

# Rising High



**"It must be tall. Every inch of it tall. The force and power of altitude must be in it, the glory and pride of exultation must be in it..."—Louis Sullivan in his essay "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," *Lippincott's Magazine*, March, 1896).**

**T**he modern skyscraper is a symbol of the 20th century, but the history of the high and towering phenomenon began in fact earlier, during the low days of despair following the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 and after a nationwide economic depression that did not end until 1875. The efforts to rebuild Chicago introduced a new attitude of functional design that employed technological innovations and demonstrated the city's ascendancy in skyscraper design. This architectural revolution left behind old European trends and produced

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unique American projects initiated by the father of the skyscraper, William Le Baron Jenney, who came to Chicago in 1867 and developed the steel-framed skyscraper, in such designs as the first Leiter Building (1879) and the Home Insurance Building (1884), both now demolished. The modern skyscraper was constructed using iron- and steel-framing techniques in place of traditional masonry construction, which had restricted vertical progress.

Jenney was followed by younger Chicago architects who created extraordinary structures that included the 16-story Monadnock Building (1889–91 by Daniel Burn-

*Highrise*, panoramic video work, Sandra Rosas Ridolfi, Hyde Park Art Center.

ham and John Root), a narrow slab-like form of sculptural mass in brick, a powerful expression of simplicity. Burnham and Root looked up and went on to design the 22-story steel-framed, terracotta-clad Masonic Temple

**Andy Warhol's film *Empire* was filmed as one stationary shot of the Empire State Building from 8:06 p.m. to 2:42 a.m. on July 25–26, 1964.**

(1890–92), which was lighter and more open (demolished in 1939). At the same time Chicago's Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler designed a particularly innovative vertical structure, the Schiller Theater Building, later the Garrick Theater and then demolished. Sullivan's philosophy of "form follows function" was celebrated in many new constructions. However, as it often happens in the city where politics drives all, a strict height-limitation ordinance arrested further progress in Chicago until after World War I. By then, New York City had taken the lead with an unmatched vertical rise.

The concept of the skyscraper in art is powerful in both form and function. Andy Warhol's film *Empire* was filmed as one stationary shot of the Empire State Building from 8:06 p.m. to 2:42 a.m. on July 25–26, 1964. The cameraman was Jonas Mekas. Warhol created *Empire* in several 100-foot rolls of film, each separated from the next by a flash of light. Each roll had become a piece

of time, real and cinematic. Warhol lengthened *Empire's* running time by projecting the film slower than its shooting speed, thereby making the progression to darkness barely visible. The result is eight hours and five minutes long. The film's protagonist is the tallest building in New York, and the action is the passage from daylight to darkness. Occasionally the viewer can see an office light turn on or a blinking light at a neighboring building, and in three of the reels, Mekas and Warhol started filming before they turned the light off, so it's possible for the viewer to see the reflections of the two in the window. Warhol commented that the point of his film was to "see time go by."

Although there are very few words spoken during 182 minutes of the film *Cremaster 3*, a viewer can find curious characters and remarkable action. Written and directed in 2002 by artist Matthew Barney, the film is set in New York, specifically centered in the Chrysler Building, its spiky Art Deco spire reaching the clouds. The film's skyscraper is a temple in progress, a symbol of fanatical and ambitious creativity. The film portrays the power to create and destroy and the downfalls of hubris and arrogance.

A new work, *Highrise* by Chicago-based artist Sandra Rosas Ridolfi (b. 1979), opened this month at Hyde Park Art Center, running through April 12. The panoramic video work deconstructs a Gold Coast skyscraper that the artist had spent hours of filming and recording. Ridolfi, who filmed her footage from the rooftop of the Marriot on Michigan Avenue, shows events that occurred from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. during the fall of 2008. Her film reveals the subject's architecture and the corresponding pattern of human activity weaving in, around and through it. In an interview with *Chicago Life*, Ridolfi spoke of her interest in the patterns of time and space and their effect on human activity. "I have been working with the notion of time and duration... I have been exploring time and its relationship to nature, space and human activity by questioning our perception of it through the use of video and photography, due to their documentary nature." □