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# The 2004 Gold Medal

## Nomination Sheet

### Nominator

Jamie Aycock

AIA Board member name (or PIA contact name)

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### Candidate

Auburn University - Rural Studio

Firm Name

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THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS



May 29, 2003

Gold Medal Jury  
The American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20006-5292

Re: Nomination of Samuel Mockbee, FAIA

To the Jury:

Please accept this letter and enclosed submittal package as the nomination of Samuel "Sambo" Mockbee, FAIA for the 2004 AIA Gold Medal. The entire Gulf States Region unanimously supports Samuel Mockbee's re-nomination for this prestigious honor.

The breadth and depth of Mr. Mockbee's tragically short career is truly astounding. He was in professional practice where he won numerous local and regional design awards, created a new regional vernacularism, received the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant as well as numerous other national accolades, taught at Harvard, Yale, Berkeley, University of Virginia, and Auburn University.

Mr. Mockbee, who preferred Sambo, is best known for his energy dedicated to co-founding and directing Auburn University's Rural Studio, located in Hale County, Alabama, where he devoted the last 12 years of his life. He focused on teaching a unique blend of vernacular architecture and social responsibility to a generation of architectural students, through an invigorating creative design process and hands-on building experiences. He taught his students that architecture is a discipline deeply rooted in community and to embrace his philosophy that everyone, rich or poor, deserved a "shelter for the soul." I know of no other architect, anywhere, who has done more in the cause of architecture, decency, and of creating livable communities, while at the same time molding hundreds of today's students into caring citizen architects. So, this is just the beginning.

As the enclosed biography and body of work will indicate, Sambo Mockbee was a complex man, all at once genius, spiritual and creative, modest and charming, humble and proud. With over 100 books, articles, and films published, Sambo and the Rural Studio have truly transcended both the architectural profession and the academy and have found a shelter in the hearts of the populace, not only in the south, but throughout the country and the world.

I am honored to make this nomination. Sambo Mockbee, the architect, the teacher and the man, deserves to be awarded the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Architects.

Thanks for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jamie Aycock".

Jamie Aycock, AIA  
Gulf States Regional Director

Samuel "Sambo" Mockbee, FAIA  
1944-2001

BIOGRAPHY

Samuel "Sambo" Mockbee dedicated his life, as a teacher and as an architect, to the goal of providing "shelter for the soul". His inspirational and authentic architecture served to improve the lives of the most impoverished residents of rural Alabama through his work at Auburn University's Rural Studio. Mockbee was so committed to this pure act of service that, in 1991, he abandoned a full time architectural practice with Coleman Coker and the firm Mockbee Coker Architects to accept a position at Auburn's School of Architecture. It was there that he and long time friend and Auburn professor D.K. Ruth conceived of and founded the Rural Studio concept.

A fifth-generation Mississippian, Mockbee was born on December 23, 1944 in Meridian. Because of his love for drawing, he knew by the time of his ninth birthday that he wanted to become an architect. However, upon graduating from high school and before beginning the formal study of architecture, Sambo served two years in the U.S. Army as an artillery officer at Fort Benning, Georgia. At the conclusion of his armed service commitment, he enrolled at Auburn and graduated from the School of Architecture in 1974. After an initial internship in Columbus, Georgia, he returned to his native Mississippi in 1977 to form a partnership with classmate and friend Thomas Goodman. The firm quickly established a regional reputation for outstanding design through the utilization of local materials to create a work based upon derivations of vernacular imagery. Mockbee Goodman Architects won more than twenty-five state and regional design awards during their short affiliation. However, it was his partnership with Coleman Coker in 1983 that established Mockbee's reputation as one of the nation's premier regionalists, and as a strong and important new voice coming from the South. In 1990, Mockbee Coker Architects was selected by the Architectural League of New York to participate in their prestigious Emerging Voices Series. In 1995 Princeton Architectural Press published *Mockbee Coker: Thought and Process*, a monograph recognition of their important, but unusual body of work. The book documented the manner in which Mockbee Coker challenged the preconceptions and definitions of the normative process of creating architecture. It was during this time that Mockbee began to bring into focus a personal understanding and recognition of the social, economic, and cultural inconsistencies that existed in the late Twentieth Century South. That collected knowledge, coupled with the existing cultural heritage of mystery and mysticism of the region, became a framing device which established both boundaries and opportunities for his work. It was this experience that led to Mockbee's early interest in working to improve the living and working conditions of the South's most impoverished citizens.

