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Bruce Abbey **Drawings and Paintings 1965 - 2000**

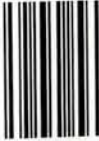
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Bruce Abbey **Drawings and Paintings 1965 - 2000**



Some of this work was exhibited at the College of Architecture Art and Planning at Cornell University and at the Syracuse University School of Architecture Summer and Fall 2000, and at Fox and Fowle, Architects, in New York in the Fall of 2003.

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Forward

At a particularly difficult moment in my third year, my studio professor came by to chat and to encourage my flagging spirits. He observed that while he could teach me many things about architecture he could not in fact teach me to make a drawing such as the one that he saw pinned to my desk. We talked about the implications of the diagram that I had made and how to interpret it. It was from that moment forward that my self-education as an architect began. Learning to see is a complicated struggle, particularly when the seeing is both internal understanding as well as external perception. Drawing is the act of representation of experience, intuitive knowledge, and personal expression. Over the years I have continued to explore compositional structure through line and color to create meaningful associations between formal constructs, interactions and connections that were first suggested by my drawings and sketches as a student.

Also, by teaching in the studio for almost 25 years, the giving of numerous design crits resulted in the production of a graphic shorthand that formed the basis for a method of pictorial communication that could share the memory of a given place and the themes to be discovered through the act of drawing itself.

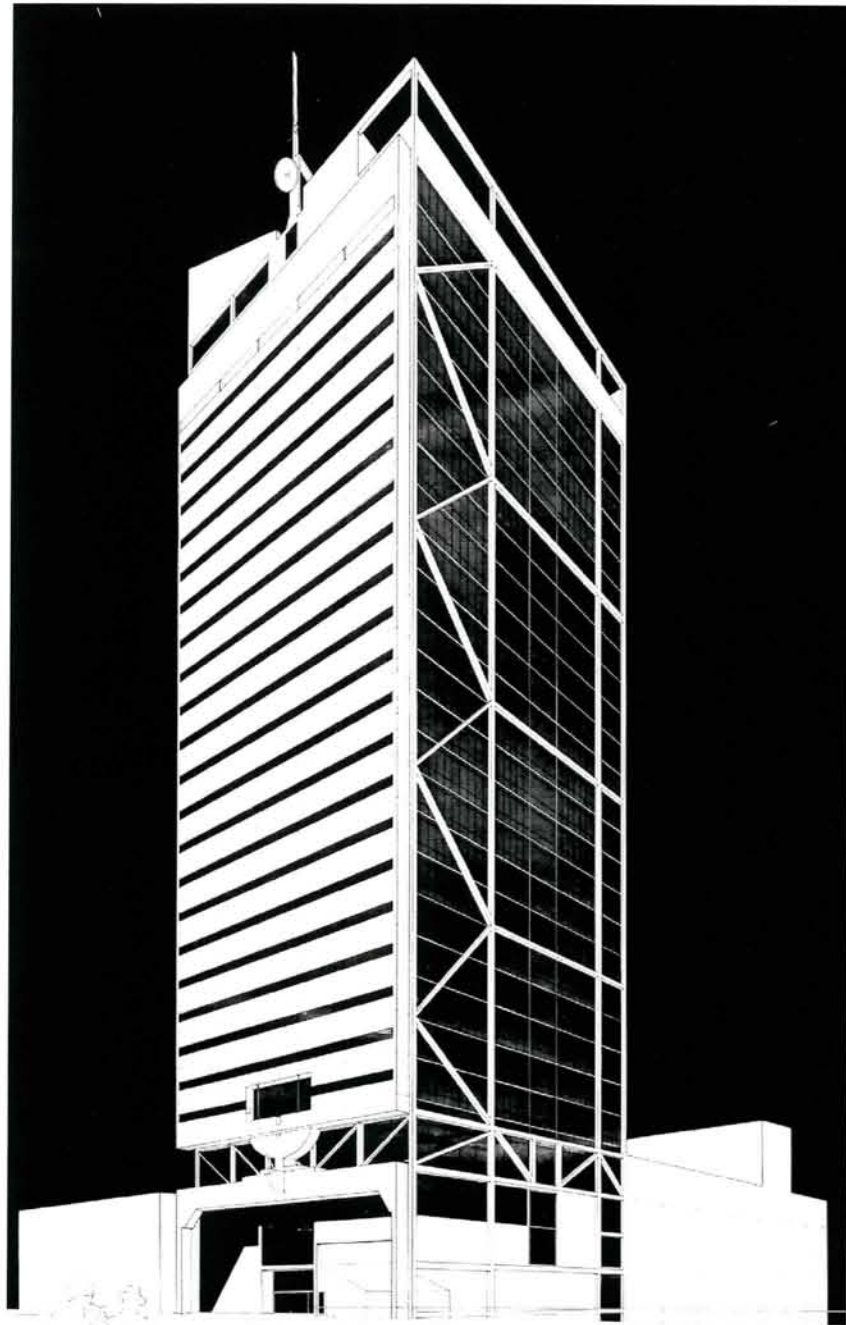
There is no greater pleasure than the self-awareness of making and experiencing the appearance of something from nothing. The blank sheet represents opportunity, challenge and potential. There is the immediacy of moving the pencil or pen while self correcting and being able to observe the result before the mind can grasp the implications. Only afterwards can critical judgement enter into the process of making. The best drawings are those in which the idea happens as it is being created. A goal is spontaneity and freshness. Thus for the most part, I draw from memory; memory that is intensified by observation and then reflection.

The work presented is a partial record of the past 35 years. They document both an external and internal viewpoint, some related to architectural production, most to the memory of places visited: all are from my hand and head.

I am most indebted to Le Corbusier for the admonition to avoid being one who possessed "eyes that do not see," to H. Peter Kahn, Professor of Art at Cornell for making visual literates of the first year class, to Robert Slutzky, for his professionalism and mastery of color theory, and to Michael Graves, for his graphic virtuosity and architectural insight.

This catalog is dedicated to the memory of my mother, who encouraged me, as she baked every Saturday morning, to draw at my table in the kitchen. Thus hearth and home were forever joined with pleasure of making images.

Bruce Abbey
Syracuse, New York 2004



2. Late Entries: Chicago Tribune Tower Competition 1980

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Preface

Drawing is a precursor to language. It is a symbolic representation of the world as experienced or imagined. It also is an analytical tool of great power.

