

A 'Monster Edifice': Ambivalence, Appropriation, and the Forging of Cultural Identity at the Centennial Exhibition

QUESTIONS OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE have tended over the years to provoke American self-consciousness and ambivalence. Discussions of influences from Europe are charged with questions of whether American designers could or should even aspire to equal European architecture. Touting authenticity and self-sufficiency as quintessential American virtues, critics and practitioners have complained that borrowing European formal styles to dress up public occasions seemed to reveal a sense of inadequacy and a lack of grace rooted perhaps in the frontier experience. The Centennial Exhibition in 1876 raised all these concerns and more. One hundred years after the Declaration of Independence, it was time to take stock and reflect and the exhibition was designed to showcase the nation's cultural progress as well as its industrial products. The architecture and exhibits gave off an energetic, carnivalesque spirit, which perfectly suited the party atmosphere but seemed bumptious to those seeking a more refined memorial for the historic milestone. Critical response split between those who thought the boisterous free-spiritedness of the Centennial Exhibition expressed a rich complexity of cultural heritage and options and those who thought it showed only a "lowbrow" lack of discipline.

The "monster edifice" of my title was actually James D. McCabe's admiring term for the main building of the Centennial Exhibition. In his *Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition* (1876), McCabe proudly boasted that at 1,880 feet in length and 464 feet in width the main building was the largest in the world (fig. 1). Despite this undeniable engineering achievement, later reception of the exhibition has seldom been so positive. American anxieties about a perceived provincial awkwardness compared to

the dominant European achievements color the critical discourse. Contemporary European design was tending in two directions in the 1870s. One was toward ever more elegant academic interpretations of the past, as seen in the architecture of the French École des Beaux-Arts, and the modern, or High Victorian, Gothic practiced in England. The other was a trend towards individual innovation and modernism, seen in the practical architecture of the first International Exposition at the Crystal Palace in London, and the innovative and highly personal styles of Impressionist painting.

American artists and architects were studying in Europe in increasing numbers, but were still perceived to be playing catch-up. Critics in the United States were not favorable toward overly bold experiments: the audacious realism of Thomas Eakins's *The Gross Clinic*, created for the Centennial Exhibition, was shown with the scientific exhibits rather than in the Art Gallery. Other North American innovations were not yet ready. The development of the most original American building type, the skyscraper, was just beginning to take shape in Chicago and New York.

Even President Ulysses S. Grant struck a defensive note in his opening address inaugurating the exhibition, admitting that cultural activities had been secondary to Americans who had, until recently, been preoccupied with utilitarian needs:

One hundred years ago our country was new and but partially settled. Our necessities have compelled us to chiefly expend our means and time in felling forests, subduing prairies, building dwellings, factories, ships, docks, warehouses, roads, canals, machinery, etc., etc. . . . Burdened by these great primal works of necessity, which could not be delayed, we yet have done what this Exhibition will show in the direction of rivaling older and more advanced nations in law, medicine and theology; in science, literature, philosophy and the fine arts. Whilst proud of what we have done, we regret that we have not done more.¹

President Grant's apology pales in comparison to the sneers of later critics, however. The genteel tradition was just taking shape, and despite its initial popular success, the efforts of this first great national exhibition since the Civil War have not been well received by later critics. The virulence of twentieth-century critics suggests that there is something very provocative, and perhaps threatening, about the architecture of the exhibition. Lewis

¹ James D. McCabe, *Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition* (Philadelphia, 1876), 292.

