



In a December 2008 review of the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) by Ada Louise Huxtable, the *Wall Street Journal* architecture critic asserted that "something has gone noticeably wrong." Talking about the design by Brad Cloepfil and Allied Works Architecture (AWA) two months after the building's opening, what exactly had gone wrong? According to her the "bad move has been the late insertion of a picture window on the restaurant floor" near the top of the ten-story building. But a visit to AWA's website years later to see photos of the building yields the quizzical response, "What picture window?"

A screenshot from the architect's web page, accessed April 3, 2012, is found opposite, and below it is a photo of the exact same view taken later that day. The difference between the two photographs is obvious: the picture window, which Huxtable pointed out "the client insisted and the architect resisted," is missing, but seeing the building in person reveals that this middle section is all too real. Bypassing the reality of client and any disagreements therein, AWA made the photographic representation on their web page resemble the original intention. Per a correspondence with the architects, they altered the photo to show the building as designed, given that the alteration to the facade was done without their consent or authorization.

In other words, AWA treated the photo like a rendering—a means of depicting a design idea—rather than as a photographic record of the building as realized.

Photoshop, the tool of choice for adding

the last of bit of polish to a rendering, is used to eliminate the central portion of the picture window, the horizontal expanse that paints a letter H across the facade. Glazed terracotta tiles "stamped" (in Photoshop parlance) from above and below have taken its place and reinstate the reading of the wide vertical bands at the top half of the building.

As a tool, Photoshop is also used greatly by the professional photographers that furnish architects with supposedly honest images of their completed buildings. Various exposures are combined into one image, colors are adjusted, superfluous obstructions—stoplights, garbage cans, etc.—are magically removed. In the Photoshop environment, renderings and photographs are the same, since all pixels are equal. They have the same size, each is defined by RGB values, they can all be modified like the rest.

Even beyond this technical view, the photorealism of renderings and the polish of photographs merge the two types of images closer together. It's not a stretch to treat one like the other, to see a photo as a malleable document that is imbued with idea, intention, and reality. Yet by denying a major part of a building as completed, AWA's photo of MAD also denies the process of its realization.

This is a form of therapy that paints the architect in a positive light and allows him to forget about the conflicts that compromised the original vision.

Author's Note: Many thanks to Matt Peddie for bringing the photo analyzed in this essay to my attention.