

Richard Longstreth

*Looking beyond the Icons: Midcentury Architecture, Landscape, and Urbanism*

University of Virginia Press, 2015

Richard Longstreth's collection of essays, *Looking beyond the Icons: Midcentury Architecture, Landscape, and Urbanism* combines extraordinary depth of historical research with sophisticated preservation advocacy. It is a model for melding these affiliated disciplines. Longstreth writes about overlooked, controversial, and often despised heritage with great erudition and provides far ranging engagement with architecture's context in economics, culture, real estate, finance, politics, and social vision; his work broadens our understanding of buildings and landscapes both as they were conceived and as their meaning and influence has changed across time. Longstreth casts an inquiring eye across compelling subjects ranging from post-liturgical reform design in the Catholic Church, to the role of design in progressive education, to the importance of landscape setting to vernacular motels, and makes a cogent argument for the preservation of urban renewal sites and shopping malls. Longstreth's analysis clearly articulates why the preservation of buildings and landscapes is important and why these help us gain insights into the past in ways that texts, photographs, and other forms of communication cannot. These virtuoso essays, written over a period of thirty years and now gathered into a single volume, are also a wakeup call to preservation communities that are often too reticent to support efforts to save non-traditional buildings or to look critically at preservation's complicity in the prettification of historic environments through faux-historic design and landscaping. *Looking beyond the Icons* captures the arc of a career of pioneering investigation into, and preservation advocacy of, mid-century design. It beautifully complements the body of work represented by the Antoinette Forster Downing prize.

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