

Telltale / Borrowed Landscapes

1998 ACSA Design Award

MARK ROBBINS
The Ohio State University

These projects, mounted in Australia and Japan, explore the intersection of the built environment with culture. The work provides settings that encourage interaction between viewers in either gallery or outdoor public settings. A concern with history, media, and popular culture is evident in the projects which attempt to reveal aspects of daily life at the scale of the city, the building, and the room. These multiple views highlight the conjunction of authorized and unauthorized activities. The material palette, often used against expectations, adds another layer of resonance to the abstract framework. The installations present abstractions of the built environment for non-specialized audiences while opening up the field for broader investigation by architects - that is, drawing architecture from Benjamin's distracted periphery to expose the complex social and economic forces that generate form.

The *Telltale* project was commissioned for the 1996 Adelaide Festival and built along the Torrens River in Adelaide, Australia - a waterway that splits the city in half. A series of objects designed to mark and record activity on the river's edge reveals traces of the many uses of the site that are often invisible to the casual observer. The city is full of telltale markings: in the physical remains of graffiti, condoms, cigarette butts with lipstick, castoff T-shirts, and soiled linen. A wall structure, projection screens, night-lights, and furniture pieces collect and display this evidence. The installation

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Telltale

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Borrowed Landscapes

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theatricalizes such small clues as relies, leaving the story of their origin in question.

Borrowed Landscapes was erected as part of a cultural exchange in a 2,000 square foot gallery in a modern museum on the outskirts of Tokyo. It is made up of a series of horizontal and vertical planes either surfaced with wooden slats or brick veneer, and incorporates selected pieces from the Saitama Museum collection. Through materiality and form, built fragments evoke rooms and a public square, and blur the distinction between interior and exterior conditions. This confusion is reinforced by the mixing of objects drawn from domestic and institutional contexts. These objects - ranging from early 20th century Japanese paintings of odalisques and reproductions of opera singers in character make-up, to contemporary Western fetish items such as Calvin Klein advertising imagery - suggest the hybridization of Japanese and American art and popular culture. The title of the project is drawn from the Japanese spatial concept of *Shakkei*, which describes the organization of the Zen garden in which the distant landscape of the mountains and trees is considered part of the composition of the enclosed garden. This spatial arrangement is used as a metaphor for cultural appropriation, employing architectural form as a means to convey the complex and often ambivalent relationship between Japanese culture and the West.

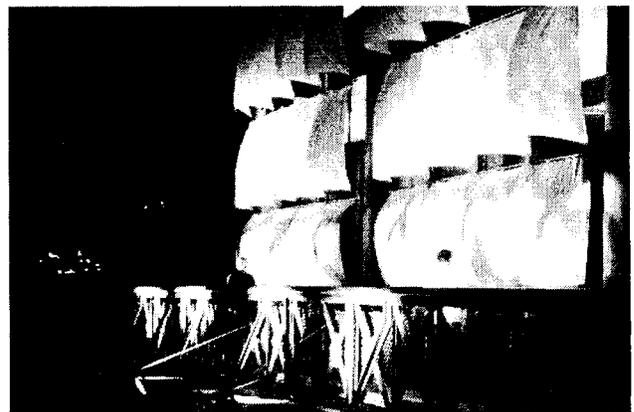


Fig. 1.

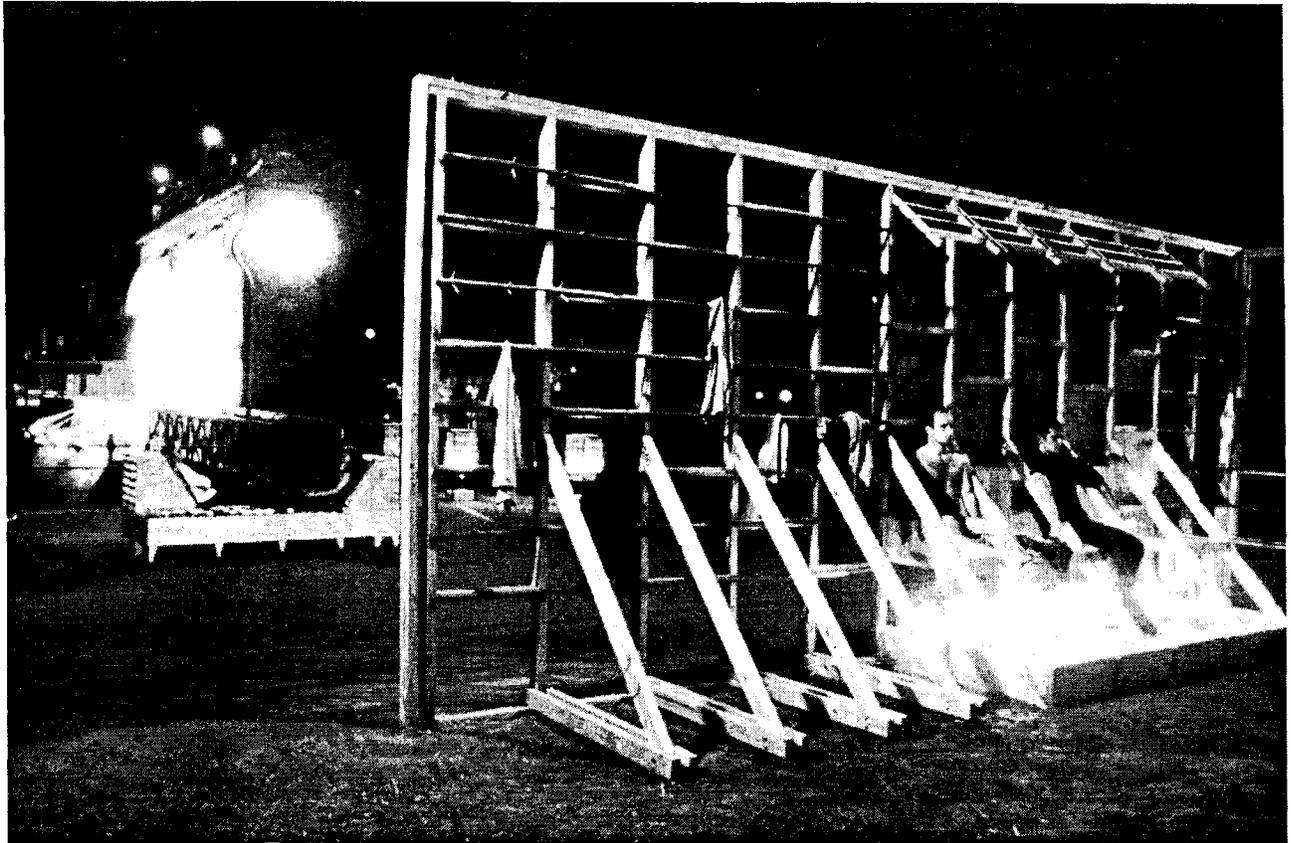


Fig 2. Telltale Temporary Installation, 1996, Adelaide, Australia (details, above and left).



Fig. 3. Borrowed Landscapes - 36 Views. Installation, 1994, Saitama Museum of Modern Art, Japan (detail).