As a student of architecture, I was educated to think spatially. The conception and realization of form was taught as a process that started out as a two-dimensional diagram pregnant with three-dimensional possibilities. To heighten the awareness of spatial notation, I was immediately confronted with the problem of the flatness of the sheet of paper where the illusion of depth depended on the location, size, texture and overlap of objects in relationship to each other. All depended on the role of the contour to reveal shape, form or depth. Thus the investigations into spatial relationships has always for me been a question of line and depth cues.

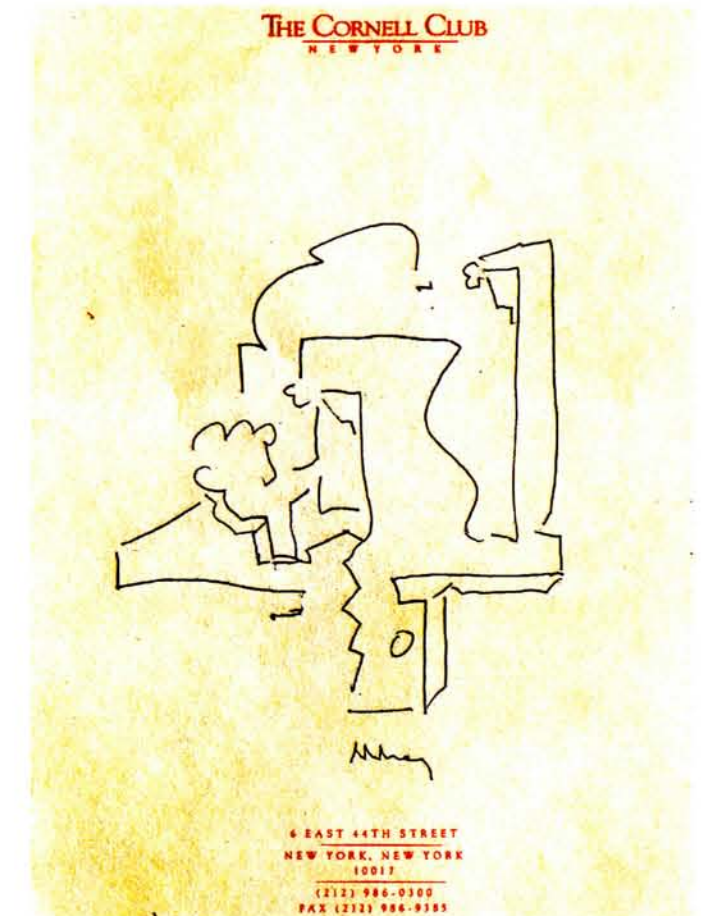
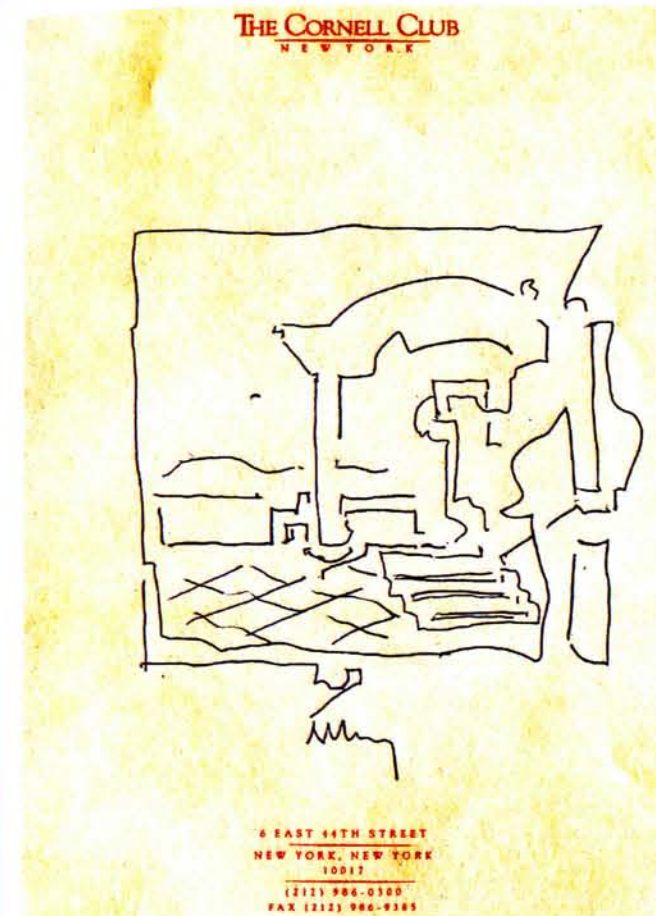


3. Le Kef, Tunisia 1966

Gestalt devices such as the manipulation of figure/field or figure/ground relationships and the use of reversals to force a greater awareness of spatial issues became second nature to the design process. A simultaneous manipulation of figure and field by means of contour, edge and color is ultimately understood as a metaphor for the completeness of the world as we want it to be. Nothing useful is left out, all is pertinent and all is accommodated

Paul Klee's *The Thinking Eye* may well be the inspiration for the drawing shown here. Drawing is a purposeful act. One that hides as well as reveals. Klee's research (and research it was) tells how the eye and the mind connect to express content whimsically, allegorically or analytically.

The exhibit documents some of my graphic thinking over the years in a variety of mediums and scales. What links them is a dialogue about line, color and form, to communicate a value or narrative idea. They are a result of direct experience and expression of the world in its conceptual and emotive state, drawn often from memory. Vasari said that "drawing is an apparent expression, or a visible image of the thoughts of the mind (esprit) and of what one has formed first in the imagination." Perhaps Rudolf Arnheim said it best in his introduction to *Art and Visual Perception*, "all perceiving is also thinking, all reasoning is also intuition, all observation is also invention."



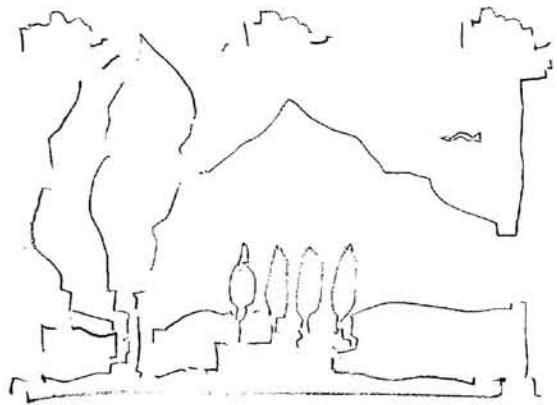
4-6. Cornell Club Series 1998

Drawings

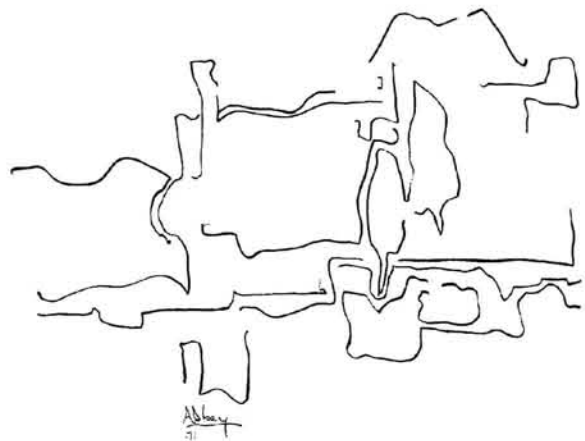
The Hand (cover) is a self-conscious act of drawing while watching oneself draw. It is about the power of concentration necessary to see and to create simultaneously. Does the eye and muscle coordination already possess the knowledge of the line before the mind understands? Does our finger recoil from touching the hot object before the mind registers pain?

