

OPEN HOUSE: Large-Scale Architectural Drawing as a Medium for Engaging Public Space

ADAM MODESITT

Tulane University

CARRIE NORMAN

Tulane University

There exists ample precedent for artists engaging architectural subject matter in public work, often at the scale of buildings. The artist Richard Haas, for example, executed a series of large-scale murals illustrating architectural facades and interiors. [1] It is far less common however, for architects to deploy drawing as a medium for engaging public space. Since the era of Leon Battista Alberti, in which architectural labor divorced from construction labor, the dissemination of drawings by architects has been primarily restricted to private commissions or internal trade publications. As Robin Evans famously noted, architects' drawings are not a direct medium, but instruments in service of another medium to be executed by others. [2] Despite renewed attention to drawing among architects recently, architectural drawing still rarely engages the public realm directly. [3, 4, 5]

This text presents OPEN HOUSE, a project that explores the possibilities of large-scale architectural drawing as a medium for public engagement. A winning entry to a competition commissioned by The Helis Foundation, OPEN HOUSE is a 85' x 17' life-size orthographic section, drawn on a freestanding brick wall in downtown New Orleans.

OPEN HOUSE depicts a 1:1 scale section through the interior of a typical New Orleans home, specifically a 19th century Victorian shotgun house. Drawn as-built, the section depicts historic construction details typically unseen, such as back-to-back coal-burning fireplaces and pocket-head ("jib-head") windows, that slide upward into the wall. Amid and between historic construction details, the section depicts unadulterated,



Figure 1. A Mardi Gras indian in the kitchen of OPEN HOUSE. Photo by authors.

