A TRACE TO SIMULACRUM
Blurring the boundary between Art and Architecture

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The discussion of art and architecture has been the attention of many scholars, largely because of the similarities between the two entities. Art and architecture are both measured by an individual's perception. It is the individual's perception that allows for art to be related to architecture as architecture is to a city. This evolving cycle pertains to a vision of perception based on scale. One can have a different perception based on scale through distance, magnitude and connectivity. It is the co-existence of art and architecture that allows for a blurring of perceptions which ultimately leads to true innovation.

We can look at the mural painting of Richard Haas to gain a further understanding of the marriage between art and architecture. Haas utilizes the existing built environment as his canvas to blur an individual's perception of reality and illusion. It is only when an individual's perception is in a dissonant state that art and architecture merge together and become one continuous element within the built environment. The co-existence of the two entities begins to mold our perception and as a byproduct it generates a new pattern in which we cannot perceive the difference between art and architecture.

1.   INSPIRING CO-EXISTENCE

Richard Haas's early works focused on abstract paintings, wood cuts and diorama boxes. However, it was Haas's first passion – architecture - that influenced his works and developed his calling[1]. In 1968, Haas moved to New York and started to establish his own artistic style, which jumped quickly from abstract painting to realistic architectural prints that were based on the physical form of New York City[2].

During the 1960s, the modern movement dominated the entire architectural practice. Witnessing the rapid development of American cities during 1950s-60s, Haas felt that his prints were an attempt to save the falling past. With these prints, Haas expressed his sensitivity to the traditional building and his concern for the new modern urbanism[3]. Haas was most notably known for his ability to depict New York City in an artistic architectural print.

Since the 1970s, Richard Haas has been recognized for his "make over" murals on building façades which engage the public into the large city scale. He transforms blank building walls into classical and gloriously detailed works.   His work often reminds viewers of the traditional illusionist Quadratura painting in Renaissance. (Figure 1,2)
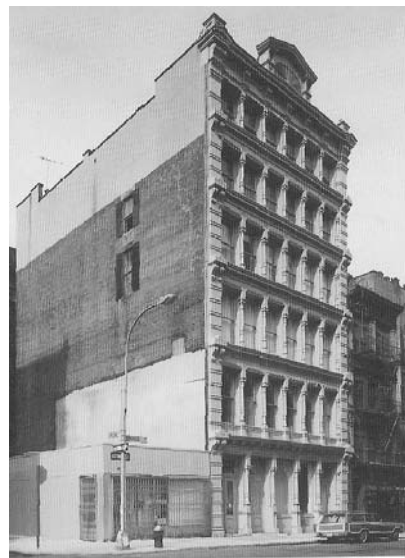

Figure 1. Before mural. 112 Prince Street, New York City. 1975. http://www.richardhaas.com/

enriching it with new meanings [4] ". It was Haas's objective to design a canvas that allowed existing forms to be incorporated into the expression of his vision.

Haas uses well-known architectural elements such as arches, windows, columns, and domes to soften the impact on the eye caused by the chaotic clashes of the city (figure 3). His painting technique of architectural representation, that follows the rule of *trompe-l'œil* [5] often rendered facades, sections, and perspective views. (Figure 4)

Figure 2. Haas. After mural. 112 Prince Street, New York City. 1975.
http://www.richardhaas.com/

Figure 3. P S E & G Substation. New Brunswick NJ1982. Haas. http://www.richardhaas.com/

Haas's conceptual ideology is to understand the relationship of a building in the greater perspective of the city and the surrounding context. His works are not done simultaneously with the design of the building, but rather are the ones transform the already built architecture. This is the beginning phase of co-existence. Richard Haas took these visions and designed them to become reality in two dimensions. Many of his works were never painted by himself; he was simply the architect of the art. Haas would birth his ideas through the same way an architect manifests a design: basic diagrammatic and programmatic plans and details. Haas's ideology took art and architecture to a new marriage that co-existed in the same realm.

