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Book Review: Rowe, Colin and Leon Satkowski. Italian Architecture of the 16th Century (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002).

Abstract
Released in January 2003, Italian Architecture of the 16th Century promotes itself as a book written by Colin Rowe and coauthored by Leon Satkowski, professor of architecture at the University of Minnesota. Embossed on its cover beneath the title and in large font is Colin Rowe. Below this, in smaller font, is & Leon Satkowski.

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regionalism (though Frampton does not emphasize this point). There is tough criticism here, not merely appreciation. In "Minima Moralia: Reflections on Recent Swiss German Production," for example, Frampton observes, regarding Herzog and DeMeuron's Pilotengasse housing, that, "should one choose to compare [it] to the prewar Siedlung Neubuhl completed outside Zurich in 1932, one is compelled to acknowledge the passage of some kind of inescapable decadence. Strange that the vision of the radical should depend upon a gratuitous impoverishment of the act of dwelling" (328).

He concludes this essay, and with it the collection, by saying, "One perhaps needs to add that one does not indulge in critique for the sake of a gratuitous negativity, but rather to spur the critical sensibility, to sharpen the debate, to overcome, as far as this is feasible, the debilitating dictates of fashion, and above all to guard against the ever-present threat, in a mediatic age, of sliding into an intellectual somnambulance where everything seems to appear to be for the aestheticized best in the best of all commodified worlds" (331). Against the gratuitous, the aestheticized, the commodified, Kenneth Frampton offers an understanding of architecture's significance for human action in the world. He does so as an intellectual who addresses not the intellect alone, but the embodied mind, a mind that is—and can only be—formed and understood in its mutual relationship with the political and physical world.

NOTES

1. And perhaps suggest an alternative to the stultifying phrase, "post-occupancy evaluation."
2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 7; quoted in Frampton, 25–26.
3. Quoted in Frampton, 26.
4. For a further exploration of the theoretical implications of architecture's obduracy (and of its interiority), see Patrick L. Pinnell, "Theater Knowledge, House Knowledge, and the Place of Architecture," *arcCA (Architecture California)*, Winter 2003, 40–43.
5. Quoted in Frampton, 27.
6. Ibid, 28.
7. A closely related—and usefully complementary—essay, "Prospects for a Critical Regionalism," appears the same year in *Perspecta 20*, 147–162. The *Perspecta* essay looks at concrete examples in the work of Alvaro Siza, Ricardo Bofill, Raimund Abraham, Luis Barragán, Mario Botta, Tadao Ando, and others.
8. From manuscript sent by Frampton to *Harvard Design Magazine*.
9. As far as I am aware, Frampton nowhere offers a simple definition of "tectonic." In his *Studies in Tectonic Culture*, he traces the use of the term from its origins in the Greek *tekton*, meaning "carpenter" or "builder," through its use in 19th-century German architectural theory, and into the 20th century. He notes the complexity of the term, which implies both constructional logic and aesthetic discipline. It may perhaps be understood as representing an unrealizable aspiration: the inseparable interdependence of poetry and construction.
10. Notable among Kenneth Frampton's colleagues in this commitment are Mary McLeod and Joan Ockman.
11. I'm thinking of Marco Frascari, David Leatherbarrow, Peter McCleary, and Joseph Rykwert.
12. I can't help mentioning a signal fault of the volume, one not, I think, attributable to its author: the lack of illustrations that did appear in earlier publications of many of the essays. The original printing of "The Usonian Legacy," for instance, included twenty-seven illustrations. It is reprinted in *Labour, Work and Architecture* with eight. Some omissions are debilitating. They cannot be explained by printing costs; the graphic layout of the book, with significant margins, affords ample opportunity for more images with no increase in the number of pages. One hopes minimalist graphic sensibility is not behind the exclusions—this would put the cart before the horse. Three possibilities remain: the cost of high-resolution originals and scanning; the cost of reproduction rights (but many of the images are by now in the public domain, and, as support for Frampton's critical arguments, could in any case be reproduced under the principle of "fair use"); and the time needed to track down the originals. Whatever the combination of these or other factors, the publisher has hobbled Frampton's work. Phaidon should consider a restoration of the missing illustrations for future editions, of which one hopes there will be many.