The Auburn University Rural Studio became the vehicle through which Sambo Mockbee would be able to realize his personal aspiration that architecture become for him, a *work which was true to the heart*. The Rural Studio was conceived as an opportunity to raise the spirits of the rural poor through the creation of homes and community facilities which aspired to the same set of architectural ideals and virtues as those buildings which have substantial budgets and prosperous clientele. Mockbee once said that "Everybody wants the same thing, rich or poor ... not only a warm, dry room, but a shelter for the soul". The Rural Studio epitomizes that aspiration. Working from this ideal, students enrolled in the Rural Studio are exposed to the concept of

“context based learning” where they actually live in and become a part of the community in which they are working. It is through this process that they learn the critical skills of planning, design, and building in a socially responsible manner. More importantly, Mockbee’s social ethic is imbued in the students by instilling professionalism, volunteerism, individual responsibility, and a commitment to community service. In that context, Mockbee and the Rural Studio faculty have involved the students with materials investigations and technologies which have mitigated the effects of poverty upon rural living conditions. Mockbee presented architecture as a discipline which is rooted in community ... a principle that must be committed to environmental, social, political, and aesthetic issues. The Rural Studio is a demonstration to students that they can make a difference.

The work of the Rural Studio is well documented and it has won numerous accolades throughout the United States and worldwide. It has been featured prominently by both the popular and the professional media, including the 2001 Princeton University Press publication *Rural Studio: Samuel Mockbee and An Architecture of Decency* by Andrea Oppenheimer Dean. Television crews from ABC’s Nightline, Oprah Winfrey, CNN, CBS, and PBS appear with regularity at the Rural Studio compound in tiny Newbern, Alabama. In 2000, Mockbee was the recipient of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation “Genius Grant”. The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York invited the Rural Studio to exhibit in its 2002 *Biennial* which opened on March 7. The *Biennial* exhibits the best in American contemporary art and marks the first time the museum has extended invitations to architects. In 2001, Mockbee was one of eight recipients of the 2001 Mississippi Governor’s Award for Excellence in the Arts. And, in 2000 he was one of five national architects honored for environmental, social, and aesthetic contributions by the Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum at a White House ceremony. In 1988 he was the first recipient of the National Building Museum’s Apgar Award for Excellence. In addition to Auburn, Mockbee taught at Harvard, Yale, Berkeley, and the University of Virginia.

In September of 1998 Sambo was diagnosed with leukemia. The illness slowed him down, but he none-the-less remained committed to the aspirations and ideals of the Rural Studio. He and his students began experimenting with recycled goods, such as discarded cardboard and carpet tiles, as potential low cost building materials. On December 30, 2001 he died of complication from the disease. He is survived by his wife Jackie and four children, Margaret, Sarah Ann, Carol, and Julius. Despite his renown, Sambo Mockbee remained modest and resolutely “down-home” until his death. He was a charmer with a quick wit and a thick Southern drawl. Samuel Mockbee was a rare hybrid who was truly loved and admired by all who came in contact with him. He had an amazing design talent, but his uniqueness came from his compassion for people, especially those who were socially and economically disadvantaged. He cast a spotlight on an aspect of our culture that most avoid ... and he demonstrated that socially responsible architecture can delight the senses, inspire the masses, and serve the soul.

Quoting David Moos in the January/February 2003 edition of *Tema Celeste*:

“Much as one feels his devastating absence, Sambo Mockbee’s legacy lives on as the Rural Studio continues its unique pedagogical process ... his bequest is best felt through the deeds of colleagues and students who are preparing this coming year for a full slate of projects which live up to his ideals of honesty and moral merit.”



## EXHIBITS

*"Rural Studio"* traveling exhibition 2003-forward, Curator: Birmingham Museum of Modern Art, Birmingham, Alabama to travel onward to museum sites at Atlanta, San Francisco, Toronto, National Building Museum, Washington, D.C., Scottsdale, Arizona, Paris and London.

*"Self-Help Continued: the Rural Studio,"* Colegio de Arquitectos de Cataluña (COAC), Barcelona, Spain, June 12, 2003.

*"Utility NOW!: Richard Saxton and the municipalWORKSHOP"* Rural Studio Outreach Student exhibit of Street Sweepers, Indiana University Art Museum, 2003.

*"Just Build It!: Rural Studio,"* Architekturzentrum Wien, Vienna, Austria, March, 2003.

*"Design Matters: Newbern Baseball Club,"* Design Alabama, Montgomery, Alabama, 2002.

*"Theater of Tile"* Neo-Con Interiors Trade Fair & Exhibition, Merchandise Mart, Chicago, Illinois, 2002.

"Creative Excellence Award" by International Interior Trade Design Association (IIDA) Chicago, Illinois.