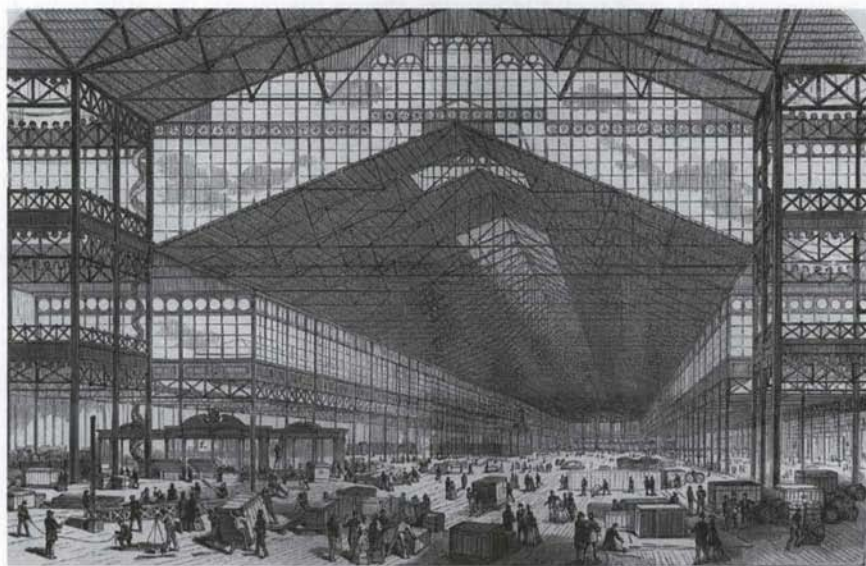


Fig. 1. Installation in main exhibition hall, January 1876; Henry Petit and Joseph Wilson, architects. This and other illustrations in this article are from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876* (New York, 1877).

Mumford wrote in *The Brown Decades* (1931) that: "It is hard to conceive anything lower than the architecture of the Centennial Exposition. . . ."² Two decades later, Russell Lynes concurred with Mumford's opinion that the festival architecture was not only terrible in itself but also reflected a deeply flawed culture:

Critics today look back upon the Centennial Exhibition as an architectural and artistic calamity that produced not a single new idea but was, rather, the epitome of accumulated bad taste of the era that was called the Gilded Age, the Tragic Era, the Dreadful Decade, or the Pragmatic Acquiescence, depending on which epithet you thought most searing.³

² Lewis Mumford, *The Brown Decades* (1931; reprint, New York, 1971), 16.

³ Russell Lynes, *The Tastemakers* (New York, 1954), 115. Oliver W. Larkin was only slightly more charitable in 1949 when he decried the picturesque propensity for variety and irregularity: "The oddest collection of structures that had ever been assembled in America, and assembled in that rather careless

Mumford and Lynes seemingly indict the architects for moral failings as much as for design flaws. Clearly, the association of artistic style and cultural values was more strongly linked than ever. How did the exhibition architects get it so wrong? Or did they? Perhaps they caught something real, something apart from homegrown national pride that led visitors such as William Rideing to enthuse about the exhibition in *Appleton's Journal* in 1876:

The exhibition grows on one like some grand landscape which cannot be comprehended in the first glance, and it is constantly presenting itself in a new aspect. At the end of an exploration that has lasted nearly three weeks, I have abandoned the hope of exhausting its wonders, and, in despair, I throw myself for rest on the grassy knoll of George's Hill, from which eminence the Main Building appears to be a mass of gold, and the thousand windows seem to be aflame in dazzling yellow light.⁴

Rideing's unabashed delight in the exhibition highlights the critical chasm. What inspired awe in him—the exhibition's size, complexity and variety—later evoked only disdain.

If the exhibition buildings appeared monstrous in a negative sense, however, that judgment may reflect more on the critics than on the buildings. In an insightful essay called *Freaks*, Leslie Fiedler perceptively reminds us that in the very concept of monstrosity there is often a sense of shared identification and a mix of fascination and fear.⁵ The Centennial Exhibition buildings have been an American shadow self, frequently denigrated in comparison with the White City of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Until very recently, only John Maass and Stephanie G. Wolf seem to have given the Centennial Exhibition serious consideration. Although strongly criticized by later modernists, the genteel elegance of the Chicago Exposition won popular approval that still endures, while the more unruly Centennial Exhibition gets scant attention. The manifold variety and unrestrained exuberance of the Centennial Exhibition, however, epitomized the dynamism of the era. Unlike the Chicago Expo-

way which was still a convention in landscape architecture, with winding paths and unexpected openings." Oliver W. Larkin, *Art and Life in America* (New York, 1949), 241.

⁴ William H. Rideing, "At the Exhibition III," *Appleton's Journal* 15, no. 378 (June 17, 1876), 793-94.

⁵ Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York, 1978).

sition, no single style was enforced on the architects. They were free to choose and the result was a kind of smorgasbord of architectural options and cultural traditions. The Centennial Exhibition demonstrated a deep, if occasionally naïve, curiosity about world culture and history and a willingness to experiment. These qualities are still to be found in evocations of history in American popular culture. Places like Disneyland or Las Vegas, for instance, offer an even more extreme simulation, "virtual travel" predicated on a suspension of disbelief.⁶