REVIEWED BY DANIEL NAEGELE

Italian Architecture of the 16th Century

by Colin Rowe and Leon Satkowski

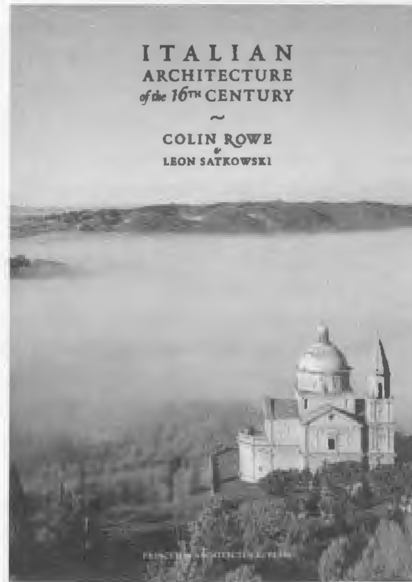
New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002

Released in January 2003, *Italian Architecture of the 16th Century* promotes itself as a book written by Colin Rowe and coauthored by Leon Satkowski, professor of architecture at the University of Minnesota. Embossed on its cover beneath the title and in large font is *Colin Rowe*. Below this, in smaller font, is *& Leon Satkowski*. Its advertising mentions Satkowski only once, describing him as "a Rowe student." Much more prominently, it heralds the book as the "last published work of the legendary Colin Rowe, . . . a testament to the buildings, architects, and artists [he] most deeply appreciated . . . , subjects that captured Rowe's heart and challenged his fertile mind." It goes on to state that the book "is written in Rowe's unmatched and engaging personal style," notes that the book "emphasizes the leading subjects of the 16th-century Renaissance: the architects (Bramante, Vignola), the patrons (Leo X, Cosimo I de Medici), the artists (Michelangelo), and the cities (Rome, Venice, Florence)." It ends by declaring the work the "finest critical scholarship on 16th-century Italy, and an accessible guide for the non-scholar" and by insisting that "this book is destined to be regarded as one of Rowe's most important."

Now there are certainly reasons to believe that a book by Colin Rowe on cinquecento Italian architecture could fit this description. There are, for instance, the many references to Palladio in Rowe's earliest essays and the ubiquity of Rome in *Collage City*[1]; the important presence of Michelangelo and even Pirro Ligorio in his beautifully crafted "The Provocative Façade: Frontality and Contrapposto"[2]; the deservedly famous "Grid/Frame/

Lattice/Web" essay invoking Giulio Romano (most recently found in the *As I Was Saying* collection[3]); and the occasional conversation with Rowe in which subjects such as his bumping into Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown on a visit to the Palazzo Farnese constantly came up. Rowe kept an apartment in Rome, and stories are still told there of his deep appreciation of its architecture. There is, too, in a slightly different realm, that undeniable and very English obsession with Italy: Lord Burlington and Robert Adam, of course; later Ruskin and D. H. Lawrence; and today, the high-gloss films of Merchant and Ivory.

To be sure, there are many reasons to believe. But there's one *big* reason to doubt the publisher's assertions. Colin Rowe died on November 5, 1999. And where certainly his much earlier collaborations with coauthors—John Hejduk, Robert Slutsky, and Fred Koetter—proved extremely fruitful and successful, it seems to me that always it was *the written words of Rowe*—the beautifully crafted articulation of a thoughtful and well-honed critical position, a position that appeared as the verbal analogue of the "permanent argument" architecture that it championed—that made manifest the very potent and insightful ideas of *both* authors.[4] With *Italian Architecture of the 16th Century*, this is not the case. As early as the first few lines of the book, when he opens his Acknowledgments with an epigram that quotes the spoken words of Colin Rowe, Satkowski demonstrates his lack of understanding of the essence of his coauthor's critical position. "I have always liked looking at 16th-century buildings in Italy," the March 1998 quotation reads, "and I find them gratifying and refreshing as the spectacle of Modern Architecture becomes more depressing" (vi). Thus from the outset, Satkowski establishes opposition between Modern Architecture and the subject of the book we have yet to read. The putative opposition is reinforced in Satkowski's second sentence when he



insists that Rowe "was among the very first to recognize that the 1920s work of Le Corbusier was profoundly influenced by historical examples, and especially, by the villas of Palladio" (vii). But, of course, Rowe never argued "influences," he simply set *his* understanding of the work of Palladio next to that of *his* understanding of Le Corbusier, articulating both similarities and differences, delicately balancing the two, withdrawing his own personal assessment in favor of a positive ambiguity that insisted on the intelligent and active participation of the reader and that brought to the essay a life and vitality that it has to this day.[5] In these essays, Rowe offered the reader not the foregone conclusion of an expert, but a "way of thinking about" architecture. "A dialectician, the greatest,"[6] was Rowe's assessment of Le Corbusier, and his reason, one supposes, for featuring him in so many of his essays. But by stating that "Le Corbusier was profoundly influenced by Palladio," great credence is given to 16th-century Italian architecture and its capacity to serve as an authority to Modern architecture. Satkowski seeks this credibility. The importance to his reader of his subject and to his take on that subject seems dependent on his diminishing the Modern masters.

