

OPPORTUNITIES

The e-Newsletter of the **Design Communication Association**

Fall 2015

The DCA Fall 2016 conference is not far away

By Zuzanna Karczewska, Montana State University

Montana State University will host the 2016 Design Communication Association Conference at their Bozeman Campus and Chico Hot Springs Resort.

The theme for this year's conference will be "Communicating Speculative and Creative Thinking" and it encourages the examination of the questions of the current sensibilities in representation and design communication with the emphasis on its ability to inquire, question and wonder.

Mark your calendars for September 7 – 10, 2016 and join us for engaging and inspiring keynote addresses, juried paper sessions, and graphic workshops.



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Figure 1. Cappadocian rock-cut rooms, 2014. Watercolor by Fabio Colonnese

Cappadocian rock-cut architecture or the epiphany of interior space

By Fabio Colonnese, Sapienza University of Rome

In September 2014 I took part to university research for the study and promotion of rock-cut architecture in Cappadocia. The main goal of my work unit directed by prof. Marco Carpiceci from Sapienza University of Rome, was to survey some architectural settlements by the area of Goreme. The surveying procedure involved the use of a laser scanner FARO: this is an extremely powerful and fast machine, whose lightness makes it suitable to be transported along the dusty hills and through the narrow tunnels of rock-cut environment (fig.1). In recent years, the spread and simplified use of such a powerful tool has upset traditional survey practices and results. Among the many consequences of this technological revolution here I would like to underline at least two of them: the surveyors are no longer stimulated to explore and study carefully rooms and structures for they can delegate most of the work to the electronic eye; secondly laser scanning produces a "dead time" in which the surveyor should wait outside the reach of the scanner to avoid contaminating the results. Another element is to be added to the previous ones: the stratification of uses and transformations that affected some of these few square meters rooms carved into the rock, has generated suggestive and enigmatic spatial configurations. For these and other reasons during the laser scanning I started making drawings on small sketchbook.

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Intersecting Layers

By David Fox, University of Tennessee

There are two purposes for these field drawings. The first is to advance the thoughtful delineation of beautiful spaces and the second is to assert the value of freehand drawing, in situ, as a critical means to measure the human condition across time. The aim is to carefully coordinate my hand and eye as a body-based instrument so to interpret space with thin, subtle veils of line and tone to form an emotional connection between medieval spaces and modernity. The results foster my imagination with the distinctive qualities of graphite to reveal intersections of past and present.

A trending assumption by students is that mechanical devices offer a more expedient and clearer means of representation, sometimes to such an extreme that eliminates pencils and pens. While software might offer new opportunities, such as sound and time notations, it has limits. The value of the hand is to underscore the potential interpretations growing from our being in beautiful places. The vitality of graphite, in this instance, lies in the distinction that its control flows through a part of body and not through a complex device that is apart from the body. Machines are third party filters whose internal workings tend to dislocate our mind from content and context alike. While the use cameras or recording devices does open vast potentials (which I utilize through other lecture/assignments), the sole reliance on such media short-circuits the minds' ability to inwardly digest the lessons being taught by the eye.

Graphite infuses these images (fig 1) with dreamy qualities through its various densities and subtle differences ranging between 4B and 4H. Each pencil is a tool to capture a unique sensation that Ernest Watson describes as how, "you will discover your pencil doing things you have not consciously dictated. These spontaneous performances are indeed fundamental to creativity. Without them, you may succeed in producing tolerably good technical results, but your drawings will not have emotion or verve. They will not thrill the observer".¹

Tuscany is the locus of these drawings made in conjunction with student trips over a number of years (fig 2). These small format studies document and etch into my memory conduits to another era, offering personal interpretations of architecture and its' larger, cultural ramifications. The intent is to upend the term virtual, disconnecting it from its' current electronic connotations and, assert instead, its traditional roots where human memory is animated, alive, and separate from a computer chip.

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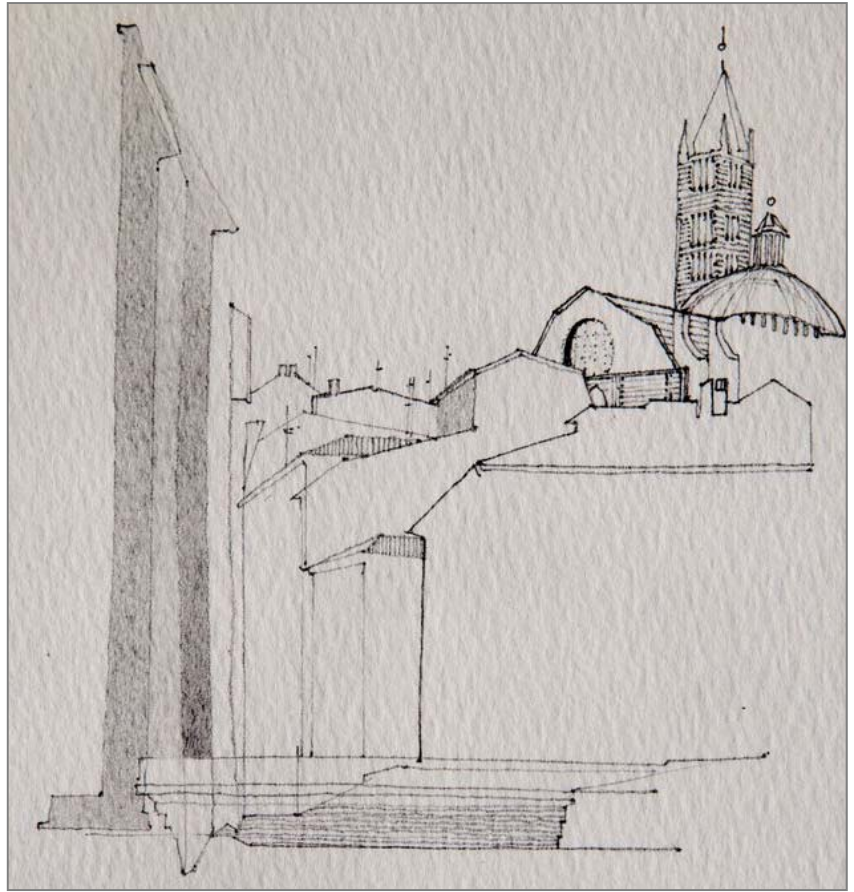


Figure 1. The Duomo, Siena, Italy, 2007

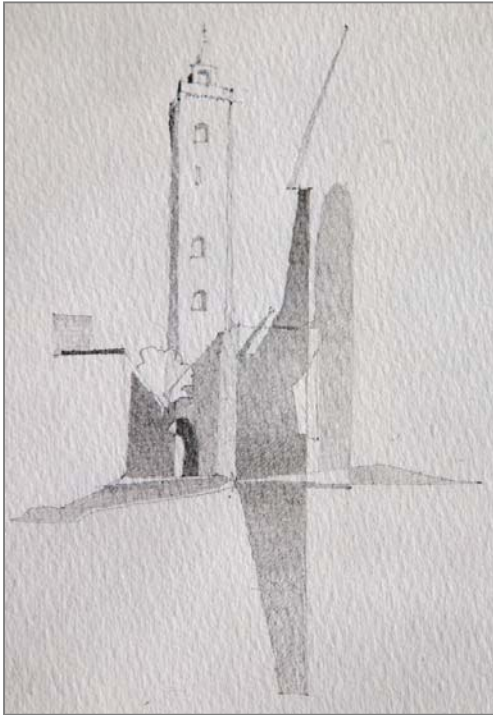


Figure 2.

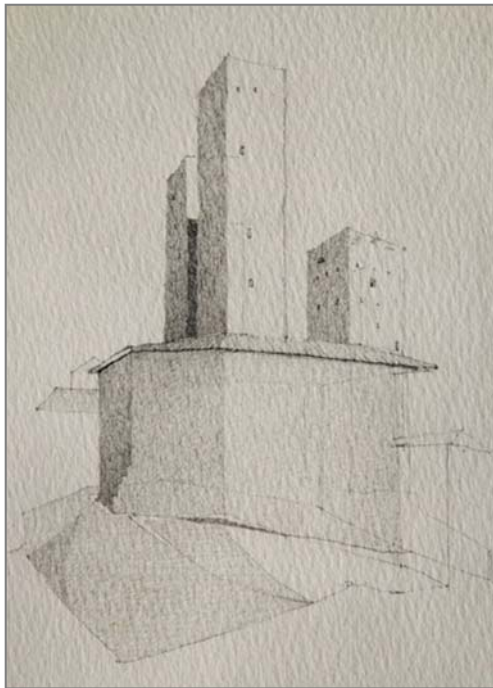


Figure 3.

1 Watson, E. (1968). *The art of pencil drawing*. New York: Watson-Guipill Publications.

2 Deetz, J. (1967). *Invitation to archaeology* With illus. by Eric G. Engstrom. Garden City, N.Y.: Published for the American Museum of Natural History [by] the Natural History Press.

3 Karr, M. (2015). *The art of memoir*. Harper

Being an interloper to Siena and San Gimignano, I became vividly aware of common routines of that are either lost or taken for granted in American suburbs. Hearing a foreign conversation over espresso begins to stir my imagination to consider the same words and same gestures happening many years ago in the same space and how they will echo well into the future. Walking through the city elicits the similar sensations, yet now the centuries old masonry asserts it's silent language by sculpting space and light to duplicate the exact same lines of another era. Here, the study of architecture is a glimpse into another realm. The noted archaeologist James Deetz defines his field as "the study of man in his broadest sense" where, specifically, "archaeologists are anthropologists who usually excavate the material remains of past cultures, and through the study of such evidence, attempt to re-create the history of man to determine the nature of cultural systems."² For architects, our 'evidence' is far more ethereal. Perhaps it's the aromas redolent in the every turn of its streets? Or maybe it's sound of laughter from an afternoon meal and a particular angle of light illuminating the uneven texture of a wall at sunset that stirs my imagination? The architecture that defines their world causes me to wonder how the centuries old, intricate, narrow shapes and proportions still ring true. Can such spaces inform the future?

These ancient walls still possess an authenticity built-up from the millennia of cultural transformations where truth is an inherent strand of their DNA. Their surfaces, and the medieval substrate beneath, are structural markers amidst continuous change. Drawing was, and remains, an opportunity to look beyond and see into the spaces to find the unknown, mysterious elements that defy pictorial depictions. These images attempt to capture a virtual, translucent chronicle of time. A literary example from Mary Karr's, *The Art of the Memoir* offers an apt description:

*"So a single image can split open the hard seed of the past, and soon memory pours forth from the every direction, sprouting its vines and flowers up and around you till the old garden's taken shape in all its fragrant glory. Almost unbelievable how much can rush forward to fill an absolute blankness."*³

The lessons are that field drawing is a process one must take on without fear of consequence. Let the lines grow on and from the paper and become alive. Alone, in a carefully chosen location, a faint line adjusts the widths and lengths of spaces with a precise eye: looking again...calibrating again. Such an approach to drawing cements time and space into a bonding plane where a two-dimensional depiction of bricks and mortar does, in fact, solidify into the mind. These images do not describe a moment as much as they become the moment that recalls a richness far more than is apparent, such as the smells of centuries-old recipes baking in Italian ovens that waft in the cool breezes. The act of drawing stretches the boundaries of representation and celebrates a deeper, more vivid understanding of reality. This will, for the architect, inform our design ideas that will then transform the future. In the same way a research scientist posits an assumption and offers proof, field drawings are an essential component to the logical argument that leads to making authentic, substantive places that validate both the vision and skills of the observer.

My challenge-which is the same I give to students-is to see things that aren't really things and peel away time to reveal the nearly invisible layers that illuminate the nuance of creativity. And when these students graduate to work in another complex, yet less dense, territory, how will they bring a similar vitality a new building? Certainly, the power of the drawing lies in its ability to one day translate the experiences into an Architecture-capital A-where past, present and future melds into one dynamic entity that, in this case, harbors within its walls the recollections Italy. Unlike archeologists, our imagination is to not replicate a former condition but to poetically speculate and project an idea into a future dimension. Thus, to design well we must draw well.

Cappadocian rock-cut architecture or the epiphany of interior space

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It took days to me to find a way to capture at least a small part of those suggestions with my pencil and watercolors (fig.2). Beyond the contribution in terms of critical knowledge of the surveyed architecture that is fundamental during the postproduction stage and the visual communication of the results, those sketches helped me to understand what was so attractive to me: the answer, may seem obvious, is: the space. Some of these artificial caves offer the opportunity to observe and experience what Bruno Zevi called the "grado zero" of the architecture, the bare configuration of illuminated surfaces that determines the intrados of the architectural envelope, without being "distracted" by accessories and details (fig.3). As an architect who is mainly engaged in interior design, I realized that while I was drawing those tufa surfaces I was trying to imagine the lives of entire generations raised in such a dark and dusty rooms; at the same time I was also driven by the impulse to attribute functions linked to contemporary rituals of social life, even in a completely unconventional way. To my eyes those environments, especially the most anonymous and eroded ones, with niches and ledges with no apparent relationship to the human body, looked like full-scale models onto which to cast more or less fantastic design ideas.



Figure 2. Cappadocian rock-cut rooms, 2014. Photo by Fabio Colonnese



Figure 3. Cappadocian rock-cut rooms, 2014. Watercolor by Fabio Colonnese

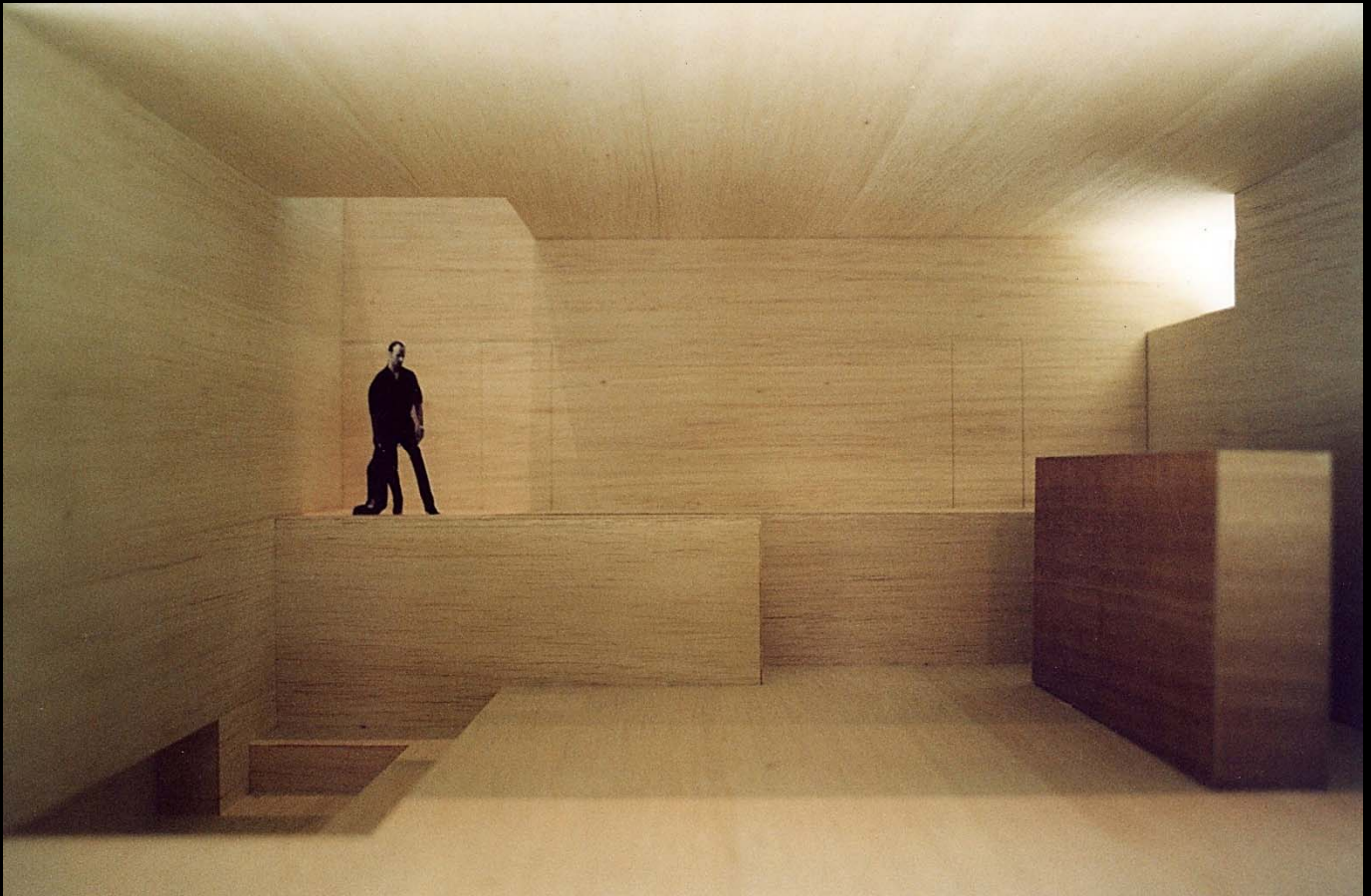


Fig.4 Alberto Campo Baeza, *Model of house design*, 2000. Photo by Fabio Colonnese

