Gathering Blue
Holding the Aqueous
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Ashley M. LeFew

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William U. Galloway
Steven R. Thompson
Hans C. Rott

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Abstract

This set of drawings and paintings is a means to explore building. The building is imbued with the qualities of elusive memories and images that have been rediscovered and reconsidered through making. The qualities are linked back to place, the place of a bath house and sailing club at Smith Mountain Lake. In seeking qualities, the work explores the relationship between flatness and depth, line and color, form and image, and therefore architecture and painting. The work draws out and gathers disparate blues and searches for those transient aspects of the world that can be rendered eternal.
Dedicated to John Milton Barnes, a man of impressive character, an exceptional father, grandfather, and sailor who valued order in all aspects of life.
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Architecture, as well as building, has the potential to render eternal the aspects of human existence that are most transient. This set of drawings and paintings is a means to explore building. The building is a bath house and sailing club for Smith Mountain Lake. It becomes a reliquary for holding the likenesses, images, and emotions of memory, and the qualities of place. The building makes room for life or patterns and fields of life that it holds. There are traces of vibration and chaos and ebbs and flows. Reflectivity and turbulence are eroding the building. Stable elements of building become the armature for less stable images of memory. Stable geometry is pushing against the forces and tides of wishes, dreams, and thoughts; the everyday of the building against the eternal; happiness against sorrow; necessity against free will and chance. All of the forces are playing out, and put into play. Images are boats floating, rising and falling and swaying, not in spite of their limits, but precisely because they are tethered to the dock. The building as an ordered entity aspires to hold the aqueous, to contain the immeasurable, and to present the indescribable.
Beginnings and Endings
The Aqueous Repository of All Things

“The Cubist medium thus is not one of ethereal clarities but of dense, gelatinous ambiguities. It savors water rather than air, the container-like still-life rather than the open landscape, the receptacle with its concavities and convexities rather than the straight and limitless vector, the mesh and the interlock rather than the statics of object adjacencies. It suggests an equilibrium, but one that oscillates and vibrates. Shimmering with visual puns and alliterations, humorously rejoicing in its own chimerical existence, it encompasses the ebb and flow of form and meaning, the grafting of illusion and allusion. At once inwardly turbulent and outwardly reflective, it is the stream, perhaps the ocean...the aqueous repository of all things.” (Slutzky 30)
Rcollecting Place
On Blue

Let the background for the building be a range of blues. Blue not unlike the dappled colors I often see behind my eyelids. The color I find lurking under layers of creamy reds of living flesh. The color of souls who are gentle, yet with hope and courage confront life’s certain sorrows. Blue that is pulled across the ground as shadows made by the Virginia sun weave through forests. The color of a distance that recedes as you near, the color that morphs and shimmers when you blink. It is like the sky which fades at the edges and varies with the water in the air. It spreads like butter over distant cities and mountains, and glistens like melting sapphires in golden hair. The melancholy hue that reminds me of all I have never seen and might never know. I find its wondrous reflection ever held within the vibrant and turbulent surface of water. It offers reverie for the mind as it undulates like a down-filled comforter across a bed. I can only attempt to catch it in fragments and pull it forward, holding it tenuously in a woven net of lines. All the while I wonder if it will be slowly leaking back into the sky, slipping past the bounded horizon, and leaning toward the water of its cosmic reflection.
Through the attempt to perfect her work, the architect, like the alchemist, is working toward her own perfection. The work moves from the personal and the narcissistic to the collective and the universal. The path to the eternal and the immeasurable is through the quantifiable and the measurable. We must begin by fixing something in our minds and eyes in order to transcend that very fixation.

Through the trees you find the limit of the land.
A garden of boats growing untamed.

Turning,
the lake leads us back toward the painting of the sky.
Horizontal surfaces tilt up.

Only the lake is the middle ground.
On Water

“There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs—commerce surrounds it with her surf. Right and left, the streets take you waterward. Its extreme downtown is the battery, where that noble mole is washed by waves, and cooled by breezes, which a few hours previous were out of sight of land. Look at the crowds of water-gazers there.

Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. Go from Cohefars Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What do you see?—Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fized in ocean reveries. Some leaning against the spiles; some seated upon the pier-heads; some looking over the bulwarks glasses! Of ships from China; some high aloft in the rigging, as if striving to get a still better seeward peep. But these are all landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster—tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?

But look! Here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder warehouses will not suffice. No. They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in, and there they stand—miles of them—leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lands and alley, streets and avenues—north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite. Tell me, does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all those ships attract them thither?