2. HAAS'S LANGUAGE

2.1. Trompe-l'oeil accomplishing the architecture language of Richard Haas

Richard Haas was one of the muralists funded by Citywalls, an organization influenced by ethnic and social issues. The Citywalls' group of mural artists included Richard Haas, Diego Rivera and other Mexican artists. However, it was Haas's ability to speak a common language with architects that made his work stand out. It is a notion that an "architect does not invent his language from nothing: he makes use of the language of his predecessors for his own intentions, changing it little by little,

Figure 4. Angelo Michele Colonna and Agostino Mitelli. *The Triumph of Alexander the Great.* Palazzo Pitti, Florence. 1638.
http://content.answers.com/

However, his use of *trompe-l'œil* is never merely an end in itself. Haas actually rejects classifying his murals as *trompe-l'œil*. He layers information and elements in hopes that viewers reach out to read the rich story told by the artwork. Haas's intention is never to

adumbrate the elements or concept of his works.   However, there is a high level of symbolism associated with the architecture elements he paints, as well as the ironic juxtaposition of the paint and the real architecture canvas.

2.2. Mural as entity

Different from other muralists, Haas has a strong interest in three-dimensional forms. This could be traced back to his early diorama work that captured three-dimensional perspectives. In the 1979 Times Tower mural, Haas painted on a blank industrial building just south of Times Square in New York City. His mural expanded from the typical two-dimensional canvases to a canvas that covered multiple walls [6] . One's perception of the building changed based on the distance in which it is viewed. An individual that is further away has a perception of the building having all of the painted architectural geometries, but then is released into a new moment once one realizes the painting is merely a static addition to the architectural canvas.

Haas invents architectural elements and paints them in situations where they achieve a reality, almost a life, of their own. By marrying the painted architecture as closely possible to the existing architecture, he endeavors to make one feel that it belongs where it is within its context. The painting belongs to the building as the building has always been part of the natural cityscape, as previously discussed.

2.3. Comments on architecture

From 1975 to 1977, Haas completed a vast mural for the blank rear facade of the Boston Architectural Center, which is a harsh, cold structure of raw concrete, an archetypal piece of 1960s brutalism. (Figure 5, 6) He produced a section view of an imaginary classical structure.   Haas reinterpreted the basic architectural elements of balustrades, columns, arches and a great central dome. This cross section of a domed neoclassical space has greatly transformed the wall of the original modern concrete building. It is not merely nostalgic. It makes a strong comment on the modernists' value of architecture and the city. Its non-rational Renaissance elements challenge the fundamental truth that modern architecture stands for.
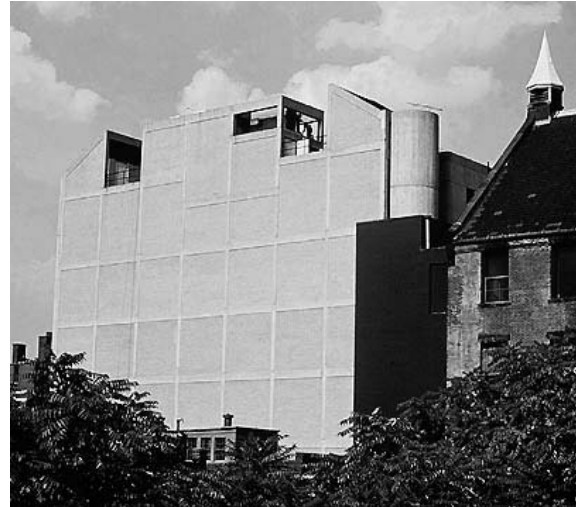

