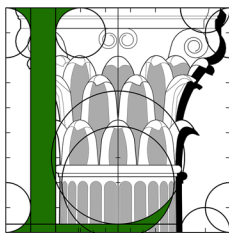




SANCTUARY PLACES:

EVOLUTION AND ENDURANCE
OF FRANCE'S SACRED PLACES



GABRIEL PRIZE PROPOSAL 2009

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Sanctuary Places:

Endurance and Evolution of France's Sacred Places

France is singular in its importance in the evolution of sacred space. The nation possesses crowning achievements in medieval and Romanesque design, the very birthplace of the Gothic and home to some of its most delicate expressions, well-proportioned works in classical revival churches, and numerous inspiring abbeys, pilgrimage chapels, basilicas, and excellent cathedrals. Although many of these are tucked neatly into dense urban settings, some are designed replete with public outdoor places. Admittedly, many French sacred buildings have a diminished draw of parishioners or pilgrims then when first dedicated. Though the intensity of use may vary, these buildings are still vibrant parts of the civic life, and of the landscape. My intent is to understand the role of a series of sacred buildings in their contexts in terms of the quality of spaces, the relationships between the open places and constructed edifices, and the contribution these sacred buildings make to an overall aesthetic. I have chosen a wide array of subjects for the initial study, and look to the guidance of the European Representative to assist me in narrowing the field. Most buildings I have selected are in urban contexts, but as a resident of a small community, I also seek to study buildings in more open areas.

The key elements and characteristics I seek to examine and compare in each public space are as follows:

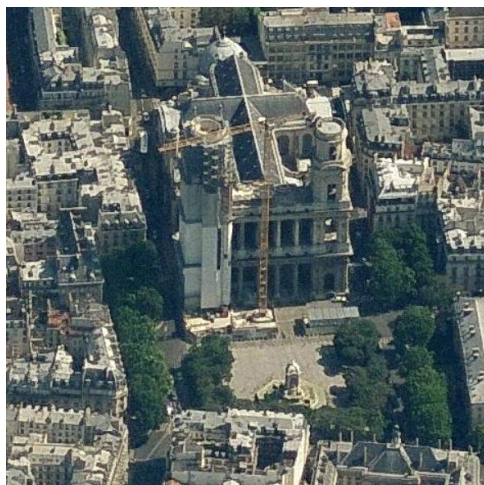
- The public space as approached and as seen from outside
- The vistas seen from multiple outside vantage points
- The number and activity of occupants on the site
- Procession into the subject building, especially on days upon which services take place
- Tactile surfaces and textures of outdoor paved areas
- The presence of natural elements and foliage as a counterpoint to built space and hard space
- The type and style of street furniture, lighting, and outdoor seating
- Overall form and shape of the buildings surrounding the public place
- The presence and expression of detail in the subject building and surrounding buildings
- The overall genus locus of the place
- and of course
- The inspiring feeling of the place...which of course will stimulate the artistry of the pieces

I intend to use two modes of expression for the studies, and each is described the syllabus for a course I teach next semester at Kent State, Watercolors: Versatile Medium for Expressive Art.

First is the travel sketch, which is always painted al fresco with a relatively loose pencil drawing and a few washes. These are most readily categorized as "expressionistic." For these quick paintings, I use pan paints by Russian manufacturer Yarka, brand "Saint Petersburg."

Second is the finished rendering, which is usually accomplished with photographic aids, which I currently tend to produce in high dynamic range, or HDR. HDR photography enables as its name describes a much wider array of tones and detail than conventional photography. Images are created from a merger of base images taken at various exposures. I utilize a light table to manually transfer these to a large board, and then carefully paint the image. For the interest of the committee, I use two types of paints, French paints by Sennelier and Dutch paints by Holbein. I generally use sable brushes only.

