

HALEY JIN MEE CHUNG

DESIGN PORTFOLIO 2022

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About me

I received my BFA in creative writing from George Mason University in 2015. Before discovering an interest in book design, I worked for an anarchist dog walking collective in DC, while I was “figuring things out.” After landing a position as publishing manager at Politics and Prose, I taught myself how to design books and felt as if I found a practice that both challenged and suited me. This led me to pursue my master’s in Publishing and Writing at Emerson College. While completing my graduate work I was the Editor-in Chief of Boston-based literary journal *Redivider*, completed an editorial and marketing internship at Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, and worked at MIT Press. Aside from designing, I devote time to my sound art project, experimenting with data bending and field recordings. I’m currently based in Philadelphia and spend a lot of time thinking about materiality, Usonian architecture, and how people interact with space.

Work experience

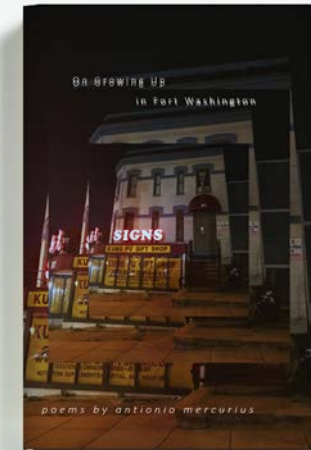
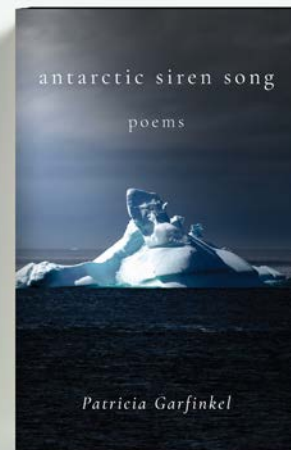
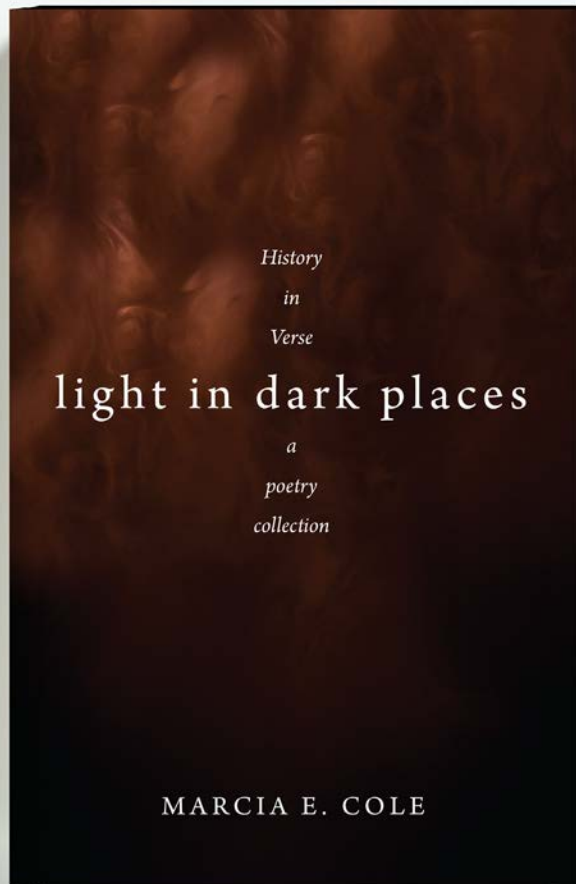
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|-------------------|---|
| 10/2019 - Current | The MIT Press
Bookseller and Marketing Assistant |
| 10/2020 - 12/2020 | Farrar, Straus and Giroux
Marketing and Editorial Intern |
| 09/2019 - 02/2021 | <i>Redivider Journal</i>
Editor-in-Chief |
| 09/2016 - 08/2019 | Politics and Prose Bookstore
Self-publishing Manager |

Education

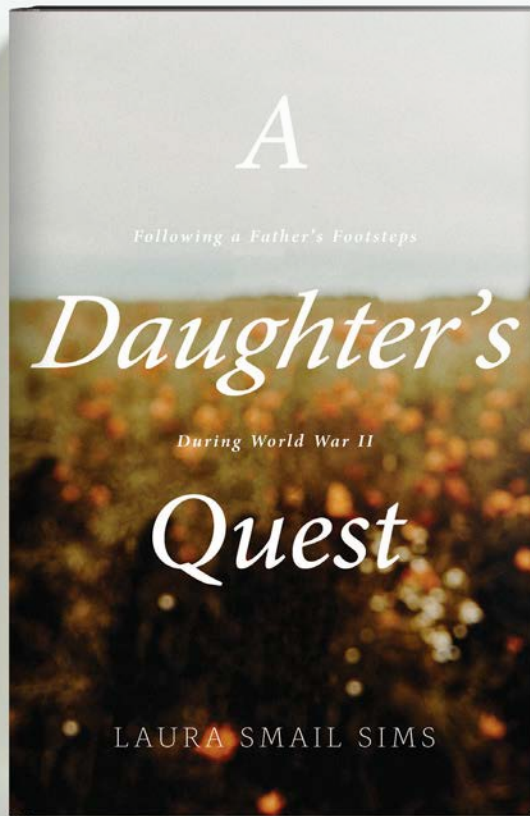
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| 09/2019 - 12/2021 | MA / Publishing and Writing
Concentration / Book design |
| 08/2021 - 05/2015 | BFA / Creative Writing
Concentration / Poetry |

Books

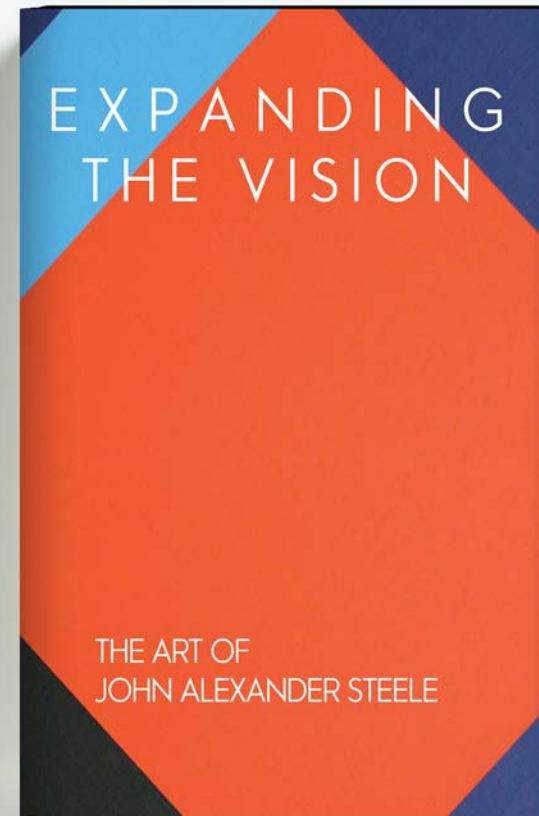
A sample of the book covers I designed during my time at Politics and Prose. I worked closely with several authors to create a cover they felt accurately depicted their work designing cover and interiors for several genres.



- 01 *Light in Dark Places* (poems)
- 02 *Antarctic Siren Song* (poems)
- 03 *On Growing Up in Fort Washington* (poems)



04 *A Daughter's Quest* (Memoir)



05 *Expanding the Vision* (Art Monograph)

Chapter one

Federal bureau of investigation special agent (retired) Jacquelyn Bierman recorded part of her voiceover for a television show she was doing with Dick and Mary Fisher. The recording equipment was operated by Dan Uebel, who doubled as sound recorder and cameraman. Her words would be dubbed over video of her driving down I-270, turning onto Telegraph Road, and passing through the somber beauty of the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery and St. Louis County Park.

"Today we are visiting St. Louis, Missouri, home of Jefferson Barracks, the oldest U.S. military installation west of the Mississippi. The airmen and soldiers stationed there lovingly refer to it as 'JB.' It was established in 1826 and named after President and Founding Father Thomas Jefferson. We were called in by Lieutenant Colonel Mickey 'Logan' Delaney, a high-ranking officer in the Missouri Air National Guard. Over the course of his 15 years of service at the base, he reports having experienced several encounters with the paranormal."

16

The next scene was of her shaking hands with a tall officer in a flight suit standing by a naval gun captured off the Spanish cruiser *Almirante Oquendo* during the Spanish-American War. The mighty Mississippi River rushed through the background, heading south toward the Gulf of Mexico.

"Lieutenant Colonel Delaney, it's a pleasure meeting you. It's always an honor speaking to our country's best and bravest."

"Thank you for your support and your service," Logan replied.

"Before we get started, military and first responder nicknames have always fascinated me. How did you get the nickname *Logan*?"

Delaney smiled and gave a soft chuckle. "Well, it is a comic book reference for a football reference."

Jackie cocked her head questioningly.

Delaney continued. "I used to play college ball for *the* best state school in the country: *The* Ohio State University. We had a rivalry with the state school to our north. I won't even mention the state's name, but their mascot is the wolverine. Since Logan is the alter-ego of the superhero Wolverine, people thought it would be funny to make that my callsign."

"All right," Jackie said, "now you said that you have experienced some supernatural occurrences on base?"

