that many more stories like this will transpire as the archives of commercial architectural photographers are increasingly “discovered.”

The tradition of photojournalism also appeared as a distinct thread throughout the exhibition, and the curators brought it full circle from Abbott. Constructing Worlds ended with Iwan Baan’s documentation of the Centro Financiero CONFinanças, an abandoned office and hotel development in Caracas, Venezuela, that had been informally colonized since the 1990s (the residents were being evicted at the time of the exhibition). The tower, known as Torre David, was transformed into a self-supporting community that became emblematic of the cooperative, organizational capability of Caracas’s vast underhoused population. This touching, even optimistic series of photographs shows Baan’s skill at humanizing the everyday lives of people in extraordinary circumstances.

The selection of Baan to end the exhibition was a clever one. Trained in art school but very much entrenched in the commercial enterprise of architectural photography, Baan exemplifies the global character of today’s professional practitioner. He can often be found shooting “starchitecture” from a helicopter, yet he is sensitive to the lived experience of those on the ground. His practice reflects the ease with which many photographers today move between commissioned work and personal projects, and how both might be recognized for constructing worlds in the popular imagination.

EMILY BILLS
Woodbury University

Related Publication

Notes

Drawing Ambience: Alvin Boyarsky and the Architectural Association
Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis 12 September 2014–4 January 2015
Rhode Island School of Design, Providence 24 April–2 August 2015

Rarely do we see an exhibition dedicated to the role of pedagogues, professors, or critics—all vital protagonists of architectural culture. Often subsumed in general discussions of pedagogy, or hidden away in the biographical data of architects’ backgrounds, pedagogues offer valuable insight into changing institutional cultures and the teaching environments where designers find their creative voices. At the core of the curatorial decision to focus on a teacher lies the possibility of critical engagement with the formative past of a wider architectural culture.

Curated by Igor Marjanović and Jan Howard, Drawing Ambience: Alvin Boyarsky and the Architectural Association was organized around the drawings and publications that Boyarsky collected and edited during his years in the Architectural Association. Across the four main rooms of the exhibition, the curators constructed a sophisticated dialogue between the drawings collected by Boyarsky and the publications the AA produced during his tenure, the former mounted on and the latter encased in openings in the walls, at times creating windows onto other exhibition spaces. Within the encasements, the curators deployed the compound palimpsests of some of the books, revealing the layered logic driving AAs publications and marking much of the deconstructivist movement in architecture.

Boyarsky was a central figure in post–World War II architectural culture, but one whose prominence has since faded. During his tenure at the AA, he transformed the school into a hub of architectural experimentation. As Irene Sunwoo argues, Boyarsky introduced to the AA the culture of experimentation that he had experienced during his years at the International Institute of Design, a traveling summer session that attracted an international group of students, theorists, and architects. 1 Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Bernard Tschumi, and many more were part of the vibrant environment that Boyarsky, a collector by nature, created. In an obituary, Grahame Shane praised him for turning the AA into the “most talked-about architectural center in the world.” 2 Boyarsky had a direct impact on architects, designers, and students of talent. His legacy persists in the programs that his disciples established throughout the world: Tschumi at Columbia, Leon van Schaik at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Peter Cook at the Bartlett School of Architecture. Marjanović, an important scholar of his work, has claimed that Boyarsky’s approach to drawing influenced pedagogy on an international level, shaping architectural discourse and practice. 3

With Drawing Ambience, the curators invited visitors to explore in Boyarsky’s collection the traces of the AA’s dynamic culture, where students and faculty transferred interactions and conversations from paper to lecture hall to gallery space and even to the AA’s pub. As noted in the introductory wall text, with the exhibition title the curators intended to point to “the imaginary space that architectural drawings evoke, but also to the physical ambience in which they were displayed, collected, and discussed.” Marjanović and Howard made it their central objective to present Boyarsky’s pedagogical reform as the environmental condition that gave birth to the architectural culture that would dominate much of the discussion during the 1980s and 1990s.