Once more. Say you are in the country; in some high land of lakes. Take almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream. There is magic in it. Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest reveries—stand that man on his legs, set his feet a-going, and he will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in all that region. Should you ever be a thirst in the great American desert, try this experiment, if your caravan happen to be supplied with a metaphysical professor. Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever.” (Melville 3-4)
To be present on the site is to inhabit a stained glass window. The shadowed vertical figures of the foreground frame the hazy blue horizon. In its permeability it gives you the layers of the horizon like the flatness of a painting or a wall. The paths of the site allow you to penetrate this painting and inhabit the room of the lake. The site is directed toward blueness.
Directing the Whole
"As I kept passing and repassing the filling or woof of matline between the long yarns of the warp, using my own hand for the shuttle, and as Queequeg, standing sideways, ever and anon slid his heavy oaken sword between the threads, and idly looking off upon the water, carelessly and unthinkingly drove home every yarn; I say so strange a dreaminess did there then reign all over the ship and all over the sea, only broken by the intermitting dull sound of the sword, that it seemed as if this were the Loom of Time, and I myself were a shuttle mechanically weaving and weaving away at the Fates. There lay the fixed threads of the warp subject to but one single, ever returning, unchanging vibration, and that vibration merely enough to admit of the crosswise interblending of other threads with its own. This warp seemed necessity; and ere, thought I, with my own hand I ply my own shuttle and weave my own destiny into these unalterable threads. Meantime, Queequeg’s impulsive, indifferent sword, sometimes hitting the woof slantingly, or crookedly, or strongly, or weakly, as the case might be; and by this difference in the concluding blow producing a corresponding contrast in the final aspect of the completed fabric; this savage’s sword, thought I, which thus finally shapes and fashions both warp and woof; this easy, indifferent sword must be chance—aye, chance, free will, and necessity—no wise incompatible—all interweavingly working together. The straight warp of necessity, not to be swerved from its ultimate course—its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of necessity, and sideways in its motions directed by free will, though thus prescribed by both, chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events.” (Melville 233-234)
blue is distance

Recto-verso faces of the entry
The parting of the buildings creates a portal to the meeting of sky and water. The wooden planks of the path resound rhythmically as you walk toward the framed blue horizon. The compression of the path opens at the end in a horizontal and vertical expansion. As though walking onto a stage from behind a curtain, the path gives you access to the whole world. You are surprised to find it looks back at you with expectation.

is the meeting of sky and water a room or a painting?
If place is the space between a body, and a containing body, then what is the potential relationship between the body of the building, and the body of the lake? The containing body of the lake, or shoreline, is the limit of the land. The relationship between two bodies can become the relationship between their bounding lines.
On the periphery of the inner circle, the site of the project will serve as the beginning of a line marking the center of the lake. The line—and thus the project—measures the lake as a body, marks a center, and provides an opportunity to inhabit the lake. A place is made between the body of the person and the containing boundary of the lake. The lake becomes a room.
Night is the time of the sincere opening of the world to sight. It is the time of the dome of the sky.

Day is for the agitated mirror of the lake to show us indirectly the blue, the things that we can only understand through reflection, things that we are incapable of looking straight in the eye.
The sky and the lake
1. Sailboat docks in the lake
2. Hill with dry boat storage
3. Main transportation line and car parking
4. Bath house and sailing club buildings
5. Deck facing the lake
6. Entrance gate

The image of the city
A bodily imagining of the site
A realization of hierarchy and order allows for a blossoming. The building becomes directed toward its own being, and the director becomes the spectator.
The Generation of the Plan

Exaggeration and articulation of the elements of memory
If symmetry is a reflection then excess can be disciplined redundancy.
Drawing a collage of memory
The sequence and grouping of rooms leads to intricacy.
Section elevation through walkway.
aspects of the interior are withheld, while other rooms leak into the sky.
Sketch of courtyard open to the sky
walls keep the world out, and hold an intensification of the world within
Presence of a Room
“Precision and fine craftsmanship are the benchmarks of the Nantucket Basket. Reminiscent of the historic Lightship Baskets made by sailors during long sea voyages, this lovely basket has a wooden base, a sturdy wooden handle, and is tightly woven to hold even the most fleeting memories of a summer afternoon on the island.” (Nantucket Basket)
Central room section with ceiling and floor unfolded
"Why is almost every robust healthy boy with a robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other crazy to go to sea? Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were now out of sight of land? Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of the story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life: and this is the key to it all." (Melville 5)
Plan of central room with floor and fireplace alcove

Glass tile and joint study

Transparency study
Textural tile pattern of the floor
Woven beams and a textured wall are born of crystalline blue.
The containment and the seeping of the visual from a room within a room and the revelation of the stair.
The interior surface of the wall is agitated, turbulent, and porous.
Plan and section elevation of the central room.

