



Glover's photograph of the Viewer's Façade in Monument Valley, Australia: setting kitsch brickwork against the sublime of the landscape beyond

EXHIBITIONS

Photographs of façades not buildings

MARTIN CAIGER-SMITH

The Façade: photographs by Richard Glover

Architectural Association Slide Library, 34-36 Bedford Square, London WC1, until 15 January.

Glover's photographs hang serenely above the tiered drawers of this small and busy library, despite the slide-viewing light strip which runs beneath them and casts a disconcerting glare into the viewer's eyes.

Unlike the thousands of precisely labelled slides below, Glover's images have no straightforward documentary function. Ranging from inner-city Sydney to somewhere in Mexico, they are tight-cropped details with terse titles, guarding their secrets, and presenting themselves, clearly, as photographic art.

'The façade' is a loose linking theme: it is, of course, one of architectural photography's foremost subjects. The façade in photography is but a surface reading, denying us view of the 'real space' the camera has such notorious difficulties in conveying. It provides instead an infinity of possibilities for exploring pure form, for playing on theme and variation, and for focusing on the sort of quirky, contingent or everyday detail that lies at the heart of photography's strength. Think of Walker Evans's famous

roadside stores of 1930s America, or Lewis Baltz's minimalist photographs of the industrial parks of California in the 1970s.

The photographs here from Mexico, though, are not in fact 'architectural' at all. They are abstracted, two-dimensional formal studies of tone and texture, of peeling paint washes in deep rose and cream, of scored graffiti and tattered poster, all testament to the ravages of weather and the human hand. As such they fall within a well-trodden terrain which stretches from the famous graphic details of Aaron Siskind to the colour studies of Eliot Porter. And if they fail it is because much of the patina of the crumbling, porous and colour-soaked surfaces which Glover depicts is lost in their rendering in high-gloss R-type colour print.

Glover's Australian pictures are different. They seem to explore the tension between the panoramic format of the photograph and the extended façades of wharf and warehouse. Backing off from his subject, the photographer allows, at times, a

hint of history, a trace of context, but still effectively plucks these buildings from their surroundings. The most successful images play on the poetry of the derelict or the rhythm of repeated forms, receding planes and stabbing sawtooth diagonals.

They occasionally find added nuance, as at the Viewer's Façade in Monument Valley, where

kitsch brickwork is set against the sublime of the landscape beyond. In the end, though, formal play too often dominates: the building is detached from the environment and we are distanced from its structure and surface. What is left is pattern alone. □

Martin Caiger-Smith is an exhibition organiser at the Hayward Gallery

EXHIBITIONS

Forget philosophy, look at architecture

PETER WISLOCKI

Jean Nouvel

Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Mall, London SW1, until 14 February.

This exhibition heightens the cultural divide between the leading architects on either side of the English channel.

In this country there is but a small, academic fringe explicitly addressing linguistic, cultural and philosophical issues – the likes of Norman Foster and Richard Rogers seldom discuss their work publicly in terms other than the social and pragmatic. We tend to think of Post-Modernism in terms of the overtly historicist and decorative style of Terry Farrell and Jeremy Dixon, and the writings of Robert Venturi and Charles Jencks.

Among French architects, meanwhile (and those non-

French architects with the greatest following in France, notably Rem Koolhaas), Post-Modernism tends to be defined as the more profound cultural condition identified by Post-Structuralist thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard.

This is certainly the case with Nouvel. Brian Hatton's essay in the exhibition catalogue, relating Nouvel's work to the cinematography of Wim Wenders, identifies the architect's fundamental concerns with 'shifts and glances in a milieu of information, signs and hyperreality' – concerns clearly visible in the broad spectrum of work on show.

The exhibition includes buildings which have already