ART ON THE GROUND FLOOR
FROM THE LOBBY TO THE PLAZA
THE ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF COLD WAR CORPORATE MODERNISM

A Dissertation in
Art History
by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation covers the years from 1954 to 1963 and presents five important examples of ‘lobby art’ at its most potent and fertile time when it acted as a novel mode of corporate interior decoration and identity construction. Abstract art displayed within these spaces performed a didactic function of visually rendering what a corporation was or wanted to be, both as a physical entity and as an integral component of society. The legibility of such messages was complicated and occasionally contested by the variety of actors involved, whether they were corporate executives, artists, art selection committees composed of museum professionals, architects, real estate developers, or the local government. The plurality of voices makes this subject noteworthy.

After World War II, with modernism in vogue, there arrived a new philosophy at odds with the previous architectural paradigm. Instead of bulky applied ornament, architects stripped their facades to call attention to the building’s underlying structure. Despite this shift in thinking, the lobby remained an important place for impressing clients and tenants. Lobby art was given a greater responsibility, bearing the onus of decoration and signification that was previously performed by the overall appointment of materials and ornament. All of the physical and conceptual weight associated with the previous mode was consolidated into single works of art. The art chosen had to simultaneously read as abstraction, while being open enough in its symbolism to communicate a flexible range of interpretations about the specific building, the corporate identity it housed, and larger economic ideologies in which these institutions thrived.
This study is not focused on a single building type or patron but instead analyzes a select, but varied group of buildings which combined abstraction with International Style architecture to argue for its potential to speak to a variety of patrons and structures serving different purposes. Two chapters deal with a flagship branch of a major financial institution (Chapters 1 and 3), two feature speculative office towers (Chapter 2 and 5), and one deals with the headquarters of a corporation (Chapter 4). Abstraction sited in dense metropolises rewards scrutiny because of the tremendous diversity of its potential audience. The other major venues to see large-scale abstraction outside of galleries and museums during this period were universities and ‘corporate campuses.’ Access to corporate and educational campuses were more restricted, both by socio-economic demographics and the vetting involved in the employment of white-collar workers respectively. The challenge for art in lobbies was to speak on behalf of a corporate body as well to the individual employees who worked within its hierarchy.

This dissertation focuses on the major urban center of New York, where skyscrapers first came into being in the second half of the nineteenth century.\(^1\) Manhattan continued to be an incubator for skyscraper design through the Great Depression and beyond.\(^2\) The golden age of ‘lobby art’ was rooted specifically in the Grand Central area of Midtown boasting a high concentration of prestige International Style construction. Chapter 4 deals with Inland Steel, the first skyscraper erected on the Loop since the 1930s\(^3\) to show how the corporate-sponsored branch of the International Style

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\(^3\) The Prudential Building (1955) was the first skyscraper built in Chicago after the Great Depression. It is located just off the Loop, next to what is now known as Millennium Park at 130 E. Randolph Street. It was designed by Naess & Murphy (later renamed Murphy & Associates) in the International Style, set on a
(paradoxically rooted in a definable and precise geographic region) came to be disseminated to other major American cities and beyond.\(^4\) Inland Steel was chosen for analysis not only for the city’s historical promotion of tall buildings but also to show how one of the International Style’s most persuasive champions—the architectural firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill—was itself styled on the model of a corporation, a quality which appealed to its like-minded clientele. Such a corporate body, spread across the country, and eventually with international locations, depended on a complex system of communication. Chicago is an apt location for this concept because of its historical status as a nexus for both tangible goods (notably grain and cattle) and more abstract economic speculation epitomized by the Chicago Board of Trade.\(^5\) Chapter 4 shows how Chicago evolved its networks of communication from telegraphs and railroad lines in the 19\(^{th}\) century, to the employment of the most sophisticated technology available for organizing production, packaging, marketing and distribution during the mid-20\(^{th}\) century.

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\(^4\) In the 1970s, Chicago produced two renowned post-International Style works- The John Hancock Center (1968, 2\(^{nd}\) tallest in the world at time of topping out, tallest outside NYC, opened in 1970) and the Sears Tower (1973, overtaking the World Trade Center as the tallest in the world, a title it held for 25 years). These buildings became the most visible examples of a new school of architecture- structural expressionism. Bruce Graham, who designed Inland Steel, was the architect for both projects, working in partnership with structural engineer Fazlur Rahman Khan (who also worked on Inland Steel). Graham joined SOM in 1951 after working for Holabird and Root and stayed with the firm until his retirement in the 1980s. Graham was a collector of art like Bunshaft, both men advocated for the incorporation of modern art in their designs.

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**Introduction**

**The Increasing Presence of Abstraction in Lobbies and Office Buildings in the 1950s**

Functionally the lobby is the building’s valve, receiving, distributing, ejecting; but beyond that it is an architectural experience which on entrance and departure imprints upon the spectator’s mind and eye the character and quality of the building and its organization—if it has either—

- Serge Chermayeff, 1956

As the head of Harvard’s architecture department, and Walter Gropius’ successor, Chermayeff was an authority on the built environment at mid-century. A practicing architect for several decades and a scholar of urban design, he knew well the integral role that lobbies played in setting expectations for the spaces beyond, and their ability to control the flow of traffic in and out of a building. A lobby has an essential architectural function verging on the organic—his description is visceral and bodily. Chermayeff’s quote introduced a feature article in *Architectural Forum* surveying the variety of contemporary lobby designs, asserting that at mid-century these spaces were a subject of much interest to architects, artists and interior designers.

Lobbies have the capacity for affecting the intellectual and emotional perception of a building. Their visual potential is analogous to a building’s façade multiplied and folded into itself, as a total environment. They are inhabited images. When designed and appointed effectively a lobby communicates how the structure, and its patron, want it to

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7 Serge Chermayeff (1900-1996) began as an interior and industrial designer. As an architect he worked with Erich Mendelsohn in Germany before arriving in the United States in 1940. He was a professor at the California School of Fine Arts, Brooklyn College, MIT, Harvard and Yale, as well as serving as the president for the Institute of Design in Chicago. His son, Ivan, founded a graphic design firm with fellow Yale alumus Tom Geismar in 1957. Chermayeff & Geismar would go on to design celebrated corporate logos many of the most. Their abstract logo for Chase Manhattan Bank, in 1959, is discussed in Chapter 4.
be perceived. In the postwar period, these messages were increasingly expounded through the use of mid-century modernist abstract art. This dissertation explores American “lobby art” in its golden age, from 1954 to 1962, a time before its perceived banality and our cynical disposition to it became rote.

A lobby was a highly-charged space and therefore was ideal for the display of certain types of art. This was only one aspect of a larger trend in the 1950s of incorporating modern art in architecture. By the time of Chermayeff’s 1956 statement the notion of installing art in modern architectural projects had percolated for several years. The 1950 exhibition “The Muralist and the Modern Architect,” at the Kootz Gallery, paired abstract painters and renowned modern architects to design hypothetical buildings that integrally incorporated art.  

Scale models of the paintings and architecture were displayed, but not realized in built form. The exhibition did, however, lead to later commissions, like Hans Hofmann’s 1956 mosaic mural for an office tower designed by William Lescaze (Chapter 2). The following year, the architect and critic Philip Johnson convened a symposium on the Relation of Painting and Sculpture to Architecture at the Museum of Modern Art to address the seemingly uncomfortable relationship between modern architecture and its use of the fine arts. It would take the initiative of architects and their patrons, as well as gallerists and individual artists to actualize this effort.

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Not only critics and architects advocated for art’s greater inclusion—business people increasingly collected contemporary art for their homes and offices.\(^\text{10}\) Tapping into this new market for art collectors was a lucrative opportunity for gallerists and manufacturers of industrial equipment as well. In 1953, Edith Halpert’s Downtown Gallery was transformed to resemble an executive’s office.\(^\text{11}\) (fig. 1) She collaborated with modernist designer Edward Wormley, of Dunbar Furniture, who used the opportunity to display the company’s sleek new line of office desks and chairs. The company co-sponsored the exhibition, and their logo was featured prominently in the show’s announcement brochure. Modern furniture was promoted as the complement to modern art, and vice versa, as integral components of a total interior decorating composition. The mock office featured an IBM typewriter, Ediphone, intercom, and paintings by Georgia O’Keeffe, Charles Sheeler, and Stuart Davis—some of the most established of Halpert’s stable of artists. “Art in the Office” was organized to show forward-thinking businessmen art’s potential for enlivening the spaces of work. Halpert concurrently announced the creation of a new department within her gallery specifically for placing art in offices. She corresponded with executives from the Bakelite Company and US Steel, announcing the event, as well as making inquiries to trade publications and *Fortune Magazine*. She told Robert M. Smith, managing editor of *Office Management*, who reviewed the exhibition, that in terms of sales, “Art in the Office” was, “the most

\(^{10}\) “The Businessman and Picasso,” *Fortune*, vol. 41, June 1950, pg. 102.

\(^{11}\) “Art in the Office,” The Downtown Gallery, November 17\textsuperscript{th} to December 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1953. The exhibition announcement is included in The Downtown Gallery Papers, the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 5505. Also see Saarinen, Aline B. “Business and Art, New and Encouraging Developments Looking Toward the Future.” *The New York Times*, June 6, 1954, pg. X6.
successful ever held by her gallery.” It was also an investment on her part because, by selling businessmen their first work of art, there was a good chance they would return for more. Halpert averred, “there is no such thing as a one-time buyer.” Smith went on to tout the advantages of collecting and displaying art in one’s office—it could serve as an ice-breaker for clients and colleagues, “whether the visitor’s reaction is admiring or takes the form of ‘My three-year-old kid could do better than that.” He also noted the potential financial benefits of collecting—because the IRS categorizes art as ‘furnishing’ these purchases can be incrementally deducted over a ten-year period, during which time they may potentially increase in value.

The same year as “Art in Offices,” the second annual “Art in Interiors” exhibition at the Midtown Gallery featured an executive office as one of its six vignettes. Industrial designer and early practician of “corporate identity” construction, Walter Dorwin Teague, arranged the executive office space, pairing the latest in textile design with contemporary painting. In 1954, the concept of the “Art in Offices” exhibition was inverted—instead of turning a gallery into an office, an office was turned into a gallery—the Federated Brokerage Group, located near Columbus Circle, was transformed into an exhibition space for Grace Borgenicht’s gallery. One of Borgenicht’s younger artists, Jose de Rivera, would be commissioned the same year to create a sculpture to mark the entrance to a newly erected office tower at 711 Third Avenue (Chapter 2). The exhibition at the

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12 Robert M. Smith, typed draft of an article for Office Management, correspondence file, The Downtown Gallery Papers, the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 5505.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
Federated Brokerage Group was spearheaded by the Young President’s Organization, composed of industrial executives under the age of 40 who, in the words of Aline Saarinen, “having done pretty well, through birth or brain, with Mammon, these young executives are now turning to art.” Her husband, the architect Eero Saarinen, was also a major proponent of collaborating with contemporary artists on his built works.

Bucking the idea that art collecting was a feminine hobby or a leisure activity solely for the wealthy, its value was becoming increasingly noted by businessmen. Halpert noticed this shift taking place. In a letter to Fortune’s art director, Leo Leonni, she observed—

The trend of buying for business offices... is little more than ten years in the making... the change from female to male support and this has nothing to do with Kinsey. As a matter of fact, he missed an awfully good point. In the past the adventurous collectors were women to a great extent who dared to support the contemporary culture in its various manifestations. Since the war however, with the loss of the early buyers... contemporary collecting is almost entirely in the hands of the boy, occasionally aided and abetted by the wives but more and more in a minor way.

Art critic and curator of American Art at the Whitney Museum, John I. H. Baur, also promoted the incorporation of art into offices. He introduced his 1954 ABC for Collectors of Contemporary American Art, illustrated by Saul Steinberg, noting the, “prestige value

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17 Ibid.
18 For instance, he commissioned Harry Bertoia (the subject of Chapter 1) to create a suspended sculptural screen behind the altar at his MIT chapel (1955). He commissioned Constantino Nivola to make a suite of free-standing relief sculptures for the Ezra Stiles and Morse Colleges at Yale University (1958-62). His TWA terminal (1962) is essentially a sculpture as lobby, or vice versa. His Gateway Arch (1965) is a sculpture at the scale of monumental architecture, a mid-century modernist Colossus of Rhodes.
19 Edith Halpert to Leo Leoni, Correspondence, November 18, 1953, the Downtown Gallery Papers, the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 5505.
of art in industry, which has led many acute businessmen to hang fine paintings in their offices or reproduce them in their publications and advertisements.20

The job of decorating business spaces increased dramatically in scale and visibility when abstract modern art was sited in lobbies, and later in plazas. There, art reached larger audiences. Lobbies proved to be, albeit for a short period of time, a fertile space for artists to engage with ideas in excess of simply expressing positive messages about their corporate patrons. Abstraction could be both flexible in its interpretation and pointed in its acknowledgement of its architectural context. The office building construction boom in Midtown Manhattan spanning from the mid-1950s to early 1960s, provided the opportunity for lobby art to thrive.

Construction of new office towers was concentrated in the Grand Central area of Midtown bound by 42nd and 59th Streets, and between Third and Fifth Avenue. Between 1945 and 1958, 84 plans had been filed for office buildings in Manhattan, of which half had completed construction by the latter date.21 Over half of these buildings were located in the Grand Central area. This pace continued for the next few years, but by the early 1960s the locus of construction shifted to Downtown. Like any large-scale, big-budget effort, there were many actors involved. The lobby had a practical as well as an

21 “Fabulous New York Office Boom Keeps Growing; Rental Market Still Firm.” Architectural Forum, vol. 110, no. 1, January 1958, pgs. 12, 13, 16. One of the earliest and most conspicuous building projects after the end of World War II was the United Nations Secretariat begun in 1947 and completed in 1952, designed by Oscar Niemeyer and Le Corbusier. 1952 was also the year that the Lever Building finished construction. It was designed by Gordon Bunshaft and Natalie de Blois of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill and featured the first Manhattan structure with glass curtain walls on every façade, which would become a hallmark of Cold War era International Style office towers. It served as an anchor for prestige construction in the Grand Central area just as the erection of Chase One Plaza in 1961 would shift the focus of construction to the Downtown financial district in the 1960s. For a more general study of this trend see Causes of the Postwar Boom in Office Space Construction in Manhattan. Real Estate Research Corporation, 1960. See alsoJason M. Barr, Building the Skyline: The Birth and Growth of Manhattan’s Skyscrapers. Oxford University Press, 2018.
ideological function, as did the art placed within. Functionally, art could address particular qualities of the building’s design, and assist with traffic flow by calling attention to the structure’s various zones, as Chermayeff noted in this introduction’s epigram. Through the use of metaphor, materiality and symbolism, art could further offer a form of welcoming to employees, and convincingly argue for the naturalness of the capitalist system.

A predicament arose—if art was going to be used in a building—should it assert its autonomy from its surroundings or subsumed into the architecture? Given that the International Style became the most popular mode of design for the newly constructed office buildings, in the absence of applied ornamentation, how were these structures to be inviting to their occupants and enticing to prospective renters?22 Critics and architects were aware of this problem. Stripped facades and interiors could be cold and sterile, instead of positively conveying modernity. A 1956 Architectural Forum feature article, in which Chermayeff lingered on the necessity of ornament in lobbies, was devoted to these spaces. The editor noted that, “A lobby always has been the face to a building’s body, and now that more and more buildings are being clothed in factory-made armor, this unmasked face is even more vital than before.”23 Art had to be tactically chosen and properly displayed to improve the image of the parent company. The article continues,

22 This movement was defined in the eponymous exhibition and catalog— Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson. The International Style: Architecture Since 1922. The Museum of Modern Art, 1932. It appeared from February 10- March 23, 1932. This emerging movement was unified by the architect’s interest in thinking of buildings as framing volumes instead of constructed masses, modularity in design, functional flexibility, the technical perfection of structural materials, the dispensing with applied ornament; instead creating visual interest through component’s proportions, and their relation to the composition as a whole. For the International Style’s dominance in postwar office skyscrapers see Eric Peter Nash and Norman McGrath, Manhattan Skyscrapers. Princeton Architectural Press, 1999. See also Ada Louise Huxtable, The Tall Building Artistically Reconsidered: the Search for a Skyscraper Style. Pantheon Books, 1984.

“Those architects and clients who are resisting the inevitable pressure to make lobbies uniform and unambitious have to justify their resistance in economic terms.”\textsuperscript{24} For those who resisted spending money on art, the case could be made that a well-designed lobby would pay dividends by impressing visiting clients and attracting others to lease office space. It made good business sense.

Most writers who addressed the role of contemporary art in lobbies sought the “integration”\textsuperscript{25} of art and architecture. For instance, Jimmy Ernst’s 1959 panoramic, sweeping mural, punctuated with projecting easel-scale compositions, \textit{The Riches of Nebraska}, (fig. 2) commissioned by the Continental National Bank in Lincoln, was praised for its integration with the architecture by its, “harmony with the colors and materials of the interior structure”.\textsuperscript{26} Where Ernst’s mural accommodated its palette to the construction materials in its vicinity, another mode of integration was demonstrated by Isamu Noguchi. In 1957, he was commissioned to create a total sculptural environment for the lobby of 666 Fifth Avenue, immediately adjacent to Rockefeller Center. He installed an undulating ceiling of semi-transparent white plastic, its fluid forms echoed in a nearby wall-mounted metallic sculptural water feature. Noguchi created a total sculptural environment fused to the architectural surfaces; structural as opposed to chromatic integration.

Simply blending in was not sufficient for renown critic Ada Louise Huxtable who advocated for “apposition.” She argued that the Industrial Revolution and modernism had

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} For a discussion of this term by a noted modernist sculptor, who had a keen interest in architecture and the potential to combine the two see Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, “Issue of Integration,” \textit{Progressive Architecture}, vol. 34, February 1953, pg. 77.
\textsuperscript{26} “Bank Mural Judged Best for Art, Integration With Interior,” \textit{Architectural Record}, vol. 125, no. 2, February 1959, pg. 346.
led to a separation of the arts that should be embraced instead of awkwardly forced back together, as this would evince both a misunderstanding of history and the development of art. She praised apposition, the alternative to integration, as—

…enrichment by juxtaposition, completion by contrast… to enhance and enlarge the sensuous appeal of a contemporary work of architecture in such a way that the building is greater than it would have been without it. It emphasizes strong counterpoint rather than close harmony… it goes beyond mere elaboration or decoration to provide sharp, judicious and extremely meaningful accent to the strict simplicity of contemporary architectural forms… The individualized, warmly human touch of the personally created work of art is a natural complement and proper completion for today’s standardized, impersonal construction of mass-produced modular elements.27

Sculpture’s literal separation from the structure around it allowed it to function with greater apposition than a painting hung on a wall or a mural literally fused with the architecture.28 Of all the examples she illustrated in her article, only one featured painting, the remainder were free-standing sculptures, mosaic, stained glass, and patterned screens.29 The facture of artworks called attention to their status as singular, hand-crafted objects, an antidote to the machine-made regularity and modularity of International Style architectural components, providing much-needed aesthetic warmth.

28 When paintings were purchased or commissioned, they were frequently placed in executive areas such as at the Manufacturers Trust (Chapter 1), the Chase Manhattan bank branch at 410 Park Avenue (Chapter 3), and Inland Steel headquarters in Chicago (Chapter 4). There, they met with a smaller audience. Given the elite status of executives and their clients, paintings displayed in these spaces conveyed different types of messages than the sculptures displayed in the lobbies below. Painting was used to validate their privileged status.
29 The paintings she illustrated occupied a private lobby on the upper floors of the Seagram Building. All of her other examples were sited where they could be viewed by the public.
Meyer Schapiro similarly argued for the humanity of abstraction, which he felt was, “an obvious and necessary enrichment of our lives.”

Within the context of an office tower, large-scale paintings might have read as architectural “cladding”, a term much maligned within the International Style. By occupying real space, sculpture could more powerfully engage its architectural context. Its placement could help visitors make sense of the various functional zones of a building, and provide a transition between an overall reading of the sculptural mass of a building when seen from afar, and the more human-scaled area of the lobby. The works commissioned for mid-century office tower lobbies were mainly large in scale—hovering between human and the architectural. A particular type of sculpture, namely that which utilized materials and fabrication techniques from the world of industry, appealed to executives because this art seemed to embody the activities of experimentation, development, engineering and industrial design, that were important in an increasingly technology and research-driven field of business enterprise.

The Architectural History of Lobbies and Their Precedents

The notion of a lobby is somewhat nebulous, especially because of its numerous historical antecedents. Transitional spaces appear in a host of building types—from the narthex of Gothic cathedrals, Bernini’s “arms” at the Vatican piazza, grand entryways in

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Baroque palaces, and the claustrophobic reception halls in Victorian townhouses. Transition in architecture is nearly ubiquitous in the discipline. It is difficult to think of structures that do not attempt to mark the change from exterior to interior in some fashion. To list all of the possible forerunners of lobbies—from prehistoric passage tombs to airlocks on the International Space Station—would consume a great many pages.

The postwar treatment of the lobby was in high contrast to their appointment in the first wave of skyscraper construction in America. Prestigious projects like the Woolworth Building (1912), the Chrysler Building (1930), and the Empire State Building (1931) featured lobbies encrusted with precious materials, especially marble, and adorned with applied ornamentation of sculpture and gilding. Visitors were meant to be dazzled by the sheer weight of it all, both in terms of actual bulk and in the preciousness of the materials utilized. Similarly, the exteriors of these buildings were clad in bulky stone and topped with sculptural flourishes. These designs increased the visual impact of the building while they obscured their interior structure. An editor at *Architectural Forum* reviewing lobby design in 1956, slipped into reverie when thinking about these older structures: “I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls was the descriptive lyric for almost any lobby a few years ago… but the design tune is changing.”

After World War II, with modernism in vogue, there arrived a new philosophy at odds with the previous architectural paradigm. Instead of bulky applied ornament, architects stripped their facades to call attention to the building’s underlying structure.

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Despite this shift in thinking, the lobby remained an important place for impressing clients and tenants. Lobby art was given a greater responsibility, bearing the onus of decoration and signification that was previously performed by the overall appointment of materials and ornament. All of the physical and conceptual weight associated with the previous mode was consolidated into single works of art. The art chosen had to simultaneously read as abstraction, while being open enough in its symbolism to communicate a flexible range of interpretations about the specific building, the corporate identity it housed, and larger economic ideologies in which these institutions thrived.

Lobbies are the most public area of a building as well as the visitor’s and worker’s first visual impression after viewing its exterior. Advertising and public relations, the other components of corporate identity, are more ephemeral but also more wide-reaching. Art had been commissioned and used by big business in the first half of the twentieth century, but only through figurative work.34 A lobby is a physical place, an

34 In the 1930s, corporations in Los Angeles sponsored figurative murals in their lobbies, which crafted a version of local history positioning themselves as instrumental for the economy and society’s prosperous development. Muralists may have been paid to valorize their patrons but the work for the Los Angeles Times building and their frank depiction of laborers showed that there was the possibility for commissioned works to subtly critique their patron or at least obliquely refer to a troubled time in their past i.e. their union busting efforts. See Monica Jovanovich-Kelley, “The Apotheosis of Power: Corporate Mural Commissions in Los Angeles During the 1930s,” Public Art Dialogue, vol. 4, no. 1, pgs. 42-70. Other business entities like the Ford Motor Company and the Bitumous Coal Institute commissioned figurative modernist artists to create images depicting, respectively, their manufacturing centers or allegories of the importance of consumer products in the country’s development. In 1927, Sheeler was hired by Ford to photograph their River Rouge manufacturing plant. These images were used to advertise the Model A. Later, he returned to the scene to paint the location in his precisionist style. Most notable is American Landscape, 1930, in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, object no. 166.1934. For Kent’s work for the Bitumous Coal Institute see Eric J. Schruers, “Interpreting the Real and the Ideal: Rockwell Kent’s Lost Bitumous Coal Series Rediscovered.” Southeastern College Art Conference Review, vol. 13, no. 3, December 1998, pgs. 241-255. After the paintings were used for advertisements, they were given to university mineral science departments, including Penn State University. Also see Falhman and Schruers. Wonders of Work and Labor: the Steidle Collection of American Industrial Art, Penn State Press, 2008.

Of any 20th century attempt to fuse large-scale art and prestige architecture within a semi-public space, Rockefeller Center stands alone. Built from 1930 to 1939, Rockefeller Center’s commissioned sculptures, paintings and reliefs in polychromed stone and polished stainless-steel valorized labor, celebrated the dissemination of news, constructed an idealized vision of American history, and attempted linkages between classical mythology and contemporary business. News (1940), by Isamu Noguchi, created
environment in which modern art, architecture, and furniture were orchestrated to construct an idealized, and experiential, conception of a corporation. International Style architecture was distinctive for its maximization of visual transparency through the conspicuous use of glass curtain walls. Physical transparency made an argument for the legibility of what the corporation claimed to be and do. Transparency was an invitation to look inside, thereby elevating the aesthetic valuation of the lobby over the façade, a feat newly possible with modern materials and engineering.

The Challenge and Potential of Corporate-Sponsored Abstraction During the Cold War

The notion that postwar corporations and the federal government co-opted and repurposed modern art for their ideological agenda was revelatory when first discussed by scholars in the 1970s, but it has since become a cliché. Recently, scholars such as

for the entrance to the Associated Press Building, was at the time of its production the world’s largest cast stainless steel bas-relief. Noguchi went on to be one of the most sought-after artists for corporate office towers in the postwar period. See Cross, Louise. “The Sculpture for Rockefeller Center.” *Parnassus*, vol. 4, no. 5, October, 1932 and Krinsky, Carol. *Rockefeller Center*, Oxford University Press, 1978. Its sunken court carried pretensions of an omphalos, eventually to be surrounded by a series of international-themed pavilions. This plan was stymied by the rise of German fascism. John D. Rockefeller’s interest in aligning his architectural project with the avant-garde backfired when he invited Diego Rivera to adorn the lobby of the RCA Building. Rivera’s depiction of Communist politicians led the mural to be whitewashed. For a discussion of Rivera’s *Man at the Crossroads* (1932) see Alice Friedman, “The Cultured Corporation, Art, Architecture and the Postwar Office Building,” in *Architectures of Display, Department Stores and Modern Retail*, edited by Anca Lasc, Patricia Lara-Betancourt, and Margaret Maile Petty, Routledge, 2018, pgs. 233-248. Rockefeller’s son David, would come to play an integral role in the creation and popularization of corporate arts commissioning and collecting, recognized both art’s potential for ennobling its patron as well as confusing or angering the public at large, building on the lessons of his father’s ambitious projects. David Rockefeller would create a virtual Rockefeller Center of his own—twice! First at Chase One Plaza (1961) where he was the bank’s president, and again at a larger scale through his leadership in creating the World Trade Center (1972).

Alex J. Taylor and Joshua Shannon have taken up this inquiry, adding complexity and revision to this now well-trod narrative. They have shown that the ideology marshalled by abstraction was not as monolithic as previously stated. This dissertation gives further nuance and correction to this Cold War narrative. The projects discussed in the following chapters developed at a unique time in American history where a robust economy and a sense of unbridled optimism about the future were shot through with anxiety over threats from abroad and social tensions at home, which would boil over in the late 1960s. The challenge for artists and architects in the 1950s and early 1960s was how to develop a new visual language to communicate the particularity and potential of the present moment when the country’s future was all but clear.

Artists had to negotiate between expressing their individual vision to a wide public and accommodating the desires of their patron. Such a potentially contested endeavor gave artists the opportunity to tackle a spectrum of issues not possible within a more conventional arena like a museum or gallery. The very best responses to this challenge found their patron’s approval while simultaneously offering a critique of the nature of work, its hierarchies, and the way individuals interact with and move through the constructed architectural spaces of labor; subjects not readily discussed by corporate executives and real estate developers.


36 Alex J. Taylor’s work has been especially nuanced in its study of corporate patronage, the absorption of abstraction into apolitical mass culture, and the personal politics of artists like Alexander Calder that went in opposition to the prevailing political narrative of abstraction by the federal government in their international exhibitions of American art which sought to advertise the freedom of expression and individuality offered by a capitalist democracy in contrast to the communist way of life promoted by their Cold War nemesis- the Soviet Union. Joshua Shannon, The Disappearance of Objects: New York Art and the Rise of the Postmodern City. Yale University Press, 2009. Shannon looked at a handful of artists who used the changing city of Manhattan as their raw subject matter at the very same time that late modernist sculpture was installed in newly built office towers.
The following examples were chosen for their ability to make convincing arguments about the value and perpetuity of the capitalist system through a variety of visual means, especially through quasi-organic metaphors on or near a surface level of visual analysis. By taking the time to look deeper, a range of alternative potential readings and narratives can be revealed, often in direct opposition to their patron’s intentions. Abandoning the modernist myth of the work of art’s autonomy, abstraction entered into the spaces of work. Its direct association with big business and moneyed interests has caused these works of art to evade the scrutiny they deserve. By taking the time to look and think deeply, a richer sense of the aspirations and anxieties of the public, business executives, and the artists charged with mediating these groups will be brought to light.

Lobby art addressed the issue of temporality. Many bear a monument-like quality. Instead of serving to commemorate the historical past, they aimed to canonize the moment of their creation. Art was marshalled to express optimism for the country’s future and citizens encouraged to take part in the aggrandizement of democracy through conspicuous consumption. Instead of simply reading the artworks in the following chapters as tokens of unbridled enthusiasm for the capitalist system and faith in its continuing flourish, they also sought to preserve this era for posterity. There is a sense of anxiety in this effort, disclosing that the future of capitalism and America’s privileged status was in question at the very moment when prevailing cultural narratives promised ever greater triumphs. The subsequent adoption, in the late 1960s to mid-1970s,

37 This rationale is rarely stated explicitly but the fact that there is such a paucity of scholarship on this subject speaks volumes in its very silence.
of corporate modernist aesthetics by federal public art programs continued this act of memorializing the halcyon days of postwar America in monumental forms of abstraction.

**Defining the Term ‘Corporate’**

Before going any further, it is essential that the term ‘corporate,’ be explicitly defined. The word lends itself to abstraction, obscuring more than it elucidates. One of the roles of lobby art was to ground this linguistic abstraction, albeit paradoxically, in formalist abstraction. This ambiguity is not a product of historical distance, contemporary writers also took issue with explicitly defining what corporations were, and their societal role. Andrew Hacker’s 1966 *New York Times* article, “A Country Called Corporate America,” dealt with this contested notion—

Part of the problem is that if Americans are suspicious of bigness, they are not really clear about just what it is about large corporations that troubles them… Our commentaries in this area are piecemeal and sporadic. We have the vocabularies for criticizing both ‘big government’ and ‘big labor’ but the image of the large corporation is a hazy one, and despite its everyday presence in our midst our reaction to its very existence is uncertain… Unfortunately, it is far easier to think in terms of actual individuals than of impersonal institutions… We are reaching the point where corporate power is a force in its own right, for all intents and purposes independent of the men who in its name make the decisions.  

Hacker attributes this increasing ambiguity about corporations through the first half of the twentieth century to the growing power of stockholders. Their influence shaped the way businesses made decisions. Large organizations gradually became less identified with singular figures like Andrew Carnegie or Nelson Rockefeller with the rise of antitrust legislation. Hacker concludes that the public cannot expect corporations to act in

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society’s interest because they exist solely to create profit. The aforementioned figures’ philanthropic activities did little to change the public's valuation of their business practices.

Part of the ambiguity of this term traces back to the origins of a corporation, also known as a limited liability company. A legal agreement is undertaken by a group of investors so that in the event of a lawsuit or the company’s bankruptcy, individuals will only lose the money they initially invested and will not be held financially accountable in hypothetical future lawsuits. Given the notion of a group of people legally and financially bound together under an invented name, corporations bear a strange dual identity as both a single entity and the accumulation of many personal interests under legal protection. The 14th Amendment was passed in 1868 to grant equal rights and due process to all American citizens in the Reconstruction era, but subsequent cases used the amendment to solidify the personhood status of corporations. Many of the artworks discussed in this dissertation dealt with this quality of corporations via part-to-whole relationships between their sculptural materials. Viewers visually oscillated between the artwork’s composition

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39 There are a number of approachable and informative introductions to the development of corporations. For instance, see John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Company: A Short History of a Revolutionary Idea*. Phoenix, 2005.

40 In 1886 Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Rail Road, Chief Justice Morrison Waite proclaimed in his verdict that the notion that corporations have equal protection, just as citizens, under the 14th Amendment, is uncontested in the legal world. This was used as a precedent for many later cases in the 19th and 20th centuries. This ambiguous status has been further complicated by legislation like the paradoxically named 2010 Citizens United case which gave corporations the right to spend money freely on election campaigns as if they were people. See Adam Winkler, *We the Corporations, How American Business Won Their Civil Rights*. Liveright, 2018. The oddity of this situation was well illustrated with Mitt Romney’s 2011 gaff at the Iowa State Fair, during his presidential election campaign when he responded to angry protesters, “Corporations are people, my friend,” only to further rile them. See Philip Rucker, “Mitt Romney Says ‘Corporations Are People’,” *The Washington Post*, August 11, 2011, accessed online January 27, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/mitt-romney-says-corporations-are-people/2011/08/11/gIQABwZ38I_story.html.
as a whole and its constituent components, thereby validating the qualities of participation and group action within the world of work.

To avoid monolithic thinking, this dissertation looks at a variety of business types—financial institutions, speculative real estate developers, and manufacturers. Because the commissioning of art and the construction of prestige, large-scale buildings located in densely populated cities required significant capital investment, the study deals with financially successful organizations. No matter the influence of any single person within these companies, no organization is led single-mindedly; most major decisions were made by committee. The notion of a single executive dictating the actions of a corporation by mercurial whims is untenable. The following chapters present numerous examples of executives giving up a measure of their control, heeding to the advice and expertise of architects, artists and art institution professionals.

Another assumption that must be questioned is the nature of ownership of prestige architectural projects, especially skyscrapers. All of the buildings that will be addressed, with one exception, qualify for this designation. Skyscrapers were the most likely place to find abstraction in a semi-public setting at this period. Like corporations, skyscrapers

41 The notion of what defines a skyscraper has changed with the increasing advancement in structural engineering. Tall buildings were made possible and logistically sound by the invention of the elevator. Given this essential technology, a skyscraper could be defined as a building taller than that which could be comfortably scaled by stairs. Most buildings without elevators are capped around six stories. Any number of floors greater than this could technically qualify as a skyscraper, although given the number of much taller structures in major urban centers, this designation might necessitate some qualification. The exception in my dissertation to the study of skyscrapers is the Manufacturers Trust (Chapter 1). The building is a squat, four-story volume of glass and steel serving both as a bank and offices for executives as well as dining amenities to entertain clients. While it does not quality in height, the argument will be made that it expresses prestige, success and architectural novelty in terms of absence, namely the boldness of the choice on the part of Horace Flannigan, the bank’s president, to build small despite the fact that maximum profit for the building would be found in its vertical extension and leasing office space to outside organizations. Surrounded, as it is, by stone-clad skyscrapers of an earlier generation.

42 One exception to this would be ‘corporate campuses’ which were a new concept developed at this time. Mirroring middle class flight from urban centers to the growing suburbs, these campuses were modeled on
are usually referred to by a single name, which carries the implication that the occupants are similarly derived from a single company. The vast majority of skyscrapers are at least partially speculative real estate investments, implying the creation of office space in excess of what the financier plans to use themselves, with the expectation that it will be leased at a profit. This is true for the buildings at the focus of Chapter 2 and Chapter 5. These office towers were created by the Kaufman family of real estate developers who shifted their interest away from erecting apartment buildings in the years after World War II to office buildings. The structures discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 bore the name of a single company but their employees and executives only occupied a portion of their floorspace. The remainder was leased to offset the costs of construction, utilities, and maintenance of the structure. Speculative real estate skyscrapers were not relegated to the postwar period. Throughout their early history, buildings like the Singer, Metropolitan Life and Woolworth were primarily speculative. Carol Willis, Gail Fenske, and Deryck Holdsworth have drawn attention to this basic fact about most skyscraper design, that has frequently been elided.\textsuperscript{43}

The Turn Against ‘Lobby Art’ in the 1960s

During the 1950s and early 1960s, abstraction in the lobbies of office towers was mainly talked about positively, but it was not discussed as if it was a discrete category of art. The high-water mark of this effort was 1962—when construction of the Pan Am Building and Chase One Plaza would provoke concern with their massive scale, and reshaping of the city. The real estate boom in Manhattan was similarly seen with favor during the 1950s, but unbridled optimism about The New would come to be re-evaluated with the 1962 destruction of Penn Station, germinating into the architectural preservation movement. It was only when enough examples had been amassed that “lobby art” became a term and category in its own right. In essence, the term’s appearance coincided with its demise.

At the term’s inception, appearing frequently in popular periodicals, often capitalized or set in quotes, the phrase carried a derisive connotation. It appears capitalized and in quotes in John P. Sedgwick’s *Discovering Modern Art: The Intelligent Layman’s Guide to Painting from Impressionism to Pop* (1966), “more superficial contemporaries whose work (like a good deal of Renaissance Mannerist painting), is best seen at a brisk walk through the room in which it hangs, and might therefore be referred to as “Lobby Art,””\(^44\) and is set in quotes in a 1967 article in *The Nation*—“They are degraded to ‘lobby art’.”\(^45\) This does not mean art’s usage in such spaces was not discussed previously. As I have already laid bare, the effort to integrate art and modern architecture had taken place in print, in conferences, and in practice for over a decade.

\(^45\) *The Nation*, vol. 204, no. 3, March 1967, pg. 474.
The fact that ‘lobby art’ was now a recognizable category registered that there were enough examples to allow for a generalized term. By 1972, Barbara Rose of *New York Magazine* noted that, “most of the art people see is not in museums but in banks, offices and lobbies.”\(^{46}\) The phrase referred to a particular type of abstract art, not simply anything decorative placed in a lobby setting. The most commonly referred to type of art in these settings was composed of, “scraps of welded metal.”\(^{47}\) Art was seen as one component of an increasingly recognizable kit of parts. Critic Russell Lynes conducted an informal tour of Manhattan’s lobbies and came up with a general means of classifying them. He divided lobbies into the, “genteel… flamboyant… opulent… businesslike… cozy… (and) nondescript.”\(^{48}\) As for the “businesslike” lobby, he felt that the majority of, “the new building(s) scream ‘Modern’ as the old muttered ‘Ancient’.”\(^{49}\) He typified their decoration as focused around sculpture placed—

against the lobby walls (with colored lights behind it) as phony as the plastic rhododendrons and ferns which fringe the glass fountain in the center lighted with green and/or pink neon. There is something monumentally mingy about it. Unlike the old apartment-house lobbies, the new ones frequently start at the sidewalk, with little transition except a glass door from the outside to the inside. Fountains outside are an introduction to fountains inside, and they play over metal abstractions that are meant to look like the sculpture they imitate but misunderstand.\(^{50}\)

\(^{47}\) Vicki Goldberg. “Mondrian is a Paper Napkin, Now that America’s All Out for Art, Brancusi will be a Doorknob,” *Horizon* Vol. 5, Issue 5, 1963, pgs. 90, 91. Every work of sculpture discussed in this dissertation was composed of welded metal of varying types. There are two notable exceptions to this within 1950s lobby art—Isamu Noguchi was a sculptor who received many commercial commissions. He worked almost exclusively in the traditional material of carved stone. His *Red Cube* (1968) made for the Marine Bank plaza in Downtown Manhattan is an outlier in his oeuvre in that it too was made of painted and welded steel. Constantino Nivola was another sculptor favored by mid-century modernist architects. He created notable commissions for the Olivetti showroom in Manhattan (1954) and the Morse and Ezra Stiles Colleges at Yale University (1958-62) designed by Eero Saarinen. Nivola worked almost exclusively in sand-cast concrete.
\(^{49}\) Ibid.
\(^{50}\) Ibid.
In addition to apartment buildings, ‘lobby art’ was increasingly, “a genre much in favor with New York’s commercial architecture”, especially at the locus of the construction boom in Midtown.\textsuperscript{51} For many people, by the early 1960s, art’s appearance in such places was becoming, “the bane of Park and Madison Avenue’s new skyscrapers.”\textsuperscript{52} In this context, art became uncomfortably associated with commerce and real estate speculation, no longer able to effectively communicate nuanced messages about its patrons, and to validate the role of individual employees within a workplace’s hierarchy.

Lobbies were becoming as uniform in design as the workers who passed them every day. Vicki Goldberg of \textit{Horizon} magazine pondered this situation stating, “you’d think the Organization Man would prize original art as one of the few areas where the unique is still available, standing as he does by the pit of conformity that yawns at his feet.”\textsuperscript{53} This quote shows a slight misunderstanding of the situation. The phrase “Organization Man,” derived from William H. Whyte’s 1956 study of mid-century corporate culture, refers to white collar workers who make up the bulk of a corporation.\textsuperscript{54} The decision whether or not to include artwork in the lobby of a building, and to determine what type of art was appropriate, would be an executive decision, not one determined by the employee’s popular vote.

Novelty had given way to banality. A perceptible shift had occurred—art that had once caused throngs of pedestrians to stop and gawk, now passed it by without a moment

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{The Nation}, vol. 204, 1967, pg. 474.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Art International} Vol. 10, Part 1, pg. 64
\textsuperscript{53} Vicki Goldberg. “Mondrian is a Paper Napkin, Now that America’s All Out for Art, Brancusi will be a Doorknob,” \textit{Horizon} Vol. 5, Issue 5, 1963, pgs. 90, 91.
\textsuperscript{54} William H. Whyte. \textit{The Organization Man}. Simon and Schuster, 1956.
of consideration.\textsuperscript{55} As art in these types of spaces became more ubiquitous, it could no longer hold viewer’s attention. It had become, “the non-art category of “Lobby Art”—visual Muzak.”\textsuperscript{56} Receding into the background of one’s visual experience it became something, “best seen at a brisk walk through the room in which it hangs”.\textsuperscript{57} For some, its presence became something of a nuisance that, “won’t keep me interested long enough to pass the time till the elevator comes. It’s orphan art; nobody loves it and nobody wants it for itself.”\textsuperscript{58} Goldberg’s quote seems to say something about the nature of lobbies in excess of how they are decorated. As a transitional space, the objects located within them neither seem to belong to the building’s owner, nor are fully offered to the workers and tenants above. It is a type of limbo space, meant to pass through without fully taking into consideration. And it was not always clear why certain artworks were selected for display, or by whom. It was almost as if a sculpture in the lobby was becoming an expected feature, instead of an intentional choice. Goldberg bemoaned, “what committee chooses lobby art anyway?”\textsuperscript{59} Her statement reveals what many people were coming to feel about lobby art—that it was the product of administrative consensus instead of a true artistic creation from the hand of an individual. The people deciding what work to include were thought of as having no credentials to justify their choices. Lobby art seemed increasingly to be a manifestation of anonymous executives with little aesthetic taste.

