

DAVID SCHOFIELD

INSPIRED BY THE MOOD AND ARCHITECTURE OF CITY STREETS, SCHOFIELD MAKES SKETCHES ON SITE TO INFORM HIS LARGE, DISTINCTIVE PEN-AND-INK DRAWINGS.

BY M. STEPHEN DOHERTY

It is rare for a New York gallery to devote its main exhibition space to a display of drawings by one contemporary artist. Neither the sizes nor the prices of typical drawings are large enough to justify such a showing. But the monumental pen-and-ink drawings created by Florida artist David Schofield did take command of Gallery Henschel in the city's SoHo district in October, 1991, and attracted the attention of collectors willing to pay prices comparable to those charged for paintings. A description of how these drawings were created helps to explain the reasons for this unusual gallery exhibition.

DRAWING: A LIFELONG INTEREST

Schofield, who is 36, has been drawing with pen and ink since he was a child, almost always focusing his attention on architectural structures. "When I was 14, I did a series of drawings of landmarks around the Chicago suburb where I was raised, and a local bank was going to publish them in its calendar," he recalls. "That project was never completed, but it got me into a small business of drawing private homes, churches, and historic buildings in the area."

An avid swimmer, Schofield had considered becoming a marine biologist but left college in the mid-1970s to establish a career as a professional

artist. He supported himself by selling drawings door-to-door, first in Miami and then in Philadelphia where he took a few art classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. "I literally went from house to house in the wealthier sections of town, asking people if I could do pen-and-ink drawings of their homes, members of their families, or whatever, all on a no-obligation basis. On a good day, one out of two people would say yes and on a bad day, one out of three. During the three years I pursued this, only one person refused to buy the drawing I made for him."

While in Philadelphia, Schofield began making larger pen-and-ink drawings of historic buildings in a style that was more personal and inventive than the quick sketches he had been selling door-to-door. He continued in this direction after relocating to Key West, Florida, in the late 1970s.

A collection of these ambitious drawings was shown in Schofield's first solo exhibit in Key West in 1979. At the age of 21, he had established a distinctly original style of pen-and-ink drawing. Two successive exhibits at the Key West gallery gave him the professional security to continue exploring that style of work. More recent exhibitions in Washington, Texas, New Jersey, and New York have shown a further exploration of that style.



Gilsey House, 1984, pen and ink, 60 x 41½.
Collection the artist.

BEGINNING WITH SKETCHES

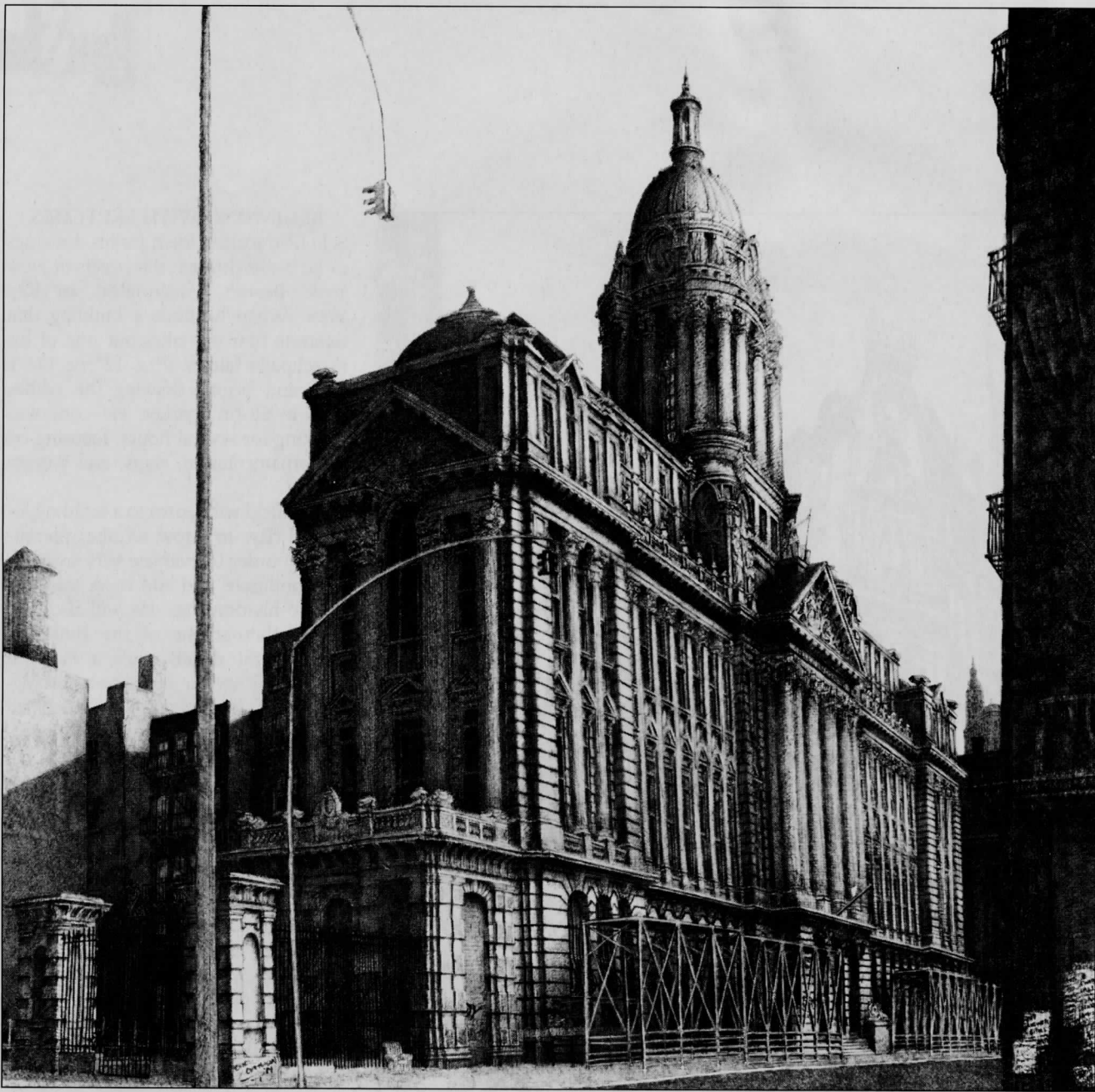
Schofield gathers ideas for his drawings as he walks through the streets of New York, Boston, Washington, or Key West. When he finds a building that interests him, he takes out one of his sketchpads (either 9" x 12" or 11" x 14") and begins drawing the edifice with a felt-tip marker. He continues working for several hours, focusing on the ornamentation, signs, and pattern of light.