*"Rural Studio – Three Thesis Projects"*, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Biennial Exhibition, New York, New York, 2002

*"Interface Americas presents: Rural Studio"*, Neo-Con Interiors Trade Fair & Exhibition, Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL, 2001.

*"Architecture of the Black Warrior River"*, Max Protetch Gallery, New York, New York, 2000

*"Design Culture Now"*, Smithsonian, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, New York, New York, 2000

*"Futures to Come"*, *Architectural Record*, Max Protetch Gallery, New York, New York, 1999

*"Rose Ranch House"*, *GA Houses*, Global Architecture Gallery, Tokyo, Japan, 1999

*"Architecture of the Everyday"*, Nexus Center for Contemporary Art, Atlanta, Georgia, 1999

*"Fabrications"*

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1998

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998

Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio, 1998

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Spain, 1998

## ACADEMIC POSITIONS

Professor of Architecture

Gresham Professor

Auburn Alumni Professor, Auburn University, 1991– 2001

Freidman Professor, University of California, Berkeley, 1998

Davenport Professor, Yale University, 1997

Shure Professor, University of Virginia, 1996

Goff Professor, University of Oklahoma, 1995

Visiting Professor, Harvard University, 1994

Distinguished Visiting Critic, Clemson University, 1990

Design Studio Critic, Adjunct, Mississippi State University, 1984 - 1990

## PROFESSIONAL

Mockbee Goodman Architects, 1977 – 1983

Mockbee Coker Architects, 1983 – 2000

Samuel Mockbee, Architect, Canton, Mississippi, 2000 - 2001

Elected, The American Institute of Architects, College of Fellows, 1989

National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, Registered Architect, 1977

**STATEMENT OF ACHIEVEMENTS/AWARDS**  
**Samuel "Sambo" Mockbee, FAIA**

**MAJOR AWARDS**

Richard Neutra Award for Professional Excellence, California State Polytechnic University  
2002, posthumous.

Quality of Life Award, Auburn University College of Human Sciences, United Nations Building,  
Washington, D.C., 2001, posthumous.

John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellow "Genius Award", 2000

Cooper Hewitt, Nominee for Environmental Design Award, 2000

Caring Institute Award, Washington, D.C., 2000

Mississippi Governor's Lifetime Achievement Award for Artistic Excellence, 2000

Tau Sigma Delta Silver Medal, Texas Tech University, 2000

J. Streeter Wiatt Distinguished Professor, Auburn University, 2000

Apgar Award for Excellence, National Building Museum, Washington, D.C., 1999

Tau Sigma Delta Silver Medal, Mississippi State University, 1998

Record Houses Award, Shiloh Fall Residence, *Architectural Record*, 1997

Outstanding Faculty Member of the Year, School of Architecture, Auburn University, 1995

The Education Honors Program Recognition, "Auburn Rural Studio", The American Institute of Architects,  
Washington, D.C., 1995

National AIA Honor Award, Cook Residence, 1994

Graham Foundation Grant, "The Nurturing of Culture in the Rural South", Chicago, IL, 1993

Record Houses Award, Barton Residence, *Architectural Record*, 1992

National Honor Award, Barnard Observatory, University of Mississippi, National Trust for Historic  
Preservation, Washington, D.C., 1992

First Award, 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Design Awards, *Progressive Architecture*, Three Charity Houses "Breaking the  
Cycle of Poverty", 1987

Honor Award, Drawing by American Architects, AIA Journal, Washington, D.C., 1982

**Rural Studio  
Media List  
2003**

Wingfield, Kyle, "Innovative program develops rural communities, architectural minds," May 34, 2003, Associated Press wire story which appeared in newspapers throughout the country including *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Birmingham News*, and *The News and Observer*, Raleigh, N.C.

"Do Gooders," *It's Christopher Lowell*, The Discovery Channel, May 19, 2003. A look at the work of the Rural Studio since Samuel Mockbee's death.

Nix, Jason, "A Room of One's Own: AIDS transition home's design to incorporate newest in transitional care methodology," part two of a two part series, *Opelika-Auburn News*, March 16, 2003.

Nix, Jason, "A Room of One's Own: AU's Rural Studio reaches out to AIDS patients through labor and design," part one of a two part series, *Opelika-Auburn News*, March 9, 2003.

Ho, Cathy Lang, "In the Stacks: The last Rural Studio House Supervised by Samuel Mockbee Demonstrates that Design driven by Client, Community, and Context can Transcend any Obstacle," *Architecture*, February 2003.

Moos, David, "Life after Mockbee: Alabama's Rural Studio carries on Samuel Mockbee's legacy of inovative architecture at the service of improverished communities," *tem celeste*, February 2003.