Thus—and to protract this point perhaps too far—Satkowski introduces Le Corbusier in *Italian Architecture of the 16th Century* only to belittle him, and, with him, all of Modern Architecture. He opens his epilogue with another epigram, this one by the 1936 L-C: "Shatter the 'schools'. . . as well as the 'School of Vignola,' I beseech you" (310).[7] Now Satkowski has written a rather fine chapter on Giacomo Vignola, and with this out-of-context L-C quote he seems to ask patronizingly why the 20th century's most influential architect did not appreciate the Italian theorist-architect as much as he, Leon Satkowski, does. He immediately provides the answer. "It was all too easy for architects such as Le Corbusier to demonize cinquecento architects," Satkowski declares. "Vignola was singled out for special criticism, most likely because of how his immensely successful treatise on orders . . . represented everything that Corbusier sought to achieve in his "Five Points of a New Architecture" (313). For Satkowski, then, petty jealously was the root of Le Corbusier's dismissal. Le Corbusier, Satkowski insists, "misunderstood" Vignola, thus suggesting that there is only one correct understanding, that belonging, of course, to Satkowski.[8] Demonizing, indeed. Unfortunately, Satkowski's entire last chapter is dedicated to such suggestions. The geniuses of modern architecture—Wright, Le Corbusier, and even Walter Gropius—wrongly dismissed cinquecento Italian architecture. They simply weren't savvy enough to appreciate what Leon Satkowski would ultimately find fascinating. And so a curious cap is put on the entire book. For how to accept or value "readings" of 16th-century Italian architecture from one so obviously incapable of understanding far more accessible 20th-century architecture? How to find the presence of Colin Rowe's wisdom in words and movements so obviously in opposition to his? Oh, that these were merely annoying attributes and

not major concerns for a viable critical position that seems to have eluded Leon Satkowski.

That Satkowski both begins and ends his book with a concern for Modernism is rather unfortunate, for it frames his far larger effort in an awkward manner and we must necessarily assume that a badly formulated position toward Modernism implies a badly formulated position toward Italian cinquecento architecture. This framing, however, cannot be ignored, for certainly it is Satkowski's attempt to answer obvious questions raised by the book: why should we of the 21st century be concerned with 16th-century Italian architecture? And isn't it all a bit pretentious and ultimately unnecessary—not least since many of the great 20th-century masters found it so very academic and useless? Satkowski's response is far different from that which we might imagine from Colin Rowe. Nowhere does Satkowski attempt an intelligent account of the stifling over-academic atmosphere that confronted these Modern masters; rather he views their opinions of his own preferences as a threat to the integrity of his position. Ultimately, he dismisses these masters as rubes. And the great fault of the book is exactly this. For certainly its subject, Italian architecture of the 16th century, has merit, though to architects and students of architecture who might read the book, its merit must be largely *potential*—comprised of far more than information of an arcane sort, a lesson construed in a manner that encourages the reader to see "with new eyes" the great works of Italian architecture and to understand that such works are relevant to the creation of architecture in the 21st century. Colin Rowe could have written this. His influence on the making of architecture—as evinced in the introductions to monographs on the New York Five, on Stirling, and on Krier—was substantial, and one must attribute this to his essays and books that encourage the thoughtful consideration of architectural creation in relation to the great architecture of the past. Rowe's way of writing was crucial to his capacity to encourage reflection; but despite publicity blurbs that insist the book was written in "Rowe's unmatched and engaging personal style," in great understatement, Satkowski notes in his acknowledgement that "Colin's unique voice may have been lost in completing this book" [vii].