This type of drawing for me suggests the power of the self-reflexive act. A balance exists between acute observation and expressive invention.

The Chicago Tribune Late Entry Competition (2) is more about figure-field manipulation, but also has devices found in later drawings.



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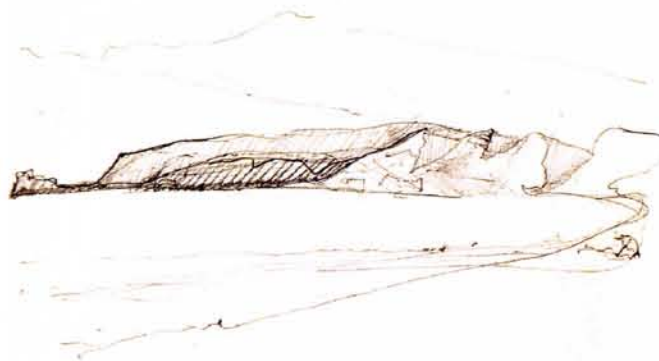
Le Kef, Tunisia (1996) resulted from the desire to capture the essence of what was a daily walk that was the beginning of a new and intense experience at the start of my Peace Corps service, following graduation from architecture school. It was freshly drawn from the accumulated memories of walking down the hill in this exotic and romantic landscape, as soon as the door to the house was closed and paper could be found. The immediacy of memory was essential to distill the compositional devices; silhouette, sky, Mirabout, and electric tower into an organized structure. The panorama of the evening sky confronts the one-point perspective of the path down to the town center and the vertical vanishing points of the tower connect the distant sky and rocky foreground. It is almost a five-point perspective or fish-eye view.

In the *Cornell Series* (4-6), fantasy still-lives are made combining "objects trouves" (keys) and images of the city, all done in place. The club stationery has a wonderful tooth, a nice yellow ochre color and a vertically centered logo. A curious formal resonance exists between the drawing of *Le Kef* and the far more analytical contour drawing that certainly was not conscious.

The travel sketches (7-10) are done from memory within 24 hours of visiting a site. They try to capture the spatial experience and the essential compositional characteristics of a given place. The lake drawings (11-12) are done in place.

The Key Biscayne drawings (13-21) are similar to the Cornell drawings in that contour and line are the means of constructing space and narrative. Too many meetings have provided the material for studies of coffee cups and glassware. Even mundane objects define the space around them, or in them, as it were. Some are escapist fantasies.

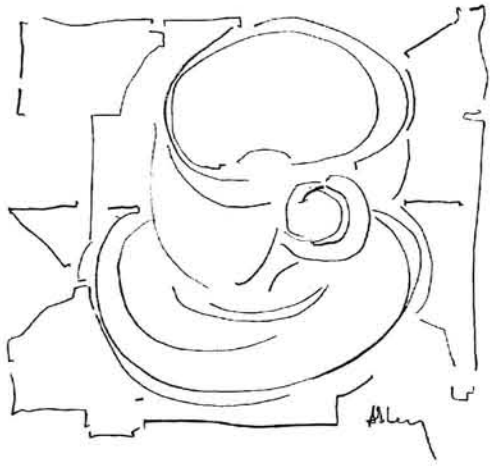
- 7. Tuscany
- 8. Yugoslavia
- 9. Tuscany
- 10. Lake Winnepesaukee, NH
- 11. Pt. Reyes, CA
- 12. Long Lake, NY



