indeed Kiefer is a house favourite, with an enormous painting on one side of the entry lobby. Likewise, British-born Sean Scully, who has an entire large gallery devoted to a mini-retrospective of his Catherine stripe paintings. There is also room for local stars of the recent past, such as Texans Vernon Fisher and Melissa Miller. Perhaps most congenial to Ando’s geometries are the generation of Minimal and post-Minimal sculptures and paintings: well-displayed works by Jackie Winsor, Dan Flavin and Donald Judd. (One wonders if such institutional spaces significantly perpetuate the reputation of this movement.) The end galleries of each of the three wings are especially scenic. Water provides the effective backdrop to a floor plane by Carl Andre, and is nicely reflected in Michelangelo Pistoletto’s mirrored The Etruscan (L’etruso), 1976. This is a curatorial challenge, however, witness George Baselitz’s sculpture, overwhelmed by the view.

Recent photography and video bring the installation up to the present, anchored by Cindy Sherman, and videos by Bruce Nauman and Bill Viola.

The loans will soon go back, the collection consolidated on one floor, and the other will be devoted to temporary exhibitions. The first is a Philip Guston retrospective of 140 works organised by chief curator Michael Auping, on view through 8 June, 2003. Following its Texas premiere, the Guston show travels to the San Francisco MOMA, the Metropolitan Museum and the Royal Academy, London.

We will be hearing more from Tadao Ando, who has just unveiled a master plan for the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Mass. He is also designing a new Calder Museum for Philadelphia. Meanwhile the First Lady, Laura Bush has toured the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 2002. Designed by Tadao Ando. Photograph by David Woo.

Museum of Fort Worth and pronounced its architecture ‘magnificent.’

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NICHOLAS HAWKSMOOR – REBUILDING ANCIENT WONDERS

VAUGHAN HART
Yale University Press 2002 £35.00 $60.00 299 pp. many illus ISBN 0-300-09699-2

The architect Nicholas Hawksmoor’s obituary (1736) tells of a man in private life who was ‘a tender husband, a loving father, a sincere Friend and a most agreeable Companion’, and a man noted (despite wracking pains of gout) for his evenness of temper. He had a reputation for being modest about his work. Contemporaries admired his knowledge of the history of architecture and his scholarly grasp of the famous buildings of the world despite never having actually seen them; they knew him to be a ‘Skilful Mathematician, Geographer and Geometrician’. For Hawksmoor the formative collaboration with Christopher Wren was invaluable as grounding in both the theory and practice of building. It gave him close contact with the Royal Society and he was able to meet the best thinkers of the day while nurturing the desire to collect books covering a huge range of subjects from philosophy to civil engineering and natural history. His library notably included contemporary works telling of advances in
the emerging sciences, as well as books on travel in exotic lands. Hawksmoor was unlike many of his contemporaries, particularly those gentleman-architects who, on returning from The Grand Tour, replicated the great Italian buildings they had seen. Instead, he was self-educated and widely informed so he could gradually gather ideas for later use in buildings. Using the phrases of an empiricist he once said that all buildings needed to be tested, like any other worthwhile experiment, by ‘Experience and Tryalls’.

He lived in an age of reason, at a time in which questions of style and taste were of supreme importance; they were the focus of most discussions in drawing rooms and coffeehouses of the day. In the latter part of his life, particularly, the Palladian hold on architectural taste was a tight one; to Hawksmoor, its pedantry and strict adherence to antique models was far too narrow. When the archpriest of Palladianism, Lord Burlington, openly criticised Hawksmoor’s work, he called Burlington and his fellow architects mere ‘virtuosi’. His own ‘architectonicall method’, he insisted, was based on ‘good reason’ and his buildings were full of what Vanbrugh called ‘ingenuity’. He simply failed to follow the Palladian tyranny of taste. The antique ornaments he used departed from their historical models in both form and use. They were, to say the least, inventive. He used them in unprecedented and exciting ways because he needed to adapt the historical models to fit local circumstances. Throughout his career, which extended from 1702 to 1730, his architectural vocabulary changed according to expressive needs, its forms were always rich and bold, being grand and melancholy at the same time.

After Hawksmoor’s death he was completely ignored, even his tombstone in Hertfordshire lay neglected and broken until early in the nineteenth century. There were some glimmerings of interest in his work when a short book on his life appeared in 1924 but his place in English architecture only became clear when the full-scale monograph by Kerry Downes was published in 1959. This provided an excellent basis for Vaughan Hart’s book, which looks not only at the surviving examples of his work, but also at papers and letters, and at the unrealised and the now, sadly, destroyed projects. It is a good time for a fresh assessment of Hawksmoor’s work, not least because he is such an interesting individualist and because his use of ornament and mass has much to say to today’s postmodernist architect.