Richard Morris Hunt, the first American graduate of the French *École des Beaux-Arts*, gave the exhibition very mixed reviews. Among the positives, Hunt called attention to the unglamorous yet worthy achievements in transportation and sanitation at the Philadelphia exhibition, which more than matched the renovations being undertaken in the older cities of Europe and America. American architects raised the standards for physical comfort; in London, high-class Victorian railway hotels boasted of "American style" luxury, including central heating and a bathroom on every floor.⁷ Practical designs in fact opened a door for the acceptance of other aspects of design in American culture. Hunt also praised the role of the exhibition in fostering the art education of the masses, noting approvingly the contemporaneous building of museums, including the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston by the architects William Ware and Henry Van Brunt, the new Industrial Art Museum which was to be housed in Memorial Hall, and the new building for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts by Frank Furness.⁸ Like the innovations at the Centennial Exhibition of which Hunt approved, the new museums had practical as well as esthetic missions. They were being built not only for the appreciation of art but also to help train better industrial designers. For example, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston built a large collection of textiles from around the world to serve as examples for the

⁶ Modernist criticism of the Columbian Exposition of 1893 began with Louis Sullivan, who compared its effects to "lesions significant of dementia" in *The Autobiography of an Idea* (1924; reprint, New York, 1980), 325. Recent studies have enhanced our understanding of this fair's wider cultural significance, particularly: Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair* (Chicago, 1984), and Robert Muccigrosso, *Celebrating the New World: Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893* (Chicago, 1993).

⁷ Richard Morris Hunt, "Paper on the Architectural Exhibit of the Centennial Exhibition," *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the American Institute of Architects*, vol. 10 (1876), 34–38.

⁸ John A. Kouwenhoven, *The Arts in Modern American Civilization* (New York, 1967), 88, cites a number of contemporary critics and artists, including Robert Underwood Johnson, E. A. Abbey, and Dwight William Tryon, who testified to the critical role of the exhibition in introducing a new awareness of the arts in American life.

textile mills in Lowell and elsewhere in the state.⁹ The most eloquent American spokesman of the new doctrine of "art for art's sake," James McNeill Whistler, who was in fact born in Lowell, found much more receptive audiences in London and Paris than he did in his native Massachusetts.¹⁰

The quest for an American style in architecture was just beginning in 1876, and Hunt found minor signs of it in at least one exhibition structure, the New York State Building by Gilbert B. Croff and F. T. Camp. Hunt wrote, "The New York State Building is truly remarkable from quite another point of view, and may be intended as a representation of the *New American Style* or *Order of Architecture*, based on *hexagonal principles*, models of which form a curious exhibit in the Agricultural Hall."¹¹ He was clearly stretching to find the positive here. The columns in the Agricultural Hall may have been hexagonal, which is admittedly an innovation from the classical orders of architecture, but the rest of the building was rather conventionally eclectic. Hunt noted that Memorial Hall is "rather satisfactory" from a certain distance, but upon closer inspection "loses much."¹² His criticism, interestingly, might describe a contemporary Impressionist painting, which loses definition when approached too closely. Hunt found that nearly all the exhibition buildings shared the same flaws revealed in the American exhibit of architectural drawings, namely, a tendency toward pretentious ornament, shallow novelty, and "a certain insane desire" for excessive height.¹³

⁹ Walter Muir Whitehill, *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: A Centennial History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).

¹⁰ The concept of "*l'art pour l'art*" emerged in French art in the Romantic era of the early nineteenth century, and Whistler was one of the first to introduce it to the English-speaking world. Ever the contrarian, he rejected the imposition of practical aims on art: "Beauty is confounded with virtue, and, before a work of Art, it is asked: 'What good shall it do?'" He equally denied the superiority of the art of the past: "Why this lifting of the brow in depreciation of the present—this pathos in reference to the past? If Art be rare today, it was seldom heretofore. It is false, this teaching of decay." James McNeill Whistler, the "Ten O'Clock" Lecture (1885), in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1892; reprint, New York, 1967), 135–59.

¹¹ Hunt, "Architectural Exhibit of the Centennial Exhibition," 36.

¹² *Ibid.*, 37.

¹³ *Ibid.* "As compared with the exhibits of other nations, one is struck with the ambitious pretension of our designs, overloaded as they too often are with meretricious ornament. Another salient feature is the attempt to produce novelty of effect, often resulting in a want of harmony and repose, so essential to good work. A certain insane desire to carry up some portion of a building to an excessive height was remarked upon by a foreigner, who naively inquired why it was that we Americans did this. . . ."

