

henry ford residence

marion mahony's perspectives 1906-1937: a visual analysis

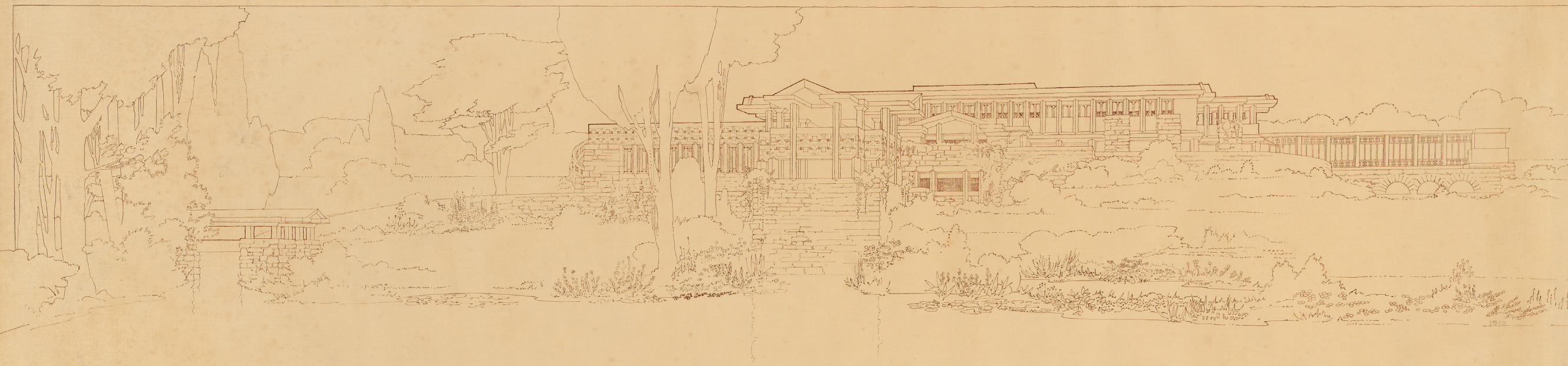
stein johansen

the architect, history and her drawing

I want to thank Jurjen Zeinstra for guiding me through the writing of this thesis and for deepening my appreciation for architectural drawings, past and present. Additionally, I want to thank the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, for providing much of the image material found in this thesis.

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Henry Ford Residence (elevational perspective drawing), Positive Vandyke print on drafting cloth by M. Mahony (Northwestern University Archives, 1912)

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Marion Mahony: Architect & Artist

At the turn of the 19th century, the modernist wave within art and architecture was in full swing. A period of experimentation and progressive thinking, this was a moment when architects challenged the conventions of architecture and proposed visions for the architecture of the future. One prominent and perhaps underappreciated figure in this time was the architect and visual artist Marion Mahony Griffin¹. Starting off her career in 1894, Mahony became the second registered female architect in the United States and the first employee of Frank Lloyd Wright. Working closely with Wright, Marion became known for her evocative presentation work and in particular her perspective drawings.

In broad terms, there exists two main categories of architectural drawings; the first being notational drawings, describing an architectural object through specification (realistic representation), and imaginative drawings, intended to evoke perceptual qualities of a project (abstract representation) (Bafna, 2008, p.536). While depicting her buildings in a relatively true-to-form manner, Mahony introduces visual elements that straddle the line between art and architecture. This infusion of elements from graphic arts into her architectural renders diffuses the distinction between the two disciplines and allows us to judge the works based both on their architectural merits and on their qualities as graphic compositions in their own right. This thesis will be focusing on the latter, through an analysis of a selection of Mahony's perspective renders between the years 1906 and 1937.

Beginning with an analysis of Mahony's drawing for the Henry Ford residence in Dearborn, Michigan (figure 2), each chapter will elaborate on a specific feature of this drawing, before being compared to another drawing of Mahony. Each of

¹ Throughout this thesis I will be referring to Marion Mahony by her maiden name - Mahony - in order to avoid any confusion with her husband, Walter Burley Griffin.



Figure 1: Marion Mahony Griffin (New York Historical Society, date unknown) Retrieved from https://www.landmarks.org/women_built_type/marion-mahony-griffin/

these drawings will be looked at in greater detail, culminating in a series of image analyses, aiming to uncover commonalities between some of the works of Marion Mahony, and how these features impact our perception of her drawings.

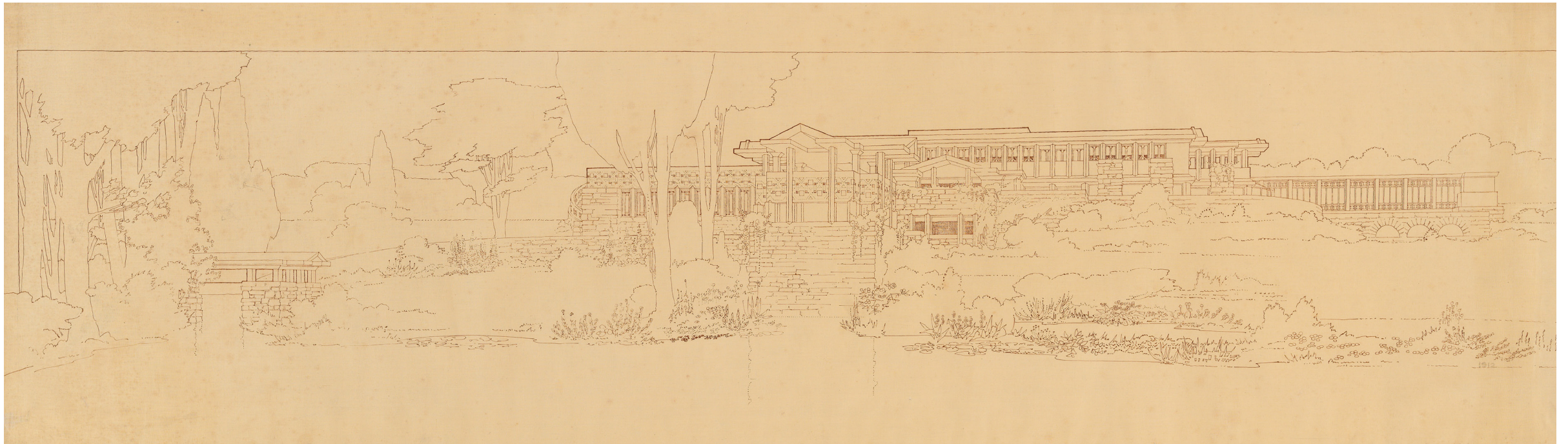


Figure 2: Henry Ford Residence (elevational perspective drawing) by M. Mahony (Northwestern University Archives, 1912)

I. One With Nature. Marion Mahony & the Henry Ford Residence

The Henry Ford dwelling (figure 2) was designed by the office of Frank Lloyd Wright in 1912. Having departed for Europe for one year in 1909, Frank Lloyd Wright left several of his ongoing and future commissions to be completed by architects and associates in his office under the leadership of Hermann von Holst. Many of Frank Lloyd Wright's houses in this period were thus credited to Von Holst, however, the question of attribution has been discussed in later years (Birmingham, 2006). Historian H. Allen Brooks attributes the designs for the Henry Ford dwelling, specifically, to Marion Mahony, citing her distinctive architectural style as evidence of this (Brooks, p.164)².

The ten-bedroom house was designed for automaker Henry Ford of the Ford Motor Company at his Dearborn, Michigan estate. The house is arranged over three storeys on a sloping

site overlooking a river. Organised in a pinwheel arrangement, the sprawling floorplan features multiple living rooms, guest rooms, a library, a music room, an indoor pool and several outdoor porches. The architecture aligns with that of the prairie school with its wide projecting eaves, arts & crafts detailing and long, horizontal lines. (Brooks, p.163)

Disputes between the architects and client resulted in the completed house not being built as per the Frank Lloyd Wright/Marion Mahony³ designs but instead handed over to William H. Van Tine, who made significant alterations to the design, turning it into a mix between the prairie style and English gothic revival before its completion in 1915 (Brooks, p.163). The Marion Mahony design for this house thus only appears in the drawings produced by the architect in 1912. While the attribution of work in the office of Frank Lloyd Wright is complicated (and perhaps best left to the historians), there is no question that Marion Mahony was the brain behind much of the visual ma-

² A more extensive discussion on the attribution of several projects produced in Wright's office during this period, including the Henry Ford House, can be found in H.A. Brooks, (1972), *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and his Midwest Contemporaries*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press

³ H. A. Brooks suggests that the Ford house was designed primarily by Marion Mahony, likely based on preliminary sketches done by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1909. (Brooks, 1972, p.163)

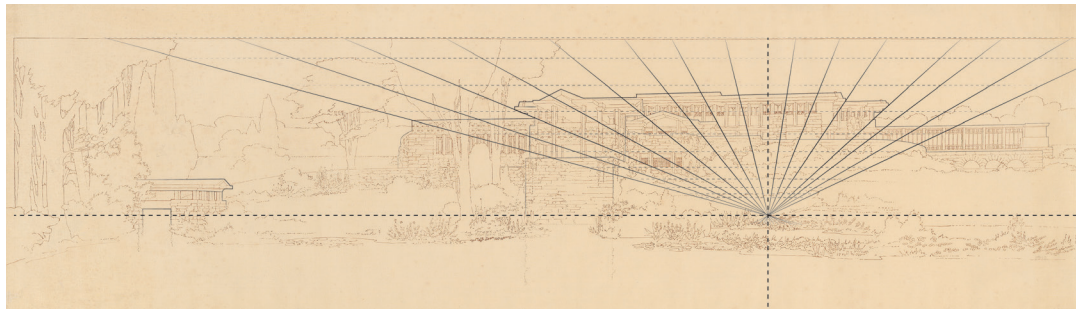


Figure 3: Location of perspectival construction lines. Own manipulation of original drawing.

terial produced in the office at the time, the Henry Ford house drawings included. A skilled architectural visualizer, Mahony's contribution to the visual material in the office is evidenced in the renders of Frank Lloyd Wright's houses of the period (Krutz, p.51).

The drawing, typical of Mahony's work at the time, is a perspective line drawing depicting the house as seen from the river below. A single line frames the top borders of the image⁴, leaving the lower parts of the composition to spill into negative space, emphasising the building's horizontal qualities and strong relationship with the water. Foliage is rendered in simple silhouettes, with more detailed illustrations in the foreground and around the house itself. This has the effect of creating depth in the image, and a sense of the house bleeding into the landscape. The connection between building and site is further emphasised by the composition of the image itself. The house is positioned offset in the frame, giving generous attention to the garden while allowing space for a picturesque vignette of the little boathouse. A low horizon line (figure 3) further exaggerates the fall of the site. As was typical of Mahony's drawings, emphasis is placed primarily on the foreground (foliage) and the centre of the image (the house) while the background is largely an abstraction (Krutz, p.63).

⁴ I am making the assumption that the image has been cropped and the frame indeed continues to the right of the image, as was common in Marion Mahony's visuals.

