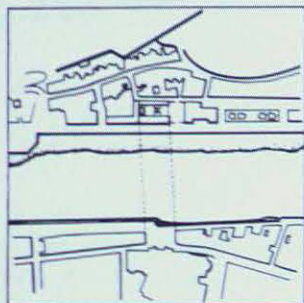


University of Toronto

FLORENCE

1983

by Alan Tregebov

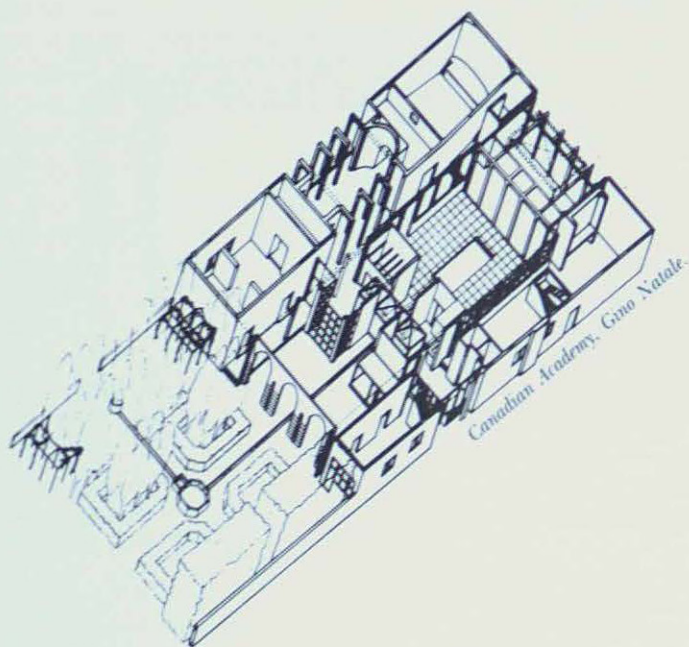


Les projets qui suivent sont la réalisation des étudiants en architecture de l'Université de Toronto lors d'un séjour à Florence durant l'automne 1983. Parmi ceux-ci on retrouve quelques études de façades et quelques propositions pour une "Académie Canadienne à Florence."

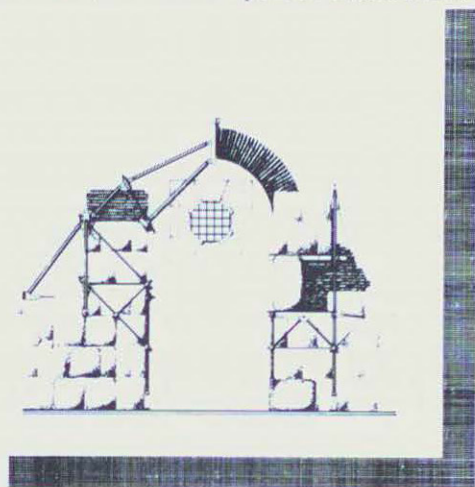
In the past few years the University of Toronto has undertaken fourth year studio programmes in Paris, Venice, Urbino, and most recently in Florence. Each programme has taken unique form in confrontation with the new set of architectural facts. In retrospect, an underlying idea of study abroad—the emersion in another culture to gain clearer understanding of how architecture is or has been made in another cultural framework.

The programme in Florence focused on the specific study of architectural events that had come to life in that city. As the centre of the resurrection of architectural antiquity as well as a centre of a very distinct vernacular tradition developed through the Middle Ages, it seemed natural to investigate the fundamentals of this architectural language.

The students were faced with the task of identification of primary architectural elements and then the development of their personal understanding of the potential significance of the elements. The early Renaissance works developed from very specific antique references and models but within certain parameters of the Tuscan tradition. The power and influence of the rediscoveries captured the imagination of the western world; the basis in philosophical and political theory substantiated the meaning of the architectural works. There was a reconfirmation of the concept that architecture relies on its own history to give meaning to the new works. The tectonic and symbolic roles of the elements and compositions refer to so many simultaneous ideas that the concept of a totally new approach, free of the pre-existing traditions, is untenable. Thus, we were faced with history as fundamental to understanding the architectural environment; our proposals are placed in the continuum of history.