The classically-oriented Hunt did not respond favorably to the raw energy of the "monstrous" expanses of the Main Exhibition Building and Machinery Hall. These translucent buildings with their repetitive arcades and diaphanous curtain walls of glass, derived from the Crystal Palace in London of 1851, had an insufficient pedigree for the traditionalist. Nonetheless, they inspired a generation of twentieth-century modernists, who found their straightforward functionalism and seemingly unlimited spaces to be worthy of emulation. Industrialization led to an ever-widening split between architecture and engineering in the nineteenth century. New building types, such as the enormous exhibition spaces on the Centennial grounds, needed to be built quickly. Traditional building techniques and styles were discarded in favor of structures that were technically innovative but seemed little more than sheds to traditionalists such as Richard Morris Hunt. This display of the products and arts of the entire country and much of the world, however, gave an image of unending abundance, a market without limits, and resonated with the image of America as a land of plenty.

The exhibition presented an encyclopedic spectacle of the industries and achievements of the modern world. Displays ranged from historic locomotives to plaster models of the food fishes of the sea. To navigate the hundreds of acres of the exhibition grounds, visitors could avail themselves of an early monorail, or hire a wheelchair and pusher to wheel them effortlessly through the halls. One could see the wares of the world, and even purchase them, with a minimum of effort. Established hierarchies of taste were challenged at the exhibition; cheap chromolithographs and photography bumped into the precincts of higher art, disturbing the sacralization of culture, an important principle for the emerging genteel tradition.¹⁴

The glorious chaos of the architecture of the Centennial Exhibition and of those new museums, so despised by later tastemakers, reflected a triumph of nineteenth-century eclecticism. The complex roots of the exhibition's architecture are paralleled in the background of its chief architect, Hermann Joseph Schwarzmann, a German-born engineer who turned to foreign models for his designs. Nearly all the buildings referred to some historical style—Gothic, Renaissance, and even Islamic were popular choices—though the styles were seldom applied correctly according to academic standards.

¹⁴ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 160–61.

Some critics scorned the stylistic inconsistency and borrowed forms of nineteenth-century architecture as evidence of a widespread cultural indecision and lack of imagination.¹⁵ But the stylistic chaos has also been attributed to too much imagination, too little obedience to precedent. Even John Ruskin, the chief advocate for Victorian Gothic in England, felt he was surrounded as early as 1872 by "Frankenstein monsters," undisciplined hybrids of historical styles, partly of his own making.¹⁶ His call to architects to revive the medieval forms of French and Venetian Gothic was enthusiastically followed, but his call for adherence to the "Lamp of Obedience" which declared "we want no new styles" went unheeded.¹⁷

Creative combinations of these appropriated forms can also be seen in a positive light, as reflections of a confident curiosity about the past and a reluctance to be bound by academic rules. The word "influence" suggests a passive process, by which an external force or person shapes the design almost by magic.¹⁸ Contemporary art historical discourse favors the word "appropriation," which implies an active role for the designer, who takes from the past and engages in a dialogue with it. The Centennial Exhibition was above all a spectacle, and its architecture, theatrical, inviting the viewer to participate through imagination in the full panoply of architectural history. The temporary nature of the buildings reinforced the sense of theatricality and fantasy.

The "modern Gothic" Boston Museum of Fine Arts and Furness's uniquely eclectic Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts are aggressive, vibrant buildings, belying any pervading sense of indecision. There is

¹⁵ The criticism of nineteenth-century architecture for not finding its own style was not restricted to America; an artistic congress was held in Antwerp in 1861 to debate the question of "why our epoch, superior in so many respects to former centuries, has not its own particular form of architecture." Quoted in J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style: Architectural Ideas from the Picturesque to the Post-Modern* (Chicago, 1987), 100.

¹⁶ John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (39 vols., London and New York, 1903-12), 10:458-59, March 16, 1872: "And one of my principal notions for leaving my present house [and fleeing to Brantwood] is that it is surrounded everywhere by the accursed Frankenstein monsters of, indirectly, my own making. . . ."

Quoted in Crook, *Dilemma of Style*, 94, 284 n. 173.

¹⁷ John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London, 1849). This book laid the foundation for the High Victorian Gothic, also called Ruskinian Gothic. See Eve Blau, *Ruskinian Gothic: The Architecture of Deane and Woodward, 1845-61* (Princeton, 1982).