I should make mention of an important motivation to this enterprise. My hometown, Cleveland, Ohio, is currently undergoing an important transition. The Cleveland diocese is growing smaller at the same rate the entire urban area is shrinking in population. This area of Northeast Ohio will be reduced by fifty-two parishes by closings and mergers within the next two years. Most churches are fundamentally sound structurally. Some are architecturally suitable for adaptive reuse, whereas others are most suitable for religious services alone. Many of these have public plazas, and these will assuredly still be utilized as the building utilization changes. I will assuredly share my findings in France with appropriate parties upon my return.



St-Sulpice, constructed 1592-1732
Paris

Saint Sulpice, the “Cathedral of the Rive Gauche”, is one of the largest churches in Paris. This church has gained recent acclaim in popular culture through novels and film, and I look forward to examining the actual edifice and its stately presence in its neighborhood.



Pantheon, constructed 1758-1789
Paris

This site, originally designed as an abbey, exists today as a tribute to French heroes. I am enamored with this reinterpretation of the original Roman treasure, and want to note comparisons between them.



La Madeleine, constructed 1806-1842
Paris

After construction of two designs was halted and the foundations destroyed, the final design of the Madeleine was inspired by the Maison Carre at Nimes. The exterior of the building is surrounded by 52 Corinthian columns each measuring 20 meters high. I am interested in studying the relationships between this design and its forebears.



Sacre Coeur, constructed 1875-1914
Paris

This basilica was designed by Paul Abadie after winning a public competition. I am intrigued by both the national and religious symbolism in the building. I am interested in exploring the ways in which visitors experience the plazas and take in the views of surrounding cathedrals.



Notre Dame du Bas, constructed 1863
Ronchamp

I was first attracted to this church on a visit to Ronchamp in 2003. The church building is intact and in use, but there are serious signs of lapses in maintenance, most specifically in efflorescence on the walls and the interior columns. It is apparent that most church funding in Ronchamp goes towards Le Corbusier's masterpiece.



Notre Dame de Fouriere, constructed 1872-1876
Lyon

Most striking about this basilica are the slender turrets that rise from each corner. The adjoining terrace provides a panoramic view of the nearby city and the cathedral. I am interested in studying the commonalities between this building and Sacre Coeur in Paris, built in the same era with similar national symbolism and bold design themes.



Eglise St-Bruno des Chartreux, constructed 1584
Baroque façade constructed 1871
Lyon

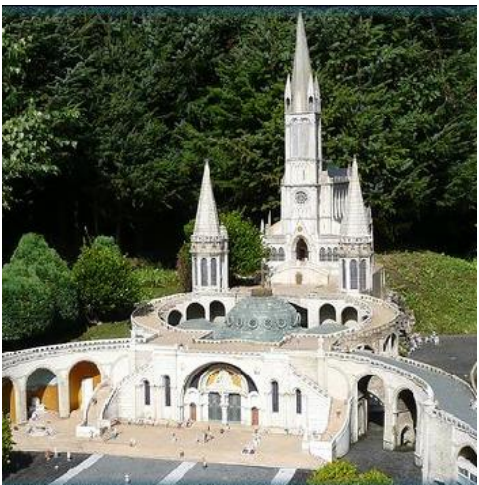
The façade of this monastery is considered to be a masterpiece of Baroque. It consists of three receding levels; a porch bordered with Ionic columns and Doric pilasters, a curvilinear balcony and a niche containing the statue of Saint Bruno. I am interested in studying how the foliage breaks down the scale of the building to the surrounding plaza, creating a more human scale so that the building maintains a presence but is still approachable.



Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette, constructed 1852
La Salette

The basilica and the surrounding network of trails is a pilgrimage for Roman Catholics. The site is remote, at an altitude of 6000 feet, and is nine miles from the nearest town. As a long time scout and outdoor enthusiast, I am very excited to explore the scenic backdrop of this site.

I am interested in studying the feeling of the space when it is empty or sparsely populated contrasted with when it is filled with pilgrims.



Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, constructed 1866-1872.
Lourdes, France

Again, a pilgrimage chapel, this one is in a neo-Gothic vein. This wide open space is an outdoor pedestrian area, and will certainly be very different to behold at sunrise then during the noon hour, filled with travelers and pilgrims.