

The Urban Presence of Sketchers

Juan Fernández González

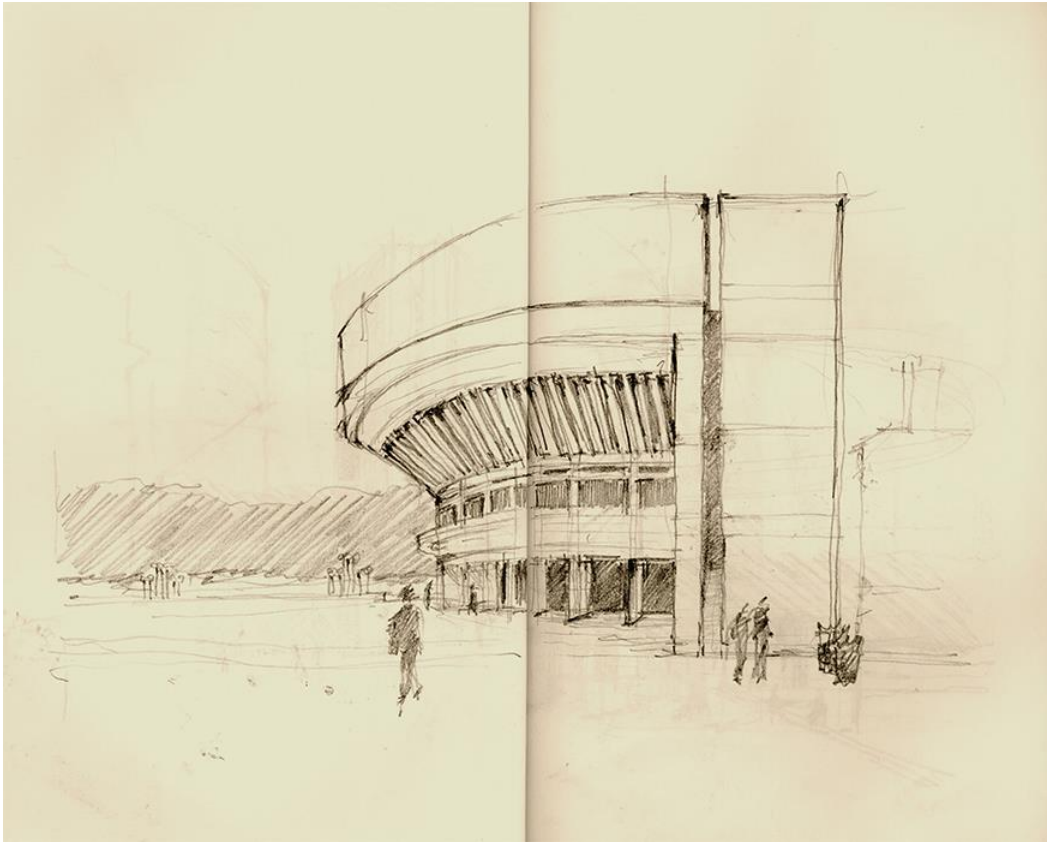
Abstract

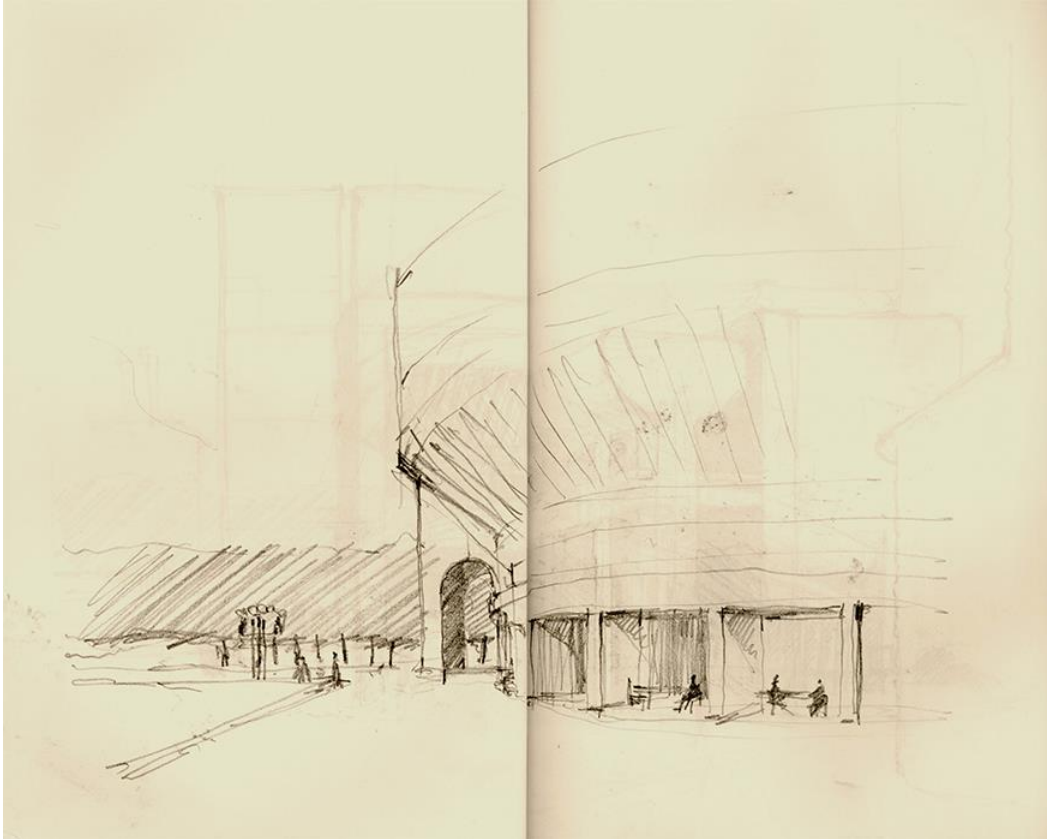
The presence of urban sketchers has an impact on pedestrian traffic and exchanges in the city. The nature of these exchanges depends on where people sketch from and whether they are alone or in a group. This piece includes sketches from the Christian Science Plaza in Boston, which were drawn in public by the author.

