come away from the exhibition thinking that all classical portrait statues were of women. Even slaves had opportunities for “self-improvement.”

The water supply was abundant and “water for flushing toilets was essential for every household.” Pompeii emerged as a bourgeois society in which many of the visitors to the exhibition would have found themselves perfectly at home, though the more adventurous and prurient might have been attracted to bars, some of which “had a reputation for excessive drinking, gambling, and sexual immorality.”

All depictions of city life must be partial, but bourgeois Pompeii is more partial than most. There is almost no reference to public architecture and thus there is no politics, no empire, nor any economy. Eumachia’s statue stands next to that of no politics, no empire, nor any economy.

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And then there were the absent smells. Most people had inadequate water supplies. Fountains and cisterns provided water, which would be carried into houses. Human waste was emptied by buckets, often carried through houses, to be dumped into soil carts. Urine was collected in vats to be used in the cleaning of cloth. Pack animals moved goods through the city and turned the grain mills that made coarse flour. The city must have stunk, and the people would have been vulnerable to all the diseases common to the worst of slum cities.

Undoubtedly, the wealthy of Pompeii had lovely houses. But outside, there was another city on the street, kept back by the guard dogs. Life was difficult and dirty, and death sudden and pervasive. For the free poor (missing from the exhibition), the slaves, and women, hierarchic Roman society was violent, insecure, and very hard work. Before we are transported by nice bourgeois Pompeii, we might consider nasty Roman urbanism.

Leaving the exhibition, I wondered, yet again, why we are so committed to liking the Romans.

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Accompanying Publication

Drawing the Future: Chicago Architecture on the International Stage, 1900–1925
Mary & Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois
19 April 2013–6 August 2013

At a moment when architecture, urban design, and urban planning are focused on the phenomenon of global megacities, which are made possible by global finance and networks and made necessary by rapid urbanization, Drawing the Future: Chicago Architecture on the International Stage, 1900–1925 offered an important historical perspective (Figure 1). An illustrated exegesis on the ways in which urban design and planning principles, formal architectural devices, and building technologies traveled between Chicago and Europe via Canberra, Australia, the exhibition positioned the winning entry to that city’s Federal Capital Design Competition, by Chicago architects Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin in 1912, as the hinge on which these exchanges turned immediately before and after World War I.

Curated by David Van Zanten, with Ashley Elizabeth Dunn and Leslie Coburn, Drawing the Future was a sequel to the Block Museum’s Marion Mahony Griffin: Drawing the Form of Nature exhibition in 2005. Both exhibitions drew heavily upon the rich legacy of drawings gifted to Northwestern University by Marion Mahony Griffin. In addition to material from the Art Institute of Chicago and other collections, Drawing the Future also borrowed extensive materials from the Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections at Northwestern. The exhibitions and their accompanying catalogues demonstrated the depth of materials and scholarship at Northwestern relating to Chicago’s progressive architectural movement in general and the Griffins in particular. While the earlier exhibition focused exclusively on the work of Mahony, whose important contribution to architecture had not been attended to by architectural historians until relatively recently,1 Drawing the Future sought to contextualize the work of the architectural couple within a broader conversation about progressive urban planning and architecture almost a century ago.

The exhibition opened with the Griffins’ plan for Canberra, which situated a monumental City Beautiful urbanism within the context of an open landscape of hills and water. Despite the fact that neither of the architects had been to the site, these features provided an underlying ordering system for the axial planning of the city as a whole, placing the capital complex along the axis of two hills, fronting a lagoon formed from the water system. The work for Canberra was displayed in the context of renderings for the 1907–8 Plan of Chicago, establishing a contrast between the attitude toward nature embodied in each scheme, as presented in the approach of their delineators, Marion Mahony Griffin and Jules Guérin, respectively. An aerial view from Otto Wagner’s Die Großstadt (The large city; 1910) suggested the European
context. The second room’s collection of Chicago progressive architecture as seen through Mahony’s drawings of houses by Wright, Walter Burley Griffin, and herself provided the context for the Canberra proposal’s attention not only to landscape and topography but also to the setting of buildings within nature. As Van Zanten states in the catalogue of the first exhibition, “It must be emphasized that this new Chicago architecture was to an extraordinary degree one of drawings.” Through Wright’s Wasmuth Portfolio, with Mahony’s rendering techniques, an exhibition of the Griffins’ work in Paris and of their Canberra scheme in Lyon, both in 1914, and the couple’s travels to promote the competition for the Canberra parliament building, European architects and planners were exposed to their work. With entries to the competitions held by the Chicago City Club in 1914 and 1916, this second room also illustrated how progressive architects looked beyond Daniel Burnham’s monumental city to the qualities of the neighborhood and residential life. Proposals by American architects William Gray Purcell and George Elmslie for the Canberra parliament building demonstrated how progressives favored bold geometric massing over classical ornament for monumental structures. This dialogue between the architecture and urban planning of the Beaux-Arts/City Beautiful tendencies on the one hand and progressive architecture on the other ran through the exhibition, without being articulated as one of its specific themes.