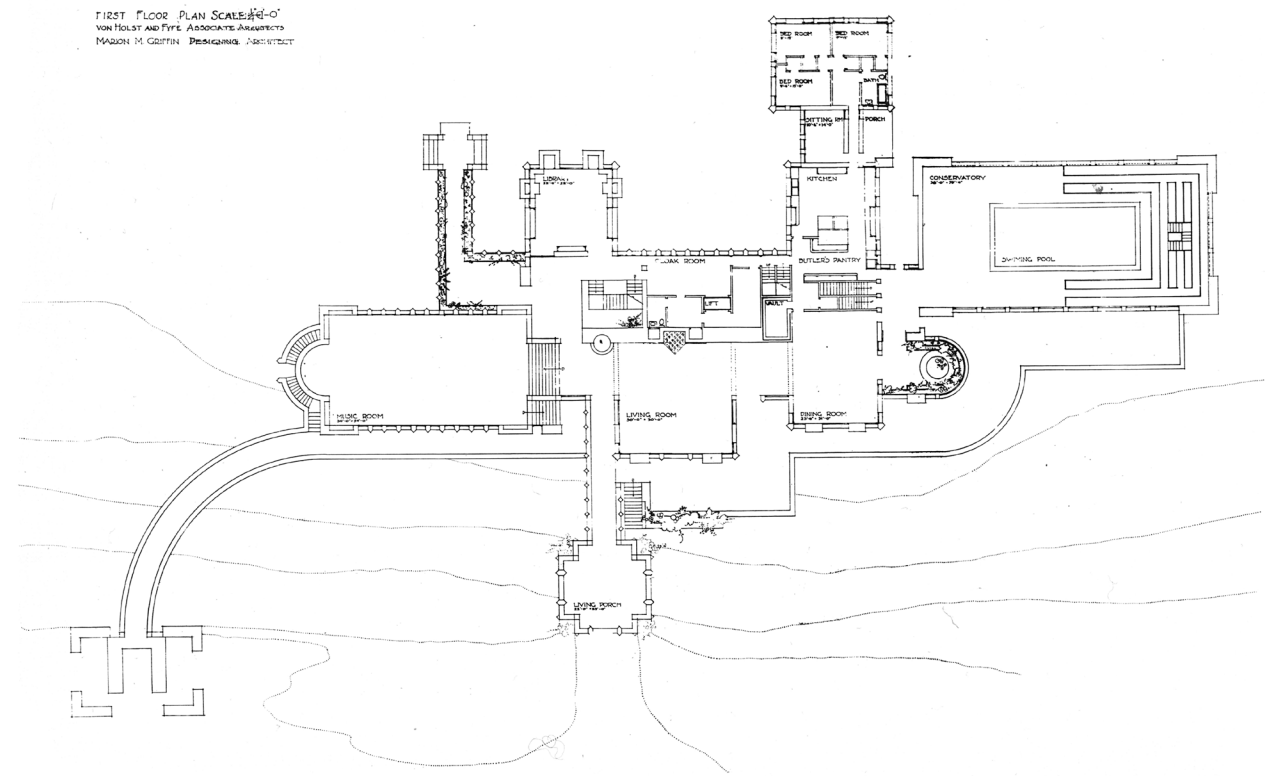


Figure 4: Henry Ford Residence (plan) by M. Mahony (Northwestern University Archives, 1912)

Deconstructing the Ford house drawing

In the leftmost quarter of the Ford house perspective drawing sits a boathouse, partly obscured by lightly drawn trees and foliage. The straight lines of the stonework contrast with the more wild, organic lines of the surrounding vegetation. In contrast to the main house, the openings of the boathouse are drawn with a thicker line weight, signalling that the structure is open-aired and not enclosed. This is supported by the floor plan (figure 4), in which the little building is only mentioned by a simple outline, perhaps also noting its secondary role to the main house.

The central portion of the composition features the main character; the house. Being the most heavily detailed part of the drawing, it is rendered in dense linework, depicting the dwelling as

it sits in the landscape. In the foreground, the 'living porch' juts out, and as its walls extend downwards, they merge with the water below. Behind the porch, a curved retaining wall slopes up from the boathouse. Running behind the porch, it meets the house before continuing on the level above, enveloping the house in one fluid motion. Piercing the lower parts of the stone wall are three openings, the only basement windows shown in the drawing. These windows display a discrepancy in relation to the other openings, in that they are drawn with a dark, linear hatch. It is unclear why this effect has been applied; perhaps it signifies a certain glazing type or stained glass, or is it simply a graphic effect to avoid the window disappearing in the foliage?

Thicker line weights are applied to two areas of the main house. The first, and most obvious is the thick line that runs along the roofline of the house. Interestingly, the outline does not extend to the entire house, but only select parts. At the left corner of the house, the line terminates when meeting the line of the abstracted trees in the background. On the right-hand side, the line extends until it meets the building form of the 'conservatory' behind. The thicker line has the effect of consolidating all of the layers of the house into one monolithic object. A consequence of this is that the feeling of perspective and depth within the drawing, and in particular the distance between the different building forms, become diffused. A clear example of this is the porch in the foreground, which in reality extends quite a distance from the house yet appears at first glance as a part of the structure behind it. As the thicker line is a recurring theme in Marion Mahony's drawings, it can only be assumed that this is an intentional effect; perhaps wanting to blend the house with the landscape, the line distinguishing the building below from the skies above. The second use of the thicker line can be seen applied to the porch above the dining room, where similarly to the boathouse, the thicker outlines signify an open-air space.

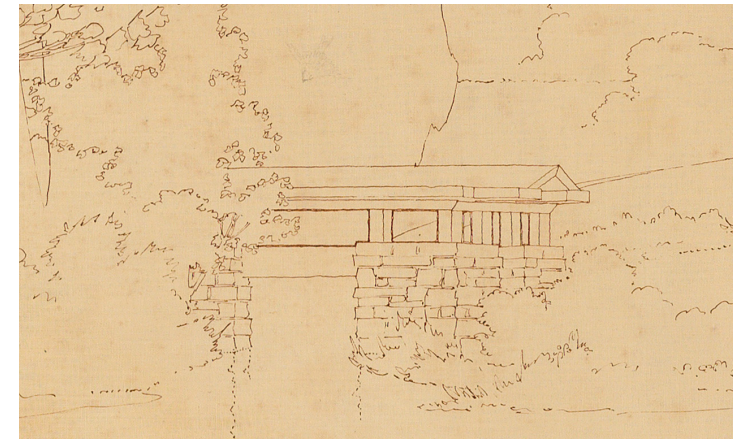


Figure 5: Detail, the boat house

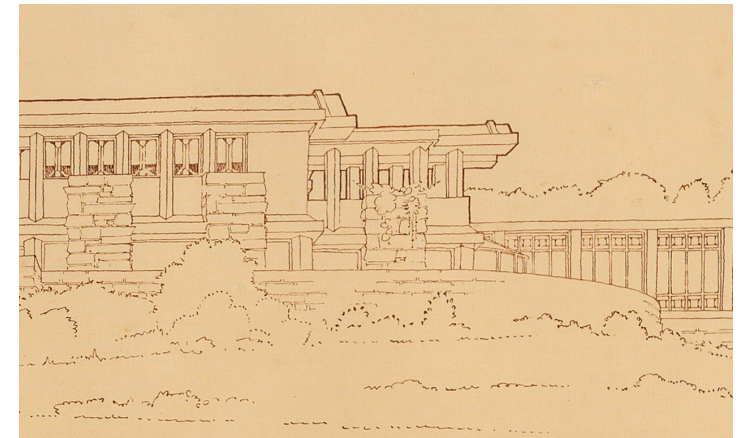


Figure 6: Detail showing the curved retaining wall and the upper-level open porch.

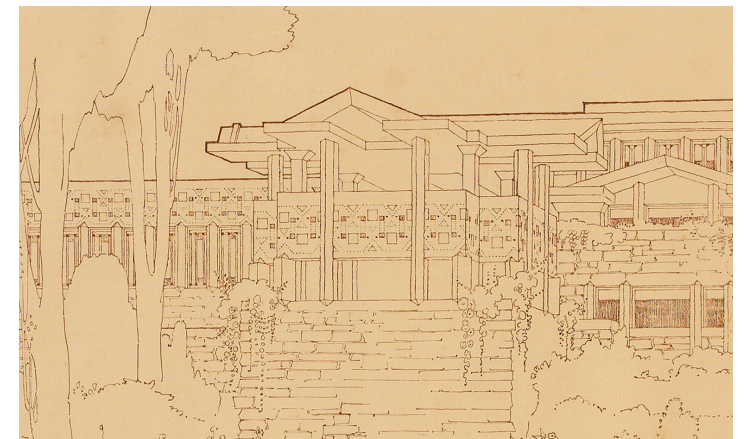


Figure 7: Detail of the 'living porch', appearing as part of the overall building form.

Ornamentation

The Ford house is drawn with six different types of ornament. Starting from the left, the first is a pattern of simple geometric shapes (figure 8) applied as a band to parapets and balcony walls in what appears to be plaster of concrete. The pattern is made up of triangles and squares of varying sizes, the lower-most triangles interlocking with the second ornament; the extruded column (figure 8). This triangle-shaped extruded form is used as window sills and columns and features as a repetitive element on almost all parts of the house. Three types of stained glass windows are shown (figures 8, 9, 10), each with a different design. The final 'ornament' can be seen at the base of the 'conservatory' wing, where three stone arches - and the only curved openings in the drawing - are included in the patio wall (figure 10). The ornaments as they are presented in the drawing add texture and variety to the impression of the building, making it appear materially denser in comparison with the substantial portions of negative space immediately adjacent to it. Further, the linework of the building complements the densely drawn foliage that exists elsewhere in the drawing, creating an overall sense of balance to the composition.

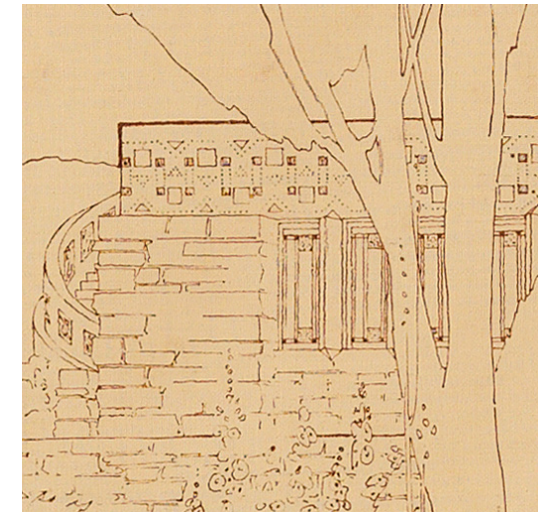


Figure 8: Detail of geometric pattern, profiled window sill and stained glazing

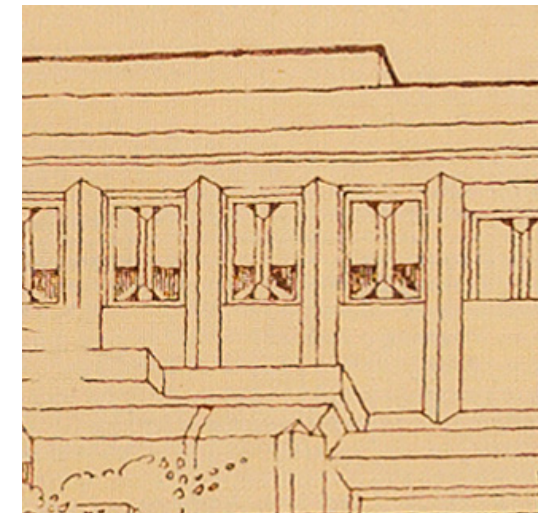


Figure 9: Detail of stained glass at the upper level of the house.