\textsuperscript{55} For instance, inquisitive figures were captured in photographs standing outside of the Manufacturers Trust and the Inland Steel Building, gazing through the glass walls at the sculptures displayed beyond. 
\textsuperscript{56} Barbara Rose, \textit{New York Magazine}, vol. 5, no. 5, June 4, 1972, pg. 47. The relationship between actual Muzak, its historical development, and lobby art is discussed at the end of Chapter 5. 
\textsuperscript{57} John P. Sedgwick, \textit{Discovering Modern Art: The Intelligent Layman’s Guide to Painting from Impressionism to Pop}. 1966, Random House, pg. 204 
\textsuperscript{58} Vicki Goldberg 
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
A 1963 *Life* presented “Life Guide- Displays of Modern Art in City Buildings,” tracking the emerging phenomenon and listing many of the projects discussed in this dissertation, including Inland Steel, but only mentioning the work by Richard Lippold in its lobby.\(^6^0\) The author must have been familiar with *Hero*.\(^6^1\) (fig. 3) A cartoon accompanying the *Life* article depicts lobby art come to life- bestial mouth agape, it leans towards and threatens to eviscerate a startled businessman holding a briefcase. He recoils from its razor-sharp maw, raising his arm in a pathetic attempt of self-defense.\(^6^2\) This must be at least somewhat tongue-in-cheek given the introductory paragraph immediately adjacent which avers, “some of the new art springs right out at you as you go past and some of it needs a little neck-craning to find. Almost all of it is well worth going a few blocks out of the way to see.”\(^6^3\) The author’s cheeky, albeit positive tone in conjunction with the cartoon seems to lampoon the uninformed and unaware public as much as the art which inspires fright. It is a caution to developers, architects and executives to consider the ignorance or reticence to modern art by their future audience. Throughout this dissertation, more ‘difficult’ work, or that which is not so transparently aligned with the constructed identity of the patron, was displayed away from the masses in elite areas occupied by figures at the apex of organizational hierarchies.\(^6^4\)


\(^6^1\) A photograph of *Hero* was published in Edgar Kaufmann Jr., “The Inland Steel Building and Its Art,” *Art in America*, vol. 45, no. 4, Winter 1957-58, pg. 27.

\(^6^2\) “Life Guide- Displays of Modern Art in City Buildings,” *Life Magazine*, vol. 55, no. 6, August 9, 1963, pg. 14. The caption underneath the cartoon reads, “Modern art can be a big surprise to the unsuspecting passer-by.”

\(^6^3\) Ibid.

\(^6^4\) Another example of this is the second generation Abstract Expressionist Sam Francis’ 1959 mural commissioned for a Chase Manhattan Bank branch at 410 Park Avenue (Chapter 4).
Recovering the Value of ‘Lobby Art’

My study spans from 1954 to 1962, concentrating on Manhattan in New York City as an incubator for this unique aesthetic of corporate modernism. Chapter 4 presents a project from Chicago to show both the means by which this aesthetic was disseminated throughout major American metropolitan areas, and eventually abroad, as well as paying homage to the long shadow of influence these two cities have cast over skyscraper design. The dissertation ends during a period when public and critical appreciation for this type of art was shifting. This fracturing enthusiasm related to a variety of factors—real estate trends, the cooperation of big business and government in altering the urban landscape on an unprecedented scale, the rise of architectural preservationist groups, nascent postmodernist architecture, new forms of avant-garde art, and the proliferation of second-rate ‘lobby art’ viewed as an expected feature of prestige, profit-oriented, architecture.

Given that the term ‘lobby art’ came into being at its relative critical demise, the negative associations with this phrase have largely carried through to the present. The dismissiveness of this category has obscured the fact that corporate-sponsored abstraction enjoyed a period when it was considered novel, interesting, and generally met with favor by critics and the public. This dissertation aims to remedy the paucity of scholarship and interest in these endeavors. Instead of attempting to trace an entire history of 20th century corporate-sponsored American abstraction, the chapters are organized around five projects that wedded International Style architecture and abstraction in novel and

65 Chapter 1 discusses a relatively squat bank building, but the majority of ‘lobby art’ is associated with tall office towers.
interesting ways at the very height of the effort to integrate art and architecture’s popular and critical appeal, offering the artists involved the greatest potential to address issues in excess of those offered by traditional art venues, and occasionally at odds with the intentions of the patron.

There are identifiable qualities that many of the works share. Successful projects were able to call attention to their architectural context in a way not conventionally seen in museums or galleries. (This would be a prominent feature of later movements like minimalism and installation art that directly called attention to the physical and architectural space in which they were displayed, but it was a novel feature of modernist art). Returning to Chermayeff’s introductory quote, the well-designed lobby controls the movement of its occupants. Art acted as a beacon to draw a visitor’s attention to various functional loci within the site and prescribe their movement through the building (Chapter 4). Other types of abstraction served as visual or literal barriers to prevent access to parts of the building where only certain people were allowed (Chapter 1). Additionally, art was used to transition from one’s experience of the building’s overall sculptural massing, when seen from the street, to encountering the more human-scaled space of the lobby.66 Works referred directly to tangible parts of the building like its escalators (Chapter 1), elevator shaft (Chapter 2), HVAC systems (Chapter 3) and entrances (Chapter 5). Sculptures and paintings had to perform a paradoxical role in that they simultaneously functioned as self-contained units of high culture and as didactic

66 A precedent for this function of lobby art is sculptural ornamentation framing a building’s entrance. A successful example of this is Louis Sullivan’s 1899 Carson Pirie Scott Building. Its street level is distinguished from the upper floors by a contrast of materials—ornamental bronze below and glazed ceramic tile above. At the corner entrance, the bronze work expands in complexity and scale.
aids, clarifying their specific architectural context and communicating the constructed identity of their corporate patron.

State of the Scholarship

There is a paucity of literature dealing specifically with lobby art. In short, no monograph exists on the subject. There have been celebratory publications on particular corporate collections like Art at Work on Chase Manhattan and museum exhibitions like the Whitney’s 1960 Business Buys American Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts’ 1979 Art Inc.: American Paintings from Corporate Collections. ARTnews and the International Art Alliance have published directories of corporate art collections, a subject discussed by Charlotte Appleyard and James Salzman. Works like Corporate Art and Privatizing Culture have dealt primarily with the role of corporations in the explosion of the art market in the 1980s, the former work so rooted in the practice of sociology that individual artworks are neglected.

There have been a handful of dissertations which deal with similar issues. In 2015, Amanda Ann Douberley completed The Corporate Model: Sculpture, Architecture, and the American City, 1946-1975, at the University of Texas, Austin. She covers some of the projects discussed in this chapter, but quite briefly. She covers a much greater time

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period, and types of examples, including the second wave of American public art in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 2017, Emily S. Warner completed the dissertation *Abstraction Unframed: Abstract Murals at Midcentury* at the University of Pennsylvania concerning abstract murals associated with Manhattan skyscrapers. She is currently developing this project into a book of the same title. Her work dealt primarily with notions of reception and the ambiguous notion of whom was the intended audience for such works. I am interested primarily in the role of abstract sculpture and its relationship to its site. There has yet to be a scholarly work that has read lobby art within its architectural context and addressed notions of reception and corporate identity construction.

**Justifying the Selection of Buildings**

This dissertation covers the years from 1954 to 1963 and presents five important examples of ‘lobby art’ at its most potent and fertile time when it acted as a novel mode of corporate interior decoration and identity construction. Abstract art displayed within these spaces performed a didactic function of visually rendering what a corporation was or wanted to be, both as a physical entity and as an integral component of society. The legibility of such messages was complicated and occasionally contested by the variety of actors involved, whether they were corporate executives, artists, art selection committees composed of museum professionals, architects, real estate developers, or the local government. The plurality of voices makes this subject noteworthy.
This study is not focused on a single building type or patron but instead analyzes a select, but varied group of buildings which incorporated abstraction into International Style architecture to argue for its potential to speak to a variety of patrons and structures serving different purposes. Two chapters deal with a flagship branch of a major financial institution (Chapters 1 and 3), two feature speculative office towers (Chapter 2 and 5), and one deals with the headquarters of a corporation (Chapter 4). Abstraction sited in dense metropolises rewards scrutiny because of the tremendous diversity of its potential audience. The other major venues to see large-scale abstraction outside of galleries and museums during this period were universities and ‘corporate campuses.’ Access to corporate and educational campuses were more restricted, both by socio-economic demographics and the vetting involved in the employment of white-collar workers respectively. The challenge for art in lobbies was to speak on behalf of a corporate body as well to the individual employees who worked within its hierarchy.

This dissertation focuses on the major urban center of New York City, where skyscrapers first came into being in the second half of the nineteenth century.\(^{70}\) Manhattan continued to be an incubator for skyscraper design through the Great Depression and beyond.\(^{71}\) The golden age of ‘lobby art’ was rooted specifically in the Grand Central area of Midtown boasting a high concentration of prestige International Style construction. Chapter 4 deals with Inland Steel, the first skyscraper erected on the Loop since the 1930s\(^ {72}\) to show how the corporate-sponsored branch of the International Style construction was a noteworthy change in post-Depression corporate architecture.


\(^{72}\) The Prudential Building (1955) was the first skyscraper built in Chicago after the Great Depression. It is located just off the Loop, next to what is now known as Millennium Park at 130 E. Randolph Street. It was designed by Naess & Murphy (later renamed Murphy & Associates) in the International Style, set on a
Style (paradoxically rooted in a definable and precise geographic region) came to be disseminated to other major American cities and beyond.\textsuperscript{73} Inland Steel was chosen for analysis not only for the city’s historical promotion of tall buildings but also to show how one of the International Style’s most persuasive champions—the architectural firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill—was itself styled on the model of a corporation, a quality which appealed to its like-minded clientele. Such a corporate body, spread across the country, and eventually with international locations, depended on a complex system of communication. Chicago is an apt location for this concept because of its historical status as a nexus for both tangible goods (notably grain and cattle) and more abstract economic speculation epitomized by the Chicago Board of Trade.\textsuperscript{74} Chapter 4 shows how Chicago evolved its networks of communication from telegraphs and railroad lines in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, to the employment of the most sophisticated technology available for organizing production, packaging, marketing and distribution during the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century. In the conclusion I address the many other urban centers in which prestige architectural projects incorporated abstraction, showing that it was not relegated simply to New York and Chicago. The International Style quickly became the national style for

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\textsuperscript{73} In the 1970s, Chicago produced two renowned post-International Style works- The John Hancock Center (1968, 2\textsuperscript{nd} tallest in the world at time of topping out, tallest outside NYC, opened in 1970) and the Sears Tower (1973, overtaking the World Trade Center as the tallest in the world, a title it held for 25 years). These buildings became the most visible examples of a new school of architecture- structural expressionism. Bruce Graham, who designed Inland Steel, was the architect for both projects, working in partnership with structural engineer Fazlur Rahman Khan (who also worked on Inland Steel). Graham joined SOM in 1951 after working for Holabird and Root and stayed with the firm until his retirement in the 1980s. Graham was a collector of art like Bunshaft, both men advocated for the incorporation of modern art in their designs.

American corporations at midcentury, albeit at a time when public perceptions about lobby art were shifting.
fig. 2- Jimmy Ernst at work on *The Riches of Nebraska*, 1959, Continental National Bank, Lincoln, Nebraska, photo by Stan Wayman, the LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images.
Chapter 1

The Manufacturers Trust (1954)

When the Manufacturers Trust Bank unveiled its newest branch in the summer of 1954 in midtown Manhattan, its design turned architectural conventions on their head. (fig. 1.1) Architect Gordon Bunshaft, of the firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, dispensed with the traditional conventions of thick walls of masonry and neoclassical facades, along with their associated connotations of fortification and security. Taking their place were the largest panes of glass ever manufactured in America, visually melding the building’s interior and exterior. Passersby frequently needed first-hand knowledge to convince themselves of this transparent barrier’s veracity; “a Handi-Man every few hours removes finger and face marks left by the public,” noted a bemused critic from The New York Times. Despite some grumblings, most found the branch ‘breath-taking’. These translucent panes were held in place by thin aluminum mullions, so sinuous they visually melted under in the sun’s glow—the façade appearing as a miraculous, unbroken expanse of glass.

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75 The largest panes were located on the second floor, the double-height main banking area. They measured twenty-two feet tall, ten feet wide, and nine-sixteenths of an inch thick. They cost $1,500 apiece, over $14,000 inflated to 2019 value. They were produced by Franklin Glass Company of Butler, Pennsylvania. See Robert Walker. “A Single Pane of Glass-$1,500- Goes into Bank Branch Building,” The New York Times, July 23, 1954, pg. 34. See also Architectural Forum, vol. 101, no. 6, December, 1954 pg. 104.


78 The mullions were manufactured by General Bronze, see Progressive Architecture, vol. 35, no.12, December, 1954, pg. 58. Other applications of aluminum such as the entrance door and handrails were produced by Reynolds Aluminum. See Progressive Architecture, vol. 35, no. 3, May 1954, pgs. 172-3.
The Building

This branch was designed to be, “a showcase for service,” a phrase used repeatedly by the bank’s president and picked up in numerous critical reviews. Architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable found that the building was, “no longer architecture in the traditional sense: it is a design, not a substance, but of color, light and motion.” Structural columns of reinforced concrete, wrapped in thin veneers of white plastic, stood elegantly behind the glass curtain so that the building’s means of support were not immediately visible from the exterior. Thus, the bank was rendered visually weightless, approaching evanescence. In the daylight, it read as a hermetically sealed volume. At night, evenly bathed by fluorescent lights diffused by semi-opaque plastic panels installed full-bleed into drop ceilings, it became a luminous jewel-box. (Fig. 1.2) Its novelty drew crowds of pedestrians both day and night, and 15,000 visitors on its opening day. Non-bank members, wanting to see the interior firsthand, led to the creation of an official tour, led by one of the assistant managers.

81 The panes of glass were not technically windows because they were sealed shut, so as not to let the air conditioning escape.
The bank’s transparent shell inscribed a delicately delineated volume, especially on the double-height second-story. The first floor acted as a crystalline pedestal for the space above it, while the ribbons of dark plastic that wrapped the third and fourth floors framed the space below through contrast of materials, and their respective translucency and opacity. An editor for *Architectural Forum* critic called the building, “a true landmark in delineation of space” on account of its use of glass and its, “tremendous wealth of illumination”.\(^{85}\) This visually quantifiable, rectangular mass of air was not only architecturally framed, but mechanically improved — it was air-conditioned in the summer, heated in the winter, and evenly bathed in illumination. For the period each day when the sun’s rays fell directly upon the 5th Avenue façade, 33-foot tall, golden semi-translucent fiberglass curtains mechanically unfurled from hidden recesses, creating, in the words of its interior designer Eleanor Le Maire, “a soft film of color that would hush the sun’s glare without shutting out New York.”\(^{86}\) All these mechanical systems hidden from sight, sandwiched unobtrusively within the luminous drop ceilings on each floor, rendering them as weightless as the walls of glass beyond.

Throughout the building, there was a consistent interplay of lightness and weight. The artful balancing of material oppositions was used to refer both to the traditions of bank design and the institution’s break from outmoded conventions. Transparency argued

\(^{85}\) *Architectural Forum*, vol. 101, no. 6, December 1, 1954, pg. 104.

\(^{86}\) This is a quote from the Manufacturers Trust’s interior designer Eleanor Le Maire in 1954. Fiberglass was chosen because it was, “stretch-proof, wrinkle-proof, fire-proof, mildew-proof, rot-proof… shed dirt (and) promises never to weaken in hot sun.” See the advertisement for Owens-Corning Fiberglas, *Interiors*, vol. 25, no. 10, December, 1954, pg.14. In the same issue, the building is featured in the letters to the editor page. Two venomous paragraphs of text were printed adjacent to a miniature photograph of the building. Matthew Cantillon, the advertising manager for Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corporation, was incensed that the previous month’s article failed to mention the, “3,000 yards of Fiberglas boucle,” an editorial lapse he dubbed a, “blooper.” He went on to argue that the shimmering gold, semi-transparent drapes were, “an integral part of the interior design, and that it should have been featured as such.” This was certainly a faux-pas for a magazine which continually sold advertising space to industrial producers of construction material in conjunction with articles featuring buildings which were composed of the same products.
that banking too was becoming more open, less secretive and increasingly hospitable to
the expanding middle class. Architectural novelty might get you to walk through the
door, but customer service ensured fidelity to the institution.

The Tradition of Bank Design

The Manufacturers Trust’s unadorned structure and overall transparency went
against traditions of bank architecture, a building type derived from ancient Greek
treasuries. Historically, such treasuries were either placed in the vicinity of Greek temples
or within a temple’s cella, furthest away from the main entrance, behind several lockable
rooms, like its placement within the Parthenon. Treasuries stored ritual gifts to the
temple’s god, where they were safeguarded by the building’s caretakers.87 These
structures were also erected near places known for oracular power, most famously dotting
the approach to Delphi. (Fig. 1.3)

The treasury building type borrowed certain features from Greek temples. Both
were frontally-oriented rectangular volumes topped by a triangular roof, terminating at
either end with a pediment. Treasuries however, lacked the temple’s encompassing
stylobate. Their walls were composed of solid masonry, which could only be accessed via
a double-columned façade, through an antechamber, behind a locked door. By dispensing
with the stylobate, the building’s function of storage and protection was foregrounded.

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Because so many financial institutions were derived from these classical models, they have often been called temples of money.  

The Manufacturers Trust was not the first instance of challenging expectations for this building type. There were some exceptions to the strict adherence to Neoclassicism in bank design. For instance, Louis Sullivan’s Marquette Building in Detroit (1893-95), an important early skyscraper, featured a bank on its bottom floor. The overall design emphasized verticality in its stone-sheathed steel columns. Gilded bas-reliefs decorating the street level bank depicted the allegorical history of Detroit, its ‘discovery’ by the building’s eponymous French explorer, relations with Native Americans, and the establishment of trade. Financial institutions like banks were thus positioned as a major actor in the development of urban centers. Sullivan was responsible for some of the most unique bank designs at the end of his career when more prestigious commissions eluded him. His Mid-Western banks featured unique use of materials and decorative motifs including screens and murals to highlight the source of a bank’s wealth rooted in a particular place. He occasionally even put the vault itself on display a technique used at the Manufacturers Trust. McKim, Mead and White’s 1905 Knickerbocker Trust in New York City, although still in the Neoclassical style, became a model for the “low-scale bank.” There was a direct line of influence to the later Manufacturers Trust.

Although the Manufacturers Trust could have appeared to some as something totally without precedent, the architects built upon previous novel bank designs, retaining features that connoted strength, while incorporating new materials and artworks to argue

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89 This design was influential but not necessarily intended. The building was originally going to rise an additional nine floors but the funding for further construction dried up.
for the bank’s sensitivity to Promoting the Manufacturers Trust design, architectural firm founder Louis Skidmore stated, “We had an idea that it was time to get the banks out of mausoleums… we’re trying to make banking more human.”

Artwork at the Manufacturers Trust

The bank’s sculptural qualities were complimented by three sculptural commissions—activating and punctuating the sleek spaces within. The first sculpture masqueraded as a functional one-- a massive bank vault door, by industrial designer Henry Dreyfus with the Mosler Safe Company, located at street-level, on Fifth Avenue, just behind the wall of glass. The door exuded traditional banking characteristics of weight and fortification to connote security and financial stability, but did not perform its original function. Instead of guarding a vault, its sculptural and formal qualities were foregrounded. The gleaming, polished bronze surface was left unlocked and provocatively ajar during business hours so that pedestrians could marvel at its complex mechanical workings, like a delicate timepiece blown up to gargantuan proportions. The door did not protect assets, but was instead installed purely for the visual pleasure of passersby. Physical protection of valuables became almost redundant with the federal government’s insuring of individual’s deposits. The door instead

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91 Leif H. Olsen, “Glass Bank Lures Tourists, Deposits,” *The New York Times*, February 1955, pg. 149. The vault was located beyond a permanent grate behind the Mosler door. The security deposit boxes were accessible through a side entrance out of the visual range of clients and window shoppers.
92 The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation was established by the Banking Act of 1933 to restore trust in the American banking system during the nadir of the Great Depression. This organization is funded by
functioned in the mode of allegory, showing the bank’s continued commitment to safety and security regardless of the fact that its assets were insured through the FDIC.

Gordon Bunshaft further commissioned two abstract sculptures from artist and furniture designer Harry Bertoia. A delicate construction of metal wires, hung above the terminus of the main escalator. (Fig. 1.5) The escalator was placed in such a way that it penetrated the flor slab above, elevating individuals to the center of the double-height, main banking floor above. The sculpture appeared cloud-like in its shape and its semi-transparency to those riding upward. As one ascended, the cloud visually grew in size—transforming from something that appeared weightless and materially intangible from afar, to a visually resolved, dense network of lines, punctuated by small squares of colored metal. 93 Moving towards the sculpture at a consistent rate of speed, at a 45-degree trajectory, was a novel type of art viewing experience, analogous to a camera zooming in on a subject. Although standing on the moving conveyance was, in a sense, a passive activity, the visual interest created by the approaching sculpture, as well as the individual’s movement through real space, made this viewing experience an active affair.

Bertoia’s second commissioned sculpture was an immense, architecturally-scaled screen. It was composed of 800 plaques of enameling metal, a copper substrate traditionally fused with powdered glass by heating, brazed here with nickel and copper. Entitled *Golden Arbor*, this gleaming expanse sparked visual interest through the play of

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Bertoia created a similar sculpture, a swarm of torqued metal rods suspended from the ceiling, at the Banks Trust. Located at 280 Park Avenue (1963), the building was designed by the firm Emery Roth and Sons. Henry Dreyfus composed its interior and its decoration, including a number of decorative screens. Bertoia’s “sunburst” was installed above a stairwell connecting the bank’s executive suite on the 17th floor to a sub-executive floor. Here the viewing experience was more staccato than the movement of an escalator. Ascending to the executive floor may have also brought with it some trepidation or intestinal distress as a lower-level administrator anticipated meeting with their superiors.
light and shadows on its forms andvoids. For critic Louise Huxtable, the sculpture imparted, “a note ofByzantine splendor in an otherwiseausterely elegant interior.”

(Fig. 1.6) Bertoia’s abstractions extended the bank design’s dialogue between past traditions at the transitional moment of its creation through a sensitive treatment of materials.

The Design of the Manufacturers Trust and its Break from Tradition

Bank design calcified by its continual reliance on aesthetic traditions throughout theeighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The conventional notion of a Neo-Classical strong box that defined American bank design since Latrobe's Bank of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia became increasingly outmoded over the first half of the twentieth century. Aspects that had once inspired confidence seemed outmoded, secretive and cold by the mid-twentieth century. This was especially true after the Great Depression, when investors realized that no amount of architectural fortification could protect their assets. The Manufacturers Trust blasted through the heavy walls of stone, and the weight of

95 A notable exception to this conservativism in bank design was studied by Craig Zabel. The Prairie School Banks of Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis S. Sullivan, and Purcell and Elmslie. PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1984.
96 Historical precedents for the ‘strong box’ go as far back as the Parthenon. See Craig Zabel. “George Grant Elmslie: Turning the Jewel Box into a Bank Home,” in American Public Architecture, European Roots and Native Expressions. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989, pgs. 228-271. The volume was edited by Craig Zabel and Susan Scott Munshower. The Latrobe bank was created in 1780 to generate funds for the Revolutionary War effort. Craig Zabel argues that this move away from the fortified strongbox was a long progression. All of the credit should not go to modern architects like Bunshaft but instead must be shared by previous figures like Louis Sullivan and George Grant Elmslie for incorporating visual transparency and the welcoming hospitality of a domicile into bank architecture design. See Zabel, pg. 229.
tradition to embody the confidence and optimism of the postwar American economy.\textsuperscript{97} Horace Flanigan, the bank’s president, had seen the economic damage wrought, beginning in 1929, firsthand.\textsuperscript{98} Thus his choice to commission a bank without precedent had a personal resonance.

Instead of housing all the functional aspects of banking in a large, open area as in the majority of previous designs, spaces were separated between the street level and upper levels based on the average duration of specific financial activities. As one rose upward, the attendant complexity of the relationship between clients and the institution increased. A hierarchical organization of space was visually palpable from the street beyond. Each of the five floors and basement inscribed a separate functional zone: low-level employees and mechanical equipment were placed underground; check cashing and depositing services were easily accessible from the street level; commercial banking was discussed in the double-height second story; personal loans and bookkeeping took place on the third story; mortgages and real estate loans transpired on the fourth level, and executive offices and their private dining facilities were located on the fifth and final floor, surrounded by a garden terrace.\textsuperscript{99} The three floors of public spaces were displayed behind a visually, if not structurally seamless, glass edifice. The upper two floors were

\textsuperscript{97} In traditional bank designs, the building was not only a metaphor for the wealth it protected, but also a physical accumulation of expensive materials and fine craftsmanship. It was a symbol for wealth and the thing itself. In one sense a bank was an ostentatious display of what one could buy with money. There was a mausoleum quality to many of the Neoclassical temple banks, where wealth was manifest in inert masses given up to posterity. Modern architecture inverted this equation. Instead of a monumental pile of wealth, the building conveyed wealth and sophistication with a minimum of matter. Instead of the weight of stone and iron its lightness testified to its engineering and use of modern materials and technology.

\textsuperscript{98} “Bank Counts it Money in a Glass Showcase,” \textit{Business Week}, October 16, 1954, pg. 50. The author stated, “From the first, Flanigan—who became president in 1951—wanted a different, unconventional bank. During the dark days of the 1933 bank holiday, he became convinced that the prevailing bank design was inadequate. As banks folded, Flanigan recalls, the buildings were good for nothing, “except pool halls and policy parlors.’ A good bank building, he insists, should have some utility, as well as housing a bank.”

\textsuperscript{99} A section of the bank building with its various zones demarcated is illustrated in, “Modern Architecture Breaks Through the Glass Barrier,” \textit{Architectural Forum}, vol. 101, no. 6, December 1954, pg. 104.
aesthetically contrasted against the public spaces through alternating bands of metal mullions and small windows, imparting a sense of privacy. Beginning at the top of the glass panes on the second floor, the private floors were delineated with ribbons of laminated ‘sandwich’ porcelain panels, their first application in an “all-glass building”. The penthouse terrace was recessed from the edge of the building, invisible from the gaze of pedestrians on the sidewalk. Only the tops of tree saplings arranged in a row of planters peeked over the edge. Public spaces were transparent and private spaces were kept from view. Although there was a visual division, the sheer luminosity of the public space was more aesthetically absorptive than the upper floors, thus one did not visually linger on the areas where they were not permitted.

By dispensing with interior partitions on the second floor, the act of banking itself was opened up, made less formal and more transparent, carrying forward the visual message of the glass walls into interior functionality. Horace C. Flanigan, the bank’s president, stated proudly that, “the building will be its own best salesman, a

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101 This design element sprung from legal necessity. The adjacent building to the south of the Manufacturers Trust owned the air rights above the bank, starting at the fifth floor. This also accounted for the bank’s squat proportions. From the beginning of the building’s conception, the bank’s president, Horace Flanigan wanted a small building for the sole use by his company. He was not interested in producing extra floors of speculative office space for renting out to other firms. The building’s size, especially as it was surrounded by aging stone giants, was an advertisement for the bank, because it showed that they were financially strong, and did not need to finance their construction projects with outside income.

The reasons for choosing transparent glass instead of tinted, heat-retaining glass like that used at the Lever Building, were both practical and aesthetic. The Manufacturers Trust’s five-story height was relatively squat compared to its skyscraper neighbors, so it received direct sunlight for only a few minutes a day. Its novel transparency and minimalist structure were ideally suited to its function as a flagship branch, which depend on maximum visibility and aesthetic impact. The visual appeal of the building served a public relations function to attract new depositors. The overall visual impression of the building was due partly to its well-designed proportions, made all the more striking by its contextualization among aging, looming, stone-clad skyscrapers.

102 Again, the building’s architectural context was essential. The tall buildings around it created a pool of shadows. During the daytime, the interior of the bank was kept brighter than the street beyond. This, in combination with the bank’s translucent glass, made the panes visually disappear. This effect would not have been possible if the bank stood alone and bore the full brunt of the midday sun.
merchandising concept new in banking and one that we believe pioneers the way to better customer service.”

The Manufacturers Trust may have bucked tradition but its novelty was a choice made by bankers and thus should be seen as a calculated risk.

A skyscraper erected on this site would have maximized the ratio of footprint to floor space. Dispensing with this potential income testified to the institution’s financial stability. Throughout its modest five floors a luxuriance of empty space highlighted the precision of its engineering, its tasteful appointment of furniture and thoughtful commissioning of artwork. Despite receiving almost universal praise in the press, the bank’s design irked an editor at Harper’s Magazine who called it—

…without doubt New York’s most conspicuous new building and a leading contender in the current competition for the Ostentatious Underconsumption of Space. In this city, where real estate comes at a small fortune per cubic foot, the only way you can attract attention is to carve out an enormous chunk of it which you then deliberately refuse to occupy… Lovely as it is to look at, in terms of the potentialities of its site this is the most uneconomical piece of architecture since the pyramid of Cheops.

What the critic failed to appreciate was that this design which seemed so uneconomical, was a tactical choice on the bank’s part. It was largely an advertising strategy. And it worked. Such a bold move could have only been undertaken by a bank with numerous

\[103\] *The New York Times*, September 23, 1954, pg. 51
\[104\] It might be more accurate to say that it created the appearance of stability instead of signifying a true condition. The bank’s president, Horace C. Flanigan when initiating the design process wanted a building that would not only convey a new sense of transparency and customer service but also one that could be sold if need be to another type of institution, namely a department store. The interior designer Eleanor Le Maire had previously worked in this field. After changing hands several times, at one point owned by Chase Manhattan, 510 5th Avenue was converted into a flagship for the clothing company Joe Fresh in 2009 and then The North Face in 2015. Thus, the location is operating in a mode conceived of as a possibility at the time of its initial design.
\[105\] “After Hours,” *Harper’s Magazine*, December 1, 1954, pg. 73.
branches around the city.\textsuperscript{106} The opening of this flagship branch aligned with a change in their print advertising. Their former ad campaign frequently featured a cartoon in which two individuals representing varying demographics or occupations (house wife and boy scout/ house wife and middle-aged butcher/young sailor and adult taxi driver/ businessman and mailman, etc.) where the figure on the left is assumed to have just asked the location of the nearest Manufacturers Trust branch. The figure on the right responds, “Just around the corner!” which became their tagline.\textsuperscript{107} The intended effect of this was to make the institution seem nearly ubiquitous in Manhattan. In 1954, the bank started running a new campaign, featuring photographs of young, middle class individuals (even single working women!) and couples with the tagline “Everybody’s Bank.”\textsuperscript{108} The new look was more sophisticated, much like the design of the new branch. There was a conscious effort to appeal to this new demographic. It was an effort to reverse the stereotype of bankers as only being concerned with dealing with the wealthy. This too was mentioned in the Harper’s article—

what the ads acknowledged, in their emphasis on ‘service,’ was that American attitudes toward money have changed…. they believe that the middle classes… keep the country going—not by hoarding a big balance so that banks can spend it for us but by buying things, by spending money and keeping it in motion.\textsuperscript{109}

As an advertisement for the company in built form, “a showcase for service,” it relied on maximum visibility.\textsuperscript{110} Within an architectural shell based on smooth planes of

\textsuperscript{106} The bank announced in October 1954, coinciding almost exactly with the opening of the new branch, that their assets had just crossed the three-billion-dollar mark. See \textit{The New York Times}, October 5, 1954, pg. 18.
\textsuperscript{110} This is a quote from a Manufacturers Trust advertisement, \textit{The New York Times}, October 4, 1954, pg. 15.
modular consistency, the furniture, potted plants and artwork, punctuated and further divided the space. If left unoccupied, the building’s stripped, modern aesthetics might have appeared cold and sterile. Furniture and art punctuated these voids. They further assumed the brunt of communicative responsibility. These messages were choreographed spatially, so that as visitors moved through the bank, they experienced a succession of visual metaphors which accrued into a rich, constructed cosmology. By constantly referring, albeit through thinly-veiled abstraction, to this part-to-whole metaphor of the economy and society, visitors and employees were invited to conceptualize their own role within this financial and ideological system.

Although the building was best viewed from 5th Avenue, its entrance was on 43rd Street, marked with a small aluminum plaque with white lettering set against a panel of black granite between two sets of double-doors. The vantage most often taken by architectural photographers was from the corner of 5th Avenue, north-east the building. The bank was designed so that its most viewed façade could be left unbroken. The glass façade on Fifth Avenue was inviting but also functioned as a barrier, its welcoming was more aesthetic than practical. Turning the corner towards the entrance, 43rd Street was cast in shadow.

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112 The vantage most often taken by architectural photographers was from the corner of 5th Avenue, north-east of the building. Ezra Stoller’s photograph taken from this position has become the definitive image of the building.
113 The eastern-facing window’s tension between welcoming and obfuscation has precedents in the luxury department stores, just north on Fifth Avenue near Central Park, most notably Bergdorf Goodman. There, window displays were visually enticing but not necessarily an invitation to enter. Costs of the items within were prohibitive to most pedestrians. Although display windows appeared for the delight of all, they were only a theatrical substitute for the experience of shopping for the very wealthy. Instead of narrowly delineated, terrarium-like enclosures at the nearby luxury stores, Manufacturers Trust converted the entire publicly-accessible space into a spectacle for passive ocular consumption. Photographs and articles dating
Art on the Ground Floor- Henry Dreyfuss’s Bank Vault Door

While public banking areas were on display behind transparent glass, so too was a sculpture, specifically positioned for sidewalk viewing. A bank vault, the traditional heart and core of a bank, was brought up to street level. (Fig. 1.4) Its door rested just feet from the glass at the south-west corner of the building. During business hours it was left provocatively open. In reality the door was superfluous; the actual vault was accessed out of the public’s vision. The vault door became an object of aesthetic admiration because of its mode of display—isolated and illuminated in a white cube of space. Like the internal mechanism of a fine watch writ large, its appeal derived from a tension between delicacy of design and sheer mass of solid metal. One could easily get lost looking at the precision of its components, the way the elements nearly kiss, the shine of polished metal and its complex geometrical composition. It was a bold move to put something on display that was usually kept hidden from customers.

During the daytime, the vault was left open. At night, it was shut. Because the door was not functional, this daily ritual was connected to the bank’s hours of operation. In 1954, preeminent architectural photographer Ezra Stoller took a series of pictures of the bank. His vantage at the opposite corner on 5th Avenue and 43rd street has become the iconic representation of the building. Another powerful image shows a man in a dark


114 The safety deposit boxes and actual vault were located in the western rear of the building and were accessed by a side door that only employees were allowed to use.
grey overcoat, standing alone at night, staring through the glass at the closed vault door. When the vault was left open, its intricate workings invited close inspection. (Fig. 1.7)

Unlike the abstract sculptures upstairs, the idea for the vault door commission came from the bankers themselves. Architect Gordon Bunshaft relayed that, “it’s like sailors and boats. While we were designing the building, the bankers kept taking us down to bank cellars and showing us vault doors; then they would stand around looking at them, and say to each other reverently, ‘Isn’t it beautiful!’ After a while we began to agree.”

Combining conservatism and modernism, the vault door connoted transition between outmoded and fashionable eras of bank architecture and interior decoration. Traditionally, heavy walls have been a bank’s first line of defense, but the vault was literally what protected its assets. A vault is like a miniature bank within a bank. In some cases, this metaphor was literalized. The Riggs National Bank in Washington D.C. (1903) displayed its vault in the middle of the main banking floor. While the Manufacturers Trust Building continued the tradition of displaying the vault, it was conceptually inverted. The decorative vault door celebrated the material vestiges of banking’s past, in the same way that a modern textile company might display a restored Victorian loom in its central lobby.

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116 Despite the apparent novelty of the vault’s position and visual orientation, there was a precedent for this as well. Louis Sullivan’s 1906 bank in Sidney, Ohio also displayed the bank vault behind a large pane of glass although it was only visible once inside the bank, in the main banking area. Like the Manufacturer’s Trust, putting the heart of the bank in plain sight but out of reach elevated it and made it enticing.
The Check-Cashing Room

Rounding the corner of Fifth Avenue and 43rd Street, visitors entered through a set of double doors into the street level banking area.\(^{118}\) (Fig. 1.8) This was the site of, in the words of Bunshaft, “the special checking division where the main volume of business is handled- the ten-cents-a-check department where you go in, cash a check and get out fast. On paydays the traffic is terrific”.\(^{119}\) The space was streamlined, encouraging mobility, as it was the area for short, efficient transactions that made the bank relatively little money. The Manufacturers Trust also dispensed with traditional teller cages. Instead, a series of mobile strong-boxes could be wheeled about the area as needed, their mobility and novelty connoting modernity. If the lack of functionality of the nearby vault door communicated a new conception of banking, so too did the teller’s strongboxes. Traditionally, a vault is static— so massive it cannot be moved. The mobile strongboxes served as a correction to this tradition communicating the modernist fascination with functionality. Just as a modernist office, without interior structural columns, that could be reconfigured with partitions as needed, so too could the tellers address a variety of client’s needs.

An emphasis on movement and flow was registered by the conspicuous installation of an escalator, the primary visual divider of space on the street-level floor. Like the bank vault, it too was isolated in its placement away from the 5th Avenue façade so that while approaching it, visitors could take note of its sculptural form and metallic sheen. The checking division served the needs of the many, the upper floors served the

\(^{118}\) There was another entrance in the rear for employees to quickly access the dual elevators.

needs of a select few—those with commercial accounts who had a more personal and profit-producing relationship with the bank. Their differentiation in status was registered by their physical elevation to the second story. The escalator penetrated the ‘floating’ ceiling of illuminated plastic above, which made it appear suspended or cantilevered, visually minimizing its structural anchoring to the floor. An opening in the second floor, of the same proportions as the footprint of the elevator, framed both the conveyance and the sculpture hung above its terminus.

The prominent display of an escalator might not seem novel today, but it was in 1954. Its presence in a bank was strange, as they were normally found in department stores. Escalators had existed since the late 19th century, but had not always connoted efficiency. They began as an oddity, appearing first as an amusement park ride at Coney Island. Early in their history, the press misogynistically assumed that women would not be able to navigate this technology, but given their wide installation in department stores, women became their primary users. By installing an escalator in a bank, the company argued that their operation was more like a department store in its emphasis on service, and conveyed hospitality to women, especially those from the middle class.

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120 An escalator was first installed for commercial use at the Siegal Cooper Department Store in New York in 1896. The most famous example of this type of conveyance was at Macy’s in Manhattan. Unlike most escalators, their treads were made of oak and ash. See David Dunlap. “Latest Miracle on 34th Street: Macy’s Keeps Wooden Escalators,” *The New York Times*, November 25, 2015, pg. A1. They dated from the 1920s. Escalators were popular in department stores because their slow motion allowed shoppers to gaze around the store, tempting them to inspect merchandise.

121 Jesse Reno’s “inclined elevator,” appeared at Coney Island in the fall of 1896. It appeared next at the recently opened Brooklyn Bridge. After being purchased by Otis, the inventors of the elevator, it was shown at the 1900 Paris Exposition, where it also served as a type of amusement ride.

122 For instance, a series of cartoons appeared in *The Boston Globe*, December 25, 1910, pg. 37, showing the variety of ways women would misunderstand the functioning of an escalator, or create a traffic bottleneck with their hesitancy to board it. Closer in time period to the opening of the Manufacturers Trust, a spread in *Life* depicted the mishaps of women and the elderly as they attempted to ride the first escalator installed in Santiago, Chile. See “Scares from Moving Stairs,” *Life*, vol. 38, no. 26, June 27, 1955, pg. 67.
Bertoia’s Suspended Construction

As one ascended the escalator to the main banking floor, a feeling of lightness created by the conveyance was encouraged by the sculpture above it. (Fig. 1.5) This untitled sculpture by Harry Bertoia was not a mobile in the style of Alexander Calder, but as a suspended sculpture it formed a novel relationship between notions of mass and support. A dense network of shaped metal wires formed an elliptical, cloud-like mass. Its apparent break from gravity’s clutches enriched the weightless lifting motion of the escalator, a new form of art-viewing experience.

The suspended sculpture’s form derived directly from the material properties and method of construction of Bertoia’s earlier Diamond chair. While designing furniture for Knoll he also produced hanging wire sculptures to complete domestic interior design ensembles. 123 Knoll’s showrooms were punctuated by tableaus featuring both his functional and sculptural works. 124 At the Manufacturers Trust, escalator riders were slowly propelled toward the object of interest, but its suspension above kept it tantalizingly out of reach.

Although a contemporary snickering comment was meant to be derisive, it similarly illustrates the above conception of a functioning whole composed of many individuated, essential parts:

(Bertoia’s) rotating web of metal that hangs from the ceiling is more difficult to explain. Guides jest that it represents the island of Manhattan, the dots (as)

subway stations. Actually, the delicate structure is meant to offset the massive screen on the opposite side of the room.  

This part-to-whole relationship mentioned in the above quotes could also relate to the bank’s larger presence in Manhattan, in excess of this single flagship branch. It was one of dozens of branch locations punctuating the city, like a network of subway stations. Contemporary advertisements averred that they were so plentiful, even if one was in an unfamiliar part of town, there was always one to be found, “Just around the Corner!” The hanging sculpture was like an illustration of the bank’s presence in Manhattan—although each branch was a distinct architectural entity, they were connected to one another through a common pool of assets and credit.

**Golden Arbor**

Arriving at the top of the escalator and turning to the left, one could take in the visual spectacle of Fifth Avenue laid out before them through the broad panes of glass. The cast concrete floor slab in the elevated main banking area was receded seven feet from the curtain wall, cantilevered over the street-level check cashing area below. A narrow walkway between the escalator and a row of potted plants along the edge of the slab extended along the eastern side facing Fifth Avenue. Too narrow for furniture, the space served as a promontory to take in the immensity of the glass and the street life beyond.

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126 This was the tagline featured in numerous Manufacturers Trust advertisements until 1954, see *The New York Times*, April 27, 1953, pg. 13.
127 The vantage allowed for a meditation on historical continuity as well. Just across the street was a traditional bank building clad in heavy masonry in which the Manufacturers Trust employees formerly worked.
The presence of furniture on the second floor registered a change in relationship between client and banker, as well as the longer expected duration of their interactions. (Fig. 1.9) This was a place for, “commercial accounts and senior officers”.\textsuperscript{128} Along the periphery of the space the same check-writing desks and counters from the first floor were installed. In the center of the room were ten sets of desks and chairs where clients could converse with bankers in a formal, albeit exposed, manner. Immediately adjacent to the escalator was a bank of upholstered chairs interspersed with end tables where clients could wait comfortably. Such luxurious seating connoted hospitality towards those with a more substantial relationship with the bank than their street level counterparts. This was a place for conversations about individual banking needs instead of the type of repeated, short-term transactions that occurred downstairs, eventually supplanted by automatic teller machines.

