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Places

Title

Three Letters to an Architect Dissolving

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9pr4r13j>

Journal

Places, 4(2)

ISSN

0731-0455

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Publication Date

1987-07-01

Peer reviewed

Three Letters to an Architect Dissolving

Douglas Darden



Rowhouses

You will be deceived by the
buildings in this neighborhood.

In the empty light that
fills the day, whole blocks nod
in conformity. Brick facades
agree on what to say.

Dusk is another story.

As the sun gives up
naming the hour, houses begin
to contest each other—
a revolt against proximity.

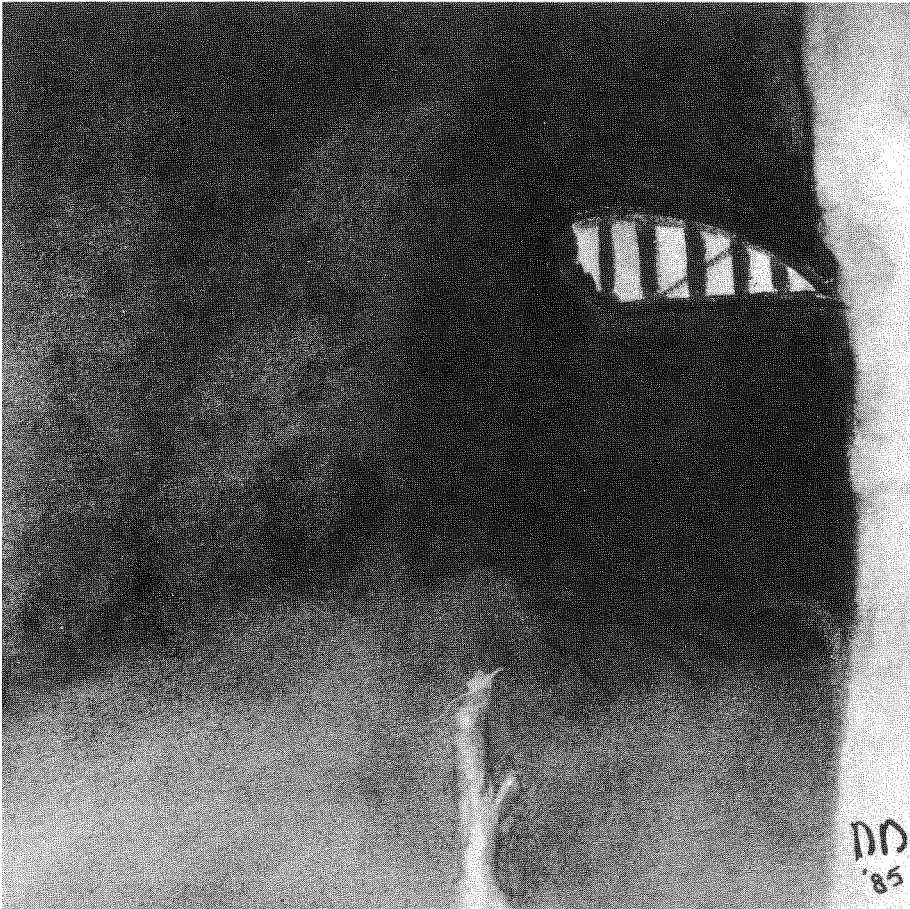
Profiles call to crow and cat;
on cool roofs tin gadgets
poke accusations of decay.