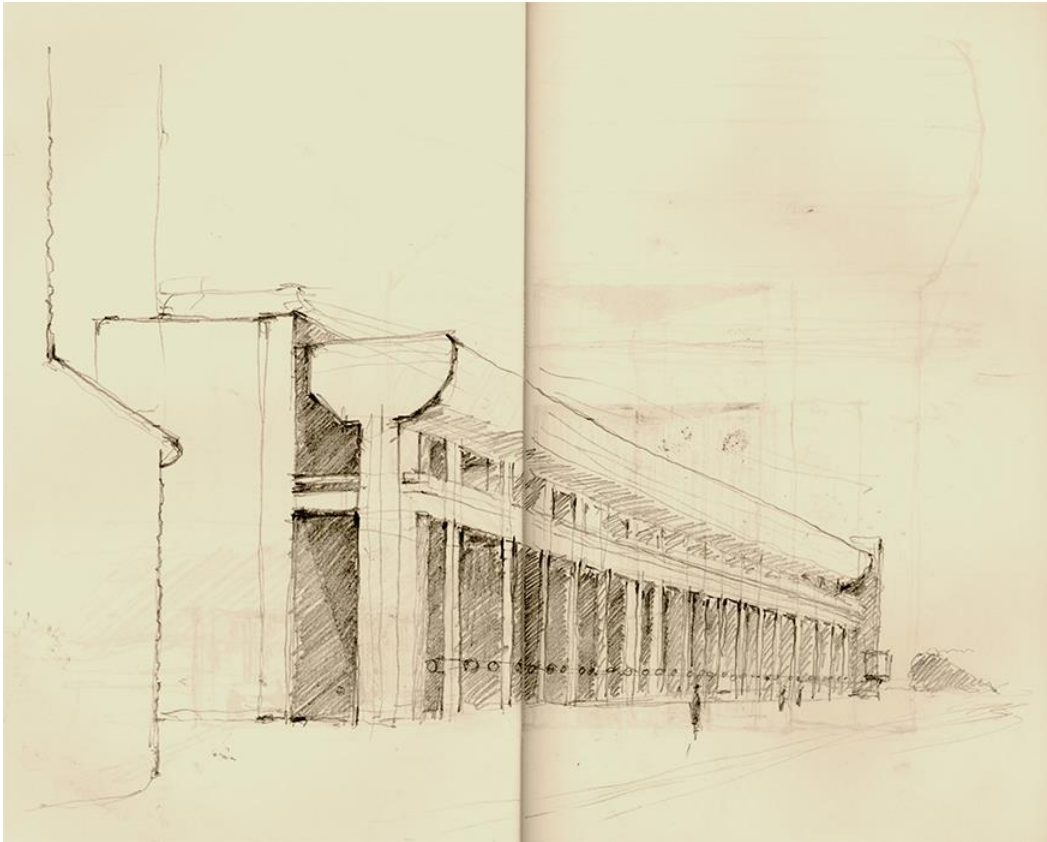
Urban sketching has an impact on pedestrian traffic. Several years of on-site sketching have led me to experience different encounters with pedestrians. The nature of these exchanges often depends on the choice of a place from where you draw. When I sat on a narrow lane beside a canal in Annecy, and when I sat on the steps of a Tadao Ando museum in Tokyo, my physical presence disturbed traffic. Sometimes people walk around me and other times they decide to stop to look at my sketchbook or to talk with me. When I stood on a store's doorstep to sketch the cathedral of Mérida, and when I hid by the bushes in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, my physical presence seemed to go unnoticed. Yet, the Mexican owner of the store across the street offered me a bottle of cold water, and a New Yorker took a picture of my sketch. The nature of the exchanges with people also depends on the choice of a subject. When I sketched the Christian Science Plaza in Boston, and when I sketched a dock in Lunenburg, people curiously looked the same way that I was looking. Urban traffic is affected even more when several people draw on the same spot. McGill University's Sketching School and the Harvard Graduate School of Design's GSD Sketching Group bring people together to sketch on-site. Whether it is four people or sixty, groups of sketchers slow down pedestrian traffic because they physically occupy a part of public space and because they capture the attention of the passerby. In addition to being a way of observing and capturing different places, sketching is a delightful way of engaging with people and pedestrian traffic.

Juan Fernández González. Christian Science Plaza. (Boston, 2021).











About the author

Juan Fernández González is a Master of Architecture Candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he is the President and Co-Founder of the GSD Sketching Group. This student group aims to dignify the role of hand drawing in architectural education. Since his graduation from the B.Sc. Architecture program at McGill University in 2019, Juan has helped Ricardo Castro and David Covo teach Architectural Sketching and Field Sketching every summer, most recently as a Course Lecturer.

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