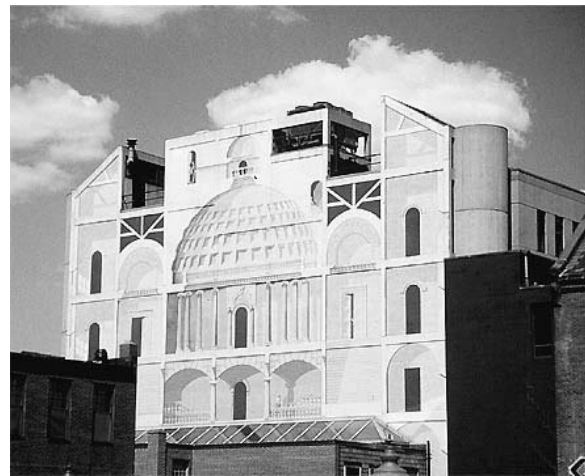Figure 5. Before mural. Boston Architectural Center, Boston MA. 1977.
http://www.richardhaas.com/

Figure 6. Haas. After mural. Boston Architectural Center, Boston MA. 1977.
http://www.richardhaas.com/

As described by Peter Eisenman, "representation was a simulation of the meaning of the present through the message of antiquity, then reason was a simulation of the truth through the message of science." With representation, architectural value derives from a source outside itself. For instance, "Renaissance architecture represents the nature or divine sources with a cosmological or anthropomorphic geometry. In modern architecture, nature and divine origins are replaced by rational solutions. Function and technique replaced the catalogue of type forms as origins.[7]" In other words, both Renaissance

and modern architecture rely on faith, but the representations are totally different.

Because rationality became the moral and aesthetic basis of modern architecture; the built environment should look rational, represent rationality and represent truth. The mural located on the Boston Architecture Center represents Haas's insistence of pairing old with new and past with present. The mural isolates historical architectural beauty and forces one to confront the contradictory of these two different aesthetic values[8]. His mural exposes the unaccommodating opposition of "science" — rational objectivity, technology, and functionalism —   to "experience" — mystery, poetry, and being[9].

2.4. The lost memorial, nostalgia

Richard Haas utilizes historical events to further explore the ideas of perception. *Shadow* series and *Chicago Homage* are two of his works that have the capacity to reveal themselves as a text and reading event. Here the murals tell the story of the site and context by referencing recorded history. The reader of the building's story has the perception of his own identity as a reader rather than as just an observer.   Haas also reconstructs the lost history of a site by making one realize the importance of light, shade, and shadow upon a building's façade.   Within these works, Haas extracts historical site construction and paints them in the form of a darkened silhouette. The cast shadow of a forgotten building gives the viewer a perception that is not atypical of the built environment. But it is the importance of realism and expression of a higher power that an individual begins to develop their own perceptions.   The work reaches a level of indication that is similar in definition to art, by allowing each viewer to have his or her own perception and understanding.

Between 1994 and 1997 Haas designed his shadow prints.   These murals depicted shadows of forgotten landmark buildings, cast onto structures that currently occupy the site. (Figure 7) By creating a sense of displacement in both space and time, he added a narrative layer to architecture [10] . These murals often represented different phases in the history of skyscraper construction. He invented stylistic juxtaposition in the spirit of the contiguous buildings and preserved the life of architecture.
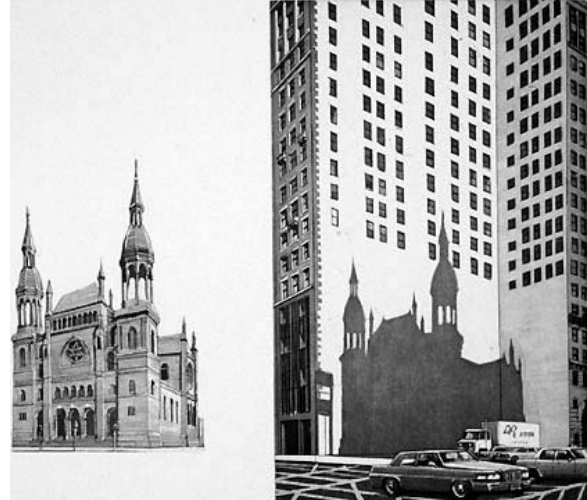

