

Rem Koolhaas agrees with San Francisco Architectural Heritage?

Reviewing Koolhaas's show "Conocaos" at the New Museum, Nicolai Ouroussoff observes, "New buildings are designed in watered-down period styles, . . . eroding the distinction between what's real and what's fake, and producing what Mr. Koolhaas calls a 'low-grade, unintended timelessness.'"

Writing at roughly the same moment in *Heritage News*, Mike Buhler, Executive Director of SF Architectural Heritage, offers a similar challenge: "A common misconception about historic designation is that it leaves buildings 'frozen in time.' But historic preservation is not about stifling creative new design. It's about managing change so that we can retain the best of our shared heritage . . . A compelling example of this precept is the 1 Kearny project, which successfully blends the past, present, and future by combining buildings from three distinct eras."

Old Buildings, New Designs: Architectural Transformations, by Charles F. Bloszies, architect of 1 Kearny, explores fusions of old and new buildings from around the world. It is scheduled for publication by Princeton Architectural Press in October 2011.

An Architect's Fear That Preservation Distorts

Has preservation become a dangerous epidemic? Is it destroying our cities?

That's the conclusion you may come to after seeing "Cronocaos" at the New Museum. Organized by Rem Koolhaas and Shohei Shigematsu, a partner in Mr.

Koolhaas's Office for Metropolitan Architecture, the show draws on ideas that have been floating around architectural circles for several years now — particularly the view among many academics that preservation movements around the world, working hand in hand with governments and developers, have become a force for gentrification and social dis-

placement, driving out the poor to make room for wealthy homeowners and tourists.

Mr. Koolhaas's vision is even more apocalyptic. A skilled provocateur, he paints a picture of an army of well-meaning but clueless preservationists who, in their zeal to protect the world's architectural legacies, end up debasing them by creating tasteful scenery for docile consumers while airbrushing out the most difficult chapters of history. The result, he argues, is a new form of historical amnesia, one that, perversely, only further alienates us from the past.

"Cronocaos" was first shown at the 2010 architecture biennale in Venice, the ultimate example of what can happen to an

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MICHAEL FALCO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Cronocaos, an exhibition at the New Museum, argues that historic centers are being sanitized to the detriment of their character.

Exhibition on an Architect's Fears That Rushing to Preserve Distorts the Past

From First Arts Page

aged city when it is repackaged for tourists. In New York the show is housed in a former restaurant-supply store next to the museum on the Bowery, in a neighborhood where the threats to urban diversity include culture as well as tourism. The Bowery's lively bar scene has been pushed out by galleries and boutiques. CBGB, the former rock club, is a John Varvatos store.

To highlight this transformation, Mr. Koolhaas and Mr. Shigematsu have kept the supply store's yellow awning, painting the show's title directly over the old lettering. Inside, the architects drew a line down the middle of the space, transforming one side into a pristine white gallery and leaving the other raw and untouched.

The result is startling. The uneven, patched-up floors and soiled walls of the old space look vibrant and alive; the new space looks sterile. An illustration of how even the minimalist renovations favored by art galleries today, which often are promoted as ways of preserving a building's character, can cleanse it of historical meaning. (To sharpen the contrast further, Mr. Koolhaas scattered a few beat-up tables and chairs, salvaged when CBGB

"Cronocaos" is on view through June 5 at the New Museum, 235 Bowery, at Prince Street, Lower East Side; (212) 219-1222, newmuseum.org.

was closed five years ago,

This has become a global phenomenon. All over the world, historic centers are being sanitized of signs of age and decay, losing any sense of the identity that buildings accumulate over time. Facades are carefully scrubbed clean; interiors, often blending minimalist white walls and a few painstakingly restored historic details, are reduced to a bland perfection. And new buildings are designed in watered-down period styles, further eroding the distinction between what's real and what's fake, and producing what Mr. Koolhaas calls a "low-grade, unintended timelessness."

Mr. Koolhaas argues that this process continues to spread. Using an assortment of graphs and charts, he claims that 12 percent of the earth's surface has already been landmarked by groups like Unesco, and that figure is expected to rise steeply in the near future. What's more, the age of what is being preserved continues to shrink. In the late 19th century only ancient monuments received legal protection; today buildings that are 30 years old are regularly listed as historic sites. (Mr. Koolhaas's own architecture is part of this trend. A house he designed in Bordeaux, France, was declared a national monument only three years after its completion in 1998.)

This phenomenon is coupled with another disturbing trend: the selective demolition of the most socially ambitious architecture of the 1960s and '70s — the



MICHAEL FALCO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The show asks whether preservation movements have become a force for social displacement.

last period when architects were able to do large-scale public work. That style has been condemned as a monstrous expression of Modernism.