The studio, history and theory courses focussed on the meaning of the architectural traditions and their impact on the design process. The programme began with a stated desire to study the often ignored third dimension. We often spend our time making plans in architectural schools, and while each major mark on plan represents a vertical element, we tend to leave the development of the vertical surfaces until the last moment; the staff hoped to correct this inequity.



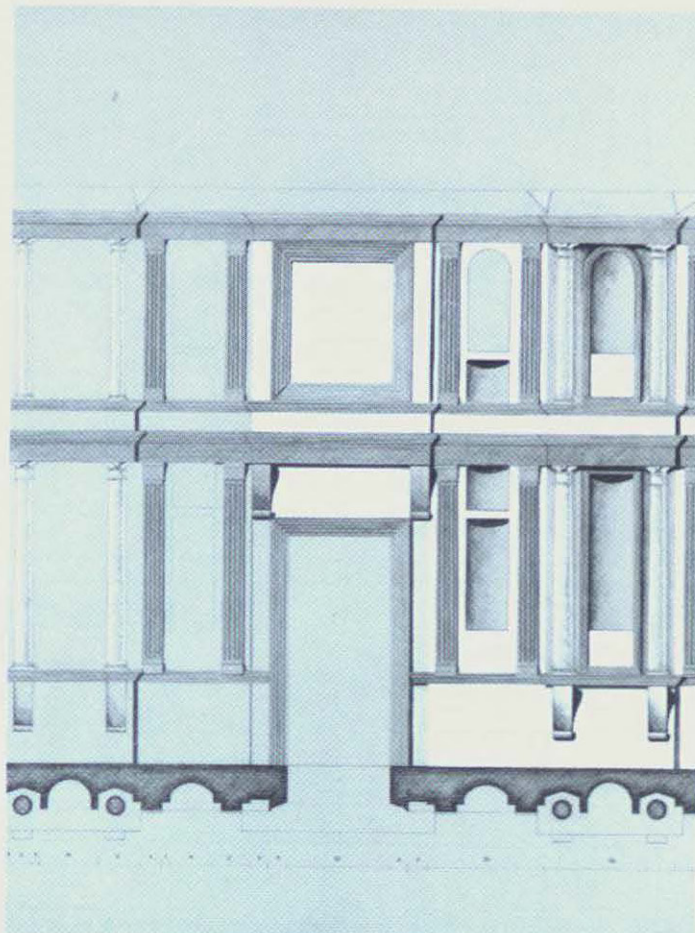
Column Wall Opening, Jan Macing

To begin, a facade problem was chosen, a study of the relationships between the wall surface, the openings in it, and the potential of the column. A paper of definitions on possible classical and modern meanings of these relationships was used to start the discussion. In retrospect, it proved somewhat difficult to move so radically into the issues of facade as an intellectual set of relationships separate from ideas on a specific programme for human behaviour.