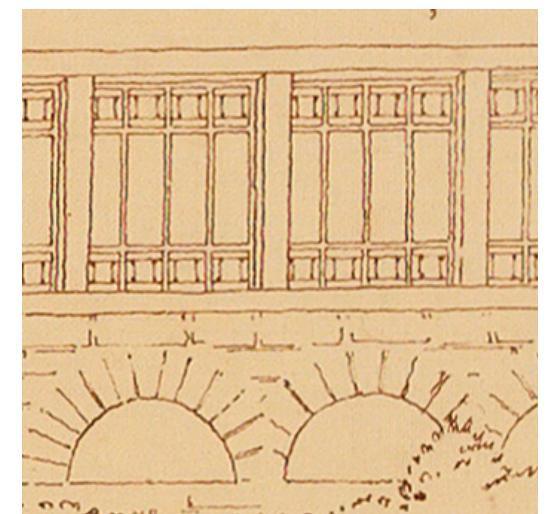


Figure 10: Detail of the 'conservatory', featuring stained glass and the arched openings below.

2. Ukiyo-e: Japonism in Chicago

Drawing styles and visual compositions are not arbitrary. The way a drawing is structured says something about what the architect and/or artist wants to convey about a project. The stylistic choices made are a reflection of how the architect wants the building to be perceived, and it is also - usually - a reflection of the trends of the time. Wanting to illustrate their buildings in the most flattering ways, an architect will naturally select a style that makes their audience (client, government authorities, public) understand and agree with the design being proposed (Thomine-Berrada, p. 143).

Marion Mahony completed her education at MIT in Massachusetts in 1894, becoming the second registered female architect in the United States. Mahony was also the first employee of Frank Lloyd Wright, where she assisted both on design and visualisation (van Zanten, p. 3). Wright himself held a large collection of Japanese Ukiyo-e prints which had a great influence on his own work as he perceived them to contain visual elements that aligned with his ideals of a utopian society in harmony with nature. The Ukiyo-e prints originated in the 17th and 18th centuries in Japan and typically featured woodblock prints with strongly outlined forms, flat colours and creative use of perspective. Wright encouraged his assistant, Mahony, to use stylistic elements from these prints in her renderings as they would harmonize well with the style of the prairie-style buildings that he was designing⁵ (Roberts, 2013, p.3-10). The degree to which Marion Mahony directly contributed to these designs, as well as the architectural designs attributed to architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, and later her husband Walter Burley Griffin, has been debated in later years, with scholars suggesting that her involvement was likely downplayed (Birmingham, 2006).

⁵Ellen E. Roberts notes that "Wright's high regard for ukiyo-e was, like that of most Westerners at this time, grounded in their formal characteristics rather than in any understanding of their original meaning in Japanese culture", suggesting that their appreciation for the Japanese prints was limited to their inherent visual appeal. (Roberts, 2013, p.6)



Figure 11: Swallows and Cherry Blossoms (colour woodblock print) by U. Hiroshige (The Art Institute of Chicago, Clarence Buckingham Collection, early 1830s). Example of prints used as inspiration for Chicago architects and artists around the year 1900.

Birch Burdette-Long and Chicago Japonism

Paul Kruty argues in *Marion Mahony Reconsidered* that it was the draftsman Birch Burdette Long that played a pioneering role in introducing the Japanese aesthetic to the presentation drawings of Frank Lloyd Wright's office (Kruty, 2011, p.58). Around 1900, a wave of Japanese influence travelled across the Chicago architectural scene, following several exhibitions of Japanese art in the previous two decades. These exhibitions inspired architects and artists alike, with Japanese influences starting to be incorporated both into the visual representation and the actual architecture being produced (Roberts, 2013). Architects such as Arthur Heun produced painterly images of his houses which featured Japanese-esque architectural forms such as upturned gables. In a perspective of the Brinsmaid house from 1900, the image is divided into a three-part form, clearly inspired by Japanese prints. Meanwhile, the Chicago visualiser and draftsman Birch Burdette Long produced drawings that, according to Paul Kruty, were "less painterly and more abstract", which is attributed to "developments in European graphic arts, but clearly [still] related to Japanese art" (Kruty, 2011, p.58). The connection to European arts of the period can be exemplified by the Art Nouveau movement, which was in part inspired by the organic lines of the Ukiyo-e prints (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022). Artists such as the British illustrator Aubrey Beardsley and Viennese architect Otto Wagner (figures 12 & 13) both relied on Japanese woodblock prints as an inspiration for their visual representations (Souter, 2012, p.41). The Japonism seen in Chicago was thus not an isolated phenomenon but part of a wider Western appreciation for Eastern art.

In 1901, Birch Burdette Long produced an image of a walkway and a pergola for the Catalogue of the Annual Exhibition of the Chicago Architectural Club (C.A.C), which featured a vertical



Figure 12: The Climax (Illustration for Oscar Wilde's *Salome*) by A. Beardsley (Tate Gallery, 1893)



Figure 13: Church at Steinhof by O. Wagner (Museum of Vienna, 1903)

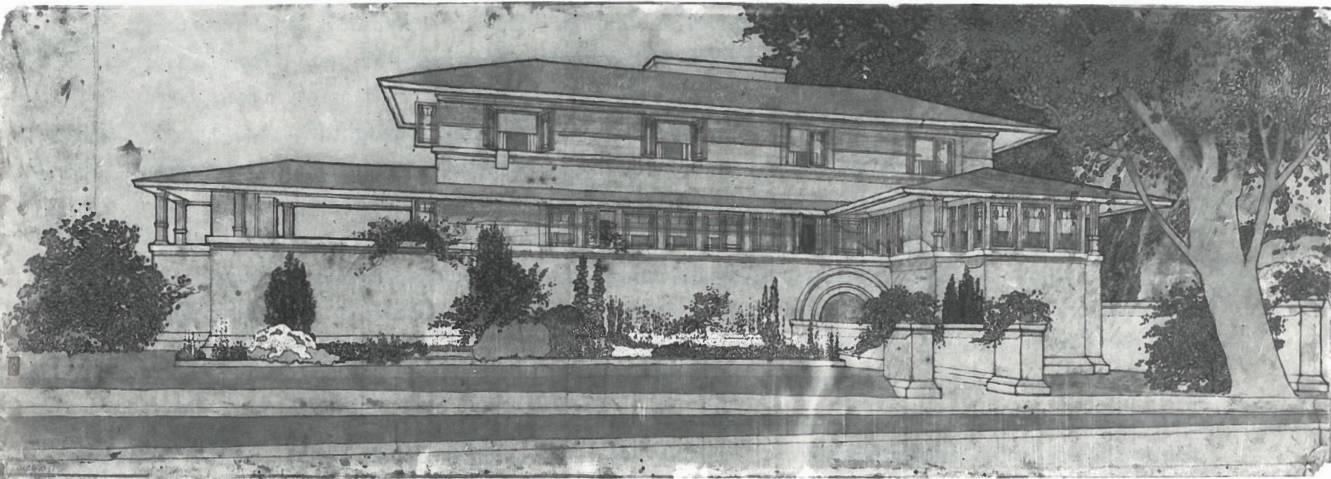


Figure 14: Frank Thomas House, (perspective view) by B. B. Long (Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 1901-02)

three-part composition with the building itself being placed in the upper-left corner of the middle panel. Around two-thirds of the image is given to the foreground, accentuating details such as the water lilies, planter boxes and the foliage running along the walkway. The building itself is rendered in black linework and appears bright in contrast with the otherwise rather darkly toned image. The background consists of highly abstracted dark trees that cover nearly the entire sky, only allowing small spots of light to piece through.

When Frank Lloyd Wright was preparing the first showcase of his new "Prairie architecture" for the 1902 C.A.C exhibition, he commissioned Burdette Long to produce perspective drawings for several of his buildings. Paul Kruty suggests that it is in the Burdette Long-drawing for the Frank Thomas house (1901-02, figure 14) that we can identify several important characteristics later seen in Marion Mahony's drawings. These include foliage rendered in strong outlines, uniform application of colour, shadows used strategically as graphic forms (such as when accentuating a projecting eave), and a sky that abruptly ends with a straight vertical line (Kruty, 2011, p.58). It was likely this drawing technique that Marion Mahony built upon for her drawing of the Unity Temple in 1906.

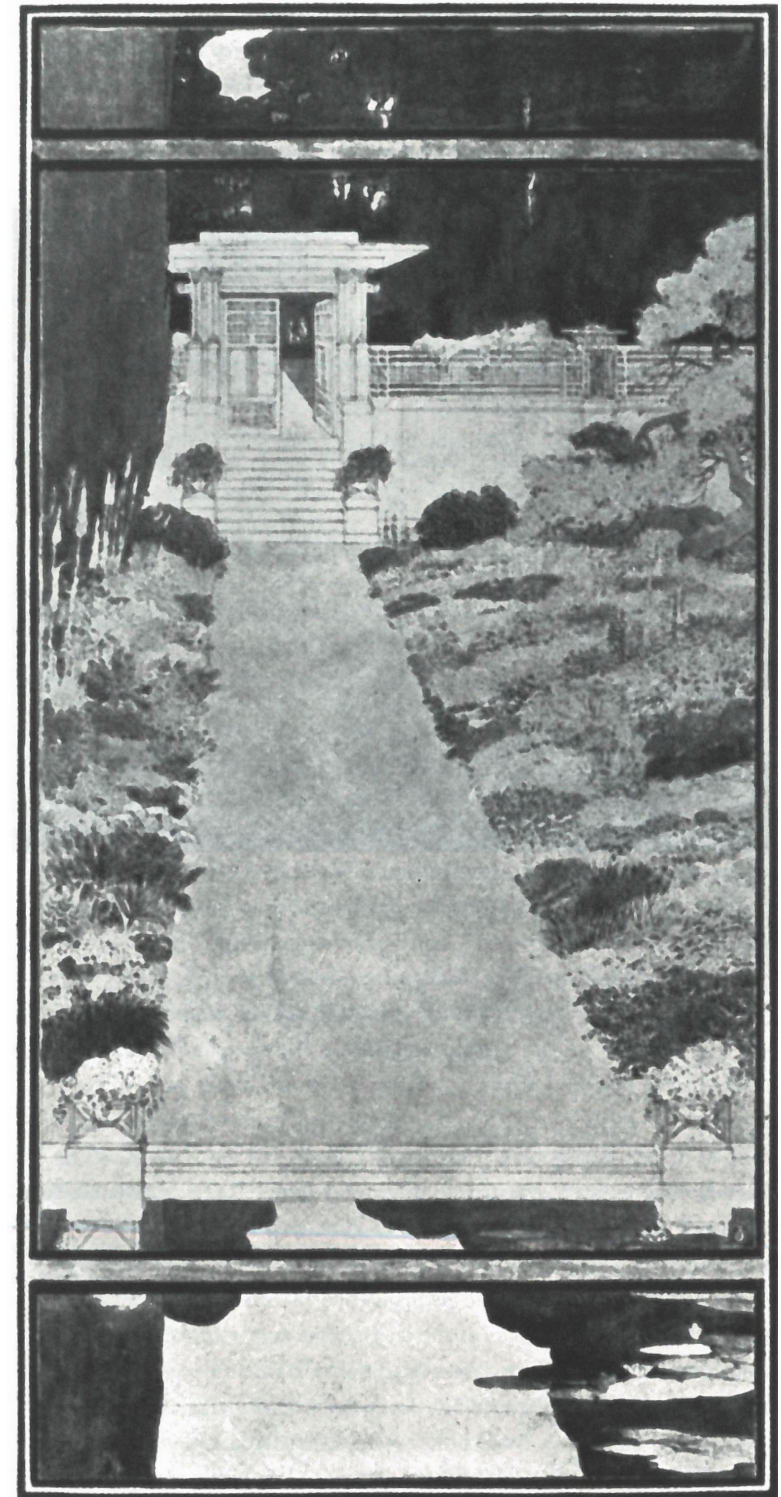


Figure 15: Catalogue of the Annual Exhibition of the Chicago Architectural Club (Title page) by B. B. Long (Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 1901)

