The artists gathered in *A Love of the World* present us with a kaleidoscopic view of architecture and the city where the ideas of the discipline and the artifacts of the world find new and fertile common grounds. Through their insistence on looking at architecture across the grain of its own categories and as part of a larger context, the images comprising this exhibition construct a discourse that is both a response and a companion to the main thesis of the second Chicago Architecture Biennial—Make New History. The proposal is that in order to effectively reintroduce history as a working material for architects today, we must also adopt an understanding of architecture as being, at any point in time, part of a larger material culture.

In order to support the case made by the exhibition, this essay articulates the origin of the delamination of architecture from these broader categories by examining the role of abstraction in the emergence and evolution of modern architecture. It then proposes the external vision provided by the artists in the show—which both expands and challenges our mental image of a canonic modernity—as a possible lens to reconceptualize the relative position of architecture within the built environment. The exhibition is part of an effort to undo artificial dichotomies and expand the source materials available for contemporary architectural production.

The original split between architecture and history can be located with precision in the early twentieth century, at a moment when the exhaustion of history as a foundation for architectural education was paralleled by an increasing interest in formal abstraction. After the project of historic eclecticism had run its course and attempts to perpetuate its logic of styles with movements like *Jugendstil* and *Modernisme* had failed, modern architecture finally presented itself as an anti-style, ready to represent the essence of a new era of progress and development and eager to materialize its impending footprint on the planet. Abstraction acted at this point in time as a disinfectant or an eraser, generating a new space—a void—in which modern architecture could unfold on its own terms, independent from the burden of previous local models and historic traditions.¹

For the early moderns, however, abstraction was not a monolithic phenomenon; it had different origins and different attributes. On the one hand, it was imported to architecture from avant-garde painting and its related disciplines, which had

---

¹ Such a role is implicitly acknowledged within the framework of this biennial. In 2013, the biennial’s artistic directors, Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee, made an argument sympathetic to the one in this essay when they noted that “the International Style of early modernism assumed a generic form to homogenize and sterilize the specificity of local context.” Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee, “Generic Specificity, Five Points for an Architecture of Approximation,” *2G* 87 (2013): 166.
For a parallel and much expanded version of this argument, see Pier
hould fulfill all the potential of the medium in which
shared the mandate that any modern art form
of modernism. However, while both approaches
don the underlying belief that medium spec-
qualizing the value allotted to classical and indus-
genesis and the teaching of modern architecture became
geometric abstraction happened to be more portable, so to speak, and easier to teach.
that comprised the legitimate materials of archi-
traits, according to which architecture abandoned
was as much an exclusion of historic models as an inclusion of previously
reflected contemporary objects and urban phe-
the elite of architectural production and the bulk
be them already with a first degree of abstrac-
t to operate diago-
nally across high and low modes of production
from its asphyxiating historical baggage eventually
on a of its own and ended up producing archi-
construction and the built environment as two
different and even mutually exclusive categories is
a testament to the decisive nature of these develop-
ments, according to which architecture abandoned
its ambition to transform the world and turned its
attention to the world, which allows the architect to rediscover
and validate certain ignored or repressed
artifacts already with a first degree of abstrac-
tion from the actuality of the built environment of its time.

II
already succeeded in their fight to liberate them-
seventies, Dan Flavin’s fluorescent light bulbs, and
Donald Judd’s early and rough three-dimensional
works made out of pallets and other scraps found around
himself who borrowed Gropius’s photographs for his own publica-
альным материалом и артефактами как он встал в
дома, которые он строил, не имел аналога в развитии
новых индустриальных материалов в области как
в том же предметном мире, как и в культуре национальной
самой первой страницы, а затем в любом
вокруг нас.

4 The absorption of industrial construction into modern architecture was a parallel and competing influence to avant-garde pictorial compo-
mixing, mostly Russian origins, have been in the
past. For instance, it was the underlying thesis in Erich Mendelsohn’s
России, Европа, Америка в один окно.
изображения в качестве носителями материальности в прошлом.

5 It is important to note here that this was foremost a generational
phenomenon, one of the seminal proponents of modern architecture, especially Le Corbusier, all circled back to an emphasis on materiality in their
later careers.  

2 For a parallel and much expanded version of this argument, see Pier

3 This historical genealogy is by Clement

4 The absorption of industrial construction into modern architecture was a parallel and competing influence to avant-garde pictorial compo-
mixing, mostly Russian origins, have been in the
past. For instance, it was the underlying thesis in Erich Mendelsohn’s
Russian, Europe, America, in one window.

5 It is important to note here that this was foremost a generational
phenomenon, one of the seminal proponents of modern architecture, especially Le Corbusier, all circled back to an emphasis on materiality in their
later careers.
All the artists included in *A Love of the World* operate somewhere in the spectrum found between the two contrasting photographic approaches described above, as they challenge the canon of modern architecture by either producing alternative accounts of its core episodes or proposing to expand its boundaries by incorporating objects and phenomena traditionally considered to lie outside of it. More important than the quantitative redistributions of value that they perform among objects or spaces are the specific qualities that they highlight and how their works allow us to imagine new and exciting alternatives to what we know already, effectively producing new worlds and new meanings through the sheer intensity of their way of looking at things.