The third room of the exhibition contrasted the Griffins’ residential work with proposals by European architects, most notably Tony Garnier’s Une cité industrielle, first exhibited in 1901 and 1904 as part of his work for the Prix de Rome and published in 1917, while he was architect of the city of Lyon. As with the Griffins’ interest in domestic and neighborhood life, Garnier’s Quartiers d’habitation demonstrate a shift from monumental Beaux-Arts and City Beautiful buildings to simple geometries stripped of ornament, also seen in the houses designed by the Griffins in Castlecrag, Sydney, in the 1920s, exhibited in the fourth room. The European context was also represented by work by Hermann Billing, Otto Kohtz, Wenzel Hablik, and Bruno Taut, although the link between these largely utopian works and the larger themes of the exhibition was not made clear.

The exhibition closed with postwar projects. These include Robert Mallet-Stevens’s drawings for Une cité moderne (1922), a purely domestic landscape with no overarching urban organization, and two perspectives from Ludwig Karl Hilberseimer’s Hochhaustadt (Highrise City, 1924), a city of repetitive residential slabs, industry, and transportation. These proposals seemed to represent for the curators the unfortunate demise of the progressive project—“an international architectural experiment”—after World War I, resulting in urban visions devoid of both grand symbolic vistas and proximity to nature.

Drawing the Future presented a counterargument to the narrative associated with the movement of European modern architecture to America, via the Museum of Modern Art’s International Style exhibition of 1932, a moment more often considered a forerunner to contemporary globalization. While this argument is important, and the exhibition went part of the way toward demonstrating how “architects and urban designers participated in conversations about the building of the modern city and were partners in a broad effort to reformulate the architecture and planning of the future metropolis,” the installation itself, which suggested the Griffins as the critical link in this exchange, did not hang together. Whether this was because the exhibition was too compressed to cover adequately the complex argument being pieced together by Van Zanten, which was better elaborated in the catalogue, or was trying to follow too many threads simultaneously—about progressive urbanism, the simplification of architectural form and the abandonment of detail, and the development of concrete construction methods—is unclear. It is also conceivable that the exhibition was too dependent on the Block Museum’s own collections, as illuminating as they may be.

This being said, as contemporary representations of “transnational exchange” are associated with architectural forms and rendering techniques only possible in an era of digital exchange and production, it was refreshing to see the elaborate and detailed renderings and ideas that managed to travel around the globe a century ago.

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Related Publication

Figure 1 Installation of Drawing the Future: Chicago Architecture on the International Stage, 1900–1925 (Mary & Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University).
Notes
1. See, for example, Anne Watson, ed., Beyond Architecture: Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin in America, Australia and India (Sydney, Australia: Powerhouse Publishing, 1998); David Van Zanten, ed., Marion Mahony Griffin: Drawing the Form of Nature (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005).

Sir Hugh Casson PRA, Making Friends
Royal Academy of Arts, London
31 May–22 September 2013

Sir Hugh Casson PRA, Making Friends was a small exhibition that commemorated a man whose career spanned fifty years and included a period as president of the Royal Academy (1976–84). Curated by the architectural historian Neil Bingham, and designed by Casson’s daughter’s Dinah, the tone of the exhibition was set with the description of him as “a spirited leader and a uniting force in the arts, delighting the public and profession alike.”