"Yes, ma'am. I was single and just started working at the unit full-time, hired directly from active duty. I did not have a place to stay just yet, so I had a cot set up in my office. The sound of these heavy doors opening and closing over by the breakroom would wake me up. The first couple of times I went to go check and no one was there. What's more, the lights were off when I got near them."

"Did someone not turn on the hall lights as they snuck around?"

"Nope. The lights are motion-activated, so if someone had opened them, the lights would have been on."

"Anything else?"

"I would hear people walking around when I *knew* I was the only person in the building. Needless to say, I decided to speed up my house hunting."

"Are you the only one in your unit to experience anything paranormal?"

The officer laughed. "Oh no. I have a sergeant who once was sitting at

06 Sample pages of a thriller novel by a self-published client

Body type is set in Vendetta OT for its subtle angularity and sharpness but also its readability. Display type is set in Almaq Rough to evoke the militaristic elements in the story's narrative without overpowering the page.

his corner computer station, the only person in the room. He said he heard the sound of a cubicle's overhead bin door being opened and then clattering closed as if dropped. He turned to see who else was in the room with him when he heard his CAC card being lifted—" Logan paused before continuing. "Oh, sorry, I mean our ID cards that we use to log into our computers. Sometimes I forget to translate into civilian! Anyway, it sounded as if it were lifted out of the reader and reinserted. He swung back to his screen and saw that he had been logged out of his computer."

"What did he do?"

Delaney laughed again. "Well, he got up as quickly as he could and went to the master sergeant who had an office next to mine. I heard him telling his story and stepped over to tell him mine. But we're not the only ones. If you randomly pick out 10 guardsmen stationed here, five or six will have ghost stories of their own. There is another lieutenant colonel who once saw a Confederate general working late at night at Building 1."

"So, are these the places we'll be visiting?"

Delaney shook his head. "Unfortunately, those are actively in use so Mr. Fisher will not be allowed in those. However, there are a few buildings that are not currently in use by either the Air or Army Guard, so he will be given access there."

"Have you ever had any experiences there?"

"I have not had many experiences outside of my own building." He put his hands on his hips and stared across the base as he thought about where to begin.

"There are stories for most of the buildings. For example, there's Building 78 which we call the White Elephant because it is the largest building on base, and it is painted white and not the red brick of the rest of the base's buildings. A few of the Army's guardsmen have stayed there from time to time. Many claimed to see things, but it's been empty for the past few years.

"There's also Building 28. It used to be a barracks for the men who were stationed here. Your night crew will have access since it is empty, having been closed for over a decade."

"Do you know of anything that has ever happened at Building 28?"

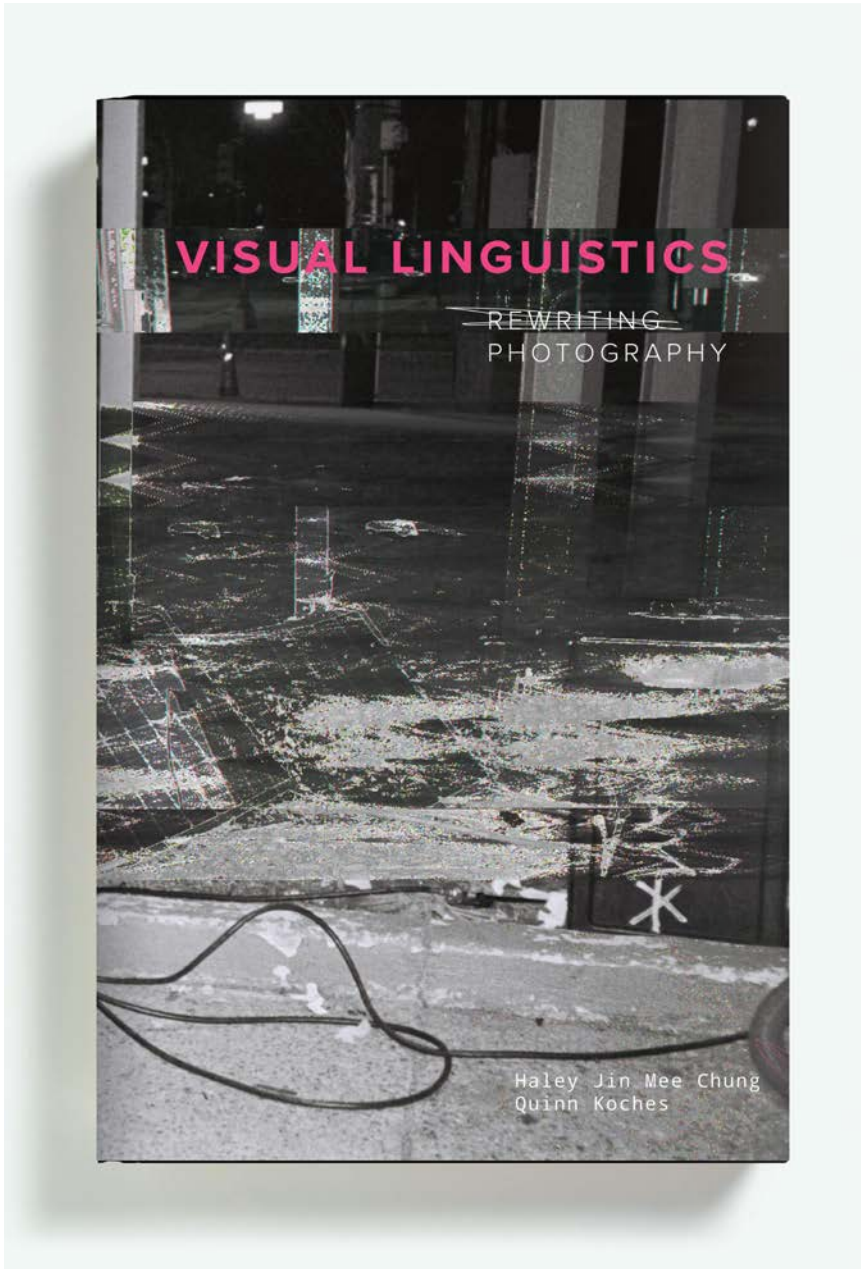
"In the early '80s, there were some NCOs—sergeants—leaving after work-

ing late. The chief master sergeant in the group noticed a light was on up on the third floor. He sent the lowest ranking NCO to run upstairs and turn off the light. The guy ran upstairs and turned it off. When he came back down, the light was on again. I think they sent this guy upstairs like three times before they decided to just leave."

"Was the light back on when they left?"

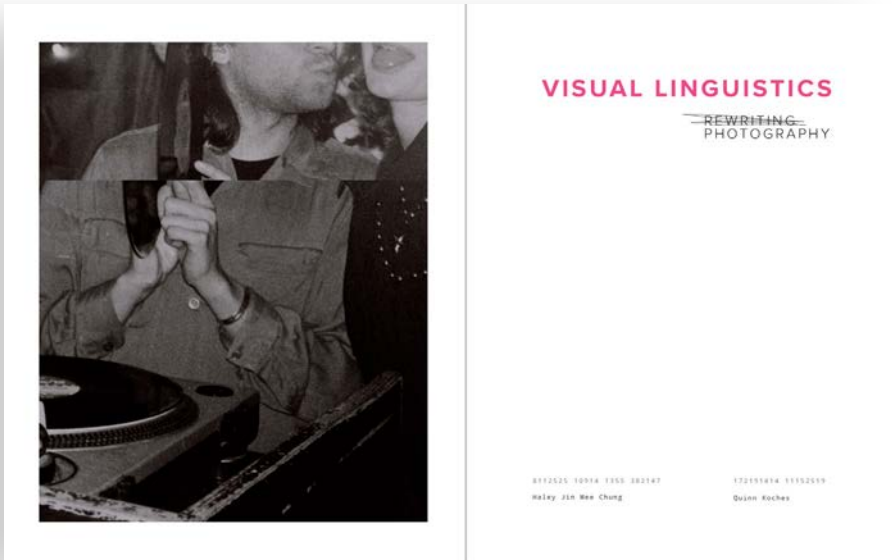
"According to the story, no one looked back. But also, the original JB was 1,600 or 1,700 acres. Now the base sits on less than 200 acres. Over time, the base was partitioned into the National Cemetery and Veterans Administration hospital. After World War II, the base was deactivated from active-duty service and turned over to the Missouri Air National Guard. We were cut down to our current size at that time, and the rest of the land was turned over to the St. Louis County parks department. The theater became a Catholic church, and the hospital was converted into use by a school district."

"Wow, a lot of history here," Jackie observed.