Figure 7: Haas. Shadow of Temple Emmanuel El, 1994. http://www.richardhaas.com/

3. INTERPRETATION OF SIMULACRUM

3.1 Architecture and Murals acting as Simulacrum

As we discussed before, Haas's murals question the value of their canvas, the modern architecture, and remind viewers of lost urban image and memory. His work represents a broad range of diverse postmodern culture from religion, science, philosophy, literary and history. These works also require the viewers to actively participate in decoding the meaning based on the rich historic references and symbolic architectural language that is presented. How does an individual understand the value of Haas's mural paintings when the essence of its architectural canvas is the presumed rationale of its structure, methodologies of origins and ends, and a byproduct of a deductive process that shows simulation? Moreover, how do Haas's murals represent a simulacrum, unlike the architectural canvases?

Jean Baudrillard defined simulacrum as a copy of an original which never existed, or an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference, the hypereal. Peter Eisenman also discussed the simulacrum of the Renaissance architecture — the message of the past was used to verify the meaning of the present. He noted "it has no meaning but a message that was displayed in the object.[11]"

Greenberg's art manifesto states that modernist architects believe architecture

should not represent another form of architecture. Instead, it should only embody its own function, and present its own meaning rather than being a message of another previous meaning [12]. However, modern architecture fails to embody a new value in itself; therefore the pure reality which modernists pursued becomes a simulation[13].

Described by Mary McLead, "in the post modern era, there are no longer any self-evident values in representation, reason, or history to confer legitimacy on the object. Decoration in postmodern architecture, like a rediscovery of history, appears as a liberating gesture [14] ". In other words, post modern architecture only contains a message, not an inherent meaning any more. It becomes a simulated sign board or a "decorated shed" described by Venturi for Las Vegas architecture[15].

3.2. The end of simulation

Fiction becomes simulation when it does not recognize its condition as fiction. Whereas, simulation attempts to obliterate the difference between real and imaginary, simulacrum leaves an untouched difference between reality and illusion. Simulacrum furthers Haas's perception of co-existence. Haas is conscious of the value of ambiguity between reality and illusion. His mural for Boston Architecture Center exposes the absence of simulation, the disconnection of the imaginary from the real. His mural is not just an image of another object-origin. It provides a sign as well as a trace that is left to the individual's own perception.

Haas's imaginary world is not one of pure make-believe. He manipulates space and creates illusion as a further gesture, never intending to overtake or control the built environment. For example, Haas's mural wall in Munich painted a door slightly open with a Mercedes Benz reposing within (Figure 8, 9). In the homage to the Chicago School, he combined elements taken from famous buildings designed by Chicago architects such as Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright. He uses such a bizarre invention to integrate various architectural elements that viewers can sense quickly that it is a fantasy[16].

Figure 8. Before mural. Alt Ring Strasse, Munich Germany 1978.
http://www.richardhaas.com/

Figure 9. Haas After mural. Alt Ring Strasse, Munich Germany. 1978.
http://www.richardhaas.com/

Haas frequently provides these traces to signify the gap between simulation and reality. In his interior mural for M.I.T, he designed a progressive transition from contemporary space to the illusionary space; it was this transition that made it possible to avoid making the typical disconnection between the art and architecture. The mural for Thunderbird Fire & Safety Equipment Corporation in Arizona is a prime example of how he generates a simulacrum between art and architecture. Within this mural Haas painted sign painters working on an unfinished mural to expose this simulacrum status.

(Figure 10) These human intrusions are meant to be ambiguous.