If *Italian Architecture of the 16th Century* is not the writing of Colin Rowe (in the same way that Madison's recently completed Minona Terrace in Wisconsin is *not* the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and to insist that it is is to diminish his legacy and undermine his beliefs), what then is it? Again, announcements regarding this book are of little help. In contradiction to publicity's insistence that the book "emphasizes the leading subjects of the 16th-century Renaissance: the architects (Bramante, Vignola), the patrons (Leo X, Cosimo I de Medici), the artists (Michelangelo), and the cities (Rome, Venice, Florence)," Satkowski declares unambiguously that "the text focuses mainly on Rome and Venice" (viii), that the treatment of Florence is abbreviated, and that, unfortunately, the planned chapters on Michelangelo and Palladio were "cut short by Colin's death" and not included in this survey (viii). Now, 16th-century Italian architecture without Michelangelo or Palladio is a bit like Thanksgiving without turkey. Despite the many benefits of a tofu substitute, it is abundantly inappropriate for the occasion and can never prove sufficient—even less so here where one of the book's declared theses is "how authority and subversion take on many forms" (xix). So when Professor Satkowski invites the reader "to detect other examples of authority and subversion that have eluded us" (xix), hands must immediately be raised and the one *big* example blurted out. For didn't Palladio, at least when written-up by Colin Rowe, almost always play the role of "authority"? And wouldn't Michelangelo—agonizing and ecstatic and looking a whole lot like Charlton Heston—be just grand as the glorified subverter? Yet, Leon Satkowski does not offer us this, but warms up instead a hardy helping of Giorgio Vasari.

Vasari is Satkowski's specialty: first, the subject of his Harvard dissertation for James Ackerman, then the rather hastily prepared publication version of same, and more recently, an extremely well-illustrated *Giorgio Vasari* published by Princeton Architectural Press. Appropriateness aside, Satkowski's "Architecture at Court: Vasari & Ammannati in Tuscany" is the best chapter in *Italian Architecture of the 16th Century*, an excellent summation of his earlier writings and a highly intelligent portrait of the writer-artist-architect known far better for his *Lives* than for the ingenious Florence Uffizi or the intriguing urban stage-set loggia in Arezzo. Satkowski documents both works of architecture thoroughly, offering fascinating insight into the patronage that insisted on such works and Vasari's persistence in pleasing his patrons. This being said, Vasari simply does not suffice as substitute for Palladio and Michelangelo. The absence of this duo and of the climax they might contribute is extremely evident in the book.

Still, *Italian Architecture of the 16th Century* is not a bad book, but it is not, as its advertisement claims, the "finest critical scholarship on 16th-century

The misleading publicity was not Satkowski's. "Weed it and reap" would be my advice to the reader of *Italian Architecture of the 16th Century.*

Italy," and its value is not that of a Rowe text, criticism of a rare sort in which "the possible, the probable, and the plausibly abstract are always in a continuous condition of intersection."[9] Instead, it should be valued occasionally as "arcane-knowledge-on-a-need-to-know-basis" and occasionally as a very elaborate and often very intriguing guidebook. It selects and documents wonderful works of architecture and provides extensive information on each, works by Donato Bramante, Giulio Romano, Baldassare Peruzzi, Jacopo Sansovino, Michele Sanmicheli, Giacomo Vignola, and, of course, Vasari. But Satkowski never fully investigates the obviously Rowe-esque themes introduced at the beginning of the book—authority and subversion, for instance, or painting toward architecture (a Henry-Russell Hitchcock notion, but directed toward Modernism, of course[10]), typologies perhaps, and definitely "the city." Though such ideas are utterly intriguing, the book would be better off without their undeveloped appearance. Indeed, were Satkowski to edit Rowe out, he would arrive at a far better integrated book. For Rowe is no easy act to follow; and he's not to be imitated or issued unfinished. *And* Satkowski's scholarly concerns seem perfectly legitimate and of interest; his art-historical manner of articulating these subjects is quite readable and often very intelligent.

Obviously, the misleading publicity quoted above was not of Satkowski's doing. It describes a book that was intended. The intention was never fulfilled. "Weed it and reap" would be my advice to the reader of *Italian Architecture of the 16th Century*, advice that might be extended to all at the table who have been served victuals considerably different from those they had expected.

