
The well-worn adage, "Familiarity breeds contempt," certainly does apply to Louisiana's handsome state capitol building. Art and architectural historians as well as laymen in this region who enjoy fine architecture tend to be more interested in eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings than those erected in this century. Professor Kubly has written what will probably be the definitive book on the chief government building of Louisiana—a structure that is one of the gems of twentieth century architecture in Louisiana.

The book is important both locally and nationally because the author is dealing with a building that was and now is one of the best surviving examples of the esthetic ideas of the first 30 or so years of the twentieth century. Author Kubly aptly describes the style in his Preface:

"The Louisiana capitol epitomizes the end of the Beaux-Arts architectural tradition in America, when a number of prominent architects were trying to update the waning academic tradition by combining conventional elements of classicism with popular imagery and modernism. This attempted synthesis of classicistic and modernistic elements became passe as the esthetic of functionalism and the economics of the Depression radically altered the architectural scene."

In other words the state capitol represents a last triumphal blast of buildings erected not only as a space in which to work, but as monuments whose forms and sculptural and painted decoration were intended to be didactic and inspirational to present and future generations. Ushered in at the same time as the capitol's construction was the purely functional, undecorated type of architecture—glass and steel boxes

While there is some fine classical beau-art type sculpture in the building, the overwhelming amount of the sculpture is in that very angular style that Mr. Kubly chooses to term beau-art modern, but is more generally being called art decó.

The Louisiana Capitol: Its Art and Architecture is a beautifully laid out book with a generous amount of white space so that the multitude of plates detailing the sculptural program do not become crowded and confused. For this, readers can be grateful to Barney McKee who has designed numerous prize-winning volumes.

While painting certainly plays a subordinate role to sculpture in the decorative scheme of the capitol, it is none-the-less a part of the original decoration and the author has dedicated an appropriate amount of space to the murals. Unfortunately some of the finest murals in the building—those in the Governor's Reception Room by Conrad Albrizio—were destroyed in 1952. By good fortune, Albrizio's original watercolored working drawings for these murals, which were the first true frescoes to be painted in Louisiana, do survive and are preserved at the Anglo-American Art Museum at LSU. These renderings as well as those for the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court are handsomely reproduced in color.

The Louisiana Capitol: Its Art and Architecture is a book that should satisfy students and scholars of Louisiana architecture and history as well as the more casual general reader because the history of this building, like most Louisiana history, is as colorful as anything from a novelist's pen. It is a fascinating study of the building trade practices dating back to the Renaissance which were totally abandoned in the late 1930s because of economics. A tour of the capitol with this book in hand as a guide should make one's visit the best yet.

—H. Parrott Bacot