Figure 10. Haas. Thunderbird Fire and Safety Equipment Corporation. 1985.
http://www.richardhaas.com/

3.3. A trace to illusion

As we discussed earlier, simulation attempts to obliterate the difference between real and imaginary, where simulacrum leaves the difference between reality and illusion to the individuals' own perception. Simulacrum exposes the lost memories and disconnection of the simulated imaginary and the real to give a hypereal perception (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Haas. 2300 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia PA. 1983.
http://www.richardhaas.com/

The relation of the painted map to a self-evidently meaningful origin could somehow transcend the present in moving forward to a timeless future, a utopia. Because the continuity of momentary history is being broken in our perception, any representation of the history can be seen only as a belief, a trace similar as a fragmentary sign, and a simulacrum which signifies the lost reality and traces a co-existance..

3.4. Contextual unity

The marriage of Art and Architecture is a simulacrum. Haas's murals expose this connection by adding a Renaissance value to the surface of modern architectures' rational value. This co-existence of layers provides a trace to dis- simulacrum where the architecture and comments are simply the lost truth. At the same time, this added Renaissance layer visually masks the problem of its modern architecture canvas and brings back the contextual unity.

During the rapid urban development in 1960s, Haas witnessed modern architecture ignoring the urban context and continuity of history. In that period of time the demolition of old buildings became a common trend that ultimately lead to the replacement of blank walls that broke a unified city into fragments[17].

With a strong architectural interest, Haas looked at the city as a complex entity where elements merged together to form a whole. He is interested in how each building is related to its neighbors and how they form an entity together that is more complex than any individuals. His searching for contextual unity could be traced back to his early architectural prints which pictured a building in relation to its urban environment [18]. Haas's mural is not merely imitating individual Renaissance architecture. He always familiarizes himself thoroughly with the indigenous urban context before he adds a mural to a building facade with its own specific history, texture, color and scale.

For example, Haas expressed his urban contextual unity in his mural on the blank side of a Consolidated Edison power station in Manhattan. The physical Brooklyn Bridge looms over the mural with a painted Brooklyn Bridge. An arcade is then painted to provide a view through the impenetrable walls[19]. (Figure 12). Haas develops a marriage between the built environment and an individual's perception.

In Fontainebleau Hotel, a similar arcade was painted by Haas as a portal view through the wall to the beyond. These illusionary openings brought viewers into inaccessible worlds that actually exist, yet not quite as they are painted. (Figure 13). Haas noted the painting must be plausible, believable, and most importantly, connected to the public in the urban scale[20]. It

is about the completion, the filling in of a missing part and the making of a totality. These two murals further the concept that Haas designs his architectural canvas to evoke an individual's creative perception which promotes simulation.

Figure 12. Haas. Peck Slip, New York City 1978. http://www.richardhaas.com/

Figure 13. Haas. Fontainebleu Hotel. Miami. 1986. http://www.richardhaas.com/

CONCLUSION

The illusionistic paintings of Haas gives the traditional dimension of art an elevated state where architecture merges with art. "He is an artist, yes, but he also functions as critic, historian, archaeologist, architect, detective, and dreamer. [21]" Innovation strives from the combination of tectonic elements that blur the lines set forth by our culture. Haas explores the values of innovation in manners that few other muralists do. Ultimately, he sets forth to blur the boundaries between architecture and art.

Compared with other muralists, Haas's murals are purely architecturally oriented and achieve their value by inheriting an already valued architecture. By painting Renaissance architecture elements on the modern building facade, he challenges the rationality and the truth of his canvas - architecture. Haas objectively looks at how art is to architecture as architecture is to the city. It is not the single entity that stands out, but the layers that co-exist in ones perception that measures the success of Richard Haas.

His painting technique follows the rules of traditional *trompe-l'œil*. By marrying the painted architecture as closely as possible to the existing architecture and by telling a story referencing to the lost history, he endeavors to make one feel that his mural belongs where it is. Haas has perfected the notion of blurring the perception of the natural cityscape and the addition of new elements.