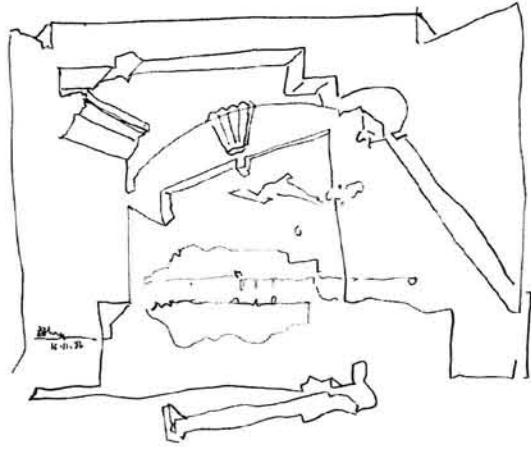
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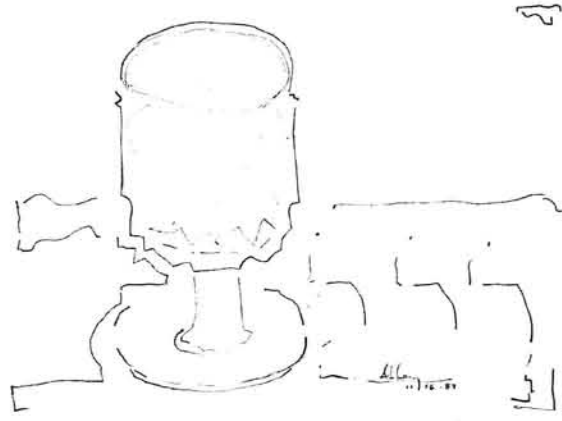
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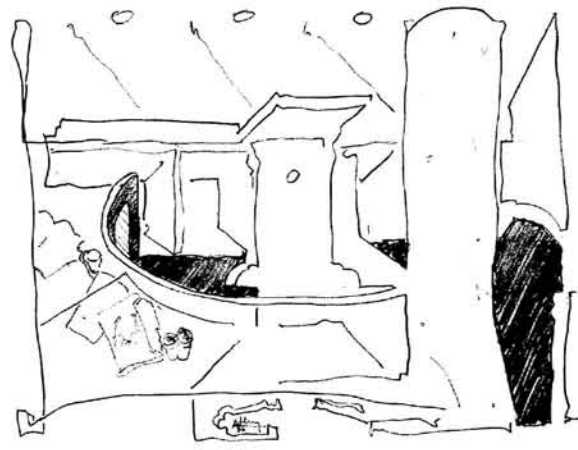
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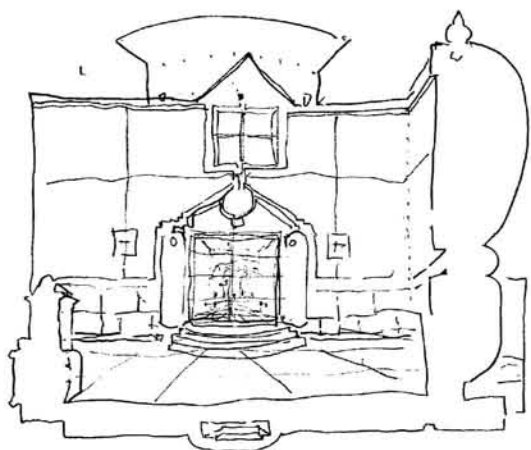
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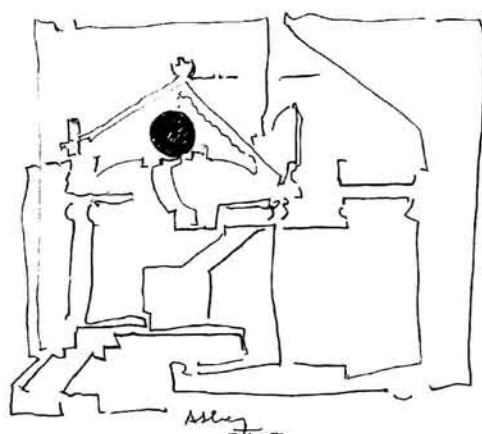
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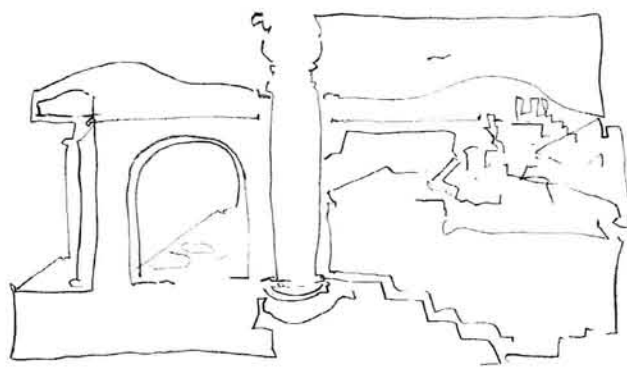
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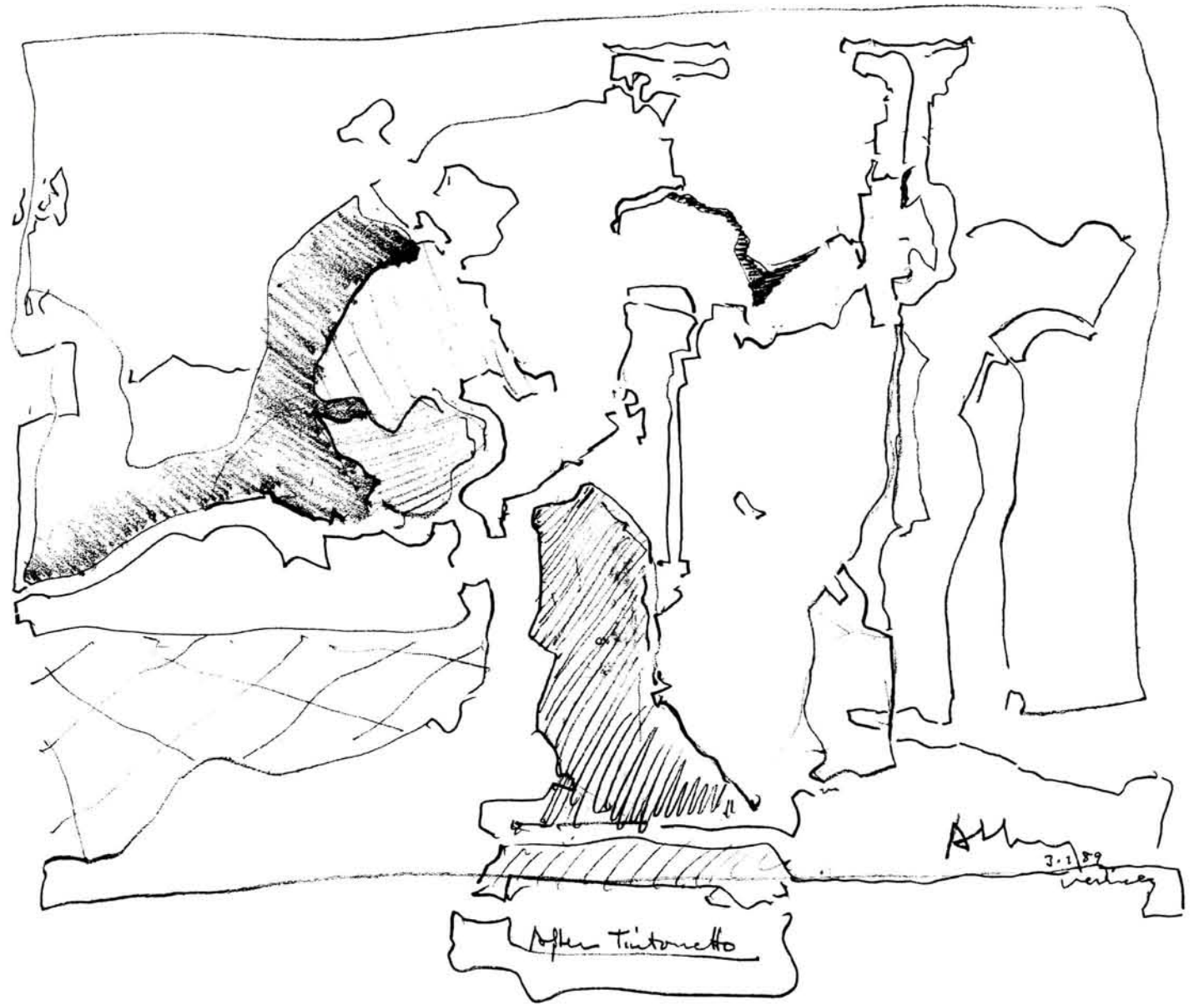