A fitting example would be the work of Luisa Lambri, whose images of the Farnsworth House (Mies van der Rohe, 1951) appear to us as distant memories of a former inhabitant. By focusing on the house as a frame for the landscape and letting the building itself fade away in our peripheral vision, Lambri partially erases the canonical architecture and leaves us with the bits and pieces of life that get captured in its corners. Her conflation of detail and atmosphere produces a reading of the architecture that is simultaneously more disembodied and more domestic, and in doing so, her photographs create a new architecture that departs from Mies to insinuate a contemporary understanding of inhabitation.

James Welling’s colorized images document the IIT campus and the Lake Shore Drive Apartments, both also by Mies van der Rohe and closely associated with the modern movement of the 1950s. His series, succinctly titled Chicago, renders these two canonic works of architecture according to a series of techniques borrowed from the experimental photography scene of the 1960s. The resulting images, produced through the layering of multiple exposures and two highly idiosyncratic periods of art history, result in an anachronism that we could describe lightly as a “psychedelic Mies,” an unexpected and completely new cultural construct that defamiliarizes the original work and produces instead an encounter with myriad new readings and future possibilities.

David Schalliol’s series on the Chicago Housing Authority deals with the literal dismantlement of the modern legacy of Mies and his contemporaries through the demolition of the midcentury social housing projects of the city. In doing so, Schalliol shatters the aura of atemporality associated with modernism and the notion that it exists outside of history. In his careful and personal portrayal of this process, which transcends traditional documentary photography to become its own genre, Schalliol contrasts the disassembly of the buildings with the vitality of their inhabitants. It is as if the architecture, a theatrical backdrop for daily life, becomes itself animated, putting forward the illusion that the buildings are receding into the mists of time as much as they are transforming to mark a new and uncertain beginning.

In a different part of town and with a different focus, Scott Fortino also reflects on the current life of the Miesian legacy, as he interrogates a cross section of its high-rise glass prisms. Fortino puts forward his own account of how the promise of the transparency of modern architecture has played out across the decades and how it exists today in Chicago, with its relaxed mix of high modern masterpieces and corporate replicas. As Fortino directs his gaze from the public space of the city into the interiors of these buildings, the reflections caught up in the glass curtain walls virtually turn each photograph into a double exposure, a synthesis of the experience of Chicago in which the intimacy and pathos of an almost domestic interior is overlaid with an afterimage of street life and the persistence of a few period photographs and drawings. In her suite of photographs of Mies van der Rohe’s Neue Nationalgalerie (New National Gallery), in Berlin, which are printed on sheets of glass, Kellndorfer exposes the gap between our mental image of the building and its actuality in the world today. Her photographs of the empty gallery at the beginning of a process of restoration focus on its raw materials; the original steel, glass, and stone coexist with the new stacks of materials waiting to be installed and with the dust and dirt of the construction site. In her documentation of a moment of change, Kellndorfer portrays the building as simultaneously unravelling and becoming.

True to his beginnings as an architectural historian, Filip Dujardin has produced a series of digital prints that focus on the interaction and interdependence between urban form, architectural type, and construction detail. His inclusive survey of high-rise construction in Chicago reveals to us the ways in which what we understand as the image of a city is constructed first and foremost through repetition and consistency. By manipulating the parameters underlying such consensus within the highly recognizable system of the Chicago grid and its architecture, Dujardin proposes a series of transfers or contaminations between different time periods, scales, and modes of architectural...
production, yielding images that contain alternative histories for the city.

Dealing with similar preoccupations, Philipp Schaerer capitalizes on the most banal and anonymous constructions to build a series of images that propose possible architectures for the city out of its very own raw matter. In his Chicago Series, Schaerer departs from his previous explorations of party walls—true byproducts of architectural design—and focuses instead on the roofs of the city. The artist then generates a series of digital images produced from the sampling, replication, and cropping of existing satellite photographs. The resulting constructed images are ambiguously positioned between the precious and the banal, between an emphasis on the literal surfaces of the city and the potential for abstraction as proposed in this essay.

Schaerer’s dual mastery of the languages of architectural drawing and documentary photography allows him to pitch these two media against each other, in a perfect synthesis that ends up being a testament to their power. Among the results of this operation is a series of works that are in essence democratic, through the ambiguity and nuance of his visual technique, he walks us seamlessly through a series of scales in the city of Chicago, focusing on the tension between order and imperfection that defines the substrate of collective space in our contemporary condition.