Smith, Courtney and Topham, Sean, "Rural Studio: Corrugated Construction," *Extreme Homes*, Fall 2002.

Starling, Monica and Caldwell, Rebekah, "Rural Studio 2002, A Scrapbook," *The Auburn Circle*, Fall 2002, this same magazine was dedicated to the memory of Samuel Mockbee.

"Samuel Mockbee and Rural Studio," *Architecture NOW!*, Vol. 2, 2002 Taschen, London, publisher; Jodidio, Philip, Editor, p. 354.355-358.359.

Witt, Elaine, "Samuel Mockbee's philanthropic plan a timeless vision," *The Birmingham Post-Herald*, November 5, 2002.

Slessor, Catherine, "Rural Alliance: Two Community Projects, Alabama, USA.," *Architectural Review*, November 2002.

Hawthorne, Christopher, "The House that Mockbee Built," *ReadyMade*, November, 2002.

Gould, Kira L., "Design with Values," *Metropolis*, November, 2002.

Adams, Cathy, "Samuel Mockbee: A heroic figure with extraordinary talent fought for ideals that challenged and uplifted a culture," *Portico Birmingham*, September/October 2002.

Hawthorne, Christopher, "Let Us Now Praise Famous Housing for the Rural Poor," *New York Times*, September 19, 2002.

Oppenheimer Dean, Andrea with photos by Timothy Hursley "warm, dry, and noble," *Yes Magazine*, Summer, 2002

Lawley, Jim, "HOMEwork: Decatur woman, other architectural students, design, build homes for poor," *The Decatur Dailey*, July 7, 2002.

Design Review, "Home Run: Three students designed the scheme, taught themselves to work in metal, and made it," *The Architectural Review*, June 2002.

Berger, Rose Marie, "Building Dreams", *Sojourners Magazine*, May-June, 2002

Samuel Mockbee Interview, *CRiT*, Spring, 2002

"Farewell to a Hero," *Natural Home*, May-June, 2002

Houppert, Karen "Sam Mockbee, Dream Builder," *My Generation*, May-June, 2002

Dorman-Hickson, Nancy "The Rural Studio's Samuel Mockbee," *Southern Living*, April, 2002

Ruth, D.K. "Remembering Mockbee," *Metropolis*, April, 2002

Smith, Roberta "The Whitney Review," *The New York Times*, March 31, 2002

Staff Report "AU's Rural Studio work in Whitney Museum's 2002 Biennial," *Opelika-Auburn News*, March 20, 2002

Cotter, Holland "Spiritual America, From Ecstatic to Transcendent," *The New York Times*, March 8, 2002

Goldberger, Paul, "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men," *Architecture*, March 2002.

Lawrence, Elizabeth "Simple Gifts-Rural Studio builds homes, functional works of art, in rural Alabama," *The Auburn Plainsman*, February 14, 2002

Oppenheimer Dean, Andrea, and Hursley, Timothy *Rural Studio: Samuel Mockbee and an Architecture of Decency*, Princeton Press, February 2002

Freear, Andrew and Sanders, Jay, "Building Speculation: What Am I Learning? How Do I Teach?" *Influence Across Fields*, The Chicago Architecture Club, January, 2002.

Professor Samuel Mockbee died December 30, 2001 from complications associated with leukemia. Obituaries were printed in the following publications as well as other publications across the country and world: *The New York Times*, *AU Report*, *Tuscaloosa News*, *Mobile Register*, *Opelika Auburn News*, *The Auburn Plainsman* and *The Clarion-Ledger*.

Jacobs, Karrie "Tons (and Tons) of Cardboard," *Dwell*, December, 2001

Bonda, Penny S. "Home and Community for the Forgotten," *Interiors & Sources*, October, 2001

Stewart, Doug "Class Act," *Smithsonian Magazine*, October, 2001

Cawthon, Raad "Samuel Mockbee's Vision in an Invisible World," *Oxford American*, Fall, 2001

Ruth, Dennis K. "Rural Housing: Reflecting the Spirit of a Culture," *Carolina Planning*, Summer, 2001

Fox, Mindy, "Citizen Architect," *Garden Design Magazine*, May, 2001, 22-23.

Slessor, Catherine, "Three Community Projects, Alabama, USA SAM MOCKBEE, Rural Studio" *Architectural Review*, March 2001, 54-61.

Rice, Maylon T., "Visionary Visitor" *Northwest Arkansas Living*, Sunday, March 11, 2001, Section B, 1, 3

Dean, Andrea Oppenheimer and Kreyling, Christine, "The Hero of Hale County: Sam Mockbee" *Architectural Record*, February 2001, 76-82.