This double-height floor featured the building’s largest and most critically discussed work of art, a large metal screen by Harry Bertoia. (Fig. 1.6) \textit{Golden Arbor} occupied the majority of the second floor’s western wall. At 70’ long and 16’ tall it was composed of:

\begin{quote}
…some 800 plaques, each 30” by 7 ½” … arranged in (six) horizontal rows and five vertical planes, to a depth of 22” … supported by a system of horizontal webs formed of 3/8” rods welded together, spaced 30” apart vertically. The vertical rods were placed at intervals, integrated with the horizontal webs, … to give rigidity… the screen is anchored to the floor and ceiling slabs.\textsuperscript{129}
\end{quote}

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\end{flushright}
Architectural Forum stated, “it may be the most appropriate art a bank ever had, looking like a great wall of abstract wealth”. Indeed it was, but based on its sheer materiality it was also literalized wealth. The plaques were made by brazing brass, copper and nickel to \(\frac{1}{4}\)” steel enameling plates with an acetylene torch. Despite its title, the work incorporated no gold, a modernist version of gilding a lily. That being said, the entire object had a golden sheen to which Ada Louise Huxtable ascribed, “a note of Byzantine splendor in an otherwise austerely elegant interior”. Its abstraction of wealth via precious metals alluded to some of the most ancient forms of currency, as well as the modern notion of paper money backed by specie. It was as if the ingots of precious metal that back America’s currency were brought from the vault and put on display artistically transformed. During the few hours a day when the glass façade was penetrated by direct sunlight on Fifth Avenue, a series of motors mechanically unfolded gauzy golden curtains to shield the employees and customers. Its specific hue was selected to reiterate the screen’s metallic hue and the life-giving light source which it obscured.

Bertoia was well suited to walk a thin ideological line as his previous design of avant-garde furniture and domestic sculptural screens for Knoll Associates attested. He created industrial designs for mass-produced work as well as singular sculptures, displayed in exhibits at the Staempfli Gallery. Born in San Lorenzo, Italy in 1915, Bertoia immigrated to Michigan, where he studied and later taught at the Cranbrook

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131. Seymour Lipton, discussed in Chapter 4, employed a similar, albeit idiosyncratic, form of brazing in his sculptures.
Institute. His 1952 ‘Diamond’ chair design for Knoll Associates garnered him national recognition. Its ergonomically composed lattice of welded metal rods could be seen as a material translation of Eames’ experimentation with molded plywood ergonomics and has since become an icon of mid-century modern design. It has been described as operating between furniture and sculpture and as a precedent for later constructions.¹³⁴

The same year, he received his first corporate sculptural commission. The architect Eero Saarinen greatly admired a 1952 exhibition of Bertoia’s furniture and sculpture installed at the Manhattan Knoll showroom, illustrated in a 1953 Life article about the company.¹³⁵ (Fig. 1.10) The resulting 10’ by 36’ screen served as a partition between the entrance and seating area in the employee cafeteria building at the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan, a massive industrial and administrative corporate campus designed by Saarinen.¹³⁶ (Fig. 1.11) There, his work wavered between functionality, in its clear division and ordering of architectural space, and interior decoration.¹³⁷ The most recently published monograph on the sculptor, Bertoia, The Metalworker, discusses the development of this project.¹³⁸ Because of its large scale, Bertoia fabricated the screen outside his barn studio in Bally, Pennsylvania, so that he could experiment with the reflective properties of the sculpture’s materiality. When he saw the work installed, he was disappointed. Placed a distance away from the windows,

¹³⁴ “Bertoia: his sculpture, his kind of wire chair,” Interiors, vol. 27, no.10, October, 1952, pgs. 118-121.
¹³⁵ Ibid., pg. 79. Also see “Drum Beaters for Modern, Knolls Use Dramatic Displays,” Life, vol. 34, no. 9, March 2, 1953, pgs. 71-75.
¹³⁶ The GM Technical Center (1952) designed by Eero Saarinen in collaboration with Alexander Calder set a precedent not only for the ‘corporate campus’ model which became increasingly popular in the 1950s but also for the potential of incorporating abstraction into a working environment.
¹³⁸ Beverly H. Twitchell, Bertoia, The Metalworker, Phaidon, 2019, pgs. 165, 166.
the screen became a, “silhouette, and there was very little play of (light) and dark.”139

This led him to visit the sites where his work would be installed to make sure there was proper illumination. At the Manufacturers Trust, *Golden Arbor* truly glowed.

Opening any home decor magazine in the mid-50s, one would find a plethora of decorative screens ranging from mobile, lightweight folding models based on Japanese paper screens, to mass-produced, patterned metal lattices installed into a home’s walls and gilded with metallic paint. After his Manufacturers Trust commission, Bertoia would go on to have a fruitful career making art situated in corporate and governmental spaces.

140 In the context of banking at the Manufacturers Trust, Bertoia’s sculptural screen similarly served to separate architectural spaces, dividing an area intended for clients from the employee elevators beyond.

At the Manufacturers Trust, there was an attempt to anchor the potentially ambiguous qualities of a financial institution in an architecture of legibility and transparency. Art furthered this effort, illustrating the interconnected nature of the bank’s


140 After the Manufacturers Trust, Bertoia created decorative screens for the Cincinnati Public Library (1954), Saarinen’s chapel at M.I.T. (1955), the First National Bank of Miami (1956), and the State Department building in Washington, D.C., (1956). The United States Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair was also graced by his work. His works were successful in the context of the contemporary fashion for corporate and governmental semi-public spaces because they possessed no offensive subject matter and were novel in their use of materials and visually engaging construction techniques. In the 1960s and ‘70s such commissions were the bread and butter of his career. He created works for financial institutions, libraries, college campuses, hotels, civic centers, stores, airports, corporate headquarters and the State Department. Bertoia’s commercial success and corporate patronage has caused him to fit uncomfortably into the postwar American canon. His work was contemporaneous with artists like Ibram Lassaw, David Hare and Seymour Lipton, dubbed ‘action’ sculptors for their invention of new forms by experimenting with the oxyacetylene torch. He was included with the aforementioned artists in the Whitney Museum’s 1985 exhibit *The Third Dimension* as well as in smaller gallery shows in Manhattan and Allentown, Pennsylvania where he spent the last decades of his life. In the years after his death his work fell off the radar of collectors and institutions most likely because of his connection to postwar American corporate architecture which fell out of favor in the 1980s and ‘90s. Only recently has Bertoia’s work returned to the auction block, fetching promising prices.
branches, in its flagship location. The materiality of the screen was at once symbolic and literal, in its connotation of wealth, but its physical reality was also an accumulation of material wealth. Thus, the work spoke to commodities that could be acquired through exchange, but was also a manifestation of the very units of exchange. Contemporary accounts of the bank and its artwork stressed the screen’s size, weight and material composition. Similarly, the logic of capitalism is concerned with quantifying physical things, imbuing these materials with perceived value and converting them into profit.\footnote{This basic understanding of capitalism was first articulated as a cohesive system by Adam Smith in his 1776 magnum opus \textit{An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations}, which sought to make sense of the economic mechanics involved in the Industrial Revolution.}

\textit{Golden Arbor} not only gave symbolic solidity to the financial workings of the institution, but made the building seem more grounded, as its very dimensions were architectural in scale. The potential risk of a glass box is that it can appear too open and fragile, but Bertoia’s screen visually anchored the entire building.\footnote{Philip Johnson’s glass house dealt with this issue via its squat proportions and visual anchoring to its site.} Given the double-height of the second floor and its unhindered display to the street beyond, the screen was perfectly positioned to exude stability and strength in an abstract manner to pedestrians at a distance, just as Dreyfuss’ vault door grounded the novelty of the bank’s design in a recognizable object associated with traditions of banking to those looking in from the sidewalk. With the walls of the bank virtually removed, the interior and specifically the art installations had to bear the conceptual burden of strength and fortification that heavy masonry had traditionally communicated. A more cynical interpretation of the building and its artwork is that financial institutions could carry with their traditional practices so long as the appearance of change was suggested by an altered aesthetic. In contrast to the hanging sculpture, viewed while riding the escalator, \textit{Golden Arbor} was meant to be...
visually absorptive. Eugene Clute of *Progressive Architecture* noted that the screen, “has an important visual function, providing a treatment along the rear wall of the main banking room that is capable of attracting and holding attention.” Displayed in this gleaming white space, it was the most chromatically and texturally compelling object in the building. It demanded attention. If the building created a sense of deep space, the screen was the visual limit of that space.

Like a financial rood screen, Bertoia’s *Golden Arbor* hid the inner workings of banking where the transubstantiation of money occurs. It served as a physical and symbolic division between spaces for customers and employees. Like traditional screens, Bertoia’s work created visual interest by the juxtaposition of positive and negative forms, of objects and voids. A screen, by definition, physically and visually blocks access to the space behind it. Bertoia’s screen too served this purpose, visually blocking access to employee offices and executive spaces via the twin elevators located in the building’s north-west corner. The elevator doors were painted a bright crimson hue. This chromatic burst was partially visible through the screen and served to add visual complexity to the composition. As an expansive, punctuated wall of aesthetic interest, viewers became absorbed in looking at it. Its monumentality necessitated a certain distance to be able to view it in its entirety. A solid wall communicates that access beyond is not possible. A screen does not make such a declarative statement. Instead it keeps one at arm’s length by visual pleasure, not force. Oriented frontally, it was not to be viewed in the round as with more traditional sculpture. If visitors had felt encouraged to amble about the screen

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inquisitively, they might have felt that they had permission to enter the restricted zones beyond. Instead, the screen served to break up interior space and subtly prevent access to employee areas without expressing this prohibition declaratively.\(^{144}\)

A sensitivity to how an object was placed within its specific architectural context was integral to relative success or failure of lobby art. It had to activate the space in an appealing, but not distracting or unpleasant way. If it had been hung alternatively over the elevators at the Manufacturers Trust, *Golden Arbor* would have been difficult to inspect closely or for a prolonged period of time as it would have created a potential bottleneck of people waiting to board to leave the elevators.

At the Manufacturers Trust, just as the hanging sculpture illustrated a corporate cosmology, so too did the screen. It was similarly an entity composed of many discrete parts that were regularized, but not identical.\(^{145}\) Instead of a universe in miniature, the metaphor here had its origin underground. It has the appearance of an archeological artifact, obviously worked by hand, which has become patinated over a long period of time, and recently unearthed. It is like a remnant of the tradition of banking, in its brute materiality, arguing that despite the increasing abstraction of financial organizations,

\(^{144}\) For a contemporaneous formal comparison with Bertoia’s screen, in 1957, Ellsworth Kelly unveiled his largest sculpture to date, entitled simply *Sculpture for a Large Wall* for the lobby of the Penn Transportation Building in Philadelphia where it spanned the width of the cantilevered wall above its bank of elevators and faced an outdoor plaza. It was featured on the cover of *Architectural Record* in May, 1957. Its 104 black, yellow, blue, red, and silver anodized aluminum panels alternated between tilted and upright so that they could reflect light with playful unevenness. The panels were arranged with subtle gaps between the individual modules so as to create a dynamic juxtaposition between positive and negative space. These formal issues informed Kelly’s later iconic wall-mounted geometric shapes of pure color which hung in tension between conventions of painting and sculpture. See the exhibition catalog *Ellsworth Kelly, Sculpture for a Large Wall, 1957*, Matthew Marks Gallery, 1998, with an essay by James Meyer. The object was removed in 1998 during extensive renovations of the building. It was purchased and donated to MoMA. It was shown most recently at the Barnes Foundation’s exhibition *Ellsworth Kelly: Sculpture on the Wall*, May 4-September 2, 2013.

\(^{145}\) For historic precedents for this arrangement refer to the shimmering Byzantine mosaics in Ravenna, Italy.
money is still something tangible. It was successful because it worked through “apposition,” a concept promoted by architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable. Its assertion of handmade quality emphasized the machine-crafted perfection of the surrounding building’s modern engineering.

To extend this reading of abstraction in terms of its illustration of natural forces to valorize capitalism, *Golden Arbor* spoke to notions of long duration. Whether depositing money to slowly earn interest, or in paying back a mortgage loan over several decades, a bank is a place where people make long-term decisions. *Golden Arbor* alluded to notions of duration in two ways. It did so first from a phenomenological perspective in that its rootedness to the earth and its stability acted as a foil for the ever-shifting activity unfolding before it.

Secondly, *Golden Arbor* spoke to duration in a symbolic way, as a representation of the capitalist economy in the guise of an organic entity. Its title doubles down on the organic reference: the economy is a tree; its many branches are sectors of this economy; its innumerable life-sustaining modules of leaves are rendered as the population. Like leaves, it is individuals who function to absorb materials (their deposits or repaid loans) to nourish the larger organism (the bank). This metaphor can be even more localized as referring to functional areas within the bank itself. The 800 panels are not unlike a wall of safety deposit boxes, modules whose contents are unique, but whose faces are repetitious. A bank is made of many individuals, both in front of and behind the teller’s desk. Each is part of a whole, while retaining their individuality. The screen invited bank customers and employees alike to project their own role in the economy via its thinly-veiled

figuration in the form of abstraction. Throughout this dissertation, architects and patrons commissioned work featuring abstraction based on organic models to connote specific, positive messages about its individual patron as well as the larger economic and political system in which they functioned.

**The Afterlife of Golden Arbor**

Despite *Golden Arbor*’s claims for the duration of capitalism in general, and the longevity of its patron in particular, Manufacturers Trust eventually folded. Its assets were absorbed by a succession of institutions ending with Chase Manhattan Bank, a corporate identity which will loom large in this dissertation. The building continued as a bank branch until 2010. The site was sold to Vornado Realty, a major corporation with prestige addresses throughout Manhattan. Chase retained ownership of *Golden Arbor*, which joined tens of thousands of works in their ever-growing, precedent-setting corporate art collection (the subject of the following chapter). The real estate company planned to convert the space into two retail locations, which would have necessitated cutting new entrances into the façade and rotating the escalator 90 degrees. The property had been granted New York Historical Landmark status for its exterior in 1997 and its interior in 2011. The New York City Landmarks Committee approved the real estate company’s proposed changes to the interior but a private group of local preservationists were enraged by the proposal, which they claimed would irreparably alter the design, especially because the building’s material transparency aesthetically fused inside and outside.

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147 See [https://www1.nyc.gov/site/lpc/index.page](https://www1.nyc.gov/site/lpc/index.page)
Their larger concern was that throughout Manhattan, developers were being given unfair advantages by the city government, neglecting the opinions of residents and the importance of New York’s cultural history. Vornado was taken to court where preservationists were successful in imposing restrictions on the allowable alterations to the interior. Vornado proposed creating a replacement screen, but this too was rejected.

Media coverage of the lawsuit prompted negotiations with Chase Manhattan to return *Golden Arbor* to its original site, on indefinite loan, so long as the interior retained its landmark status. Vornado hired the original firm—Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, to complete the restoration and reconfiguration of the building and paid for the screen to be cleaned, restored and reassembled on site.

In 2012, 510 Fifth Avenue reopened as the American flagship store for Joe Fresh, a Canadian retailer specializing in so-called ‘fast fashion’ i.e. low-priced clothing with high-end styling. So, the question we must ask now is how *Golden Arbor* functioned in its new setting, despite remaining in situ? At the Manufacturers Trust, and especially as the building was repurposed for Joe Fresh, the collusion of abstraction and capitalism reached a fever pitch. Here, art validated and ennobled even the most superfluous economic activities.

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148 Robin Pogriben. “Modernist Landmark Behind a Court Battle”, *The New York Times*, September 29, 2011, C1. The role of historic preservation came into focus in the early 1960s and was one of the factors that led to a re-evaluation of lobby art. This will be discussed at length in the conclusion.

149 The renderings of the proposed design were incredibly hideous and embodied all of the worst features of lobby art. It looked like abstraction designed by a board of directors—bloodless and offensively inoffensive.

150 The refurbishment of the Manufacturers Trust Building is highlighted on SOM’s website as one of its featured projects. There is not surprisingly, no mention of the attendant controversy surrounding the changes undertaken. There is also a nice video on YouTube on the topic of the work’s restoration by Steven Sebring for the retail firm Joe Fresh who later occupied the building. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mDB70rqjPE.

151 David W. Dunlap. “Fresh Start for an Artwork in a Fifth Ave. Retail Spot”, *New York Times*, June 1, 2012, A24. In 2015 Joe Fresh did not renew their lease and the space was taken over by The North Face.
Golden Arbor functioned as a backdrop in both contexts but for different ends. 

(fig. 1.12) Installed in a retail outlet the screen’s materiality was set against other quantifiable commodities instead of rendering the abstraction of finance in a tangible form. In its reincarnation at Joe Fresh, Golden Arbor is simply a colorful background upon which clothing was displayed. Instead of a stage set for the human drama of banking, it framed mannequins- human surrogates rendered sculptural in their stasis. Where the panels were once targets for projecting oneself into the capitalist economy, in its new context, shoppers were invited to project themselves into the mannequins, imagining how they would look wearing the clothing. Additionally, the teller counter which sat just in front of the screen, was converted into a row of cash registers. Where a customer once spoke with a banker who possibly knew them by their first name, now, an anonymous consumer here begrudgingly goes through the motions of transaction, their stilted interaction with another human being temporarily mollified by the optical dazzle of the golden screen beyond. What had once been the new and puzzling phenomenon of credit, was by the beginning of the 21st century, the standard means of economic exchange. The abstraction of finance had been so integrated into American’s daily life that its intangibility was no longer questioned, but taken for granted. Taking its place was the minimal social interaction necessary for completing a purchase that had become artificial and abstract given social media’s irreparable damage done to the social intelligence of the Millennial generation.

Although Golden Arbor technically remained in situ, its abstraction retooled for narcissistic ends. The screen’s ideological void was supplanted by the contemporary credo which prioritizes short-term satisfaction of individual’s desires via the purchase of
commodities. Joe Fresh’s products were advertised as a means to instantly increase one’s perceived value and status through clothing that looks expensive but is in fact cheap. Again, we are gilding a lily while staring at our own reflection. In the age of “selfies,” Bertoia’s screen begs to be reduced to a backdrop of a new kind; its aesthetic variegation digitally flattened and fused with our visage, clad in a new purchase, or shared via social media to accrue the modern currency of ‘likes’. What once punctuated and defined deep, actual, architectural space has been compressed into a Jpeg to be unthinkingly consumed for a fraction of a second by the anonymous masses. What was once visually absorptive can now only be considered successful if it inspires a brief pause within a nearly endless daily ritual of ‘scrolling’ on one’s cell phone. Joe Fresh is not meant to bear the blame for these larger social phenomena in isolation, but is merely symptomatic of a larger process dictated by late-stage capitalism. In the break-neck pace of life in the early 21st century, Golden Arbor no longer is forced to bear the conceptual weight and responsibility of connoting longevity and duration. These concepts are anathema to contemporary youth culture and appear cloying antiquated.

I have spent a good deal of time discussing the various ways in which *Golden Arbor* functioned symbolically within its two contexts. In doing so I hope to have shown the role that notions of duration play in validating the capitalist system. Duration and longevity are fundamental for conflicting expressions of corporate identities as 510 Fifth Avenue converted from banking to retail. Manufacturers Trust and later Chase Manhattan owned *Golden Arbor* in a legalistic sense. They saw value in the work for its promotional capacity; humanizing the act of banking, and its successful ability to transparently signify a message supporting the individual institution as well as the broader economic system in
which it operated. The work of art was also a commodity in and of itself. Because of its critical and popular reception over the years as well as its articulation of a historically contextualized mood of American postwar optimism, the screen has increased in actual market value over time. *Golden Arbor* is thus coveted by its owner for its exchange value as well as its more intangible cultural value, albeit in direct proportion to the extent which these good feelings can be marshaled by and connected with their corporate identity. To retain such a valuable object is to put faith in its increasing status over time, a type of investment not unlike that of a loan or purchase of a stock portfolio.

Historic preservationists, like the ones responsible for taking Vornado to court, must be viewed as a foil to these multiple corporate interests. Preservationists seek a type of ownership of history as it accrues to specific objects and buildings. They believe that if certain built forms attain a high enough standard of quality and novelty, they become part of a collective heritage, regardless of their original patron’s intentions. Manufacturers Trust president Horace Flanigan, in his initial meetings with S.O.M.’s architects, stressed that he wanted the building to be adaptable to future clients and specifically for retail purposes, acknowledging that the Manufacturers Trust may not always occupy the space. As banker and a product of the Great Depression he had seen how even walls of stone cannot hold back the mercurial tides of the economy. Returning to his comment about the “merchandising trick” of the glass walls, he was prescient in anticipating the possibility of the building becoming a retail outlet. The building’s walls of glass certainly influenced the look of later prestige retail establishments.

The vault-like shop windows at the nearby Bergdorf Goodman remain intact and are a popular tourist destination in Manhattan, especially for their blow-out spectacles.
coinciding with the Christmas shopping season. This institution has weathered the vicissitudes of time and the many changes in fashion, but for reasons other than its palpable sense of fortification in its architectural styling. Not only do the windows attract pedestrians because of their contents but because the antiquated architecture has existed long enough to pass out of and back into popular taste. No doubt this building is much beloved by historic preservationists.

Both corporate patrons and the preservationists alike, mentally invest in the idea that great art stands for something larger than itself; it has an ennobling function which speaks to truths or aspirations of society at large and is able to consolidate these ephemeral or intangible qualities into physical objects. Certain types of abstraction, notably that based on organic models, was especially ripe for this kind of social myth-making in the postwar period. It simultaneously advertised its openness to signification while also lending itself to being co-opted for specific institutions and ideologies. The ways abstraction was martialed for particular types of historical and cultural myths remains a perennial source of ideological conflict. When concepts such as duration are at the heart of such matters, only time will tell who is allowed to write the final authoritative narrative.
fig. 1.1- The Manufacturers Trust, 510 Park Avenue, 1954, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
fig. 1.2- The Manufacturers Trust, 510 Park Avenue, 1954, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
fig. 1.3- The Treasury at Delphi, via Wikipedia.
fig. 1.4- Vault door by Henry Dreyfus, The Manufacturers Trust, 510 Park Avenue, 1954, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
fig. 1.5- Untitled hanging sculpture by Harry Bertoia, The Manufacturers Trust, 510 Park Avenue, 1954, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
Fig. 1.6- *Golden Arbor* by Harry Bertoia, The Manufacturers Trust, 510 Park Avenue, 1954, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
fig. 1.7- Vault door by Henry Dreyfus, The Manufacturers Trust, 510 Park Avenue, 1954, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
fig. 1.8- Interior, first floor, The Manufacturers Trust, 510 Park Avenue, 1954, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
fig. 1.9- Interior, second floor with *Golden Arbor* by Harry Bertoia, The Manufacturers Trust, 510 Park Avenue, 1954, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
fig. 1.10- Knoll’s display of Harry Bertoia’s furniture designs and sculpture from “Drum Beaters for Modern, Knolls Use Dramatic Displays,” Life, vol. 34, no. 9, March 2, 1953, pg. 75.
fig. 1.11- Harry Bertoia’s screen for the employee cafeteria, GM Technical Center, designed by Eero Saarinen, 1952, photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
fig. 1.12- Joe Fresh at the Manufacturers Trust Building, post-renovation, 2012, photograph by Eduard Huber for som.com.
Chapter 2

The Grand Central Building

In 1950, Samuel Kootz Gallery presented “The Muralist and the Modern Architect” pairing the artists David Hare, Robert Motherwell, Adolph Gottlieb, and William Baziotes with, respectively, the architects Frederick Kiesler, The Architects Collaborative (led by Walter Gropius), Marcel Breuer, and Philip Johnson. The teams collaborated to integrate large-scale abstraction with hypothetical architectural proposals for private homes and public buildings. The painter Hans Hofmann worked with Jose Luis Sert and Paul Lester to design a mosaic mural to cover one façade of a concrete bell tower for the newly master-planned city of Chimbote, Peru. (fig. 2.1) This exhibition featured models and preliminary drawings, but it was not just a thought experiment. Kootz actively solicited commissions. He was not alone in this effort. Art Digest critic Doris Brian noted in his review of the Kootz exhibition, “dealers in contemporary art are beginning to create brand-new markets for their boys. … By furnishing the avant-garde

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153 In 1948 Kootz became Picasso’s worldwide dealer. His mural-scaled painting Guernica (1939) may have provided Kootz with a powerful example for the potential for pairing monumental abstraction with modern architecture. In 1949 Hofmann returned to Europe for the first time in two decades and visited Paris where he met with Picasso at a Kootz-curated show of Hofmann’s painting.
154 Sert was the architect of the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 International Exposition in Paris where Pablo Picasso’s Guernica was first displayed. There was also a large mural in the stairwell by Joan Miro as well as a number of other artworks displayed representing national and regional craftsmanship. Guernica was installed at the Museum of Modern Art for several decades, returning to Spain after the death of Francisco Franco in 1975. MoMA was located in Midtown Manhattan, which was also the area of New York City which saw the greatest implementation of abstraction in prestige architectural commissions. This is not direct causality, but should be noted as a precedent for collaboration between artists and architects. Romy Golan has compared Guernica to the medium of photomontage which was in vogue at this time period and was utilized in many of the Spanish Pavilion’s interior displays. See Golan, Romy. Muralnomad: The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927-1957. Yale University Press, 2009.
155 In the wake of the 1950 exhibition, Kootz tried and succeeded to make the theme of the show a reality. Robert Motherwell and Adolph Gottlieb created work for three synagogues from 1952-54 through the efforts of their dealer.
with enormous surfaces for oversize concepts, Kootz provides his artists with their most logical medium as well as with an all but untapped market … This project not only comes under the heading of clever art merchandising, but of public service.”¹⁵⁶ During the ascendancy of abstraction’s placement in prestige mid-century American architectural commissions, corporate presidents and real estate financiers would frequently describe their inclusion of art in similar terms to ‘public service’.¹⁵⁷ Art was used in these contexts partially to obscure the reality that producing profit was the main reason for these buildings’ construction. This quizzical notion further complicated the ambiguous status of lobbies and plazas, as they were presented as public spaces but, in reality, were legally owned and maintained by private interests, dictating who had access. The question of abstraction’s increasing scale and its connection to, or separation from, daily life would be provocatively addressed just a few years later by Hofmann in a realized architecturally-sited commission.

**The Building**

In 1955, Hofmann applied the ideas gleaned from “The Muralist and the Modern Architect” to an office building, originally named “The Grand Central Building” by its financier, located at 711 Third Avenue, in midtown Manhattan, designed by architect William Lescaze. (Fig. 2.2) Their collaboration was an important early example of how abstraction could be combined with modern architecture to great effect and critical

¹⁵⁷ This quote comes from Kaufman’s brochure for 711 Third Avenue, William Lescaze Papers, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.
acclaim. The building’s financier, real estate mogul William Kaufman, worked directly with Samuel Kootz to plan the works for his new speculative office building. Among the gallery’s stable of artists, Hofmann held the most established pedigree and longest career. Despite his professional success during his life, his teaching and its impact on the younger generation of Abstract Expressionist artists has often overshadowed his artistic output.\textsuperscript{158} The unique qualities of this commission allowed him to treat architectural space in novel ways, to apply his theory of ‘push and pull’ beyond the physical confines of a canvas and into mosaic, a media previously foreign to the painter. The potentially problematic relationship between a profit-driven architectural venture and a respected patriarch of painterly abstraction instead provided Hofmann a novel venue in which to explore issues beyond those that could be addressed within a conventional venue.

The necessity of working at a larger scale to complement an architectural context, and his work’s literal attachment to a functional object (an elevator bank), forced abstraction to leave the comfort of the white cube, and its implications of art’s autonomy from the world, to address an audience that did not expect to be viewing art. Both Kaufman and Hofmann viewed art as a way to enrich the daily lives of workers. It remains a testament to a successful collaboration, given the persistence of his mosaic for over 60 years.

Hofmann’s challenge at 711 Third Avenue was not only to practice a medium for the first time, or tackle a composition on a scale without precedent in his oeuvre, but also to produce an artwork to address a wide spectrum of people. A speculative office building was not built and paid for by an intended, single client, but was financed with

the expectation that the floors would be leased, turning a profit from a plurality of tenants. Elsewhere in this dissertation, as in the previous chapter, a mid-century flagship branch or headquarters was designed to include a major art commission from the inception of its design. In that type of context, the artwork was tasked with embodying a particular notion of how the individual corporate patron desired to be perceived. Building on ‘spec’, Kaufman did not know who would occupy his building, or if it would simply stand vacant. Such an endeavor required faith in the vitality of the economy and its persistence. Because of the significant capital investment in land, construction costs, electricity, heating and air conditioning, the building would only begin to turn a profit after several years of occupation. Without knowing what type of organizations would fill its floors, its accompanying artwork could not refer to a particular enterprise as the Dreyfus and Bertoia works spoke to the changing nature and existing traditions of

159 Probably the most well-known example of a speculative office skyscraper is the Empire State Building (1931). It has remained so iconic that it is treated as a publicly-held treasure (for example, it was listed first in the AIA’s 2007 list of America’s Favorite Architecture), but it merely houses a collection of unrelated tenants. Its name intentionally makes the building seem like it is the property of its eponymous state, but in reality, it has changed owners several times. Since 2012, the Empire State Realty Trust and the Empire State Building Association, comprised of over 2800 investors, own and maintain the structure. Given that it was the tallest building in the world from 1931 until the erection of the north tower of the World Trade Center in 1970, and its location on prime Midtown real estate, the Empire State Building cost a fortune to construct—nearly $41 million, equivalent to nearly $555 million in 2018 dollars. The fact that construction was undertaken in the aftermath of the 1929 stock market crash is hard to fathom. Such an undertaking, at such an immense scale, for a speculative office building required a tremendous faith in the future viability of the American economy from its investors. The building remained only partially occupied through the 1930s and 40s, making an equal amount of profit from its observation tower as from its tenants. It only became truly profitable in the 1950s. Al Green, the former politician who spearheaded its construction and oversaw its maintenance, aggressively marketed the building and kept the lights on in all of the offices despite their vacancy in an effort to project a sense of occupancy and profitability. He held onto the property despite the potential of becoming bankrupt by the project. His faith in the economy’s upturn eventually panned out, but not all speculative office buildings are guaranteed success. They require a tremendous capital output and enough liquidity to maintain the property during rough economic periods. For more, see Mark Kingwell. Nearest Thing to Heaven: The Empire State Building and American Dreams. Yale University Press, 2006 and Carol Willis and Donald Friedman. Building the Empire State. W. W. Norton, 1998.

160 The cost of construction was $10,000,000. This figure comes from a promotional brochure published by Kaufmann for soliciting tenants. William Lescaze Papers, Avery Architectural & Art Library, Columbia University.
banking in Chapter One. Further, the commission would be unsuccessful if it was overly general in its implied meaning or subject matter. Abstraction was useful in such a situation because it had a greater potential for open and diverse readings. This did not mean that any non-figural work would achieve these desired results. The artists, architect and patron had to collaborate to produce a space that was inviting and appealing--the art needed to draw prospective tenants inside, but not be so novel as to upset individuals with more traditional aesthetic taste. Art had to enliven the place of work and welcome a spectrum of professionals. Hofmann’s mosaic at 711 Third Avenue further served to address notions of social connectivity on both micro and macro levels. Such connectivity was essential within administrative hierarchies as well as for creating a sense of community within a building occupied by a number of unrelated businesses. The lobby was where these various professionals came into contact with each other, so the architecture’s artistic embellishment aimed to promote these relationships in the area with the greatest potential for social interaction.

The basic design of 711 Third Avenue had percolated on William Lescaze’s drafting table for several decades until the economy was robust enough, and a client amenable, to manifest his ideas in built form. Not only were the facades at 711 Third

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161 The formal relationship between a sturdy block base and a tower projecting from it, had originated in his 1932 design for the PSFS Building in Philadelphia. It was one of the earliest and most iconic International Style skyscrapers built in America, despite its Streamline Moderne street-level façade. It was also the Swiss-born architect’s first major commission in the United States. The PSFS Building served as an illustration of the International Style as defined by Hitchcock and Johnson in the eponymous 1932 exhibition at the Museum of Modern art. In a radical break from the profusion of materially disingenuous applied ornament on earlier skyscrapers designed to quote past aesthetic styles, this new paradigm of architectural thinking was obsessed by dispensing with applied ornament to foreground the essential structural elements of the design. Lescaze had attempted to build a more rigidly cubic, unadorned version of this concept in an unrealized headquarters for CBS in 1935 and an unbuilt speculative office building at 2 Broadway in 1952. Stammb Shapiro. William Lescaze. Rizzoli, 1982, pg. 15. For the CBS design, a double-story square slab functioned as a plinth for a five-story, rectangular tower. The two masses were visually and structurally distinguished from one another by a single-story of pilotes. Le Corbusier named
Avenue stripped of applied ornamentation but the very articulation of their massing was also an unexpected sight in Manhattan. The building’s apparent formal simplicity belied how Lescaze had radically reimagined the ubiquitous ‘set-back’ model which defined so many Manhattan skyscrapers in the first half of the twentieth century. Its design connoted a high level of prestige for the owner of the building and its occupants. When *Architectural Forum* reviewed the building, Lescaze was lauded for “cutting the wedding cake”, referring to his simplification of the stepped design derived from the 1916 building code which dictated a tapered structural massing as a building increased in height. By employing a single step at the sixth floor and rising to a modest 20 stories, Lescaze had shed over 1 million cubic feet of potential rentable office space in relation to the building’s footprint, allowing it to remain simply light and air. The International Style’s obsession with the distillation of structures into clear, geometrical masses had a flipside—prestige, traditionally expressed through expensive materials and finely worked decorative elements, could now be manifest by the tasteful framing of voids. Pedestrians and tenants alike would be especially appreciative of this greater access to sun and air.

his slender cylindrical columns pilotes, they were used notably at the Villa Savoye in Poissy, France (1931) and the Unit d’Habitation in Marseille, France (1947). They have since become one of his most recognizable architectural motifs. The CBS Building drawing is published and briefly discussed in Lorraine Welling Lanmon. *William Lescaze, Architect*. Art Alliance Press, 1987, pg. 105.

162 The 1916 New York Building Code established a formula for the total amount of floor space on a given plot of land. Buildings which occupied their entire footprint could only rise a few stories before the façade had to be ‘set back’ from the property line. As the building rose further, this system repeated. Given these restrictions, most tall buildings adopted a ‘ziggurat’ shape. A notable exception is the Empire State Building which has a low structure occupying its total footprint surmounted by a single tower covering a fraction of the site, which rises with subtle setbacks in a columnar fashion.


164 The seventh-floor projected slightly from the central tower to the north and south, used as an outdoor sitting area.

165 This was true of the Manufacturers Trust, discussed in the previous chapter. It is also a feature of other prestige Manhattan office towers in the 1950s, notably the Lever Building (1952) and the Seagram Building (1958).
The building was distinguished not only by its novel massing, but also by its exterior chromatic embellishment: “a broad, grey base, a slim white midsection, and a big blue block of a tower with its columns projecting on two sides.” 166 This further articulation of architectural masses through color modulation softened their perceived bulk, creating a chromatic conversation instead of one based simply on a contrast of scale and geometry. Artworks continued this softening effort at a more personal and human scale of the street entrance and within the interior of the lobby. The building’s financier William Kaufman stated: “it costs so little to have something outstanding I’m amazed more ‘spec’ builders don’t go in for it.” 167

Lescaze had long advocated for collaboration between artists and architects at the earliest stages of planning. Throughout his career Lescaze made a point to integrate artwork in his architectural projects. In 1938 he stated, “As you probably know, mural paintings and sculpture are unfortunately too often an afterthought. They come after everything else is settled… That situation must change”. 168 The previous year, Lescaze had worked with Burgoyne Diller, head of the NYC Federal Arts Project, under the auspices of the WPA, to commission five abstract murals for the Williamsburg Houses, sponsored by the Public Works Administration. 169 Two years later, he solicited Arshile Gorky to paint a mural at the 1939 World’s Fair Aviation Building. In 1949 Max Spivak created a mosaic mural located over a stairway leading to the ticket booth at the Lescaze-

167 Ibid.
168 Lanmon, pg. 132
169 The murals were painted by Ilya Bolotowski, Balcomb Greene, Paul Klepe and Albert Swinden. They were later painted over, but rediscovered in the late 1980s. They were carefully removed and now reside in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum. A work by Stuart Davis was sold instead of installed in the housing project and an oil on canvas painting by Francis Criss was rejected because its color scheme was thought to clash with its surroundings.
designed Calderone Theatre in Hempstead, Long Island. (Fig. 2.3) *Interiors Magazine* called this project, “an amazing merger of art, architecture, and sound business,” and noted that the artist was given, “blueprints in the early stages of the design,” so that his art could be an integral aspect of the theatre.\(^{170}\)

Instead of competing for height, postwar skyscrapers strove for notoriety through their inclusion of amenities. Abstract art was only one type of such value-added features. In the absence of art, prestige architectural projects emphasized technological progress in terms of creature comforts and cutting-edge materials.\(^{171}\) Artwork, especially abstraction,

\(\text{\textsuperscript{170}}\) “Glass Mosaic Mural for Calderone Theatre,” *Interiors*, Volume 109, no. 3, March 1949, pg. 108. This work also appeared in the 1949 MoMA exhibition “Painting and Sculpture in Architecture”. Also see “Mosaic Mural,” *Art Digest*, Vol. 24, 1949, pgs. 10, 24. One of Lescaze’s final projects, from 1968, was located at One Oliver Plaza in Pittsburgh for the Heinz company. There, he encouraged the artist Pierre Soulages to translate his signature abstract gestural painting into a mural-sized ceramic tile mosaic in the building’s lobby entitled *14 May, 1968*. This work was later removed and since 1996 has resided at the Trumbell Branch of the Butler Institute of American Art in Warren, Ohio in a gallery custom-built for the work. The work is 14’ by 20’ and composed of 294 ceramic tiles cemented to the wall. At the Butler, it is illuminated at night producing a visual effect similar to that of the Manufacturers Trust Building. A large glass window frames the mural and the illumination makes the space read as a lantern. The mural is mounted on a rotating wall so that during the day it can be rotated to face into the gallery. After hours its position shifts 180 degrees to address passing traffic outside. See a photograph of the work at butlerart.com.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{171}}\) To give a short list of ‘firsts’ and near ‘firsts’ associated with the most iconic buildings of the period: The United Nations building (1950), was the first American skyscraper to feature a glass curtain wall. Gordon Bunshaft’s Lever Building (1952) was the first to be totally sealed, meaning that the windows could not be opened, so as not to let the air-conditioning escape. The curtain walls of green-tinted glass, kept spotless by a window-washing conveyance installed permanently on the rooftop projected an emphasis on hygiene, an ideal feature for a company dedicated to cleanliness. The Manufacturers Trust (1954), featured the largest panes of architectural glass ever produced in America, and was the second building to have window-washing equipment installed permanently on its roof. The Inland Steel Building in Chicago (1958), the subject of Chapter Four, actualized the modernist fascination with modular construction. Many of the major structural components, the flooring, and the HVAC systems were composed of factory-built modules assembled at the construction site. Relying solely on exterior columns, its interiors were unobstructed so that movable partition walls could accommodate the changing needs of the company. The quest for ever-greater amenities took a hubristic and fatal turn with the Pan Am Building (1962). It was the first skyscraper in Manhattan to feature a helipad, attracting plenty of publicity for the venture. Disaster struck on May 16, 1977 when a crash at the site under high winds took the life of five commuters. See Robert D. McFadden “5 Killed as Copter on Pan Am Building Throws Rotor Blade”, *New York Times*, May 17, 1977, pg. 1. There was a precedent for this feature in the Empire State Building (1931) which had a dock for a dirigible on its spire but high winds at this height and the necessity to drop ballast from over 1000’ onto unsuspecting pedestrians below prevented it from being functional or practical. The only attempt to dock there was made September 15, 1931 by a Navy airship but it was not successful. See “Throng Strains Necks as Blimp Tries to Kiss Empire State Mast,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 15, 1931, pg. 3.
placed conspicuously in a building’s most public areas was used to sell office space, both to paying tenants and to the public’s taste. Artwork softened the notion that the erection of skyscrapers was merely a tangible byproduct of capitalist greed. Amenities like artwork made the buildings feel warmer, more approachable and inviting.

William Kaufman anticipated a spectrum of businessmen and their clients to occupy his office tower and specifically commissioned artworks that would have a broad appeal. The art chosen to punctuate its most public spaces acknowledged the heterogeneity of its audience through notions of connectivity, both in terms of the technology of workplace communication and practice of social interaction. Hofmann’s mosaic also referred to the means by which the economy functions in an interconnected manner through the visual language of abstraction.

The building, with its diverse clientele, was like a miniature version of the economy at large, with individual companies pursuing their own self-interest and profit-seeking, while contributing to the system as a whole. It housed three advertising agencies, a management consulting firm, Nation’s Business Magazine, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a life insurance company, a construction firm, a shipping organization, and the Klein Institute for Aptitude Testing. The Building Trade Employers Association was the711 tenant mentioned most frequently in New York periodicals, as they were

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172 Aptitude testing was extremely popular in the 1950s for vetting future employees. It was seen as an application of scientific thinking to the workplace which had evolved into peacetime use from the military who used it to assign soldiers to positions where their skills and intelligence would be most effectively utilized. This type of testing in a white-collar hiring context was extensively criticized in Alan Harrington. *Life in the Crystal Palace*, Avon Books, 1961. The book describes his personal experiences working at one of the newly constructed ‘corporate campuses’ in a suburb outside Manhattan, his growing dissatisfaction with the corporate culture, and ultimately his decision to leave the financial comfort of the organization. This pointed critique of mid-century corporate culture is a highly valuable resource for the study of this period but it has been little recognized or discussed. It has been overshadowed by other, now iconic works such as Sloan Wilson. *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*. Pan Books, 1958, and William H. Whyte’s *The Organization Man*, Simon and Schuster, 1956.
involved in arbitrating several union disputes related to skyscraper construction in Manhattan in the late 50s.  
While 711’s tenants may have provided a window into the economy at large, the Building Trade Employers Association, and their legal embroilment, grounded this notion in reality. Here, a speculative office building was occupied by an administrative body facilitated the continuing creation of such speculative endeavors. On the ground floor was a retail space for Dictaphone machines, the type used by many of executives upstairs for transcription by their secretaries. This was but one of the technologies utilized by a spectrum of businesses to increase the efficiency of workplace communication. Upon the opening of 711 Third Avenue, the Chase Manhattan Bank not only occupied the street level south-west corner.

A 21st century pedestrian strolling on Third Avenue, between 44th and 45th Street, could easily pass the edifice of 711 without pause. Its regularized cubic volumes and unadorned facade may no longer read as novel, instead simply one among many similar corporate glass and steel boxes. This was not so upon its unveiling in 1956. At nineteen stories, it was the tallest building on Third Avenue, and its first International Style office building. In the 1930s, the creation of Rockefeller Center moved the locus of prestige construction from downtown to midtown, with most of the new buildings located on Park and 5th Avenue. Eastward, the skyline remained relatively low. Thus, the un-obstructed view of the building would have been quite impressive. Until the early 1950s, an above-

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173 To establish which tenants resided in 711 Third Avenue in the first years after it opened, a search was undertaken through articles, but more fruitfully, in the classified section of The New York Times from 1956 to 1960.
174 It is tempting to think that David Rockefeller of Chase Manhattan was inspired by the art installations to incorporate abstraction into the branch constructed at 410 Park Avenue four years later, the subject of Chapter 3. This building is the subject of Chapter 4.
ground train ran along Third Avenue, making the street life below cast in perpetual shadow; resonating with a continuous mechanical din. The painting *El Station, 3rd Avenue at 53rd Street, NYC* (circa the 1930s) by Ernest Fiene emphasizes how the appearance of this neighborhood before the train’s demolition.\(^\text{177}\) (Fig. 2.4).

The Third Avenue ‘El’ made its last run on May 12, 1955. The event was captured in a photograph from the Durst Collection.\(^\text{178}\) (Fig. 2.5) In this photograph, the street signs are not legible, but the location is easily identified by 711 Third Avenue’s steel frame rising in the right side of the photograph. A plywood wall surrounding the construction site bears a sign advertising the building, which corresponds exactly to Lescaze’s own photographs tracking the building’s erection. In his photograph, this sign is clearly legible. (fig. 2.6) A rendering of the finished building is dubbed the, ‘The Grand Central Building,’” a name which never caught on with the public.\(^\text{179}\) 711 Third Avenue is framed by an almost unbroken expanse of sky, emphasizing its great height relative to its neighbors. With the ‘El’s’ removal, Third Avenue was opened to light and

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\(^{177}\) The painting is in the collection of the Palmer Museum of Art, University Park, Pennsylvania, gift of Lee and Barbara Maimon, accession number is 2015.27. A totally different take on a similar subject can be found in Francis Criss’ *Sixth Avenue El*, 1937. This oil on canvas painting emphasizes the light above and beyond the tracks, but the composition is grounded by a long dark shadow cast. This painting was commissioned for Lescaze’s Williamsburg Houses, but was rejected. It is now part of the Whitney Museum of American Art’s collection, accession number 82.1. It can be viewed at https://whitney.org/collection/works/1806 as it is rarely exhibited.


\(^{179}\) This name was also used in printed promotional material. An example can be found in the William Lescaze Papers, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University. Curiously, the pamphlet has a sketch, possibly by the architect himself, which extends the dimensions of the tower into the sky and beyond the frame of the picture that fundamentally changes its proportions. If it is by Lescaze’s hand, was this aspirational, or simply a doodle to pass the time?
air, making it an ideal location for new, modern-styled office towers. For Kaufman to begin construction before the ‘El’ was demolished was a bold and risky move. But it paid off. 711 subsequently acted as an anchor for construction in the vicinity. In order to sell prospective tenants on this property, especially given its location in an unproven area of Manhattan, artworks were used to garner publicity and leases.

When placed in or near a tall building, one of art’s potential functions, especially when visible from the street, was to affect a smooth optical transition from the overall sculptural massing of the architecture to the more human-scaled entryway and lobby. A press release for the 1949 MoMA exhibition “Painting and Sculpture in Architecture” framed the issue in similar terms, stating that one of the potential functions of art was to, “form a visual bridge between the large scale of architectural forms and the much smaller scale of the human onlooker”. From a distance, a building arguably can be read as a solid sculptural mass, especially if it is taller than the structures around it, or if it stands apart from surrounding buildings. There was a phenomenological aspect to entering a building, especially one of such mass and height. The openness of the street gave way to a feeling of compression. In order to soften the feeling that the entire mass of the building was being suspended over one’s head, artificial illumination and artistic embellishment.

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182 In his review of current and historical use of architectural sculpture, Irving Titel categorizes the types as integral, applied and related. He cites the Egyptian pyramids as an example of the first. Indeed, because they are nearly solid these funerary monuments verge on pure sculpture, albeit at a scale greater than most architecture. He describes Gothic cathedrals as employing both integral and applied sculpture. ‘Related’ sculpture is mainly a product of the 20th century, referring to free-standing sculptures that form a relationship with their architectural surroundings but are not physically attached to them. This definition holds for nearly all of the art discussed in this dissertation and most ‘lobby art’ in general. See Irving Titel. “Architectural Sculpture Today: A Survey,” *Arts and Architecture*, vol. 69, no. 11, November 1952, pg. 35.
were employed to impart a greater sense of lightness and humanity to the transitional experience.

Before the writing of New York City’s 1916 building code, the major aesthetic feature of a tall building was its façade. Skyscrapers created before 1916 mainly focused their aesthetic embellishment on their street-facing façade, because most buildings rose up vertically from the extent of their footprint, abutting their neighbors, thereby maximizing potential floor space. Thus, the street façade was the only one left unobscured. Given the cost of applied ornament, it was reserved for where it was most visible. The sides of a tall building were rarely faced in stone, given that it would only be seen by their neighbors. After 1916, tall structures were required to incrementally reduce their massing based on a formula relating footprint to height. After a certain point of rising from the extent of a building’s footprint, its facade was forced to “set back,” to allow in light and air.183 In 1922, architectural illustrator and theoretician Hugh Ferriss presciently foretold how the laws would impact architects in Manhattan.184 (fig. 2.7) Given these new rules Ferriss predicted, “the building, above the setback line, will typically be seen from all sides. Once more architects will design buildings, not facades... it may be said that architects will cease to be decorators and will become

183 The 1916 Building Code was largely a response to the example of the Equitable Building (1915). It featured two tower slabs set upon a five-story base, creating a narrow light well between the towers. This design maximized the amount of rentable space while still providing natural illumination for all the tenants. For pedestrians and architecture critics alike, this structure was a blight as it blotted out the sun in its vicinity. It became an illustration of architecture’s form dictated by the greed of the developer, and as an affront to the life of the street.

184 Hugh Ferriss. “The New Architecture,” The New York Times, March 19, 1922, pgs. 8, 27. He also criticized the treatment of the majority of previous skyscraper facades. Most architects used a tripartite plan: base, column and shaft, which derived from classical columns. Unlike columns, these buildings did not change in shape at each location, but instead just had ornament attached to them that referred to these precedents. He felt this was disingenuous because it was essentially a veneer alluding to sculpture instead of being truly sculptural.
sculptors.” When he labels architects as “decorators,” it is not only meant to be dismissive, but also anticipates the later efforts of International Style architects to frame architectural voids, and highlight integral structure, instead of papering over buildings with applied ornament. The 1916 code would persist, with few modifications until 1962. Because the aesthetic of mid-century modernism was becoming dominant in the 1950s, architects could not rely on embellishing their ‘sculptural’ buildings with applied exterior sculptural ornamentation. This would be a step backwards. Instead, they relied on massing itself to connote a sculptural quality. The risk was that stripped massing could appear cold, and modular regularity made scale itself difficult to determine, both of which could undermine the building’s sculptural quality. Advocating for the incorporation of art into modern architecture, Douglas Haskell, editor of *Architectural Forum*, summarized this very issue in 1958:

> In modern architecture there are almost no universally known dimensions: surfaces are flush, plain, often without visible joints or seams, so the scale of a building is very hard to establish. Painting and sculpture, used in the right places, can be of tremendous help to the architect in solving that problem. (Art can) restore the human touch to our increasingly industrialized architecture.

By addressing visitors with sculpture scaled to their bodies, art could provide a form of welcome. In the lobby, the building literally opened itself up, defying the expectation of interior solidity exerted by the geometric rigidity of its exterior massing. This transition

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185 Ibid.

186 A similar motivation, albeit deriving from completely distinct origins, would compel Minimalist sculptors to emphasize materiality and scale. They wanted to avoid sculpture that connoted other things, instead emphasizing their status, in Donald Judd’s words, of being “Specific Objects.”

187 “Aluminum Art and Architecture,” pamphlet for the 1958 Reynolds Memorial Award, established in 1956, given to an architect or firm that best included the material of aluminum in their design. It was accompanied by $25,000 and a unique commissioned table-top sculpture. The 1958 art/trophy was designed by Jose de Rivera, whose own practice was praised for the use of modern industrial materials like aluminum and stainless-steel. The sculpture and images of the winning building (The Transportation Pavilion at the Brussels World’s Fair) were exhibited in Reynolds Metal Company’s Manhattan headquarters from June 3-28, 1958. The pamphlet can be found in the Jose de Rivera Papers, Archives of American Art.
had traditionally been accomplished with sculptural ornament as a framing mechanism around the entrance.\textsuperscript{188} Not so with 711 Third Avenue.

\textbf{The Entrance and Jose de Rivera’s \textit{Continuum}}

Along the sidewalk on Third Avenue, pedestrians were faced with a nearly endless blank wall. Punctuating this regularity was \textit{Continuum}, a two-part welded stainless-steel sculpture by artist Jose de Rivera, hung on the northern wall to the left side of the entrance, in an exterior vestibule niche.\textsuperscript{189} (\textbf{Fig. 2.8 - Continuum}) From the beginning of his design, Lescaze had planned to create a stainless-steel foyer wall, “knowing that de Rivera’s worked in stainless-steel, Lescaze called him in. The two planned the articulation of the wall together.”\textsuperscript{190} Collaboration was not just lip service from the architect, but something he continually practiced. Unlike most 1950s abstraction placed in a building’s lobby, this was an example of art functioning as a beacon, identifying the entrance and directing traffic flow into the building.\textsuperscript{191}

\textsuperscript{188} This is especially true of Rockefeller Plaza where many of the art installations take the form of sculpted reliefs placed above building entrances.
\textsuperscript{189} The upper left component measures 29” in height by 36” in width, the lower right element measures 33” in height and 27” in width. The bottom point of the lower piece was 5’3” from the ground while the bottom of the upper piece was 7’4” above the black and white checkered marble floor. The William Lescaze Papers, held by the Avery Architectural & Art Library at Columbia University contains several photographs of a model of 711 Third Avenue in which the de Rivera sculpture is placed to the left and to the right of the entrance to test what is more visually effective. In its final location the sculpture faces the flow of automobile traffic on the right side of the street, closest to the building. Possibly it was assumed that sidewalks would be used primarily by pedestrians moving in the same direction as the lane of traffic they abutted so that the sculpture would be viewed by as many people walking and driving as possible.\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{191} There were two other entrances to the building at the south-west and north-west corners of Third Avenue but these only gave access to retail spaces. At the building’s opening, the southern space was occupied by a Chase Manhattan Bank branch and the northern space was occupied by the Dictaphone company.
Continuum was composed of two polished, welded, H-shaped stainless-steel elements that alternated between being bulbous and pinched at their midsections, terminating in four attenuated, spinney points. Their placement in relation to each other, and the staccato rhythm of their extremities created a balletic pas de deux on the wall. de Rivera’s elegant, stainless-steel arabesques recall the biomorphic abstraction of Joan Miro and Hans Arp. The top, left element had its two left limbs nearly parallel to the ground below, while its lower, right-side limb reaches toward the earth and its upper, towards the sky. The second element has nearly identical proportions to the first, but was attached to the wall slightly lower, to the right. Its form displays a greater application of torque. The two forms are similar in overall shape, despite their placement in relation to each other and the direction of their terminating forms. They are arranged in such a way that two of the limbs come nearly into contact. Referring to this near “kissing” motif in much of de Rivera’s work, Sheldon Kirby asserted in his review of the sculptor’s 1972 retrospective—

Michelangelo showed us that electric life-giving spark when he pointed the finger of God at the finger of man in the Sistine Chapel. To travel across the timeless space of those two points is to realize what de Rivera induces. We make the jump.

This ‘jump’ did not occur solely in the mind of the viewer. Placed next to a building’s entrance, its dynamic form encouraged a pedestrian’s movement in kind, flowing into the

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192 Stainless steel was first produced in Germany at the Krupp Steel Works in 1912. Allegheny Steel Company purchased the rights in 1928 and produced the first American-made product. It found early use in dental tools and objects that needed to be continually sanitized, like hospital wash basins, appliances, and work surfaces for food preparation. The Chrysler Building (1930) featured stainless steel conspicuously on its façade, notably on its crowning flourish, and its abstracted gargoyles, alluding to the use of chrome on automobiles. Stainless steel should not be confused with chrome- the former is an alloy of steel and chromium; the latter is steel electroplated with a thin film of chromium. Eero Saarinen’s Gateway Arch (1963) in St. Louis, MO would be another monument to this uniquely 20th century material. For a comprehensive account of the material and its development see Harold M. Cobb. *The History of Stainless Steel*, ASM International, 2010.

lobby. Their forms invoked a sense of gracefully bounding, like two antelopes running side by side, frozen at a distinct point in their gallop’s arc.

The implied figuration of the two figures exuded a welcoming quality from the entrance. The sculpture’s presence softened and humanized the architecture by contrasting with the stripped, mechanical regularity of the facade. *Continuum* attracted pedestrians’ attention from afar, certainly when its stainless-steel surface reflected the glare of the mid-day sun. Viewed in proximity, its biomorphic leaping figures encouraged movement into the lobby beyond. Notions of scale and address were important to the artist, especially for an architectural commission, de Rivera stated:

No matter what the size of the building—keep the scale within the human scope. An eye and mind can take in a large structure if it is modulated, if it has proportions that are varied. While architecture can stand alone as a functional form, as a space experience it can be aided by proper painting and sculpture. Painting, sculpture and architecture are in themselves complete experiences; yet if brought together they can produce a total experience beyond that which they express alone.

This did not mean that any type of art added to a building would improve it. It required an equitable relationship—art and architecture had to speak to one another.

William Lescaze’s choice to install a de Rivera sculpture at the entrance to 711 Third Avenue was a calculated move. He recognized that the sculptor occupied a unique position between art and business, one that would appeal to a diverse clientele, even if they were not previously familiar with his work. It was not only de Rivera’s choice of materials and fabrication techniques which appealed to industry and art critics alike, but

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194 The mere fact that these forms have four limb-like elements attached symmetrically to either end of a more bulbous torso-like shape refer to bipedal humans and a plethora of four-legged animals.

the elegant refinement he teased out of them. Where David Smith embraced modern materials and industrial tools to make work that exuded a brash, masculine, rebuke to the tradition of sculpture, de Rivera created work that produced pure aesthetic pleasure. Dore Ashton noted that, “contemporary connoisseurs prefer to avoid the work ‘beauty’… yet confronted with sculpture by Jose de Rivera, most viewers involuntarily feel that the works are ‘beautiful.’” Wayne Craven opined that de Rivera, “gives his form an elegance, a delicacy, and a grandeur that belong to the tradition of the ancient goldsmith rather than the crass work of the modern factory.” By the late 1960s, the artist’s continued formal and material investigations, especially amidst the ascendency of Minimalist sculpture, caused Hilton Kramer to praise his, “complete identification of expression with the refinements of craft and an extreme economy of means—now looks positively romantic in its personal invention.”

A 1956 exhibition entitled “Sculpture and Architecture: Jose de Rivera, William Lescaze” at the Grace Borgenicht Gallery was devoted to the artist and architect’s collaboration, coinciding with the unveiling of 711 Third Avenue. Rivera’s sculpture Continuum was described as, “incorporated into the entrance façade of 711 Third Avenue,” another instance of the prevalence of this term in the positive assessment of art and architecture’s combination. Lescaze’s career record of incorporating the arts in his

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200 Interiors, vol. 31, no. 3, March 1956, pg. 14. The architect photographed a model of the entrance, experimenting with placing de Rivera’s sculpture at both the north and south sides of the entryway. These
architectural designs was presented through a series of photomurals, culminating with 711 Third Avenue. The photograph of de Rivera’s sculpture accompanying *Interiors*’ review of the exhibit was mistakenly rotated 180 degrees. Was it a curatorial error by Borgenicht or the photo editor at *Interiors Magazine*? In this alternative orientation the composition suffered from an excess of implied gravitational pull, conveying compression and entropy instead of lightness. Despite this error, it seems to imply that biomorphic forms were imbued with the potential for animation. At 711 Third Avenue this potential for movement was marshalled for encouraging traffic flow into the lobby.

Not long after 711 Third Avenue’s opening, *Continuum* became the logo for the William Kaufman Group. (Fig. 2.9) How successful did it function as a corporate logo? It certainly did not possess the immediate brand recognition of later purely abstract geometric logos like the 1959 Chase Manhattan Bank (see Chapter 4). An organization named after a single person is difficult to represent through abstract means. Nor did Kaufman’s surname possess the brand-ready, auditory impact of certain colorful real estate mogul, turned president. It did, however, celebrate Kaufman’s first incorporation of art into one of his real estate ventures. Before 711 Third Avenue, he had focused on creating apartment buildings in Manhattan’s suburbs.

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201 Photographs by William Lescaze are held in the William Lescaze Papers, Avery Architecture & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

201 Jose de Rivera often employed actual rotation via motorized pedestals, both for his table-top sized sculptures and large-scale commissions like his ‘Construction’ for the Hilton Hotel in Dallas, Texas (1956). The work is illustrated in Dore Ashton, “Sculpture of Jose de Rivera,” *Arts Magazine*, Vol. 30, April, 1956, pg. 41.

202 A similar transformation occurred with Jose de Rivera’s most famous, or at least most viewed, work of art. Commissioned in 1967 for the plaza at the entrance to the National Museum of American History at the National Mall, *Infinity*, a 13.5’ x 8’ x 16’ sculpture, rotated mechanically from the base of the sculpted element to its black granite trylon pedestal. This commission was paid for by the General Service Administration’s Art-in-Architecture program, established by the Kennedy Administration. The second wave of federally-funded public art will be discussed in the conclusion. *Infinity* took the form of a stainless-steel Mobius strip undulating and twisting in on itself. It moved at a rate of one revolution every six
The creation of 711 Third Avenue proved to be a turning point in Kaufman’s business; he would increasingly focus on urban office towers. He seemed to recognize that this change necessitated the use of abstraction, as this type of work was increasingly appearing in rival spaces. The fact that the building was located outside the epicenter of office tower construction in the Grand Central area, instead residing at its periphery, there was an aspirational component to Kaufman’s marshalling and identification with abstraction. Art’s potential for garnering positive press and profits was a notion that he passed down to his two sons, who would soon take over the business. Melvyn Kaufman, who oversaw design, incorporated a variety of artworks, often in an unconventional manner, into the family’s office buildings (see Chapter 5). By incorporating the de Rivera’s sculpture into his business logo, Kaufman perpetuated the notion that the mid-1950s were a special time. By foregrounding art, instead of architecture, the logo assured clients that amenities were prioritized in his buildings By translating the physical sculpture into a graphic logo, it literally became ‘a symbol of the time’.

The specific placement of Continuum at 711’s entrance anticipated its subsequent use as a logo. Although it was not accompanied by the name of the developer, its installation height was in a continuous line of sight with other business identifiers and
advertisements on Third Avenue. Like any logo, Continuum’s potency increased with repeat viewing. Passing the sculpture at the beginning and end of every work day would impress its image into the minds of the building’s occupants, transcending the specificity of the discrete sculptural pair, to form a mental association between sculpture-as-image and the Kaufman organization.

Lescaze and de Rivera were sensitive to the sculpture’s placement, not only in terms of its height on the wall, but also in its direction of address. Lescaze extensively photographed architectural models of 711 Third Avenue to test the effects of various lighting conditions. For example, he made a miniature module of the window treatment to see how shadows would play on its surface at different times of day. He also created a model of the entry vestibule within which he placed a scaled version of Continuum on its northern and southern walls, in turn. (Fig. 2.10) In each of these two images, a light source outside the frame shines from the right side of the model to replicate the angle of the sun as it makes its daily westward journey. When the sculpture was placed on what would be the southern wall, it is almost unrecognizable, cast in shadow. Placed on the northern wall, Continuum shines. In addition to catching the sun, the work presents itself to nearby pedestrian and automobile traffic.

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203 Again, see the photograph of the last run of the ‘El’ in Kate Ascher and Thomas Mellins. New York Rising, An Illustrated History from the Durst Collection. Monacelli Press with Columbia University, 2018, pgs. 108-109. The exception to this line of advertisements was a single billboard affixed to the fourth floor of 711 Third Avenue’s frame, advertising the structural steel’s manufacturer. Obviously, this only appeared temporarily during the construction period.

204 All of the photographs discussed in this paragraph were taken by William Lescaze and may be found in the William Lescaze Papers, Avery Architecture & Art Library, Columbia University.

205 This was not the first time that de Rivera had considered incorporating his work into an architectural project. In 1952, his sculptures illustrated Dore Ashton’s call for the integration of art and architecture. See Dore Ashton, Arts and Architecture, vol. 69, no. 11 November 1952, pgs. 14, 34. An architectural model of a tall building with a blank façade, interrupted by three rectangular entryways at its base, was adorned by de Rivera’s undulating wisp of stainless steel. The form was approximately 40’ tall, in relation to the height of the human figures displayed in the central bay. Its form was reminiscent of a sinuous contrail of cigarette
Arts and Architecture defined de Rivera’s output in 1956 as marked by “dedication to a narrow but vertically developed philosophy of sculpture”. His works often took the form of a calligraphic line written in three-dimensional space via a sinuous, flowing ribbon of gleaming stainless steel. The sculpture illustrating the above quotation was entitled Construction 8 (1954) which took the form of a Mobius strip; a circuit of steel twisting and undulating gracefully upon itself, a figure-eight in which none of its segments touched. It perched, impossibly balanced, on a polished black, slightly elliptical blob of stone, which functioned both as a rudimentary pediment but also as a neutral, matte background upon which the stainless steel could shine all the more seductively. His work for 711 Third Avenue represented the other major branch of his sculptural output—wall-mounted constructions featuring torqued triangular forms. To create these works—

an actual spine or rod is shaped to the desired contour of the piece with a vertebra of triangles spaced at close intervals. The triangles enlarge or diminish as may be

206 Arts and Architecture, vol. 73, no. 9, September, 1956, pg. 13
desired in the final form. Over this skeleton the skin is forged with the triangles serving to guide the turning of its surface planes.  

After the ‘skin’ was welded to the armature, the seams were sanded down and polished, “rubbed hard and long with carborundum cloth of two hundred different degrees of fineness. Finally, its greatest highlights are brought out with buffing rouge.”  

Although these works did not receive the level of critical attention or acclaim as his undulating metal rod sculptures, they did appear in the context of interior decoration. His Construction #15 (1951) appears in a domestic interior designed by Margaret King Hunter, “one of the country’s few successful woman architects,” in a special issue of Life dedicated to women. Another such work was installed on the façade of a restaurant in Midtown Manhattan in 1948. Here, it functioned similarly to Continuum, in that it served as a beacon to customers. Because it was installed directly on the façade, instead of in an exterior vestibule, it gleamed in the sun. The high polish that the artist employed was one of his signature features and he considered it an integral part of the sculpture:

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208 Dore Ashton. “Sculpture of Jose de Rivera,” *Arts Magazine*, vol. 30, no. 4 April, 1956, pg. 40.

209 This work is in the collection of the University Art Museum, Berkeley, California. It measures 35 x 48 x 31”. “Housewives’ House- Designed by a Woman, it Puts Kitchen in the Center,” *Life*, December 24, 1956, pg. 136. Hunter attended Harvard’s Graduate School of Architecture in 1942, the first year they allowed women. She and her husband Ed would bring modernist design to Vermont. The couple’s impact on the area was the subject of an online exhibition, “Mad for Mid-Century Modern, Modern Architecture Comes to Norwich,” presented by the Norwich Historical Society.

210 “Arresting Café Front Created with Sculpture and Mosaic,” *Herald Tribune*, November 16, 1947, pg. 1. There is a photograph of the artist working with an assistant at his New York City studio and an image of the work installed. The caption reads, “Midtown restaurant, designed by George Nemeny and A. W. Geller, uses bold abstract sculpture by Jose de Rivera against plain façade of redwood siding”.

211 The entrance to 711 looks totally different today. In 2009 the black and white checkered flooring was removed, the hinged doors replaced with two revolving doors and the entrance was relocated to abut the sidewalk instead of being recessed. Jose de Rivera’s sculpture was moved inside and placed on the southern wall of the lobby, facing the elevator bank.
The ‘matter’ is broken, for its high polish captures every light, echoing forms, creating new ones, making a cadenced refrain of the whole… The artist knew before he began, that the ally of light was waiting to assume its final, crucial role… A multitude of forms, never the same, is created by light on the surface… we can assimilate the changing forms at human speed… Our eye follows, hypnotized by the man-made rhythms which correspond undoubtedly to our own inner tempos. Even if these sculptures are left immobile, and we must walk around them, the eye performs the same function: our senses are aroused to create a whole.\textsuperscript{212}

The reflective quality of Continuum encouraged movement just as its leaping figuration accomplished. One can imagine catching its brilliant reflection of light by surprise, from afar. Curiosity peaked, they would approach the sculpture. With every change in the viewer’s position, the gleam would respond by shifting along its elegant form. The sculpture was an effective beacon in this context, but the sculptor also found favor in the world of industry.\textsuperscript{213}

\textsuperscript{212} Dore Ashton, “Sculpture of Jose de Rivera,” \textit{Arts Magazine}, vol. 30, no. 4 April, 1956, pg. 40.
\textsuperscript{213} Jose de Rivera’s sculpture was employed at 711 Third Avenue to identify the building’s main entrance, to welcome visitors and employees, and to promote a positive working environment, but beyond its walls the artist found favor with industry, especially manufacturers of metal products. In terms of the art historical canon, David Smith is the American sculptor most lionized for his use of industrial materials and tools, but in the mid to late 1950s de Rivera was a veritable poster child for the wedding of art and industry. See for example Candida N. Smith, \textit{David Smith}, Gagosian Gallery, 2010 and Anfam, David. \textit{Abstract Expressionism}, Thames and Hudson, 1994.

In 1954, de Rivera was highlighted by Electromet Review, a publication devoted to stainless-steel, as one of several contemporary artists turning to the, “modern material to provide masterpieces that will last indefinitely… combin(ing) past and present… the resulting smooth, gleaming creations are literally symphonies in stainless steel.” Stainless-steel’s ruggedness meant that it could be confidently displayed outside, year-round, like Continuum. The next year, one of his rod constructions illustrated an advertisement for American Enka Corporation, a producer of rayon and other synthetic fibers. See American Enka Corporation, advertisement, \textit{Time}, October 1956, pg. 99. In this context, his undulating lines of metal monumentalized and ennobled their sinuous product, as if isolating a single thread, increasing its proportions, and giving it a metallic finish. He made industry look sophisticated. In 1957, the industry publication \textit{US Steelways} profiled the sculptor as “a product of our times,” in his use of modern materials and industrial fabrication techniques. See “He works at art—hammer and tongs,” \textit{US Steelways}, February 1957, pg. 24. This was not just empty praise, de Rivera was the son of the chief engineer at a sugar factory in Louisiana, and worked for several years in foundries and die-cast manufacturing in Chicago in the late 1920s and early ‘30s. See Thomas S. Tibbs, “Introduction,” \textit{Jose de Rivera: Retrospective Exhibition, 1930-1971}, La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, February 20-April 16, 1972, Whitney Museum of American Art, May 8-June 8, 1972, published by La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, 1972, pg. 4. In 1958, Reynolds Metal Company commissioned a sculpture from him to serve as the Reynolds Memorial Award, given annually beginning in 1956, to an architect that best utilized aluminum in their design, and to “encourage collaboration between art and architecture, and between industry and the
Any type of positive surprise, no matter how fleeting, was something to be encouraged when entering the world of work. At 711 Third Avenue, the specific art installations were chosen for this ability. William Kaufman’s promotional pamphlet for the building quoted the developer—

We recognize that people spend most of their lives in and about their offices. This was the basis for our inspiration to add the tranquility and warmth of the arts to a building which was designed to provide the ultimate in comfort and facilities… To Jose de Rivera our applause for his timeless contribution in the weaving of the pattern of harmony.  

Kaufman positioned art as one of a number of amenities offered by the office building. His use of the words ‘tranquility’ and ‘harmony’ subtly addressed the potential tension associated with a workplace. Disharmony can appear within a single organization, but the larger issue was that 711 Third Avenue housed a variety of unrelated businesses, and potential competitors. Art was placed in areas with the greatest potential for chance encounters.

The Lobby and Hans Hofmann’s Elevator Mosaic

At 711 Third Avenue, Continuum functioned as a beacon to draw in tenants or visitors to the main entrance. Once their eyes adjusted from brilliant natural light outside, to the fluorescent illumination inside, an aesthetic morsel appeared in the distance. The slab of brilliant, tessellated chroma was Hans Hofmann’s mosaic mural wrapping the

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fine arts.” See Eastern Public Relations Office, Reynolds Metals Company, “Sculpture of Jose de Rivera to be presented to the architects selected by the American Institute of Architects to receive the 1958 R. S. Reynolds Memorial Award,” press release, June 1, 1958, Jose de Rivera Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Museum.
Throughout the development of the skyscraper building type, elevators have traditionally been placed in the center of the building where light does not penetrate. Establishing the elevator shaft as a spine from which the offices are clustered makes economic sense because the highest rents come from spaces with access to natural light, especially before the widespread use of electric, and later fluorescent, lights. To avoid visual monotony in this important area, art could embellish these otherwise austere zones. Mosaic was a particularly effective medium because of its glassy shine and vibrant color, making the space seem larger and more welcoming.²¹⁵

This was Hofmann’s first realized mosaic after the 1950 exhibition, “The Muralist and the Modern Architect” and only one of two completed in his career. Art historian and curator Kenneth Silver, argued that Hofmann’s Chimbote project for the Kootz exhibition, expanded the painter’s artistic practice, leading to his late signature style: floating rectangles of pure color set amidst or in relation to patches of gestural painterly bravura.²¹⁶ Instead of painting a maquette for the proposed bell tower enlarged to its final, architectural scale, Hofmann created ten large-scale studies, which he collaged together, creating rhythms of scale and color.²¹⁷ One of the surviving works, Push and Pull Study

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²¹⁵ The building originally had deeply veined marble surrounding the elevator. When the building was refurbished in 2009 this was replaced with a monotone grey marble so as not to detract from the visual stimulation of the mosaic.
²¹⁷ The issue of expanding a small composition to architectural scale was discussed in relation to a mosaic created by Lee Krasner and Ronald Stein for a skyscraper at Two Broadway, designed by Emery Roth & Sons (1959). Their solution was to literally break with tradition—instead of using regularized square tiles, they manually broke large ceramic tiles to fill the jagged forms of their composition. By dispensing with an underlying grid, the mosaic retained a painterly quality. See B. H. Friedman, “Manhattan Mosaic,” Craft Horizons, vol. 19, no. 1, January/February 1959, pgs. 26-29. The mosaic firm led by Vincent Foscato oversaw the installation of the Krasner mural and was also responsible for executing Hofmann’s murals.
for Chimbote, (fig 2.11) was to be used as an abstracted artist’s signature, something like a corporate logo near the apex of the tower. Its title corresponds to the theory most associated with Hofmann’s—the idea of creating optical movement through a constructed, fictive sense of depth, via a calculated relationship of color, line and shape, only to be subsequently ruptured by the awareness of the two-dimensionality of the painting’s underlying support. Visual pleasure and intellectual interest are maintained by the viewer’s constant oscillation between the material facticity of the painting and its persuasive illusionism. The floating square in the study illustrates this concept nicely—darker colors seem to visually recede and the brighter parts of the composition appear to push away from the surface into our own real space. Being rectangular, the square echoes the basic geometry of the support.

Although the Chimbote project was not realized, Hofmann jumped at Kaufman’s commission. The artist averred having, “never (done) a commercial job throughout my long artistic career … never did I have the idea to do anything that I considered not to be pure art in the most uncompromising and absolute sense of the word”. Possibly Hofmann’s test run with Sert led him to reevaluation. The multiple layers of mediation and translation in scale and material required for completing an architectural commission may have seemed a hindrance to some, but Hofmann whole-heartedly embraced the process.

Krasner’s mosaic is also discussed by Emily S. Warner in her 2017 University of Pennsylvania dissertation, to be published in the forthcoming book Abstraction Unframed: Abstract Murals at Midcentury. Unlike this dissertation which focuses mainly on sculpture and its siting in privately owned lobbies and plazas, Warner focuses on murals funded by the government or works displayed on the exterior of buildings so that they address the public.

For the 711 Third Avenue project, studio assistants “freely translated” his painted studies onto graph paper, then enlarged them to architectural scale on four 16-foot long blueprints. Working in an abandoned Kaufman property near to 711 Third Avenue, soon to be demolished, Hofmann cut these prints up, experimented with various compositions, further painting them, and collaging sheets of colored paper. This last step is how his signature floating squares, mentioned earlier, were introduced into 711’s final mosaic composition. Once he was satisfied, the various layered elements were glued in place. Hofmann worked with Vincent Foscato’s Long Island-based Venetian mosaic workshop, using over 500 hues of tile to translate his composition into a medium formerly foreign to the painter. From this completed ‘cartoon,’ tiles were arranged into the composition. Sections of tiles glued to a paper backing were delivered to the lobby at 711 Third Avenue. There the walls were covered with cement, the paper pulled off the back, cement rubbed into the gaps between the tiles, and the mural reappeared right side forward.

A promotional pamphlet accompanied the opening of 711 Third Avenue highlighting Hofmann’s mosaic, and the integral role of art in the world of work. Kaufman lauded its ability to, “vitalize the lobby and infuse it with the sense of the life that throbs so strongly all about us on Manhattan Island.” The pamphlet continued, “by virtue of its sparkling quality, mosaics, even in ancient designs, light up after centuries for the beholder. By his vigorous and commanding mastery of color relationships and his power to design in subtle color tones, Mr. Hoffmann has magnified this sparkling quality

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219 An extensive description of Hofmann’s working process for the 711 Third Avenue commission can be found in Silver, pgs. 43-49.
221 711 Third Avenue: Preview of Mosaic Designed by Hans Hoffman, pamphlet, April 18, 1956, pgs. 1-6, Hans Hofmann Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute.
and breathed into it the vividness of our mid-Twentieth Century existence”. The palpable sense of energy in this mural and its connection with the quintessential mid-century urban center of Manhattan recalls Piet Mondrian’s *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1943), taking the city’s grid of streets as a compositional feature, imbued with the energy and improvisational character of jazz. Hofmann’s mosaic similarly alluded to the larger context of Manhattan, especially as the square tiles formed an intricate and dynamic grid all their own.

The mosaic allowed Hofmann to expand his concepts of “push and pull” beyond the edge of the canvas into real space. Upon its unveiling, *Interiors Magazine* lauded the work’s “vivid design full of force and movement, (which) destroys not only the visual solidity of the shaft but also the boxy effect of its planes – a true integration of art and interior design”. (fig. 2.12) One-way Hofmann accomplished this was by extending the design around the corners of the elevator core, directing vision from flat planes into real space. Murals are usually viewed from a single point, often requiring optical scanning along their panoramic proportions. The Chimbote project, despite its abstraction, would have been fairly conservative except that viewers would scan it vertically instead of horizontally. At 711 Third Avenue however, one cannot see composition in its entirety, thereby encouraging circumambulation for visual pleasure as well as assisting visitors in finding one of four elevator doors. Just like one’s first view of the mosaic was obstructed by the corridor wall, so too were the contiguous sections of color broken by the corners of the elevator bank. This produced a tantalizing effect— in the pursuit of taking in the composition as a whole, viewers were want to keep turning the corner. Because each

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222 Ibid.
223 *Interiors Magazine*, vol. 32, no. 1, January, 1957, pg. 10
section spilled over the next vertical edge, this process could go on indefinitely. If the composition had been figural, this feature might have been irksome, but because of its playful abstraction, it made the total work dynamic. Often, the most engaging vantage points for viewing the mosaic were when the corner was in the center of one’s vision. Seen from this angle, literal spatial recession became wedded with optical effects of recession based on the composition’s color relationships. The viewer became an actor in the drama of the work of art’s unfolding, foregrounding issues of temporality and duration in a way not possible with a fixed easel painting. The viewer was physically pushed and pulled in concert with the analogous optical effects produced by the mosaic’s composition.

One of the advantages of mosaic as a medium was its ability to work effectively from a distance as well as in proximity. Visitors first caught a glimpse of the white-and-blue dominated west-facing portion upon entering the lobby. Brighter in color than the marble wall behind, it produced the optical illusion of floating beyond its true physical position. This effect was summarily negated as the lobby’s corridor obscured the remainder of its western face. As one approached, the planes of seemingly pure color revealed themselves to be mottled, like a Post-Impressionist canvas. The mosaic’s tesserae were not the pencil-eraser-sized dabs of Seurat, but instead similar in scale to the elevator buttons nearby, and just as enticing in terms of haptics; like the buttons, they almost begged to be touched. The tiles were regularized in their shape and installation, forming a nearly endless grid. This regularity gave them the digital quality of pixels.

Unlike the canonical integration of mosaic and architectural surface in the Byzantine tradition, the composition occupied terrestrial space instead of being relegated
to the ceiling of an apse where its distance from the viewer allowed the image to remain perpetually resolved, as well as eluding to the heavenly hereafter. In Byzantium, visual interest was maintained by the ever-shifting luminescence of flickering candlelight on unevenly set tiles. At 711 Third Avenue, the mosaic was brightly and evenly lit by the fluorescent lights above. Its planes of tile were set flush and contiguous to each other, so visual animation of the composition instead relied on a continual perceptual oscillation between resolved planes of pure color and an awareness of their multifaceted composition, as well as the viewer’s movement around the elevator shaft. This perceptual doubling of color, like a multi-stable image, did not appear in Hofmann’s painting practice because he used pure colors, often directly from the tube.224 When his paints mixed, wet on wet, their interaction was indexical, like the Abstract Expressionists who followed him, instead of relying on simultaneous contrast like the postimpressionists. Barnett Newman has been applauded for his close attention to the phenomenological impact of the viewer’s positionality, but Hofmann’s thinking on this subject at 711 Third Avenue was similarly subtle.225 As visitors turned the corner at the end of the entrance corridor, they were met head-on with the elevator core’s volumetric totality. The dominant yellow gesture on the left side directed their gaze downward, around the corner to the elevator’s polished metal doors. Between the double set of doors, mosaic panels dominated by a high-visibility-yellow background drew attention to the functional locus of the block. His composition frequently employed diagonal gestures to visually break the underlying grid.

224 Silver, pg. 65.
The composition on the far side of the core was dominated by a burnt orange and crimson red. (fig. 2.13) While the blue and white section exuded Apollonian tranquility, populated by large gestural marks in red and yellow, the far side was all Dionysian chaos. The former section invited viewers to approach the elevator doors, while the latter discouraged prolonged looking. The compression in scale and the number of marks on the far side also emphasized the actual architectural compression of space around it, compared with the corridor’s approach, and further, the openness to the sky at the building’s exterior. Gestural marks appeared like an indecipherable language, or amoeboid life forms, with most of them set against white rectangular frames. Kenneth Silver called these forms, “suggestive of scraps of paper, or magazine clippings, or plans, or charts, tacked to a cluttered, orange-ground bulletin board, perhaps a reference to the kinds of busy work lives anticipated on the nineteen floors of offices above.”

In the midst of all this formalist uncertainty was an anchor of stability, a floating rectangle of a different sort: the elevator’s control panel. The necessary functionality of the elevator buttons re-emphasized the tactility of the thousands of individual mosaic tiles. Similar to the compositional effect of Hofmann’s floating squares, the elevator panel ruptured the optical exploration of illusionistic space, asserting the facticity of its architectural support. The opening and closing of the doors provided a further layer to the notion of “push and pull.”

As a speculative real estate venture, art at 711 Third Avenue had to address disparate occupants. The two works discussed spoke to notions of connectivity at both

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micro and macro scales. Jose de Rivera’s sculpture could be read in terms of the social connection between two bodies, or the electrical charge between synapses. *Continuum’s* scale was effective in addressing pedestrians on the street. The potential for sociality was further established by the somewhat cramped scale of the lobby, a feature not perceptible in photographic reproduction. 711’s lobby was not a great theatrical space where strangers exchanged glances from afar, as in a luxury hotel or opera house. Instead, most of the ground floor footprint of 711 Third Avenue was given over to a Chase Manhattan bank branch at the south-west corner of the building and a retail outlet for the Dictaphone Company at the north-west corner. After cleaving over so much, the lobby was little more than a narrow corridor leading to a space just large enough to accommodate the elevators.

Framed like a modernist Kaaba in the back of the lobby, Hofmann’s mosaic referred to larger systems of connectivity than *Continuum*, but it built upon the former work’s encouragement of social interaction. The bold gestural marks on the blue and white dominated section of the composition could be read in terms of the infrastructure of canals, freeways and even the jet-powered trajectory of airliners. The red portion of the mosaic nodded obliquely to the linguistic and organizational instruments of bureaucracy: memos, ledgers and emerging computerized calculation and record-keeping. Like the Harry Bertoia screen discussed in Chapter 1, Hofmann’s mosaic emphasized a part-to-whole relationship. It’s chromatic hum, created via mottled planes of simultaneous color contrast, and the overall visual cohesion of its gestural and geometric forms were based on the conglomeration of innumerable discrete elements. This part-to-whole relationship could be easily read as a metaphor for a thriving capitalist economy. The economic system invoked was responsible for bringing these disparate office workers and their
clients together, where art encouraged the creation of a well-functioning social network in miniature.

Art too had potential psychological benefits for the workplace. It embodied notions of creativity and individuality; especially valuable for those working in the building whose occupation might deny them a sense of autonomy and volition within the larger hierarchy of a business organization. A lobby was a transitional space with people moving from the self-directed experience of their private lives to the proscriptive environment of work. Entering the unadorned interior of the elevator, a miniature vestibule within a larger vestibular space, the machine-assisted upward movement offered one last moment of quiet introspection before entering the world of work. In 1950, while thinking more broadly about the new potential for artwork in public life Hofmann stated, “our working places should be made into palaces where it will be a joy to work… neuroticism in our time has its cause in a space-starved living condition.”

Art had the potential to expand the sense of space, a feature welcomed especially at, where people were forced to occupy the same space for hours each day. Speaking in 1956 to the New York Times art critic Dore Ashton, Hofmann explained, “I thought of people working (at 711 Third Avenue) and I wanted to make it as spring-like, as gay as possible”. He felt that public buildings should become, “the aesthetical documentation of our democratic ideals… in democratic thinking, space is not anymore conceived for the voluptuous and luxurious living of kings… nor for an inflated glorification of dogmas

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227 Tine Dickey, “A Decisive Moment: Hofmann’s Mosaic Murals” in Hans Hoffman. edited by James Yohe, Rizzoli, 2002 pgs. 271-76. Also see Typescript, Nov. 25, 1950, Hans Hofmann Papers, the Archives of American Art, the Smithsonian Institution

and ideologies.”\textsuperscript{29} In a sense then, art which was once the exclusive privilege for kings and popes to express their wealth and power could now be marshalled to elide the very patron responsible for their creation. Often, art displayed in these modern workplaces was framed as if it was a gift to the people who worked there. While aesthetic embellishment of lobbies and plazas may have been greeted with favor, the supposed altruism ascribed to art’s existence should not be taken at face value. This was especially true for speculative real estate ventures, where no matter what colorful language was used to promote them, their existence was solely dictated by the pursuit of profit. If art made the workplace more agreeable, all the better to maintain the longevity of their leases.

The success of Hofmann’s large-scale, architecturally-sited projects was contingent on their patronage. The ambiguous quality of business patronage, especially in a speculative office building, necessitated that Hofmann’s mural spoke to a variegated work force. This situation provided the conditions for a novel relationship between art and viewer, one not possible in more traditional contexts. The attention that the mosaic elevator received in the popular press led to future commissions for Hofmann in this new material, but they were not met with the same level of critical praise.\textsuperscript{230}

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{230} In 1959, Hofmann was commissioned to create a mosaic mural for the exterior of the New York School of Printing at 439 West Forty-Ninth Street. The building was designed by Hugh Kelly and B. Sumner Gruzen, representing a new model for public school buildings. Hofmann created an exterior mosaic mural spanning sixty-four feet near the school’s entrance. The artist later referred to this work as the ‘bowtie on the building’, implying that it was an ornamental afterthought, not integrated with the architecture as it was at 711 Third Avenue. See “Tokens of Art in City Schools”, \textit{Progressive Architecture}, vol. 60, no. 4, April, 1959 pgs. 146-151.

Hofmann’s mural was described as, “a vivid splash of color, it faces a row of dingy brownstones.” See
The Status of Mosaic in the 1950s

Perhaps it was the medium of mosaic in particular, when it was presented to the public on a grand scale, that caused consternation. Although it was not a common material seen in galleries and museums in the 1950s, it was a popular means of decorating buildings.

Perhaps the most successful East Coast mosaicist was Max Spivak.231 As previously discussed, he collaborated with William Lescaze on the Calderone Theatre in 1948. He received many other commissions in the postwar period.232 His name has since lost currency, until 2015, when a perfectly intact mosaic surrounding the entrance to 5 Bryant Park (originally known as 111 West 40th Street) was uncovered. The New York

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“Mosaic on the Exterior of the New York School of Printing,” *Craft Horizons*, vol. 19, no. 1, January/February 1959, pg. 8. One could make a similar argument about 711 Third Avenue as it was the first prestige architectural project in the area. Instead of persisting as a ‘token’ of art, the office building’s success motivated other construction projects around it, thereby improving the neighborhood.

The potential for creative artistic interventions in public schools were stymied by budgets and installation at the very end of the construction process, relegated to spaces pre-designated by the architect without consultation with the artist, creating an awkward relationship between the artwork and its architectural context. This was the case with Hofmann’s mural at the New York School of Printing where it was placed along an otherwise blank wall. Thus, it engaged viewers as they moved through space or engaged the concepts of ‘push and pull’ as they had effectively at 711 Third Avenue. The public at large, took fault with what they saw as the unnecessary expenditure of public money on something as seemingly unessential as aesthetic embellishment. See Brown, Conrad “Uproar over new York’s school art”, *Craft Horizons*, vol. 19, no. 1, January/February 1959, pg. 10. Actual expenditure on art was less than one cent for every ten dollars. At 711, the art installations were privately funded, but when the public was forced to foot the bill, art could be seen as superfluous.

Born in Poland in 1906, Spivak graduated from Cooper Union before studying in Paris and traveling across Europe. In 1938, he received a commission by the WPA to design a mosaic panel at the Civil Service Hall in Washington, D.C., chiefly so that unemployed mosaics could be hired to install the work. See Otis Gage, “Mosaics for the Millions, Max Spivak Brings the Art of Byzantium to Broadway,” *Craft Horizons*, vol. 15, no. 3, May/June 1955, pg. 35.

He designed the exterior of Riker’s Cafeteria in Manhattan. From 1950-52 he adorned the home of architect Edward Durrell Stone, the cruise ships *S.S. Liberty* and the *S.S. Constitution*, and the lobby of the Statler-Center Hotel in Los Angeles. From 1959-1962 he taught art history and visual art at Bard College, followed by a ten-year appointment in drawing and mosaic at the Pratt Institute and the New School for Social Research. He designed murals in oil, mosaic, stained glass and tile for clients as various as high schools, research laboratories, theatres, ocean liners, hotels and libraries. This biographical information was gleaned from the Max Spivak Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Museum.
Times wrote a lengthy article about the discovery and the artist himself.²³³ What first appeared to be the micro made macro—dozens of aestheticized microbes bobbing playfully in a plenum of agar; on closer inspection they revealed themselves to be abstracted tools of the garment industry, the original tenants of the building. Spivak’s work was described by Otis Gage in Crafts Horizons as bringing, “a sense of joy, vitality, and excitement to public places and to humanize the stone and steel of modern living… (he is) a poet in color who chooses to speak to Everyman.”²³⁴

Despite the professional success of Spivak, he remained an outlier in the larger trend to incorporate modern art into architecture. The above comment about mosaic appealing to the “Everyman”, could also be seen as a double-edged sword—popularity and critical esteem are often in conflict.

Perhaps mosaic did not appear to be a sufficiently fine art material because of its lack of idiosyncratic facture. Its regularized glazed tiles elided the artist’s hand, and as previously discussed, the translation from design to installation potentially detracted from a sense of spontaneity often considered to be synonymous with artistic creativity. Mosaic certainly did not bear the indexical quality of painting and its cultural association with artistic bravura. As opposed to the traditional Byzantine tesserae, mosaic at mid-century was usually created with identically sized, mass-produced square tiles mounted to walls in giant grids. Perhaps, the workman-like character of mosaic’s installation was legible in its finished form. Despite the mechanized fashion of their creation, these types of

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²³³ David W. Dunlop, “A Brief Resurrection for a Mural Recalling the Garment Industry’s Heyday Building Blocks,” The New York Times, March 26, 2015, pg. 19. Discovery of the 40 x 18 ½’ mural came as a surprise to the building owners and public alike. Despite immediate public interest in the mural, the renovation went on as planned, preserving but continuing to obscure the mosaic.

commissions represented the high end of mid-century mosaic art. Because of its inexpensiveness as an exterior wall treatment or as a mode of interior decoration, there was an entire hierarchy of mosaic products available in the mid-50s to architects, construction workers and housewives. Each segment of this spectrum had its own perceived value, especially in relation to more lauded media like painting and sculpture. Architectural mosaic ran the gamut from utilitarian monotone cladding to decorative designs by famous artists.

In the mid to late 1950s, the aforementioned Spivak produced a line of signature mosaics available for consumer purchase. The series was produced by Suntile ceramics and advertised in various publications such as *Progressive Architecture* and *Architectural Forum* from 1956-58. Not only his name but his visage was connected with the series. He was shown alternatively in a dress shirt and tie designing tile patterns on paper, and inspecting test samples, like a quality control manager at a factory. He was styled more like a businessman or project coordinator than an artist. It could be argued that he exploited the ambiguous status of mosaic positioned between artistic expression and easy-to-install architectural decoration. While the finished Suntile products gave the look of original craftsmanship, the one-inch square tiles arrived pre-mounted on one by two-foot sheets. The patterns of the modular tile units ranged from striped, free-floating geometry or seemingly-randomly placed single blocks set against a contrasting background. Here mosaic combined qualities of art and craft with utilitarian installation. Advertisements suggested a range of applications: “murals, stripes, border, fabric-like

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235 For an example of the advertisement see *Progressive Architecture*, vol. 37, no. 5, May 5, 1956, pgs. 226-27.
236 The tile patterns were affixed to Setfast, a flexible patented material designed for easy use. To facilitate stress-free installation the Suntile company offered to refer local vetted contractors.
textures, geometric or random patterns”. In the somewhat dry words of the artist that sound more like a corporate mission statement than an artistic manifesto, “Our aim is to make available to architects and designers economical stock patterns in ceramic tile which will satisfy current interest in new forms of surface enrichment.”

Another company that advertised artist-designed mosaic patterns was Pomona Tile. In 1957 they introduced their “Distinguished Designer Series”. The artist-designed mosaic modules could be repeated to fill any given wall size, set against a contrasting pattern, or as a single module installed on a blank wall, like a painting. The advertisement announced:

Working under special assignment from Pomona Tile Manufacturing Company, five distinguished contemporary designers – Liebes, McCobb, Bass, Lazlo, and Sheets – have opened the way for scores of beautiful new uses and applications of decorative tiles for both residential and commercial construction. The project was an interesting challenge. The results … as usually happens when the true artist applies his talent to a new medium of creativity … are totally unexpected and unprecedented. And this inspiration, in turn, should beget a great new school of ideas, from architects, decorators, and builders.

The last name mentioned was Millard Sheets, a preeminent West Coast mosaicist. His commissions for the facades of dozens of branches of the Home Saving and Loan Bank made him an icon of California mid-century modernism.

237 Ibid.
238 Ibid.
239 Arts and Architecture, June 1957, pgs. 6-7.
240 Adam Arenson. Banking on Beauty: Millard Sheets and Midcentury Commercial Architecture in California. University of Texas Press, 2018. His mosaics were all figural, celebrating the history and culture of California. Their subject matter was redolent of the WPA, but were rendered in a slightly abstracted manner. This patronage led to commissions for government buildings, schools and hospitals. Sheets led a workshop of craftsmen out of his Claremont studio which produced the mosaics as well as painted murals, stained glass, fountains and sculpture. They are often placed on the wall with a generous border around them, making them more like weatherproof paintings than full bleed murals. See Paul Bockhurst. Claremont Modern: The Convergence of Art + Architecture at Midcentury. DVD, 2016.
In addition to products for the home, and for architects, was the emerging do-it-yourself craft hobby of mosaic-making. This was similar to the fad of making mobiles, discussed in conjunction with Alexander Calder in the following chapter, or paint-by-numbers. Magazines like *Sunset, House & Garden, House Beautiful, Better Homes and Gardens, Design, Popular Mechanics,* and *Life* all published instructions for making mosaic decorative plates, ashtrays, tiles, table-tops, and bird baths in addition to framed pictures that could be hung inside the home or outside in the backyard.\(^{241}\) (fig. 2.14) In this context, decoration and play were the notions most discussed. School children and housewives seem to be the main target for these articles. These associations with mosaic in the 1950s may have led artists who used the medium to be seen in a less than positive light. There were a few notable instances when mosaic was used at architectural scale in a well-received way. In 1959, Lee Krasner and the young painter Ronald Stein, designed an 86 by 12’ mosaic above the entrance of a new office tower at Two Broadway, near Battery Park. It was positively reviewed by Craft Horizons, and the artists were applauded for their ability to, “revitalize and individualize the mosaic technique,” by dispensing with regularized, mass-produced square tesserae and instead, by breaking Venetian enamel plates, so that they could more faithfully translate their preparatory collages to architectural scale.\(^{242}\) Another project that received a good deal of positive press was the new library building at the University of Mexico, in Mexico City. It was featured in *Life* in conjunction with the school’s massive modernization project that


transformed the campus in 1956. The entire exterior was covered in volcanic stone and tile mosaic, “set with Indian symbols.”\(^{243}\) (fig. 2.15) The *Illustrated London News* called it, “Probably the only building of its size in the world entirely covered with pictorial mosaic.”\(^{244}\) Even so, these projects were outliers within the breadth of mid-century modernist architectural projects.

It could be argued that like Hofmann, both Spivak and Millard Sheets tarnished their reputation by engaging with corporate patronage, especially in a medium that already blurred the designation between art and hobby. The question surrounding much of modern art is what type of patronage is appropriate for the modern artist? The palpability of the patron and artist relationship for mid century business-commissioned abstraction could make some scholars uncomfortable; cautious to give these projects their due consideration. Corporate art patronage seems to break some unspoken taboo, but the very conditions of this mode of patronage allowed artists to address issues they could not under more traditional circumstances. Frank Stella summarized the complicated status of Hofmann and his artistic legacy as such:

Possibly one of the reasons he did not achieve the type of success that artists like Pollock, Newman, Rothko, Kline and Still is he did not achieve a signature style/an artistic brand instantly recognizable as him. If anything, this came at the end of his life with the combination of ‘floating squares’ and gestural brushwork. The difficulty to pin him down is exacerbated by these public commissions which seem to break with the narrative of Ab Ex as a personal physic struggle in isolation in the studio through the medium of painting.\(^{245}\)

\(^{243}\) “Shiny Showplace for Studies,” *Life*, vol. 41, no. 23, December 3, 1958, pg. 105
The inability to “pin him down” stylistically could also be seen as a virtue. Instead of bombast, Hofmann was able to focus his energy and talents into a variety of connected fields. This attitude also led him to experimenting with new materials, working processes and modes of patronage. Curator Kenneth E. Silver sought to revitalize interest in this dynamic part of Hofmann’s career by organizing a 2015 exhibition at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut. It featured painted studies for mosaics as well as drawings and architectural plans. The highlight of the exhibit was a half-scale reproduction of the elevator shaft placed in the very center of the gallery. (fig. 2.16) In her review of the show, New York Times critic Roberta Smith reiterated many of the traditional critiques of Hofmann’s oeuvre, but reserved praise for the 711 Third Avenue project and his, “murals (which) add a blast of color to a muted legacy… (they) almost literally jostles visitors. But that doesn’t stop the work from detonating in the mind and eye.”\(^{246}\) Just like the materiality of mosaics, Hofmann’s unique project was able to stand the test of time.

fig. 2.1- Architectural model of Chimbote, Peru, reproduced in Silver, Kenneth E., *Walls of Color: The Murals of Hans Hofmann*. Bruce Museum, 2015, pg. 23. The bell tower Hofmann was to decorate is visible in the open square near the center of the model.
fig. 2.2- 711 Third Avenue, 1956, designed by William Lescaze, photograph by William Lescaze, William Lescaze Papers, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.
fig. 2.3- Max Spivak mosaic mural, Calderone Theatre, Hampstead, New York, 1949, photograph from “Glass Mosaic Mural for Calderone Theatre,” Interiors, Volume 109, no. 3, March 1949, pg. 108.
fig. 2.4- *El’ Station, 3rd Avenue at 53rd Street, N.Y.C.*, Ernest Fiene, circa 1930s, Palmer Museum of Art, The Pennsylvania State University.
fig. 2.5- The Last Run of the “El”, May 12, 1955, Seymour B. Durst Old York Library, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library
Fig. 2.8- *Continuum* by Jose de Rivera, 1956, installed at the entrance to 711 Third Avenue, designed by William Lescaze, photograph by William Lescaze, William Lescaze Papers, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.
fig. 2.9- The William Kaufman Organization, logo, created 1956, via kaufmanorganization.com.
fig. 2.10- Photographs of architectural model of lobby at 711 Third Avenue, 1955, photograph by William Lescaze, William Lescaze Papers, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.
Chapter 3
The Inland Steel Building (1958)

In 1958, the Inland Steel company opened a new headquarters at 30 West Monroe Street on Chicago’s Loop. (Fig. 3.1) It was the first skyscraper constructed on the Loop since the Field Building (1934) and was Chicago’s second International Style skyscraper.\textsuperscript{247} The majority of this dissertation has focused on abstraction’s use by business in Manhattan for several reasons- Midtown was the locus of a postwar high-rise office construction boom, which began earlier and had more longevity than in any other major American city.\textsuperscript{248} It was and remains the financial hub of America, and financial institutions like banks were some of the most prolific and precedent-setting organizations for the collection and display of abstraction. Manhattan acted as an incubator for corporate modernism—an aesthetic which blended a particular mode of abstraction with International Style architecture. Once this style had been established, it was exported to other major U.S. cities, directly or through imitation. This combination of glass curtain walls and large sculptural abstraction became nearly synonymous with prestige

\textsuperscript{247} In 1955, One Prudential Plaza opened on 130 E. Randolph Street. Although this 41-story headquarters was an International Style building, it featured no abstraction in its lobby or plaza. Instead, its west-facing façade was a blank wall of stone veneer, interrupted only at the upper floors by a deep relief carving of the company’s logo—a rock outcropping meant to convey strength and security. Underneath this sculptural accent was carved the name of the company and its motto, “Insurance Company of America,” filled in with gold leaf. Thus, the structure combined modernist architecture with artistic embellishment that would have fit comfortably in a WPA-era structure.

\textsuperscript{248} The automobile industry, located in Detroit, MI led to the creation of several prestige architectural projects, including the GM Technical Center (1952) and the Ford World Headquarters (1956). They were located outside the city proper and were more analogous to the emerging campus-style offices popular in the mid to late 1950s. Office towers were constructed in Los Angeles, Chicago and Dallas, but without the density of Manhattan. Because so many towers were erected in a walkable area, pedestrians would have been able to see the aesthetics of corporate modernism develop before their eyes in a short time period. The other component of the postwar real estate boom was the construction of single-family homes. This period saw the rise of mass-produced homes and master planned suburban communities like Levittown, New York or Lakewood, California. This phenomenon bears little relationship to the profusion of mid-century office towers except that they provided housing for workers and their families. Abstract art did not play a part in their development.
architectural projects, whether they were corporate headquarters, banks, or speculative office towers, or a combination of building types.

The Inland Steel building illustrates this process of aesthetic dissemination, not only because it was one of the city’s first postwar modernist skyscrapers, but also because it was designed by SOM, a firm that modeled itself as a large corporation, with offices throughout the country. Art installed at Inland’s headquarters referred to its architectural setting and spoke to notions of connectivity — the very quality which facilitated a smoothly running business as well as allowing for such aesthetic dissemination across great distances. Like many of the previously discussed artworks, they were selected for their ability to visualize an ideal conception of not only a particular company, but its place within the economy at large. The art at Inland Steel not only depicted an organizational hierarchy, but also the webs of communication through its complex supply chain, as well as its integration into the larger structure of capitalism. The art also referred to particular novel qualities of the building itself, both in terms of its mechanical and structural features. The most easily seen work of art, located in the street-level lobby, referred to the architecture through a subtle contrast between voids and solids, between the visible and the invisible. Its mode of display, and its connection to a manufacturing operation rendered the sculpture as a type of engine for business. The rebranding of atomic energy from war to peacetime applications provided a backdrop for the reading of the building’s major art commission.
The Building

The building’s design changed drastically over time, and its final manifestation as something novel and attention-grabbing was a product of a change in company management. In 1954, SOM representatives met with the chairman of Inland Steel, Clarence Randall. He wanted something “very conservative and temperate. I want to preserve the best of the past. I want this building to be like a man with immaculate English tailoring- his clothes are so good you are not aware of how well he is tailored.”

Luckily for the architectural history of Chicago, Randall retired the next year, putting the construction project in the hands of Joseph Leigh Block, Inland’s CEO and the son of the firm’s founder.

Instead of a traditional design he opted for something much more modern and daring. In his words, he wanted a building that would, “do steel proud and do our city proud,” functioning, “both as a civic monument and a showcase for Inland’s diversity of steel products.” Indeed, the structure was supported by steel columns smelted by Inland Steel and clad in a metallic curtain wall. (fig. 3.2) An International Style skyscraper was a perfect choice for a steel company because the honest depiction of structure and materials was a hallmark for the architectural movement.

And there was no constructional material which had a greater impact on the development of skyscrapers than steel. The steel I-beam became emblematic for tall buildings in the twentieth

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250 Ibid.
251 The Reynolds Metals Regional Sales Headquarters (1959) by Minoru Yamasaki in Southfield, MI was similar to the Inland Steel Building in that it advertised the very products it sold on the façade—a gilded, patterned aluminum sunshield provided the main source of aesthetic interest and referred to the company’s courting of the construction industry throughout the 1950s.
century, supplanting the ornamental stone column and its connections to classicism. The structural and aesthetic role of the steel columns, which supported the weight of the Inland Steel Building were highlighted by pulling them away from the curtain wall so that they not only broke up the monolithic quality of its sculptural massing, but made their engineering role more palpable. The entire structure was supported by fourteen exterior columns, connected to one another by 60’ girders, allowing the interior office spaces to be completely unobstructed. Joseph Block’s brother, Inland’s vice president Leigh Block, advocated for the inclusion of art, both in the lobby and executive spaces, as well as the employee lounge and in office corridors. Given SOM’s reputation for using art, this may have also been suggested by the firm, but being an art collector himself, Leigh would have been familiar with its potential to ennoble architectural spaces.252

Inland Steel was designed by Bruce Graham and Walter Netsch of SOM.253 In 1958 they were lead designers of SOM’s Chicago branch, but they did not have the same name recognition that Gordon Bunshaft enjoyed (see Chapters 1 and 4). In almost all of the contemporaneous publications which discuss the Inland Steel Building, neither of their names is mentioned. Instead, SOM in general is given credit for the building’s design. This reveals something interesting about this firm; namely that they were involved in the same kind of corporate identity construction as their clients. The acronym had a monolithic quality, even though it was composed of the founder’s names. By

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252 Block and his wife Mary (vice-president of the Lord and Thomas advertising company) collected French Impressionism, Cubism, Old Masters, prints and photography. He was a trustee of the Art Institute of Chicago since 1949, its president from 1970-72 and chairman of the board from 1972-75. Together they amassed one of the best private collections of art in America, which they donated substantial portions of to the Art Institute and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.  

253 Graham later became famous for his creation of the John Hancock Center (1970) and the Sears Tower (1973) which he designed in collaboration with structural engineer Fazlur Rahman Khan, which have come to be architectural icons of Chicago. Netsch is most associated with the U.S. Air Force campus and especially its daringly designed chapel in Colorado Springs, Colorado (1959-62).
abbreviation, SOM took on the quality of a brand name. The de-personalized nature of
the acronym was furthered by the fact that the founders were no longer involved in
design, instead the administration of several offices was overseen by lead architects like
Bunshaft.\textsuperscript{254} Part of the strength and success of SOM in the postwar era was that they
appeared to a variety of businesses, offering them a basic kit of parts. The aesthetic of
corporate modernism was crafted mainly by Bunshaft. By the late 1950s, his designs
largely influenced the firm’s company style. Instead of being rigid, this model presented
itself as an empty vessel, adaptable to the needs of their patrons, malleable enough to
express a range of identities, from producers of soap, soft drinks and ketchup, to banks
and insurance companies.\textsuperscript{255} While the novelty of Inland Steel’s design and the successful
incorporation of artwork could have been used to promote its particular designers, at
SOM individual strengths were used to bolster the reputation of the firm in aggregate,
putting personalities behind the firm’s collective identity.\textsuperscript{256} SOM was so proud of this
project that they moved their Chicago offices into the building after its completion.\textsuperscript{257}
Inland Steel was thus a functioning office space, as well as an advertisement for both the
entities involved in its creation.

\textsuperscript{254} For more on the history of the firm see Nicholas Adams. \textit{Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: SOM since 1936}, Electra Architecture, 2007.
\textsuperscript{255} Bunshaft designed the Lever Building (1952), Pepsi-Cola World Headquarter (1960), Heinz Research Facility (1965), Manufacturers Trust (1952), and the headquarters for the Connecticut General Life Insurance (1957).
\textsuperscript{256} While many architects would have used a portfolio of successful projects as a means to start their own firm, Bunshaft, despite being SOM’s most notable designer, spent the entirety of his career with the firm. SOM was organized as a meritocracy, at least in theory, to reward and promote workers to positions of influence, while still residing under the auspices of the firm at large.
\textsuperscript{257} Using a building as an advertisement for the architecture firm responsible for its design has a precedent in the Auditorium Building (1889) by Louis Sullivan. After its completion, Sullivan relocated his office to occupy its south-west tower. It was in this location that Frank Lloyd Wright assisted in the design and drafting of other projects while he was designing private homes for his neighbors in Oak Park, IL. At their new headquarters, Inland Steel occupied nine of the building’s floors, SOM rented two, thus leaving eight additional floors for speculative office space, which was used to offset construction costs.
The Inland Steel Building was structurally daring, but its innovations sprang from one of the core tenants of the International Style—namely that the outward appearance of a building should derive logically from its functional requirements. What made Inland Steel so groundbreaking was its attempt to separate services from served spaces. Said another way, all of the various components necessary for creating a comfortable work environment—namely heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), as well as restrooms and elevators, were consolidated into a ‘service tower’ structure immediately adjacent to the office tower. At each floor there was a large notch on these columns upon which the individual floors sat like a tray, leaving the office interiors uninterrupted by structural supports. The open interior spaces were thus able to accommodate a range of tenant needs—functional areas could easily be established and reconfigured through the use of modular partition walls of painted steel and opaque glass, instead of relying on permanent, structurally integral interior walls. (fig. 3.3) In a further effort to keep the office space as unobstructed as possible, electricity and HVAC was routed from the service tower into the offices via channels cut into the steel girders, which then led it to a system of drop ceilings and hollow floor modules. Modular construction had long been a dream of modernist architects, but it was only at Inland Steel that these ideas were put

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258 This was a direct break from the Beaux Art tradition which relied on strict symmetry, applied ornament and the notion of a building as a sculptural envelope within which various functions were made to fit.

259 The office floors measured 177 by 58’. See “New Office Building for Chicago, Illinois,” Progressive Architecture, vol. 36, no. 6, June, 1955, pg. 9. Also see “The Inland Steel Building is literally turned inside out... means a completely flexible, open office area in the main building,” caption accompanying a photograph of the open floor plan in Progressive Architecture, Inland Steel advertisement, June, 1955, pgs. 54, 55.

260 The partitions were manufactured by the E. F. Hauserman Company of Cleveland, Ohio.

261 This was the first tall office building in Chicago to be completely air conditioned. The mechanical equipment for this service was by the Trane company. See Trane advertisement, Chicago Daily Tribune, May 29, 1960, pg. SB.
into practice in a systematic way. Thus, all of the workplace’s amenities appeared miraculously through vents in the floors and in the luminous ceiling above. A company pamphlet advertised that, “the air you breathe will have been sprayed, filtered, and heated or cooled … to provide comfortable temperature and humidity at all times.” Seen from the street, there was an engaging interplay between the two structures—the service tower was six stories taller than the office tower, on a much smaller footprint, clad in metal, except for HVAC vents at the top. The office tower provided contrast in its proportions and expanses of glass, while its steel supports provided visual rhythm and sculptural massing.

Inland and the Steel Industry

Inland Steel presented themselves as a lean and scrappy organization through public relations and via financial and industry publications. Despite their relatively small size compared to the other members of the ‘Big 8’ steel producers, Inland took advantage of its valuable location in Chicago, increasing their output and profitability through shrewd consolidation of raw materials and production facilities, by emphasizing client relationships, and by promoting smooth communication throughout their complex

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263 Pamphlet, “Regarding facilities at new Inland Steel Building”, Box 2, File 45, Inland Steel Company Records, Calumet Regional Archives, Anderson Library, Indiana University Northwest.
264 In 1945, Inland hired William G. Caples as their industrial-relations manager. His active role may have accounted for the company’s frequent appearance in business publications such as *Business Week, Forbes, Fortune* and trade publications such as *Iron and Steel Engineer* and *Lighting* in addition to magazines devoted to art and architecture.
supply chain. Of the top eight integrated steel manufacturers, Inland had the smallest production and lowest net income, but it made up for this in efficiency. During the second half of the 1950s, Inland produced higher returns on investments and consistently ran their mills at production rates greater than any of the larger companies, paying above average dividends to their investors, even amidst recessions. There were several reasons for this.

The most important factor for Inland’s success, despite fierce industry competition, was their location in the hub of the Midwest, with the country’s greatest demand for steel—nearby manufacturers produced products ranging from automobiles, appliances, and machinery to the construction of warehouses, shipping containers and buildings. In 1958, the year their new headquarters opened, Inland sold 86% of its products within a 300-mile radius of Chicago. By contrast, larger companies based out of upstate New York, northern Pennsylvania or Alabama had more wide-spread markets, but had to incur significant freight costs, decreasing their overall profits.

Another factor for Inland’s success was their consolidation of manufacturing into a single location—a two-mile long man-made island in Indiana Harbor, twenty-five miles south of Chicago, on the edge of Lake Michigan. (fig. 3.4) Here, its three integrated plants consistently operated at over 90% capacity, while their competition hovered between 60 and 75%, and during peak periods of performance, like mid-1957, production

265 The top three American producers of steel at the time were U.S. Steel, Bethlehem, and Republic. The bottom five companies were all roughly the same size as Inland Steel, so its status as ‘number eight’ should not be seen negatively. Also, the notion of the ‘top three’ is also misleading as U.S. Steel was really in a category of its own. By their sheer volume of production, the company was basically able to dictate the price of steel for the entire market.

266 “Why Inland Steel is so Lively,” Business Week, June 21, 1958, pg. 47.
surpassed 100% of their plants’ predicted capacity. They boasted the fourth-largest steel production facility outside of the Soviet Union. Given their prime location, Inland had relatively easy access to raw materials. As much as possible, Inland owned the extraction companies as well as a fleet of barges to ship ore, limestone and coal. Despite the relative ease of transportation and efficiency of an integrated manufacturing plant, it was still a complex supply chain to oversee by Inland’s administration. Raw materials coalesced in their Indiana Harbor Plant, and finished products radiated out to the greater Chicago area and beyond, coordinated by the administrators at their downtown headquarters. To ensure that the system worked smoothly required transparent and effective communication among the various nodes of extraction, transportation, processing, selling, and shipping departments. It is important to note that this description of Inland comes from the leaders of the company, and thus should not be held

267 “Inland’s Happy Island,” Forbes, June 1, 1957, pg. 15. The third plant had been built by the U.S. government to aid the war effort but was purchased by Inland after the war’s end. Joseph Block, Inland’s president and CEO in 1958 served during World War II as the War Production Board’s deputy director for steel, see Herbert Solow, “Inland Steel Does It Again,” Fortune, July 1958, pg. 99. The title of world’s fourth largest outside the USSR comes from the previously mentioned article on page 100. 268 Their limestone came from a company-owned quarry in Manistique, MI, the world’s largest such operation, which was carried seven miles by rail to barges at Port Inland in northern Lake Michigan. Iron ore was sourced from the region surrounding the Great Lakes, and coal came from company-owned mines in eastern Kentucky as well as that purchased from West Virginia, Virginia, and Illinois. See “Inland Steel Company, Indiana Harbor Works,” Iron and Steel Engineer, September, 1959, pgs. 5-6. Finished products were stored by Joseph T. Ryerson & Son, “the world’s largest steel warehousing operation,” also owned by Inland Steel. See “Inland’s Happy Island,” Forbes, June 1, 1957, pg. 16. Joseph T. Ryerson & Son was founded in 1842 and merged with Inland in 1935, see Herbert Solow, “Inland Steel Does It Again,” Fortune, July 1958, pg. 99. Edward Ryerson was Inland’s CEO from 1951-53, after which he devoted his energies to civic issues and philanthropy while still sitting on the company’s board. 269 The unique features of Chicago, which Inland profited from in the 20th century was also responsible for its economic and urban growth in the second half of the 19th century, especially after the cataclysmic fire of 1871. The city served as a hub for the processing and sale of livestock and cereal crops. Unlike Inland’s use of water freight, the previously mentioned industries depended on the use of the railroad. It was in the massive pig and cattle butchering operations that the notion of the division of labor was tested and refined at a large scale. Often Henry Ford is given credit for developing the assembly line to construct his Model T, but Chicago butchers effectively created this system, albeit in reverse, as disassembly plants. Many early steel mills focused on the construction of railroad tracks to satisfy the country’s growing needs, but by the 1950s the bulk of this infrastructure had been completed, and steel companies shifted their focus to other applications. For a general history of Chicago’s development see Donald L. Miller. City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America. Simon and Schuster, 1997.
as synonymous with factuality. What is important is to take note of how they wanted to present themselves to the public. Their new headquarters was only one part of this constructed identity.

To prevent being subject to the cyclical nature of individual industries, Inland Steel sought out diverse clientele by producing products with a wide range of possible applications. Several of the biggest steel producers hitched their production cart to Detroit’s automobile industry. In good years this decision reaped big profits, but during recessions, this strategy could deal a heavy blow. Inland, by contrast, consciously avoided this by making sure that no single industry accounted for more than 17% of their sales. The fact that the steel industry as a whole had to respond to so many different types of businesses was important because, as U.S. News & World Report noted in 1957, steel acted as, “a barometer for business generally.” Inland focused on sheet metal and flat-rolled products which turned less of a profit than specialty products, but possessed potential applications for finishing in a larger variety of fields. For instance, despite that their headquarters was a literal advertisement for the architectural potential of steel, the company had to purchase its stainless-steel curtain wall from an outside manufacturer.

The name Inland conveyed pride in its Midwest roots, but it elided the fact that the company was largely family-operated. Leopold Block and his brother Philip founded the operation in 1897 after visiting the Columbian World Exposition, where they were

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270 Ibid.
272 The company was Allegheny Ludium. Herbert Solow, “Inland Steel Does It Again,” Fortune, July 1958, pg. 100.
impressed by the untapped potential of the location for the steel industry. After his
death in 1952, Leopold’s son Joseph became the chairman, his brother Leigh, the Vice
President and head of purchasing, and cousin Philip, the vice chairman.

Despite the fact that the company was made public in 1901, “seven of the sixteen directors represented
three families’ stockholdings that go back several generations.” By industry standards
the executives were fairly young, averaging 51 years old, with an average of 24 years of
service to the company in a variety of positions, often rising through the ranks of
salesmen.

Not only was communication a priority within the company, but client relations
were frequently mentioned as a reason for Inland’s profitability and efficiency—these
qualities were meant to be discernable in the design of their headquarters. In terms of
administrative hierarchy, Inland’s avowed efficiency was purportedly due to the small
size of the executive pool, which was not bogged down by a larger bureaucratic structure
or numerous, far-flung branch offices. It also helped that the headquarters was in such
proximity to the production plant. Business Week noted that this created, “a flexibility in
decision-making and production-scheduling that few competitors can match.”

References:

276 Ibid. The oldest executive, Russel L. Peters, vice president of finance, was sixty years old in 1958.
Newly hired salesmen were closely vetted and were instructed to keep detailed records of all business
inquiries, even when production could not keep pace with demand. These records were a valuable asset
when production increased—salesmen could then re-establish communication with prospective clients.
277 The publication Lighting reviewed the newly constructed building, quoting the firm that the open floor
plan of the office tower would be, “17 percent more efficient than average.” They included no mention of
how this figure was derived, what factors were involved in ‘efficiency,’ or what an ‘average’ office plan
referred to. The specificity of the number seems to have been a means of eluding any sense of what actually
was being discussed. See “Stainless Steel Giant,” Lighting, July, 1958, pg. 13.
278 “Holding its Own Against the Titans,” Business Week, December 15, 1962, pg. 104.
the number of Blocks on the executive floor, it was not indicative of nepotism. Both the chairman and president had started in sales and continued to meet with clients, despite moving up the ranks, so that, “buyers accustomed to dealing with low-level management at other mills are flattered to dine with Inland’s top brass.” Executives urged dealing with customers in person, “the result was that steel customers got to know the Inland crowd and like them.” Business publications lauded Inland’s customer relations in terms that often verged on the hyperbolic, comparing the selling of steel to romantic courtship. Business Week noted the company’s, “fetish for wooing,” customers, while an unnamed loyal client was quoted by Fortune that dealing directly with top brass was, “more pleasant, sort of like dealing with a twenty-one-year-old blond instead of an old hag.” The palpable misogyny of the previous statement shows that communication was prioritized within a homosocial environment. Like the adjoining service tower’s relation to the offices, the largely female staff which assisted the male executives was similarly bracketed and treated as an invisible, though necessary, service. In other respects, Inland reciprocated like any good partner—whenever possible they purchased goods from companies that used their products.

Inland Steel defined itself in terms of efficiency and customer relations, which the press repeated nearly verbatim, but their relationship with employees who manufactured their products was frequently problematic. In the thirteen years following the end of 279 Despite their high positions in the company, the Block and Reyerson families held only 8% of the votes within the board of directors. See Herbert Solow, “Inland Steel Does It Again,” Fortune, July 1958, pg. 99.
280 Ibid., pg. 106.
282 “Holding its Own Against the Titans,” Business Week, December 15, 1962, pg. 104.
284 Ibid., pg. 97.
World War II, there were several strikes and many more threats to strike. In 1949, a forty-two-day walkout cost the industry as a whole nearly ten percent of their annual production. The longest and most financially impactful strike occurred in 1952 across the nation’s manufacturing plants. The government temporarily took over the mills before the Supreme Court ruled the action illegal, after which the strikes resumed. It lasted fifty-three days, and Robert A. Lovett, the Secretary of Defense, stated that its impact on production was analogous to a, “bombing raid.” In Chicago alone, 90,000 steel workers sat idle, losing $75,000,000 in wages and nearly three million tons of lost production. The effects of the strike continued for months because of the lapse in shipping raw material earmarked for winter when cold weather made extraction more difficult. The next year, a strike at Inland closed operations for three days over concerns about overtime pay. In 1956, another nationwide strike lasted from June 30th to August 5th culminating with the signing of a three-year contract, guaranteeing an annual increase to wages based on the rising cost-of-living. When questioned, Inland’s president Joseph Block, explained the situation in dry economics—that labor costs continually outpaced production profits of steel. He also passed the buck for dictating wages and the general cost of steel, stating that,

We in the steel business are pretty much subject to whatever U.S. Steel happens to believe is the right policy… they are by far our biggest competition in Chicago…

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288 Ibid.
if U.S. Steel should determine to raise its prices, my guess would be that our company would follow such a lead.²⁹¹

He further bemoaned that, “employees and the public, as well as management, are absolutely fed up with having annual crises in the steel industry,” which the three-year contract was meant to assuage.²⁹² While it is true that the majority of these strikes were mandated nationwide by the United Steelworkers Union, instead of reflecting conditions particular to Inland, it does reveal that the company’s efficiency was predicated on paying wages to their labor force that many viewed as substandard. Similar to the misogyny voiced previously, there seemed to be a two-tier system in terms of employee valuation—white-collar executives and their clients at the top; pink-collar female workers and blue-collar laborers at the bottom. The contributions of the latter groups were never part of Inland’s constructed identity voiced to investors or reporters.²⁹³

Labor strife played out on the pages of the Chicago Daily Tribune. Numerous full-page advertisements were taken out by the United Steel Workers of America, representing the national union, the American Iron and Steel Institute, and the Steel Companies Coordinating Committee, representing the executives and board members of

²⁹¹“Exclusive Interview with Joseph L. Block, President, Inland Steel Company,” U.S. News & World Report, June 7, 1957, pg. 86. It should be stated that U.S. Steel was a private company, not an attempt to nationalize the industry.
²⁹²Ibid., pg. 90.
²⁹³Inland was slightly more progressive when it came to race:

It was the first steel company to have an African-American outside sales representative and, in 1954, became the first to secure a nondiscrimination clause in its basic labor agreement with the United Steelworkers Union—eight years ahead of any of its competitors. Inland executives were leaders in Chicago United, an early, forward-thinking coalition of business and community leaders dedicated to racial equality. The company was also among the first to have an African-American on its board of directors.

Big Steel. Both sides of the debate were hyperbolic—the unions called forced shutdowns, “cold-blooded, shameful, and contrary to the best interests of our nation,” amidst record-breaking profits.\textsuperscript{294} In response, the steel industry claimed that they offered, “opportunities unlimited,”\textsuperscript{295} and that, “wage levels in the industry place steel workers among the top ten percent of all industrial workers,” providing working conditions where, “safety is almost a religion,”\textsuperscript{296} while another advertisement likened union strikes to a medieval siege.\textsuperscript{297} The relationship between management and labor was sanitized in the company’s self-fashioned image presented to the press.

Despite the unique advantages of being located in Chicago and nearby Indiana Harbor, Inland was looking to expand its markets at the same time that its new headquarters advertised the company’s strong Midwestern roots. In 1956 they began a $290-million expansion campaign, including the building’s construction.\textsuperscript{298} By the time of its completion, plans were underway to open a new branch in Houston to tap into the newly booming economy of the Southwest.\textsuperscript{299} With the imminent completion of the Saint Lawrence Seaway and the Calumet-Sag Channel, Inland’s finished products could be taken by the company’s fleet of barges down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, and into the Port of Houston without paying freight costs to outside companies.

\textsuperscript{294} “Now America… Steel Profits Are Exposed for You,” United Steelworkers of America, advertisement, Chicago Daily Tribune, August 7, 1959, pg. 15.
\textsuperscript{296} “Steelworkers Like Their Jobs,” American Iron and Steel Institute, advertisement, Chicago Daily Tribune, March 27, 1956, pg. A4.
\textsuperscript{297} “Yes, the Steel Strike Could be Settled Today—if the American People Want to Surrender to Inflation,” The Steel Companies Coordinating Committee, advertisement, Chicago Daily Tribune, September 24, 1959, pg. C9.
\textsuperscript{298} “Inland’s Happy Island,” Forbes, June 1, 1957, pg. 17.
\textsuperscript{299} In the years after WWII, the Southwest became a hub for technology companies, many of which had been recently founded to assist in the war effort. The fine weather was also a factor that drew many people from the Midwest and Northeast.
Given the fact that in the late 1950s Inland Steel was looking to expand their market beyond the Midwest, and in doing so break from the centralized model which had won them praise and profit, the sleek modernity of their new headquarters building connoted an aspirational quality. Read in this light, the formal relationship between the service and office towers was like a bar graph projecting future profits—the service tower reached six stories higher than its partner, towards the sky and for as yet untapped markets. It is not surprising that they chose to engage in such a visible construction project at the same moment they were attempting to rebrand their organization as a national venture. Photographs, taken by Hans Namuth, of Leigh Block smiling in front of Lippold’s Radiant I appeared in both Fortune and Look.\(^{300}\) (fig. 3.5) He seemed to be trying to fuse himself with the sculpture’s outward reaching form. The stainless-steel tubes radiated from his body, expressing not only an interest in contemporary culture, but the aspiration to transcend the hub of Chicago.\(^{301}\)


\(^{301}\) Inland’s success was halted by the economic depression of the 1970s, a situation which affected the entire steel industry and beyond. In an effort to boost their sales, the company joined with the Japanese firm Nippon Steel, which today is the world’s third largest producer of steel. After weathering several more decades of stagnation, Inland began to turn a profit, and was acquired by Ispat International in 1998. This company later merged with Arcelor Mittal, an international organization, and as of 2017, the world’s largest producer of steel. Arcelor Mittal was also ranked 123\(^{rd}\) in Forbes’ 2017 “Global 500” list.
The Leigh and Mary Block Art Collection

In a mode similar to 711 Third Avenue’s novel inclusion of art into a speculative office tower by William Kaufman (Chapter 2), a single individual was responsible for the decision to commission and purchase paintings and sculptures for Inland. Vice President Leigh Block was an avid art collector and was instrumental in convincing the board to include artworks for the new headquarters, similar to his brother Joseph, advocating for a daring architectural design. Leigh began collecting art after he married Mary Lasker Foreman, heir to an advertising magnate, in 1942.\(^{302}\) They eventually amassed one of the finest private collections in the country, including numerous important works by Cezanne, Van Gogh, Degas, Picasso and Braque.\(^{303}\) In 1957, Chicago-based painter Ivan Albright completed a commissioned portrait of Mary, which was one of many works the couple later donated to the Art Institute of Chicago.\(^{304}\) (fig. 3.6) In 1967, theirs was the first Midwestern private collection to be exhibited at the National Gallery of Art.\(^{305}\) The

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\(^{302}\) Before his marriage, Leigh had collected rare British and American manuscripts, as well as engravings spanning from the Renaissance to the nineteenth-century. Mary had slowly accumulated a selection of early 20\(^{th}\)-century European modernists. Leigh’s childhood interest in marbles made him fascinated in color, but it seems it was Mary who spearheaded the intensification of their collection of paintings. See Francine du Plessix, “The Flawless Eye, Mary and Leigh Block,” in Jean Lipman, The Collector in America. Introduction by Alan Pryce-Jones, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971, 112-113.

\(^{303}\) Their holdings of works by Braque outnumbered any other artist in their collection. They owned pieces which spanned his career, and even traveled to Paris to buy some of the paintings directly from the artist. The couple also had a sizable collection of Pre-Columbian sculptures which they juxtaposed with their European paintings.

\(^{304}\) The portrait of Mary is one of only three-color reproductions in the exhibition catalog Frederick A. Sweet and Jean Dubuffet. Ivan Albright: A Retrospective Exhibition Organized by the Art Institute of Chicago in Collaboration with the Whitney Museum of American Art. Art Institute of Chicago Press, 1964, October 30\(^{th}\) to December 27, 1964.

\(^{305}\) One Hundred European Paintings and Drawings from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leigh B. Block. See the exhibition catalog John Rewald. 100 European Paintings and Drawings from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leigh B. Block, The National Gallery of Art. May 5 to June 11, 1967, co-sponsored by the Los
show’s curator, John Rewald, lauded the Block’s as having amassed “one of the finest collections in the country,” despite the fact that-

Chicago is distant from the various places where art is being constantly exhibited and traded, this means it takes much more energy and persistence to pursue the exacting hobby of putting together a collection than is required of a New Yorker, a Londoner, or a Parisian… Though this exhibition presents but a selection, it will be more than sufficient to establish Mary and Leigh Block among the select few who have elevated the hobby of acquiring works of art to the height of a creative act… (the collection) sets an example for those – ever more numerous—who seek the aesthetic satisfaction of the true amateur.\footnote{100 European Paintings and Drawings from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leigh B. Block, introduction by John Rewald. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1967. Pgs. 3-5.}

Although Rewald’s tone is more than complimentary, it carries a subtle undercurrent of elitism—the east coast art expert impressed by the untrained Midwestern creating a collection that stands in parity with those of the world’s ‘true’ art centers; an activity he repeatedly refers to as a ‘hobby’. For Leigh Block, their collection represented a testament to the couple’s, “partnership of such mutual understanding and respect that our home has become, at least for us, a rare haven of peace and beauty,” but those looking from outside may have also sensed an aspirational quality to this endeavor.\footnote{Francine du Plessix, “The Flawless Eye, Mary and Leigh Block,” in The Collector in America, compiled by Jean Lipman and the Editors of Art in America, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971, pgs. 102-113.} Perhaps, their purchase and display of art, highlighted by venerable European Impressionists and Cubists, was a way to compensate for their location in Chicago, which many on the east coast viewed as a cultural backwater.
The cultural relationship between New York and Chicago might help to explain why a particular brand of corporate modernism in art and architecture, incubated in Manhattan, was able to be so successfully disseminated throughout the country’s other major metropolitan centers in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Cities like Chicago, despite possessing a world-class collection at the Art Institute, still felt insecure when it came to their role in promoting and participating in the most advanced forms of contemporary art. This was partly due to the fact that Abstract Expressionism, America’s first native movement to attract critical European acclaim, was so inextricably tied to New York City. This insecurity was directly addressed by a 1954 editorial by Kenneth Shopen in the Chicago Daily News. He pointed the blame at Chicago’s artists, collectors, and museum officials for not adequately supporting local artists, and continually looking for approval from Manhattan, stating that people in Chicago are, “inclined to think of art as something that is imported… a cultural inferiority complex, a hangover from an old habit that used to be national.” The editorial was accompanied by a satirical cartoon, in which a gallerist with magnifying glass-in-hand, and an art-collecting couple, fawn over a large abstract painting with the caption, “Made in New York”. Are these figures to be taken as surrogates for people like the Blocks? Despite any reservations about being

308 The fact that key artists like de Kooning, Pollock, and Smith, actually produced their most well-known work outside of Manhattan in Long Island and upstate New York was elided by the way Ab Ex was packaged and mythologized by art critics and international exhibitions as being inextricably tied to the city.


310 Ibid.
collectors in Chicago, the Blocks and their growing collection, were featured in numerous publications.\footnote{Only two years prior to the Daily News editorial, Mary and Leigh Block were featured in \textit{Life} as one of a handful of powerhouse collectors in Chicago, whose many gifts were responsible for making the Art Institute a preeminent cultural institution. See “Chicago’s Fabulous Collectors, Art Institute Announces it will get Treasures from their Homes,” \textit{Life}, October 27, 1952, pgs. 90-100, 102. A two-page color spread features the Blocks in the living room of their Glencoe, IL, apartment, surrounded by Pissarro’s depiction of the St-Lazare Station, a van Gogh self-portrait with bandaged ear, an exotic Rousseau landscape over the fireplace, as well as paintings by Cezanne, Monet, Bonnard and Degas. Leigh sits next to the fireplace, casually reading a newspaper, while Mary, in the foreground, sits in profile, reading an art publication with a large color plate still life by Matisse readily visible. Their practiced repose—as if unaware of the camera’s presence, is ruptured by the fact that the image she scrutinizes is a reproduction of a work in their collection, identified by an adjacent illustration. A similar compositional structure is used by William Grigsby in his photograph of the Blocks for the 1971 publication \textit{The Collector in America}. See Francisne du Plessix, “The Flawless Eye, Mary and Leigh Block,” in \textit{The Collector in America}, compiled by Jean Lipman and the Editors of \textit{Art in America}, introduction by Alan Pryce-Jones, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971, pg. 104. Again, they sit in the living room, Leigh in the exact position as before, with hands instead of legs crossed. Mary sits opposite from him, turning her head to the left to make eye contact with the photographer whose placement in the room has shifted to emphasize Degas’ bather instead of the Rousseau, which the couple had sold several years earlier. Again, Mary is emphasized in her foreground placement. Another photograph takes essentially the same view of the 1952 \textit{Life} article, albeit without the couple present. All of the paintings, with the exception of the Pissarro, have been replaced, with a late Monet water lily study taking place of pride over the mantle. Throughout their lives, the Blocks gave generously to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the venerable, encyclopedic institution in Manhattan. They also remained loyal patrons to their hometown. In 1980, they established the Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University. See the obituary, “Leigh Block; Steel Exec, Art Institute Benefactor,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, December 10, 1987, pg. 44. Block attended the University of Chicago as a young man but did not graduate. Mary Block earned degrees from Vassar College and the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute for Technology. See Mary Caroline Simpson, “Modern Art Collecting and Married Women in 1950s Chicago – Shopping, Sublimation and the Pursuit of Possessive Individualism: Mary Lasker Block & Muriel Kallis Steinberg Newman, \textit{Women’s Studies}, vol. 39, no. 5, 2010, pg. 588. Given the visibility of Richard Lippold’s \textit{Radiant I} from the sidewalk beyond, it too became almost like a gift of art to Chicago, similar to \textit{Four Seasons}, Marc Chagall’s 1974 mosaic mural, located across Dearborn Street from Inland Steel. The mural was donated to the city by financier Frederick H. Prince. It sits in the Chase Tower Plaza, completed in 1969 by C.F. Murphy Associates, Stanislaw Z. Gladych, and Perkins & Will.}

When Leigh advocated for incorporating art into the new headquarters building, he did not simply graft his personal taste onto the modern structure. Instead, he made tactical choices—selecting works that would speak to the company’s roots and the novelty of the headquarter’s architecture context. His success at simultaneously communicating these potentially divergent messages through artworks played out not only in the commissions and purchases he advised, but the way that this art was marshalled for public relations opportunities. In Hans Namuth’s \textit{Look} photograph, there
is a palpable clash of artworks and an attempt to collapse workplace hierarchies.\textsuperscript{312} (fig. 3.7) Given the fact that this image was specifically intended for publication, its staging should come as no surprise, but looking more closely at the choices made reveals how similar image-making is to business identity construction. Two men are carrying a painting behind the pool of water which inscribes the lobby sculpture \textit{Radiant I}, ostensibly captured in the midst of hanging it. They wear hard hats, despite the fact that construction was completed seven years prior. Thus, they appear more like the workers who produced steel at Inland’s Indiana Harbor factory than those who would belong in a downtown Chicago office building.

What they carry is no ordinary painting—Willem de Kooning’s 1957 \textit{Bolton Landing}, was most-likely the Inland collection’s most valuable painting.\textsuperscript{313} The title of the painting refers to the environs around David Smith’s studio where he constructed his welded metal sculptures, displaying them outdoors so that they could visually fuse to the landscape.\textsuperscript{314} Like the commissioned sculptures on the first and nineteenth floors, this

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\textsuperscript{313} \textit{Bolton Landing} measures 6’11” by 6’2”. See John Elderfield. \textit{de Kooning: A Retrospective}. The Museum of Modern Art, 2011, plate 111. In the wake of Pollock’s 1956 death, de Kooning had come to personify the Abstract Expressionist movement, commanding high prices in exhibitions at the Martha Jackson Gallery (1955), and Sidney Janis Gallery (1956, 1959, 1962). Inland purchased over a dozen paintings to decorate their offices. An employee art competition was also held, and the winners were displayed in the offices of lower-level administrators and in the employee dining room. A curious, unattributed work hung on the wall of the dining area—it appears to be an illustration of a Calder mobile, nullifying the kineticism of the source material. An image of the dining room was taken by Ezra Stoller in 1958 and can be found in the Ezra Stoller collection, recently acquired by ArtNet. It also appears as a backdrop for Inland president Joseph Block in Herbert Solow, “Inland Steel Does It Again,” \textit{Fortune}, July 1958, pg. 96. \textit{Bolton Landing} was sold at auction at Sotheby’s on May 9, 1984. It was purchased by Norman and Irma Brahman for $847,000. The same year Inland was acquired by a larger company. Phillip Block, acting as spokesman for the seller, claimed that they were worried about possible vandalism by the future building’s tenants stating that, “some nut might deface it.” See Jeffrey Hogrefe, “Top Price for Calder,” \textit{The Washington Post}, May 10, 1984, accessed online October 16, 2019, pg. 12.
\textsuperscript{314} The other paintings purchased for display in the offices, hallways, and common areas of Inland Steel were chosen for their illustration of subjects relevant to the steel industry. For example, a Georgia O’Keefe painting depicts a skyscraper in the 1930s. Another painting was from the ‘Percisionism’ school, known for their depictions of industry.
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painting made direct reference to the material of steel. There is a formal resonance between the painting and *Radiant I*, as both compositions are dominated by intersecting diagonals. *Bolton Landing* features a conspicuous, bright orange horizontal gesture in the painting’s upper-right quadrant, intersecting with a diagonal stroke of the same color. This form is mirrored underneath in dark grey paint, functioning like a shadow. The structural rigor of the composition is not unlike the structural steel which sculpturally defines the façade of the Inland Steel Building as well as Lippold’s gleaming cluster of stainless-steel rods.

What is curious is that *Bolton Landing* had been installed upon the building’s completion. (Fig. 3.11) Referring again to a suite of photographs taken by Ezra Stoller in 1958, it appears on the 19th floor, executive penthouse. It was hung on the wall at the terminus of the service tower, flanked by restrooms on either side, with mechanical equipment located behind the wall. It provided a focal point for people turning left from the end of the central office corridor into the service tower. The elevator banks were clad in polished stainless steel which reflected narrow, vertical sections of the painting. Also present were several chairs and a sofa, as well as a desk and chair for the receptionist. This was an elite space with restricted access, and thus a much smaller potential audience than that for *Radiant I*. By merging the semi-public sculpture and executive-level painting in the photograph, the Vice President is attempting to collapse pre-conceived workplace hierarchies while maintaining his occupational authority. Leigh Block is positioned in a way that gives the impression of a photomontage. The lip of the water pool is only about six inches from the floor of the lobby, yet he seems to rest comfortably, especially for a man of sixty years. This composition also gives the
impression that the lobby, and the action transpiring within it, is a type of reverie for the Vice President—the sculpture and workers float above him while he calmly oversees the activity, despite looking in the opposite direction. Just as the sleek aesthetics of the building counteracted the gritty reality of steel production, the posed photograph attempted to elide the friction between steel workers and management. In the Look photograph, Leigh sits in repose in front of the Lippold in suit and tie, exuding a calm managerial presence, a power which moves people into action and transforms raw materials into finished products.

The workers in hardhats are seen in a momentary lapse in action—the man on the right has temporarily placed the painting on the ground, while the worker on the right lifts it ever-so-slightly off the ground, looking to his left as if anticipating further orders. They seem to halt before moving past the Lippold sculpture. Referring to the floorplan of the building, this would mean they are moving towards the wall of glass which runs along Dearborn where there is no exit to the sidewalk. The elevators are located at the opposite end of the lobby, so their only likely potential destination would be the Chicago Chamber of Commerce exhibition space, but it is difficult to imagine why. Additionally, it would not be practical to carry such a cumbersome painting along the narrow passage between the water pool and the wall beyond when they could have instead carried it though the open lobby in front of the sculpture. Given the previously mentioned cultural dichotomy between New York and every other major city to the West, the image seems to double-

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The painting was not being moved to be loaned to an exhibition. The auction catalog that Bolton Landing appeared in 1984 lists an exhibition history for the painting. After being purchased from the Sidney Janis Gallery, it was first shown in a retrospective of de Kooning’s work in 1968, three years after the Look Magazine photograph was taken. The exhibition traveled to the Stedelijk Museum, The Tate Gallery, MoMA, the Art Institute, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. See Contemporary Art, Sotheby’s, May 9th-10th, 1984, lot number 26, pg. 26.
down on Inland’s appreciation for, and investment in art from in and around Manhattan, while simultaneously advertising their firm roots in Chicago.

The Lobby Sculpture- Radiant I

The major work of art commissioned for the Inland Steel Building was entitled Radiant I by Richard Lippold, an abstract construction of stainless-steel tubes, gold wire, and copper wire enameled with cadmium, measuring 13 x 24 x 15’. (fig. 3.8) It was placed in the lobby at the building’s south-west corner, visible from the street behind floor-to-ceiling panes of glass on either side. The core of the sculpture was composed of a collection of stainless-steel tubes, welded together in a star-burst cluster. Strictly horizontal and vertically-arranged tubes anchored the composition, complemented by secondary rods positioned at 45-degree angles, bisecting the primary rods in both depth and height, so that the tips of the rods implied a cubic volume. From the tips of the tubes, a number of wires fanned outwards toward the pool below, and ceiling above. Gold and copper wires secured the central intersecting crosses, while the cadmium-enameled wires sprung from the secondary, angled tubes, and terminated at the ends of the primary tubes. The wires were both decorative and structurally integral, pulling away from each other, keeping the central mass static and suspended a few inches above a reflecting pool of water. The arrangement of structural components was like a rigidly engineered fractal

316 A 1955 photograph by Ezra Stoller of a model of the Inland Steel Building shows a different conception of the lobby. It is a double-height space instead of a single story. Additionally, there is a staircase visible at the end opposite from the entrance which goes up to a cantilevered floor slab suspended over a portion of the lobby below. Instead of a sculpture in the center of the lobby, a large figure-eight construction is mounted over the entryway. See the Ezra Stoller Archive held by ArtNet, ID number 21Q2.
progression, radiating outward from the central motif. Lippold’s sculpture was also formally similar to other contemporaneous objects inspired by atomic energy. Its radiating form is similar to George Nelson’s starburst wall-hanging clock, graphic designs by Herbert Bayer, and a whole host of domestic appliances and goods, described at length by Thomas Hine in his book *Populuxe*.\(^{317}\)

Within the context of a workplace, Lippold’s sculpture metaphorically functioned as an engine of business, loosely modeled on a nuclear reactor. Given the amount of press that nuclear reactors were receiving in the mid-to-late 1950s, viewers would be equipped to read the sculpture in terms of the most cutting-edge technology in energy creation. The sculpture’s abstraction of such power was directly related to the most conspicuous architectural feature of the Inland Steel Building - the consolidation of all of the ‘services’ (elevators, bathrooms, mail chutes, and HVAC) into a separate tower. This feature was conspicuous in terms of the aesthetics of the building, a feature frequently noted in the press.\(^{318}\) Intriguingly, this separation was tangible when viewing the building from the street, but when working in the office spaces they seemed to arrive miraculously. The same could be said for the artificial lighting which radiated through drop ceilings. Electricity was similarly channeled through the service tower into the ceilings via additional punctures in the girders. The job of the Lippold sculpture was to


\(^{318}\) The separation of service spaces and served spaces was an extension of the philosophy of the International Style, namely that a building’s form must derive from its functional requirements, as opposed to Beaux Arts structures, in which all of the various functions were shoehorned into a preconceived sculptural envelope.
speak to this strange condition of the building; its life-supporting energies were at once architecturally manifest and phenomenologically invisible.\(^{319}\)

Lippold was more explicit about his sculpture’s relationship to its architectural context. He drafted an artist statement on *Radiant I* in late July of 1957, which he sent to Leigh Block for use in publicizing the commission. His statements are intriguing for his sensitivity to the communicative ability of abstraction. He averred that *Radiant I*,

…symbolizes, like the whole building, the important role of steel in contemporary life. Rising like a luminous shaft of brilliant light in the heart of the Loop, the new building radiates the strength and self-confidence of the personal pronoun which forms the initial letter of “Inland.” The sculpture is a transition between the great scale of the building, to which it is carefully related formally, and human scale. In this way, the elegant strength of the building is given a core, or heart, of human size. The sculpture creates a seed of recognition from which the building lifts its total form. These wires radiate towards the ceiling and floor of the building to which they are attached, thus giving and taking meaning from the architecture. All of the arms of the central form are captured in the network of radiating lines, except for the single vertical central rod. This is left free, standing, like the building, as a central “I” from which flows the surrounding brilliance. This sculpture attempts to indicate that steel, as a material, and the steel industry as a force, have achieved such strength of purpose as comes to all things which exert a mature influence on the stream of life.\(^{320}\)

His comparison of the sculpture to a heart works with its reading as an abstraction of energy. The heart can be conceived as the motor of the body, pumping oxygen to the organs via a system of arteries and veins that radiate outwards from the core. The work is described as if it creates its own luminescence, instead of reflecting the natural and artificial light around it. In his discussion of the personal pronoun in the sculpture’s title,

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\(^{319}\) All the attention paid to this ‘service tower’ and its strict consolidation of functional equipment was somewhat disingenuous. In reality, the tower and the office building itself, obscured from view a two-story annex located on the north-eastern quadrant of the site which contained additional mechanical devices as well as the mailroom. This annex was not visible from either Monroe or Dearborn but only from the eastern windows of the offices above. Plantings were put on the roof of the structure to soften its mundane quality. The same could be said for the Seagram building which appears to be a single tower but in fact hides a smaller structure behind it which houses various functional requirements of the building.

energy is rendered in terms of vitality, which charges the space of the lobby, and the building as a whole. Lippold deals with a part-to-whole relationship that has been a chief quality of works discussed in previous chapters. His description is a bit confusing in this respect—he refers to the role of steel in society as a whole, but then, without a transition, attributes a singular quality to the sculpture as if it were analogous to a human being. Extending this notion, who is the individual represented by, “the personal pronoun?” In another section, it seems that the building is given a sense of vitality like a person, which is derived from the central, vertical arm of the sculpture, left untethered. He specifically mentions that its scale is meant to resonate with the people in the lobby, then are we to assume that the “I” is the viewer? The fact that his statement is not easily resolvable makes it all the more interesting, and shows the many ways the sculpture could produce meaning given its context and formal elements.

The Lippold sculpture referred to the novel consideration of energy by the architects at its particular site, but more broadly to atomic power. Nuclear power and its postwar reimagining from devastating weapon to power source was the historical backdrop upon which the creation of the sculpture and building played out. On December 8th, 1953 Eisenhower delivered his “Atoms for Peace” speech to the United Nations, ushering in an international campaign, led by the United States, to shift nuclear research from weapons to energy creation, as well as to explore its potential adaptations.
to industry, medicine and agriculture. By the summer of 1955, a working reactor housed in a ‘swimming pool’ water tank was assembled in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and then shipped to Geneva, Switzerland for public display at the first International Conference on Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy. During the two week conference, this functioning reactor was viewed by over 60,000 visitors who marveled at the blue light that radiated from the fuel rods submerged below. The Shippingport Atomic Power Station, located outside Pittsburgh, with a Westinghouse-designed reactor, became America’s first nuclear plant for providing public energy. Inland Steel was in the process of completing construction during the same time that Shippingport connected to the grid.

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322 By 1956, radioactive isotopes were used by industry to look for flaws in welded joints and metal casings. Radiation had been used on crops such as barley to produce higher yields, and was also employed in fertilizers. Other radioactive materials were used by doctors to identify the presence of cancer and to eradicate it from the human body. There were also speculative future applications, such as the preservation of food through radiation, or to provide a heat source for the refining of metal, glass and oil. This information was gleaned from Congress’ first Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. “The Nuclear Revolution,” *Time*, vol. 67, no. 6, February 6, 1956. Commencement address given at the Pennsylvania State University, June 11, 1955 by Dwight Eisenhower, “Meeting the Human Problems of the Nuclear Age,” *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. 32, June 27, 1955, pgs. 1027-1030. A number of small reactors, of various types, were constructed for research, including America’s first reactor operated by a university at Penn State. *Nautilus*, the world’s first nuclear-powered submarine, was unveiled in the first weeks of 1955. See “Under Way on Nuclear Power, on a ‘Trial Run the ‘Nautilus’ Proves Herself in Turbulent Seas,” *Life*, January 31, 1955, pg. 24.


324 Laura Fermi, “The Prettiest Reactor Ever Built,” *The Reporter*, November 17, 1955, pgs. 32, 33. Unlike Russia and Britain, the United States did not have a government mandate to build reactors, instead leaving the initiative to private industry. The Atomic Energy Commission partnered with interested businesses, sharing technical and construction information, as well as providing fissionable material for the reactors. This lack of top-down planning was viewed negatively by some, who saw America losing the international race for atomic energy. The AEC’s policy may have been a product of the Eisenhower-led, Republican administration which generally eschewed government regulation of American business.

325 The Soviet Union built the world’s first nuclear plant for civil use in June of 1954 and Britain opened the first commercial plant in 1956. Shippingport reached criticality on December 2, 1957, achieving full power by December 23. It was officially opened and synced with the power grid May 26, 1958.
Despite its potential for power creation, and industrial applications, atomic technology was not always discussed in glowing terms.\(^{326}\) The government, and business-led public relations campaigns aimed to separate the peaceful future of the fissionable atom from its wartime use as a weapon of unprecedented destruction. As the 1950s progressed, the potential hazards of nuclear bomb testing, and the creation of electricity through radioactive chain reactions came to light.\(^{327}\) Nuclear power—both its virtues, and potential dangers, were thus at the forefront of public imagination. The rigid symmetry, and machine-like craftsmanship of *Radiant I* could potentially counter

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\(^{327}\) In June of 1957, a joint congressional subcommittee on radiation listened while experts in the field synthesized their findings. See “A Searching Inquiry into Nuclear Perils,” *Life*, June 10, 1957, pgs. 24-29. Scientists relayed how nuclear fallout from weapon testing was thrust into the upper atmosphere in the form of a radioactive cloud, where it entered the jet stream, and could be carried hundreds, if not thousands of miles, before returning to the earth via precipitation. Most alarming was the production of strontium-90 by these blasts. This material could seep into soil and waterways, eventually absorbed by livestock and humans alike. Strontium’s chemical properties were similar to calcium, and thus was readily stored in bones, leading to the development of leukemia, and other maladies. This formation is known as the distinctive ‘mushroom cloud’, an image inextricably tied to atomic bombs, and their capacity for massive destruction.

Even more worrisome, this dangerous substance was invisible to the naked eye. In 1951, the Kodak film company of Rochester, New York, registered radiation that had traveled over 2,500 miles from a nuclear bomb test in Yucca Flat, New Mexico. This incident showed that earlier speculations on the radius of potential fallout were not predictable. See Steven M. Spencer, “Fallout: The Silent Killer,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, August 29, 1959, pgs. 26-27, 88-90. The Kodak Company had equipped its production facilities with Geiger counters because of a previous contamination in 1945 – after film became mysteriously developed, the culprit was traced to the film’s packaging, manufactured by an Indiana plant whose water was contaminated by a nuclear test in Nevada.

There were also potential dangers to the use of nuclear reactors. The chain reaction could get out of control and rupture its container, leaking radiation. This would affect the power plant workers, but also potentially escape the structure and spread via the wind. This very thing happened at the Windscale plant in Cumberland, England in December, 1957:

These huge, radioactive monuments to the unpredictable childhood of the atomic age are the results of a fire which broke out in the No. 1 reactor a year ago. Superheated uranium, combining with supposedly cooling air, caused a chemical blaze which burned fiercely for two days. By that time the fire was finally put out, 200 square miles of surrounding countryside had been contaminated by radioactive smoke escaping from the chimney. While there were no atomic casualties, thousands of gallons of milk had to be dumped into the Irish Sea, and Britain took a second look at the prospects of living with atomic energy... So ‘hot’ are the interiors of these dormant monsters (twin 416-foot smoke stack towers), it was learned last week, that it will be 10 to 30 years before man can approach them.

See “The Deadly ‘Monsters’,” *Newsweek*, Vol. 52, December 8, 1958, pg. 64.
anxieties about its connection to nuclear power. It was a self-contained system exuding order and balance, with all the tensile forces of the wires in perfect harmony and resonance. Based on the aesthetics of *Radiant I*, atomic energy and its potential benefits for mankind must have been on Lippold’s mind as he conceptualized this project. It also related to his previous sculpture *Variation within a Sphere, Number 10: The Sun (1953-56)* commissioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and displayed in 1956 to critical acclaim.\(^{328}\) (fig. 3.9)

*The Sun*’s construction of gold wires was similar to *Radiant I* in that it was symmetrical from numerous angles, its form created through tensile forces, anchored to the floor and ceiling of the gallery. Its reference to the star at the center of our solar system spoke to its energetic, life-supporting quality, specifically radiant energy created by nuclear fission occurring in the glowing orb’s core. The artist was photographed by *Life*, semi-recumbent under the construction, set against a blank background, its central mass gleaming; illuminating his face as he stares skyward with a mixture of awe and reverence.\(^{329}\) The creation of nuclear energy happens on an atomic level and thus is not visible to the human eye. Similarly, by enclosing the services in the tower, their ability to produce light, heat and air conditioning also operated out of sight. Just as the tower enclosed all necessary mechanical equipment, *Radiant I* attempted to visually coalesce all of these machines into a single free-standing abstract object. As the various services


radiated out of the tower into the office floors, so too did the stainless-steel bars radiate from the sculpture’s core, suspended as miraculously as man’s ability to split the atom.

There were certain morphological similarities between nuclear reactors and Radiant I. At their core were a system of rods filled with radioactive fuel (uranium or plutonium), which were raised or lowered into a medium.\textsuperscript{330} This medium regulated and slowed the speed of freed neutrons to effectively catalyze a chain reaction that heated the medium into steam, which in turn powered turbines, creating electricity. Similarly, Radiant I was composed of a system of stainless-steel tubes supported by a network of steel, gold and cadmium red-enamedled wires held in tension above a shallow pool of water. The pool thus took on the role of the reactor medium.

Placed in front of a highly polished black marble wall, Radiant I was illuminated from below and above via recessed miniature spotlights, so that it literally seemed to radiate its own energy.\textsuperscript{331} The sculpture was aesthetically bound by the pool below, and the drop ceiling above, just like a reactor was encased so as to prevent the leakage of radiation. The plate glass walls of the lobby functioned as an additional transparent volume that both contained and displayed the sculpture. The street level lobby was recessed fifteen feet underneath the floor above it, acting as a further framing mechanism, as well as providing a transition to the human scale of the lobby. When Westinghouse created a display scale model of a reactor it was constructing in 1954, it was similarly

\textsuperscript{330} This medium is most often soft water but also heavy water or molten sodium. A reactor was said to be ‘critical’ when the chain reactions were self-supporting, approaching greatest potential productivity.

\textsuperscript{331} The black marble wall and the lighting system was not part of the original architectural design but was suggested by the artist. The light fixtures were installed by Richard Kelly, the artist’s cousin, and cost $5,900. See correspondence between Kelly and Lippold, as well as with Inland’s vice president of October 10\textsuperscript{th} and November 11\textsuperscript{th}, Richard Lippold Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Museum. The fixtures were designed by Edison Price, Incorporated.
encased in translucent material, its inner workings simplified to three vertical shafts.\textsuperscript{332} (fig. 3.10) Upon entering the lobby, one had to walk past the sculpture, into the service tower and then into one of the six elevators. Thus, the energetic reading of the sculpture was also a harbinger for the mechanically powered assent awaiting beyond. Like all of the other services, the elevators operated via unseen mechanisms located within the confines of the service tower.\textsuperscript{333} Like the rods of a reactor, these units too were raised and lowered within the self-contained tower.

Lippold spoke specifically to the connection between his sculptures and atomic imagery. Describing his work \textit{Orpheus and Apollo} (1962) (fig. 3.12) for Lincoln Center to Nelson Lansdale, the artist hoped to create the effect of, “one frame from a series of photographs of an explosion which might be atomic.”\textsuperscript{334} The work is formally more dispersed, and lacks the symmetrical orientation of \textit{Radiant I}, but this was in large part a response to its architectural context in a relatively narrow lobby. His sculpture at Inland Steel also responded to its site, both the dimensions of the lobby, and its unique division of service and served spaces. Given the potential anxiety associated with nuclear reactors, \textit{Radiant I} exuded a sense of calm stability, like a perfectly operating machine. Recently, Marin R. Sullivan argued that Lippold was so sought after for architectural commissions at mid-century because his work created synergy between the sculpture and building.

\textsuperscript{332} “The Atom: Age of Nuclear Power Has Arrived,” \textit{Life}, January 4, 1954, pgs. 86-89. The model appears on page 86. Its outer shell was composed of clear plastic. The tubes had an architectural quality, making the entire model like a terrarium for industrial smokestacks.

\textsuperscript{333} The “Autotronic” elevators were a brand-new product from Otis.; their name, a portmanteau of automatic and electronic, signaled that they did not require an operator, simply controlled by the push of a button, another seemingly miraculous mechanical quality of the Inland Steel building.

producing an effect greater than the sum of their parts.\textsuperscript{335} This notion of synergy is a correction to the more commonly-discussed notion of integration by architectural critics. One of the few contemporary voices that pushed against integration was Ada Louise Huxtable who noted that successful projects resulted from a mutual independence of art and architecture, enriching each other through contrast.\textsuperscript{336}

\textit{Radiant I} referred to another conspicuous feature of the headquarters—its relationship to empty space. In addition to the separate service tower, the building’s other major architectural innovation was the placement of its major structural columns set in front of, but fused to the facade. Previous International Style skyscrapers featured unbroken, flush curtain walls to emphasize their utilization of glass, with interior columns supporting the floor slabs. Inland Steel had no such columns, and the exterior columns were rendered thicker, so that fewer were necessary. The columns had a ‘step’ inset in their mass so that the floor slabs nestled in this gap, further supported by seven 60’ girders running horizontally between each of the fourteen exterior columns on each floor level. Thus, each individual floor was a visually and structurally unbroken space, allowing for the tenant’s personal customization via mobile partition walls. It could boast that it was, “the widest clear span of any tall building ever built.”\textsuperscript{337} (\textbf{fig. 3.12}) These massive, open, cubic volumes were most impressive at the final stage of construction, before any of the drop ceilings or floor modules were installed. Thus, the spatial vacuity

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{335} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{337} “Regarding facilities at New Inland Steel Building”, Pamphlet, Box 2, File 45, Inland Steel Company Records, Calumet Regional Archives, Anderson Library, Indiana University Northwest.
\end{flushleft}
which made up the majority of the perceived bulk of Radiant I also commented on another major feature of the building—its openness.

Lippold was interested in the potential for sculpture to visually inscribe volumes instead of articulate themselves through massing, a feature he connected to the particularity of the architectural site his work was commissioned to embellish. Radiant I reconciled notions of presence and absence, both in terms of architectural structure and the building’s mechanical functionality. The artist frequently referred to notions of space—he saw the conceptual and scientific exploration of space as synonymous with the present moment. Speaking to Rosamond Berner in 1960 in an interview for L’Oeil Magazine, the artist stated:

We look through each other in the twentieth century, not at each other. In my own work I seem to have evolved a concentration on nearly pure line. Only in metal wires have I so far perceived a quality of sensuous and linear purity which I feel enables sculpture to contain the spatial conquest which characterizes our age. The principle material of our moment of existence is space.338

Empty space further served as valuable raw material for Inland Steel when it sought tenants. It was the structural power of steel—conspicuous on the façade, and hidden under the floor slabs—which made this abundance of empty space possible. Lippold’s sculpture spoke both to the rigid, constructive uses of steel, as well as the more aspirational and transcendent qualities of this modern material.

Notions of empty space were also a major component of the sculpture’s relationship to atomic energy. To increase public acceptance of this new technology, there was a widespread effort to educate people about its workings. Television programs

and literature attempted to reach a variety of age groups and levels of education. One of the most iconic attempts to humanize and explain nuclear energy was the book *Our Friend the ATOM*. One concept the book illustrates effectively is that matter is largely composed of empty space, and that the phenomenological experience of solid objects is deceptive. Additionally, stationary objects are a riot of energetic activity at the atomic level. *Radiant I* similarly created visual interest by contrasting voids and solids to show the dual nature of matter in terms of our perceptual and intellectual/scientific understanding of them. What we know to be solid (namely the steel tubes) appear weightless, and the wires, which are so slender and visually delicate, convey serious tensile strength. The construction is static, but its metallic reflectivity, and its ever-changing viewing conditions imbued the work with a great buzzing vitality, as if to illustrate the micro vibrations present in all matter, normally invisible to the naked eye. The work allowed viewers to combine a scientific interest in the world with a quasi-spiritual amazement at the complexity of nature, and man’s ability to wrest it under his control.

*Radiant I* further spoke to notions of workplace connectivity. It may be seen as a way to visualize a corporation and its fractal-like webs of communication along its hierarchy. Instead, as *Radiant I* insist—a corporation is a living entity which operates dynamically. Although influence and communication radiate from the president or CEO it is not a single chain of power but instead spreads in all directions equally, almost like the synapses within a human brain. The sculpture did perpetuate a hieratic understanding

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339 Heinz Haber, *The Walt Disney Story of Our Friend the ATOM*, Simon and Schuster, 1957. The book traces the history of Western philosophy and science, beginning in ancient Greece and continuing to the present, concerning the very nature of matter, culminating in the atom’s modern use for war and peace time.
of power relations (large and important at the center, small and in multitude at the periphery) but in a more democratic sense to how power is distributed and the extent to which communication is flowing back and forth like an electric current instead of strictly top-down. Referring back to the description of Inland’s operation at the beginning of this chapter, the sculpture refers to the building and its occupants, and especially its management, as an intellectual hub that oversees its complex supply chain. The Indiana Harbor facility was a secondary hub where all of the raw materials were brought together and processed into finished products. Despite the fact that the latter site was where tangible labor produced steel in a hot and dirty environment, the means for controlling this labor force was contained in sparkling, temperature-controlled offices many miles away.\textsuperscript{340} The polished gleam of Lippold’s stainless-steel tubes was an effort to sanitize and aestheticize this process, and to claim that the real work was accomplished in suits, not hardhats.

To prepare Inland’s staff for moving into the new headquarters, a pamphlet was distributed.\textsuperscript{341} Its cover features an illustration of a queue of cartoon employees, encumbered with furniture, boxes of office equipment, and stacks of papers, each with a broad smile on their face, happily crossing Dearborn Street. Their previous offices were housed in the First National Bank Building, designed by Daniel Burnham in 1901 in the Italianate style, represented on the pamphlet’s cover by the silhouette of a clock, located

\textsuperscript{340} The press frequently mentioned that the Inland Steel Building was the first skyscraper in Chicago to be completely air conditioned.
\textsuperscript{341} “Regarding Facilities at New Inland Steel Building”, Pamphlet, Box 2, File 45, Inland Steel Company Records, Calumet Regional Archives, Anderson Library, Indiana University Northwest. The other tenants in addition to Inland Steel, SOM and the Chicago Chamber of Commerce, as previously mentioned were the Chicago Restaurant Association, the Mary Lasker (wife of Leigh Block) Income Trust, several law firms, insurance companies, the Mexico Refractories Company, and a diesel locomotive corporation.
at the building’s corner, visible in historic photographs. Instead of the building’s facade, the new headquarters is represented by a large, cadmium red sunburst, hovering over the employee’s heads. It acts as a beacon to their new offices. Its central core and radiating rays are a redeployment of Radiant I’s central starburst, as well as obliquely referring to Lippold’s earlier sun construction. Thus, Radiant I can also be read as a form of welcoming, bathing the employees with its reflected glow.

342 For a photograph of the building with its clock see https://chicagology.com/skyscrapers061/, accessed November 15, 2019. The building replaced an earlier headquarters for the bank on the same site. The structure was reviewed by A.C. David in the Architectural Record in January, 1906. Like the later Inland Steel Building, the First National Bank was both a headquarters and a speculative real estate venture, with its $3,000,000 construction cost offset by tenant leases. It was demolished in 1970 and is currently the site of Chase Tower. The clock illustrated in the pamphlet was removed and placed on a concrete pedestal in Chase Tower’s Exelon Plaza along with a plaque praising the work of First National’s employees over the years. Inland Steel moved into the building in 1903 with 15 employees. By 1958, there were 530 employees spread over two of its floors. See the previously mentioned pamphlet, pg. 5. Inland’s new building, and its art, conveyed an interest and respect for modernity. Given that Burnham was the architect of the previous building, a name whose influence put him in league with Jenny and Sullivan as the titans of 19th century Chicago builders, the choice to enlist SOM, the preeminent postwar architectural firm, advertised that Inland was boldly marching into the mid 20th century. As the only steel manufacturer headquartered in Chicago, this building was an opportunity to make a nationwide statement, while still paying respect to their Midwestern roots.
Art on the Executive Level- Seymour Lipton’s Hero

The other major work of art, the sculpture Hero, by Seymour Lipton, was commissioned for the Inland Steel Building’s most elite, privileged space in the tower. (fig. 3.19- Hero) Placed at the end of the 19th floor corridor, outside Leigh Block’s office, he could see it from his desk, looking past his receptionist’s area.

Hero is seven feet in height. It is composed of rods of nickel-silver that have been brazed onto joined sheets of Monel metal and steel, placed on a very low pedestal. There are two major masses in relation to each other- a vertically oriented bundle of slender forms and a horizontal mass composed of interpenetrating vertical zig-zags. The sculpture does not rest completely on the pedestal but instead is perched upon it— it sits delicately on the tips of the vertical forms, the structural rods poking out from the bottom of the curved panels. The two major masses contrast by a sense of stable stasis in the vertical support and a dynamic implied kineticism in the top form. Hero is one of a

343 Within Betty Parsons’ gallery records, held at the Archives of American Art, a payment of $900 is noted for a model of Hero in 1957, but there is no mention of what the artist and gallery were paid for the finished work. Another entry in her records contains a list of sculptures in public and private collections with “Hero/ 57” listed as belonging to Mrs. F. W. Hilles of New Haven Connecticut. This seems to refer to the wife of Frederick Whiley Hilles, Bodman Professor of English Literature at Yale University. After his death in 1975, his wife Susan funded the construction of a library at Radcliffe College that bears the couple’s names. Lipton’s 1958 showing at Parsons’ gallery was quite successful—he sold sixteen of the twenty-one sculptures on display, with a top price of $15,000. See “Boom on Canvas,” Time, vol. 71, issue 14, April 7, 1958, pg. 82.
344 A photograph taken from the opposite vantage point, looking into Block’s office was published in “Inland’s Steel Showcase,” Architectural Forum, pg. 91. On the same page is a floorplan of the 19th executive floor with Block’s office demarcated with the abbreviation “V.P.”
345 Monel metal is a nickel alloy, mainly composed of nickel and copper, with trace amounts of iron, manganese, carbon, and silicon. The alloy is stronger than pure nickel. It is corrosion resistant, and thus is often used in applications where it will be exposed to sea water or other potentially damaging natural elements.
handful of resolutely vertical works that Lipton experimented with from 1958-59. It is the only sculpture in the *Hero* series that contains steel, an obvious nod to his patron; the others are made simply of nickel-silver and Monel metal. (fig. 3.14) In his preparatory drawing, Lipton seems to have taken into consideration how the architecture, namely the grid of windows beyond, would serve as a framing mechanism for his sculpture. He has scaled the drawing so that the horizontal frame of the window visually bisects the sculpture directly underneath the top, horizontally-oriented massing.

Albert Elsen’s 1970 Lipton monograph argues that this series of works, which are some of the most anthropomorphic of his career, are indebted to the aesthetic vocabulary of medieval armor. There is a structural similarity between Lipton’s works and their historical antecedent. Both are composed of shaped sheets of metal with a hallow core. His technique was highly singular and broke from traditions of sculpture, especially with the long precedent of the monolith and subtractive carving. In terms of Lipton’s place in the canon it is his technical innovations and working process that are most lauded and discussed. *Arts Magazine* published an article on his process in the same year *Hero* was completed. They dubbed it his “direct metal process.”

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346 In the Betty Parsons Papers, held by the Archives of American Art, she listed the titles, prices and clients who purchased works by Lipton. There is an entry for a model of Hero, but not the finished, full-scale work.
349 The sculptor used metal shears to cut sheets of Monel metal into the desired size and were then pounded into a three-dimensional form and spot welded together. The form was then brazed with an alloy of nickel-silver to give it an overall surface texture and sheen.
to maquette and maquette to full-scale finished sculpture, Lipton changes and adapts the form in a spontaneous and intuitive manner.\textsuperscript{351}

Lipton and other Abstract Expressionist sculptors like David Smith used industrial equipment and an additive process to create their works. They eschewed the traditional materials of wood, stone and bronze, instead opting for modern industrial metals because they felt they were more authentic representations of the contemporary moment. It certainly worked well for a steel manufacturer. That being said, neither \textit{Hero} nor \textit{Radiant} make explicit reference to the industrial uses of their client’s products, instead their works operate more in terms of allegory. This is especially true of \textit{Hero}; the very title begs for ennobling industry. Its placement in the elite executive offices renders these men as veritable heroes themselves.

Lipton claimed his sculptures sought to embody large existential themes such as man’s struggle to define himself and achieve great things, despite the many obstacles the world puts in his way. For instance—

\begin{quote}
The tensions in man as an individual and social being, the blind energies and sudden clairvoyances all struggle along to achieve a fruition, some balance, some steady vision. These harsh tensions, dramatic or lyrical, are a basic reality in man. This is the realism that I am trying to get at in sculptural language.\textsuperscript{352}
\end{quote}

The work aims to illustrate this theme of struggle in the masculine individual. Exceeding the boundaries of philosophy, we can extend this notion to the Horatio Alger “bootstraps” philosophy that defined early American capitalist thinking. Despite William Whyte’s argument in \textit{The Organization Man}, that by and large corporate employees had dropped

\textsuperscript{351} See his process in the documentary film by Nathan Boxer, \textit{Sculpture by Lipton}, Image Films, 1954, 15 minutes. His process is at odds with later fabrication shops, notably Lippincott, that simply blew up the dimensions of an artist’s models into architectural scale.

this earlier rugged individualist thinking for seeing value in being part of a large team, the
top executives could still congratulate themselves with the notion that they had fought for
their elite status through hard work. This was certainly true of executives like Leigh
Block, who had worked his way up the corporate ladder from salesman to vice president.
Such rugged individualism was evident in another way in the executive boardroom’s
traditional display of oil-on-canvas portraits of past Inland presidents. It is also an ethic
associated with the male-dominated school of Abstract Expressionism, a school the
sculptor was associated with through his material choice and working process. Although,
in person, Lipton was soft-spoken and introspective, the work he created was strong-
willed. As the 1963 cartoon in Life suggested, it could also be menacing. These
connotations would be welcome on the executive level of Inland Steel, where captains of
industry would resonate with such images of strength and self-determination that Hero
exuded.

A Postmodern Take on Richard Lippold and the Inland Steel Building

Lippold’s sculptural abstractions celebrated the postwar American preoccupation
with technological innovation. This quality, as well as his formalist language, was
lampooned by architect Robert Venturi in his first commissioned project, Philadelphia’s
Guild House (1960-63).353 (Fig. 3.15) This work was under construction as the Pan Am
Building, including Lippold’s lobby sculpture, Flight, were being unveiled to the public.
Lippold was receiving other high-profile commissions, notably Orpheus and Apollo for

Lincoln Center. Venturi was a bold choice by the relatively conservative Quaker board of trustees which oversaw the construction of the Guild House, an apartment complex for low income senior citizens. His design has become a touchstone for the nascent Postmodern movement in architecture, but its design appealed to the board because of its inexpensive construction cost. Guild House did not have any of the pretensions of prestige International Style architecture with its cutting-edge amenities, engineering and construction materials. His design was mainly composed of brick and enlarged versions of domestic sash windows. There were few areas of adornment—glazed tile framing the entrance, and a single, large polished black granite column placed directly in front of a door, acting more as an obstacle to foot traffic than architectural embellishment.

The board took issue with one feature of Venturi’s design that read most conspicuously as applied ornament. They objected to his plan to top the building with a gilded metal wire construction, modeled on a TV antenna. (Fig. 3.16) Refusing to budge, Venturi eventually had to go into his own pocket to pay for the fabrication and installation of his antenna.³⁵⁴ Architectural drawings of the Guild House appear in his two most influential books. Venturi states, “The antenna, with its anodized gold surface, can be interpreted in two ways; abstractly, as sculpture in the manner of Lippold, and as a symbol of the aged, who spend so much time looking at T.V.”³⁵⁵

In Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture (1966) the Guild House appears at the end of the book in a portfolio of his designed and completed works to illustrate a

³⁵⁴ This has been difficult to find a published source for, but it was relayed to me in person by Dr. Christine Gorby, an expert on Venturi, who knew him personally. She is currently a fellow at the American Academy in Rome and is completing a book about Venturi’s writing.
variety of principles laid out in the text.\textsuperscript{356} (Fig. 3.17) In \textit{Learning From Las Vegas} (1972) the Guild House is used to define the concept of the decorated shed as opposed to the ‘duck’, his term for much of modernist architecture which takes its aesthetic appeal from an all-encompassing sculptural massing.\textsuperscript{357} Both books refer to the antenna as a “Lippold”, meaning that it apes the style and stock themes of the artist.

Referring back to the design of the Guild House, there is one major interruption in the nearly monotonous brick façade: a large semi-circular window which arcs across the top floor. In the words of Venturi:

\begin{quote}
The central window on the top floor reflects the special spatial configuration of the common room inside and relates to the entrance below, increasing the scale of the building on the street and at the entrance. Its arched shape also permits a very big opening to penetrate the wall and yet remain a hole in a wall rather than a void in a frame. The television antenna atop this axis and beyond the otherwise constant height line of the building strengthens this axis of scale-change in the zone of the central facade, and expresses a kind of monumentality...\textsuperscript{358}
\end{quote}

Thus, we have a very different sentiment about the role of technology in American life.

With Lippold, technology ennobles man, allows him to communicate across the globe, travel into uncharted territory, and tap into the very essence of matter. He touches on the very best of our age and the heights of human achievement. His sculptures are statements of pride in our society, anticipating future technological greatness.

At the Guild House, Venturi refers to a technology that was reaching near ubiquity by the early 60s. Instead of being allied with notions of greatness and exploration, the technology in question serves the role of pacification. Where Lippold implicitly refers to people at the height of their intellectual and physical powers, namely

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{356} Ibid.
\bibitem{357} Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. \textit{Learning from Las Vegas}, MIT Press, 1972, reprinted 1977, pgs. 93, 95, 97-100.
\bibitem{358} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
working men, Venturi addresses a population that has ceased to serve a valuable role in society. The aged and retired no longer work, instead they merely bide their time passively watching TV. For Lippold, technology elevates people and gives them the potential to achieve greatness. For Venturi, television is an equalizing force of a different kind—it reduces us to the level of base consumers. Guild Houses’s common room is a place for coming together, but not like a town hall meeting, here the only voices heard are those of actors, not citizens. Lippold’s interest in technology is grandiose and transcendental, Venturi’s is grounded in the banality of passively watching TV.

Richard Lippold’s Radiant I came into dramatic contact with postmodernism in 2010. In the decades since its completion, the Inland Steel building fell into disrepair, despite being named a Chicago Landmark in 1998, and needed an influx of investment to update and repair its cladding and interior fixtures. The architect Frank Gehry had visited the building in the early 1960s on an architecture tour and was impressed by SOM’s stainless-steel cladding. Gehry organized a group of investors to buy the building. When he realized that they were not going to hire SOM to do the refurbishment, as he insisted, he arranged another group of investors, led by his friend, Manhattan real estate developer Richard Cohen to purchase it in 2007. In exchange for organizing this deal Gehry was given a five percent stake in the building.  

360 Fred A. Bernstein, “Frank Gehry (a Part Owner) Helps Develop a Landmark,” The New York Times, November 16, 2010, pg. B 10. The renovation by SOM cost a reported $10 million. Cohen speculated that he would spend the same amount on “tenant improvements”. Because of the status of the building and the way it was renovated, Cohen was to receive $8 million in city property tax abatement and federal tax credits of up to 20% of the renovation costs.
As a token of his appreciation, in 2013, Gehry created a sculptural desk and chair set out of molten glass to serve as the security desk. 361 (Fig. 3.18) With this work Gehry subverted the modernist interest in glass for its lightness and transparency, especially as associated with the curtain wall, and rendered it nearly glacial in size and weight. The architect playfully dubbed it Icehenge. Here the forms are so thick that instead of light passing through them, it seems to be arrested, or lit from within. Their rough-hewn quality and sculptural monumentality seem to derive more from Vulcan’s forge than the mathematically precise modular units of glass we associate with modernism. If we agree that Radiant I speaks to the peculiar relationship to power (both administrative and HVAC) as well as space (both in terms of the vacancy of the office floors and the way in which communication bridges distances) then what does the desk say? It seems on first glance as an attempt to elevate the status of the security guard, a position which has become more important since September 11th. In reality, the security guard is expected to be perpetually standing or walking about the lobby. Thus, during the brief moments when the guard must access something on the desk they hover over it awkwardly. Gehry’s work here rests uncomfortably between free-standing sculpture and functional object. Seen from the street, its six-foot glass columns frame a frontal view of Radiant I, but their weight and material contrast glaringly. Blair Kamin, reviewing the installation for the Chicago Tribune called it, “an interesting curiosity from a great architect. Enjoy its virtues. Like all lobby furniture, it’s not forever.” 362 While tastes in furniture are known to fluctuate, Radiant I still functions effectively in its context. The only issue now is that those who simply want to view the sculpture or take a picture of it, are rebuked by the

362 Ibid.
nearby security guard. Like so many lobbies in the Post 9/11 period, one can only enter if they are a tenant or are on official business.

It was the particular conditions of his corporate patronage which allowed Lippold to produce a work that was sufficiently abstract, especially in terms of its material experimentation and its framing with architectural features as well as custom lighting. It too worked on a symbolic level, offering a multiplicity of readings, all of which supported the ideals of the company. Additionally, Radiant I spoke to the most interesting features of the building itself, notably its relation to power and to space.
fig. 3.1- Inland Steel Building, designed by Walter Netsch and Bruce Graham of SOM, 1958, photograph by Ezra Stoller, 1958 via artnet.
fig. 3.2- Inland Steel Building, designed by Walter Netsch and Bruce Graham of SOM, 1958, photograph by Ezra Stoller, 1958 via artnet.
fig. 3.3- Interior with colored partition walls, Inland Steel Building, designed by Walter Netsch and Bruce Graham of SOM, 1958, photograph by Bill Engdahl, Chicago Historical Society, National Building Museum.
fig. 3.4- Inland Steel’s Indiana Harbor Plant, photographer and date unknown, Inland Steel Company Records, Calumet Regional Archives, Anderson Library, Indiana University Northwest.
fig. 3.5- Vice President of Inland Steel, Leigh Block, in front of Richard Lippold’s Radiant I (1958) and Willem de Kooning’s Bolton Landing (1957), photograph by Hans Namuth, Look Magazine, vol. 29, no. 6, March 23, 1965, pg. 69.
fig. 3.6- Portrait of Mary Block, Ivan Albright, 1955-1957, oil on canvas, 39 1/8 x 30”, Gift of Mary and Leigh Block, The Art Institute of Chicago, reference no. 1959.7.
Fig. 3.7 - Executive floor with Willem de Kooning’s *Bolton Landing* (1957), Inland Steel Building, designed by Walter Netsch and Bruce Graham of SOM, 1958, photograph by Ezra Stoller, 1958 via artnet.
fig. 3.8- *Radiant I* by Richard Lippold, 1958, Inland Steel Building, designed by Walter Netsch and Bruce Graham of SOM, 1958, photograph by Ezra Stoller, 1958 via artnet.
fig. 3.9- Richard Lippold with *Variation within a Sphere, No. 10: The Sun*, *Life*, vol. 41, no. 5, July 30, 1956, pg. 90.
fig. 3.12- Open floor plan, Inland Steel Building, designed by Walter Netsch and Bruce Graham of SOM, 1958, photograph by Ezra Stoller, 1958 via artnet.
Chapter 4

Chase Manhattan Bank (1959)

In 1959 Chase Manhattan Bank unveiled a flagship branch office on 410 Park Avenue in midtown Manhattan, to critical fanfare.\(^{363}\) (Fig. 4.1- 410 Park Avenue) All of the other buildings in this dissertation were created to stand alone—in terms of the novelty of their structure, their commissioned art tailored to the specific context, and as free-standing buildings. The motivation for this branch’s creation was different. It was but one in a series of coordinated events to establish a new corporate identity for Chase. The modernist design of the branch, and its inclusion of large-scale abstraction, was a calculated harbinger for the unveiling of their new headquarters, Chase One Plaza, two years later.

In the second half of the 1950s, the company was greatly increasing in scale and profitability. They introduced one of the first major credit cards, and were re-branding their image through the adoption of a new abstract logo. Given all of these transformations taking place, the 410 Park Avenue branch was specifically designed to showcase both the company’s newly elevated status, as well as their emphasis on customer service. By highlighting the main banking area through the conspicuous use of glass, the humanity of their operation was put in the forefront. The relatively small scale of the branch was meant to allay wariness of the institution’s actual size, assets, and influence. It was a strategic public relations campaign to counter the notion of the bank as a monolithic force, to soften and humanize their image at the very period when they were establishing their dominance in the financial industry.

The Building

Park Avenue 410 featured a glass-enclosed volume similar to the Manufacturers Trust, but with curtain walls not nearly as transparent; with smaller window panes interspersed with bands of light grey painted metal. Its public banking facilities were located on its first and second floors, with private employee offices above. The building was hierarchically organized with executive offices and dining facilities on the upper floors. Chase leased the basement level as well as the first four floors. It was the bank’s 101st branch in Manhattan. Above bank, were 17 stories of speculative office space. Thus, the building was able to retain the cohesion of a flagship branch at street level, while being more economical in terms of utilizing the available real estate. This made it similar to the Inland Steel Building, as it combined corporate offices and amenities with speculative real estate, to take maximum advantage of its architectural footprint.

In another respect, 410 Park Avenue is unique within the projects studied in this dissertation in that it was the product of two architectural firms. The building as a whole was designed by Emery Roth & Sons while the portion occupied by Chase Manhattan was designed by SOM’s Gordon Bunshaft. Other major tenants were Hearst Publications, Lufthansa Airlines and the United Carbon Company. Unlike most speculative real estate projects featuring a single, overall design, 410 Park Avenue advertised a separation between the various occupants of the building, specifically

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364 “Leases Acquired for Branch Banks,” The New York Times, May 1, 1958, pg. 54. The owners of the building were Francis J. Kleban and Alfred Tananbaum.
366 Ibid.
highlighting the presence of the bank. Public spaces on the first and second stories were
opened up to a greater amount of glass, distinguishing them from the denser interplay of
metal and glass above. Because of the building’s overall height, it did not register as
effectively as a temple to commerce as the Manufacturers Trust did, but rather as an
office building with a public space near the street. Often the upper floors are cropped out
of press photographs to focus on the area occupied by Chase.\textsuperscript{367} The structure rises 12
stories flush with the edge of its property line. Above this are a pair of two-story tall,
cruciform setbacks, at which point their geometry reverts to being rectangular. There are
two of these additional levels before the building terminates in a small volume enclosing
its mechanical equipment. It is finally surmounted by the ever-ubiquitous Manhattan
water tower. This organization of cubic volumes is like an International Style
interpretation of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century ziggurat-type massing, set atop a sheer-walled
tower.

The modern workplace of the late 1950s was designed to be visually pleasing and
comfortable as a means of maximizing worker efficiency. It certainly promoted sobriety.
Easier to hide the smell and swagger of a two-martini lunch behind dark-carved wood,
leather upholstery and diffused lighting than it is in the sleek, bright spaces of the modern

\textsuperscript{367} The project does not appear in Carol Krisinsky’s monograph on its architect Gordon Bunshaft or in
Nicholas Adam’s survey \textit{Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, SOM since 1936}. Today, many of the upper floors
have been converted into luxury apartments. The original entrance has been cleaved to create separate
access to the public and private spaces. While the Manufacturers Trust Building continues to operate as a
flagship for another company, the Chase building at 410 Park Avenue has gone the other direction. The
space conveys a sense of privacy and subtlety at odds with its original transparency and visual display of
interior spaces to the street. Its large windows on the first and second floors are perpetually obscured by
thick curtains. This Chase branch now only caters to elite clients who must swipe an identification card to
enter. A side vestibule with multiple ATMs can be accessed by Chase members where the machines have
absorbed the role tellers originally served inside. A Ferrari dealership occupies the corner of the first floor.
The hierarchy of space remains rigidly intact and visually potent.
Walls were reduced to opaque partitions or dispensed with completely. Art, furniture and architecture were brought together at 410 Park Avenue to create an enlightened modern space for both work and commercial banking. Artwork installed here performed a variety of communicative functions in relation to its intended, hierarchically divided audience. As Sarah K. Rich asserted in her account of Mark Rothko, abstract art was well received when integrated into workplaces for its relaxing effect on employees. This feature was especially valuable for the sculpture on display in the main banking area where it could ease the potential frustration or anxiety associated with waiting for service. Thus, abstract art was charged with selling the image of an enlightened, modern corporation to the employees and business clients, as well as to customers. The portion of the skyscraper occupied by Chase highlighted the humanity of banking, and the importance of social interaction, a strategic effort to appeal to the growing middle-class consumer base.

Chase Manhattan’s Changing Status in the 1950s

The first thing that needs to be addressed is the name of the company. Chase Manhattan is the product of a 1955 merger between the Chase National Bank and the Bank of Manhattan Company. In terms of deposits, Chase was the third largest bank in

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368 Justin Henderson and Vernon L. Mays. *Office Design Sourcebook: Solutions for Dynamic Workspaces*. Rockport Publishers, 2003, pg. 7. The introduction refers explicitly to SOM as one of the first major architectural firms that specifically included interior design as one of their core services to clients.

America, and the latter was fifteenth. Combined, they became the second largest bank in the country, behind the Bank of America.\textsuperscript{370}

Not everyone was excited about this merger. United States Congressional Representative Emanuel Celler threatened to order an official investigation because he felt that the merger was in violation of a 1950 amendment to the Clayton Antitrust Act of 1914.\textsuperscript{371} If allowed to proceed, Celler warned that this would establish a dangerous precedent for banking in general, and specifically, “give an all-powerful oligarchy a stranglehold on New York banking.”\textsuperscript{372} Furthermore, Celler argued that, “The neighborhood bank has been the lifeblood of small business… the business man and merchant will be at the mercy of a financial colossus, which because of competition will be able to set the standards provided for the bank’s best interest.”\textsuperscript{373} Chase’s chairman James McCloy, countered that the merger would, “result in an intensification of competition… giving the public more extensive and … more efficient and flexible banking facilities throughout the metropolitan area.”\textsuperscript{374}

Greater demand for industrial loans and personal credit had led to a great increase in the number of bank mergers after World War II. Middle-class consumer banking also

\textsuperscript{370} “Chase Manhattan Bank Would Be Second Biggest,” The New York Times, January 14, 1955, pg. 33. Seven of the top twenty largest banks were located in Manhattan, making it the country’s financial epicenter.
\textsuperscript{371} The Clayton Act can be seen as a further effort to prevent the establishment of monopolies begun with the 1890 Sherman Antitrust Act. The Glass-Steagall Act of 1933 served to separate investment from commercial banking activities, as the unregulated speculation with consumer assets was seen as a major reason for the 1929 stock market crash.
greatly increased after the war. These new customers not only expected good service, as discussed in Chapter 1, but also expected to have easy access to a local branch. This necessitated the building of numerous locations. In essence, people wanted the stability and assets of a national bank, with the service and close vicinity of a small local bank. As Leif Olsen of The New York Times summarized, “no matter how much a bank advertises, it won’t get the housewife to come to Wall Street to do her banking. So, the bank must go to the housewife.” During 1954 alone, the year that the Manufacturers Trust opened their new flagship branch, there were 207 bank consolidations, and the first half of the 1950s witnessed 86 such mergers in the State of New York alone. This data may be impressive in isolation, but it does not give an account of the size and financial strength of the banks enumerated. The Chase-Manhattan merger was undoubtedly an outlier in this trend in terms of market share. Despite attracting criticism, the banks merged on April 1, 1955, with a combined number of 95 bank branches in New York City alone. With $10 million in reported profits in the first quarter of 1955, Chase Manhattan was also the biggest banking institution in the city.

In the second half of the 1950s, consumer spending steadily increased, a trend which Chase Manhattan capitalized on. This was especially true of their credit card, introduced late in the year 1958. (fig. 4.2) There had been credit cards before, but they were highly restricted in terms of where they could be used, and how they had to be paid.

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376 Ibid.
377 Ibid.
back. The Chase Manhattan Bank “Charge Plan” offered a line of credit based on an individual’s earnings and savings. They received a monthly bill, which they could pay in full without a service charge, or in four monthly payments at 1% interest. By the end of the year, 3,000 merchants in Manhattan were honoring the card, to 200,000 retail customers. A 1960 advertisement urged customers to, “look for the familiar blue-and-white emblem of The Chase Manhattan Bank Charge Plan in your neighborhood. It’s your sign of modern shopping convenience.” This product gave further distinction to the newly minted financial conglomerate.

To attract this new lucrative market of middle-class consumers, Chase undertook an extensive advertising campaign, designed by the ad agency Hewitt, Ogilvy, Benson & Mather, Inc. Anderson Hewitt explained that the goal of the campaign was to, “sell the banking business to the public… to help show that banks are human… and banks are

380 In the 1940s department stores started this trend by releasing credit cards, but they could only be used at that specific company. This gradually replaced the layaway system. In 1950, the Diners Club card was created. It kept track of bills at a designated list of restaurants, which had to be paid in full monthly. It became international by the mid-1950s and reached a million members by the end of the decade, but it could only be used for this limited category of purchases. See www.dinersclub.com/about-us/history.

Other major changes in the development of credit and loans took place in the first half of the 20th century. Most early mortgages were short term with some kind of balloon payment at the end of the term, or they were interest-only loans which did not pay anything toward the principal of the loan with each payment. As such, many people were either perpetually in debt in a continuous cycle of refinancing their home purchase, or they lost their home through foreclosure when they were unable to make the balloon payment at the end of the term of that loan. The US Congress passed the Federal Home Loan Bank Act in 1932, during the Great Depression. It established the Federal Home Loan Bank and associated Federal Home Loan Bank Board to assist other banks in providing funding to offer long term, amortized loans for home purchases. The idea was to get banks involved in lending, not insurance companies, and to provide realistic loans which people could repay and gain full ownership of their homes. The federal government did not create access to credit directly. Instead they provided the economic stability to financial institutions so that it would be easier for them to lend to individuals. The government gave banks large loans and protected their assets. See Rowena Olegario, “The History of Credit in America,” Oxford Encyclopedia of American History, May 2019, accessible at oxfordre.com/americanhistory.


382 “Credit Card Plan of Chase in Bow: Bank Officer Says Account Service is Off to a Good Start,” The New York Times, December 2, 1958, pg. 64.

interested in you.” They accomplished this with humor, to counter the stereotype that banks were cold and secretive by nature. For example, a 1956 ad reads, “For a better way to protect your nest egg talk to the people at Chase Manhattan,” accompanied by a photograph of a distinguished, older gentleman in suit and tie, reading the paper, a manacle clamped to his leg, attached to an enormous egg by a length of chain. (fig. 4.3) Bankers were shown as real people, instead of shadowy figures in a smoke-filled rooms. A 1958 ad playfully asked, “Why does the banker cross the street? Answer: Chase Manhattan’s 214 Broadway Branch is crossing the street to new quarters at 189 Broadway.” Chase was able to advertise their financial success with a sense of humility, showing that they were just a collection of people, not a faceless Leviathan.

Chase Manhattan’s advertisements were also an educational campaign, explaining what banks did in general, and simply attaching their name underneath. For example, a 1957 ad explained how industrial loans led to a wider choice of products and affordable prices through greater production scale and competition. Some of their campaigns took this to an extreme — child-like illustrations seemed to infantilize the consumer in the pursuit of educating them. While not all of the ads may have hit the mark, it was a unique effort on Chase’s part to change the public’s perception of banking. Making banking seem more transparent, and the product of human effort, instead of mechanized calculation, was made given concrete form in the new banking branch at 410 Park

388 See for instance, an advertisement featuring crudely-drawn, smiling cartoon workers improving a home, complete with the sun shining in the top right corner; like something you might see displayed on a proud parent’s refrigerator, *The New York Times*, April 24, 1956, pg. 21.
Avenue, which foregrounded social interaction by framing the main banking area for all to see on the street beyond.

The Artwork

At the urging of architects and with the support of Chase’s vice president David Rockefeller, $50,000 was allocated for art purchases at 410 Park Avenue, both large-scale installations and more modest easel-sized paintings and sculptures. They commissioned works by Alexander Calder and Sam Francis as well as purchased paintings by Josef Albers, James Brooks, Lawrence Calcagno, Theodoros Stamos, and Jack Youngerman, among others.

The first commissioned work was an untitled, black-painted iron mobile by Alexander Calder, an artist who had become internationally renowned for his ability to charge architecture with a sense of playful dynamism. This type of work became emblematic for lobby art. His later stabiles, would be a popular choice for displaying in plazas, both for corporate clients, and later for public buildings. The other art installation was a mural-scaled canvas attached, full-bleed, to a wall of the same dimensions by Sam Francis, a second-generation Abstract Expressionist. (fig. 4.5) At the time of his Chase commission, he was an emerging member of the postwar American

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391 In the year before his Chase commission, Calder created mobiles for the Parisian headquarters of UNESCO, the Idewild International Airport outside Queens and the World’s Fair in Brussels.
His painting on canvas was included at 410 Park Avenue because of the involvement of art specialists in the planning stages of the branch’s construction. Vice President David Rockefeller insisted on relying on the expertise of top echelon museum professionals including James Johnson Sweeney of the Whitney Museum, as well as Alfred Barr Jr., and Dorothy Miller of the Museum of Modern Art.

From Park Avenue, visitors would enter through glass double doors at the southernmost corner of the building. Like the Manufacturers Trust, the Chase branch was located on a prime corner position for maximum visibility. Once inside, turning to the right, one accessed the commercial business area with rows of desks and partitioned spaces for more private discussions. Despite the refined appointment of teak, leather and marble, there was no art installed on this level. The ceilings were fairly low to convey intimacy. The space was carpeted to suppress extraneous noise, focusing attention on discussions between clients and bankers. To cash a check, or apply for a personal loan, customers took an escalator ride to the main banking area on the second story, thereby literally elevating these aspects of banking. This organization of space showed that Chase was placing greater value in consumer banking. The building argued that financial institutions were no longer mausoleums for old money, but instead actively sought out the middle class. A review of the bank put it succinctly, “New Chase Branch Changes the Face of Banking.”

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393 Peter Selz. *Francis*, Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1982, p. 52. Selz asserts that James Johnson Sweeney was the “first American museum official to become aware of Francis’ work”. Sweeny would be an art advisor on the 410 Park Avenue project and later a member of Chases Art Collection Committee. His first major American exhibitions were the 1955 “Art in the 20th Century” at San Francisco’s Museum of Art as well as the Pittsburgh International at the Carnegie Institute.

The Main Banking Area and Calder’s Mobile

Walking straight through the entrance, one ascended via the escalator to the second-floor banking area as the Calder mobile appeared into view to one’s right. A change in financial relationship and duration of customer interaction was registered by the mobile’s presence. Like at the Manufacturers Trust Building, the visitor was mechanically propelled to the main art installation as the compression at the street-level floor gave way to expansive open space above. The subtle movements of the mobile counteracted the rigidity of the straight lines which predominated 410 Park Avenue’s International Style architecture. The stark whiteness of the interior walls and floors was intensified by a dark green polished marble wall that braced the escalator, and partially bisected the bottom two floors — its slabs appeared to float when viewed from the street, especially at night, an effect first achieved with the Manufacturers’ Trust Building, albeit not as successfully at 410 Park Avenue because the second floor was not recessed from its curtain wall.

Leaving the escalator, visitors entered the most public area designated for check cashing and deposits, a literal elevation of the small transactions traditional banks once only begrudgingly accepted. Ceilings on the second floor were highest to avoid the claustrophobia and aggravation of waiting in line, while the mobile’s movement gave customers something to watch. It provided visual entertainment like the hanging sculpture over the escalator in the Manufacturers Trust, each of which was placed out of customer’s reach. Light was more intense upstairs, illuminated like a department store,

395 Ibid.
reflecting the importance of banking as customer service. The mobile’s slow movement asserted that these relationships were nurtured over time, and worth the wait. It also gave the impression that banking was somehow lyrical or poetic, not just cold calculation and money-grubbing. At the periphery along the windows, desks and chairs offered space for semi-private conversations. The marble wall obscured a second escalator to the upper floors; a subtle division of public and private banking spaces based on optical absorption like the Bertoia’s screen at the Manufacturers Trust.396

There are many commonalities between the two banks designed by Gordon Bunshaft. Both had two floors of public space, hierarchically organized and defined by a contrast between compression and openness, darkness and illumination. Each had a street level floor with relatively low ceilings. Thus, there was a phenomenological transition from the chaotic hustle and sensorial overload of the city street to the calm of the interior. At the Manufacturers Trust this feeling of compression was utilized to promote efficient, short-term interactions for customers with small investment and relationship with the bank. This was accomplished by the lack of furniture, promoting utilitarian movement and resisting physical relaxation. Conversely at 410 Park Avenue the street-level space was used for intimate interactions between important clients and bankers. As visitors were elevated to the second floor of each building the mood and demographic shifted. At 410 Park Avenue the second floor was the main banking area. Relatively unimportant clients were literally elevated.

396 The visual and spatial experience of 410 Park Avenue is much different today. The branch has been converted for the sole use by “Chase Private Client(s)” as designated on the street by a subtle illuminated sign on black marble. Most often the floor-to-ceiling curtain obscures any view inside the banking spaces and of the art. A small area immediately inside the entrance has several ATMs which can only be accessed by swiping a bank card in the door. The emergence of ATM banking has been a watershed in the way banks are used in contemporary society which for the sake of the brevity of this paper cannot be discussed herein.
As a metaphor for a corporation, the mobile, like Chase, was a conglomeration of individual units of varying roles and levels of power that worked together to create something bigger than the sum of their parts. There was a metaphorical implication of democracy to the structure, illustrated by the mobile’s delicate balance. If equal attention was denied to any of its subsidiary components, the entire composition would fail, asserting that customers were treated equally, regardless of their level of investment. Balance was integral to the suspension of this amorphous form; gravity and tensile load were distributed along the connecting rods in a subversion of the traditional physics of sculpture in which support originated from the base. Its dynamic movement subverted the traditional notion of sculpture as weighty and inert. Because of its orientation, it responded to the slightest variation in atmospheric conditions like a responsible banker attuned to ever-changing economic fluctuations.

Despite its abstraction, the mobile can be read figuratively as a planetary model, a metaphor for corporate legitimacy and longevity. The structure was composed of delicately balanced iron rods; the main one was roughly parallel to the ceiling, but then subtly bent and divided into subsidiary projections. The wedge-shaped cut sheets decreased in size relative to their distance from the ceiling. The vaguely circular motion of components around an invisible source of gravitational pull asserted that the corporation ran like a well-oiled machine without any visible locus of control. In absence of a blinding sun about which planets spun, the source of illumination was diffuse, shining with equal intensity over the entire space. Seen optimistically, there was an argument for the naturalness of banking as if to engage in abstract financial endeavors.
was no more effort than the planets orbiting the sun on a predetermined course of elliptical motion.

Alexander Calder also had a popular appeal in the 1950s, so installing his mobile in the most public, and heavily-trafficked area was a sensible choice. Such popularity could potentially pose an issue. Carroll Dunham recently noted, “it can be tough to take him seriously… his work still has a tendency to slip into the reference frame of decoration.” Alex J. Taylor tracked the artist’s, “absorption into mass culture,” during the mid-1950s when, “Calder’s mobiles were imitated in a wide range of consumer products and commercial contexts, across home décor, fashion, film, and advertising.” Calder may have been one of the first sculptors to experiment with mobiles, but they were quickly turned into a do-it-yourself, crafting hobby; instructional manuals appeared in the popular press and in books devoted to the subject. His sculptures were also associated with high-end interior decorating. Each association threatened to skew his perceived artistic value.

Calder’s mobile at 410 Park Avenue resisted some of the more pernicious implications of popularity through several related tactics. The most obvious distinction between it and contemporaneous murals by the artist, was its employment of black paint. Most of his other works featured a gay palette, exuding a greater sense of playfulness. This dark hue was much more serious and reserved, showing that despite the novelty of a kinetic sculpture in a bank, the employees still took their jobs, and their client’s investments, seriously. The projecting elements, at the terminus of the mobile’s arms, are

399 Ibid., pg. 28.
similarly serious—the oar-like forms are defined by hard-edges, and sharp points. These are not the lily-pad forms seen in many of his other mobiles. Their kineticism was still able to be read organically, but their rigidity was not overtly anthropomorphic. The larger context of the main banking floor also assisted in preserving the sophistication of Calder’s work, as it was surrounded by luxurious materials and furniture. The hushed tone of a banking floor nearly resembled the austerity of a modern art museum. Its slow, subtle rotation echoed the movement of employees and clients around it.

**Art on the Executive Floor**

Employees, executives and business associates would ascend the escalator, walk past the mobile, turn left at the end of the richly veined marble wall, and ascend again to the bank’s private spaces. Lower-level employees worked in open office pools on the third floor. The fourth floor contained the only enclosed offices. Thus, there was increasing privacy as one rose through the hierarchically divided floors. The executive level’s thick carpet reduced the noise of foot traffic creating a more serious, private environment.

Immediately adjacent to the fourth-floor reception desk was a near floor to ceiling painting by Lawrence Calcagno entitled *Earth Legend VI*. Although the painting employed loaded brushwork and gesturation associated with the “Tenth Street 400 “Designing Artistry Blends with Avant-Garde Art in Chase Manhattan’s Newest Branch,” *Interiors*, vol. 119, no. 12, December 1959, pgs. 100-113.

401 The child of Italian immigrants, Calcagno studied at Calarts under Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, and Richard Diebenkorn before becoming an art professor. A year before 410 Park Avenue’s opening Calcagno had a solo exhibition at the Greenwich Gallery on 10th Street in New York City.
“Touch”, it loosely clung to figuration. A band of wildflowers executed in blobs of paint bisected the composition three-fourths of the way up at eye level. Above this was a setting sun complemented by various strata of the illuminated atmosphere. The bottom half of the picture was void-like except for a lightning bolt slash extending from one of the flowers.

This work continued the use of natural metaphors to legitimize banking. Financial relationships had to be tended to consistently so that they could mature over time. Like the other objects of aesthetic absorption described previously, this artwork was displayed in an area where one’s movement through the architecture was temporarily suspended. The viewing experience was meant to mark a transition between spaces. If the dimensions of the Calcagno painting were extended into space, it would align perfectly with the void in the partition wall into the executive lounge. The executive offices dispensed with traditional doors for sliding screens, a modern adaptation of Japanese vernacular interior design. Such voids echoed the modularity of the office partitions and windows.

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402 ‘Tenth Street Touch’ is a phrase coined by Clement Greenberg in his essay associated with an exhibition he curated at LACMA in 1964. The most conspicuous of the mannerisms into which Painterly Abstraction has degenerated is what I call the "Tenth Street Touch" (after East Tenth Street in New York), which spread through abstract painting like a blight during the 1950s. The stroke left by a loaded brush or knife frays out, when the stroke is long enough, into streaks, ripples, and specks of paint.
The Sam Francis Mural

The Sam Francis mural was situated on the oblique wall of a lounge, the antechamber to the executive dining room, which could alternatively serve as a boardroom. The mural’s position did not carry the visual impact of being positioned at a vantage point. Because of its size, over 38’ in length and 8’ in height, the composition could not be experienced in one shot. It was also partially obscured when viewed from the lounge by two structural support columns. Thus, it had to be experienced incrementally as one walked toward the dining room that was adorned with paintings by Charles Shaw, James Brooks and a small bronze sculpture by Robert Clatworthy.\textsuperscript{403} The mural was complex enough to be viewed with scrutiny by passersby but could also sustain long looking from the distance of the upholstered lounge chairs. Its forms were dispersed from one another whilst being vaguely connected by a sinuous web of trace-like marks. The dynamism of the painting propelled visitors towards their destination or alternatively served as a field of quiet contemplation when viewed in repose.

At the time of the mural’s production, Francis was developing a personal style coming out of the tradition of Abstract Expressionism.\textsuperscript{404} By using primary colors and moving away from the impasto machismo of artists like Willem de Kooning, Francis


\textsuperscript{404} As defined by Harold Rosenberg, the canvas was an arena for self-expression, unshackled from the limitations of figuration. The finished work was an indexical registration of an event in which the artist attempted to render his inner condition in plastic form. Notions of this uniquely American art practice were proselytized by \textit{New American Painting}, an exhibition by the Museum of Modern Art which traveled throughout Europe between 1958 and ‘59. Eva Cockcroft argued that this was a political action meant to register notions of artistic freedom of expression allowed in the United States, a critique of Soviet repression. See Eva Cockcroft, “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War,” \textit{Artforum}, vol. 15, no. 10, June 1974, pgs. 39-41.
stripped Abstract Expressionism of its potentially troubling existentialism. In this particular context, his work served to celebrate the privileged status of those who were able to view it. When trying to explain the painter’s status, on the periphery of, “abstraction’s pantheon,” Sandy Thompson, of Artweek attributed a list of Francis’ qualities that complicated his association with canonical postwar American painters; he was—

…from the beginning, European and ethereal, not academic or New York… he was not a joiner… (his) work is color, light, space—not provocation… his palette: immensely primary, and Fauve without apology… using the alchemical integrity of hedonistic color.405

It was the very same qualities that made him an ideal choice for a corporate commission. This was especially true given that the mural was adjacent to the executive dining room, a space given over to elite epicureanism. The joyous positivity of his forms and palette activated the lounge and validated the occupant’s elite status.

In Art at Work, a monograph on the Chase Manhattan art collection, Dorothy Miller described how Francis’ mural came to Chase. Miller, a lead curator at MoMA, was one of the art specialists enlisted by David Rockefeller to assemble the Chase Manhattan art collection. She visited Francis in 1958, during his temporary return from traveling abroad. He was painting in the New York studio of his friend Larry Rivers. She relayed that Francis had already finished the mural and was rolling it up with an air of self-disparagement to the effect that no one would want it. She then claimed to persuade Bunshaft and Rockefeller to give the painting a home at 410 Park Avenue.406

This story is invalidated by a 1997 gallery exhibition of Francis’ studies for the project, proving he was commissioned to undertake the mural.\textsuperscript{407} Dorothy Miller’s story is similarly at odds with the 1959 pamphlet produced by Chase Manhattan concerning their new art collection which states explicitly that the Calder mobile and Francis mural were commissioned.\textsuperscript{408} The 1997 exhibition catalog contains photographs of the work in progress in Larry Rivers’ studio, as well as a suite of works on paper, and an essay by David Anfam. The gallerist, Manny Silverman, states in the catalog’s forward—

In all the years that I have observed the Work of Sam Francis, I cannot recall a time when his creative energy flowed in a more linear direction from concept to realization than it did in the creation of the Chase Manhattan Bank Mural. From the time the first studies were executed in Paris in 1957 to the final painting in 1959 it is obvious that Sam had a final image in mind and yet he never lost the spontaneity that has always been a hallmark of his work.\textsuperscript{409}

Anfam avers that Francis received the commission directly from Bunshaft in 1957 while Francis was living in Paris. The artist submitted three studies to the Chase art advisory committee in 1957. Francis traveled for the next eighteen months, putting the work on hold until he moved to Manhattan in early 1959. Although the building would open in 1958, the mural would not arrive for several months. Francis completed about ten more sketches, most at the scale of ten by forty-nine inches. Anfam argues that the design was influenced by two precedents which the artist came into contact with in the same period as he was contemplating the mural commission: Claude Monet’s Waterlilies at the Orangerie in Paris, and an exhibition of Henri Matisse’s late paper cut-outs at the Berne

\textsuperscript{408} The pamphlet is part of the Dorothy Miller Papers, Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institute.
Kunst Halle in July 1959, the first exhibition devoted to this last period of his career.\textsuperscript{410} MoMA also acquired their own version of the Waterlilies in 1959. The works all share a near panoramic format. Francis’s organically-based abstraction bears resemblance to Monet and the crisp edges of his forms with Matisse.

Anfam posits that the central issue with this composition is the tension between the view of the work in totality from afar where the individual forms and their relation to negative space seems resolved; and the scrutinizing view from up close. He alerts the viewer to the plethora of painterly incidents only viewable from very near: gestural marks and speckled splatters of paint as well as white-on-white passages which appear to be simply blank space from a distance. This feature is not necessarily a problem to overcome, but instead one of the work’s most successful features. The composition becomes resolved in both modes of viewing experience offered by the architectural context. It is both a transitional space from the hallway to the dining area, and a space of repose. The mural activates the viewing experience for each type of viewer successfully. For those walking to the dining room, the period of transition is enlivened by experience of the painting’s innumerable incidents as its composition is gradually revealed. The central forms of the composition as well as the details in the otherwise negative space are revealed to the viewer obliquely in their passing, like a scene out of the window of a moving car. For the other type of viewer, sitting in a comfortable chair on the other side of the room, at a proper distance from the composition, the mural is resolved in totality. One may casually scan back and forth at their leisure but as a whole, it remains stable. Anfam astutely remarks that there is a human-sized wedge of negative space at the very

\textsuperscript{410} Ibid. pg. 11.
center of the composition.\footnote{Ibid., pg. 7.} This quality reaffirms the mural’s address to notions of individuality given that this is placed in an area reserved for the company’s most important clients and executives. One could project themselves into this void, thereby becoming the fulcrum of the larger composition.\footnote{This aspect of the painting brings to mind the work of Barnett Newman, where the ‘zip’ becomes the double of the viewer as well as his desire for people to allow themselves to get close enough to his large-scale paintings that their field of vision is totally taken over by the painting.}

410 Park Avenue’s two major artworks said different things about the individual and the corporation. Calder’s mobile functioned as a representation of a perfectly operating corporate machine, while Sam Francis’s mural advertised the importance of individuality within this matrix. The mobile’s dynamism resulted from the tension between the rigidity of its component parts and its graceful sweeping of arcs; this vivified fractal referred to the corporation and its workplace as a living organism, a manifestation of natural forces.

If the Calder mobile made a public statement of corporations as structures of organic cooperation, the Francis mural spoke of the role of the individual to a select group in a space exclusively for the privileged. The importance of the individual was not advertised in the customer service areas but instead in elite private spaces. There was a palpable joy and childlike enthusiasm to the way paint was applied to the canvas in triumphant bursts. It was not an overtly analytic or cerebral, like the way Mark Rothko envisioned his paintings. Francis’ mural could stand up to bright lighting instead of groping at secular religiosity. It was meant to stimulate its viewer’s appetites and sense of self-importance, not introspection, relaxation or meditation.
There was an unbounded quality to the Francis as well. It implied that, hypothetically, given enough canvas, the composition could continue indefinitely. This was accomplished by a rhythm and modulation of forms instead of a rigid geometrical composition responding to the support’s edge. Francis’s composition was populated by four distinct modules of paint that roughly correspond to the area the artist could span with his brush while remaining stationary. The modules in the Chase mural were not distinctly separated but instead were diaphanously fused together, the viewer enticed to meander through the composition’s total length instead of their optical scanning abruptly ruptured at the end of each module. Francis painted this work at a watershed time in his career, in which expanses of white attained their own physicality and tangibility.

Instead of being the ground, negative space became equal to the applied material.

Francis’ mural was additionally a clearly readable representation of geology. The modules of color are more prismatic and more opaque than works immediately preceding it such as his Basel mural triptych in which pigment was laid down in translucent skeins like watercolor breaking free of its amorphous boundaries, dripping downward. The

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413 This description could similarly apply to Jackson Pollock’s 1942 Mural for Peggy Guggenheim, itself a watershed work for the increasing scale of postwar abstraction.
414 Again, Pollock was a precedent. His Number 1 of 1948, painted un-stretched on the floor, emphasized the physicality of the artist’s extension in the process of interacting with the canvas, his corrected fingerprints drawing a lineage to Paleolithic cave paintings.
415 This aspect of his work may have something to do with his time spent in Japan and his affection for their art which employs the void as an integral part of their woodcut and painting compositions instead of conceiving of it as unimportant in its vacancy. He painted a 26’ mural for the Sogetsu School of Sofu Teshigahara in Tokyo, his first commissioned work, in 1957. The same year he painted Whiteness of a Whale, an abstraction based on the book Moby Dick in which Captain Ahab is almost maniacally obsessed with the whale principally because of its surreal whiteness. This story allows whiteness, which is usually associated with absence, to become associated with monumentality and power. He further explored this concept in smaller untitled works of the same year in which the support of the canvas dominates the pigment which is laid down in the matter of Jackson Pollock in drips and splatters. I draw this analysis from Peter Selz. Francis, Harry N. Abrams, 1982.
416 This work has been divided between the Stedelijk in Amsterdam and the Norton Simon in Pasadena; it sustained major damage that was irreversible in some components.
untitled Chase mural was rendered in a brighter palette than his Tokyo mural of 1957 in which a massing of blue was punctuated by pinks and primary colors. The colored modules in the Chase mural were solid and massive like tectonic plates that had shifted apart to reveal a white canvas. The negative space was intensified by flung and dripped paint. One can imagine the Pangea-esqe form that would result from the module’s re-consolidation. The tectonic plates were not equated with the violent movement of earthquakes, a transitory phenomenon, but instead with the slow geological movement that transcends human time. This slow movement could be equated with the slow, natural force of finance that shaped modern societies.