In Germany monuments like the Palast der Republik, whose government offices, restaurants and nightclubs were once the social heart of East Berlin, became shorthand for a period many West Germans wanted to forget. Kisho Kurokawa's 1972 capsule tower, one of the most radical housing experiments built in

postwar Japan, lies in a state of ruin, awaiting demolition. To Mr. Koolhaas, these examples are part of a widespread campaign to stamp out an entire period in architectural history — a form of censorship that is driven by ideo-

ONLINE: SLIDE SHOW

Images from the exhibition "Cronocaos": nytimes.com/design

logical as much as aesthetic concerns.

The New Museum show is essentially a manifesto, of course, but what saves it from becoming pure polemic is that Mr. Koolhaas is a first-rate architect as well as an original thinker. Some of the best parts of the show involve his efforts to find ways out of this mess.

A 1995 competition design for an expansion of Zurich international airport sought to make sense of what had become a con-

fusing labyrinth of mismatched terminals built over several decades. Rather than tear down the existing structures, Mr. Koolhaas proposed filling in leftover spaces between them with centralized entrance halls and new retail zones. He then created a circulation route to tie it all together.

The experience would have been more like traveling through a real city than through a conventional airport. By keeping the various historical layers intact, and playing up their differences, he aimed to breathe new life into a dead environment. (The plan was rejected.)

In another, more extreme proposal, from 2003, Mr. Koolhaas suggested creating preservation sectors in Beijing, in which everything from traditional hutongs to postwar Communist housing blocks would be protected, along with the way of life they housed. The rest of the city would be a kind of free-for-all, where planners and architects could experiment with new ideas and urban strategies without the crushing burden of history.

Not all of his ideas are viable; some seem intended mainly to challenge conventional wisdom about preservation and its benefits, and in doing so, to liberate architecture just a little from stale ideas. Yet Mr. Koolhaas's bigger point is worth paying attention to: in the realm of preservation, as in so much else, we seem to have become a world terrified of too much direct contact with reality.

“A common misconception about historic designation is that it leaves buildings ‘frozen in time.’ But historic preservation is not about stifling creative new design. It’s about managing change so that we can retain the best of our shared heritage.

“A compelling example of this precept is the 1 Kearny project (cover [right]), which successfully blends the past, present, and future by combining buildings from three distinct eras. The project includes the landmark 1902 Mutual Savings Bank building; the 1964 annex designed by the office of Charles Moore, itself eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; and a sleek new ten-story glass and aluminum addition completed in 2009. The structural system unifies the three buildings into a single whole, sensitively upgrading both historic buildings to qualify for federal rehabilitation tax credits.”

—Alexandra Bevk & Mike Buhler (Executive Director, S.F. Architectural Heritage),
“Making the Case for Preservation,”
Heritage News, 39:2, Summer 2011.

1 Kearny Street, Office of Charles F. Bloszies
Photo by Cesar Rubio

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HERITAGE NEWS

For Members of San Francisco Architectural Heritage (1971 - 2011)

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The Future of Preservation

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Excerpt from the introduction by **Hugh Hardy, FAIA**:

“This is an important book for anyone concerned about the future of architecture. Our media culture presents buildings from the perspective that their importance comes from being new, with a preference for works that are unlike anything seen before. Instead, Charles Bloszies has put together an incisive and broad investigation of nineteen projects from all over the world that show thoughtful ways in which new buildings draw their importance from their relation to old. His is a generous survey of an extensive and diverse range of design possibilities. More than a handsome publication of designs, however, it is also a considered exploration of a subject vital to the profession, one that should encourage great discussion.”

Old Buildings, New Designs is one of a collection of books in the Architecture Briefs Series published by Princeton Architectural Press. It is scheduled for release in October, 2011.



Case Study #07 Walden Studios



Case Study #03 BarGuruBar



Case Study #04 Ozuluama Penthouse



Case Study #14 Village Street Live-Work



Case Study #19 Recycled Batteries



Case Study #11 CaixaForum



Case Study #02 Hutong Bubble 32



Case Study #06 Knocktopher Friary



Case Study #18 Fouquet's Barriere Hotel

Old Buildings, New Designs

Architectural
Transformations

Charles F. Bloszies

Princeton Architectural Press
New York



Case Study #8 Contemporary Jewish Museum



Case Study #12 1 Kearny



Case Study #10 Moderna Museet



Case Study #15 Selexyz Dominicanen Bookstore



Case Study #9 Morgan Library



Case Study #05 Forte di Fortezza



Case Study #13 Hearst Tower



Case Study #17 135 Post Street



Case Study #16 California College of the Arts

Additional images of 1 Kearny, San Francisco, by The Office of Charles F. Bloszies. Lobby design by Iwamoto Scott Architects. Photographs by Matthew Millman.