This type of exercise that is mental and graphical together is of course the result of a purely modern education, in which the importance given to concepts such as space and movement, that are central to both architectural works and historical criticism, can suggest unpredictable links between twentieth century compositions and ancient ruined structures.

Some modern architects have attempted to measure not only form and quantity of architectural spatial chains but also their paratactic, narrative and emotional qualities. This is the case of Luigi Moretti's spatial analysis with negative models of the contained space to better envision the spatial experience, greatly influencing both architecture teaching and design communication of innovating architects such as Rem Koolhaas. The recovery of the so-called graphic a poche, in which structures and "serving" rooms are filled with the same graphical pattern to enhance the void of "served" rooms is attributable to the same modern sources.

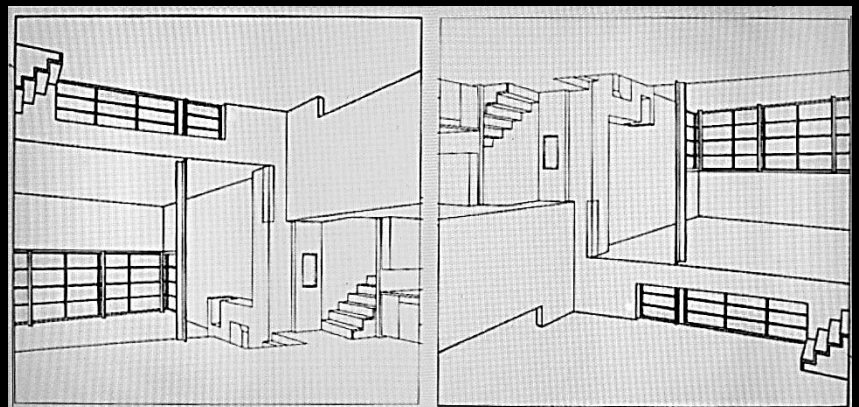


Fig.5 Steven Holl, *Villa in Cleveland*, 1992. Interior perspective: original and upside down version (elaboration by Fabio Colonnese)

Today's design communication is saturated with digital photo-realistic images and pictures from a concept model seem to convey the key space meaning more effectively than most of renderings can do. Alberto Campo Baeza's interior wooden model (Fig. 4) shows a rooms that could be easily interpreted as a regularization of a Cappadocian rock-cut room. As in an Adolphe Appia's scene for Dalcroze's *Espace Rythmique*, the viewer instinctively is projecting herself on different floors and ramps of this sort of Raumplan like in a playground for adults. The presence of a photographic human figure is the only element that suggests its scale of reduction.

As Cappadocian rock-cut rooms appear without reference to human body and domestic functions, their drawings show no clear scale and this ambiguity can be considered as an important quality in design communication.

