


May 2016

Report on the 2016 Society of Architectural Historians Conference

Jacqueline Spafford

University of California, Santa Barbara, spafford@hfa.ucsb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://online.vraweb.org/vrab>

 Part of the [Architectural History and Criticism Commons](#), [Cultural Resource Management and Policy Analysis Commons](#), [Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons](#), and the [Urban, Community and Regional Planning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Spafford, Jacqueline (2016) "Report on the 2016 Society of Architectural Historians Conference," *VRA Bulletin*:Vol. 42: Iss. 2, Article 10.

Available at: <https://online.vraweb.org/vrab/vol42/iss2/10>

This Affiliate News is brought to you for free and open access by VRA Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in VRA Bulletin by an authorized editor of VRA Online.

Report on the 2016 Society of Architectural Historians Conference

Abstract

The 69th Society of Architectural Historians conference was held April 6-10, 2016 in Pasadena, California. The conference was an international gathering of nearly 800 architectural historians, architects, historic preservationist, information professionals, and commercial partners. In the two days of sessions, 212 scholarly papers were presented. In addition, there were round tables, special interest group meetings, highlighted talks, and two days of tours.

Keywords

conference, architecture, architectural, historian, history, preservation, design, style, tour, roundtable, plenary, fellow, survey

Author Bio & Acknowledgements

Jackie Spafford has been the Curator of the Image Resource Center at UCSB since 1998. During this time she has overseen waves of transition and growth of the Center's services and collection. She is the co-editor of the Society of Architectural Historians' SAHARA project. Prior to coming to UCSB she worked at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Ontario, and attended the University of Toronto.

The 69th Annual International Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians took place April 6-10 in Pasadena, California. The theme this year was *New Local/Global Infrastructures*. The conference was based at the Pasadena Convention Center, but the events and tours encompassed the entire Los Angeles region. The vast size of this geographical area was made more manageable by the encouraged use of the Metro light rail system which has new extensions to nearly every corner of the county.

The conference attracted nearly 800 attendees—local, national, and international. The attendees come from a wide variety of professions and backgrounds, including architects, information professionals, historic preservationists, archivists, commercial partners like publishers and image providers, and of course architectural historians.

For the second year the Getty Foundation sponsored the International Program, which provided funding for 15 scholars from underrepresented countries to attend the conference. The recipients—from Brazil, Iraq, India, Tanzania, China, Egypt and many other countries—each gave a brief presentation about their research and work in a dedicated session, which has become one of the highlights of the conference. You can read more about the program and the 2016 recipients here: <http://www.sah.org/about-sah/sah-news/2016/01/13/society-of-architectural-historians-announces-2016-sah-getty-international-program-participants>

The opening night included a social hour, followed by the Annual Business Meeting at which new board officers were welcomed, including incoming SAH president Ken Tadashi Oshima (University of Washington). In addition, four new Fellows were inducted: Barry Bergdoll, Diane Favro, Richard Longstreth, and Therese O'Malley (read more here: <http://www.sah.org/conferences-and-programs/award-programs/sah-fellows>). The business meeting was followed by the introductory address by Eric Avila, professor of History, Chicano Studies and Urban Planning at UCLA, entitled “Learning from Los Angeles: Identity, Mobility, Climate and Design,” it provided a multi-faceted, yet very personal, take on the vast changes in this city.

The 42 paper sessions, now condensed into two days, April 7 and 8, were rich and diverse. There were three tracks per day, with seven sessions per track. Each session had between three and six participants, with a total of 212 papers. The sessions are listed in the handy schedule app with specific starting times, so attendees can make sure they cover as much material in as many sessions as possible. The content of the sessions, panels, roundtables, and special presentations covered topics from all eras, locations, schools of thought, and styles. In addition to the paper sessions, there were several roundtables and special interest group meetings, with Teaching Global Architectural History being a big theme. The Graduate Student Lightning Talks (where presenters have a strictly timed five minutes to talk) is a popular and terrifically valuable event. It is difficult to choose one session or presentation that stood out, but I particularly enjoyed the session on *Revival Styles in California* (PS02).

The closing Plenary Talk on Friday evening was *Potentials of the Profession*, given by Dana Cuff, professor and director of the cityLAB project at UCLA. Professor Cuff outlined some of the changing approaches to the teaching of architecture and architectural history, by examining the qualification test questions of the past (e.g., mystifying multiple choice questions) shaped by factors such as language and demographics.

On Saturday morning, attendees traveled by bus from Pasadena to the Sci-Arc (Southern California Institute of Architecture) campus in downtown LA for the Los Angeles Seminar, *Surveying L.A.: Past, Present, Future*. For the last few conferences, these half-day seminars (open to the public) have provided opportunities to examine architectural, planning, demographic, and socio-economic changes in the host city. This year the focus was on a hugely ambitious identification and survey of “significant historic resources” in Los Angeles. It’s a 10-year project, covering nearly 500 square miles, funded in part by the J. Paul Getty Trust, and executed by the Office of Historic Resources. The presenters covered the history of the project, the methodology, the goals, and some of the challenges encountered. Read more about the project here: <http://preservation.lacity.org/survey>

The rest of Saturday and all of Sunday were devoted to a variety of tours. Some focused on the work of a particular architect, for example, *The Architecture of John Lautner* or *Paul Revere Williams in West Adams*, while others explored a style, a neighborhood, or a building, such as, *Beyond the “Pasadena Style”: Regional Modernism in Southern California* and *Los Angeles’ Chinatown and Union Station*. I took a tour that tied in to the morning seminar: *Boyle Heights: The Heart of Los Angeles’ Historic Eastside*. We crossed the river from Little Tokyo on the new light rail Gold Line and walked around one of the oldest residential areas in LA. Boyle Heights has traditionally been the first home to a number of new immigrant groups, despite being almost completely Latino now, and its architecture and building murals illustrate its rich and complex history.

The conference was, as always, a rich and exhilarating experience. The perspectives from the global to the very local were fascinating, and the networking produced an abundance of new connections and ideas. You can read more about the program, including paper abstracts, here: <http://www.sah.org/conferences-and-programs/2016-conference---pasadena-la/program>