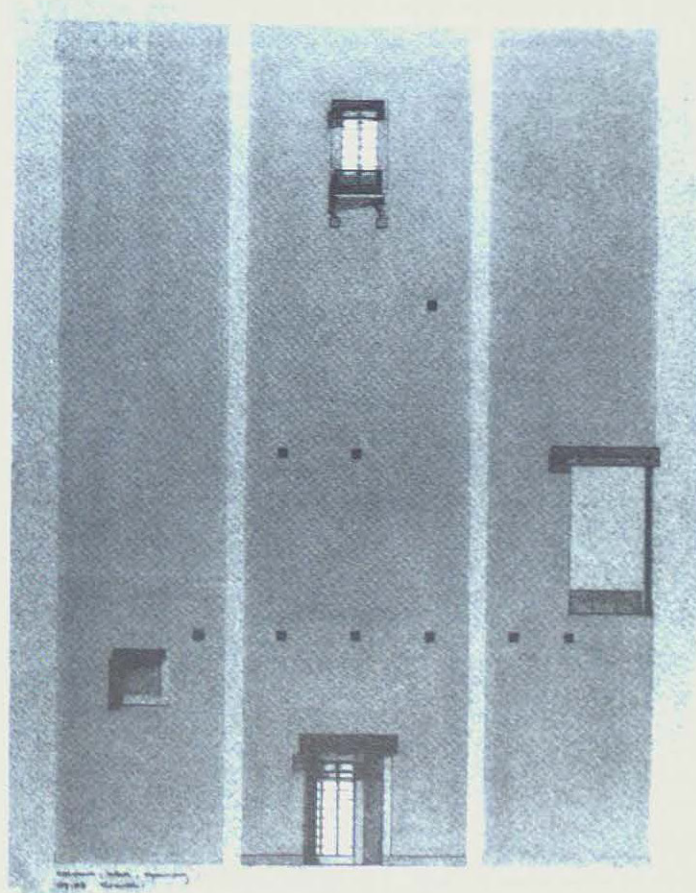
The next study centered on using an established building type—the courtyard palazzo—common in the city—and using this type as a tool to study the internal courtyard and its facades (once again focusing on the role of the wall surface in establishing the nature of architectural space).

Concurrent with this study we were joined by (the noted) architectural historian Hans-Karl Lucke for an intensive course in early Renaissance architecture; a sequence of lectures at major landmarks that focused on the specifics of the intellectual change that is marked by the formal re-use of the classical language. We looked at relatively few buildings as we tried to establish the framework for the perceptual change known as the Renaissance. It was an almost stone by stone, joint by joint discussion of the buildings that allowed many students to consider for the first time the potential meaning in the articulation of the vertical surface.

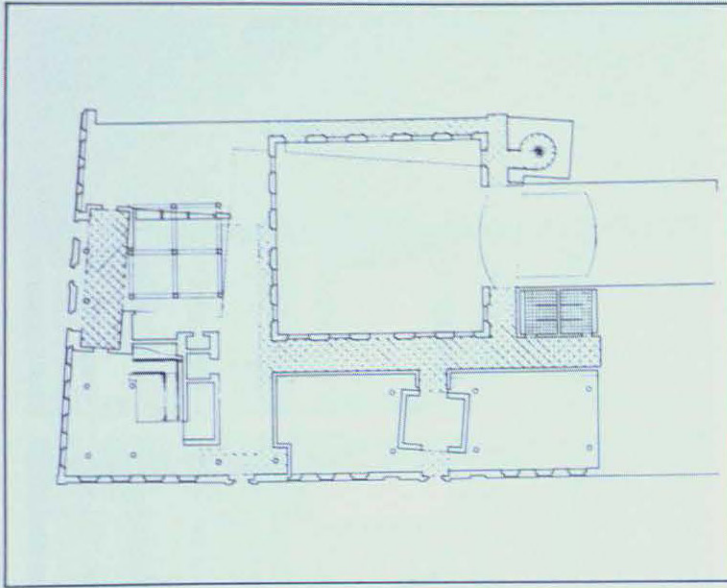
Being situated in north-central Italy it was quite easy to visit several critical moments in modern and contemporary architecture. Parallel to the study of the classical vocabulary and its embodiment of meaning in a culturally established language, we looked at several 20th century investigations. Perhaps the works of these architects could be used to establish different positions on the language of architecture—the personal language of Scarpa, the new rational investigations of Rossi, and the modern propositions of Terragni. As were the classical studies, these moderns were discussed in terms of architectural vocabulary and syntactical relationships, as well as the implied formal, iconographic, cultural, and symbolic meanings.