Marks, Randy, "A Catalyst Beneath the Stars," *Mosaic*, Southeastern Council of Foundations, Winter 2001, 6-8



Koch, Aaron, "In the Eyes of the Beholder: An interview with Sam Mockbee" *Crit Magazine*, Volume 49, 30

Hudson, Judy, "Samuel Mockbee" *Bomb Magazine*, February, 2001

Blitchington, Rosemarie, "Butterflies and Hay Bales" *Wemedia*, January-February, 2001, Vol. V, No. 1, 72-79

Mockbee, Samuel with Mindy Fox "Building Dreams: An Interview with Samuel Mockbee" *Sustainable Architecture White Papers*, Earth Pledge Foundation, 2000, 207-214.

Plummer, William and Wescott, Gail Camerson, "The Midas Touch—Rural Alabama Architect Samuel Mockbee Recycles Cast-off Materials and Lifts Up Lives," *People Magazine*, 12/4/2000, 217-221.

Sittenfeld, Curtis, "We Take Something Ordinary and Elevate it to Something Extraordinary," *Fast Company*, November, 2000, 296-310.

Foss, Sara, "Faith guides tire chapel's construction" *Birmingham News*, November 11, 2000, E5

Levy, Daniel S. "Alabama Modern-Samuel Mockbee creates homes for the poor that are cheap, practical—and unconventionally beautiful" *Time*, October 2, 2000, 92-94.

Johnson, Ken, "Art in Review; Samuel Mockbee" *New York Times*, September 22, 2000.

Seymour, Liz, "Samuel Mockbee: Reluctant Genius - Rural Studio Cofounder Receives MacArthur Fellowship" *Architecture*, August 2000, 27-28.

Grimsley Johnson, Rheta, "A Genius Nicknamed Sambo—Grant-winning architect's studio, students build on lessons of life" *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Thursday, June 22, 2000

Kochak, Jacqueline, "Auburn Professor Wins 'Genius Grant'" *Opelika-Auburn News*, Wednesday, June 14, 2000

Pickett, Rhoda, "Building Homes for Needy Families Earns Acclaim for Auburn Program" *Mobile Register*, 1

Scott, Janny, "For 25 New MacArthur Recipients, Some Security and Time to Think" *The New York Times*, Wednesday, June 14, 2000

Spencer, Thomas, "Auburn Architect Wins 'Genius Grant'" *The Birmingham News*, Wednesday, June 14, 2000

*Philanthropy News Digest*, "MacArthur Foundation Announces Year 2000 Fellowships" Vol. 6, Issue 25, June 13, 2000

*Democrat-Reporter*, Lindon, Alabama, "'Proud' Thomaston Celebrates Public Market" June 08, 2000

Mays, Vernon, "The Super Shed: Not Your Typical Dorm" *Architecture*, May 2000, 192-199

Ivey, Robert, Editorial, *Architecture Magazine*, May 2000, 23-24

Spencer, Thomas, "No place like home" *The Birmingham News*, Metrostate, March 12, 2000, 21A + 25A

In addition to these articles, there were sixty-two pieces written between 1992 and March, 2000 about Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio.

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**Magee Church of Christ**  
**Magee, Mississippi**  
**1989**

The Magee Church of Christ is one of many new buildings built on developed farm land surrounding the small rural town of Magee. Sited on a country field yet adjacent to prefabricated buildings, the church's neighbors are car dealerships, Wal-Mart, and the local liquor barn. The reality of southern suburbia mixing with rural landscape comes to play in the Magee Church through its use of materials and siting. Incorporating the building materials used by its prefabricated neighbors and its distance from other buildings, the church can be experienced as rural, but understood as suburban. Placed on the crest of a hill, the surrounding natural grasses extend the site into the already loosely defined edges of property, and provide the needed distance from church to neighbors. The parts of the church are simply expressed through its composite form: tower, apse, and nave.

On approach the strength of the southern sun makes the building appear a vision of white wood-frame construction, typical of its predecessors, yet a closer look reveals that it is clad in corrugated metal siding and roofed in fiberglass shingles like its neighbors. The roof is supported by a series of wood scissor trusses that create a vaulted ceiling. A modest room for a congregation of thirty-five, the walls wash with the bright sunlight that spills through small, evenly spaced windows. A baffle refracts the light that comes through the larger windows, giving the room a constant glow, yet provides the parishioners with a suitably somber atmosphere for meditation. The apex of the chapel holds the baptistery pool, and is open to the sky through a gabled skylight. