PLENARY SESSION

HOLLYWOOD DESIGN: DECADENCE, GLAMOUR, FANTASY, MODERNISM AND OPULENCE IN 20TH CENTURY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

March 31, 2001

Art Libraries Society of North America 29th Annual Conference, Los Angeles, CA

Moderators:
Robert C. Kaufmann-Metropolitan Museum of Art
Stephen Van Dyk-Cooper-Hewitt Museum

Recorder:
Robert C. Kaufmann

Sponsors:
Decorative Arts Round Table
Diversity Committee
Gay and Lesbian Interests Round Table
Architecture Section

Speakers:
Linda Kay Zoekler, Head, Art Reference Librarian, Huntington Library
Karen Hudson, granddaughter of Paul R. Williams "An Architect in Hollywood: Paul R. Williams"
Jason Stein, Assistant Vice President, General Valuer, Decorative Arts Department Christie's Los Angeles "Movie Sets and Modern Design"
Hutton Wilkinson, President, Tony Duquette, Inc. “Tony Duquette, a Personal Culture”

Despite a last minute change of speaker, which altered the emphasis of the session somewhat, the session on Hollywood design was well attended and turned out to be great fun. The first speaker, who stepped in at the last minute, was ARLIS/NA member Linda Kay Zoeckler of the Huntington Library Art Reference Library, who spoke on the Oviatt Building in Los Angeles. Ms. Zoeckler, who discovered the building on a walking tour when it was vacant, found that Mr. Oviatt, who visited the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris in 1925, had met Rene Lalique, the French Art Deco glass artist, and had commissioned him to design the first floor/lobby area of the building, the interior of the Oviatt men’s clothing store which occupied the first and second (balcony) floor, and the penthouse apartment in which Oviatt was to live. We were treated to a slide tour of the spectacular Lalique areas of the building, the elevator doors with massive panels of inset glass, the elegant penthouse with custom designed Lalique fixtures, and the interior of the clothing shop, now the restaurant Cicada (and a very good restaurant it is).

Karen E. Hudson, granddaughter of Paul R Williams and keeper of the Williams Archive, next spoke eloquently on this important black Southern California architect and designer in a talk entitled An Architect in Hollywood: Paul R. Williams. Mr. Williams, actively discouraged by teachers in following architecture as a career because of his race, ignored them and created a major career for himself in Southern California, designing in a number of styles. Many of his building commissions were shown, both built and unbolt. Ms. Hudson is the author of two works on Paul R. Williams, , a children’s book entitled The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams,(1994), and a monograph for adults, Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style, (1993).

Jason Stein of Christie’s Los Angeles and a specialist in 20th Century decorative arts, dissected the design career of William Haines in his talk The Hollywood High Style of William Haines. Mr. Haines, a silent film star who made the transition to talkies, was ruined by scandal, refusing to hide his homosexuality. While still acting he began to deal in antique furniture, and after the studio closed the door on his acting career, he converted this business into an interior design firm, designing for many of the studio people who initially were his best contacts, but finally working for clients outside the film industry. Slides of many of his interiors as well as of the pieces of furniture which he designed and had constructed for clients (many of these pieces still in production) showed a career which rejected the early overdecorated Spanish colonial styles popular in Hollywood, focused on a modified Regency feeling, and then, in later years, segued into a comfortable modernism

Finally, Hutton Wilkinson, President of Tony Duquette, Inc., did a tour-de-force slide lecture on Tony Duquette, Southern California designer of just about everything: costumes, stage sets (Camelot), interiors, furniture, jewelry, objets d’art, naïve art, objets trouves, etc. With fast-changing
slides and witty repartee, Mr. Wilkinson led us through Duquette’s fascinating career, his multiple homes, chock-a-block with art, furniture, DÉCOR, you name it. Mr. Duquette’s philosophy was that more was better and much more was best, and that it did not all have to be top quality, but could be used in a theatrical way and look top quality. All the words in the title of this session were demonstrated: decadence, glamour, fantasy, modernism and opulence, particularly the latter. What an entertaining and informative scamper we had through all these.