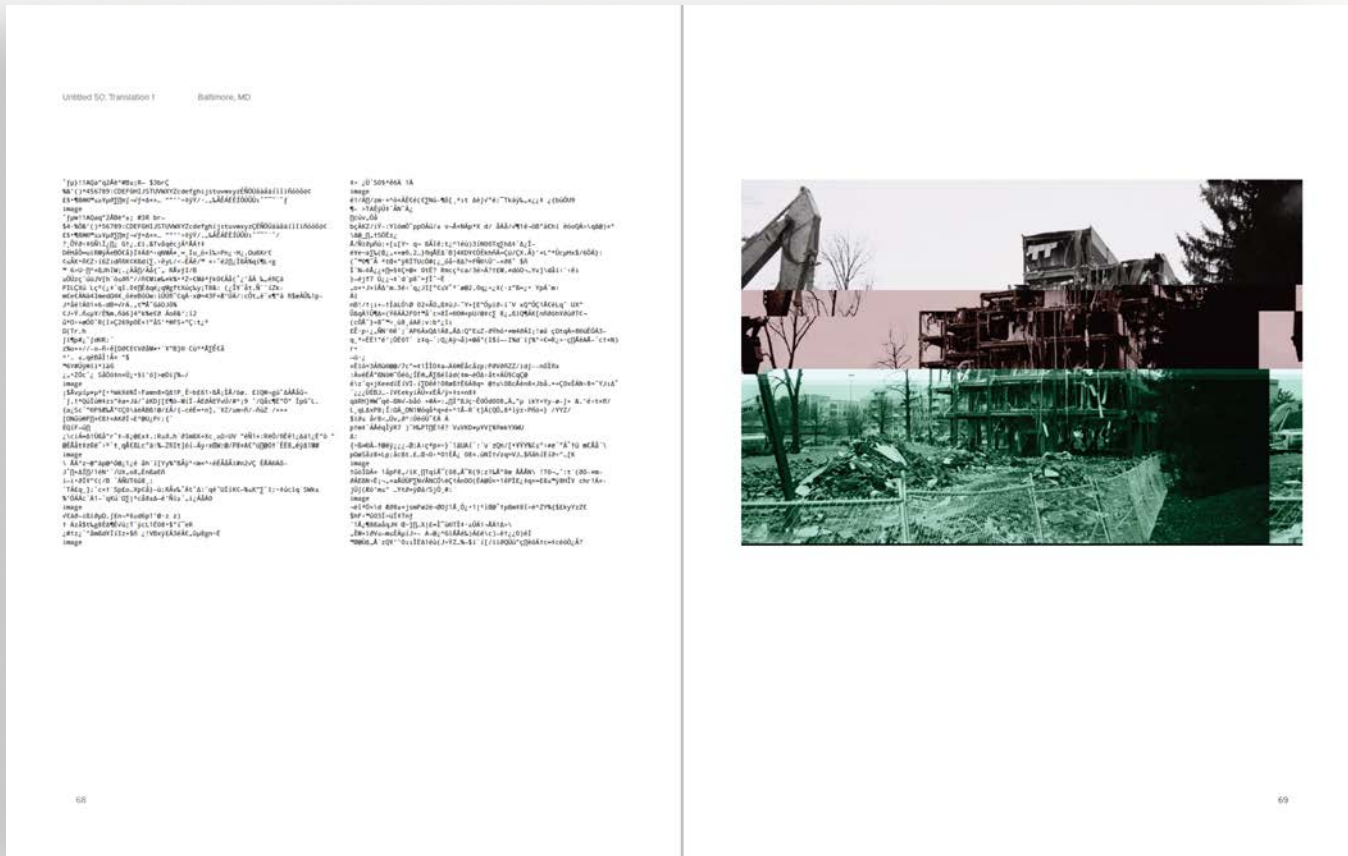
Visual Linguistics

Visual Linguistics is a personal project I completed for a book design course during my graduate studies. I spent the semester writing about how to turn photography into sound. I detail the process of recycling digital media and show how the photographs produce the foundational sounds in my own music. Here's the cover and a selection of spreads from the interior.



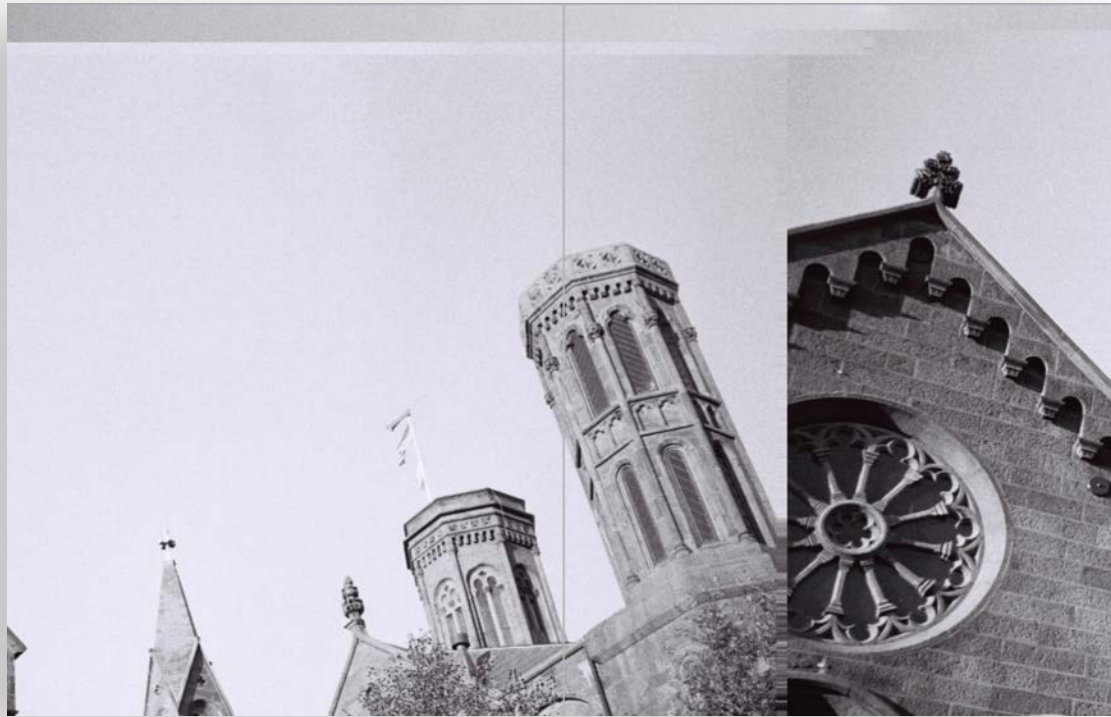
08 *Visual Linguistics* cover

09 *Visual Linguistics* title page



10 Visual Linguistics - Detail showing how images can be manipulated by exporting their code into sound software. The image on the recto page is the result of utilizing reverb in Audacity.



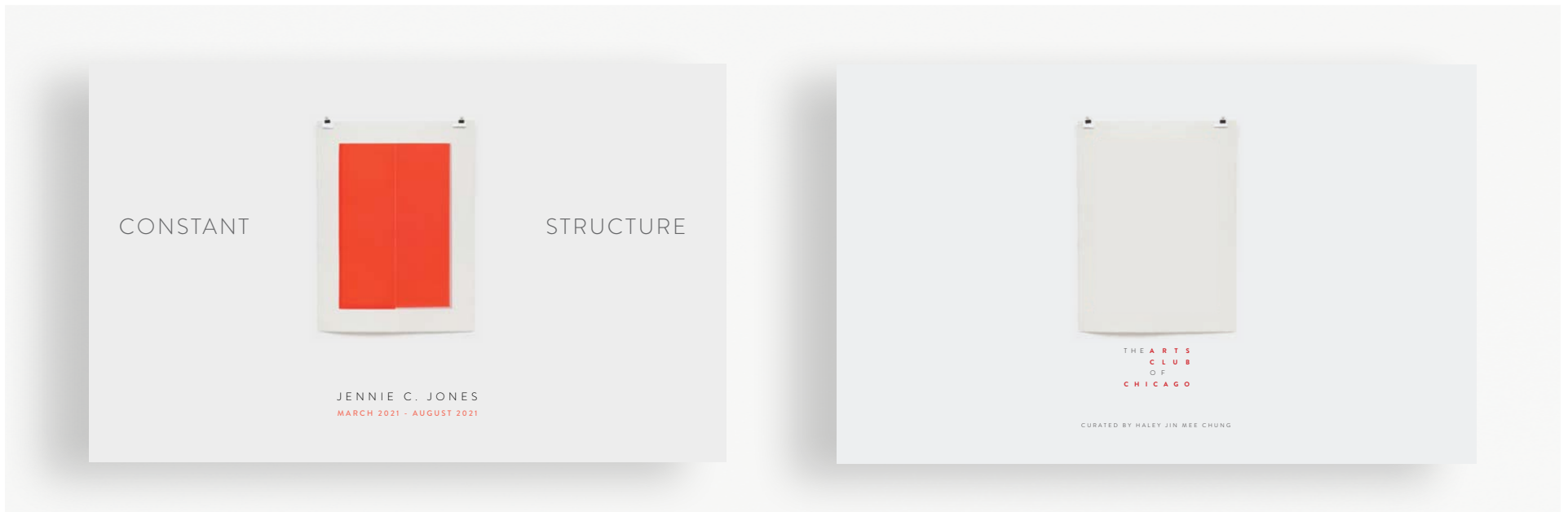


- 12 Spread - One of my favorite spreads in the book. The image depicts the echo effect in Audacity. This effect usually takes parts of an image and repeats it but this image had a surprising outcome, so I decided to spread it across the verso and recto pages.

Constant Structure

Mock pamphlet for the Jennie C. Jones exhibit at the Arts Club of Chicago

These are some spreads from a mock pamphlet I designed on Jennie C. Jones and her exhibit at the Arts Club of Chicago. Her paintings include neon tones paired or gentle shades. There is no in-between. Since the pamphlet is graphic heavy, the layout needed to be clean and modular, which just so happens to echo Jones' style. Using a color from one of her paintings as an accent throughout struck the perfect balance between imposing both rigid forms and elements of surprise.





"I hope audiences walk away with some residue that touches them in an ephemeral, poetic way—that it might stick with them longer than one revolution, one turning. The days spin so quickly lately and the experience of listening is too trite when it is reduced to a commute, car speakers or headphones on a subway."

JENNIE C. JONES

Growing up in Cincinnati, Jennie C. Jones hated playing the piano so much she hid under her family's dining room table to avoid practice. Jones, who has a good ear, could play back anything her piano teacher demonstrated but often was scolded because she wouldn't read music. Eventually she quit. She took up violin and quit that, too. But the sound that filled her family's home was unavoidable. Jones' mother had a great

record collection that engendered a deep respect for black music history. Listening to music, not playing it, turned out to be Jones' salvation as an artist - a strength evident in every sparse drawing, collage, sculpture, sonic work and painting of "Jennie C. Jones: Compilation," her mid-career survey at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. (She also has works on view this month and next at Hiram Butler Gallery.)



MINIMALISM AND MIXED MEDIA

Minimalism or minimalist art can be seen as extending the abstract idea that art should have its own reality and not be an imitation of some other thing. We usually think of art as representing an aspect of the real world (a landscape, a person, or even a tin of soup!); or reflecting an experience such as an emotion or feeling. With minimalism, no attempt is made to represent an outside reality, the artist wants the viewer to respond only to what is in front of them. The medium, (or material) from which it is made, and the form of the work is the reality. Minimalist painter Frank Stella famously said about his paintings "What you see is what you see."

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The development of minimalism is linked to that of conceptual art (which also flourished in the 1960s and 1970s). Both movements challenged the existing structures for making, disseminating and viewing art and argued that the importance given to the art object is misplaced and leads to a rigid and elitist art world which only the privileged few can afford to enjoy. Aesthetically, minimalist art offers a highly purified form of beauty. It can also be seen as representing such qualities as truth (because it does not pretend to be anything other than what it is), order, simplicity and harmony. Lingering at the intersection of music theory, painting, and sound, Jennie C. Jones

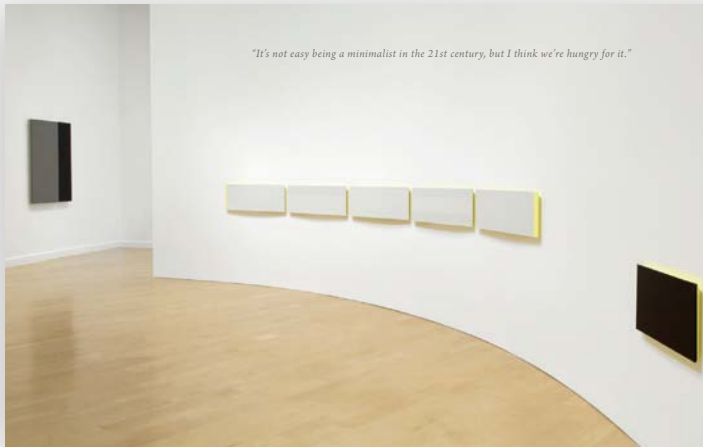


presents a new body of work prompted by the concept of "constant structure"—a term borrowed from Modern jazz composition. It refers to a consecutive chord progression with different root notes that links disparate tones into a cohesive entity.

Like the intervals of jazz then, Jones's new acoustic panel paintings, works on paper, and site-specific gestures, hit moments of dissonance and harmony through serial repetition and variation. Jones has made her mark since the 1990s by bringing the specifics of African American music history to bear upon the legacy of geometric abstraction and minimalist form. The works included here depart from

the characteristic muted gray palette of the last decade, and instead draw upon a range of hues made available by a specialty acoustic textile manufacturer. Working with a set of given materials and colors, Jones frees her forms to address poetic ideas about a personal version of Synesthesia—the melding of vision and hearing.

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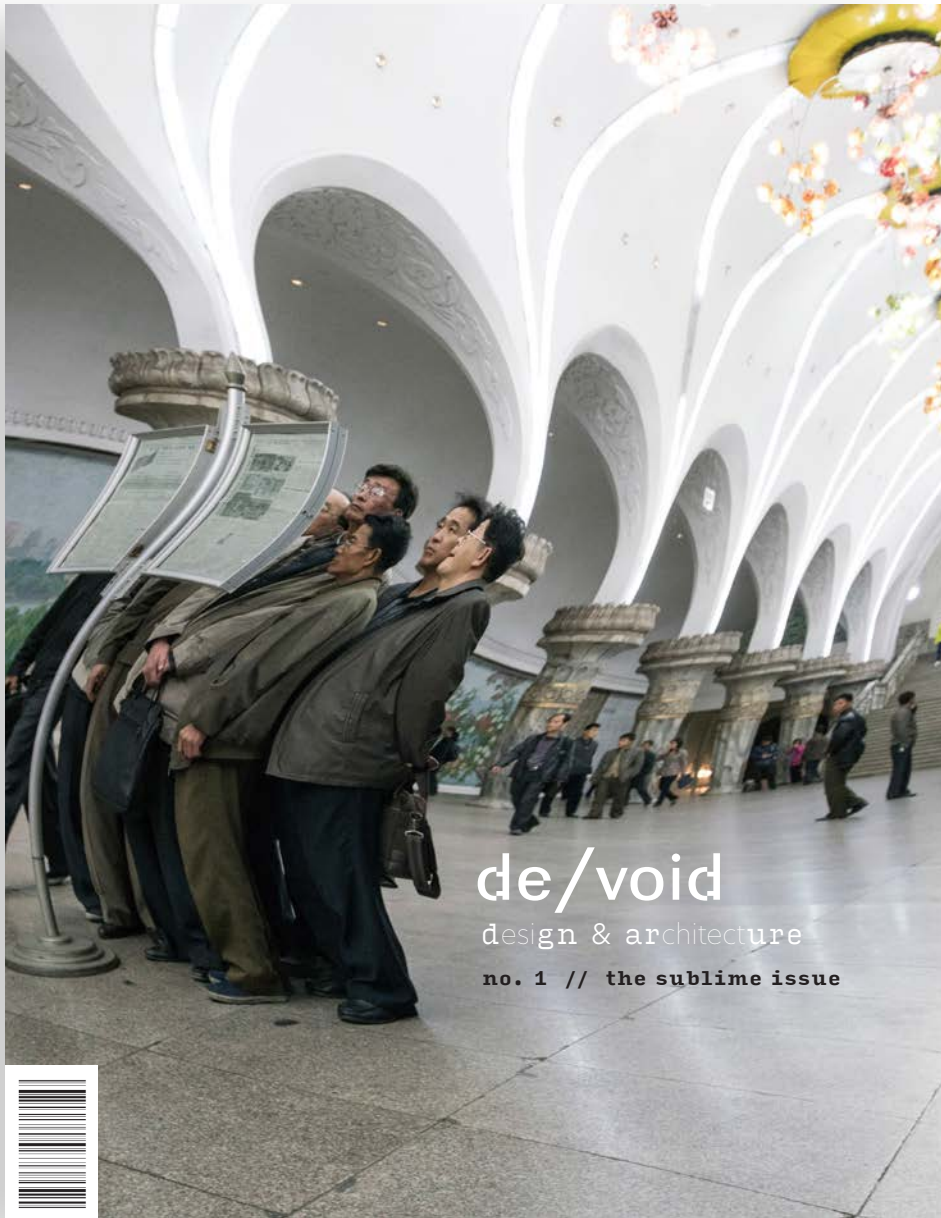
"It's not easy being a minimalist in the 21st century, but I think we're hungry for it."

It's a little bit Barnett Newman meets Charlie Parker - not that you need to know modern art or jazz history to appreciate Jones' work. "I hope it's an elegant, peaceful experience for people," Jones said, the day before the show opened. It's not easy being a minimalist in the 21st century, she added, "but I think we're hungry for it. We're just at such a saturation point - media-wise, tech-wise, that hopefully there is a respite and people find some comfort in having a moment of space and of quiet."

Jones now calls listening a "conceptual practice," but didn't realize it was her forte until after she'd gone through the rigors of art school to become a painter. During her early 30s, after she'd earned degrees from the Art Institute of Chicago and Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts, Jones was stumped about what to create. She wanted to riff on

the minimalist aesthetics of mid-20th century giants such as Newman and Ellsworth Kelly, but felt out of place as part of a generation heavy on busy, sociopolitical art.

Then one day, Jones realized how much time she was spending curating the music she wanted to hear while she worked. Listening, she suddenly understood, pulled all of her worlds together. The giants of abstract art, who tended to be white men, listened while they painted to the modern, experimental jazz of blacks. Adding another layer to it as a black woman a half-century later, Jones also recognized that the emptiness of minimalist art, which reduces painting to nearly blank canvases, could also be a metaphor for the competing forces of absence and presence, exclusion and inclusion, silence and noise.



de/void magazine

This is a project I conceived during my graduate studies for a magazine design class. The subject primarily focused on discourse surrounding architecture and design. Each issue contains content that is centered on a theme. Below is the cover for the inaugural issue focused on "the sublime." The cover was inspired by one of the magazine's feature stories and I felt that incorporating some humor onto the cover would create a magazine that felt more approachable to readers.

PLEASURE POSTPONED

Pyongyang's Tourist Hotels

JAKE VALENTE



As international sanctions continue to provoke, and unsuccessfully disrupt, nuclear development in North Korea, Pyongyang's hotels offer a window into a veiled economic history and built environment, otherwise elided by western media.