¹⁸ Robert S. Nelson, "Appropriation," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago, 1996), 116-28.

undeniably a powerful psychological effect created by the architecture of this period.¹⁹ Biological and psychological implications abound in the evolution of nineteenth-century architecture; it is tempting to compare the traditional building methods of this period's historically-oriented architects with dinosaurs, as compared to the lighter and more nimble building technologies of modernism. However, such a simplistic Darwinian analogy misses important nuances. Instead of a vast competition for the "survival of the fittest," this period of architecture reflected a deep (if occasionally naïve) enthusiasm for the pluralistic delights of the past and a refusal to deny oneself the pleasure of variety for the sake of an ascetic theoretical modernism. The architectural historian David Handlin has argued suggestively that the clashing vibrancy of Furness's architecture in particular may have been intended to reflect the "often dissonant nature of life in the latter half of the nineteenth century" and the unsettling dominance of flux and change in modern life.²⁰ In that regard, the Centennial Exhibition was a perfect mirror to the culture of the time.

The Centennial Exhibition celebrated progress but also sought to tame the rigors of the "pure" modernism of the Crystal Palace with a creative blending of historical architectural features.²¹ The architecture and displays at the Centennial highlighted strong contrasts of past and present, as well as exoticism and innovation. The gothic naves of the agricultural building, designed by James H. Windrim, combined traditional form with modernist materials, i.e., glass, and a new sense of endless space. This hall held displays of the latest progress in the ancient art of agriculture and agricultural machinery. An old windmill displayed inside—a museum exhibit removed from any possibility of function—contrasted with the dynamism of the mighty Corliss engine in the modern machinery building. The beauty of the machines highlighted unsettling questions of taste and ornament in design, as a new functionalist vernacular emerged.²² A sense of evolutionary progress,

¹⁹ One architectural historian has suggested that the inharmonious composition of High Victorian buildings, deliberately ugly and so garish as to literally hurt one's eyes to look at them, was connected to sadomasochistic impulses. George Hersey, *High Victorian Gothic: A Study in Associationalism* (Baltimore, 1972), 114–16.

²⁰ David Handlin, *American Architecture* (London, 1985), 114–15.

²¹ The concept of "anti-modern modernity," the tendency to moderate the experience of modernity in the nineteenth century, is the subject of a recent collection of essays: Lynda Jessup, ed., *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity* (Toronto, 2001).

²² Kouwenhoven, *Arts in Modern American Civilization*, 23 and passim.

entitlement, and even cultural confidence is reflected in the freedom of choice embodied in the exhibition architecture.²³

While the exhibition did not create a new style or a turning point in architecture, John Maass has argued persuasively that Memorial Hall had a significant influence on the design of at least one major European building.²⁴ The role of modern architectural journals was critical for the communication of these designs. H. J. Schwarzmänn borrowed elements of his design for Memorial Hall from a Prix-de-Rome entry by a young French architect of a few years earlier. In turn, Schwarzmänn's design was published in a German architectural periodical, and adapted by Paul Wallot for his winning competition entry for the new Reichstag building in Berlin. Thus, in a series of global cross-currents, a German-born American architect adapted a French design for the Centennial building, which in turn provided the basis for the German Reichstag, which has recently (1992–99) been redesigned by the British architect Sir Norman Foster. The role of the exhibition as meeting place and market for ideas is perfectly manifest here, as is the role of architecture as sounding board and echo chamber for design concepts which are repeated and transformed over time.

The exhibition also provided curious Americans a chance to see "exotic" architecture of other lands, to have in a sense the benefit of a world tour without the difficulty of travel. As leisure time became available to a wider group of people in the nineteenth century and modern railroads and ships facilitated travel, tourism expanded beyond the small number of wealthy who had made the "Grand Tour" of Europe in the previous century. Sanitized and controlled in the exhibition grounds, the experience of the fair, unlike real world travel, left assumptions of Western cultural and racial superiority unchallenged.²⁵ The pavilion of the popular Brazilian delegation, designed by Frank Furness, showed a rich exoticism. The upright massive logs of the Canadian Log House, and the woodwork of the Swedish Schoolhouse demonstrated new architectural ways of working with wood. The German

²³ This evolutionary view of progress was implicit in the organization of the exhibits, and frequently alluded to in the dedicatory speeches. See Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 16–17.

²⁴ John Maass, *The Glorious Enterprise: The Centennial Exhibition of 1876 and H. J. Schwarzmänn, Architect-in-Chief* (Watkins Glen, N.Y., 1973). Maass identified the prototype of Schwarzmänn's Memorial Hall in a published Prix-de-Rome competition drawing executed by Nicholas Félix Escalier. Engravings of Schwarzmänn's building were published in Germany in 1876, and clearly, according to Maass, inspired Paul Wallot's design for the new German Reichstag in 1882.