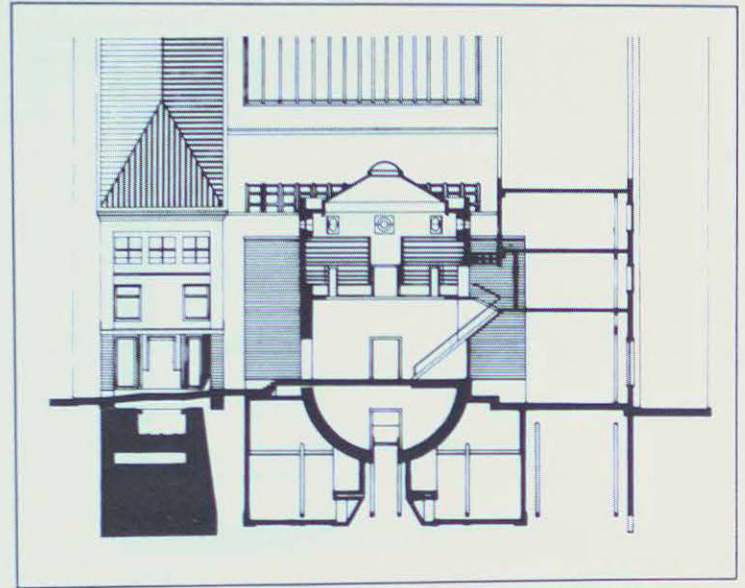
Column Wall Opening, Ken Mai Spornan



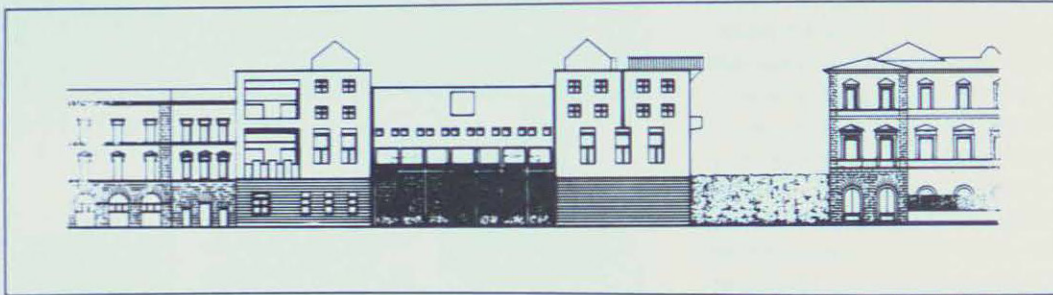
Column Wall Opening, Wilbur Wong



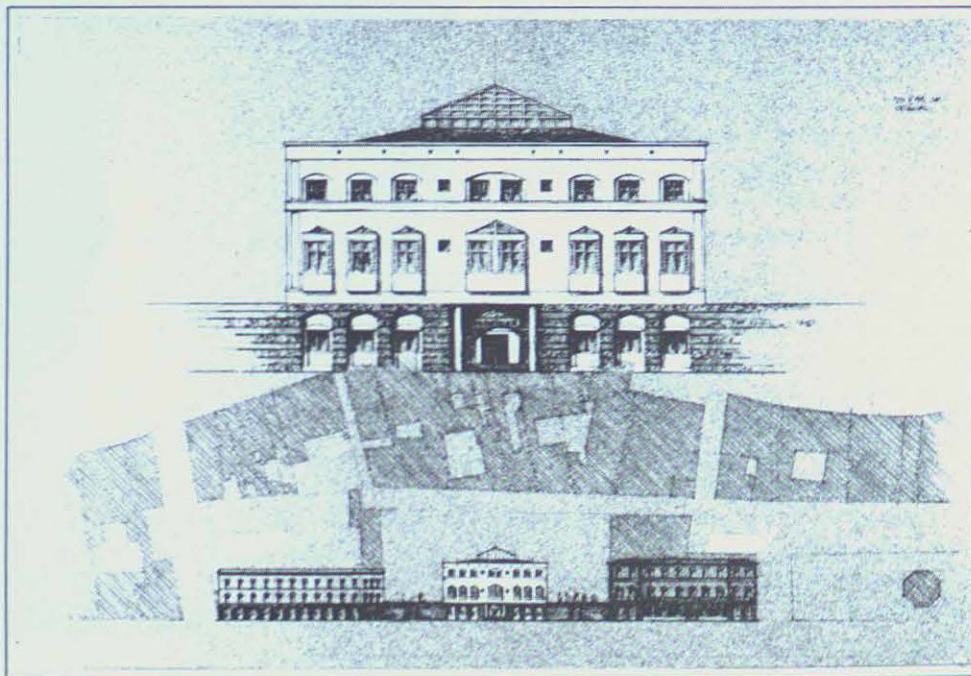
Palazzo Hotel, Leonard Kady.