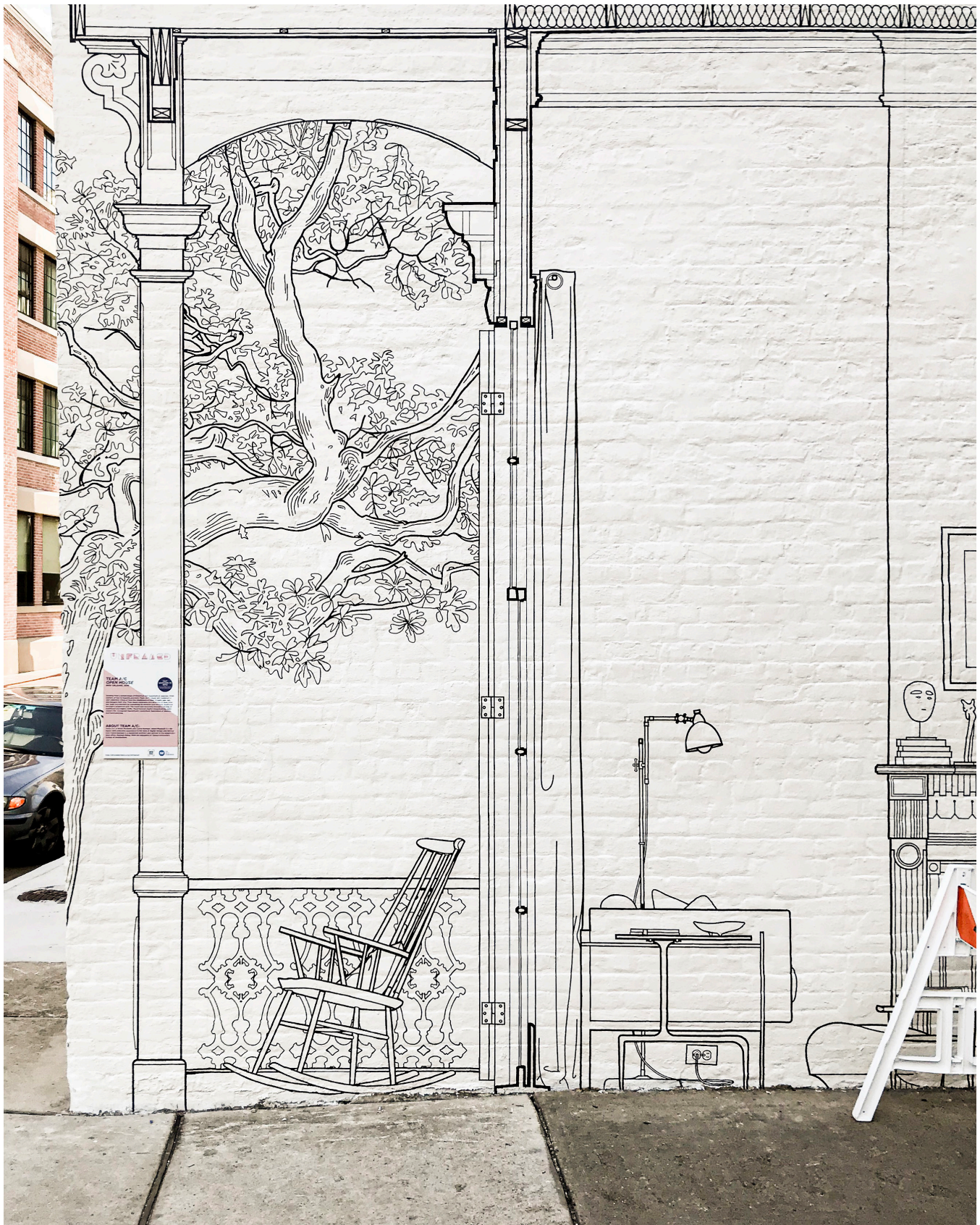


Figure 2. The front porch. Photo by authors.



Figure 3. Drawing the baseboard moulding. Photo by authors.

day-to-day, contemporary life including fixtures, furniture, and domestic trappings, such as shoes, a coffee grinder, house plants, headphones, and other wares. The drawing mixes past and present, visible and invisible, interior and exterior. Together, these features present an intimate picture of domestic life. Like an open house in real estate, from which the project borrows its title, OPEN HOUSE transforms the private interior into a public space. The floor of the house is drawn level with the sidewalk, creating a two-dimensional stage set replete with domestic props. It also provides room to play. The walls and features of the house form vertical ruling and regulating lines. From parking line striping to children's street games like hopscotch, regulating lines are common in public space but typically occupy only the horizontal plane. OPEN HOUSE becomes in part a set piece that invites passersby to become actors on a stage. The "scale figures" that occupy and play in the drawing, rather than representing the bias of the authors, become inclusive of the full diversity of the community.

The execution of an 80-foot long orthographic drawing on a worn, irregular brick wall presented an array of challenges not typically associated with acts of drawing. The scale of viewing area required a rethinking of line weights and levels of detail to operate across a wider spectrum. Architectural drawings are typically sized based on printer and plotter standards, from

8.5"x11" to ARCH E. In OPEN HOUSE, viewers may observe the drawing standing immediately adjacent, from across the street, from adjacent buildings, or from blocks away. Additionally, executing the drawing shared many parallels to building construction. To locate stencils and other implication devices, grid lines, dimensioned construction drawings, and other technical drawings were necessary. The scale of the drawing required scaffolding to implement, which in turn necessitated phasing plans and other logistical work. Line weights were drawn explicitly for larger-scale lines and developed into CNC fabricated stencils. Each line was drawn multiple times as part of the production process, first as single line in CAD (Rhino), then as a double lines making explicit the width of the line-weight, then with automated stencil tabs (a form of dashed lines), then as instructions for CNC cutting, then as traced profiles, and then ultimately as infill. Despite substantial application of digital technologies, the final step in the production remained, like building construction, an act of manual labor: painting and physically drawing on the brick surface.

The intertwined display of public and hidden elements in OPEN HOUSE—of domestic life, of historic construction details, of technical drawing conventions—is a prompt to reconsider our relationship with buildings, drawings, history, and domesticity.



Figure 4. Filling in the lineweight. Photo by authors.



Figure 5. Drawing from stencils. Photo by authors.



Figure 6. Photographing the parlor. Photo by authors.