A CARGO VESSEL BEARING THE

Cambodian flag, the Jie Shun, floats inactive in the El-Adabiya port southwest of the Suez Canal. On the 28th of August 2016, Washington calculates its coordinates and informs Cairo of the tarp-shrouded bulk-freighter's location. Upon arrival a year later on the 1st of October 2017, Egyptian customs agents inspect the vessel and discover roughly 30,000 soviet-style rocket propelled grenades concealed beneath containers of iron ore. The Jie Shun sailed not from Cambodia, but from North Korea. This discrete maneuver illustrates the type of rogue tactics the DPRK uses to ensure meager economic survival amidst, thus far, eight rounds of unanimously imposed U.N. sanctions since the nation's first nuclear test in 2006. Since then, sanctions have expanded to include the trade of arms and military equipment, iron, seafood, mineral, coal, luxury goods, caps on oil

imports and North Korean labor exports, along with asset freezes for those involved in the DPRK's nuclear program.

Just weeks prior to Jie Shun's arrival in the Suez Canal, an executive order by President Trump enabled the Treasury to block any entity engaging in transactions with North Korea from the U.S. financial system. The order attempts to target those who "enable this regime's economic activity wherever they are located." Furthermore, United States Security Council Resolution 2375, adopted on 11 September 2017, now restricts textile exports, an industry formerly untouched. Manufacturing is the largest industry in Pyongyang, and the third largest in the entire country. Resolution 2375 aspires further to "starve the regime of any revenues generated" through joint ventures to "stop all future foreign investments in technology transfers to North Korea's nascent and weak commercial industries."

In such an aggressively sanctioned economy — the effects of which make life more unbearable for the North Korean population rather than halting their government's nuclear programs — the U.S. State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs urges tourists to "consider what they might be supporting." The Bureau even speculates that tourist revenue may be channeled to fund nuclear development. This, with the Treasury block, would seem to suggest that by engaging the DPRK's small accommodation and service industries, a tourist's monetary trail could constitute a series of "enabling" transactions between the individual and the state. Their movement, access, and expenditure are thus politically bound to risk.

14/01/18 // [westaboutpyongyang](#)

11

19 *de/void* feature - *Pleasure Postponed*

The cover art was inspired by this article about the culture of North Korean tourism. I wanted to depict the distorted perceptions of the North Korea Westerners tend to dream up, while also facing that lens inward and highlight the distortions North Koreans consume through propaganda created by the state.



tions compatible with “both communism and capitalism — fairy tales in which tourism and landscape are active solvents.”

Marooned at forty-seven stories along the Taedong shores, Yanggakdo’s experience seems, then, to lie in its isolated verticality. It gives the impression of having “everything under one roof,” effectively operating as a “cash cow for the state.” However, commodified taste comes at a price and is confined to a cyclical crisis of equal parts itinerant boredom and errant curiosity. In Yanggakdo, Easterling’s active touristic solvent is realized as a monetized experience for guests. The money circulating within comes from without; an ironic display of excess-in-wait for the “frugal traveler in search of an adventure.” It is, after all, “the tour hotel for international visitors.” As Easterling’s formula further suggests, tourists’ views of Pyongyang’s landscape from the revolving restaurant are views many North Koreans themselves aren’t afforded — “As a western tourist you always get the best rooms!” Pursuing service economy standards of a frictionless

experience, Yanggakdo augments a guest’s acquired privacy to both literal and figurative heights.

There is in fact a ninth hotel, which is comparable to Yanggakdo in its architectural expression of the DPRK’s precarious economic conditions. The Ryugyong Hotel, however, offers a less transparent window into the Regime’s ability to operate under exhaustive sanctions. Construction on this 105-story pyramid—etymologically rooted in a historical name for Pyongyang, capital of willows, and originally estimated to attract \$230 million in foreign investments—began in 1987 as the DPRK undertook massive infrastructural projects to host the 1989 World Festival of Youth and Students, the largest international gathering slated to take place in the country. Logistical hyperbole in turn characterized Pyongyang’s preparation: Ryugyong was to be the world’s tallest hotel, built with intentions to subordinate to second place Swissôtel’s The Stamford (called the Westin Stamford at the time and completed in 1986) in Singapore. At the same time,

“

...commodified taste comes at a price and is confined to a cyclical crisis of equal parts itinerant boredom and errant curiosity.

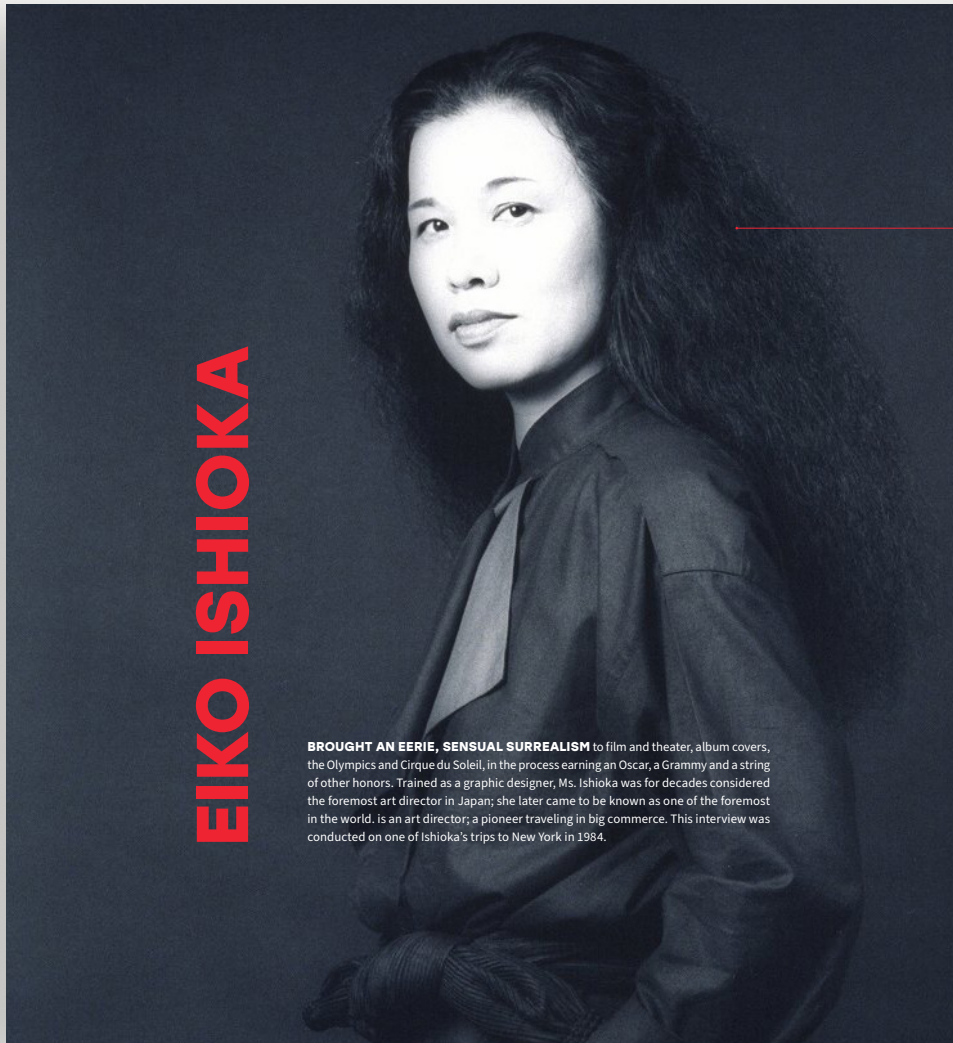
the Runggrado 1st of May Stadium was constructed, which immediately became, and remains, the world’s largest sports stadium, with a 150,000 seating capacity.

Considering that Moscow hosted the previous festival in 1985, Pyongyang’s forthcoming symbiosis of political and infrastructural consolidation as the thirteenth host to a prospective 22,000 attendees from 170 countries doubled as a timely communiqué to the world vis-à-vis the 1988 summer Olympic games in Seoul, South Korea. “For Anti-Imperialist Solidarity, Peace and Friendship” read the ‘89 gathering’s motto, variations on the same anti-bellucose vocabulary used for festivals held in Havana, East Berlin, Sofia, Prague, Budapest, Pretoria, Algiers, Helsinki, and Vienna.

In 1992, construction on Ryugyong paused due to an economic crisis compounded in part by the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, paving way for the North Korean famine, and ossifying a grim turn of the century decade for the country. It stands abandoned to this day as the world’s twenty-eighth-tallest building. To suggest that its quarter-of-a-century presence in the rapidly expanding Pyongyang skyline merits the international mockery it has received—fatalistically nicknamed the “hotel of doom” by Western journalists, labeled an architectural sin, and deemed the biggest mystery in Pyongyang—would consign Ryugyong to the realm of compulsive political affect ranging from imaginative resentment to the very policies governing U.S.-North Korean relations since American involvement in the Korean War.