Canadian Academy, Thomas Pratt.



Canadian Academy, Wilfrid Wong



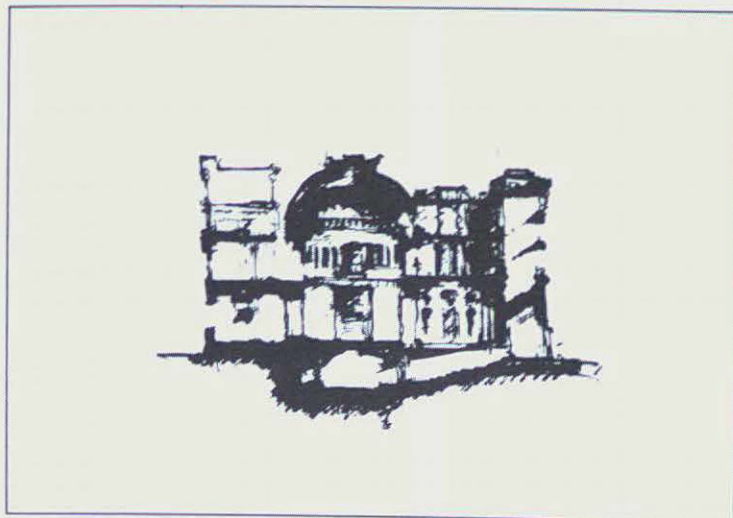
Canadian Academy, Grant Van Iderstine.

The work of the studio probably reflects the diversity of the students' own backgrounds, the range of direct stimuli and precedent, as well as the differing positions of the teachers. It would probably be fair to point out at this time the openness and excitement of the staff as we all continuously came across new pieces or new ideas in an already somewhat familiar environment.

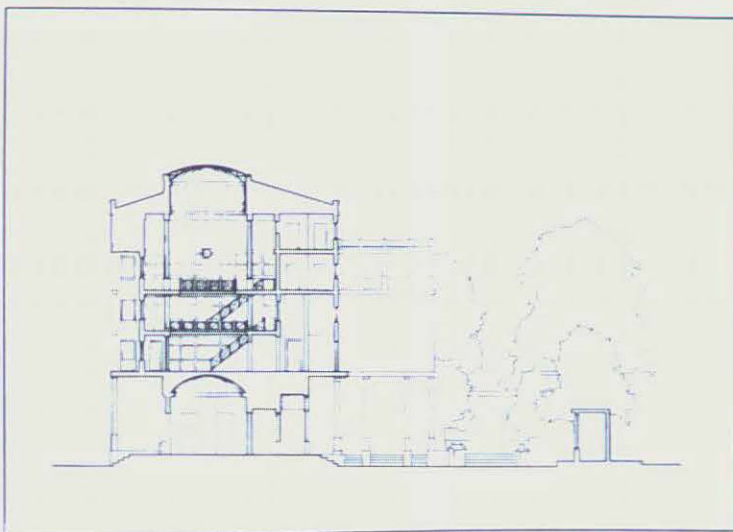
The third and major project for the semester was a proposal for a Canadian Academy in Florence. A site was chosen, on the Arno, facing the historic centre, and fully visible from the promenade along the river. The site was bounded by the sixteenth century Palazzo Serristori as well as by the vernacular architecture. The city wall and Tuscan countryside were just beyond the site. The project became a vehicle for investigations into the integration of contemporary architecture in an architecturally established context as well as a study of the relationship between our culture and the traditions of Florence.