Schofield will return to a building for several days in a row, weather permitting, in order to evaluate various lighting conditions and add more information to his drawings. He will also take crude photographs of the building's architectural details with a Polaroid camera. He says he needs only the suggestion of those forms—not detailed records, which would impose a photographic quality on his drawings.

The artist considers these felt pen drawings to be nothing more than preparatory studies; they are not finished drawings to be preserved and exhibited. He has no concern for the permanence of the materials or the condition of the sketches while they are being used in the development of the large pen-and-ink drawings. Many of the sketches become mutilated or destroyed as they are being used as reference material. "People who collect my work often ask me if they can buy the preliminary sketches used to make the pen-and-ink drawing they own, but I'm reluctant to sell them. I don't want to have to start worrying about making the sketches with permanent, well-preserved materials," Schofield says.

DEVELOPING THE INK DRAWING

Once back in his Key West studio, Schofield goes through the accumulated felt-pen sketches to decide on those that he feels are worth enlarging into complex pen-and-ink drawings. He then cuts a large piece of parchment



Central Police Station, 1984, pen and ink,
48 x 54½. Private collection.

with a snowflakelike surface from the 36"-wide roll he buys from New York Central Art Supply in New York City and lays it out on his drawing table.

Without taping the paper to the table, the artist uses a ruler and pencil to mark off the vertical and horizontal axes of both the sketch and the parchment paper so that his enlarged drawing will be centered on the page. Next, he blocks in the major lines of the building, again in pencil.

While the size of Schofield's drawings ranges from 18" x 24" to 36" x

144", the scale of the buildings in those drawings is fairly consistent. "I feel comfortable drawing buildings to a certain unmeasured scale," he explains, "so the overall size of the paper depends on the size of the buildings I'm trying to represent. Drawings of one-story residences are small, while those of city blocks are eight to 12 feet long."

Schofield's buildings demonstrate the artist's understanding of linear perspective. "Even as a teenager, I would figure out the vanishing points and

make sure that all the lines were directed to common points on the horizon," he observes. At times, Schofield distorts the horizontal lines establishing the tops of the buildings so as to enhance the sense of monumentality.