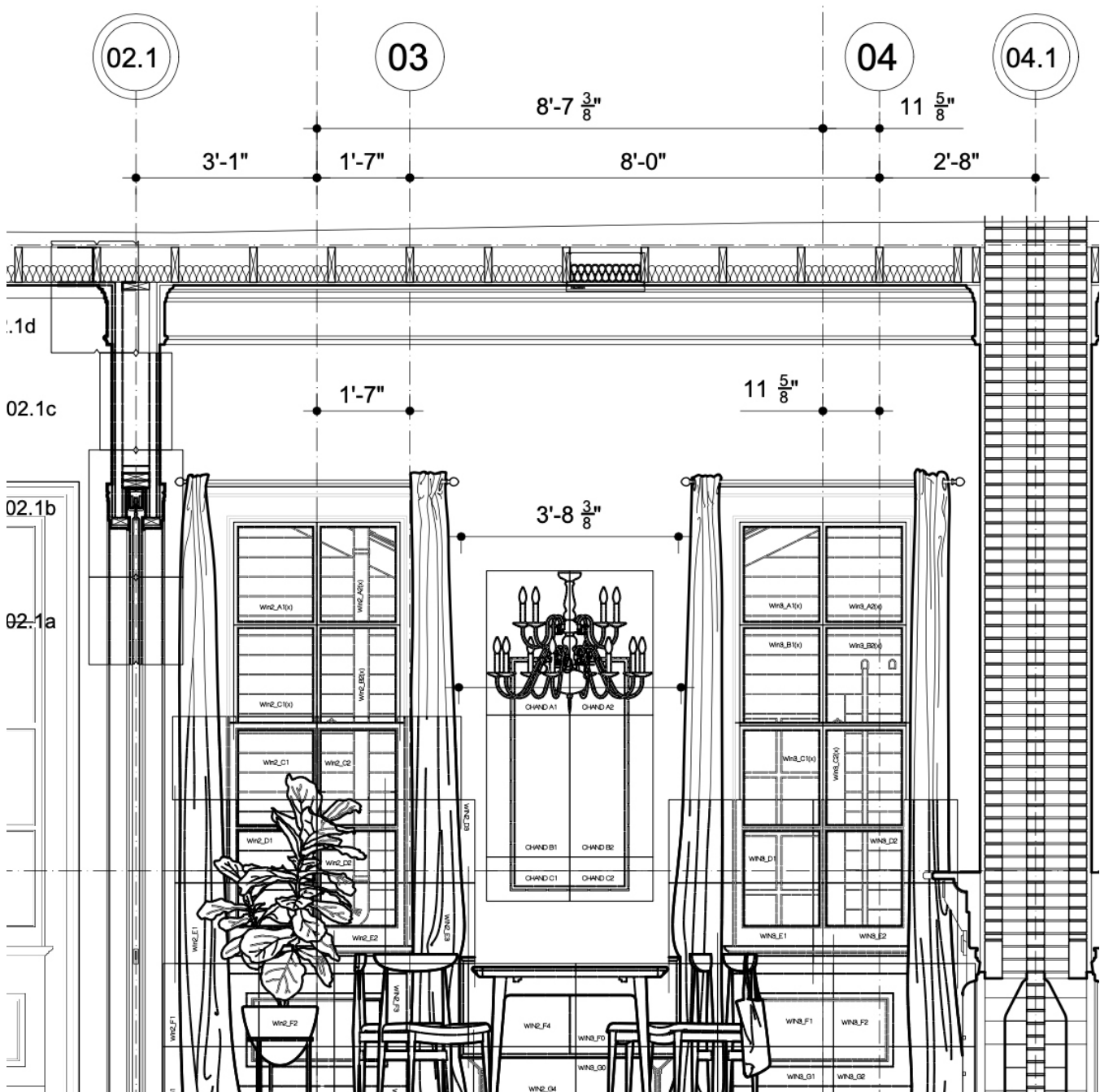


Figure 7. Construction drawings of parlor two. Drawing by authors.