3. The line drawing: Abstraction and the Unity Temple drawings

Rendered in black pen on off-white paper, the Henry Ford dwelling perspective (figure 2) is devoid of additional colour and textures, relying exclusively on black lines of various thicknesses. This version of Marion Mahony's distinctive line drawings seemingly first appears in the drawings for Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in 1906 (Kruty, 2011, p.63)⁶. The drawing shows a frontal perspective view of the Temple as seen from the street. Situated in the middle-ground of the perspective, the building is drawn with crisp lines and flat surface treatments, diverting much of the visual attention to the ornaments and vegetation that embellish the building. Human figures are placed in front of the main entry, emphasising the monolithic appearance of the structure. A number of trees provide a backdrop for the building, while two more detailed trees frame the building in the foreground. The ground in front of the building is left largely blank, with only dotted lines suggesting a footpath, grass strip and kerbs.

The first version of the image, produced for a local design committee presentation, is a watercolour rendered in soft, earthy colours, with the building blending into the composition. The building is delineated in high detail density while elements in the foreground and background are kept largely abstract. A lighter shade of off-white applied to the face of the walls makes the building stand out from the rest of the composition, the temple appearing almost to be glowing within the murky backdrop. When preparing the building for publication in the local newspaper, an abstracted line drawing fit for print media was created (Kruty, 2011, p.66). The drawing was traced by Mahony, and, while being the exact same motif, appears very different from the original drawing. Instead of abstract washes of colour, the trees are now rendered in individually drawn

⁶Wright had at the time relied on George M. Niedecken to create many of his presentation drawings. Not believing his 'conservative' drawing style to be sufficient for such an important commission, Mahony was brought in to create drawings in a more evocative, Japanese-inspired style as popularised in Wright's office by Birch Burdette Long. (Kruty, 2011, p.63)

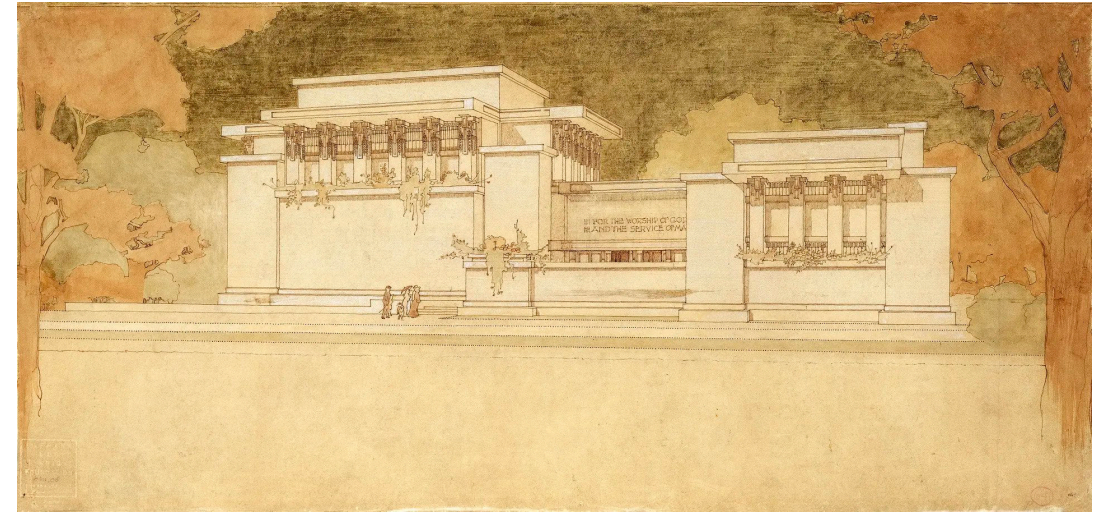


Figure 16: Rendering of Unity Temple, Oak Park, Illinois by M. Mahony (for F. L. Wright, Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 1906)

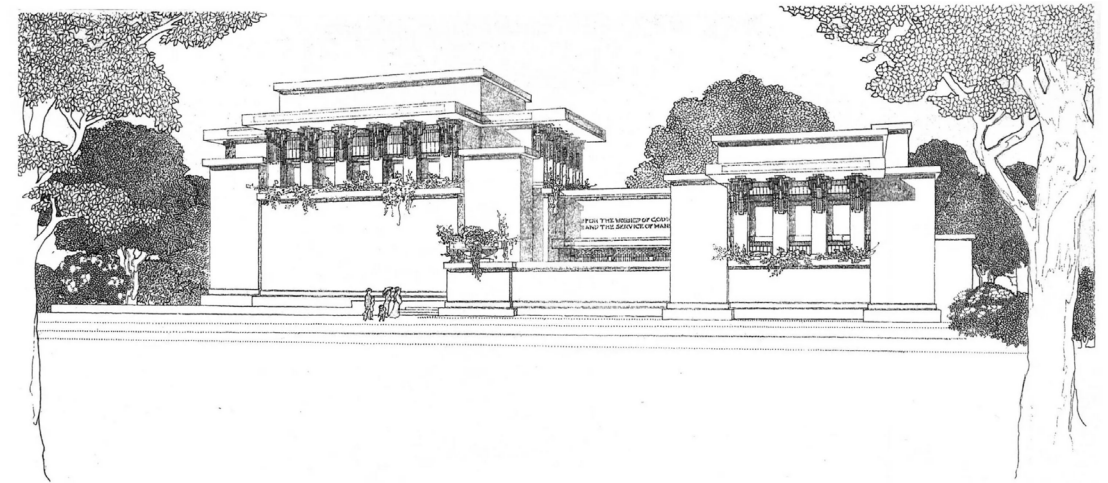


Figure 17: Line-cut of Unity Temple, Oak Park, Illinois by M. Mahony (for F. L. Wright, Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 1906)

leaves, with the foliage density increasing with the perspective. This depth effect creates a dark backdrop for the building, allowing the building to remain the visual focus of the drawing without using contrasting colour treatments.

Paul Kruty suggests that the drawing for Unit Temple was a defining moment for Marion Mahony, with the abstraction applied to the second drawing signalling a shift in Mahony's drawing style from a painterly approach to one of increased abstraction as seen in later works (Kruty, 2011, p. 68). Whether or not this is accurate, the drawings demonstrate two very different ways of illustrating a building and how media constraints can have a direct effect on the drawings produced by architects. As architects want to advertise their buildings in the most flattering way, they benefit from utilising the predominant media formats to their best advantage and it appears that Marion Mahony has here created a higher contrast line drawing in order to establish a similar effect to her larger-format original drawing. The fact that this treatment seemingly created a new drawing style demonstrates the significance that predominant media formats have on the images architects produce.



Figure 18: The Unity Temple, Oak Park. Retrieved from <https://www.chicagoarchitecture.org/2015/02/02/listpix-wright-buildings-could-become-official-world-treasures/flw-01/>



Figure 19: View from Summit of Mount Ainslie (perspective drawing) by M. Mahony (National Library of Australia, 1912)

4. Unconventional compositions

Being a severely horizontal composition, the Ford house drawing (figure 2) sprawls out across the page, mirroring the equally sprawled floor plan of the house it depicts. The image can be roughly split into three parts; the first comprising the boat-house, the second the house in the foreground and the third the house in the background. This mirrors a tendency in the Japanese Ukiyo-e prints to split compositions into three parts, with the main image being situated in the centre, and two panels of additional, yet secondary information flanking it on either side. This compositional effect can also be observed in Marion Mahony's 1912 Canberra competition drawings (figure 19).

Exaggerated Horizontality: the Canberra competition

In 1912, the same year the Ford residence was designed, a very different project could also be found on Marion Mahony's drawing board. In collaboration with her now-husband, Walter Burley Griffin⁷, they designed their competition entry

⁷Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin, an ex-employee of Frank Lloyd Wright, married in 1911, after which Mahony joined Burley Griffin's studio. (Brooks, 1972, p. 79)

for the new national capital of Australia; Canberra. The presentation panels were all drawn by Mahony, utilizing her distinctive Japanese-inspired drawing technique (van Zanten, 2011, p. 16).

Similarly to the Henry Ford drawing, the focus of the Canberra perspective is in the centre and foreground of the image, with the natural elements closest to the point of view being rendered in quite a lot of detail. The background of the hillsides is left abstracted. Being a 3-part composition, the centre of the image is aligned with the central axis of the proposed Capitol building, signifying its importance within the urban plan. The central focus is further emphasised by the two outer panels appearing faded, which in conjunction with the very detailed foreground creates an effect similar to that of observing the view through a window. The urban plan pivots outwards in two directions, creating a sense of multiple vanishing points within the drawing, emphasising the vastness of the empty landscape beyond

the city. As with the Ford house drawing, the horizontality of the drawing itself underscores the manner in which the plan relates to its landscape. The colours used are a mix of browns and blues, mirroring the toned-down colour palette of the Japanese Uki-e prints (Roberts, 2013).