The New Chase Manhattan Logo

The architecture and art of 410 Park Avenue were part of a process of fashioning a corporate identity for Chase. An October 1956 article in Interiors magazine surveying contemporary trends in lobbies introduced the subject with the suggestion that, “the lobby is where most urban buildings must establish their personalities”. This identity was further abstracted and consolidated in the abstraction of their company logo commissioned from the design firm Chermayeff and Geismar as 410 Park Avenue was nearing completion. (fig. 4.8- Chase logo) Chase Manhattan was one of the first

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417 For an analysis of works from the late 1950s I turned to the French work Francoise Bonnefoy, Sarah Clément and Isabelle Sauvage, Sam Francis, les années parisiennes (1950-1961,) Ministry of Culture, 1995 for an exhibition at the galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume from December 12 1995 to February 18, 1996. Francis at this time was traveling frequently between Europe and America.
418 Interiors, October, 1956, pg. 100.
419 Chermayeff and Geismar had only been established in 1957. This commission would solidify their emerging reputation as well as the notion that creating corporate identities was a profitable and necessary undertaking. They have since created identities or some of the world’s largest corporations including (in
corporations to be represented by an abstract logo. Abstraction was chosen so that the company would not be limited by its current holdings as an acronym would have done. Thus, they envisioned future mergers and acquisitions; in 1955 Chase National Bank and the Bank of Manhattan Company merged to form the Chase Manhattan Bank. If the logo was a representation of identity, what type of identity was represented? Its abstraction must be seen in contrast to the abstraction associated with the ‘Tenth Street Touch’. It was neither gestural nor spontaneous. It did not represent the emotional state of its author. It was a visual expression of one corporate identity crafted by another corporate identity. This image was used in all promotional materials as well as on stationary and signage. It must also be seen in contrast to more traditional logos featuring the company’s name in a decorative script or in the case of General Electric, a stylization of their acronym. In its abstraction, Chase’s logo had the appearance of novelty, modernity and willingness to be flexible and relevant to changing circumstances. Like the Manufacturers Trust Building, the aesthetic of modern abstraction was used as a fashionable package for an ideologically conservative institution.

The logo was a medallion of geometric abstraction derived from the rigidity of the grid, subdivided into discrete modules. Rectilinear forms framed a square void, its outer edges shaved off at 45-degree angles to imbue the composition with a dynamic sense of chronological order) Pepsi, Mobil, Xerox, NBC, Univision, Time Warner, Telemundo, Showtime, National Geographic and Armani Exchange as well as organizations such as the EPA, PBS, NYU and the Library of Congress.

420 In 2000 Chase purchased J.P. Morgan, it is now the largest bank in the United States in terms of assets. The collection has been renamed the J.P. Morgan Chase Art Collection to register this consolidation.
movement like an octagonal lug-nut attached to a square shaft by means of greased ball bearings. The combination of solidity and dynamism implied the bank was stable but forward-thinking. Like the lightness of modern architecture, the logo was easily read, subtlety designed, and free of unnecessary decoration, relying on its essential structure for its aesthetic appeal. The components of the logo worked together, mirroring each other and in their symmetry created a second shape. Greater than the sum of its parts, the logo was an abstraction of a corporation at its most idealized. Chase published a pamphlet concerning its new art collection in 1959 as part of the public relations campaign associated with the opening of 410 Park Avenue. The introductory paragraph is worth quoting in full:

The usual approach in choosing paintings and sculpture for a bank or business office is to choose works by established, conventional artists. Chase Manhattan, however, wanted its new office to reflect the present and even anticipate the future in its décor. For this reason, the Bank deliberately sought the work of artists whose approach is forward-looking. 422

Chase One Plaza and its Art Collection

410 Park Avenue was essentially a trial run for the expansion of their art collection at their new corporate headquarters. (fig. 4.9) Planning for this had begun almost immediately after the 1955 merger was finalized. The acquisition of art for decorating the public and private spaces of Chase’s buildings was greatly expanded at the subsequent Chase One Plaza. 423 The 60-story corporate headquarters located in

423 In 1959, $60,000 had been earmarked for art purchases. It is unknown how much was paid for individual pieces. The Francis mural is undoubtedly the object in their collection that has increased most in value. It is a relatively early work on a large scale at an important stage of his career. The same people who
downtown Manhattan, which opened in 1961, was also designed by Gordon Bunshaft in the International Style. When completed, it was the sixth tallest building in the world.\textsuperscript{424} This structure would anchor future construction in the area, culminating dramatically in the creation of the World Trade Center, a project also led by David Rockefeller. Between its unveiling in 1972, and its destruction on September 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2001, the Twin Towers became nearly a logo for Manhattan. Their design featured a sculptural installation by Isamu Noguchi recessed into its open-air plaza as well as interiors designed with contemporary fine art and modern furniture. (\textbf{fig. 4.10}) Instead of highlighting the main banking area it was literally put underground, encased in the elevated plaza. Floor-to-ceiling windows looked out of the banking area to Noguchi’s abstract tableau. Given the lighting conditions, people standing on the plaza level had difficulty seeing into the banking area, as it is alternately cast in shadow, or reflecting the glare of the mid-day sun.

The same year that the World Trade Center opened, Chase One installed a monumental group of abstracted trees on the plaza by Jean Dubuffet. (\textbf{fig. 4.11})

David Rockefeller spearheaded the construction effort, and was also responsible for the dramatic increase in the art collection. The subsequent success of the program led to its continued annual funding as well as the employment of a full-time curator and registrar. Contemporary American works were acquired along American folk art and pre-contact Chinese, African and Latin American art. The choice to purchase contemporary American art was practical given the prohibitive prices for Old Masters, Impressionists were involved in the commission were museum professionals that would lionize Francis in exhibitions, a fascinating interpenetration of institutional and private interests. Chase’s press releases about their art collection avoid discussing its nature as a financial investment. Instead altruistic notions of cultural patronage are used.\textsuperscript{424} Charles Grutzner, “New Building Downtown is 6\textsuperscript{th} Tallest in World,” \textit{The New York Times}, May 18, 1961, pg. 24.
and European High Modernism, but also it also promulgated the notion of America’s elevated post war status. It is telling that the art collection has been organized within the public relations department since its inception. Collecting contemporary art is also a validation of the present, the valuation of one’s temporality. This makes sense in light of the importance of connotations of time signified by the major art installations at 410 Park Avenue. Although the branch has been largely outshone by the creation of Chase One Plaza, it was an effective means of making Chase’s new corporate identity concrete, during a time of rapid transformation in the company’s history.
fig. 4.1- 410 Park Avenue, designed by Emory Roth & Sons, 1958, Chase Bank branch designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, 1959, photographer and date unknown.
Now...this one card gives you a charge account at over 6,000 stores!
One monthly bill covers all you buy!
Make extended payments if it suits your budget best!

Use CMCP...The Chase Manhattan Bank Charge Plan. Do all your holiday shopping...and year 'round shopping...this convenient way:

Forget about cash when you shop...you don’t need to handle a lot of cash when you carry a handy CMCP Credit Card!
See what you want and buy it...buy anything you want within your means when you want it! Just show your CMCP Credit Card!
Enjoy extended payment privileges...with CMCP you can now take as long as twelve months to repay.
Pay one monthly bill for all you buy...no matter how many member stores you shop at!
Costs nothing to join CMCP...you don’t even have to bank at Chase Manhattan!

The Chase Manhattan Bank

fig. 4.2- Advertisement for Chase Manhattan’s “Charge Plan,” The New York Times, December 9, 1959, pg. 35.
fig. 4.3- Chase Manhattan advertisement, *The New York Times*, October 22, 1958, pg. 27.
fig. 4.4- Untitled mobile by Alexander Calder, 1959, main banking floor, Chase Manhattan Bank branch, 410 Park Avenue, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, 1959, photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
fig. 4.5- Untitled mural by Sam Francis, 1959, executive lounge, Chase Manhattan Bank branch, 410 Park Avenue, Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, 1959, (top) illustrated in Art At Work, The Chase Manhattan Collection, 1984, (bottom) photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
fig. 4.6- *Earth Legend VI* by Lawrence Calcagno, 1959, 4th floor executive reception area, Chase Manhattan Bank branch, 410 Park Avenue, Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
fig. 4.7- Chase Manhattan logo, 1959, designed by Chermayeff and Geismar
fig. 4.8- Chase One Plaza, 1961, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, photograph by Ezra Stoller via artnet.
fig. 4.10- *Group of Four Trees*, Jean Dubuffet, 1969-1972, plaza of Chase One, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, photograph by author.
Chapter 5-

US Plywood Building (1963)

Beverly Pepper’s first public commission in 1963, was to design a sculpture for the entrance of the US Plywood Building in midtown Manhattan. Pepper’s seventeen-foot tall, one-ton construction of welded stainless steel, entitled *Contrappunto*, still serves as a street-level focal point. (fig. 5.1) It sits on a large, black granite pedestal, between two revolving doors. The first of the building’s thirty-eight floors is recessed sixteen feet creating a shaded pedestrian walkway. This type of privately-owned public space was a concept newly-codified by the New York City building code, which the US Plywood Building, designed by Swiss-born modernist architect William Lescaze, was one of the first to take advantage.\(^425\) Cleaving away the street level footprint for public use allowed the building to rise to a greater height. *Contrappunto* spoke to notions of architectural transition and the systemization of the world of work. Literature on Pepper mentions this work in passing, as an important stepping-stone to larger commissions.\(^426\) Yet *Contrappunto* deserves a closer reading for its sensitivity to the strangeness of its context, foregrounding the negotiation between public and corporate spaces as well as the strata of workers within the building.

\(^{425}\) The building code dictated the floor area ratio (FAR) for new construction in the city’s most congested areas. This ratio determined how many stories a building could rise based on the percentage of the total footprint that was developed. By creating an arcade surrounding the street level of 777, an instance of the newly codified concept of privately-owned public space, the structure was allowed to rise higher. For a comprehensive survey of these new types of spaces see Jerold Kayden. *Privately Owned Public Space, The New York Experience*. The Department of City Planning of the City of New York and The Municipal Art Society of New York, John Wiley & Sons, 2000.

This new type of legally defined space, which presents itself as public but is actually privately owned and maintained, would increasingly be a site for art in the mid to late 60s. In the 1950s American corporations commissioned and displayed large-scale abstraction, mainly sculpture, in their lobbies. In the 1960s, art moved from the lobby to the plaza where it more directly engaged the public, mediating this nebulous zone. It further served to soften and humanize the potentially stark aesthetic of International Style modernism, defined by facades stripped of ornament, geometric modular repetition, and unadulterated presentation of structure and materials. Art had to draw attention without being so strange as to arrest people’s movement, to embellish the entrance and speak to the merits of the workplace beyond.

**Contrappunto**

In 1963 a female artist creating large-scale metal sculpture via industrial machinery would have struck many as strange, it certainly catalyzed knee-jerk misogynist reactions. Pepper fabricated the sculpture at a Connecticut foundry where she oversaw an all-male crew. According to the mill’s foreman, “doing this may not be much for a man like (Alexander) Calder but when it comes from a small woman like her, you have to look twice.”427 As she completed the sculpture, Pepper was profiled by Newsweek as well as by the industry publication *US Steelways* which described how she would “yell” orders to the “startled (machine) operators”.*428 (fig. 5.2-) The author’s tone is one of smirking astonishment. What this dismissive account elided was her quickly-learned mastery of the

massive steel rollers and acetylene welding, having only experimented with this medium for less than a year. The foreman’s comment too is unfounded. Many male sculptors, like the afore-mentioned Calder, had his large-scale works fabricated for him based on models. This was especially true after the 1966 founding of Lippincott Inc., a fabrication shop which specialized in working for artists. Pepper was more participatory in the process, “her nose a few inches from the giant rollers”.\textsuperscript{429} Although she worked from maquettes, they were not simply enlarged to scale. With each pass of the steel bands through the rollers she would scrutinize their torsion before welding the components together into a harmonious whole. The physicality and manual labor of her fabrication process gave her a sensitivity to workers of other kinds.

One typically assumes that the intended audience of publicly-sited, corporate-sponsored artwork are current and prospective clients. Instead Pepper envisioned a different audience. When I spoke to her, she said that while making the sculpture she thought of the office workers who would pass it every day. For them, she wanted it to be constantly fresh and changing.\textsuperscript{430} Thus she incorporated a kinetic element into \textit{Contrappunto}: a more massive element rests on the granite pedestal while a smaller one above it rotates via a rod attached to a motor recessed into the architectural overhang. It completes one rotation every two minutes, fast enough to notice that it is in motion but not so accelerated as to produce a blur or distract from its subtler formal qualities. \textit{Contrappunto}'s kineticism is smooth and regularized, as opposed to the chaotic, self-destructing movement of Jean Tinguely’s 1961 \textit{Homage to New York}, Alexander Calder’s unpredictable, organic movement of his mobiles or the headache-inducing optical effects

\textsuperscript{429} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{430} Interview with Beverly Pepper by the author, July 20, 2017.
of Marcel Duchamp’s *Rotary Demisphere*. Here, workers are presented as integral parts of a well-oiled machine.

The sculpture’s title elucidates its meaning as well as its kinetic capability. Unlike contrapposto, a sculptural body posture conveying repose imbued with athletic poise, contrappunto is Italian for ‘counterpoint’, referring in music theory to several melodies, more or less autonomous, played concurrently. Instead of cacophony, the melodies produce a richer, more complex sound, greater than the sum of their parts. While sculpture is usually static, *Contrappunto*’s kineticism imbues it with a sense of temporality often reserved for other media like music. Taken literally, the concept of counterpoint suggests the relationship between the two parts of the sculpture. Both are similar in visual melody, sweeping arabesques of stainless steel, but are contrasted in size and shape.

*Contrappunto* combines actual and implied forms of kineticism which support and enrich each other. The lower sculptural element is static, as is its base, and the architecture that frames it. In motion are the upper element, the viewers and their eyes. The sculpture sits in front of a wall of glass so passing automobiles and pedestrians further cast a subtle play of reflections. The stainless-steel band’s sweeping forms are also visual representations of motion as if tracking the path of a figure skater or a draftsman’s stylus. Some of the bands taper, which produces the optical illusion of spatial recession. The architect William Lescaze stated that Pepper made her sculpture “breathe and move.”  

upper element in motion as it appears to shrink and expand rhythmically, combining literal rotational movement and implied optical movement.

Pepper took into consideration not only the workers who would view the sculpture each weekday but the larger architectural context. She was given the dimensions of the façade and the space that her sculpture would occupy which she reproduced in the foundry so that she could get the proportions just right. Architecture organizes both the viewing and photographing of the sculpture. The grid-like façade at once tempers and exaggerates through contrast, the sculpture’s curvilinear qualities. In the words of the architect, “the free-curving forms of your work enhance the calm and necessarily straight forms of the entrance to the building”.432 The various horizontal strata of the lobby’s façade optically bind the sculpture, this is especially true when vision has been frozen in photographic reproduction. Pepper’s own 1963 photograph of the sculpture uses the architectural strata to guide her composition. (fig. 5.3) The edge of the pedestal closest to the lobby is viewed such that it meets the very top of the bottom band of polished architectural steel, which in turn holds the glass in place. The second metal band, which frames the top of the glass doors and spans the façade, visually penetrates the center of Contrappunto, bisecting the very gap which separates the upper from the lower element. Given that the sculpture is composed of the same material as that which frames the lobby windows, it seems to extend its materiality from built space. The elevator bank beyond is embellished with panels of dark wood veneer separated by thin strips of polished aluminum. These modules further visually divide the sculpture, regularizing its sweeping curves.

432 Ibid.
The sculpture’s kinetic element echoes the rotation of the nearby doors, both in their vertical axis and counter-clockwise direction of their rotation. Sited at the entrance to an office building, and rotating with the logic of a clock, the regularity of work should be taken as the context for reading this sculpture. The late 1950s and early 60s were a time of social conformity, the era of the man in the gray flannel suit, especially in the world of office work. The strict verticality of the US Plywood Building asserts stability and the modules which compose its façade represent the members of society which maintain the democratic capitalist system. The US Plywood Building and its companion sculpture can be read as corporate America’s reworking of Tatlin’s idea, dispensing with utopianism in favor of the aestheticizing of administrative hierarchy.

The US Plywood Building housed blue, white and pink-collar workers. While their duties, and salaries, may have been stratified once they exited the elevator, all clerical workers and managers had to go through the same doors, while the custodians and other blue-collar workers would go through the service entrance at the building’s south-east corner. It should come without surprise that no artwork greeted those using the service entrance. Blue collar labor may have been grist for Social Realism, but in postwar America it was intellectual labor that was most valorized. Even so, the lobby is the place where the greatest amount of social mixing occurs. A mail boy, secretary and CEO could all be going through the turnstile at once. Thus, Contrappunto had to address a spectrum of viewers, with the exception of blue-collar laborers, at the very threshold where their workplace identities became solidified. The relationship between the static base and upper rotating element thus dramatized the interaction between different types of workers at the very site of the architectural transition from the public to the realm of work.
The Revolving Door

The sculpture’s position between the two revolving doors establishes a range of potential meanings for its kinetic element. It addresses the fulcrum between the public and the space of work. The eccentricity of the sculpture set against its regularized background draws pedestrians towards the entrance, humanizing the architectural transition from the street to lobby while its kineticism urges them to move in kind through the revolving doors. This type of entryway provided a greater range of functional attributes than a conventional swinging door. The evolution and utilization of revolving doors runs parallel to the development of skyscrapers as a building type. The great verticality of tall buildings produces a chimney-like effect because of the difference in air temperature inside and outside the elevator shafts. Without revolving door’s constant airtight seals, there is the potential for dangerous gusts of wind, as you can see in this photograph in which the doors have been temporarily removed. They not only keep heating and air conditioning costs to a minimum but their near hermetic seals keep sanitized air inside and potentially miasmatic air outside. Beginning in 1952 with the nearby Lever Building, most International Style skyscrapers were totally sealed, meaning the windows could not be opened. This is related to the increased use of air conditioning but it can also be read in terms of an anxiety associated with sanitation. The newly opened PanAm building, just a few blocks away, featured a newer technology, the air curtain, an invisible threshold via a constant jet of downward moving air.
Revolving doors held a special place in the collective cultural imagination, inspiring songs and jokes, for instance: “A revolving door isn’t particular- it goes around with anybody.” As a phrase, which had currency in the 1960s, it refers to high occupational turnover, especially in politics. For those visiting a large city for the first time, the novelty of a revolving door could present a potential obstacle. Thus, the smooth, regular movement of the sculpture can be seen as a correction to the potential instability of the mode of entrance as well as its larger connotations.

The building itself was a revolving door with a plurality of tenants coming and going. The moniker US Plywood Building is something of a misnomer, implying an independently funded headquarters. Instead it is a speculative office building, its erection paid for by a developer with the expectation of renting its floor space. US Plywood rented five of the 38 stories, thus earning naming rights as well as a lobby gallery for displaying their products. The remainder of the building housed a variety of companies, the second largest being the Grey Advertising Agency as well as four PR firms, a film distribution company, a bank, industry magazine publishers and representatives of the nations of Cameroon and Malawi.

And what to make of the gender politics of the revolving door? For one, men were no longer expected to hold the door. Instead, as a cheeky 1955 article in Collier’s Magazine stated, “the invention has divided the peoples of the earth into those who push and those who get pushed.” Another trope was that it acted as an obstacle to women encumbered by groceries, packages and pets. A 1942 New Yorker cartoon has a man drop his newspaper, smugly whispering “This ought to be good” as a woman approaches

433 Murray Teigh Bloom, “Comes the Revolution,” Collier’s, April 1, 1955, pgs. 88, 89.
434 Ibid.
a revolving door led by four little dogs. Thus this architectural feature at once promised ease of access while dictating whom and what could enter, namely the unencumbered workingman. The majority of those injured by revolving doors were children and the elderly, populations at polar ends of occupational productivity. Thus, depending on one’s class, gender and age, a building’s entrance could be a fraught and charged site. Going through the revolving door offered a last chance to compose oneself before beginning the work day. The 1960s workplace was largely defined by an upper echelon of male managers supported by a larger base of female administrative assistants. Pepper was aware of the potential anxiety associated with entering the workplace and her sculpture served as a form of welcoming.

For this commission, Pepper was given total creative control as well as the space and means to execute her vision, a type of creative freedom seldom offered to the working women who would view the finished product. She used the larger architectural context, to frame the work in photographs as well as in first-hand experience. The sculpture’s kineticism echoed in the revolving doors shows a keen interest in dealing with this new type of privately-owned public space. Instead of addressing prospective clients, *Contrappunto* aestheticized the world of work, with its mixing of class and gender, especially at the fulcrum of the entrance where difference was most palpable.

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Lobby Art- The Visual Equivalent of Muzak?

Pepper’s sculpture was unveiled at the same time that “lobby art” was becoming a phrase with cultural currency. Bring back to mind the quote by Barbara Rose in the introduction, who made the equivocation, “the non-art category of “Lobby Art”—visual Muzak.” I have shown how Contrappunto did much more than fade into the background—it was a beacon to the building’s entrance, calling attention to the revolving doors which framed it, and in doing so addressed the impermanence of the occupants in a speculative real estate venture, as well as the gendered politics of the workplace. The dismissive nature of the comment obscures both the potential strengths of art in corporate settings, and the fascinating history of Muzak itself. It is further relevant to this particular building. A promotional pamphlet for 777 Third Avenue included an advertisement for “Musicast,” the New York branch of Muzak, offering—

Music carefully selected for the hour of the day… season… weather… welcomes visitors in the lobby and elevators at 777. Special Plaza speakers installed to provide outdoor music in season during luncheon hours. Individual installation available for flor, individual offices and selected areas on a monthly rental basis from Musicast, Inc. Charges, as a result of the 777 contract, will be significantly less than customary rates.

Although offered as an additional workplace amenity, the advertisement showed that it was an inescapable feature of the building, even during one’s precious lunch hour. Muzak’s cyclical audio would continue the visual rotation of Pepper’s sculpture in another of the five senses.

438 Promotional pamphlet for 777 Third Avenue, William Lescaze Papers, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library.
Muzak began its life as a Dada thought exercise. The composer Eric Satie dreamed of creating compositions for specific types of architectural spaces, like bars, living rooms, and lounges, where the music would fade into the background. Its function was to add something to the experience, despite eschewing listener’s full attention. He dubbed this genre “furniture music,” as he imagined it being analogous to other forms of interior decoration. His composition, “Phonic Tiling,” foregrounded the potential function of background music. Satie was able to put these ideas into practice, albeit only once. His pieces were played during the intermissions at a combination ballet performance and musical recital at the Galerie Barbazanges, in Paris, on March 8, 1920. It was a failure. Given the technological limitations of the period, Satie had to rely on live musicians, instead of recordings. Thus, the audience could not differentiate between the traditional performances, and his more conceptual project. Even though an announcement was made before they began to, “behave as if it doesn’t exist,” the audience could not help but focus on the musicians on stage. Satie had somewhat anticipated this issue—he had the musicians stand in each of the four corners of the room—but that only served to muddle their legibility.

Two years after Satie’s unsuccessful Parisian performance, George Owen Squier developed that technology that would become Muzak in America, involving the

439 These specific locations eventually became the titles of his compositions.
440 The influence of Eric Satie on Muzak is addressed at length in Herve Vanel. *Triple Entendre, Furniture Music, Muzak, Muzak-Plus*, University of Illinois Press, 2013. One can also call to mind Henri Matisse’s statement about creating paintings that were like an armchair, for the relaxation and pleasure of the viewer.
441 Ibid., pg. 15.
442 Ibid., pg. 16.
transmission of recorded audio over telephone lines.\textsuperscript{443} Squier was an Army officer and inventor. His discovery was used by the military to transmit sensitive information without revealing the location of its origin. He purchased the rights to this technology and founded Wired Radio Inc., originally marketing the service for home use.\textsuperscript{444} Because of the popularity of radio during the 1920s, Squier had to adjust his business model, increasingly focusing on commercial spaces and later offices. It found a successful application in elevators— their early association led the term “elevator music” being coined. It was applied in this setting to allay fears about riding in these conveyances. In 1934 he renamed his company Muzak, a portmanteau of Kodak and Music.\textsuperscript{445}

Muzak really came into its own after being acquired by Warner Brothers in 1937. They developed “stimulus progression,” in which, during 15-minute segments the tempo of the music gradually increased. These segments alternated with 15 minutes of silence to prevent auditory fatigue, and the reality that listeners could only tolerate a certain threshold of musical tempo before it caused vexation. This system developed out of Taylorist attitudes toward workplace productivity.\textsuperscript{446} Critics have called this “functional music,” which is at odds with the pejorative connotation of “elevator music”—that it is simply present, not offering anything in the way of pleasure or stimulation. The ability of music to condition people’s thinking, and encourage their productivity is not unlike lobby art, which we have seen, had an effective range of functions in the mid-century.

\textsuperscript{443} The history of Muzak is detailed in Joseph Lanza. \textit{Elevator Music, A Surreal History of Muzak, Easy-Listening, and Other Moodsong}, University of Michigan Press, 2004. As the title suggests, his study goes far beyond the origins of Muzak to trace its effect on a wide variety of musical genres in the second half of the 20th century.

\textsuperscript{444} It is interesting that lobby art also had its origins in domestic personal use by collectors, before it too entered the workplace.


workplace. Instead of subliminal manipulation, it could help workers and visitors to navigate the building, and speak to the constructed qualities of the corporate patron, as well as catalyze contemplation on the nature of work itself. By acting as a beacon, or utilizing implied or actual kineticism, lobby art could increase the efficiency of traffic flow.

Muzak and lobby art can thus be viewed in terms of positive equivalence—building on the strengths of one another. They nearly reached a synthesis in the year after 777 Third Avenue opened. As Richard Lippold planned his sculpture *Flight* for the Pan Am Building, he expressed a desire to collaborate with his friend, the avant-garde composer John Cage, a devotee of Eric Satie, and especially his concept of furniture music. For example, in 1963, Cage organized the performance of Satie’s *Vexations* (1893) in which a line of music was repeated 840 times over the course of 18 hours and 40 minutes, by a group of musicians playing in rotation so that they would not fatigue, leaving that up to the audience.\(^{447}\) For the Pan Am Building, Cage proposed to compose a piece to accompany Lippold’s wire construction—

That would provide different sounds from each of the ten loudspeakers in the lobby’s ceiling, under the mezzanine, and in the base of the sculpture—as an alternative to the piped-in program of Muzak originally planned for all the building’s public areas. Cage devised a system whereby the movement of people going in and out of the lobby would activate photoelectric cells; these in turn would release Muzak, that had been electronically pulverized and filtered in the process. The result would be ‘a constantly changing, continuous concert of music in three-dimensional space, becoming in effect, a part of the sculpture.’\(^{448}\)

It should come as no surprise that this aspect of the installation was rejected by the powers at be, who instead opted for silence in the lobby.\textsuperscript{449} This would have been of tremendous interest to future art historians and scholars of music, as it anticipated New Media Art installations, as well as connecting with his earlier experiments with chance in his “prepared pianos.”\textsuperscript{450} Unlike conventional Muzak, Cage labeled his body of work Muzak-Plus for its reconnection to the audience’s active perception. This might have amused open-minded concertgoers, but in the context of a workplace the installation would have violated what made Muzak both successful and disparaged—its ability to fade into the background. Instead of promoting the efficient flow of traffic, it had the potential to jostle. Given that it was activated by an individual’s movement in the space, it would have called too much attention to the transition between interior and exterior, giving the impression of surveillance, or overt control, instead of subliminal persuasion.

\textbf{Kaufman’s Unique Art Installations}

Melvyn Kaufman, the real estate developer responsible for the US Plywood Building, and the son of William Kaufman (Chapter 2), was an eccentric figure who presented an alternative trajectory for the history of lobby art. His vision for how art could be integrated with prestige corporate architecture was a singular one, and it died along with him. Melvyn had a general distaste for how the majority of office tower lobbies were decorated. He bluntly stated that, “Marble and travertine mausoleums are

bad for the living and terrific for the dead.” His use of the term “mausoleum” brings us back full circle to the revolutionary design of the Manufacturers Trust (Chapter 1). Instead of this quality being ascribed simply to traditional bank design, he implied that the majority of lobbies, even prestige modernist examples, were redolent of the stench of moribund aesthetics. Through whimsical art installations and abundant public seating, he sought to soften International Style architecture’s austerity.

There are discernable qualities shared by the majority of the abstract works chosen by mid-century corporations. They were usually large in scale, overtly abstract at first glance, but freighted with thinly-veiled figuration, especially organic-based metaphors for the value of the particular corporate entity as well as the larger capitalist economic system. The artists chosen were vetted by the art establishment and presented in a way that aligned with museum-like display, arguing for their status in fine art and high culture, despite occupying an alternative context.

Beverly Pepper’s work would be the last art installation coordinated by Kaufman that satisfied these criteria. She was recommended by David Smith, the preeminent abstract American sculptor of his day. It is not an accident that many of the examples discussed thus far were early or first commissions for the artist involved. This aspect has a twofold benefit for the patron— they are got a quality work relatively cheaply— and by supporting an artist early in their career the patron promoted themselves as forward-thinking. The choice of Pepper for one of Melvyn’s first major speculative real estate ventures was in the tradition of his father William, the creator of 711 Third Avenue.

452 Pepper had met Smith the previous year when they were invited to participate in the Festival of Two Worlds in Spolletto, Italy. They created works in metal that were installed throughout the city. It was this opportunity which catalyzed her interest in cut, shaped, and welded metal. Having not worked in the medium previously, she had to learn the techniques in a short period of time.
(Chapter 2). As Melvyn continued to build, he developed a personal, idiosyncratic taste and broke with the increasingly normative qualities of lobby art. He did not throw out the baby with the bathwater however, continuing to employ well-established International Style architects, namely William Lescaze and the firm Emory Roth & Sons.

The second appointment of art at the US Plywood Building illustrates how he deviated from the norm. (fig. 5.5) It was far from a conventional commission, negotiated by architects and gallery directors. He was invited by Cooper Union professor Ed By, who would also be the landscape architect for Kaufman’s 77 Water Street (1970), to guest teach a class in 1968 for senior architecture majors. Kaufman treated a subject he had come to know personally — corporate architecture and the incorporation of artwork. As a final project he created a competition for students to submit proposals for an art installation at the US Plywood Building. Ted Ceraldi won the competition. His uncle, who owned a machine shop, fabricated the piece based on the artist’s specifications. It was installed in 1972.

Ceraldi’s Big Red Swing broke with every precedent of established lobby art. Foremost, it was a functional object, as the name implies. But it was no ordinary swing-measuring twelve feet, five inches on its longest side, fourteen and a half feet across with an arc twenty-two feet long red-enameled metal wedge suspended from the building’s overhang by three high-tension metal cables.

453 This was not Kaufman’s only experience with academia. Earlier in the 60s Richard Roth invited Melvyn to speak at an architecture course he was teaching at the Pratt Institute. His obituary in The Journal News mentions that he also spoke before the American Institute of Architects and the Architectural League of New York and lectured at McGill University, Ohio University, New York University and many other architectural schools.

454 Interview with Ted Ceraldi by the author, March 2, 2017.
Big Red Swing, like Contrappunto, remains in situ. It looks like a shaped painting by Ellsworth Kelly or the top of a grand piano, rendered in industrial materials, reoriented to hover just a few inches over the sidewalk below. Placed at the south-east intersection of 49th street and Third Avenue, on privately-owned public space. Its chromatic intensity and the novelty of seeing an immense swing in east midtown Manhattan continues to beckon pedestrians. Direct, physical engagement with art is totally out of character for the type of work chosen by most corporations. Traditionally, fine art is installed in these locations to express class and prestige. The choice of particular, recognizable artists connoted status for the property. Conversely, the Big Red Swing offered an opportunity for relaxation and social togetherness, by a relatively unknown artist. Because of the great weight of the structure, it only moves when multiple people are using it, accommodating at least thirty people comfortably. The mere availability of public seating in New York City is in and of itself novel, as public benches are increasingly eliminated in an effort to prevent the homeless from lingering.

Through the 1960s and beyond, public use of urban space in Manhattan increasingly became a subject of debate, especially after the new legal classification of privately-owned public space in the 1961 re-writing of the building code. These spaces offered the potential for improving New York street life, but it was a promise not always delivered. In exchange for cleaving a part of a building’s footprint for public use, structures were allowed to rise to greater heights. In the wake of the code change, many developers intentionally created spaces that were unappealing for the public to use. They were either too small, hidden from view on the street or had inadequate amenities such as chairs or benches. Many had no amenities such as seating, restrooms, or food service.
When a comprehensive study was undertaken in 1999 of the more than 300 such spaces in the greater city of Manhattan, Kaufman’s properties received highest marks.\(^455\)

For over two decades, William H. Whyte studied the sociology of street life in New York City. In 1969, he joined the New York City Planning Commission to draft a comprehensive plan for the city. Out of countless hours of observations, he compiled information gleaned into several books on urban sprawl and effective design of public spaces. In 1979, he produced the documentary *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, categorizing the way people interacted with these new privately-owned public spaces.\(^456\) A book of the same title followed the next year.\(^457\)

Although Whyte’s work was produced outside of the historical brackets I have established for my study of lobby art’s development, his theories can be applied retrospectively. This is especially true because he addressed particular examples from my study. The documentary begins with Seagram’s plaza, which he asserts is one of the most effective uses of privately-owned public space in the city because of its abundant seating, close relationship with the street, and presence of shade. He records how people interact with the space and with each other. There is an organic quality to how people group—they seem to non-verbally recognize when a given space is at its effective capacity.

Seagram was an obvious anchor for this study because the building itself is one of the hallmarks of the International Style and its various architectural features inspired countless other prestige skyscrapers at mid-century and beyond. Along with the Lever

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\(^{455}\) Whereas 56\% of the total spaces received a grade of one or two out of five, Kaufman averaged three and a half, the highest for any developer with more than one building. See Gregory Smithsimon, “Dispersing the Crowd: Bonus Plazas and the Creation of Public Space,” *Urban Affairs Review*, vol. 43, pgs. 326-349.


Building, it provided the impetus for the legal creation of privately-owned public space. Whyte found the paucity of public seating one of the most glaring problems in Manhattan, especially in these spaces which were optimistically meant to encourage their use. Whyte highlights the *Big Red Swing* as a whimsical and effective answer to this issue. He immediately transitions to another Kaufman property, 77 Water Street, as possibly the best example of privately-owned public space in the city, for its variety of seating options: benches, chairs, a “sitting sculpture” and a “maze of ledges”.

These examples show how Kaufman’s thinking about art and the design of semi-public spaces was at odds with the majority of other developers and corporations. Although the *Big Red Swing* deviated dramatically from the more conservative choice of Beverly Pepper, it gives only a slight indication of Kaufman’s later art installations. At the aforementioned 77 Water Street, he placed an old fashioned, operational candy store in the lobby and a replica of a WWI fighter plane on the roof of the tower, so that the building’s taller neighbors would have something to look at besides Manhattan’s ubiquitous water tanks. *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, video, 16:05.

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458 *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, video, 16:05.
“International Style Fever Dream.” After he died in 2012, several of his properties changed hands and their more eccentric features were removed. Given the lack of scholarship on more conventional lobby art, it should come as no surprise that there exists no study of Kaufman’s efforts at making office spaces more enjoyable through unconventional art installations. It has been the subject of several online blogs, especially those that track quirky Manhattan oddities. Such idiosyncratic and tradition-bucking choices of aesthetic embellishment were only possible because Kaufman acted alone.

fig. 5.3 - *Contrappunto*, Beverly Pepper, 1963, photograph by Beverly Pepper.
fig. 5.4- Cartoon, Richard Taylor. “This Ought to Be Good”, cartoon, *The New Yorker*, May 23, 1942.
fig. 5.6- WWI airplane sculpture at 77 Water Street, 1970, Melvyn Kaufman property, (top) installation, photograph via the William Kaufman Organization, (bottom) photo via Phil Hollenback, atlasobscura.com.
Conclusion

What Happened Next?

Although originally concentrated in Midtown Manhattan, corporate modernism began appearing throughout the country’s major urban centers. Like in New York City, these prestige building projects often were directly related to efforts at urban renewal. Major examples of this can be seen in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia in the 1960s and early 1970s. Much like the Inland Steel Building (Chapter 4), the Alcoa Building (1951-53) by Harrison and Abromovitz, was a literal advertisement for the metal products the company produced. Its most distinctive feature was a skin of patterned aluminum, a material that was used throughout the project— from air conditioning ducts to furniture. Pittsburgh’s IBM Building (1961-63) by Curtis and Davis, was another prestige skyscraper featuring a patterned metallic skin. It was created for a company that was in the midst of revolutionizing how business could be aided by computing technology. Not surprisingly, the steel industry was one of the first to use computers to keep track of their increasingly complex supply chains. The use of such skins relates directly to the interest in re-incorporating sculptural elements into the International Style, instead of merely displaying art in the lobby or plaza. We can see this as another instance of the concept of integration.

Philadelphia went through a major urban renewal project in the 1960s and the prestige towers which arose became the visual focus for this effort. The employment of mid-century modernist architecture at grand scale is most palpable in Penn Center. A four block area of downtown was bulldozed in the mid 1950s and it became a locus for office
tower construction, much like downtown New York City after the erection of Chase One Plaza. The collection of buildings built from the mid-1950s to 1980s made the city a new center for business and finance. Many of these buildings conspicuously featured large-scale abstraction in their semi-public spaces.

In short, the presence of large-scale abstraction, mainly sculpture, became more ubiquitous in Manhattan and other major urban areas in the mid-1960s to 1970s. This type of art became less associated purely with corporate offices. The growing popularity of large-scale sculpture was answered by the 1966 establishment of Lippincott Sculpture, a North Haven fabrication shop that specialized in collaborating with artists to realize architecturally-scaled works.462 If you have seen a Tony Smith metal sculpture, then you have seen their handiwork. There were many temporary exhibitions of sculpture in public places, such “Sculpture in Environment” (1967) by the New York City Parks Department, featuring works by Alexander Calder, Marisol, Louise Nevelson, Barnett Newman, Claes Oldenburg, George Rickey, and David Smith.463 Bernard Rosenthal’s contribution, Alamo, a black metal cube at double-human height, placed on a mechanically-rotating base, was so beloved that it was given a permanent public home in a traffic island in Astor Place. (fig. C.1) Manhattan’s Public Art Fund, established in 1977, sponsored a host of exhibitions in the city; frequently sculpture, but even land art, like Alan Sonfist’s Time Landscape (1978), which transformed a parcel of land in Greenwich Village with flora endemic to pre-civilized Manhattan. (fig. C.2)

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The federal government largely grafted mid-century corporate modernism onto its construction projects in the late 60s and 70s. Chicago’s Daly Plaza, completed by C. F. Murphy Associates in 1965, installed a monumental metal sculpture by Pablo Picasso in 1967, which he gave to the city as a gift. (fig. C.3) Alexander Calder’s 1969 La Grande Vitesse, a monumental red-painted stabile, located at the plaza adjacent to the Kent County Building in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was the first public art work funded by Art in Public Places, a newly created wing of the National Endowment for the Arts. It became nearly a logo for the city—its silhouette plastered on city buses and tote bags.

The General Services Administration also created an initiative to place artworks in federal buildings. Not all of these commissions were as well received by the public as Calder’s. Some saw Robert Motherwell’s 1966 New England Elegy painting for the John F. Kennedy Federal Building in Boston as a depiction of the president’s assassination, despite its overt abstraction, and formal similarity to a series of Elegy paintings he had produced for decades.\textsuperscript{464}

This dissertation tracked a golden age of lobby art, connected to the office boom in Midtown Manhattan. At the same time that “lobby” art was becoming a phrase, the completion of Chase One Plaza moved the locus of prestige construction downtown. Thus, lobby art was no longer so closely identified with a certain region of New York, despite that the aesthetics incubated there traveled much farther than the bounds of the island, as my study of Chicago’s Inland Steel has shown. This shift registered that a high mark had been reached, even as it began to ebb. Commercial office towers were becoming less concentrated in the Grand Central area, and the notion of large-scale

\textsuperscript{464} See “Assassination in Boston,” \textit{Time}, vol. 88, no. 9, August 26, 1966, pg. 60
abstraction in public and semi-public places was becoming more ubiquitous and less novel. The 1972 opening of the World Trade Center, designed by Minoru Yamasaki, and spearheaded by David Rockefeller of Chase Manhattan, replete with abstraction inside and out, summarily announced that the corporate kit of parts had reached its point of calcification. Elsewhere in the city, high visibility projects like Lincoln Center (1964-69) and Pan Am (1962) erased multicultural neighborhoods, disturbed traffic flow and often used public money for endeavors that did not seem to be for the general public. For example, Lincoln Center used federal funds meant for low-income housing to build a cultural center for the city’s elite. The modernist designs and inclusion of abstract sculpture at these complexes seemed, to many, outdated and impersonal.

Even more outlandish in scale and design than the World Trade Center, was his brother, Nelson Rockefeller’s pet project—the Empire Plaza in New York’s capital. (fig. C.4) Its mid-century modernist design was outdated on the drafting board in 1965, and achingly so upon the complex’s completion in 1976, especially as it was plagued by delays, labor conflicts, and budget overruns. Its airport terminal-like concourse is jammed to the gills with large-scale abstraction, but no one seems to be looking. Its plaza is heavily surveilled by security officers, preventing undesirables from loitering; so bitterly cold and wind-swept in the winter that it is closed to the public, and blinding in the summer, that no matter what time of year you visit, it is as vacant as a de Chirico painting, and similarly ominous. It has been called the Brazilia of New York, and its Egg-shaped auditorium is a constant source of ridicule.
How Did Art Change?

All of the works discussed in this dissertation are essentially late Modernist. The esteemed status of this loosely-defined category was challenged by a variety of movements and individual artists in Manhattan, and throughout the country. Modernism became tarnished, and those organizations who continued to commission it, appeared conservative in taste or simply uninformed. For instance, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Claes Oldenburg all incorporated urban detritus and the process of assemblage to question the expressive language of Abstract Expressionism and its attendant myth-making, as well as addressing the changing fabric of the urban environment and the erasure of life on the street. Other movements like Minimalism employed identifiable materials at human scale, eschewing modernist notions of artistic expression and the humanist value associated with idiosyncratic facture through their use of telephoned-in industrial fabrication. Furthermore, the discrete and valorized modernist categories of painting and sculpture were questioned, critiqued, and transcended. Art moved beyond inert objects to performance, happenings, land art and conceptual art. While the connection between big money and art made some artists wary of accepting corporate commissions, and has largely influenced the lack of scholarship on lobby art, the movement of Pop Art dealt explicitly with America’s commodity culture, obsession with money, and the pernicious influence of corporations on our visual world and mental lives. In architectural publications, and in practice, the International Style was critiqued, and often dispensed with, in favor of Brutalist and Postmodernist design.
Lobby art did not die. Instead it went the way of Muzak—the public simply stopped paying attention. Corporate towers in the 1970s and 1980s continued to employ the mid-century modernist kit of parts in a myriad of forms. It was only in the 1990s, and especially after September 11th when contemporary artists like Urs Fischer, William Pope.L, Sarah Morris, Julie Mehretu, and Liz Magic Laser again saw the potential of the lobby—now as a site for questioning the status of big business, either underhandedly, or in guerilla actions.
fig. C.3- Picasso’s sculpture at Daly Plaza, Chicago, 1967, photograph from the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events.
fig. C.4- Empire State Plaza (1965-1976) designed by Wallace Harrison and Nelson Rockefeller, photo via Wikimedia.
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