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- 13. Cup
- 14. Sbeitla
- 15. Villa
- 16. Fragments
- 17. AIA Headquarters
- 18. Deconstructed LeDoux
- 19. Tumbler
- 20. Cubist Buffet
- 21. Diptych



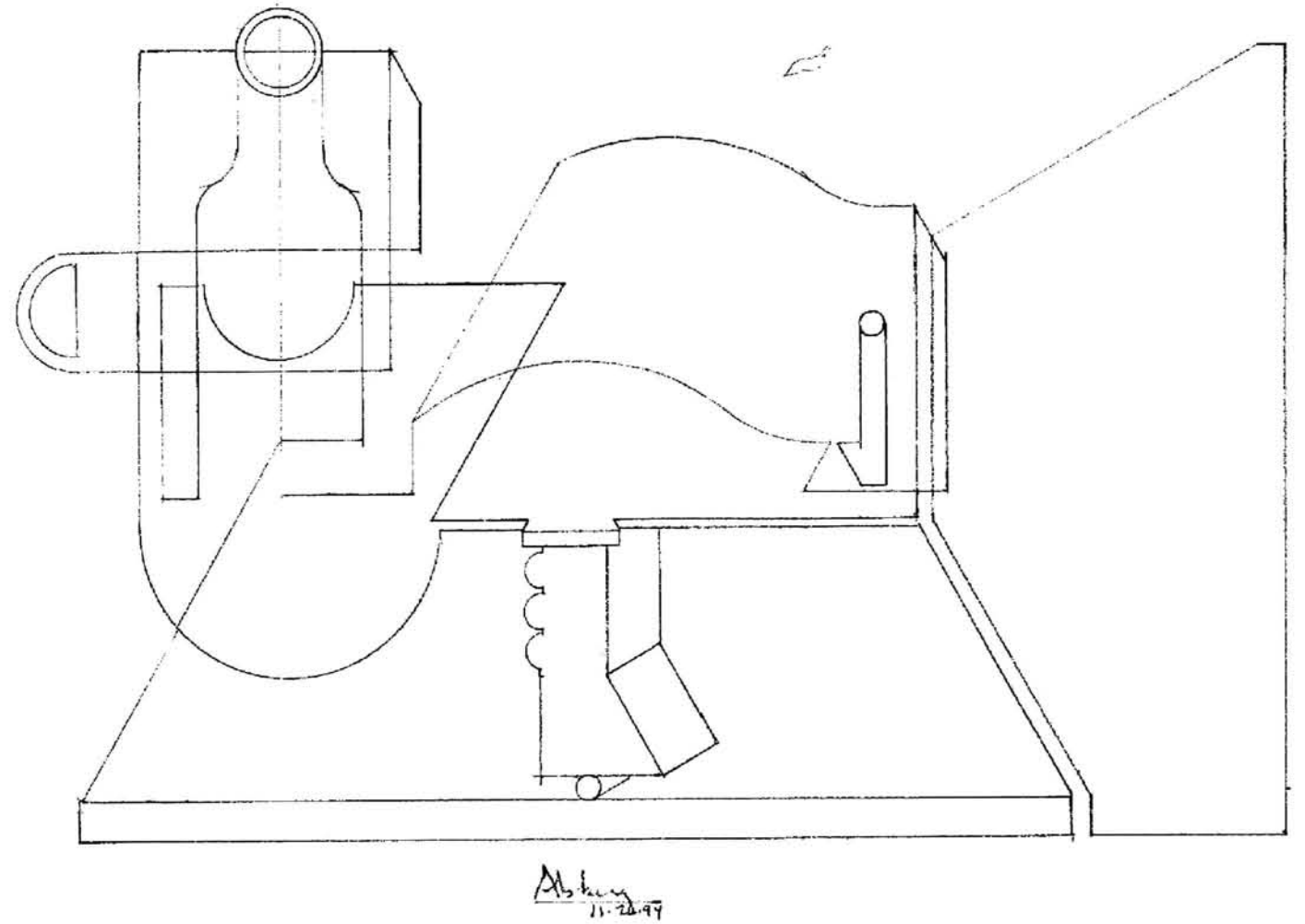
22. Still Life 1971



23. After Tintoretto 1989



24. Harlequin 1989



25. Still Life 1994

The *Still Life of 1974* is in debt to Braque and Gris. The picture plane is cut, joined and paired with the table leg producing a narrative with the compote across the cut.

Seeing the Tintoretto paintings in Venice were a shock, as the manipulation of the forms, subject matter and overall compositions struck a cord. I immediately went back to the apartment and drew an "homage."

The *Harlequin of 1989* is a diptych with the central figure as column.

The first *Still Life of 1994* is both constructed and open ended, more purist than not, more about transparency, marriage of contours and formal juxtaposition.

The second *Still Life of 1994* is a fantasy, more Tunisian than not.



Murals

Teaching in Vicenza in the summer of 1975 I experienced the tradition of frescos and narrative scenes of the good life by the 16th century Northern Italian masters. The complementary and mutually supportive use of painting and architecture was a motivation not to be resisted.

The first mural project in Charlottesville was to "correct" a living room wall that had an opening that was too large and which made furnishing the room very difficult. Objects in the room were incorporated into the scene to change the scale of the room and force a new set of relationships with the space. At the same time, work was started on the Library of Anaesthesiology at the University of Pennsylvania. It so happened that the context created a similar frontal condition as the living room and the solution took on a three-dimensional representation similar to the painted mural. This approach was similar to that of Palladio at the Palazzo Chiericati in Vicenza, by literally framing the landscape by his architecture or painted by G.B. Zelotti at the Villa Caldogna.

The second Charlottesville mural was more of a mannerist exercise "a la Giulio Romano." The space was very difficult, with a very low ceiling, an awkwardly placed and scaled fireplace and a dead end circulation from which there was no escape.

The third set of murals was for the dean's secretary, named Rose in the Syracuse University School of Architecture. Since the school has an Italian program in Florence, is located in the Finger Lakes district in upstate New York and was a program that was about spatial definition in architecture, the murals use three types of space making illusions: Chinese layering, cubist depth cues and one-point perspective.



