

Position Statement  
on the  
Reconstruction of Lost Buildings and the Construction of Unbuilt Designs

Society of Architectural Historians  
Heritage Conservation Committee

The reproduction of lost buildings or replication of designs that never existed is an important issue in conservation, one that continues to evolve while remaining unresolved.

Reconstruction has long been recognized as an appropriate preservation methodology. It is one of the four approaches to the treatment of historic properties defined under the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, along with preservation, rehabilitation and restoration.

Traditionally, the issue of reproducing lost buildings or replicating designs that never existed emerged only rarely, and often only in the context of commemorative actions (such as the partial reconstruction of the Barcelona Pavilion), or in the reconstruction of significant sites lost to natural disaster, wartime action, or neglect (such as the observation and gun towers at the Manzanar War Relocation Center).

We recognize a distinction between reconstruction and replication. By replication, we mean replicas or recreations created to stand in for a fragile original resource (such as Lascaux II, copy of the *Great Hall of the Bulls* and the *Painted Gallery* opened in 1983, and intended to divert visitors from the fragile Lascaux caves themselves). Replication may take the form of either a physical replica or a three-dimensional digital recreation, but in the case of replication—as opposed to reconstruction—there is no confusion between what is the authentic resource, and what is the replica.

However, rapid advances in 3-D laser scanning technology and rapid prototyping have radically changed both the scale and speed with which reproduction or reconstruction can occur. Buildings can now be reconstructed on a scale, and with a speed, that was heretofore unimaginable. With the technology rapidly evolving, the pace of change will only accelerate. This speed and scale immediately raise a series of questions about a reconstruction, most notably its *intent* (commercial or commemorative?), *scale and extent* (partial or complete?), *location* (original or new location?), *materials used* (original materials or modern?), *function* (original or adapted use?), and *physical integrity* (original materials and design, or current and perhaps code-compliant materials and design?).

We recommend that institutions considering reconstruction address the following three issues:

1. Whenever possible, institutions should focus limited resources upon the preservation of existing works instead of construction of unbuilt, or reconstruction of demolished, buildings. We recognize that there are times when reconstruction is an appropriate action, but it should by and large be limited to undertakings that are commemorative in nature (such as temporary reconstructions for interpretive purposes), reconstructions that are necessary for interpretive purposes designed to tell the complete, and sometimes uncomfortable, story of a site (such as the reconstruction of missing quarters for enslaved workers), or reconstructions of monuments damaged by acts of war or terrorism (such as the Palmyra Arch).
2. When the decision is made to engage in reconstruction, institutions should avoid the reconstruction of unbuilt works that create a false sense of history by forthrightly interpreting the reconstruction as a

modern exercise. Furthermore, in erecting unbuilt designs to meet current building codes, all appropriate efforts should be made to adhere to the original design using original materials, and to achieve conformity to modern building codes by accommodations made in less visible areas of the building.

3. When the desired function (such as an entry pavilion or visitors' center) can be appropriately accommodated with a contemporary design, the new design should be undertaken. The focus upon a reconstructed past should not detract from or call into question efforts that might otherwise result in a new generation of contemporary designs that themselves might become worthy of preservation in the future.

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