There was a new energy created as it seemed that we were all questioning our understanding and strengthening our arguments by direct reference to the text—the historical pieces. That the student work is not formally cohesive as a group, but is greatly divergent in its implications of style and influence, is to be taken as a position on the state of the discussion. There does not seem to be one correct way—the pluralism honestly reflects the architectural debate present throughout the world. It seems incumbent upon the teachers to ensure that each student rigorously develops his/her approach with a solid footing in history and with valid and logical theoretical arguments, but with a degree of expression that reflects the personal aspect essential to a fine art.

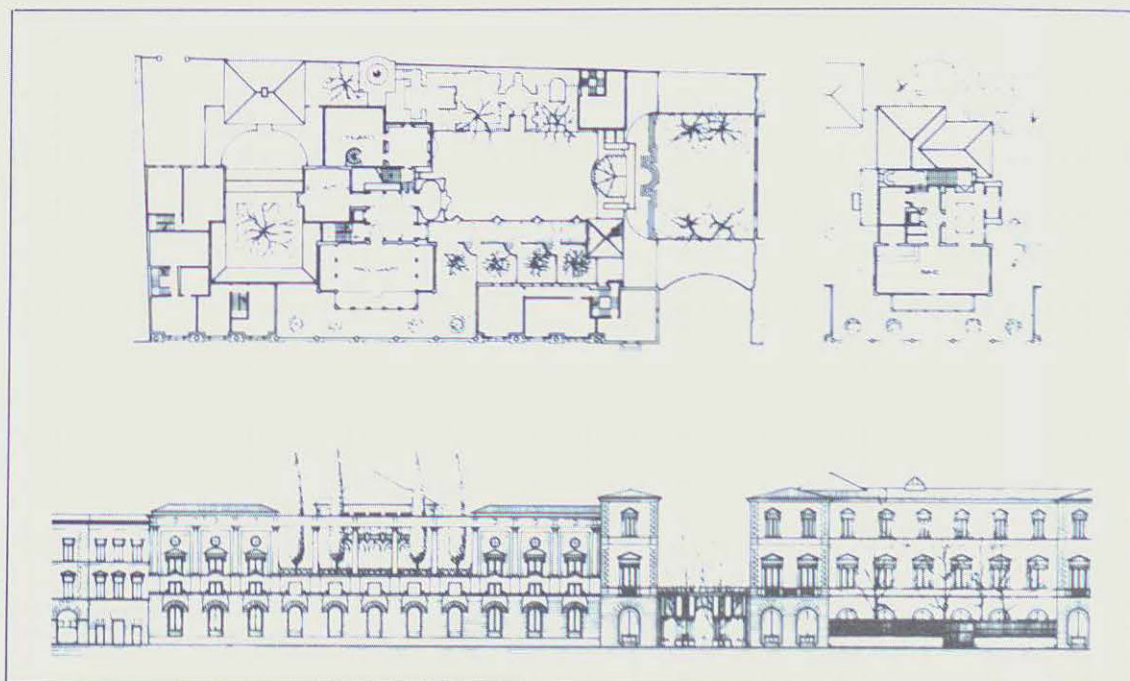
Alan Tregebov is an Assistant Professor at the School of Architecture, University of Toronto, and is a practising architect with his own Toronto office.