NOTES

1. Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978). For the "early essays," see Notes 5 and 6.
2. Colin Rowe, "The Provocative Facade: Frontality and Contrapposto," *Le Corbusier: Architect of the Century* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1987).
3. Colin Rowe, ed. Alexander Caragonne, *As I Was Saying: Recollections and Miscellaneous Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). Other "Italian" essays in this three-volume set include: "Two Italian Encounters" (1988); "Ideas, Talents, Poetics: A Problem of Manifesto" (1989); "Letter: On Precedent and Invention" (1986); "*Roma Interrotta*" (1977–1978); "Rome: Piazza Augusto Imperatore" (1987); and, "'I Stood in Venice on the Bridge of Sighs'" (1985).
4. The term "permanent argument" is employed by Rowe in his "The Provocative Façade" (27) in which he writes: "The existence of *contrapposto* presumes a pictorial or sculptural condition of permanent argument. The figure is simultaneously static and set in motion. There is the primary surface of attack, the frontal picture plane, and, then, there is the convoluted and serpentine territory which lies behind." Later in this essay, Rowe describes Le Corbusier's Villa Stein at Garches in similar terms.
5. For example, Rowe's first and perhaps his most famous essay, "The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa," was republished numerous times after its initial appearance in *Architectural Design* in 1947. With each republication, Rowe slightly altered the essay, bringing it more and more into alignment with his refined critical position. Differences between Le Corbusier and Palladio are far more pronounced and detailed in the "final" version than in the original one. Not surprisingly, the illustrative text of each underscores these differences. The "permanent argument" that results—the peaceful coexistence between decidedly different *parties*—becomes the basis for an urban theory best articulated in *Collage City*.
6. Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), 194. This essay was first published as "Dominican Monastery of La Tourette, Eveux-Sur Abresle, Lyon," *Architectural Review*, June, 1961, 401–410.
7. In fact, this letter was a reply from Le Corbusier addressed to the "Groupe des Architectes Modernes de Johannesbourg (Transvaal)" on the occasion of their publication of a manifesto to appear in October 1936. They had written Le Corbusier for counsel regarding inspiration for a new architecture. He advised them against an "academic" approach to architecture, personified, in his view, by the "*School* of Vignola" (not Vignola, himself, one might note). Rather he suggested that these architects attempt to discover architecture in the richness of nature:

> Yes, this flexibility, this exactitude, this indisputable reality of combinations of harmonious engendering in which nature offers a spectacle in each thing. Inside to outside: serene perfection. Plants, animals, trees, sites, seas, plains, or mountains. Even the perfect harmony of natural disasters, of geological cataclysms, etc. Open your eyes! . . . I want architects—not only students—to take their pencil to draw a plant, a leaf, to express the spirit of a tree, the harmony of a shell, the shape of the clouds, the play so rich of the waves on the sand, in order to discover the successive expressions of an interior force. . . . Architecture is an extraction of the spirit and not a trade. . . . It's through spiritual brightness, with grace and a smile, that architecture ought to bring to men from the new machine civilization joy and not a strict utility. Today it's this flame that we must light. And dispel foolishness.

The body of this letter is found in French in Jean Petit, *Le Corbusier lui-même* (Geneva: Editions Rousseau, 1970), 82. Satkowski does not note its source (no footnotes or credits of this sort are found in *Italian Architecture of the 16th Century*). The convictions expressed by Le Corbusier were an essential aspect of his early La Chaux-de-Fonds education and are evident in drawings of the patterns of nature that filled the walls of the School of Art studios that he taught in his hometown. Such images reappear in the photomural that Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret mounted to the curved stone wall of the interior of the *bibliotheque* of the Pavillon Suisse in 1933. Of those early years, Le Corbusier wrote in 1926, "Here in rational France the appeal to nature; analysis. The entomologist Fabre excited us. We realized that natural phenomena have an organization, and *we opened our eyes*. 1900. An outpouring. Truly, a fine moment!" See *The Decorative Art of Today*, trans. James I. Dunnet (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 137. The notion that "nature" might be a better, more appropriate source of inspiration for architecture is essential to many modern architects, including, of course, Frank Lloyd Wright.
8. Though Le Corbusier is mentioned on page 83 and quoted on page 310, the "Index" under "Le Corbusier" (325) does not indicate this.
9. Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, 216.
10. In *Painting Toward Architecture* (New York: Duell, Sloane and Pearce, 1948), Henry-Russell Hitchcock attempts to show the influence of modern art on modern architecture while documenting "The Miller Company Collection of Abstract Art." Thus, a painting by Mondrian is juxtaposed with a photograph of the front facade of Oud's Café de Unie in Rotterdam, and Wright's Hickox House in Kankakee is compared to Kunisada's "Japanese Actors" print. Rowe and Satkowski attempt to show how various cinquecento Italian architects first painted a "new" architecture in various murals and only later attempted to build something of this earlier imaged architecture.