Hart’s book falls into two parts; it moves, as it were, from theory into practice. First he treats Hawksmoor’s influences, the architects and ideas that gave rise to his architecture, and then focuses on his major solo projects. We learn how and why the architect adapted the historical model to fit in with local circumstances such as site, patron and dedication and how he added ornament to give emphasis to a political or religious message. The book is an erudite study of Hawksmoor’s architecture, solidly supported by primary sources and persuasively and unpretentiously written.

By the end of 1694 Hawksmoor, still only 33, was involved with the re-building of Easton Neston, a country house in Northamptonshire. The owner, Sir William Fermor (Lord Leominster), recently ennobled, had acquired a collection of sculpture requiring elegant display. In keeping with these special circumstances, Hawksmoor embellished the façade with lions’ heads (for Leominster) thus completely altering the canonic forms of the composite capital. The interior he redesigned to include a commodious central hall and a number of ‘conveniencies’ which were something new and resulted in a different treatment for the façade. The house, although not large, became very grand and interesting. Here, in his first solo work, Hawksmoor shows his readiness to customise age-old forms to fit individual circumstances. This is the writer’s main thesis; it is convincingly shown in Hawksmoor’s London churches where his sense of mass and ornament is best observed.

The churches in London were a part of the ambitious but unrealised plan for the building of Fifty New Churches after the devastation of the Great Fire. Financed by a coal tax and administered by a set of Commissioners, Hawksmoor became involved in the work from 1711. For a general plan the basilica form was used (except where the site was restricted) with western towers or spires and porticoes. The duty of the Commissioners was to ensure that the buildings conformed to the Act and added prestige to the City. One report even tackled that knotty problem, the matter of aesthetics, because the architecture had to be of good quality ‘stone and other proper materials’ and needed to adhere to a certain standard of dignity. One Commissioner, John Vanbrugh, stressed that the church buildings should have ‘the most Solemn & Awfull Appearance both without and within’. Hawksmoor found that he had a wonderful freedom to design towers and steeples as he wished. He had been interested in rooftops and skylines for some time, he called them his ‘emmencies’, and it is with these forms that he created what Hart calls his rooftop ‘Gardens of Rememberances’ or, as another writer termed it his ‘cemeteries in the sky’. The architect’s collection of Renaissance and Baroque pattern books provided the sources for a large vocabulary of forms from sepulchres, memorials and funeral monuments of all ages, some of

Nicholas Hawksmoor. Detail from front façade of St Mary Woolnoth, London. Photo Vaughan Hart.
them very exotic and grotesque. Hawksmoor placed his flaming urns (a symbol of the Resurrection), obelisks and pyramids on the church towers above elaborate lanterns. They gave his buildings a greater spiritual authenticity.

As well as the invention of ornament for the towers, Hawksmoor’s church buildings exhibit a huge stylistic range. This was determined, the author says, by the location of the buildings. Hawksmoor, guided by his source material, would have wanted his buildings to be appropriate to their situation. Hart, on solid ground here, demonstrates this using the churches to illustrate this point. The three churches in poor districts are plainer than his church buildings in the richer areas of London. Christ Church, Spitalfields (begun in 1714) for example, located in an area of poor weavers’ houses, stood (as indeed it does today, thanks to a decade of dedicated fund raising) as a beacon of Christian morality, austere and unaffected with little in the way of ornament. The flanking walls of the church are massive, the window openings appear to be ‘punched’ through the thickness of the masonry. The tower rises up over a portico built as if it were a huge three-dimensional Serlian, or Palladian, window of enormous scale. It is a fearsome prospect, Christ Church shows the ‘most Solemn and Awfull Appearance’ and Hawksmoor is at his best.

ELEANOR ROBBINS
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MEDIEVAL ARCHITECTURE
NICOLA COLDSTREAM
Oxford University Press 2002 £11.99 £18.95

The descriptive introduction to the Oxford History of Art series claims a combination of ‘beautiful illustrations with fascinating new perspectives on world art and architecture’. Nicola Coldstream’s new Medieval Architecture certainly fits that description. The design of this series is satisfyingly put together for the reader and the picture browser, and this volume makes a useful contribution to the needs of both. Some stunning images of great medieval buildings reveal a ‘new perspective’ (see the aerial view of Chartres Cathedral, or Tony Kersting’s telling image of the formidable curtain wall of Caernarfon Castle in Wales) and Dr Coldstream’s organisation of her subject juxtaposes information and ideas in a thought-provoking way, often undoubtedly ‘fascinating’. That, in the end, the text fails to provide a convincing ‘introduction’ to this rich material is probably the result of over-complex organisation and the (seemingly unnecessary) intrusion of current scholarly debates. Yet there are gems to be found, insights to be enjoyed and the whole is presented on a broad and inclusive canvas – a medieval architecture which extends to the edges of Christian Europe.