27. Mural, Charlottesville, Virginia 1975



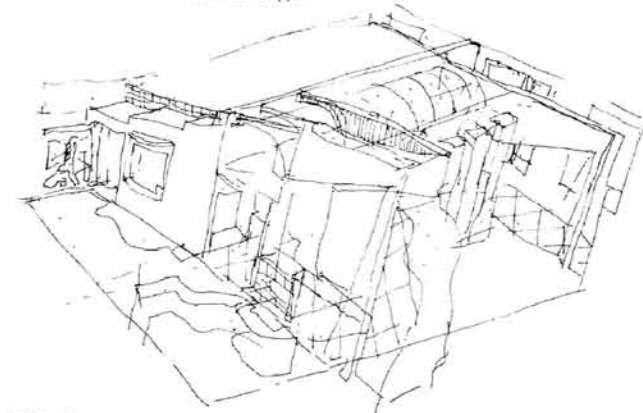
29. Library of Anaesthesiology Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1975-78 with R.D. Dripps



28. G.B. Zelotti, Villa Caldogna, Vicenza



30. Palladio, Palazzo Chiericati, Vicenza



31. Sketch



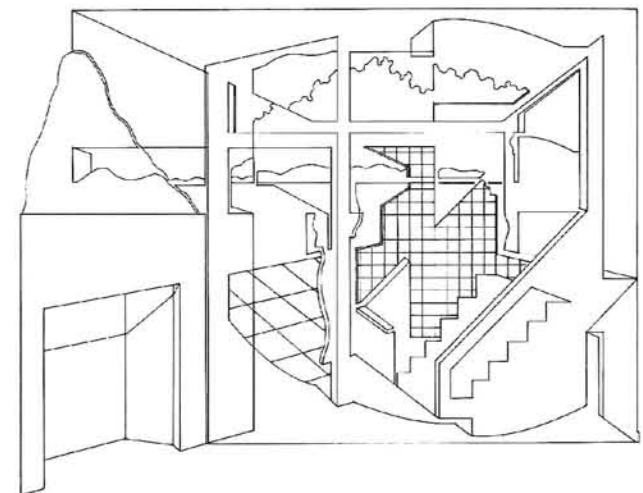
32. Mural Study, Charlottesville, VA 1977



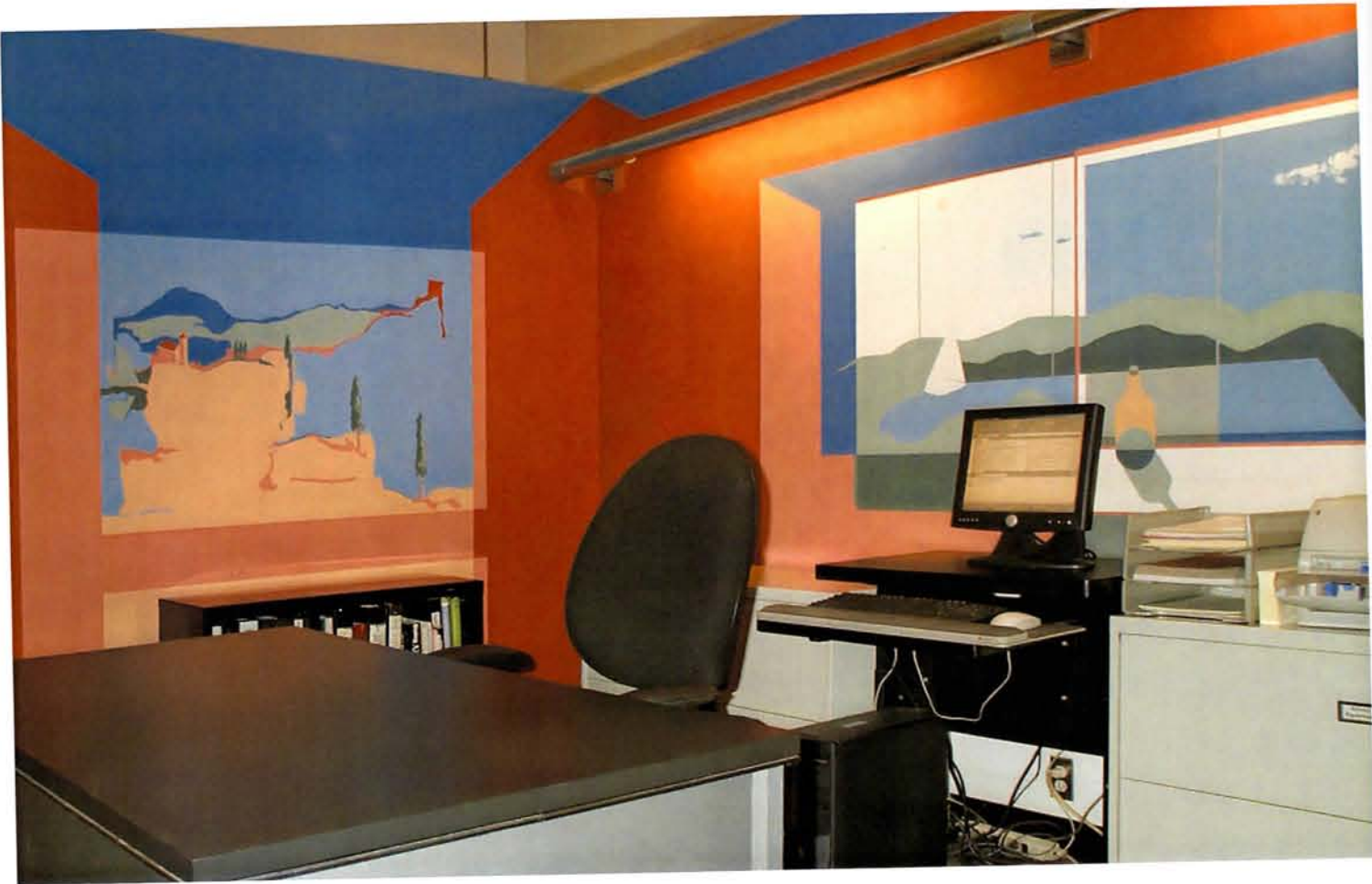
34. Mural Study, Charlottesville, VA 1977



33. Mural



35. Mural Cartoon



36. Mural, School of Architecture Syracuse University 1992



37. Mural, School of Architecture Syracuse University 1992



38. Watercolor, House Study

Watercolors

Watercolor is always more a question of technique than anything else. It works well for the quick sketch or impression. Nature scenes involving issues of atmosphere, mood or light, are the subject matter and photo-realism is not a goal.

The integration of the white field of the paper with the figures of the scene is always part of the compositional strategy. In that sense these studies are more like the drawing sketches than the murals. Color and edge are made simultaneously, and accidents do happen!