Extreme verticality: the Hardy House

The Hardy House (figure 21), designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1906, features a similarly dramatic composition, but this time it is the vertical dimension that has been exploited. Situated atop a hillside in Racine, Wisconsin, USA, the house is rendered from below, an act that appears to be more about the visual composition of the image rather than about conveying objective information about the building (Krut, 2011, p.69). In deconstructing the image (figure 20), it becomes clear that only a fraction of the frame is indeed devoted to depicting the actual building. While not telling us much about the architectural details of the building itself, the drawing does tell a story nonetheless. In positioning the building at the top of the frame, the severe vertical drop that characterizes the site becomes increasingly emphasised. The top one-fifth portion of the drawing depicts the house as seen from below, with only parts of the house being in view. The house features a single projecting roofline capping walls that extend outwards in two directions before terminating in their respective bay windows. Below the walls of the building runs a series of retaining walls that are embedded in the landscape. When focusing on this area of the drawing it appears that the perspective has been somewhat manipulated, in particular in the way in which the staircase negotiates the transition from building to landscape, looking as if the last step simply drops off the cliff. The remainder of the drawing consists of a few lines that run down and across the paper, indicating the sloping hillside. The resulting

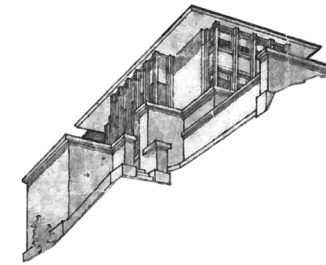
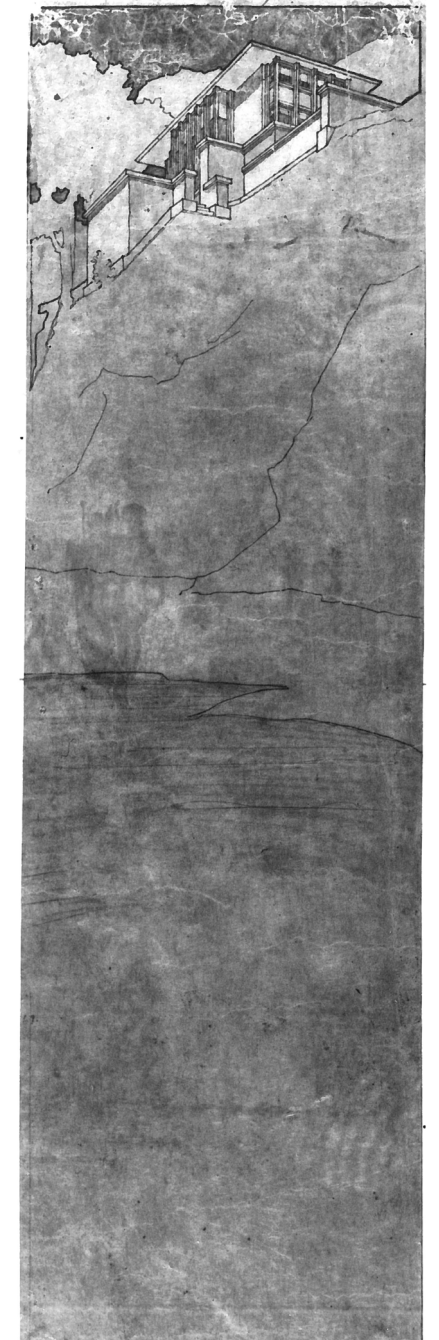


Figure 20: Visual analysis of the Hardy House isolating the house from the rest of the composition

Figure 21: Hardy House (frog's eye perspective drawing) by M. Mahony, (Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 1906)



image, despite being visually very top-heavy, does have a certain balance in its distribution of information, with the message embedded in the image being one of verticality.

5. Art & Architecture: Marion's Tree Studies

After winning the Canberra competition, the Griffins relocated to Australia in 1914 where they set up their new office. Moving first to Melbourne and later Sydney, Marion produced several graphic studies (figure 22) of the natural landscapes into which she would later place the buildings designed by herself and her husband. The Japanese-inspired drawing technique was continued and used in advertising material for residential developments in both America and Australia, no doubt utilizing the ephemeral qualities that attracted Frank Lloyd Wright to the style in the first place. These renderings are unconventional, in that the visual weight is not always placed directly on the building itself, but on the natural elements (foliage, topography) that surround it, thus selling an architecture is not just a building, but a literal extension of the landscape. Not merely a marketing technique, this way of rendering conveyed a central ethos of the Griffins' architecture that was brought to fruition in the housing development of Castlecrag on the north shores of Sydney, Australia (figure 23).

When relocating to Australia, Marion Mahony became fascinated by the Australian landscape and flora, which inspired her to create a series of detailed yet abstract illustrations of native plants and trees. These studies depict the nature of the bushland in the northern suburbs of Sydney, Australia, yet are rendered in a style reminiscent of Japanese prints, utilizing flattened perspectives and blocks of colour with strong outlines (Weirick, 2011, p. 96-97). When creating marketing material for the new suburb of Castlecrag in Sydney, developed by Mahony and her husband, Mahony inserted the building designs into similar compositions. An example of such a rendering, the *Angophora lanceolata: A Castlecrag Home in a Castlecrag Gully* (figure 24), depicts a 1925 design for a house in the lush bushland of Castlecrag.



Figure 22: Forest Portrait No. 1: Banksia Marginata, Tasmania / On the Seacoast (pen and black ink on linen) by M. Mahony (Art Institute of Chicago, 1918-19)



Figure 23: Fishwick House, Castlecrag, Sydney, Australia by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony (Johansen, 2021, own photography)

The drawing places a great deal of importance on the natural features of the site, with the house itself being a mere vignette within the larger picture (Jones, 2013). Small details, such as the white flowers in the foreground, are repeated on a smaller scale on the building itself. The central focal point of the drawing is a massive gum tree that appears to engulf the much smaller structure beneath it. Would it have not been for the sharp lines of the stonework, the house might have practically disappeared within the vivid renderings of trees and foliage. As with the Hardy House drawing, the layer of practical information is kept to a minimum, yet in this case a floor plan is included, situated discreetly at the lower-left corner of the frame.

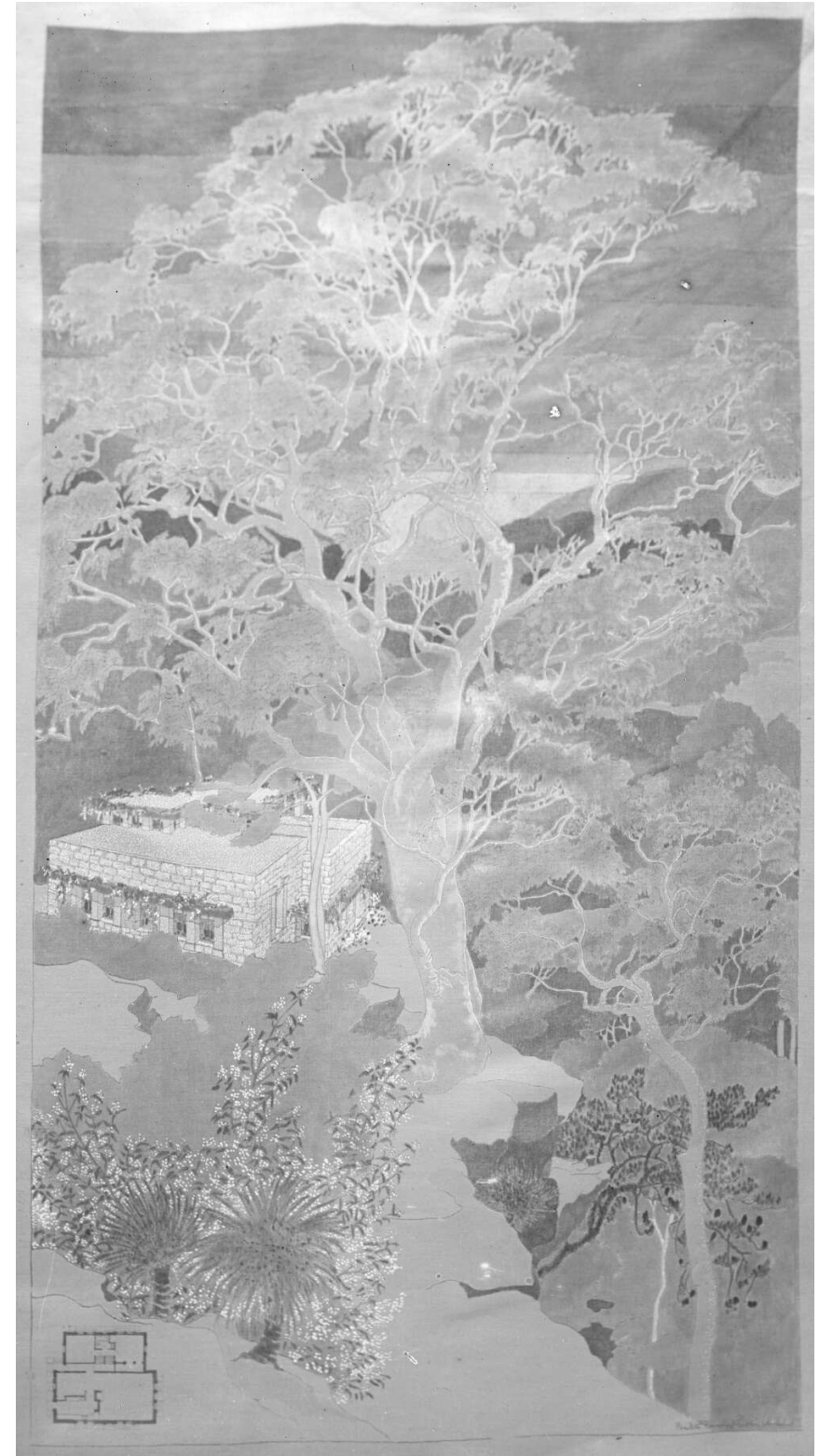


Figure 24: Angophora lanceolata: A Castlecrag Home in a Castlecrag Gully (birdseye-view perspective) by M. Mahony (National Library of Australia, ca. 1925)

6. Breaking the fourth wall: beyond the frame

Around the upper edges of the Henry Ford house perspective (figure 2) runs a single line framing parts of the composition while allowing the foreground foliage to spill out beyond its edges. This creative use of the frame is a theme across several of Marion Mahony's drawings. Loosely enclosing the image, the "frames" in Mahony's drawings are not limited to strict rectangular foreground elements, but lines that can be tweaked for a desired visual effect.

In the 1914 'Greentrees' project by Walter Burley Griffin (figure 25), Marion Mahony encases the background and parts of the foreground into a frame, while the building itself and its adjacent garden sprawl out beyond its edges, seemingly breaking free from the frame. A break in the outline occurs when it hits the building form, allowing for the building and the slope of the site to spill diagonally across the image before the composition is again contained within the two lines of the frame. Adding to the fragmentation of the frame is the placement of the title along the inside of the frame. This break in the composition and dissolution of the image creates a 3-dimensional effect that diffuses the perceived distance between the building and the foreground, enhancing the sense of perspectival depth.

