

2 Graphic Representation as Reconstructive Memory: Stirling's German Museum Projects

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Introduction

Between 1975 and 1977, James Stirling's office¹ entered three competitions for the design of museums in Germany. Although only the last design, for the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, was a winning entry that resulted in the building of the museum according to Stirling's plans, all three designs were widely published in leading architectural magazines. Of particular interest are the publications of the designs for the Nordrhein-Westfalen Museum in Düsseldorf and the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne in *The Architectural Review* in 1976² and even more so in *Lotus International* in 1977.³ What made these publications unusual was the inclusion of types of representation that were not commonly encountered in contemporary architectural publications: a large number of axonometric line-only drawings and small freehand sketches. The article in *Lotus* ended with a graphic collage that put the Düsseldorf and Cologne design principles into a broader context of Stirling's work. Various projects and the links among them were demonstrated by the same kind of analytical drawings, as the architects called them. The Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, the third in Stirling's "German museum trilogy," was presented in *Architectural Design*⁴ in late 1977 through photographs of the building's model and an array of typical small-size Stirling "doodles." Axonometric drawings of the Stuttgart museum were published elsewhere later on.⁵ Figure 2.1 displays a sample of sketches made for the Düsseldorf museum. A sheet of sketches made for Stuttgart is reproduced in Figure 2.2.

The "axos," as the axonometric drawings were called, were partial and "edited" views of selected elements of

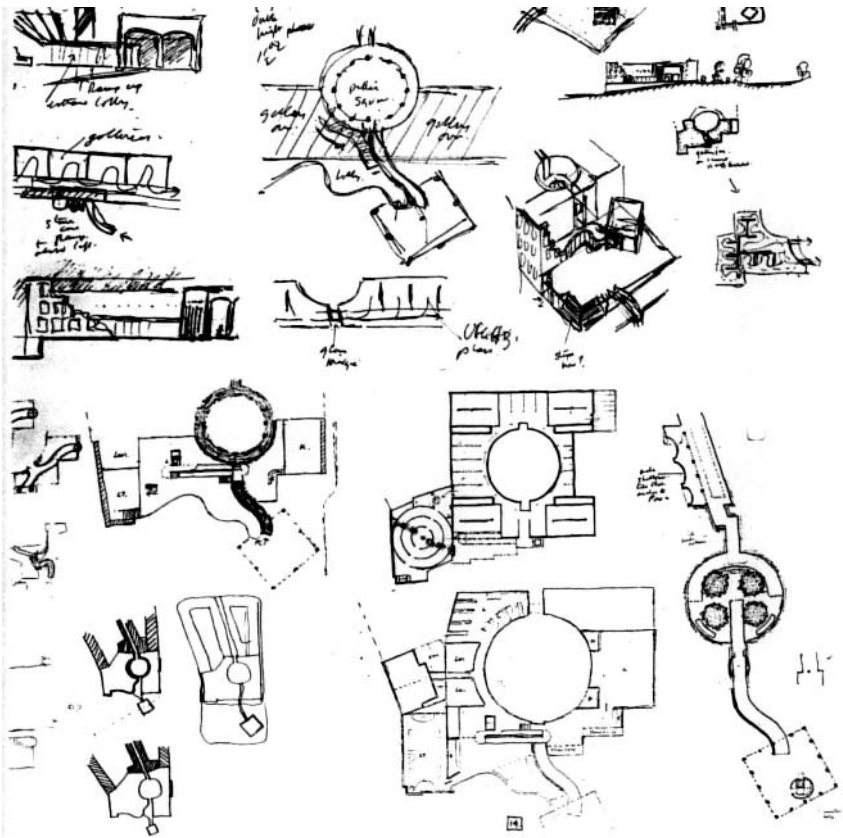


Figure 2.1 James Stirling, sketches for the Nordrheine-Westfalen Museum in Düsseldorf.

the proposed buildings, rather schematic, as opposed to habitual detailed and “rendered” views of buildings that were the norm in publications (i.e., using texture, shading etc. to “enliven” the representation). The axonometric drawings were quite abstract and could hardly be taken to represent views of the building as it would be perceived by an observer, regardless of his or her station point. Rather, the architects were interested in exposing the major concepts that guided the design in as “pure” a manner as possible. The reductionist strategy they adopted and the choice of impossible viewing angles served the purpose of explaining the concept instead of presenting the building. Along with other images that supported the representation of design concepts, we shall refer to the drawings in the competition publications as “conceptual drawings”.

The published drawings in the various reports on the German museums were a unique mixture of conventional presentation drawings (plans, sections, and elevations), conceptual drawings (mostly schematic axonometric views) and preliminary freehand sketches. Some were exploratory drawings made during the process of design; others were “after” drawings, made post factum to convey particular images and concepts: the ideas and principles that went