The model Bottoni, Mucchi, and Pucci built in 1937 for the competition of the Armed Forces Buildings for the E42 (then EUR) in Rome, was abstract and monochrome as prescribed by Leon Battista Alberti 500 years before. Although such a neoplastic configuration of planes and volumes was designed for a square it might be valid as an ornament or even as a furniture wall, as evidenced by Mario Radice's wooden decor for the Sala del Direttorio in Terragni's Casa del Fascio in Como, also inspired by his own abstract painting made two years before.

Closer examples could be found in the recent Sou Fujimoto's *Wooden House*, where human body is barely admitted, or in Steven Holl's works, whose designs often arise from sketches and watercolors made early in the morning, in a semi-oneiric condition that seems to enhance the space value of his visions. The perspective views for a villa in Cleveland in 1992 reveal his quest for a formal and communicative abstraction able to suggest to customers the potentials of the unconventional interiors where residents have the freedom to invent the sense of space. Quite coherently the line drawings leave some ambiguities whose deciphering is left to the customers in order to engage them in the design process (Fig.5).

Seen with the eyes of an interior designer, the rocky areas of Cappadocia has revealed their potential to catalyze speculation design. On the one hand this confirmed the validity of an approach focusing first on the space as a concatenation of rooms and views along paths, in which priority is given to built-in furniture like in Adolf Loos' houses; the other emphasized the need to pursue some type of mental space exploration, inspiring a series of graphic studies unrelated to any formal royal commission and precisely based on an apparent ambiguity of the scale of representation (Fig.6, 7).