Architectural figure always alludes to and aims at the representation or simulation of some other object, whether architectural, anthropomorphic, natural, or technological. Haas's murals expose this disconnection by adding Renaissance value on the surface of modern architectural rational value. This ambiguity provides a trace to simulacrum architecture and comments on its lost truth. At the same time, this added Renaissance layer visually masks the problem of its modern architecture canvas. This transformation brings back the urban contextual unity and is plausible by the public in the post modern era.

As a conclusion, Haas's murals offer a means to represent a variety of experiences, moods, and perceptions. His representation of historic elements provides the material for a complex and diverse vision of the present. He uses the replication of a past time to invoke the timeless present time. His murals expose different values between presentness and the universal, the contingent of present, the absolute and eternal of universe.

NOTES

[1] Haas originally studied Architecture in 1954 in the Wisconsin State College, but eventually switched to art education. He concentrated on printmaking and got a M.F.A degree from University of Minnesota in 1964. His early contemporary art are mainly color and ink wood cut which are influenced by the twentieth-century German Expressionists. Because his early attraction to architecture, he made a series of light box in 1966-67.

[2] During the early time in New York, Haas began to associate with the "Green Mountain Boys" and created many abstract print following Greenberg's art theories. However, he commented his practice on abstract expressionism later as, "I never really felt the paintings".   At the same time, Haas was continuing to make three-dimensional realistic dioramas, as well as architectural print, mostly focus on his neighborhood in New York. He was interested in the architectural prints of 18th century artists such as Canaletto, Charles Meryon and Giovanni Pattista Piranesi.

Phillip Pearlstein. *The prints of Richard Hass.* A catalogue Raisonne 1970s-2004. 2004.

[3] Haas noted.   "My early enthusiasm for the architecture I chose to draw and paint did not begin with any preservation consciousness but it did coincide with a rising concern for appreciating and preserving the Victorian, Beaux-Arts and Deco heritage of our cities….what was left for the past looked precarious but often more beautiful, more human, more evidently the result of craftsmanship and care than the new."

Phillip Pearlstein. *The prints of Richard Hass.* A catalogue Raisonne 1970s-2004. 2004.

[4] Martin Steinmann. Reality as History: Note for a Discussion of Realism in Architecture. *Architecture Theory since 1968.* Columbia Books of Architecture. 1976. P246.

[5] A style of painting in which objects are depicted with photographically realistic detail.

http://www.merriam-webster.com.

[6] Noted by Haas, "there are some important differences. By turning the corner they take on a new life. No longer two dimension…It must be experienced from more than one point of view."

Paul Goldberger. *RICHARD HAAS: An Architecture of Illusion.* NY Rizzoli. 1981

[7] Peter Eisenman. The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End. *Architecture Theory since 1968.* Columbia Books of Architecture. 1984. P522.

[8] This aspect is also reflected in his early age panoramic cityscapes print. In this print, old buildings mixed with new buildings as a result of continuous city grown.

[9] Alberto Perez-Gomez. Introduction *to Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science.* Cambridge: MIT press. 1983.

[10] Haas noted. "Lock the paintings as tightly as possible into the wall and the architecture that surrounds it. There must be additional elements in the mural, allowing the viewer to bring his own fantasies and illusions to the piece. I like to add narrative content where it seems appropriate."

Paul Goldberger. *RICHARD HAAS: An Architecture of Illusion.* NY Rizzoli. 1981

[11] "Renaissance buildings received their value by representing an already valued architecture, by being simulacra (representations of representations) of antique buildings. Precisely because of this need to verify, Renaissance architecture was the first simulation, an unwitting fiction of the object."

Peter Eisenman. The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End. *Architecture Theory since 1968.* Columbia Books of Architecture. 1984. P522.

[12] "Building should express its function. In its effect to distance itself from the earlier representational tradition, Modern architecture attempted to strip itself of the outward trappings of "classical" style. This process of reduction was called abstraction."

Peter Eisenman. The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End. *Architecture Theory since 1968.* Columbia Books of Architecture. 1984. P522.