Interestingly, the picture could indeed have been presented as a less complicated landscape composition, with the building being the sole focal point of the drawing and the foreground bleeding into the foreground, as seen in the perspective for the Henry Ford dwelling (figure 2). However, by this way of composing the image, Mahony delineates the inherent disassociation between the character of the building and the nature of the site. The verticality of the sloping site is accentuated by the portrait format and the slender frame, while the break in the frame emphasises the horizontality of the architecture. The

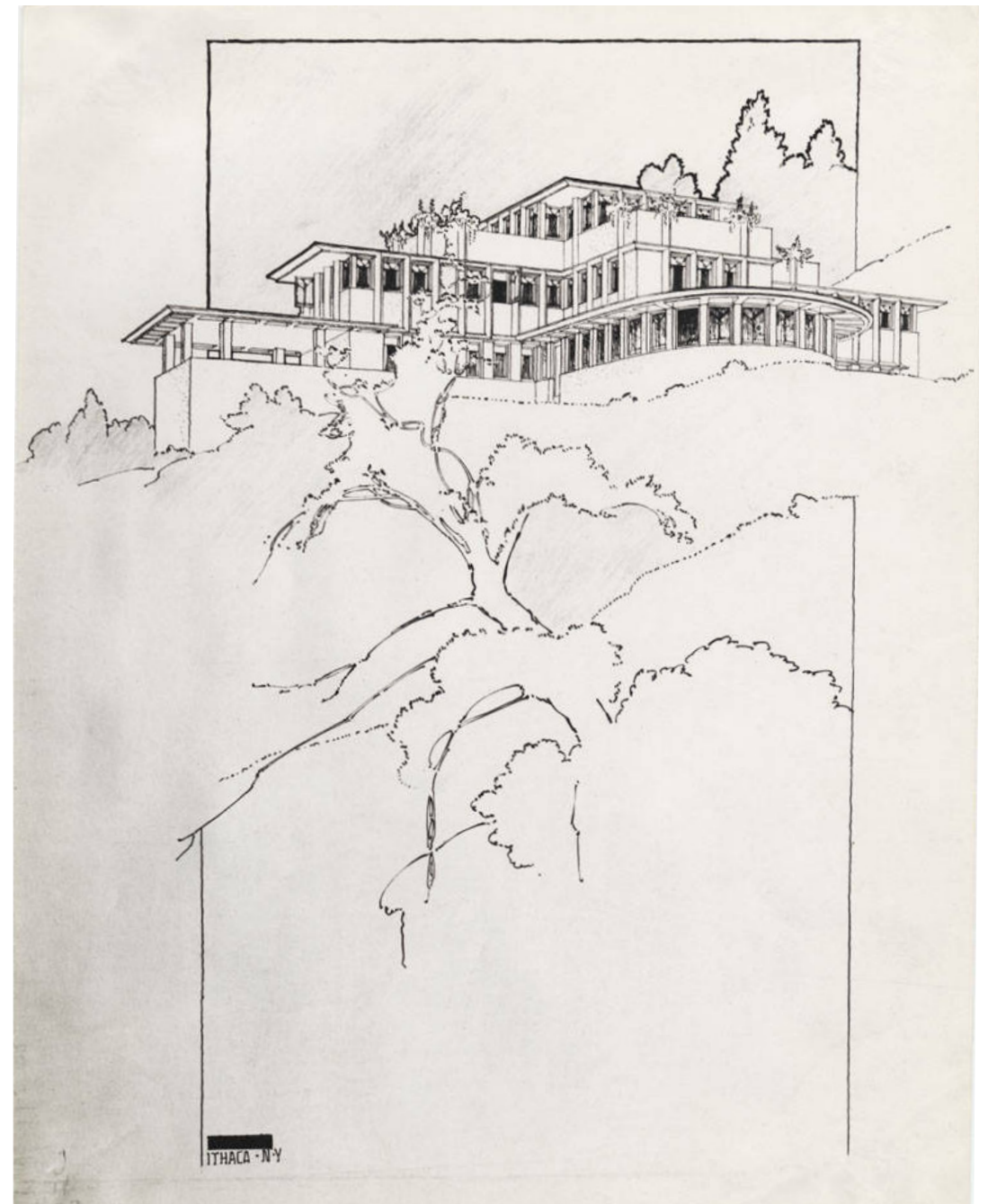


Figure 25: F.L. Morse Dwelling "Greenview" (perspective drawing), by M. Mahony (For W. B. Griffin. Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, 1914)

result is an almost cruciform-like shape, with the visual focus spreading both downwards and diagonally across the image, increasing the dynamic drama of the rendering.

The manipulation of the frame grows increasingly complex in the 'double' frames that can be observed in several of Marion's images, wherein the lines of the frame merge with different points along the perspective distortion. In the 1936 perspective drawing for Walter Burley Griffin's Union Building in Lucknow, India (figure 26), Mahony draws two outlines, the outermost framing a simple white background while the innermost frame contains the abstracted lines of the sky and foliage. The structure itself can be interpreted as the third layer of information, with the outline of the building 'framing' the architectural elements of the structure. Mahony has thus created a diagram that extends from virtual abstraction to crisp detail in three clearly defined layers within the drawing.

A very similar effect can be observed in the 1937 drawings for the library and museum for the raja of Mahmudabad (figure 27), in which a three-layered frame is used. This time the additional dimension of colour is added to the drawing, with shades of faint pink, purple and blue serving as an additional hierarchy in the perspective. The drawing depicts the building as seen from the water, drawn in a series of flat rectangular planes connected by ornamented columns and piers. The elements in the centre of the composition are given a lighter, white colour, while elements in the background or in shade are coloured in purples and blues, becoming darker the further back the element is positioned in the composition. This colour effect exaggerates the depth of the image and clearly features compositional similarities to the Union Temple drawings (figure 16), drawn thirty years earlier. The frame around the image consists of three lines that terminate at different points before merging with the lines of the drawing itself. The outermost line joins with



Figure 26: Lucknow University Student Union Building (perspective drawing) by M. Mahony (For W. B. Griffin. Art Institute of Chicago, 1936)

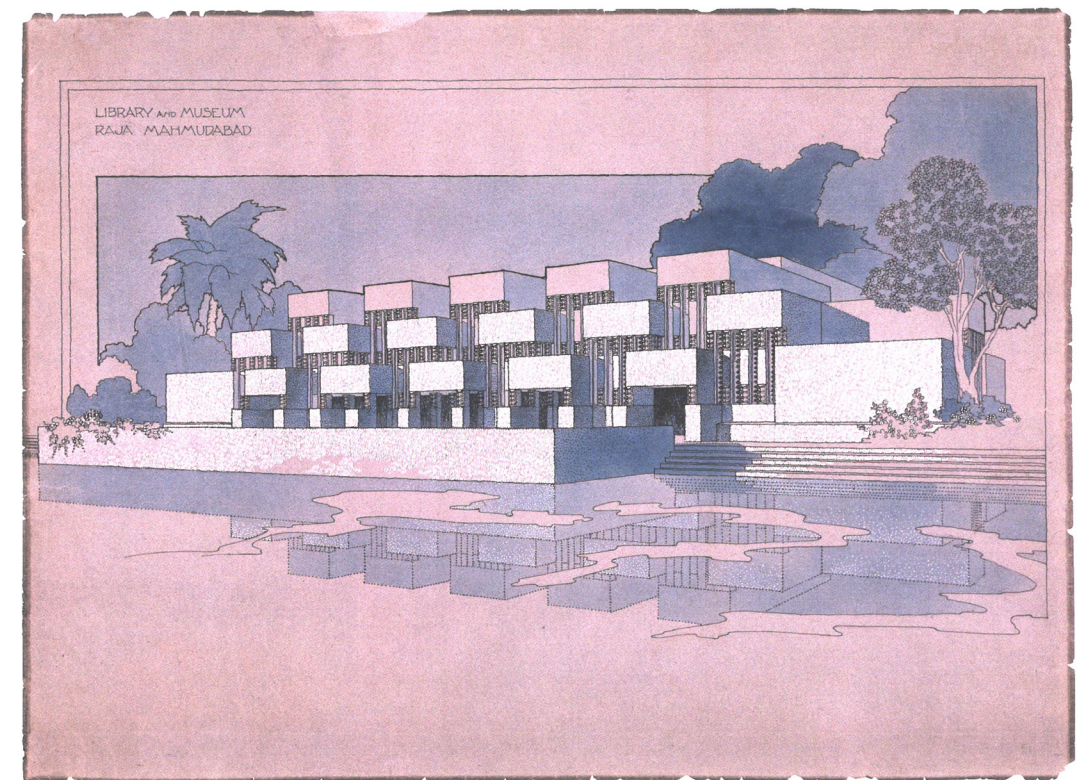


Figure 27: Library and museum for the raja of Mahmudabad (perspective drawing) by M. Mahony (For W. B. Griffin. Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, 1937)

a planter on one side and the lines of the water on the other. The next line holds part of the background trees, framing foliage on one end and a tree on the other. The third layer holds the sky, an element that appears to be positioned at the very back of the composition, obscured partly by trees.

In all these examples, the foreground of the image is left without a clear frame, and this vagueness can be seen as diffusing the line between architecture and landscape, between the man-made and the natural, perhaps mirroring Frank Lloyd Wright's ideal of buildings that are subservient to nature (Brooks, 1972, p.6). Capping the top of the image with an outline has the additional effect of guiding our vision down the page, suggesting an architecture that is not reaching for the skies but is firmly planted in the ground.

Figure 28: *Eucalyptus Urnigera* (colour on silk) by M. Mahony (Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, 1918). An example of a Japanese-inspired rendering of Australian landscapes, contained in this instance within a strict frame.



Conclusion

Following a visual analysis of Marion Mahony's drawings, several of the underlying compositional strategies utilized by the architect has been uncovered. Producing work in a wide range of representational methods, Mahony combined the realism and practical information of notational drawings with the relative abstraction of graphic arts and in so doing displayed the power that lies within the manipulation of an architectural object through variations in line weights and -styles, image framing and the application of varying levels of abstraction. Additionally, the drawings of Marion Mahony Griffin give us an interesting glimpse the experimentation that was occurring in architectural visualisation at the beginning of the 20th century. Inspired in part by Japanese prints and European Art Nouveau, Marion Mahony created a distinctive, progressive drawing style that is still associated with many of Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings today. Through creative use of compositional tools, framing, perspective distortions, colour use and conscious selection of line weights, Mahony produced an extensive portfolio of drawings whose lessons can still be applied in architectural visualisation today.

The perspective drawings that Mahony produced became in many cases the main image that was projected as the vision for the building (pre-construction) in order to win over a client and present an architectural idea. At the same time, these drawings have also become a lense through which we now judge these buildings later in history. By observing and analysing drawings created more than one hundred years ago, it has become evident that the architectural drawing is indeed a central tool to architectural practice, and a type of work that has the potential to outlive the buildings that they depicted and the architects that designed them. In the case of Marion Mahony; her actual design contributions to the offices of Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Burley Griffin remains unclear, however the drawings remain unquestionably hers.



Figure 29: Visual analysis depicting the various line weights and styles applied to the Ford house drawing.

