

Dan Mills' Urban Building Facade series reveal the layers of memory often displaced by the gentrification of neighborhoods in Chicago. Out of the detritus of rehabilitation, the artist re-circulates the architectural history of a neighborhood which has seen radical changes in its physiognomy and demographics. As the economic value of the site is re-circulated, its sedimented social history is often effaced by a postmodern pastiche. Mills turns to the marginal or discarded signs of social production to re-invent meaning and challenge the rhetoric of renewal. These constructions restore a sense of the city's history as both poetic and problematic.

The artist turns the inside out and exposes the interiors of gutted buildings to the erosion of both public and private life in the city. Developers frequently ignore a building's facade while constructing elaborate interiors in order to avoid an increase in property taxes. Mills reverses this process by first assembling elements of the gutted interiors and exposing them on the face of one of the buildings during an outdoor exhibition at Randolph Street Gallery. Later, he returns them to an interior gallery space and thus questions the relation of art and exhibition to the production of value in the city's real estate.

The work signifies the return of what has been repressed by a city vying for recognition as an ever-renewable spectacle: patterns of real social life. What has been junked by a community is as revealing as what it values and Mills restores part of the history we have forgotten. His work gives us the vocabulary of time and use with which to weave the continuous narrative of an urban life constructed by changing economic structures, rather than the ideology of natural attrition. As real development usurps the city's patina with the decor of the new, Mills' work gives us an imaginary space within which to reconstruct the architecture of our own past.

Maureen P. Sherlock
Chicago, 1989

Object description list (left to right):
Urban Building Facade #5, 1986-87
Found (polychromed) wood and nails, acrylic
37" X 56 3/4" X 3"
Urban Building Facade #4, 1986-87
Found (polychromed) wood and nails, acrylic
37" X 57" X 6 1/4"
Urban Building Facade #3, 1986-87
Found (polychromed) wood and nails, acrylic
37" X 57 1/2" X 3 1/2"
Urban Building Facade #2, 1986-87
Found (polychromed) wood and nails, acrylic
37" X 57 1/2" X 4 1/2"
Urban Building Facade #1, 1986-87
Found (polychromed) wood and nails, acrylic
37" X 58" X 3"

This book was funded in part by:
The Illinois Arts Council, A State Agency,
Sybil Lamey Gallery, Chicago.

Urban
Building Facades
1-5

Dan Mills