The structure of the book suggests an apparently neat distinction between practicality (Part I: ‘the changing appearance of late medieval buildings, their structure and how they were designed and built’) and meaning (Part II, about ‘how space was used, architectural symbolism, and how buildings reinforced both religious and political messages’). Yet in reality Dr Coldstream’s argument is less discriminating. She is hardly to be blamed for that: such distinctions are desperately difficult to sustain where holistic appreciation is so natural. A nice example of this difficulty is provided by a brief discussion of Saint-Denis, where suddenly the importance of meaning intrudes into technical skill under the heading of the ‘language of medieval architecture’. She describes how Abbot Suger was clear what he wanted, chiefly ‘a splendid setting for the shrine of the patron saint’, coupled with ‘a crown of light reflected through large stained glass windows’. Here is a patron thinking of meaning and purpose, but fully in a context of form and design. And this surely is to a large degree where the pleasures of knowing about medieval architecture lie, and what the purpose of this kind of introductory text should be.

Where technical skills and the language of meaning should be inextricably coupled in a description of a building: meaning and form, patron’s desires and functional purposes, Coldstream chops up the experience. For those familiar with this history and with the terminology of buildings, this may suggest interesting links but, as an introduction to medieval architecture for an inexperienced audience, this device is not altogether helpful. To be introduced to whole buildings: to see space, structure, decoration and design, together with the patron’s intent, might have created a text which provoked the exploration of connections and deeper contexts. Here, too often, the reader struggles to put together the building from a number of fragmentary mentions, or takes a journey across both time and space in pursuit of detail as, for example, pages 50–52, where the quarry is decoration and style: ‘After about 1400 two distinct aesthetic trends emerged . . . one emphasised movement, the other arrested it’. And this leads to pan-European space-and-time travel, from Prague to Portugal, from 1400 to the late sixteenth century, finding a diversity of structures and surfaces – all somewhat mysteriously exemplifying this single (though double) aesthetic.

More satisfactorily for the reader, Nicola Coldstream sometimes uses a very different device, that of the extended case study, for instance dwelling on the documentary evidence behind the building history of Exeter Cathedral, the Ca’ d’Oro, Venice and Ghent Town Hall. This provides a pleasing opportunity to think through the links between the various imperatives involved in any building; the availability of materials, the forces of local tradition, the intentions of the patron and the constraints imposed by the site and by supplies. While the whole story of medieval architecture cannot be treated with such leisure, it provides perhaps the most informative of introductions to ways of thinking about buildings, and – to use Michael Baxandall’s phrase – ‘patterns of intention’. A similar cluster of cases, designed there to deal with commemoration, reveals again the natural holism of architecture. For example, the changing enthusiasm for the commemoration of St Thomas Becket at Canterbury is revealed to have as much to do with changing enthusiasm for building as devotion to the saint.

For a beginner, for whom the terminology is new territory (even the time boundaries of ‘medieval’ or ‘gothic’, let alone the interplay of structure, decoration and symbolism) this book is not always easy to navigate. Its pan-European scope is set out in a pair of maps, which nevertheless provide little to guide the reader to their intention and purpose. In particular, Map 2, ‘Western Christendom ± 1450’, while it shows many of the places mentioned in the text, has unexplained colour coding (which defines some but by no means all political areas). Even the ‘boundaries of western Christendom’ lack
a clear purpose: some buildings included in Portugal sit outside the boundary; other huge areas are included, but have no buildings or towns worth a mention. Similarly the book’s full ‘technical’ vocabulary is partially explained through occasional boxed texts, some including excellent labelled drawings, but has no comprehensive glossary for easy reference. The importance given to ‘constructive geometry’, to the role (or non-role) of the ‘architect’ and the question of decorum (in the Vitruvian sense) introduce, but do not resolve, issues which might have increased the thematic unity of the volume, but somehow did not. There are highly satisfactory moments to be found in this book, wonderful images, and some intimations of a ‘gothic’ sensibility, which provide the claimed new perspective. But, like many medieval edifices, it is constructed in a variety of conflicting tive. But, like many medieval edifices, it is constructed in a variety of conflicting tive geometry’, to the role (or non-role) of principal players in the world of fashion’. She identifies ‘a logic of fashion’ based on a tension between ‘originality and reproduction’ and this prompts an illuminating discussion about ‘the shifting, often ambiguous relationships between elite and popular culture, between the original artwork and the mass-produced commodity’. Troy’s prose is clearly written and consistently intelligent.

This book, which will obviously appeal to both art and fashion historians and students, is plainly designed and has monochrome illustrations; consequently, it lacks the glamour and seductive glossy paper and colour photographs typical of today’s leading fashion magazines. It has 47 pages of footnotes, a 28-page bibliography and a detailed index.