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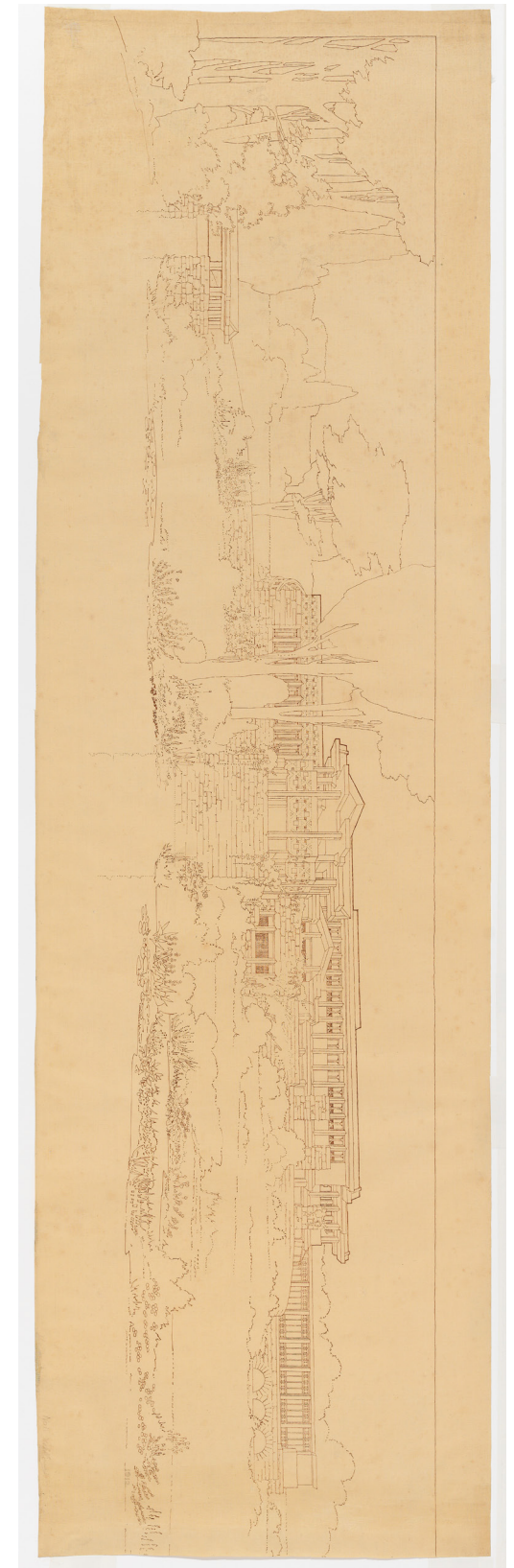
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Appendix: Drawing analysis

As part of the research for this thesis, a series of isolation studies were done in order to gain an understanding of the composition of Marion Mahony's drawings; in particular the ways in which the buildings were placed within the overall frame of the image. On the following spreads are a visual summary of the findings.

Figure 30: Henry Ford Residence, building(s) isolated from context. The amount of white space indicates a substantial amount of the frame has been given over to rendering the grounds surrounding the building.

Figure 2: Henry Ford Residence (Elevational perspective drawing) by Marion Mahony (Northwestern University Archives, 1912)



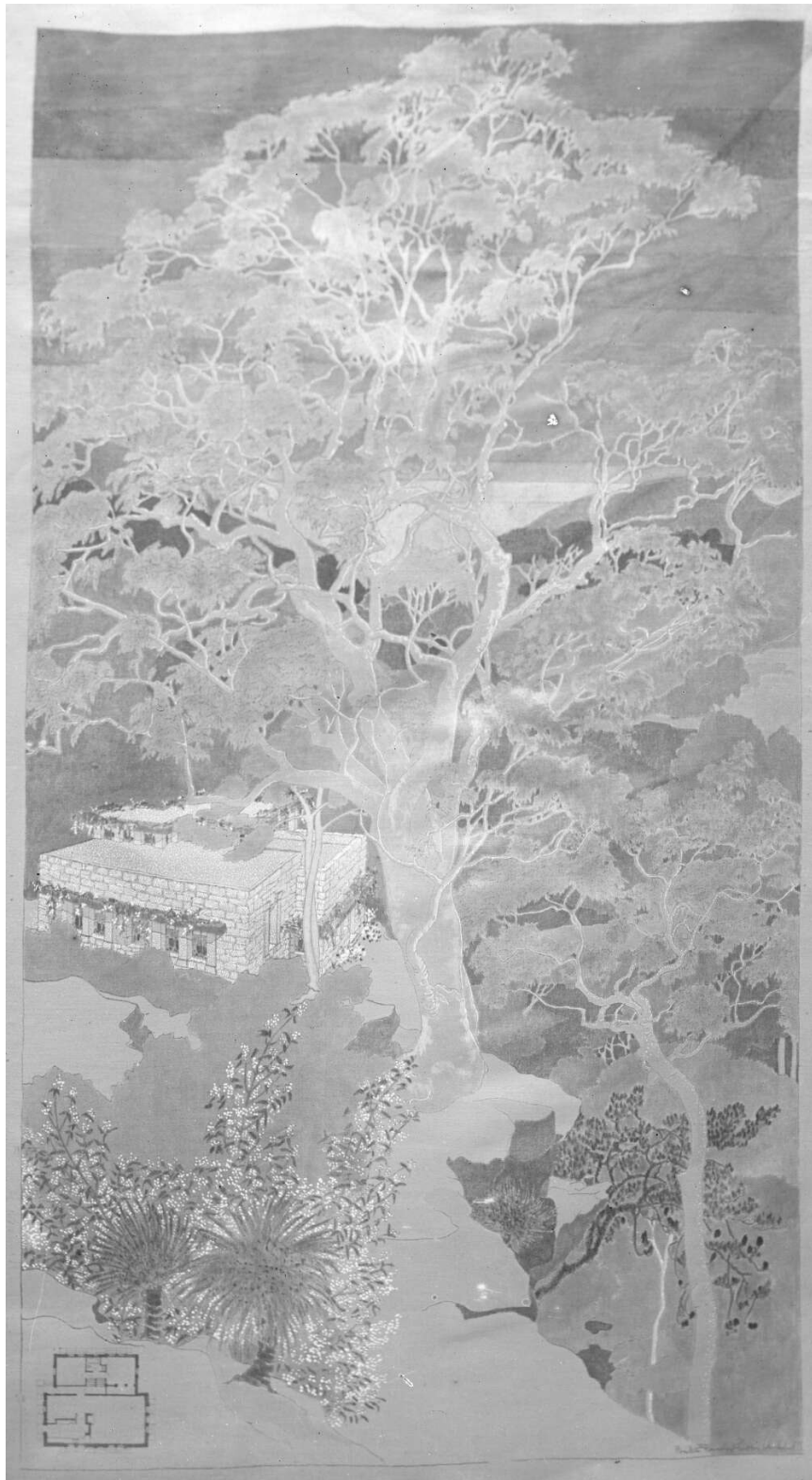


Figure 24: Angophora lanceolata: A Castlecrag Home in a Castlecrag Gully (birdseye-view perspective) by M. Mahony (National Library of Australia, ca. 1925)

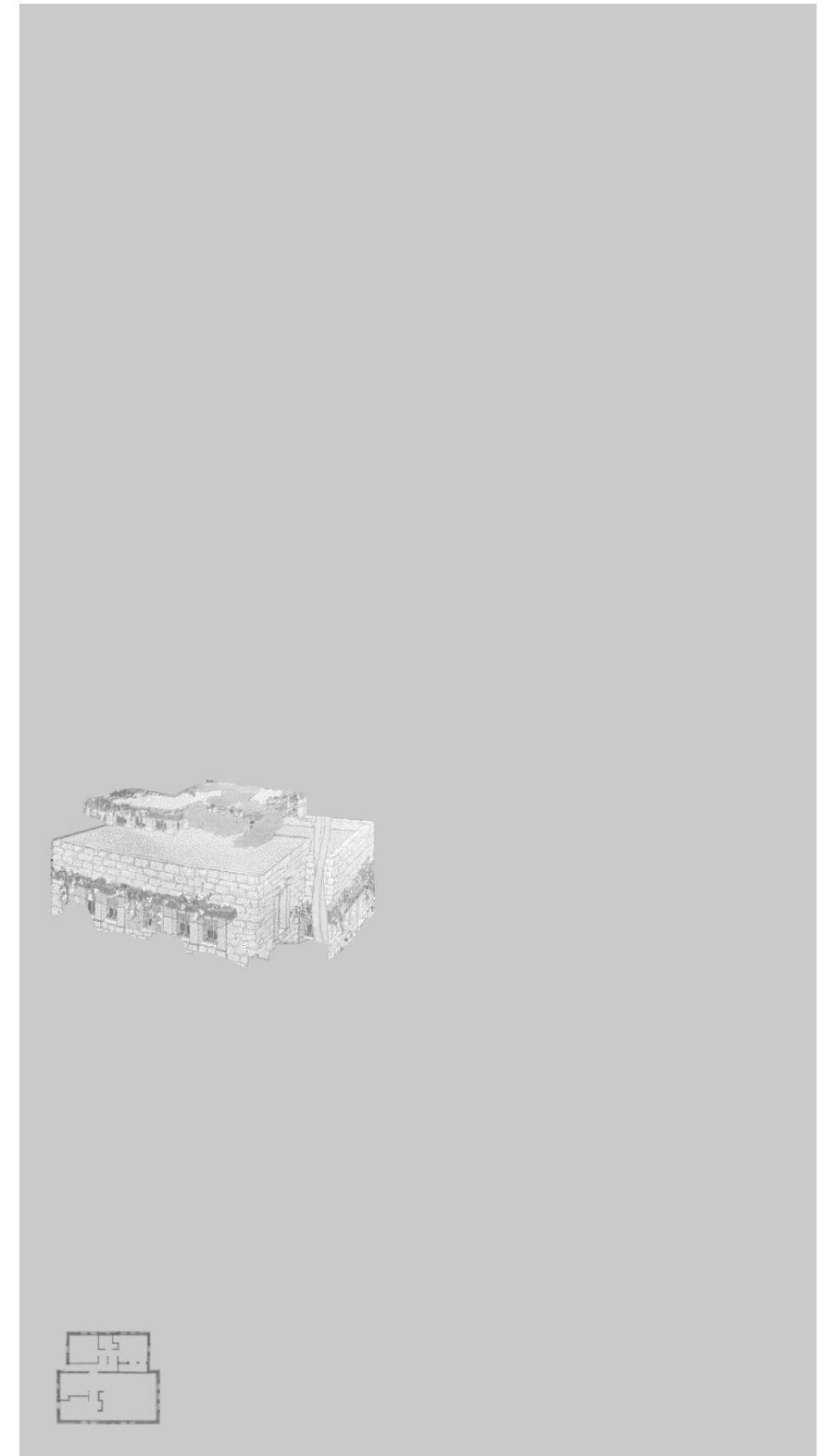


Figure 31 Angophora lanceolata: A Castlecrag Home in a Castlecrag Gully, building isolated, revealing its miniscule footprint in the drawing. Own drawing.