With the pencil lines marking off the general shapes on the page, Schofield is now ready to apply ink lines to the parchment with a Koh-I-Noor Rapidograph pen. He uses only one size nib in the pen—size 00—but files the end to bring it to a sharp point. Experience in working on parchment



Photo courtesy Govinda Gallery, Washington, DC

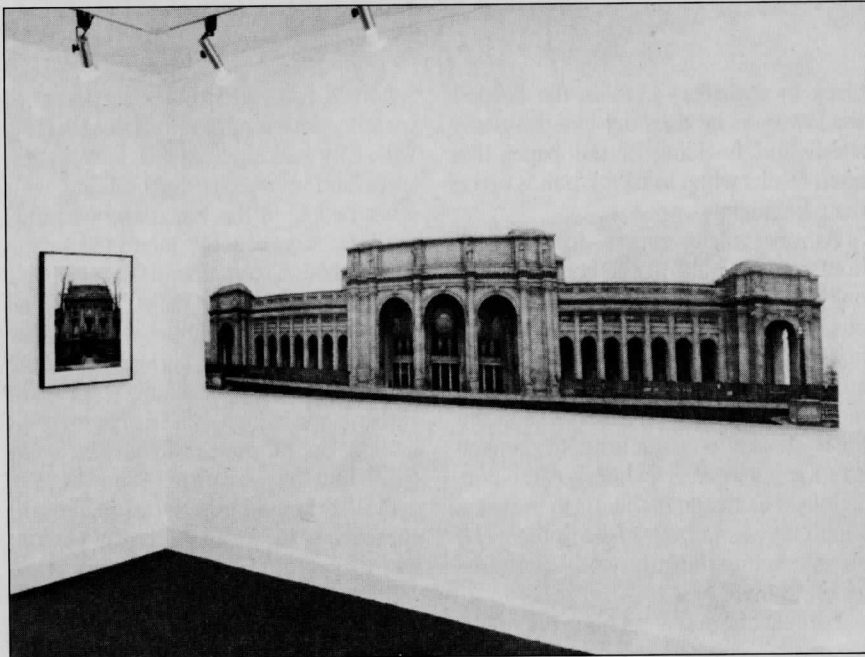
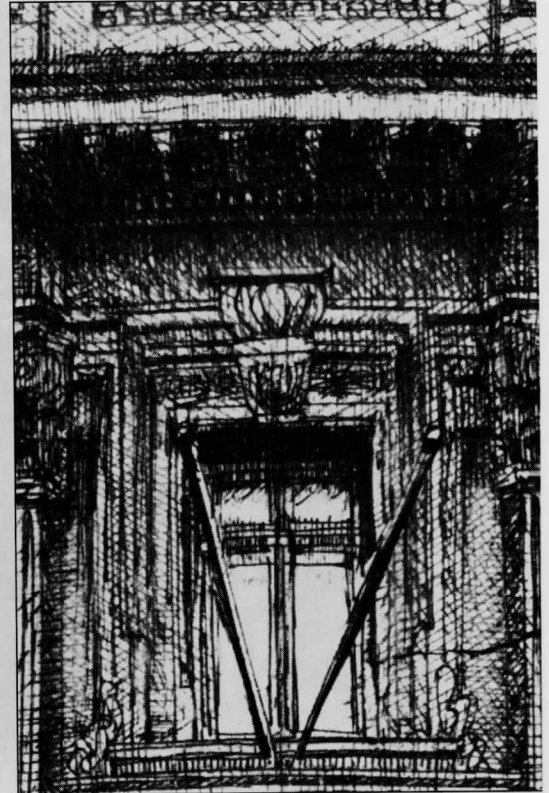


Photo: Edward Owen

Above, left: **The Cosmos Club**, 1983, pen and ink, 24 x 18. Private collection.

Above, right: A detail of **The Cosmos Club**.

Left: A 1983 installation at the Govinda Gallery in Washington, DC, showing Schofield's **The Cosmos Club** (left) and **Union Station**, which is 12 feet long.



Seventy-Second Street, 1984, pen and ink,
36½ x 48. Private collection.

paper has shown that he needs this sharper point to break the surface of the paper to allow the ink to become absorbed into the fibers.

Focusing on only one area of the drawing (usually near the center of the page), Schofield develops that section to near completion before moving on to another. Working within this roughly 8"-x-10" space, the artist goes over the penciled edges of the buildings, adds more lines to establish the windows, doors, and decorations, and then begins developing the values with hatched and cross-hatched lines.

An incredible number of uniform straight lines, drawn in all directions, establish a rich variety of gray tones in the drawing. Schofield avoids making a solid

black in any area—even in the deepest shadows—as he does not like the glossy sheen and buckling of the paper that often results when India ink builds up on the parchment.

As one might expect, hundreds of hours are devoted to the completion of one Schofield drawing. Following a rigorous schedule, the artist puts in eight to 12 hours a day, seven days a week, on his artwork. Each drawing takes a month or more to complete, and Schofield concentrates on only one at a time. In preparation for his recent New York exhibition, Schofield increased his efforts to the point where he was putting in 14 hours a day on completing the large works promised for the show.

