A Rare Opportunity to Extend 'Paul Rudolph And The Twentieth Century Monument' Into the Present

Architectural design has many purposes, one of which is to communicate ideas. Few works of contemporary architecture have sparked more dialogue than Rudolph Hall (1963) at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, also known as the Art and Architecture building - an early and well-known example of Brutalist architecture in the United States. At the time of its design and construction, from 1958 to 1963, the architect Paul Rudolph (1918-1997) was an influential practitioner leading the way to an antidote for the International Style, and chairman of the Yale architecture department. In 1967, visiting the Art and Architecture Building as a student, a few years after its completion, the building appeared heroic. Heralded by the architecture press as a Modern Masterpiece, the Art and Architecture building introduced a unique work embodied in a tangible medium of expression.

In form and spirit, Rudolph Hall liberated itself from the masters of previous generations. A process the architect began earlier with projects such as Mary Cooper Jewett Arts Center at Wellesley College, Massachusetts (1955-1958) which clearly shows a strong interest in making a positive contribution to an existing neo-Gothic situation without forgoing the integrity of Modern architectural design. In designing the Art and Architecture building, Rudolph focused on the urban features of its collegiate setting - where campus buildings in close proximity are impelled by uniformity. In this context, Rudolph makes a strong case for shared architectural expression. Instead of striving for the kind of architectural consistency that helps to give some campuses their character, the Art and Architecture Building travels another path. Rudolph was sensitive to Yale University as an enclave, but he saw the site at the corner of York and Chapel Streets as a new gateway from the South. The Art and Architecture building's predominate verticality terminates the horizontal movement along Chapel Street and introduces a substantial work of Modern architecture to the Old Campus fabric.

Influenced by the late works of Le Corbusier, Rudolph Hall is recognizably unlike other campus buildings. Beyond its verticality, its design evidences a highly original and creative authorship through the use of cast- in-place concrete. Its substantial materiality is manifest in the finned treatment method Rudolph developed for its concrete surfaces. In preparation, trapezoidal fins, measuring two-inches by one-inch deep, and spaced equal to the width of each fin, are nailed to plywood backing. The board forms are positioned across all vertical elements before a stiff mixture of concrete is placed. When the forms are removed, the fins are broken off with a mason's hammer to expose the interior tones of the aggregate. Horizontal spanning members, by contrast, are left to their smooth board-cast form. The corrugated finish does more than decorate the concrete surface. The composition represents that which supports and encloses to encourage a sense of the structure of the building in an inventive way. Used both outside and inside, it also promotes a continuous flow of space. Nearly all concrete surfaces of the interiors, including the hollow rectangular pillars which are the building's major structural elements, and most of the interior walls, are treated with the same rough-finned technique.

However, Rudolph Hall's robust exterior belies the openness of its interiors. A particular feature of the building's structural design is its quality of openness, which is reminiscent of the massive vertical piers and central hall of Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin Building (1904). Without duplicating the Larkin Building's static axial quality, Rudolph achieves similar spatial effects by situating the entry staircase off-center, and layering horizontal loft spaces, to set up a ten-story building in 37-layers - each layer encompassing aspects of the central hall - held together by vertical shafts of structure and service. Occupants circumnavigating the building experience the many

subtle structural variations of its distinctive levels, passageways, and alcoves, and ascent offers a sense of grandeur produced by shifting proportions.

Rudolph uses daylight as a design element. Ceilings hover overhead as daylight filters through clearstory windows and a few skylights that create light wells to engage both physical movement and the subtle adjustment of gaze. Clear plate glass windows set in delicate metal frames, viewed at certain times of the day, appear to vanish. In fact, daylight from above and across space produces remarkable varieties of lighting effects on floors covered in vermillion carpets and nautilus shells embedded in walls, reaching all levels of the building's rigorous geometry, to produce a unique sense of unity, and contrast, as space recedes, that strengthens the sense of structure, fusing structure and space together into a continuous flowing composition, which is distinctly different when compared to earlier models postulated by Wright and Le Corbusier.