The medium of large-scale drawing offers opportunity for new relationships between architecture and public space.

ENDNOTES

1. Siah Armajani, Niki Logis, Nathaniel Lieberman, Christopher Sproat, Robert Guillot, Richard Haas, and Vito Acconci, "The Exuviae of Visions: Architecture as a Subject for Art," *Perspecta* 18 (1982): 66–107.
2. Robin Evans, *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (London: AA, 1997).
3. Michael Meredith and Hilary Sample, eds., *An Unfinished Encyclopedia of Scale Figures Without Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

4. Paul Lewis, Marc Tsutsumaki, and David J. Lewis, *Manual of Section* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2016).
5. Atelier Bow-Wow and Yoshiharu Tsukamoto, *Graphic Anatomy* (Tokyo: Toto, 2014).

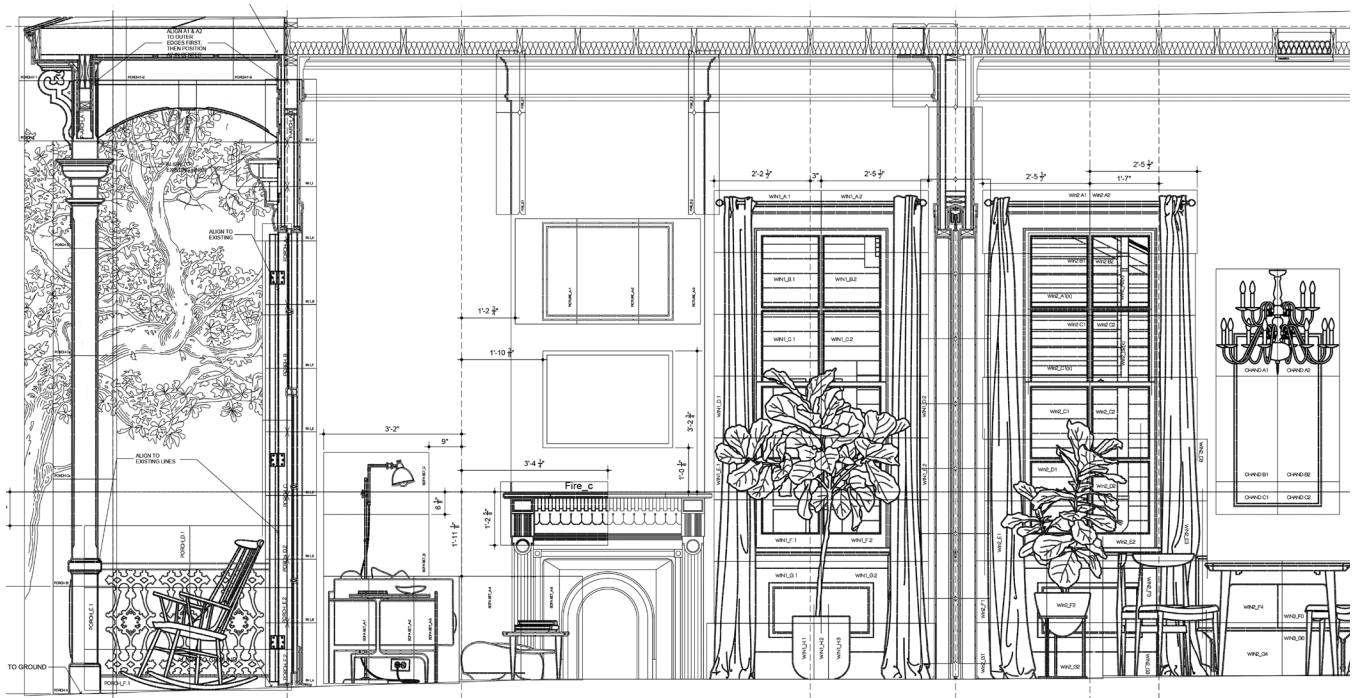


Figure 9. Construction drawing of front of house. Drawing by authors.



Figure 10. Photo of front of house. Photo by authors.