²⁵ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 14.

exhibition building manifested a discrete classicism, while the British buildings reflected an attractive Tudor style, which was to reinforce the growing Queen Anne movement in the United States. One of the most exotic and appealing buildings was the Japanese pavilion, constructed on site by Japanese workmen before the exhibition opened. The simplicity and open plan of this building, and the skilled craftsmanship in its woodwork, were to have a lasting impact on the evolution of the Shingle Style and the Arts and Crafts movement in America.²⁶ The exhibition buildings were a microcosm of the multiple strands of architecture in late nineteenth-century America.

Perhaps the only nineteenth-century art form that has found fewer modern twentieth-century admirers than architecture is monumental sculpture. The conservative style and rhetorical symbolism of public monuments was completely rejected by the modernists of the twentieth century. For much of the modern era, only the work of Auguste Rodin was seen in a positive light. In 1876, however, Rodin too was facing a storm of criticism in Paris over his realistic sculpture *The Age of Bronze*. Foreshadowing later culture wars, Rodin was criticized for the ambiguous meaning of his nude work, and accused of having simply made a cast of a live human being rather than carving it.²⁷

Public sculpture was still rare in America, and the arrival of so many sculptures in Philadelphia was itself a novelty. Nonetheless, the Centennial grounds and art exhibits featured several significant works that directly addressed the themes of freedom and the tensions of modernity. One work that attracted considerable attention was a statue in the Art Gallery called *The Abolition of Slavery in the United States*, or *The Freed Slave*, by the Trieste sculptor Francesco Pezzicar (fig. 2). An illustration in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition* contrasts the well-dressed African American spectators with the muscular nude slave bursting his own bonds in a powerful gesture, demonstrating an idealized vision of social progress since the Civil War. The image of a sculpture coming to life and struggling against its bonds has a long tradition in art, from the Greek myth of Pygmalion to the figures of slaves Michelangelo carved for the tomb of Pope Julius II. As an aesthetic allegory, the soul is shown to fight against its material limits. The image also has overtones of

²⁶ Vincent Scully, *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style* (New Haven, 1974), 28ff.

²⁷ Ruth Butler, *Rodin, The Shape of Genius* (New Haven, 1993).

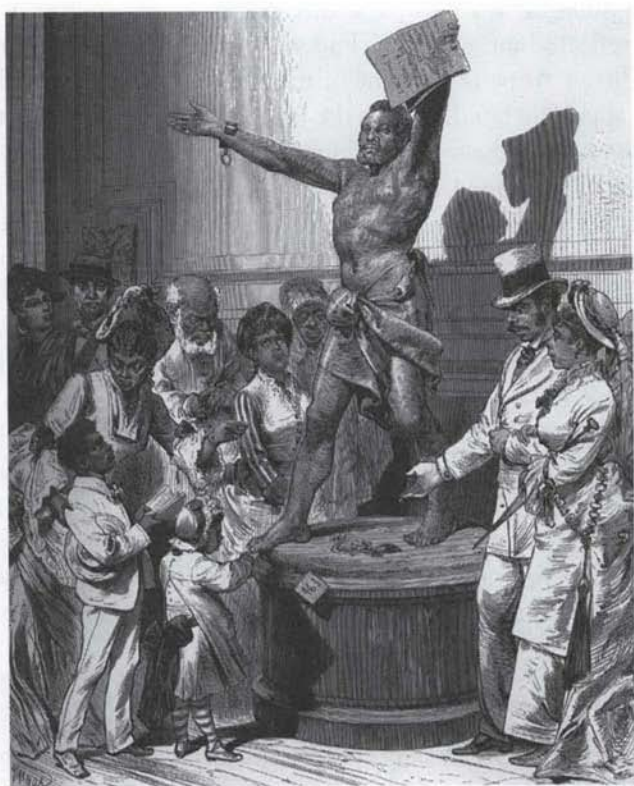


Fig. 2. Statue of *The Abolition of Slavery in the United States, or The Freed Slave*, by Francesco Pezzicar, in the Art Gallery.

something powerful escaping the control of its master, as in the legend of the Golem from the Jewish ghetto of Prague. For that reason, Pezzicar's work provoked anxiety in some observers.²⁸

²⁸ Some were clearly disturbed by the power of this sculpture; William Dean Howells revealed a disturbing racism in his sneering criticism of the sculptor and his work: "This is not his fault, perhaps, and I am not so sure after all that his Washington is as bad as the bronze statue of Emancipation (I suppose), a most offensively Frenchy negro, who has broken his chain, and spreading both his arms and legs abroad is rioting in a declamation of something (I should say) from Victor Hugo; one longs to clap him back into hopeless bondage. William Dean Howells, "A Sennight of the Centennial," *Atlantic Monthly* 38 (July 1876), 93.

