

The Ipswich Incinerator

Walter Burley Griffin, architect & urban planner

Read the face of this building
as it hunkers into the hillside,
its two stacks flung cloudward
like an appeal.
Stand like a child, arms wide,
palms pressed against warm brick.
Follow the lines of cranny and ridge,
the old head swirling monumental chimney
that sprouts saplings on its summit
as if waiting for the architect to come back,
seventy five years late,
for the topping out.

Sing the structure.
Learn a new language
of pilaster, pediment and arris.
Investigate tipping floor, hoppers and chutes,
where avalanches of tin cans,
dead cats and cabbage leaves
slid down to destruction.
Here are the bones and sinews,
the accretion of inward scars
in this hardworking place,
where a city's waste was made ashes,
purified by fire.

Study alternative scales.
Calibrate the measure of the building
in units of stature of its maker,
load bearing, resistance to heat, angle of repose,
resilience in the face of bureaucracy,
refusal to cut corners for economy,
adherence to belief and vision,
integrity in endeavour,
and most of all, in this, the least of works,
beauty brought to utility
and dignity to civic duty
and to men who laboured here.

Consider the proper point of view.
The flat simplicity of a plan,
the low angle of the acolyte,
wife and willing slave,
or axonometric, as from
atop a fairground wheel, or angel eyrie.
With time's perspective,
distance and evening light,
this place serves as a quotation
from a body of work,
a stand-in, human scale,
for an overwhelming whole.

Follow its conception and birth.
Quick confident lines on an envelope,
angles and computations,
from construct to construction,
and reconstruction.
Believe that he saw it,
concrete, in his mind's eye,
before blueprints nailed it down,
and renderings hinted
at landscaping inching close,
before the building settled into its site,
before they closed his eyelids in distant India.

Witness the reincarnation.
A building turned on its head,
its functions engineered to fit the form.
Painted backdrops are strung to fly
where trash once tumbled down,
an audience is seated to shake with laughter
where clinker was riddled,
and actors now smear on greasepaint
where workers once scoured their grimy skin.
See how the living theatre rises,
a Phoenix, from a furnace long cold.
Say he would have judged it a thing well done.



©Ynes Sanz
Brisbane 2012