Egyptian global engineering and construction contractor Orascom invested in Ryugyong in 2008 in exchange for a 75% stake in Koryolink, North Korea’s first and only 3G network. By 2011, the reflective glass exterior was completed. Following the political dimensions of touristic fantasies, an Esquire article published the same year opines about a sanctified belligerence towards the hotel: “the worst building in the history of mankind...even by communist standards, the 3,000-room hotel is hideously ugly...like some twisted North Korean version of Cinderella’s castle.” Such desperate descriptions act as a palliative for a deficit of knowledge about North Korea, a process dialectically in lockstep with glorified American inter- and post-war mobilization. Economic production based on planned urban obsolescence, disinvestment, and privatization, for example, “underwrote Cold War American practices and values from economics to geopolitics.” Pyongyang’s postwar Juche ideology, on the other hand, intended to distinguish itself from Soviet Union Marxist-Leninism, and equally important, abolish Japan’s asymmetrical colonial occupation by taking control of industrial development, iron works, mines, and fisheries.

In 1953, a post-war master plan for an internationally standardized city, including the expansion of facilities for foreign visitors, was designed in the wake of the



EIKO ISHIOKA

BROUGHT AN EERIE, SENSUAL SURREALISM to film and theater, album covers, the Olympics and Cirque du Soleil, in the process earning an Oscar, a Grammy and a string of other honors. Trained as a graphic designer, Ms. Ishioka was for decades considered the foremost art director in Japan; she later came to be known as one of the foremost in the world. is an art director; a pioneer traveling in big commerce. This interview was conducted on one of Ishioka's trips to New York in 1984.

ON SECOND THOUGHT

INTERVIEWS FROM THE ARCHIVE

INTERVIEW BY INGRID SISCHY
NEW YORK, 1984

Ingrid Sischy: I look at the cover of your book that's too big and heavy for me to read in bed. I know I've seen the tall, full-grown person before—I think I'd know Faye Dunaway anywhere. But what's she doing there, half nun, half empress? Why is a Hollywood icon on your cover? In fact, why so many appropriated forms and figures, from America, Africa, India...throughout?

Eiko Ishioka: Why not? If I explain why with too much logical reasoning, it would be limiting. Japanese people often ask me about logical reasons for creativity, as do many Americans—so much so that I realize that sometimes the basic attitude toward creation is that you have to build some logical reason around it. But sometimes I want to forget about logical reasons. To answer your question I say, this is my generation. That's one reason: my experience as a child, as a teenager, as a university student, and afterwards at work.

My basic question to you is, why must we, as Japanese artists, use only Japanese motifs? Since I was a kid, I've looked outside Japan. My father was a pioneer in graphic design. He never studied at a university, never studied graphic design; he studied by himself. Although he never had a chance to go to Europe, he was curious about Europe. When I was young I saw one of my father's posters, and I recognized the influence of [Adolphe] Cassandre [1901–68], the world-famous French poster artist. My

father probably bought a book of Cassandre's work, and he observed. Cassandre was his teacher, I guess.

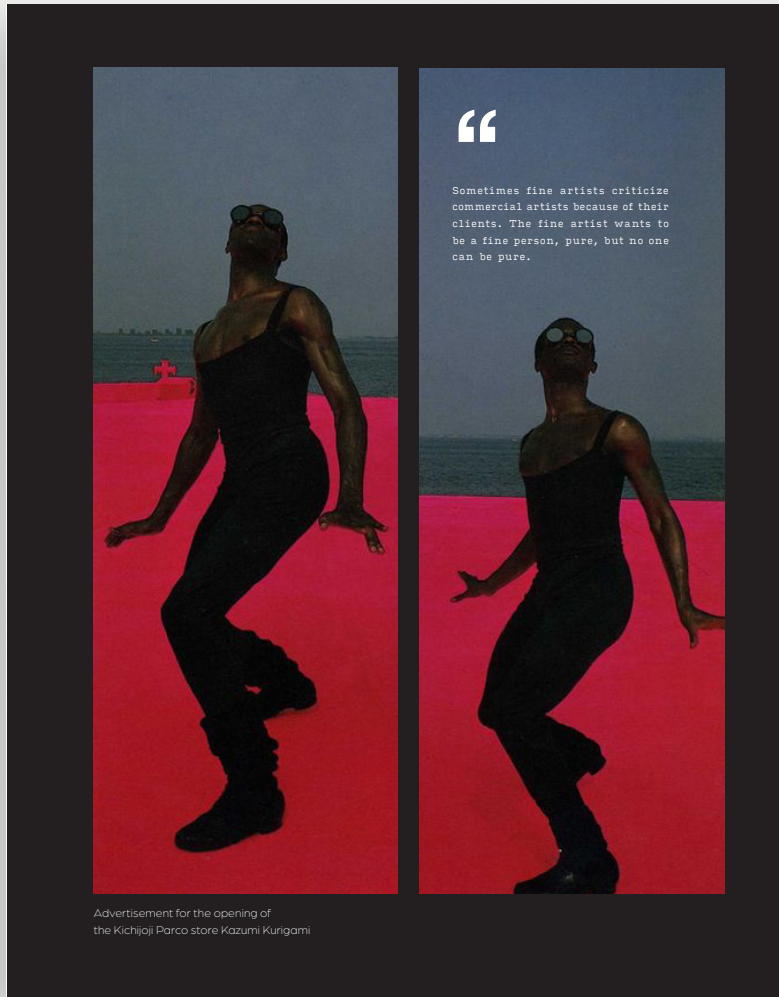
My parents' life-style wasn't a traditional Japanese one. We lived in a Western-style house, my mother wore Western clothes, the two of them took me to French restaurants, we saw American movies, and sometimes my father gave me very good American art books. I was born in Kobinatadai-machi and raised in uptown Tokyo, a cosmopolitan residential area. It wasn't like downtown Tokyo's traditional customs and life style. We lived Japanese-style Western style. Because my parents had never gone to Europe, they didn't really know; they never touched a true cathedral, they never touched French food in Paris.

My memory up until I was 3 or 4 years old is of very happy things. Then World War II began and everything changed. We moved to the country, my mother made my clothes by hand, handbags, everything. I was one very strange kid wearing fashionable-looking clothes among country kids who were wearing traditional Japanese kids' kimonos. The country kids looked at me and criticized. I was very, very lonely. The teacher was my only close friend, and every day after the lesson we would talk for one or two hours. Then I would walk back home alone, but on the way the country kids would kick and punch me. I hated the country then, the people, the mind, the life-style; I hated the tradition.

IS: And when the war was over?

21 – 22 *de/void* feature - From the Archive

Interview of Eiko Ishioka from 1984. The interview contains some incredible quotes from the costume designer that felt appropriate to spotlight throughout the feature.



ment doesn't want to spend money to support culture; private industry has to support it. In the beginning Parco's budget was tiny, so my medium was just 15 seconds. A 15-second TV commercial was like junk. In Japan most were 30 seconds, as most were in America, too. About 15-second commercials everyone said, this is junk art, worthless. But Mr. Masuda gave me complete freedom. We would talk about what Japan is today, what young people think about, what is important, where we are going. Fifteen seconds was his offer. I couldn't have 16. However, just one second was enough time in which to ask, "What is Parco?"—like a poster, but in TV.

This technique is at odds with most Japanese strategies. Japan needs logical reasons: if you go into a record shop, on the record jacket or inside it you find an explanation about why the musician is so great, how he became a success. People say, "Ah, this artist is very great," because of the piece written by a music critic. So my technique, of asking the question instead of giving the answer, frustrated everyone. The kind of audience that needs explanations never discovers anything by itself. It is lazy. We needed an active audience; we cut out the lazy audience.

IS: With the early commercials I notice an extended system of withholding of explanation. We've established that the viewer doesn't know what the product is, but what's perhaps even more disorienting is that you cut out the geography and the context, you cut out place and time.

EI: My message has to be strong and simple. It's unnecessary to talk about the desert, what kind of desert, what is the camel doing, what are the Africans wearing. I don't explain because if I explain too much about unimportant material, I can't convey the important message. So I take out the explanations, then construct one simple drama or scenario. If I take everything out, people say, "What must I see?"

IS: You mean that the face becomes the place?

EI: The face is place, a face is society, faces are sexual relation

between man and woman, faces are everything human. In one commercial I made there's a woman standing in the savanna. Suddenly rain is coming down hard, and the face is very scared—not the usual face in advertising. Ordinary advertising just uses happy, stupid faces, happy but fake. But we, the audience, are clever. We understand because we are one of the public. If they make fake realism, we just think, "Shit, I don't want to see this, forget about it." We want to see something special, something new through advertising. Japanese advertisements are not like American ones; they're considered media art. So sponsors spend enormous sums of money to make them. If the sponsor doesn't understand what art is, the sponsor fails.

IS: History has shown that knowing how to weave a spell, how to make magic with a face or a word, how to shape responses from the masses can be a dangerous power. Leni Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will [1936]—or for that matter her African work—is an apt, if obvious, Pandora's Box of media magic. Your media-machine power over me is very great. But I'm not after Wagner here—I'm after the relationship between your belief and the assignments you take on. Earlier, when we were talking about Parco, you said you took the job because you believed in it, and so you didn't feel "guilty" influencing the audience. Power and morality are clearly kin for you.

EI: Yes, if I don't agree with the subject or the product or the company's attitude, I refuse the job. Yes, the designer's position in society can be dangerous and of course the media can be dangerous. The media can also be charming. My statement is dangerous because it's true.