Turning to Rudolph's architectural drawings for the Art and Architecture building while preparing an exhibition on the subject at Yale School of Architecture in 1977 uncovered trace record of the architectural design process from genesis sketches to the point where design crosses over from potential to built reality. In a series of seven studies, Rudolph explored siting, mass, and the role played by transparency; the rigors of which are visible in a one-point perspective drawing where the apparent transparency through the mid-section of the building is set against the heavy vertical concrete, and in a detail drawing of steel window frames, rendered in white line against darkness, encouraging the perception of a transparent membrane stretched tight, and a large section perspective where the vanishing point located just below the slab between the third and fourth floors gives the impression of a void through the building's mid-section. Rudolph's splendid drawing entitled "Art and Architecture Building, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, Partial exterior perspective, 1958," now part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, captures the hand-hammered tactility of the building's exterior responding to luminous patterns of light and shadow, artfully drawn by-hand in ink, using closely spaced lines, embellished with parallel and crosshatched lines to render depth and shade. The elevation of Chapel Street drawn to scale records architectural consideration given to both the Yale campus and the town of New Haven. In retrospect, it might comfortably be said that Paul Rudolph's drawings for the Art and Architecture building are an astonishing record of architectural design performed with tremendous energy, passion, and the promise of architectural excellence.

During more than twenty-years as a professor of architecture at Rudolph Hall, from 1977 to 1999, oral histories recounted years of feuding occupants affiliated with both the architecture and art departments. Points of contention organized around physical space appear to have been incited by relatively benign transitions, for example, from easel painting to larger format canvases and three-dimensional art making, and the incendiary political strife of the late 1960's when occupants turned to protests and defacement. The building's fall from grace also happened together with the discipline of architecture's race toward mega-structures, on the one hand, and parody, on the other. Following a fire in 1969, the Art and Architecture building, according to the architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable, became "possibly the period's most conspicuously reviled modernist structure." However, its stormy history did not end there. Deans and faculties of both the art and architecture departments continued to feud, and subsequent alterations, repairs, and an addition divided flowing space, filled a second-floor cavity with concrete, enclosed open space atop the main entry stairs under glass, and occluded the building's light filled essence behind dark screens.

In the decades to follow, Post-Modern discourse frequently cited the Art and Architecture building as a prime example of the failure of Modernism. Designed and built at a moment of chaos in American history, Rudolph Hall

hosted societal controversy, and in due course, encouraged the kind of dialogue that is a democratic necessity. After more than 40 years, Rudolph Hall was restored to the canon. In 2005, the building stood among twelve structures featured in the U.S. Postal Service *Masterworks of Modern Architecture* series, and some theoretical attention managed to address the means, ends, and values of the architecture.

Rudolph Hall is special first and foremost for its potential to encompass the integrity of the processes essential to architecture as a form of expressive communication. The building might well have served to enlarge our opportunities to communicate about the meanings of architecture. Rudolph Hall will undoubtedly continue to exist, as it has always been, intimately bound up in the lives and education of architects, in the passing phases of history, and our evolving standards and concerns, and for all the passing of time, much about the architecture of Paul Rudolph will likely remain, without question, to encourage us to reflect upon architectural expression of our needs, aspirations, hopes, and dreams, as part of our centers of learning, and our towns, cities, and private dwellings, and to promote and encourage our appreciation of architecture's extraordinary potential to express the essence of who we are, as we conceive of, and situate ourselves, within our constitutional democracy.

George Ranalli

George Ranalli, FAIA
Jul. 30, 2019

George Ranalli is a practicing architect based in New York City. His essay "Paul Rudolph And The Twentieth Century Monument," Aug. 20, 1988, was originally published in the exhibition catalogue **Paul Rudolph: Drawings for the Art and Architecture Building at Yale 1959 - 1963**, by Paul Rudolph (Author), George Ranalli (Author), Thomas L. Schumaher (Author), Alan J. Plattus (Introduction), Thomas H. Beeby (Preface), New Haven: Yale University School of Architecture (1988) on the occasion of its namesake exhibition, and republished here in an updated form as "A Rare Opportunity to Extend 'Paul Rudolph And The Twentieth Century Monument' Into the Present," Jul. 30, 2019.