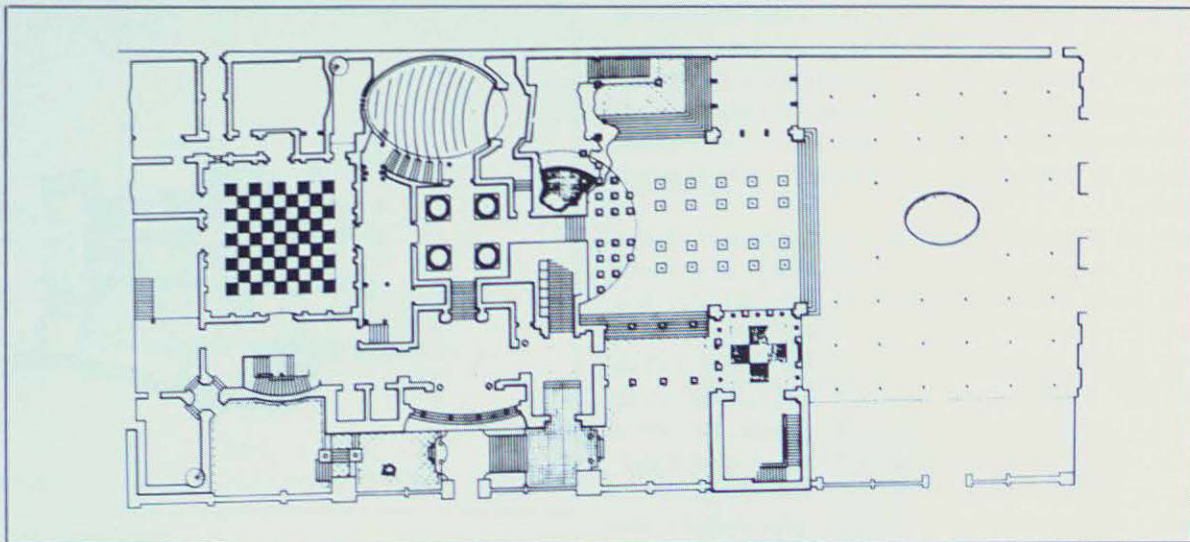
Canadian Academy, Goran Milosevic.



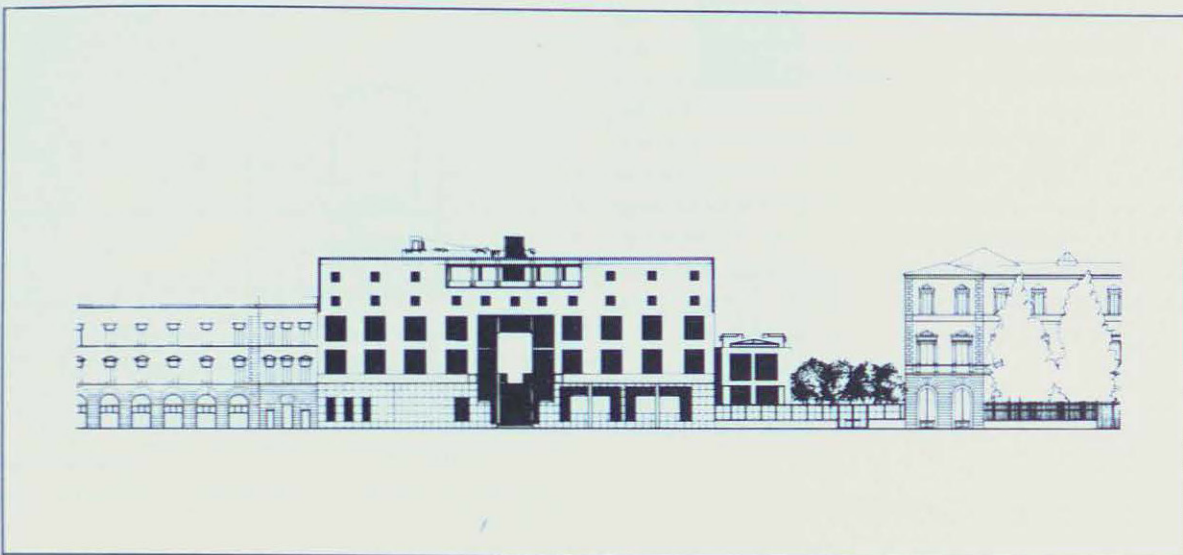
Canadian Academy, Paul Bolland.