JOHN A WALKER
Freelance art critic and art historian

COUTURE CULTURE: A STUDY IN MODERN ART AND FASHION
NANCY J TROY
MIT Press 2002 £26.50 $39.95
449 pp. 150 mono illus

A spate of recent books, catalogues and exhibitions testify to a widespread interest in the crossover between the fine arts and the world of fashion design, which is not in fact a new phenomenon. Troy, who is Chair of the Art History Department of the University of Southern California, has contributed a scholarly, historical study (which took 12 years to complete) that focuses upon the elite branch of the rag trade – haute couture – in Paris during the early twentieth century, and its relationship with the avant-garde visual art of the period. Her principal examples are Paul Poiret, who was a patron of the arts as well as a leading couturier, and Marcel Duchamp, who produced several fashion-related works (that is, his readymades).

Four chapters examine: ‘fashion, art and the marketing of modernism; theatre and the spectacle of fashion; fashioning commodity culture; and the readymade and the genuine reproduction.’ Other subjects discussed include: advertising, classicism, Cubism, department stores, Kahnweiler the art dealer, mannequins, nationalism, Orientalism, stage and costume design, and the impact of the First World War.

Troy is not interested in spotting visual influences and borrowings between the two realms of fashion and modern art but in examining shared ‘conceptual structures and marketing strategies’ and, in particular, ‘the discourse of art as it was appropriated and manipulated by principal players in the world of fashion’. She identifies ‘a logic of fashion’ based on a tension between ‘originality and reproduction’ and this prompts an illuminating discussion about ‘the shifting, often ambiguous relationships between elite and popular culture, between the original artwork and the mass-produced commodity’. Troy’s prose is clearly written and consistently intelligent.

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DRESS IN DETAIL FROM AROUND THE WORLD
ROSEMARY CRILL, JENNIFER WEARDEN, VERTITY WILSON
V&A Publications 2002 £30.00 $45.00 224 pp. 150 col illus
ISBN 1-85177-377-0
US dist Harry N Abrams, NY

Dress in Detail is the third in a series of lavishly illustrated publications that focus on a broad range of clothing examples in the Victoria and Albert Museum’s extensive collections. This book concentrates on highly decorative garments, described by the authors as ‘indigenous dress’, that originate from many countries, although examples from Central and Eastern Europe and Asia dominate. The introduction provides an insight into how these objects found their way into the Museum. Many were collected for their aesthetic value – for their fabrics, patterns and decorative techni-ques – and it is these details that provide the focus of the book.

Structured around specific garment features: ‘Necklines’; ‘Fastenings’; ‘Cuffs, edgings and seams’; ‘Contrasting fabrics’, ‘Linings and pockets’; ‘Pleats and gathers’; and ‘Applied decoration’, the authors chart the skills of makers through discussion of specific examples. Explanations of construction and garment decoration are provided. Every clothing item is accompanied by superb colour photographs by Richard Davis, each illustrating a section of a garment, allowing one to examine closely details such as fine embroidery, trimmings, and even cloth construction. These details are contextualised by means of line drawings of whole garments (by Leonie Davis) that demonstrate the complexity of many of the items under discussion. This method is particularly effective in the ‘Pleats and gatherers’ section. The top section of a boy’s shirt from Hungary (Mezőkövesd) appears in the photograph, illustrating the fine concertina pin-tucks, satin-stitch embroidery, needle lace, pearlised buttons and eyelet embroidery. The two line drawings allow one to gain an insight into how makers were able to combine fullness and close fit in one garment.

Many of the photographs included in the section ‘Contrasting fabrics, linings and pockets’ emphasise the formal juxtaposition of different textiles, such as those that make up the nineteenth-century coats and robes from Tibet. Although the majority of the garments included in the book are from the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, there are some contemporary pieces. A pair of women’s trousers designed in 1995 by Chunghie Lee is included as it makes use of a patchwork technique that had been used for centuries in the artist’s native Korea.

At a time when the foregrounding of theory is beginning to dominate studies of clothing, Dress in Detail is unapologetically object-based. For more detailed information on the social and cultural contexts for the creation and consumption of these garments one needs to consult specialist publications, a small number of which are listed at the end of the book. Dress in Detail is probably of greatest interest to designers and makers and provides its readers with a sumptuous snapshot of some of the Victoria and Albert Museum’s most decorative treasures.

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MODERN ART AND FASHION
Nancy J Troy

THE WORLD DRESS IN DETAIL FROM AROUND

DARTINGTON COLLEGE OF ARTS

47 pages of footnotes, a 28-page bibliography and a detailed index.

JOHN A WALKER
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