For relief from that grueling discipline,

Schofield has gotten into the routine of spending four months of the year in New York City making sketches, visiting galleries and museums, and talking with other people in the visual and performing arts. "I've become interested in the ballet through some friends of mine who are with the American Ballet Theater," he explains. "I've spent hours watching the dancers rehearse and perform. At some point, I'd like to try doing some pen-and-ink drawings of the figures in motion, but for now, I still have an agenda of buildings to draw." Knowing the dedicated manner in which Schofield approaches his work, one can be sure that that agenda will be met and there will be a logical progression to other graphic images. ♦♦

A detail of **The Boathouse**.



Below: **The Boathouse**, 1983,
pen and ink, 24 x 36.
Private collection.

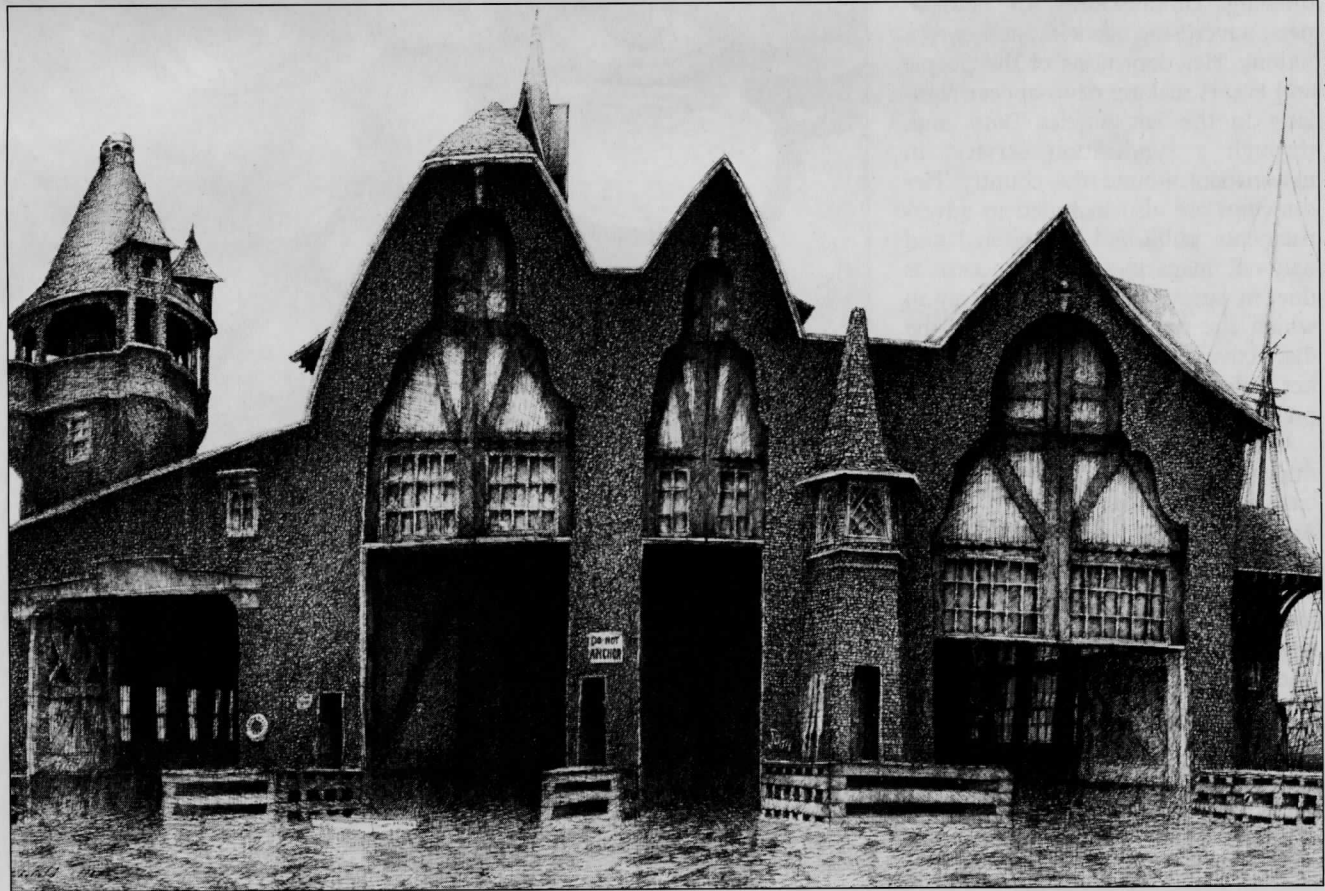


Photo courtesy: Gowanda Gallery, Washington, DC.