39. Watercolor, Winter Study



40. Keowee Key 1992



42. Long Lake 1992



41. Fourth Lake 1992



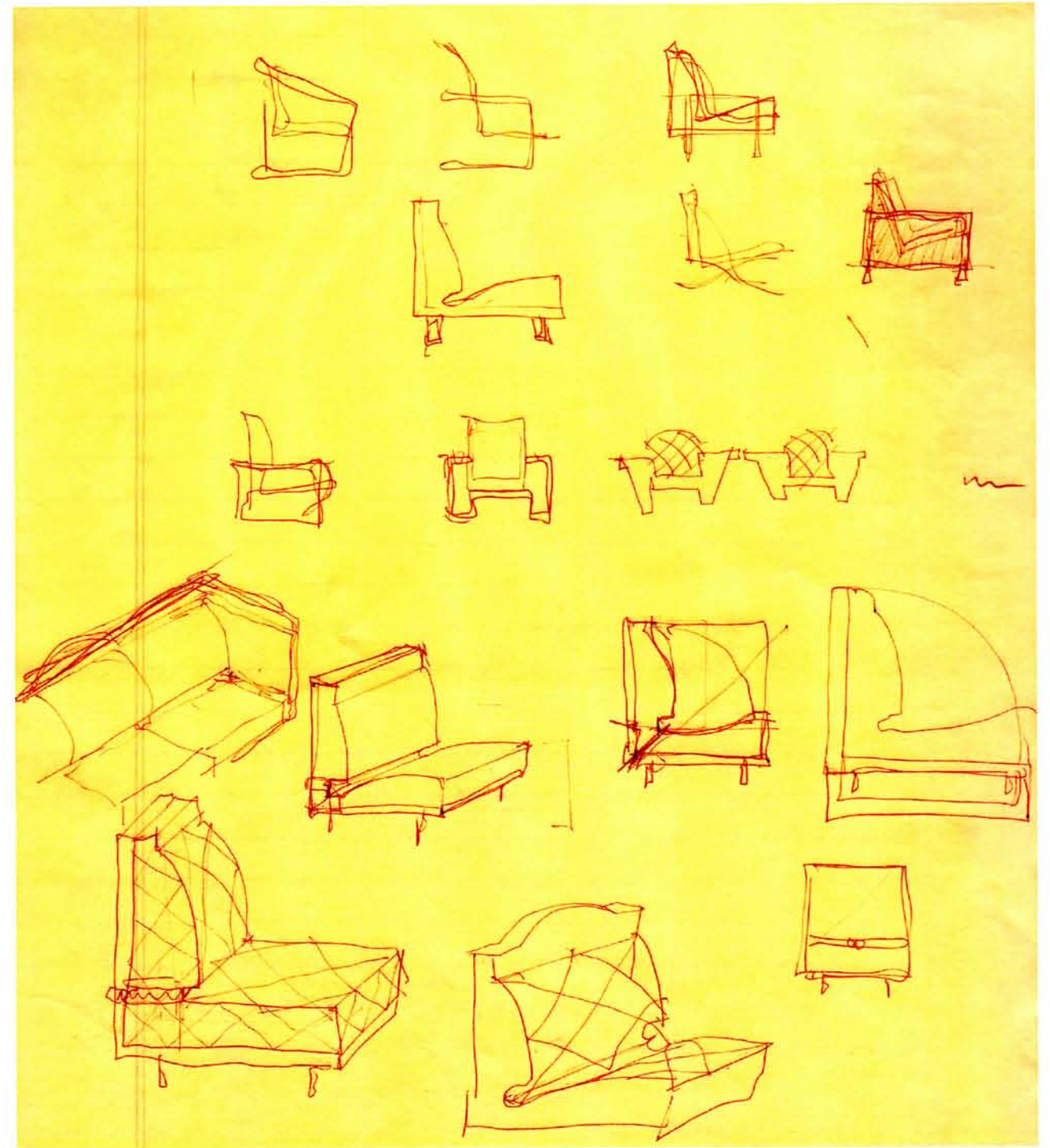
43. Fourth Lake 1994

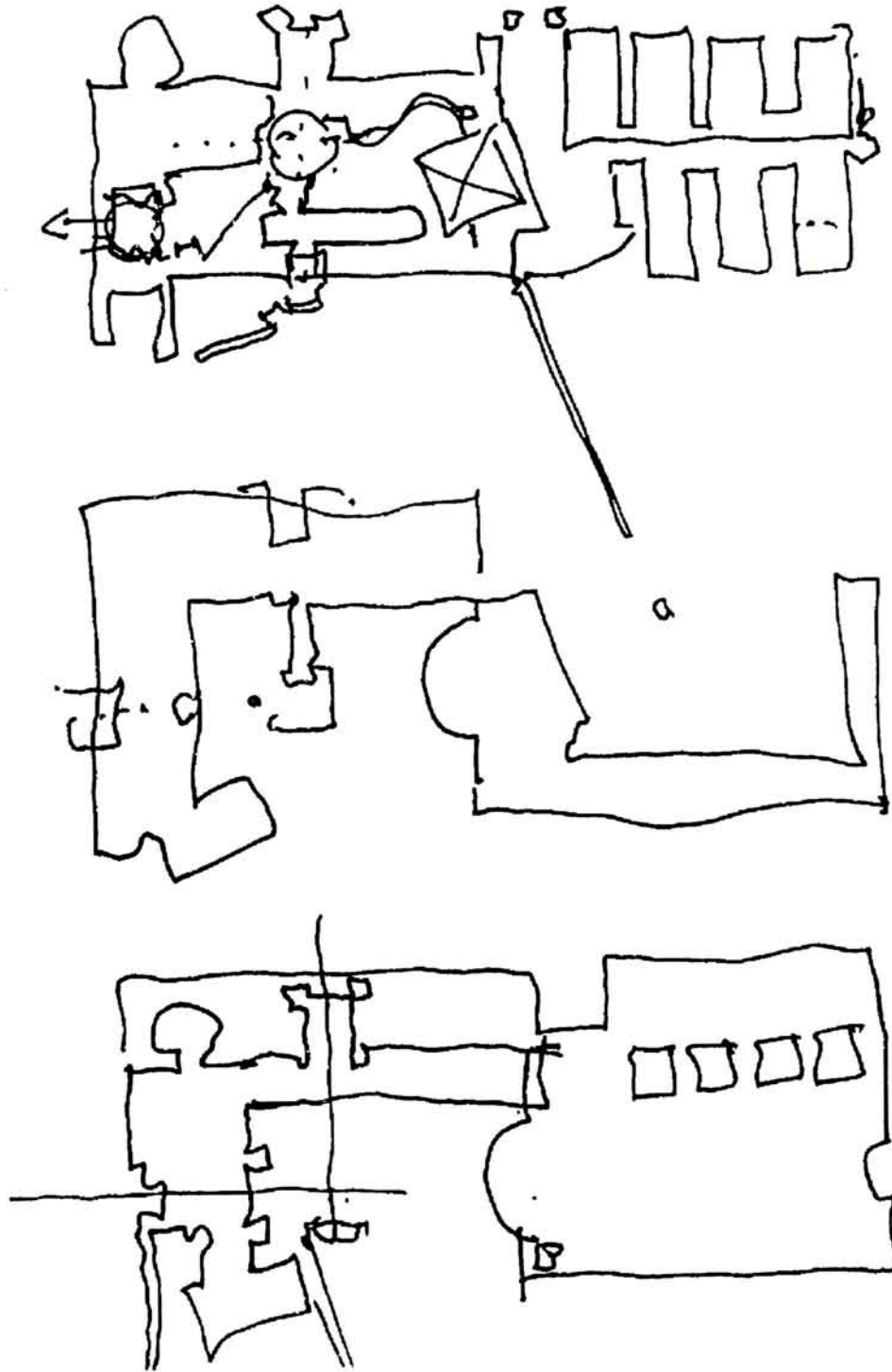
Miscellaneous Drawings

The chair studies are part of many sketches for furniture that have been done over the years. The modernist ideal of the manipulation of line to describe space for the body to occupy was an early theme. There remains always the question of proportion and the space between objects.

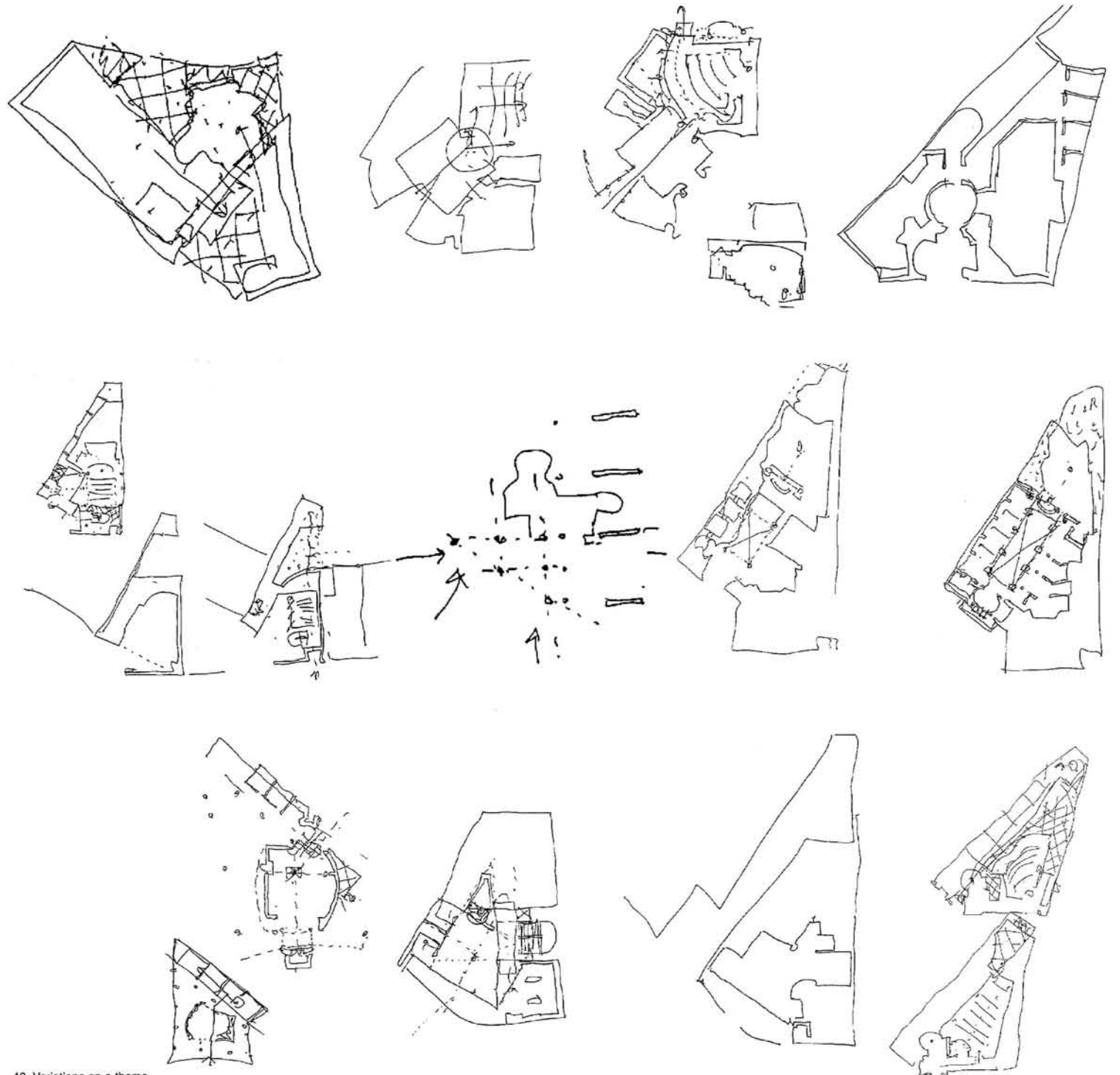
The parti drawings reflect the heritage of the Ecole des Beaux Arts design methodology. The capacity to summarize in a single drawing the salient features of a design was a highly desired ability. While generalized, the drawing suggested a spatial organization that was organized hieratically.

The following drawings (45 and 46) are from the design studio and are included to show the relationship between the freehand sketches and architectural diagrams. The issues are similar, in that the use of line and contour are manipulated to organize program relationships, procession, site configuration and structural notation by a variety of compositional strategies.





45. Parti diagrams for a library



46. Variations on a theme

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Vita

Bruce Abbey was born in 1943 in Vermont. He attended public schools in Burlington and the Liceo Ginnasio Statale "Giuglio Cesare" in Rome, Italy. He received his B. Arch. from Cornell in 1966 and M. Arch. from Princeton in 1971. Between 1966 and 1969 he served in the Peace Corps in Tunisia, working for the Bureau of Public Works and the National Institute of Archaeology. Professional experience includes work in the Office of Dan Kiley, Michael Graves and Geddes Brecher Qualls Cunningham. In 1974 he started teaching at the University of Virginia where he was department chair and associate dean. He also maintained a professional practice in Charlottesville. From 1990 to 2002 he was dean of the School of Architecture at Syracuse University.