The stair stands against the wall.
Among the play of verticals and horizontals, the stair ascends.
Balcony level plan and section through middle of central room
Resonance of Form and Color
“Color tones like musical tones, are of a much subtler nature. They produce much finer vibrations in the soul and have no designation in our language.” Wassily Kandinsky (Life of Kandinsky 90)
The faces, surfaces, and textures of the project give it a presence and character. They play with depth and flatness and rise, forming edges to meet the sky.

Opportunities to confront, look through, or move past vertical surfaces define the faces as either reflective and frontal masks, or welcoming portals into rooms.
Turbulent layers of the interior
Looking back
The building against the sky
Looking out
Essential and primal qualities of a shadowy forest on the edge of water
To find an end is to return, to reflect upon, and to continue beginning.
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North-East corner of women's building

Left pathway toward the lake

Toward open courtyard from stair hall
Model Photographs

Public bath of the central room

Layers of the central room

Outdoor porch of the private quarters meets the sky
Model Photographs

Corridor between South facade and central room

Central room
Model Photographs

Stair hall adjacent to central room

Vertical expansion of central room

Section view of central room and South corridor
Bath Houses

Alongside Petit Palais and Belvédère
Programming of architectural sequences
By the organization of Roman baths in sequence, the small spaces are juxtaposed, creating a sense of asymmetry.

The purpose of the spaces is not only to provide bathing facilities, but also to offer a place for social interaction and relaxation.

Intimacy, Sequence, Difference
The Bathing and the City

Symmetry as a depiction of disciplined reason.

Theodosius Thermae

Architectural analysis and interpretation.

Is it spatially enriched? Is it about structuring void?

A journey loop perhaps.

Diagram of Bathhouse Sequencing.

October 5th
Sail Boats

There is no need to be concerned about the sails. The main focus is on the design and construction of the vessel. The sails will be made of lightweight, durable materials that will be shaped to optimize wind resistance. The hull design is streamlined to reduce drag and improve speed. The steering system will be simple and effective.

Note: This is a rough sketch and may evolve as the design process continues.
Collection of Works

Books
The Human Condition by Hannah Arendt
On the Soul and on Mourning and Recollection - Aristotle
The Possibility of an Academic Architecture - Pier Vittorio Aureli
Collected Fables - Josè Luis Borges
The History of Color - Hans R. Bungen
The battle of the Romanes explained and illustrated - Palladio
Alice in Wonderland - Lewis Carroll
Architects: N titled - Michael H. C. Chapman
Historic Springs of the Americas - A Historical History - Sam Cohen
The Three Musketeers - Alexandre Dumas
Science Fiction as the Language of Convention - Harlan Ellison
Mieville de Espana, 1949 - 50 - An Architectural An American Singing - Esteban Manrique
Interactions of Color - Victor Abad
On Weaving - Anil Aharon
Monuments of Architecture - Marco Fodera
On Being Blue - William Grass
Rearrange: Abraham, Unhur - Brigitte Grassi
Unprecedented Formations - K. Michael Hays
Willie Nelson: Black-Eyed Peas - Brooks Hodge
Concerning the Spiritual in Art - Kandinsky
Between Silence and Light: Spirit in the Architecture of Louis I. Kahn - John L. Hall
The Dirver - Louis Abramson
Gothicism - Luigi Rosselli
National Stories: Construction and Technologies of Computing Architecture - Christopher Mark Lopez
The World's Best Sailboats - Raymond M. Naples
Midnight's Child - Hermina Meilleur
A Summer's Day - Joel Meyerowitz
Zoë and Auguste Esquivel's Journey - Joseph Cheek - Marguerite Peterson
The Architec of the City - Aldo Zaccari
The Four Elements of Architecture - Gifford Snyder
The Temple - William Shakespeare
The Collected Fables of  Wallace Stegner - Wallace Stegner
The Train to Rhoades - Jon L. Mays
Ten Books on Architecture - Vitruvius
A Blue Tale and Other Stories - Marguerite Youngman
"The Man with the Blue Guitar"
Wallace Stevens

IX
And the color, the overcast blue
Of the air, in which the blue guitar

Is a form described but difficult
And I am merely a shadow hunched

Above the arrowy, still strings,
The maker of a thing yet to be made;

The color like a thought that grows
Out of a mood, the tragic robe

Of the actor, half his gesture, half
His speech, the dress of his meaning, silk

Sodden with his melancholy words,
The weather of his stage, himself.

(Stevens 169-170)