A large statue of *Religious Liberty* was sculpted by Moses Jacob Ezekiel of Richmond, Virginia, and erected at the exhibition by B'nai B'rith. This marble statue, twenty feet high with its pedestal, celebrated figures symbolizing the Genius of Liberty protecting Religion. At the base of the group is an eagle with its talons buried in a snake, signifying the "destruction of slavery," according to the contemporary commentator James McCabe.²⁹ Symbols are arbitrary, however; it could also be interpreted as the eagle of America crushing intolerance.³⁰ Himself emblematic of the complexity of American identity, Ezekiel (1844–1917) was a Jewish sculptor, a Virginia Military Institute graduate, and a former Confederate Army officer. Although the sculpture arrived too late for the exhibition, it was displayed in Fairmount Park from 1876 to 1985. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the sculpture was seen as a plea for tolerance and respect, evoking a sense of the reliance on a divine power common to humanity.³¹ In 1985 it was moved to the grounds of the National Museum of American Jewish History at 5th and Market Streets in Philadelphia.

A monumental fountain by Thomas Kirn erected by the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America, also reflected spiritual concerns.³² Over half the membership of this association was in Pennsylvania. Designed in the shape of a cross, the four corners of this sculpture represent three prominent Catholics of the Revolutionary era and one contemporary temperance preacher. In the center, Moses towers upon the rock he has split to reveal the divine gift of water. Thus the fountain symbolizes the freedom from temptation conferred by the habit of abstinence. Although imposing, this is a rather literal work, which holds up permanent images of figures deemed worthy of emulation, and places them on a rocky fountain. The moral theme is clearly presented, but the sculpture does not invite the viewer to do more than admire the figures from a distance. The realm of art is clearly separated from that of the viewer.

These sculptures, worthy though they might be, were eclipsed at the

²⁹ McCabe, *Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*, 327.

³⁰ This is the interpretation given on the website of the National Museum of Jewish History, <<<http://www.nmajh.org/information/statue.htm>>>, on Sept. 1, 2002.

³¹ McCabe, *Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*, 327.

³² Although not well known now, Thomas Kirn was significant in his time. Penny Balkin Bach writes, "Kirn came to the United States as a child but returned to his native Germany to study with Carl Steinhauser. After creating this fountain, he moved back to Philadelphia, where he worked as a restorer for the Fairmount Park Commission and later carved *Tolerance*." Penny Balkin Bach, *Public Art in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1992), 201.

exhibition by the colossal hand and torch of Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi's *Statue of Liberty*. Created as a Centennial gift to the United States from France, the funds for its completion were lacking. So, somewhat surrealistically, the fragmentary hand arose beside a pond on the Exhibition grounds, and even those with acrophobia could take the relatively short flight of stairs to view the grounds from the rim of the torch (fig. 3). After the exhibition closed, the torch was passed to New York, where the fragment was displayed in Madison Square until 1884. In 1886, it was reunited with the rest of the statue, and set up on the base (designed by Richard Morris Hunt) on Liberty Island between New York and New Jersey. Bartholdi's sculpture was not only immensely larger, even in its partial state, but it breached the gap between viewer and work of art, and opened itself up for the audience to enter it. By entering the work, one symbolically participated in the signifying of liberty. Liberty was not just an idea represented in sculptural form, to be seen from afar on its pedestal, but rather it was open to the common person. This was a radical idea, and probably contributes to the popularity of this sculpture as a national symbol.

The afterlife of the exhibition was very limited, at least in terms of physical permanence. With the exception of a very few buildings which were designed to be permanent structures—most notably, Memorial Hall and Horticultural Hall, and a few of the fountains—the buildings of the exhibition were temporary. Memorial Hall became the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Arts, and continued to house some of the art objects of the Centennial. Most of these were moved to the new Philadelphia Museum of Art in the 1920s; the rest were auctioned off in 1954. The building was restored in 1968 as the headquarters of the Fairmount Park Commission and the Fairmount Park Guard, and a public recreation center and a social hall for civic functions were added. The horticultural building remained for many years as a botanic garden. The Ohio building, partially built of stone sent from various Ohio quarries, remained as well. It became a park employee residence, then a Fairmount Park information center.