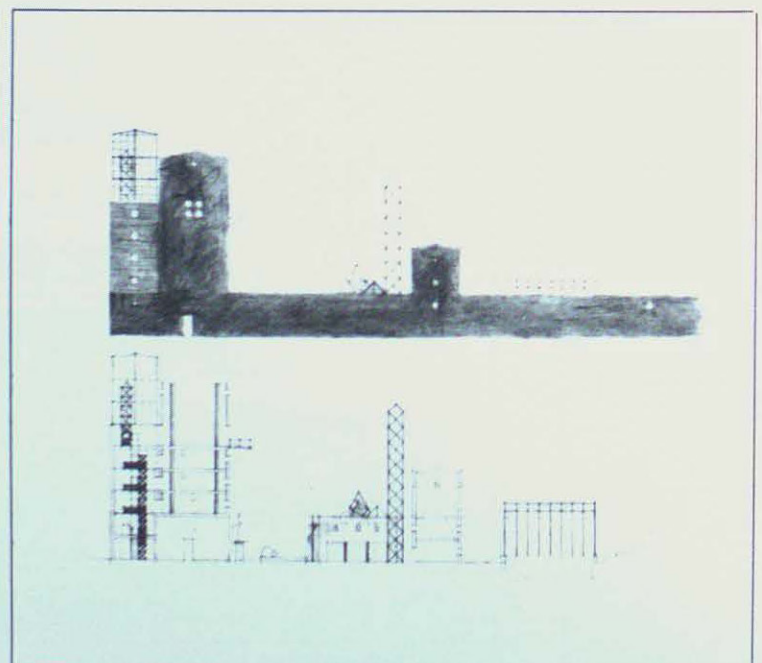
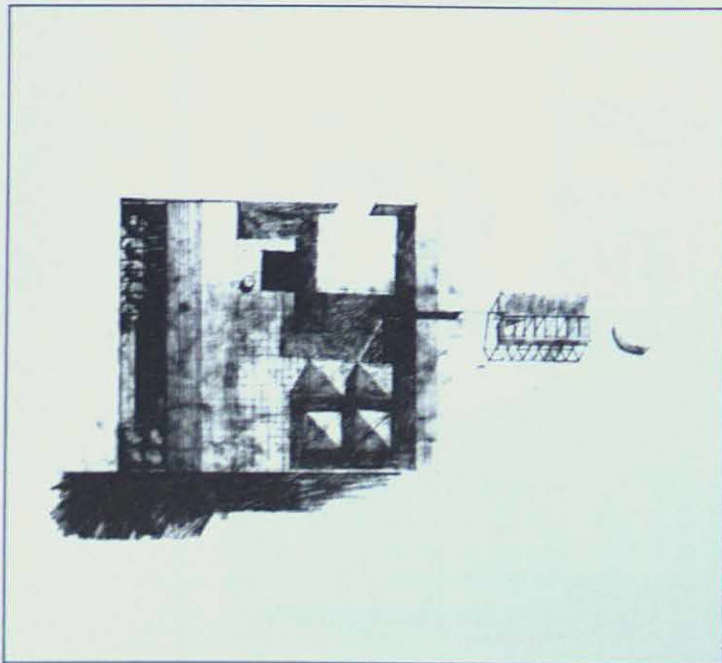
Canadian Academy, Jan Mucrag.



Canadian Academy, David Murray.



Canadian Academy, Deo Paquette



Canadian Academy, Andrew Antoszek.