[13] "…architectural form to its essence, to a pure reality, transforming the field of referential figuration to that of non-referential "objectivity. The replication of the same orders today has no significance because the value system represented is no longer valued. A sign begins to replicated or, in Jen Baudrillard's term, "simulate", once the reality it represented is dead. When there is no longer a distinction between representation and reality, when reality is only simulation, the representation loses it's a priori source of significance, and it, too, becomes a simulation." Peter Eisenman also concluded the simulacrum in architecture. "The architecture is never embedded reason; there is no architectural image of reason. Architectural restatement, replication, is a nostalgia for the security of knowing,

a belief in the continuing of Western thought…It is impossible to describe the origins and ends. "

Peter Eisenman. The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End. *Architecture Theory since 1968.* Columbia Books of Architecture. 1984. P522.

[14] "It opened up new possibilities and broke down traditional hierarchies, whether between architecture and interior design, structure and ornament, abstraction and figuration, or 'educated' taste and popular taste." McLeod also quoted Johson's notes about aesthetic liberation. "Structural honesty for me is one of those infantile nightmares from which we will have to free ourselves as soon as possible."

Mary McLeod. Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivesm. *Architecture Theory since 1968.* Columbia Books of Architecture. 1989. P678.

[15] "The decorated shed is the conventional shelter that applies the symbol….The purest decorated shed would be some form of conventional systems-building shelter that corresponds closely to the space structure and program requirements of the architecture, and upon which is laid a contrasting-- and, if in the nature of the circumstances, contradictory decoration."

Venturi, Robert. *Learning from Las Vegas.* Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998.

[16] Haas noted. "I did not feel the need to reconstruct a period style in faithful authenticity as I was personally not involved with restoration. My desire then and now has been toward reinvention, or simply invention around historical ideas that can cohabit in a space.". "I like to take existing conditions and build on them and this often leads to having to invent a style as a solution. The Renaissance was really a reinvention of a Classical past based on imagined fantasies of what that past was about."

Beth Bunlop. More than Meets the Eye. *The City Is My Canvas: Richard Haas.* Publisher: Prestel Publishing. 2001.

[17] "The fragmentation and formal explosion of the modern architectures means that not only do they contrast radically with a traditional urban fabric, but they cannot join readily with other buildings to form a defined pubic space. The single building becomes more important than the city, individual creation more important than collective accretion."

Mary McLeod. Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivesm. *Architecture Theory since 1968.* Columbia Books of Architecture. 1989. P678.

[18] "In 1970s, he began expanding his parameters, either by depicting neighboring buildings or even representing an entire street. By the mid-1970s Hass's painting, drawing and printmaking had begun to shift away from portraits or single buildings toward an attempt to capture a wider swatch of the cityscape. It is no longer isolated, appearing to float in its own space, as are most of the earlier images."

Phillip Pearlstein. *The prints of Richard Hass.* A catalogue Raisonne 1970s-2004. 2004.

Haas also made several broad panorama views of cityscape. He focuses on the large scale and the issues of cityscape as a whole.

[19] Arcade is painted on the image of the Brooklyn Bridge. The real tower looms up over the mural just to the north. Haas noted, "So the view through the arcade is essentially what one would see if the Con Edison building did not exist. The continuity of the old building left on the edge of the building should be respected, and then a dramatic break should occur in the middle of the block. "

Paul Goldberger. *RICHARD HAAS: An Architecture of Illusion.* NY Rizzoli. 1981

[20] "During his travel in Europe, his interest broadened from individual buildings to the dynamics of the city at large, its smooth rhythms and cacophonies, its connections and contrast; the "patterns and repetitions in the compositions of buildings on the street" fascinated him."

Beth Bunlop. More than Meets the Eye. *The City Is My Canvas: Richard Haas.* Publisher: Prestel Publishing. 2001.

[21] Ibid.