Throughout the four spaces of the exhibition, the visitor was exposed to the variety of media that Boyarsky’s experimental approach embraced. Screen prints, books, collages, and ink drawings offered proof of the variety of media that were deployed in design explorations. More often than not the drawings, accompanied by short explanatory texts, featured autographs and dedications—“To Alvino with affection” on a drawing by Hadid, “To Alvin with friendship” on one by Franco Purini—demonstrating some of the intimacy with which the gift economy operated. This eclectic collection stood as evidence of the exchange culture within which Boyarsky immersed the AA’s students.

In the central room of the exhibition, the curators bravely installed two club chairs and a side table on an oriental carpet.
in an attempt to transfer the AA's Members' Room atmosphere into the gallery (Figure 1). However, the rest of the exhibition did not live up to the familiarity and intimacy evoked here. The framed drawings were statically mounted on white walls; the books were encased in glass, prohibiting any interaction; and historical photographs of AA's drawing culture were sparse. The exhibition ended up being not so much about the AA, its atmosphere and pedagogy, but rather about Boyarsky's private collection and his ability to locate and relate to talent.

This very promising and ambitious exhibition would have benefited from a clearer curatorial approach. The exhibition suggested connections without directing or drawing conclusions. There was no apparent chronological, geographical, or medium-based organizational principle justifying the division of the hall into four spaces. At times a grouping of drawings suggested a historical rationale, but this impression was quickly dispelled with the random appearance of an irrelevant drawing. It might be that the collection itself was assembled in a random manner, depending on the circumstances under which the gift economy was exercised. Nevertheless, the curators did not seize the opportunity to offer the visitor a critical stance.

Even though the collection seemed to suggest that Boyarsky played a central role in the formation of deconstructivist architecture, the exhibition missed the opportunity to address this question directly. Only by association did the show rediscover Boyarsky as a central figure in the postwar architectural scene. Works by Peter Cook, Coop Himmelb(l)au, Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry, and Bernard Tschumi, to name a few, appearing side by side suggested rather than demonstrated an international network of knowledge and expertise with Boyarsky at its center. Regardless of its lack of a clear curatorial direction, Drawing Ambience was an important exhibition in that it pointed to the often overlooked role of pedagogues in the formation of architectural culture.

OLGA TOULOUMI
Bard College

Related Publication
Igor Marjanović and Jan Howard, Drawing Ambience: Alvin Boyarsky and the Architectural Association (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2015), 156 pp., 125 color illus. $27, ISBN 9780936316390

Notes

Viollet-le-Duc: Les visions d’un architecte
Cité de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine, Palais de Chaillot, Paris
20 November 2014–9 March 2015
Organized to mark the bicentennial of Eugène Viollet-le-Duc’s birth as well as to showcase an important archival donation, Viollet-le-Duc: Les visions d’un architecte challenged received notions of the rationalist practitioner rooted in positivist thought and natural science. An enormous assembly of drawings, objects, personal writings, and ephemera returned Viollet to his romantic roots and centered his oeuvre on a lifelong series of hallucinatory visions. While reflective of a recent romantic turn in Viollet studies, the show failed to represent the full complexity of that scholarship. For instance, Martin Bressani’s Architecture and the Historical Imagination (2014) deploys a psychoanalytic reading of early personal loss to position Viollet within larger historical processes and events. Although this exhibition similarly delved into biography to reframe the prolific and polyvalent nature of Viollet’s practice, its consistent recourse to a reductive literary romanticism ultimately occluded his implication in the full breadth of nineteenth-century intellectual and social development.

The exhibition best promoted the “visionary” in its treatment of Viollet’s decisive encounter with Prosper Merimée and his series of youthful voyages in

Figure 1  Installation view of Drawing Ambience: Alvin Boyarsky and the Architectural Association, Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis, 2015 (photo by Whitney Curtis).