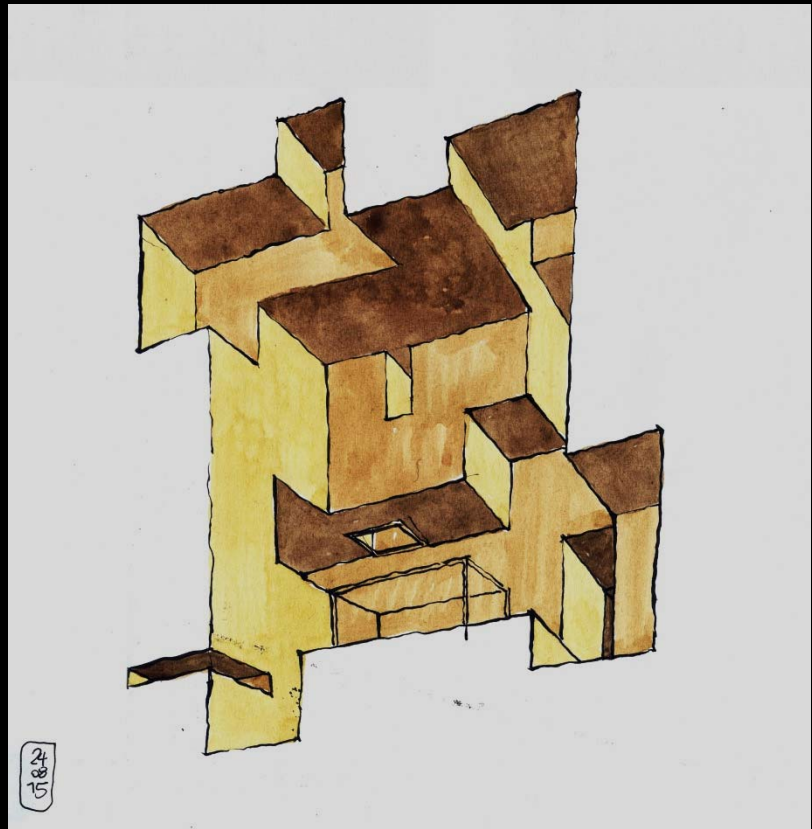


Figure 6. *Rock-cut habitat*, 2015. Watercolor by Fabio Colonnese

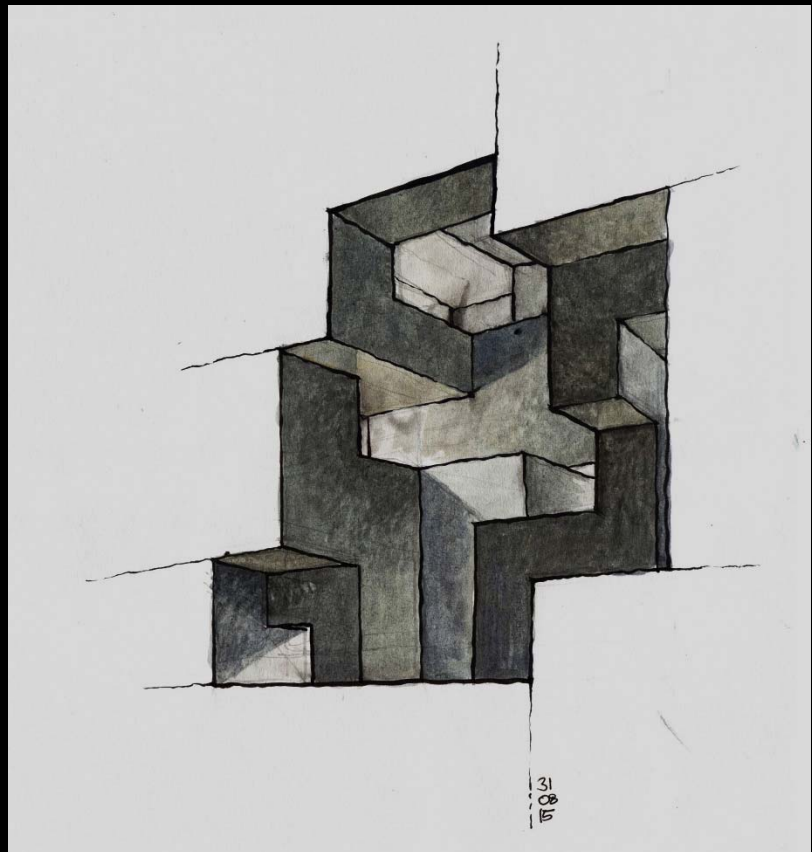


Fig.7 *Rock-cut habitat*, 2015. Watercolor by Fabio Colonnese

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Bozeman, Montana is situated in the heart of the Rocky Mountains with spectacular views in all directions. We are preparing opportunities for mountain hiking, river rafting, and a trip to Yellowstone National Park (<http://www.nps.gov/yell>).

The conference will open at the School of Architecture with afternoon registration and an informal reception followed by an early evening keynote address. After the address, conference attendees will board buses to Chico Hot Springs Resort in beautiful Paradise Valley (about an hour ride). Chico is famous for its authentic western atmosphere, geothermal pools, and gourmet dining. (<http://www.chicohotspings.com>)

We are looking forward to a great conference.



Chico Hot Springs



Mammoth Hot Springs

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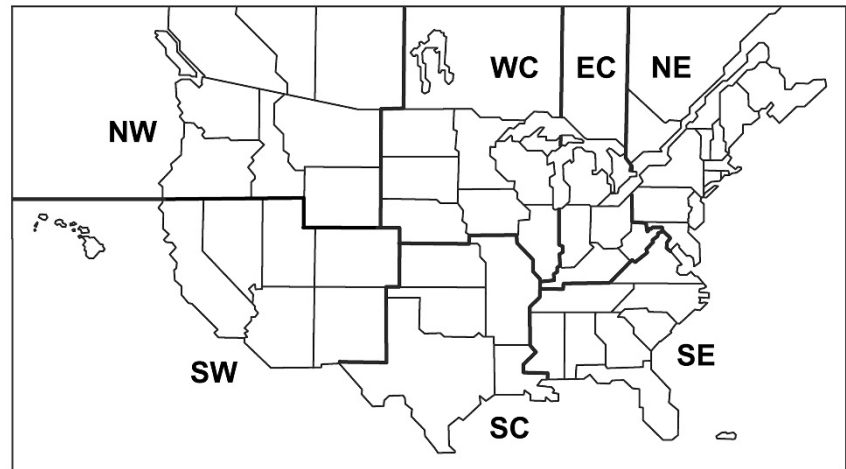
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