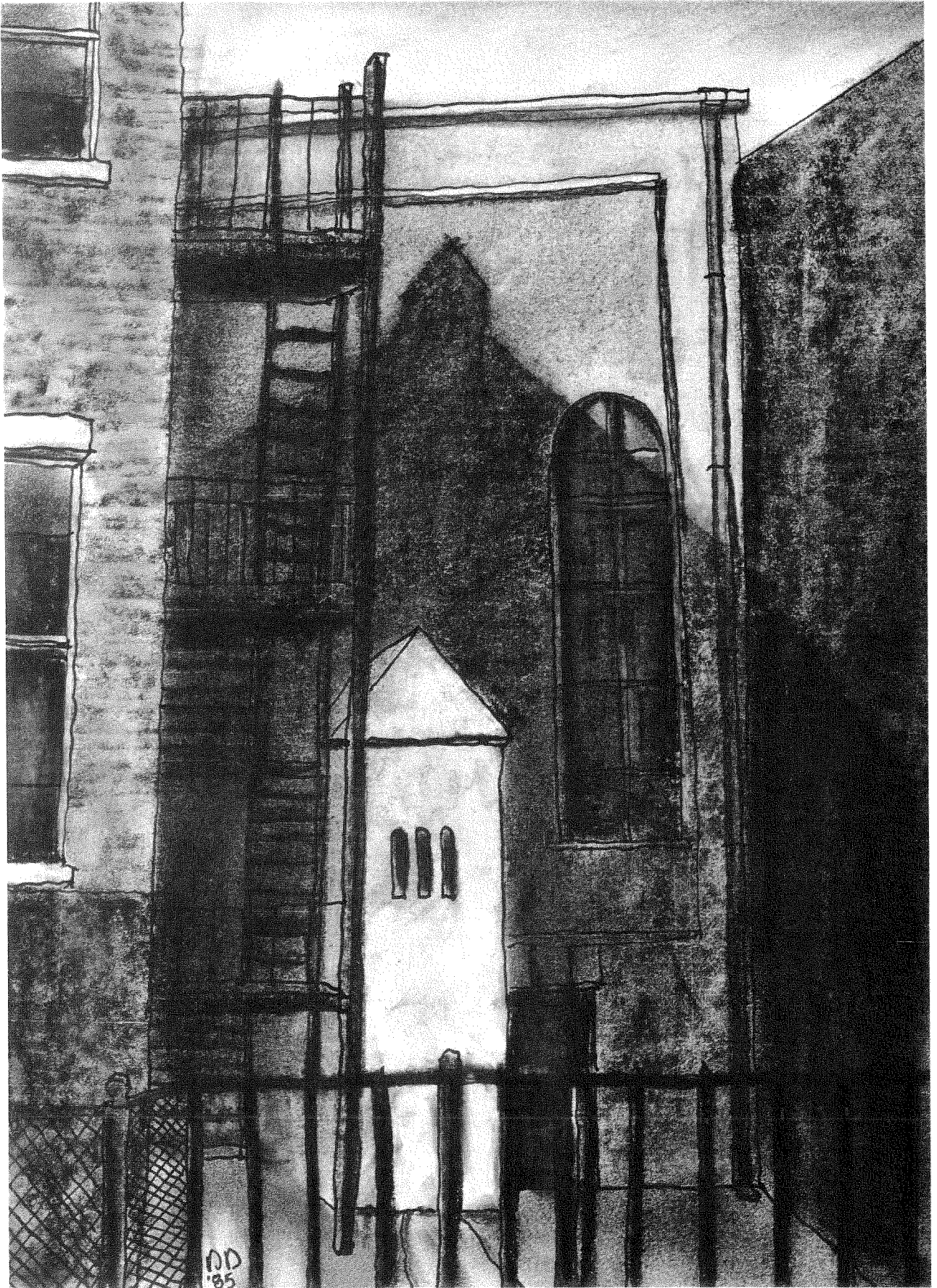
Electric lights strike at furnished
rooms. Tight quirky stairs lead to
lurid chandeliers and hallway doors,
ajar. Rows of windows unveil
a curvature of tales.

Now in a reverberating dark,
the rowhouses recede
from view: brick texts of habit
and fact; autonomous, shut.

Voyeur, en face!
Foreclose on these rows.
Don't deceive yourself. To be
an architect is to lay down your arms.

Drawings by Douglas Darden





Open Lots

There is a confinement
among these disconnected lots:
spaces are designated,
but the place is void.

The slightest debris entangles
everything. All forms resist
official history.

(In the wake of
expended urban effort,
nothing stirs. Every
lot is a detour
for the next.)

Witness the child walking past
the lots on her way to school.
At every crossing, an abnormal
hesitation, unease: the insufficiency
of her inevitable solitude.

A famous Japanese sculptor claims
that the greatest artist of this
century is the earthmover.

Dry forms replace the heavy earth.

Give up, architect: no man,
and less the rock,
revolt against these masses.

Canyons

The architect carves
a territorial niche
for the present
to commerce
with the past.

What humble frame
inscribes the action?

Frank Lloyd Wright said
that if he had to build
a monument, he would go
study the Grand Canyon.

Is this what we call humility?

Architect, you slide
on the immense concave
mirror of time,
while our age conspires
how it will end.