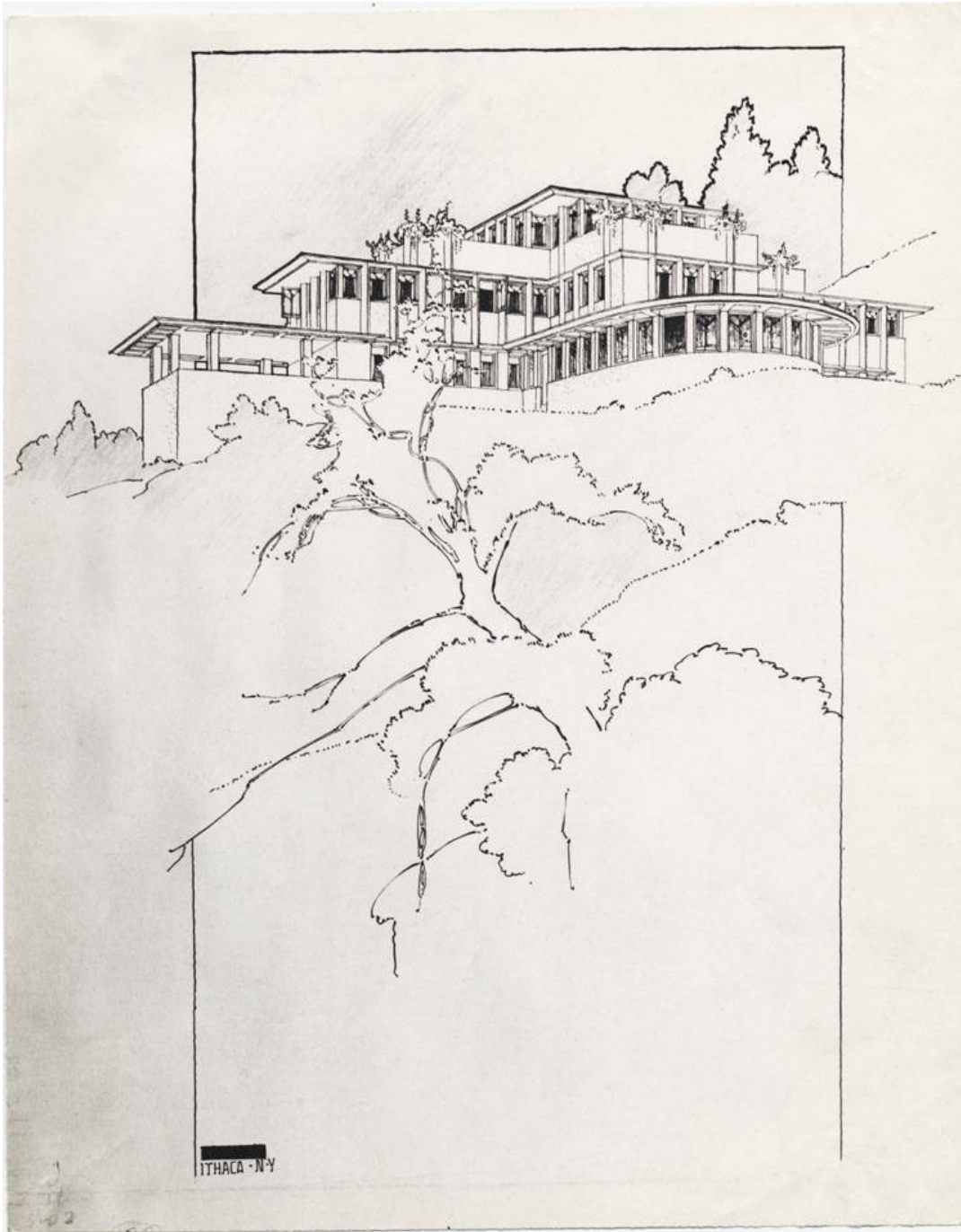


Figure 25: F.L. Morse Dwelling "Greenview" (perspective drawing), by M. Mahony (For W. B. Griffin. Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, 1914)

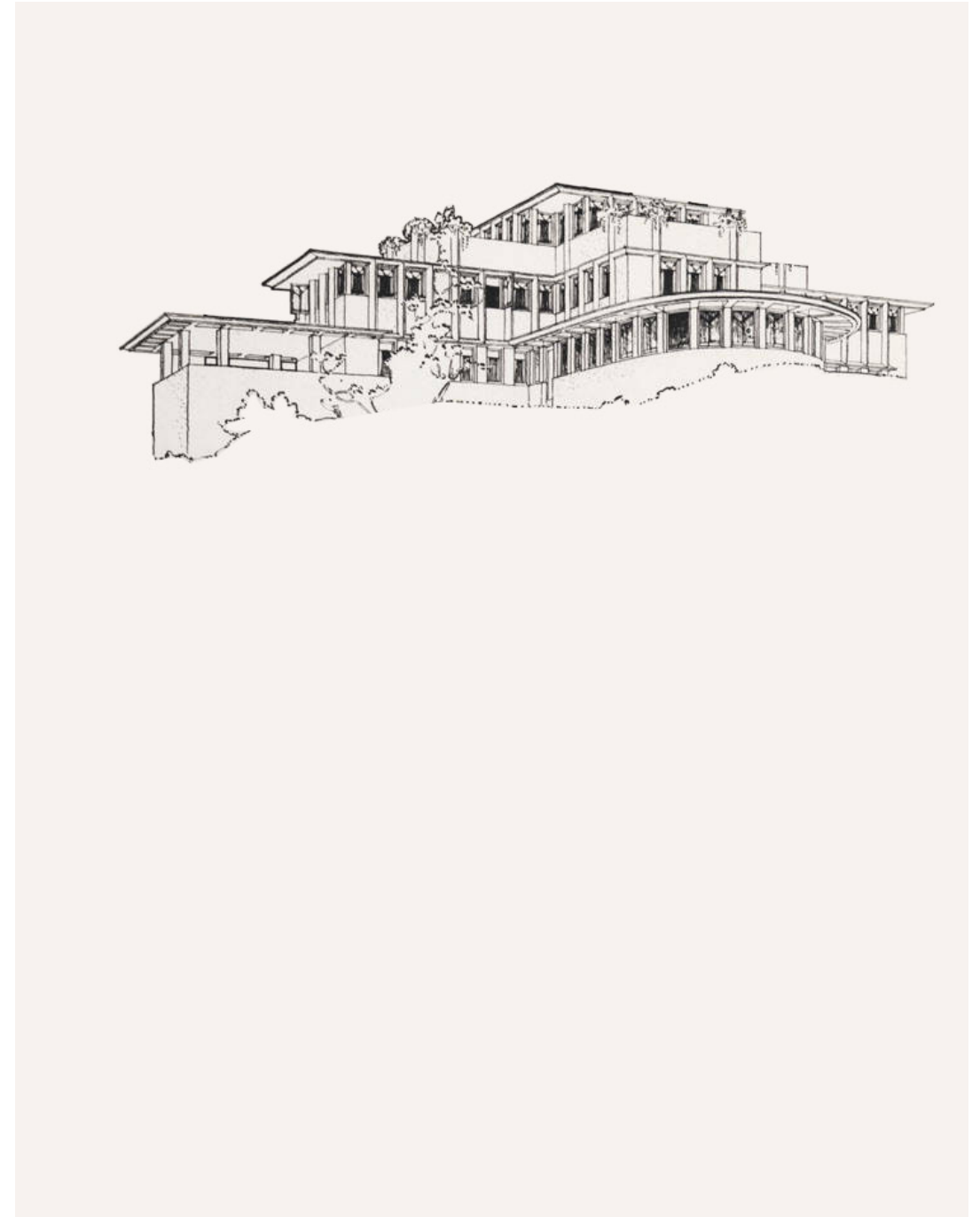


Figure 32: F.L. Morse Dwelling "Greenview", building isolated from context, revealing its elevated position within the composition. Own drawing.

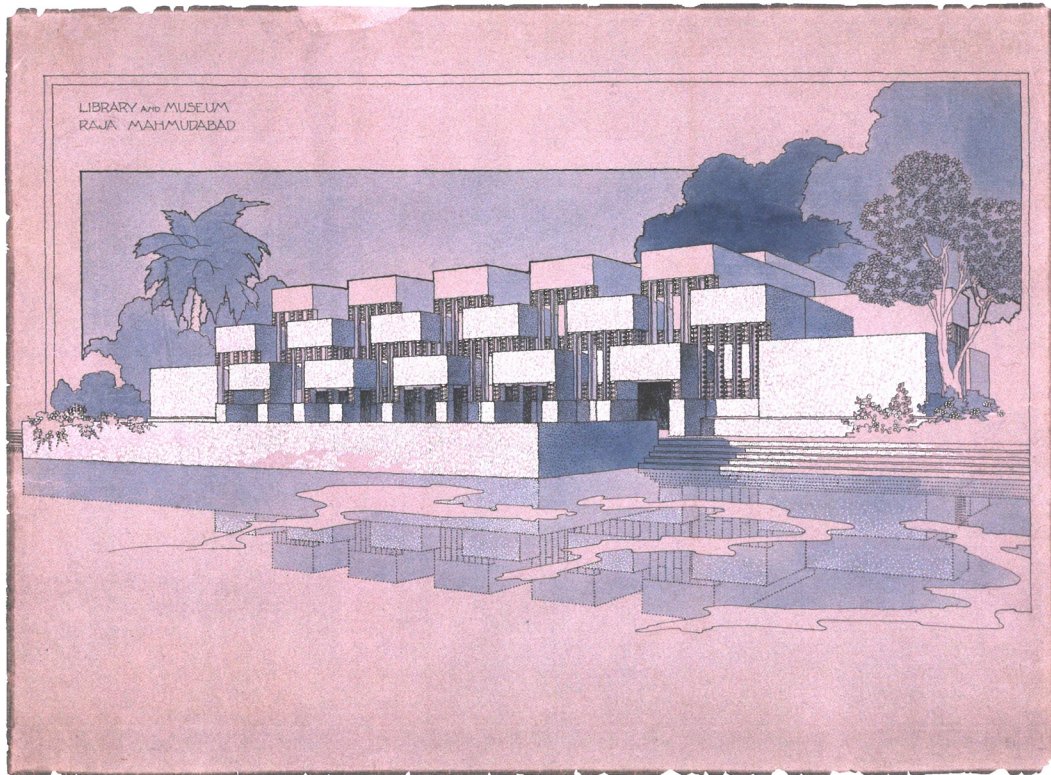


Figure 27: Library and museum for the raja of Mahmudabad (perspective drawing) by M. Mahony (For W. B. Griffin. Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, 1937)



Figure 33 Library and museum for the raja of Mahmudaba, building isolated from context. Own drawing. Note the distinct decrease in drama and dynamism that this effect has on the impression of the architecture displayed.

her drawing

'Henry Ford Residence' project by Marion Mahony Griffin and Hermann von Holst for Frank Lloyd Wright.

The second female architect in the United States, Marion Mahony Griffin contributed substantially to the development of architectural visualisation in the early 1900s. This essay uses the perspective drawing of the Henry Ford dwelling as a starting point in a discussion on drawing strategies applied by Marion Mahony Griffin in her renderings. Using elements such as, but not limited to, the linedrawing, the frame and foreign influences, each stylistic element is linked to another Mahony drawing, allowing for a comparative analysis of applied drawing techniques. Along with each discussion features a detailed description of each drawing, deconstructing the relevant parts of each composition.