Sometimes fine artists criticize commercial artists because of their clients. The fine artist wants to be a fine person, pure, but no one can be pure. Everybody—Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo—has a sponsor. Commercial art is more direct because the sponsor is a sponsor, the artist is an artist, they agree on terms, money, et cetera. Everything's on the table, and it's very clear. If



A DENSER CITY, BUT AT WHAT COST?

Albania's capital is getting a makeover intended to stop urban sprawl. But critics say the plan could leave Tirana changed beyond recognition, and erase its history.

JESSICA BATEMAN

14/05/2024 // 14:00:00

24

24 - 25

de/void feature - A Denser City but at What Cost?

Essay on city's backlash to gentrification in Tirana, Albania's capital.



Older buildings give way to new along Tirana's central Boulevard in a recent development.

Photographer: GERT SHKALLARAJ

14/05/2024 // 14:00:00

25



“The new city is taking over everything and we cannot allow this, because we will lose connection with our past.”

Working the pedestrianized Skanderbeg Square gives a taste of the city's history — and its redevelopment plans.

Photographer: RENARD ANDRINO

OVER THE NEXT DECADE, TIRANA is poised for a dramatic makeover. In the center of the Albanian capital, modern high-rises are taking the place of the current mix of informally constructed and historic buildings, under a plan called Tirana 2030. The government says it aims to stop urban sprawl by concentrating construction in the city's core and to turn Tirana into a greener city with bike lanes, more electric vehicles and forested areas moving the center.

Albania remains one of Europe's poorest countries, with a per capita GDP that's around 30% of the European Union average. And according to the city, the dramatic reboot is needed to turn Albanian vibrant but chaotic capital into a modern European metropolis. “Tirana is a city that grows by about 30,000 people a year. So the question is how to plan this growth in a sustainable way,” says Mayor Erion Veliaj, a member of the governing Socialist Party. “I think we broke the myth that only rich cities could do this.”

But with deep pockets of unimproving ancient stone and some key historic buildings already demolished, critics of the plan worry their city is being sold out to developers with little public consultation, in a process that could leave their home changed beyond recognition. Architects, academics and activists say the demolition is leading to a loss of history, increasing housing prices — and possibly even functioning as a money-laundering operation for organized crime.

“When you look at the plan, you see that the whole city is in development,” says Soriana Haxhi, an architect who took part in protests.

Albania's rich history is not full display in Tirana's city center. Skanderbeg Square, the vast plaza at its heart, became the designated center of the city after liberation from the Ottoman Empire in the early 1900s. Designed during the Italian occupation, it contains both 1930s Italian Modernist buildings and Soviet-style architecture from the later socialist period. Farther out, broad avenues feature an eclectic mix of Italian-era

apartments and later apartment blocks — many of them radically remodeled by their occupants since the fall of communism in the early 1990s. Smaller village-like streets intersect, creating a haphazard but vibrant urban patchwork.

Skanderbeg Square is now at the center of the city's changes. Previously one of the busiest roundabouts in the city, it has been pedestrianized, creating much-needed public space. But there are also some more controversial additions: At least four high-rises, in various states of construction, have popped up over the past two years. What is missing is also striking. South of this cluster, there's a hole where one landmark once stood: Albania's National Theatre, constructed in 1938 and considered an exceptional example of Italian Modernism, was demolished in May 2020 following a two-year occupation by activists, to make way for a newer, larger theater. When the demolition took place late at night, unannounced, many activists were still inside. Following the protests, an architect firm from Bulgaria signed a contract to have pulled out of the project, drawing work to a standstill and leaving the site unused and blocked by temporary fencing, with a cascade of red neon signs in the void theater in front. Angels didn't respond to city calls, request for comment.

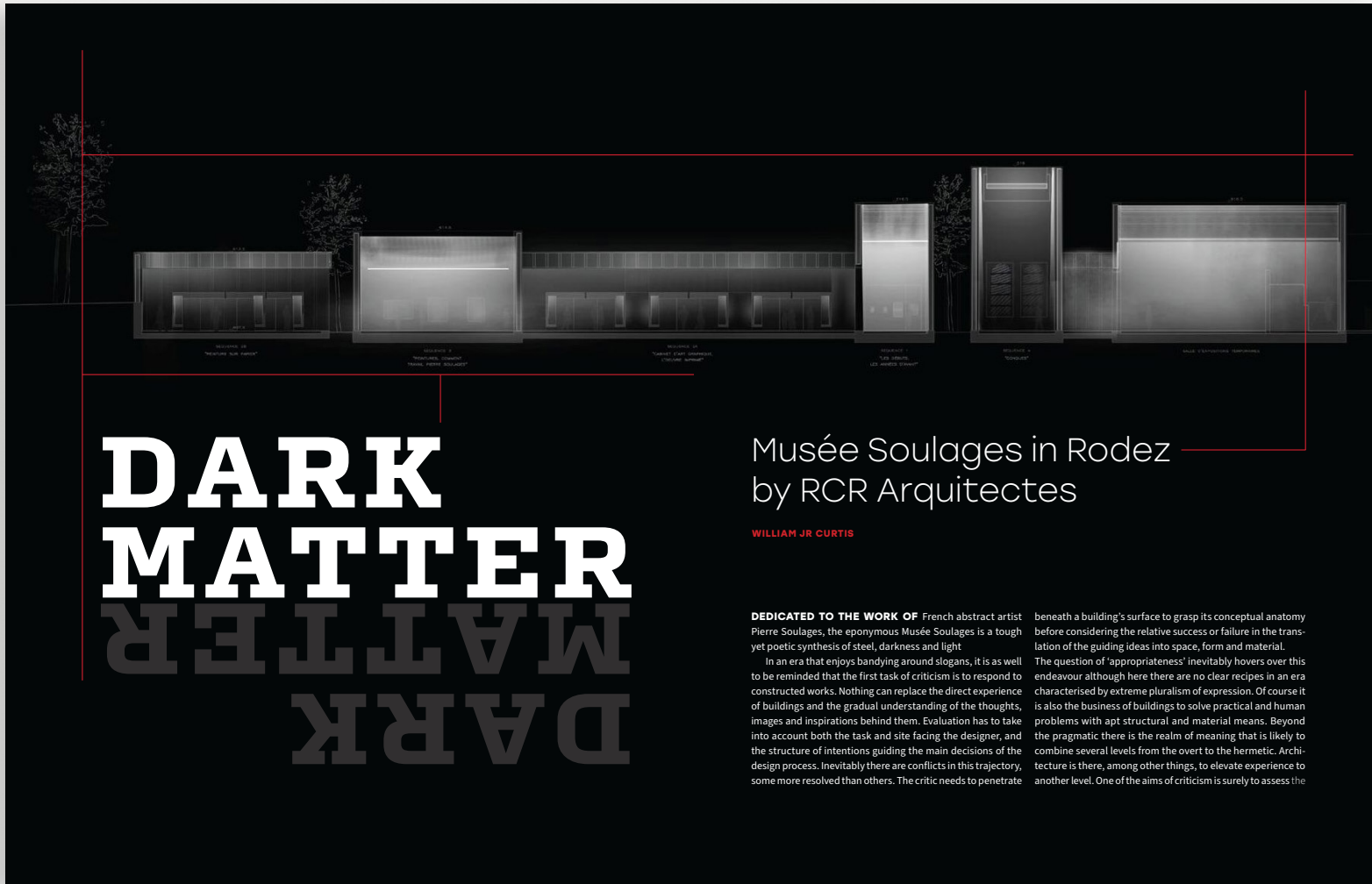
“Everything is at risk — our collective memory, our heritage space,” said Haxhi, who is head of the theater. “And it is stimulating gentrification. The new city is taking over everything and we cannot allow this, because we will lose connection with our past.”

People gather to protest the demolition of the National Theatre in May 2020. Photographer: GERT SHKALLARAJ

Plans for overhauling the city center were first revealed in 2005 under the name Tirana 2030. Jon Baboci, an advisor to the mayor on planning and architecture, says the aim was to “reimagine territorial Tirana.” Since the former communist regime fell in the early 1990s, thousands of people moved from rural areas to the capital in search of work, building settlements on former state-owned agricultural land. Baboci argues that, although this gave the city plenty of character, it resulted in a lack of public space and no architectural harmony.

“We wanted to create a small, very dense urban center and preserve as much as possible of the suburban and out-lying,” he explains. “So the plan pretty much forbids development for residential reasons outside of the core, and incentivizes people to build in the center.” Urban architect Dafina Boriçi designed an orbital forest to enclose this center, and helped devise a city plan that would ensure more greenery and public space. Bike lanes have been introduced, as well as incentives for taxi drivers to switch to electric cars.

According to Baboci, developers are encouraged to build higher in order to increase density. In return, they must give a certain percent of land around the building to the city to use as public space. The higher they build, the larger the proportion of that must go back to the city. Some flexibility is allowed with



DARK MATTER

MATTER
DARK

Musée Soulages in Rodez by RCR Arquitectes

WILLIAM JR CURTIS

DEDICATED TO THE WORK OF French abstract artist Pierre Soulages, the eponymous Musée Soulages is a tough yet poetic synthesis of steel, darkness and light

In an era that enjoys bandying around slogans, it is as well to be reminded that the first task of criticism is to respond to constructed works. Nothing can replace the direct experience of buildings and the gradual understanding of the thoughts, images and inspirations behind them. Evaluation has to take into account both the task and site facing the designer, and the structure of intentions guiding the main decisions of the design process. Inevitably there are conflicts in this trajectory, some more resolved than others. The critic needs to penetrate

beneath a building's surface to grasp its conceptual anatomy before considering the relative success or failure in the translation of the guiding ideas into space, form and material. The question of 'appropriateness' inevitably hovers over this endeavour although here there are no clear recipes in an era characterised by extreme pluralism of expression. Of course it is also the business of buildings to solve practical and human problems with apt structural and material means. Beyond the pragmatic there is the realm of meaning that is likely to combine several levels from the overt to the hermetic. Architecture is there, among other things, to elevate experience to another level. One of the aims of criticism is surely to assess the



long-term value of a work – not just in relation to contemporary architectural developments and present social needs, but also in relation to the history of architecture in a broader sense.