Many buildings were simply demolished for the sake of their materials, although some found new life in other locales. The Massachusetts building was moved to Lexington, Massachusetts, where it became first a hotel and then the Keeley Institute for treating alcoholics. It was demolished in the twentieth century. The elaborate stick style Michigan building was moved to Atlantic City where it became a private home, then a guesthouse called the States Villa. Unfortunately, it burned down in 1961. The much-praised

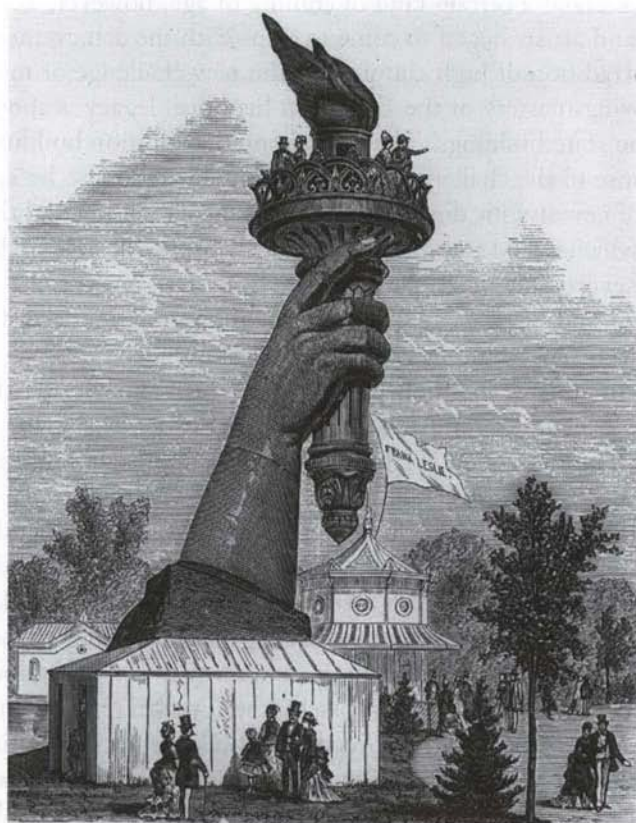


Fig. 3. Hand and torch of the *Statue of Liberty*, by Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi.

main comfort station was moved to Spring Lake, New Jersey, where it became the Lake House Hotel. The hotel opened in June 1877 with ninety-two rooms, large dining parlors, and a bowling alley. It was demolished in 1904, however, and replaced by a public park. More happily, the Swedish School House was moved to Central Park in New York and placed near the Shakespeare Garden to serve as an indoor puppet theater.

The legacy of the Centennial Exhibition was clearly mixed. In the short term, it demonstrated the vitality and the awkwardness of the emerging American cultural scene. With the exception of the Reichstag design, Europeans did not find much to appropriate from the Americans. The 1876

exhibition marked a certain kind of coming of age, however, as American architects and artists began to come to grips with the achievements of the European tradition of high culture and the new challenge of modernism. Their growing mastery of the European historical legacy is shown in the styles of the state buildings. The glass fronted exhibition buildings reflect their response to the challenge of modernism. This can also be seen in the first hints of new stylistic directions in the Japanese building and the British buildings, which would contribute respectively to the Shingle Style and the Colonial Revival. The next phase of American design was to be a creative blend of old and new, paving the way for the purely modernist styles to follow. Eclecticism would still be prevalent for decades.

The Centennial Exhibition did not create a new style, but it was an educational experience for Americans and part of its legacy was therefore conceptual. The educational exhibits featured new approaches to the teaching of children; the working kindergarten was a favorite display. At the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, Frank Lloyd Wright's mother discovered abstract geometric building blocks designed by the German educational reformer Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852). She brought these blocks back to Weymouth, Massachusetts, where the family was living, and gave them to her nine-year-old son. In his *Autobiography*, and many times throughout his life, Frank Lloyd Wright credited these blocks, the "Froebel gifts," with inspiring him to design in a new spirit of freedom.³³ Building on this spirit, Wright created the most original architecture yet seen in America. The abstract building blocks helped him develop a concept of architecture as an abstraction of nature, which represented it in geometric shapes. These abstract designs led Wright to a new vocabulary of architectural forms and constructions, which he believed represented the very essence of freedom and democracy.³⁴ In some part, at least, the roots of that achievement can be traced back to the vibrant display of the Centennial Exhibition.

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³³ Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography* (1932; reprint, New York, 1977), 33–34. See also Jeanne S. Rubin, "The Froebel-Wright Kindergarten Connection: A New Perspective," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 48 (1989), 24–37.

³⁴ Neil Levine presents a thoughtful analysis of Wright's architecture as a representation of his ideas about nature and freedom in *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright* (Princeton, 1996), 11–12 ff.