The approach taken to the curation was chronological and biographical. The exhibition opened with an outline of Casson’s early life and architectural training (Cambridge, then the Bartlett School in London). Next, two of the first room’s walls were devoted, one to his war work, when he served as a camouflage officer, and one to “Exhibitions and Interiors,” describing his role as director of architecture at the Festival of Britain and commissions for interiors such as on the Royal Yacht Britannia. A central block of vetrines displayed family correspondence, sketchbooks, and examples of his design work. The second room was devoted to “Architecture” and began with Casson’s prewar work as assistant to the modernist designer Christopher Nicholson on schemes for Augustus John and the patron of the surrealists, Edward James. The main focus was on the longest period of his professional life in partnership with Neville Conder. Photographs showed the firm’s major educational projects at Cambridge University’s Sidgwick Avenue site, the University of Birmingham, and the Royal College of Art, as well as for London Zoo, and numerous private commissions. Space was made for a display of books that Casson authored over his career, as well as for a celebration of his achievements as president of the Royal Academy, during which time he achieved the not insubstantial tasks of getting the institution on a sound financial footing and establishing the Friends organization, the latter of which has since been emulated by most major British galleries and museums. This final display led us back into the first room. The exhibition finished with a wall of the watercolors for which Casson became renowned in his latter years.

As a journey through an architect’s career, Sir Hugh Casson PRA, Making Friends offered an agreeable and comprehensive (within the size constraints) trip. The images were well chosen with a pleasing balance in favor of Casson’s own drawings and sketches. Bingham was fortunate here in having access to the archive recently donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum. Of particular note were Casson’s designs for the camouflage of portable aircraft hangars—disguises that included a public house, “The Lion”—and drawings of the Dome of Discovery under construction.

In many respects, therefore, there is little to fault about the exhibition. Yet there remains a sense that, with a greater concern for context, and a more nuanced sense of how a building is created, the display could have presented both an informative biographical account of Casson and an understanding of the evolution of English architectural modernism more generally. That this opportunity was not taken may reflect the location of the show. Although it has paid increasing attention in the recent past to the exhibition of architecture (a discipline in its remit since its foundation), the Royal Academy more generally devotes itself to exhibitions that conform to some of the older conventions of art history: the individual painter or sculptor (Manet, Daumier) or the national school (with recent shows focusing on Mexico and Australia). Casson was presented here very much in this vein, as sole author if not quite genius creator of the buildings exhibited. The show gave little sense of the process of collaboration that produces architecture and this despite the fact that Casson’s role in his postwar partnership was presented somewhat opaquely. On one of the wall panels, Bingham noted that Casson “took a predominantly advisory role in the practice, although he coordinated and designed many fine buildings.” There was something to be said about how architectural practices work, especially those undertaking significant public buildings.

Casson’s relationship with his wife, professional as well as personal, was also noted. But like Conder, her role was not discussed. Indeed, it was reduced to a photograph caption that recorded Margaret Casson as the designer of the fabric of the dress she was wearing. This conceptual problem was also evident in the other architecture exhibition at the Royal Academy at the time: Richard Rogers RA: Inside Out. The sin was worse in the latter exhibition, given that the first room of the show made much of the practice’s ethos of teamwork and collaboration with a good client. Meanwhile Su Rogers made but a fleeting appearance early on, a passing player in the greater story of her former husband’s unfolding vision.

The Rogers exhibition was also a reminder of the growing public status of the architect and the way that he, alone of that great 1980s generation of high-tech architects, has become the politician architect: advisor to New Labour and now a Labour peer. In this respect he has more in common with Casson than one might imagine, and taken together the two shows offer interesting insights into the trajectory of modernism in the postwar era. This is where the Casson show had real value. He is not paid much attention by architectural historians, except for his role at the Festival of Britain, which cannot be ignored. But as the exhibition made clear, from the early 1950s onward he was very much an establishment figure, not simply because of his presidency of the Royal Academy, but also as a favorite designer for the current royal family, for whom he purveyed a “modernism lite” in a number of domestic and nautical interiors. This is not, however, the establishment with which the English tradition of modernism is usually associated; the more familiar tale is that of the transition from strategic infiltration of arenas of influence in the 1930s to a hegemonic