The recently completed Musée Soulages in Rodez in the département of the Aveyron in the Massif Central designed by RCR Aranda Pigem Vilalta Arquitectes is a work that deserves this sort of careful scrutiny. It is surely one of the most interesting if understated architectural realisations of recent years. The building occupies a site between the old city of Rodez with its cathedral constructed in reddish brown stone, and the modern extension to the west with its mostly undistinguished buildings constructed in recent decades. It takes the form of a series of parallel oblongs coated in rusty Corten steel with interstices between them allowing long views to the rugged landscape to the north and permitting outdoor public stairways between the upper and lower levels of the site. The pedestrian approach is across a park which occupies the old foirail or cattle market,

and from this the south side, the building appears to be long, horizontal and low.

But from the other, north side, the Musée Soulages takes on a vertical and monumental character for it juts out over a steep slope. Seen from below, the 'boxes' containing some of the main galleries read almost as residual bastions, although there is a teasing dialogue between the sense of weight and the weightlessness of cantilevered steel volumes. The apparently simple theme of parallel geometries reveals a degree of complexity as the different-sized volumes contribute to an array of shapes seen in perspective with the cathedral in the background. Steel and stone make a happy marriage on this occasion and of course the black and russet colours and stark abstract geometries make an apt home for the abstract paintings in similar colours by Pierre Soulages.

But the coincidences between the work of the French painter now in his mid nineties, and the Catalan architects, over 40 years

younger, go much deeper than surface effects of colour and texture. Soulages was born in Rodez and after an extraordinary international career decided in the end that he would like to leave his patrimony to the provincial town in la France profonde where he spent his earliest years. His bold abstract works in black paint or wood stain already made an impact upon the art world in the early 1950s, while his multilayered 'outrénoir' paintings of recent decades have achieved a monumental expression with a vaguely geological aspect of stratifications and fissures. The artist's windows designed in the late 1980s for the Romanesque pilgrimage abbey church of Conques, some 40 kilometres to the north-west of Rodez, combine striations of lines in lead with crystalline glass surfaces as if they were made of translucent stone.

As for RCR, their architecture has always explored the middle zones between abstraction and materiality, the natural and the artificial, stone and steel. The architects now cross national

frontiers but their sensibility is deeply rooted in their home territory, the volcanic landscape of La Garrotxa around the small town of Olot in northern Catalunya. Local in its responses to place and topography, their work is universal in its sources of inspiration which run all the way from the American works of Mies van der Rohe, to

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The portions of the museum that are embedded in the ground and which therefore rely entirely upon artificial lighting are much lower in height and are devoted to Soulages's beginnings, as well as to his graphic works in various media.

those of Louis Kahn, to the steel sculptures of Richard Serra. Inheritors of a Catalan tradition of Modernism blending architecture and topography, they have nonetheless kept their distance from the frivolities of Barcelona, seeking out distant resonances with both Japanese modern

architecture (Ando and SANAA in particular) as well as the metaphysical order of ancient Zen gardens. The Musée Soulages is in part a tale of two small cities, or a tale of parallel landscapes, one in Catalunya, the other in the Massif Central.

More than that, RCR have developed a way of reading sites and intuiting the central concepts of their schemes by means of abstract watercolours and ink stain sketches. These mental maps serve to capture the energies of the surroundings and the hidden forces in the terrain while also hinting at the generating images and ideas of each scheme. They resemble delicate abstract paintings combining ink blots and striations and they recall not only oriental calligraphy but also the work of 20th-century painters such as Antoni Tàpies, Franz Kline and of course Pierre Soulages. I recall how in 2003 when writing the introduction to a monograph on RCR, they were happy to share a sort of scrapbook of core inspirations. This included Soulages's black paintings with cracks of light alongside black and white photos of wooden slats



REQUIRED READING

Book Review



Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design by Kristina Wilson

ERIKA HOLCOMB

In Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design, art historian, Kristina Wilson presents a provocative analysis of race and gender during the Modernist movement in postwar America. Written in accessible language, yet supported by notable scholarly sources, *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body* is a compelling read for the design student, mid-century enthusiast, and those interested in historical revisionism.

The book, 254 pages long with multiple archival images throughout, offers an excellent overview of the political, sociocultural, and economic climate of the late 1940s and 50s. Concepts of class mobility, suburbanization, homeownership, identity, gender roles, class distinc-

tion, and racial segregation are woven throughout the book to situate Modernism within a larger social context.

While the study of gender roles inscribed in Modernist architecture is not entirely new, Wilson, in her historical reading of academic literature on the movement, reveals limited discussions of race. She feels this absence of dialogue confirms the “White blindness of most of the design history establishment”. She draws from theorists, artists, and historians instrumental in establishing Critical Race Theory frameworks to argue, in part, that Modernism was used as a tool to define and reify Whiteness. As such, her two primary goals are to reveal power structures that naturalize Whiteness and to proffer a “counter-history” of Modernism through the African American imaginary.



Advertisement for Chicago Metropolitan Mutual Assurance Company (detail), *Ebony* December 1954, 89

Hilda Longinatti, of the George Nelson Office, posing on a Marshmallow Sofa, c. 1956. Courtesy of the Herman Miller Archives.

The book aims to initiate a long-overdue conversation about power structures and racialized agendas implicit in domestic design during the postwar period in the US. Wilson considers various 2-D, print-based materials and 3-D design objects to illustrate her years’ long research into underlying gender and racial constructs and power imbalances inherent in Modernism.

Her analysis is divided into 4 parts: home design books, popular magazines, Herman

Miller furniture, and decorative accessories. The first chapter—“Body in Control: Modernism and the Pursuit of Better Living”—is dedicated to books on domestic architecture and interior design of the late 1940-1950s. Specifically, she peruses 5 publications that present Modernism from different inclinations: Mary L. Brandt’s *Decorate Your Home for Better Living 1950*, Russel and Mary Wright’s *Guide to Easier Living* (1950), and Paul R. Williams’ (the sole African American author) *New Homes for Today* (1946) and *The Small Home for Tomorrow* (1945). Admittedly, this domestic literature is not historical documentation of life in postwar America, but rather are aspirational in that they present a fantasy or expectation of middle- to upper-class life, targeted primarily to White audiences.

All of these publications uphold Modernist canons of efficiency, freedom, and good design with authorial confidence; however, Wilson finds, it is the tone and imagery that differ between them. Her breakdown of page layouts in these books exemplifies how imagery and text together form a “rhetoric of interior space” that communicates messaging in subliminal ways. Different camera angles, location of focal points, lighting effects, absences of human inhabitants, types of background, and interior staging operate to reinforce ideas of possession and dominion. The chapter is particularly successful in demonstrating how gender roles are inscribed into interior space—from depictions of everyday life where women are engaged in domestic labour while husbands lounge, to Modernism’s promise of reducing housework (a woman’s domain) through smart, efficient design—but is less convincing on how it underpinned racial categories.

The second chapter, “Modern Design? You Bet!” *Ebony*, *Life*, and *Modernist Design, 1950-1959*”, explores other print-based representations of Modernism. Wilson examines 2 popular magazines, *Life* and *Ebony* each with a distinct readership. The tone, imagery, advertising, and editorial content are anatomized in both to draw general conclusions about how Modernism was presented

through different racial lenses. She argues that Modernism implied different ideals for each audience and that these 2 publications can be viewed as indexical of the nuanced life experience of Black and White Americans. Whereas *Life* presented Modernism as “an accessory for an emerging identity of middle-classed Whiteness”, *Ebony*, on the other hand, “set the stage for imagining of a particular African American upper- and middle-class life”. Wilson’s comparative reading of the magazines suggests that White Modernism emphasized cleanliness, control, and affordability and Black Modernism sociability, corporal comfort, community, and class distinction.

Chapter 3—“Like a ‘Girl in a Bikini Suit’ and Other Stories: Narrating Race and Gender at Herman Miller”—examines the objects of design, marketing materials, and showroom space of the iconic Herman Miller Furniture Company to illustrate that 3-dimensional objects could also reinforce a White, gendered worldview. While she situates her analysis within the context of postwar America during a time of rigid gender, class, and racial expectations, her case study of Herman Miller seems somewhat reductive. She makes many captivating observations on taste, status, and class identity, and cites several influential publications, both scholarly and popular, that expand on such topics. She also provides an overview of the formal language of Modernism manifest in its geometries, abstractions, references to contemporary art, and interactions with

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Wilson recalls that while mid-century Modernism, over the last 20 years, has become highly popular and ubiquitous in workplaces and the domestic sphere, its complex, fraught, historic context remains largely overlooked.




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