Finally, Marianne Mueller turns her attention to the architecture of the venue, in this case the Chicago Cultural Center, in order to focus on the moments when the different stages of its life enter into contact with each other. Through her hunter-gatherer approach, which is rooted in the photographic tradition of the snapshot, and her deep understanding of architecture as being made up of a series of elements that are in essence democratic, Mueller captures the clashes between the noble architecture of the center’s nineteenth-century building and the contemporary generic materials of the additions and partitions that enable its many functions today. Her blown up prints of fragments of the building interiors, installed in the vitrines at the G.A.R. Hall in the Chicago Cultural Center, open up a meta dialog about the representational role of architecture and its interiors. In doing so, Mueller’s work becomes a testament to our changing notions of public space and public institutions and, more critically, to the resilience and the capacity of architecture to survive and renew itself through time—to traverse history and speak the different languages of its present.

A sense of presentness is perhaps what all the artists gathered in A Love of the World share, and it is the defining trait of a project that tries to instill in architecture an urgency to work with the materials of the here and now. As we traverse the mosaic of images produced by these nine artists, which are laid out across and in conversation with the different exhibits in the architecture biennial, we gain a sense of how our idea of architecture is embedded in a much larger field. Within this field—physical but also cultural—architecture is nonetheless a powerful actor. By creating a new context in which the myth of modern architecture’s exceptionality is challenged through its confrontation with the evidence found in our built environment, the exhibition insinuates new modes of authorship for architects, but also a renewed responsibility, as it elicits an invitation to consider once again our duty to touch the lives of the many.

This exhibition is an attempt to enrich and expand the materials available to architects today. It poses an opportunity to rethink the different intensities at which architecture can operate and what its scope should be, in an effort to imagine new registers and modes of cultural production that would result in an increased role for architecture in public discourse and the construction of a shared material culture. Nowhere as in Chicago, a place where the myth of modernity and the building stock of the city become almost one and the same thing, can we find better reasons to put forward an informed argument for engaging the material world in all its breadth—an optimistic proposal for the future.
Image Histories

Projects that examine image histories are primarily concerned with the world of visual culture and architecture’s relationship to it. One might consider these projects alongside the relaxing of the visual canon from the disciplinary and historical images of buildings to the stunning array of “non-pedigreed,” everyday material and pop infiltration that marks postmodernity. More than simply a problem of studying the ways that architects produce visual likenesses, these projects are concerned with images as reference points, image production and display, and architecture photography as its own discipline.

Organizational and formatting problems may not be self-evident in the projects in the biennial, but they underwrite the renewed interest as well as increased visibility and mobility of historical content in our contemporary image world. The cut and paste culture of architectural drafting—stencils, blocks, and repeatable drawing elements born out of efficiency—also drives today’s drawing sensibilities. The Internet’s endless supply of electronic images, CAD referencing options, and architectural representations increasingly incorporates a smoother version of the early twentieth century montage logic: what British architect and participant Sam Jacob calls post-digital drawings (p. 242).¹ Projects based around the organization of images or information are trafficking in a

¹Projects based around the organization of images or information are trafficking in a
sensibility of collecting and assembling that often links platforms of display with those of storage, finding new questions in the interruption and adjacency of two or more images.

Participant baukuh, in collaboration with photographer Stefano Graziani, look at the Renaissance cartoon drawing that held information scaleable and transferrable from paper to the wall as a means of exploring the technological histories of image production (p. 68). Their study for a chapel looks at the contentless format, taking the narrative portals of Giotto’s Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, Italy and replacing them with empty stage sets for a fictitious encounter between the Queen of Sheba and Italian oil magnate Enrico Fermi: two figures that lived eras apart. In this work, baukuh celebrates the discordance, rather than a smooth encounter of image-based worlds such as those described above.

The disciplinary interest in the production of architectural ideas is considered by Bak Gordon (p. 64) and Caruso St John (p. 72). Bak Gordon’s sketches follow a long lineage of drawing understood as the carrier of the expressive impulses of the architect; his large scale sketches do not carry the careful finish of the render, and their looseness attests to their immediacy. On the other hand, Caruso St John’s project takes on the production of the office through a collection of references images, image-like models, and photographs of finished buildings that relate to a mix of realized and unrealized building designs. Represented in solid, blockish, and flat painted models and collected on a table in the form of a city block, this project speaks of the architect’s output in the most uniform sense; their assembly suggests the passage of imagery and ideas between references, models and buildings.

Image histories are also produced out of the contemporary collaborative efforts of architects and photographers. Jesús Vassallo’s curated exhibition A Love of the World (p. 183), organised as a discrete collection of works distributed through the cultural center, features art photographers like James Welling and Luisa Lambri whose photographs are captured in canonical sites of modernist architecture. Other photographers in the biennial work more actively alongside the architects whose work they shoot, like Filip Dujardin and Stefano Graziani. These myriad photographic practices that form between building, image production, and reproduction suggest that architectural design and building is changing to increasingly consider potential imageability; buildings stand to become the object of visual interpretation of many different types.

1 In his article and titling of “Post-Digital Drawing,” Jacob infers that definitions that once held between media and technique are subsumed into the smoothed category of the image. He prioritizes software platforms at work in the screen environments that produce merging potential for photographic material, alongside what might have been considered graphic.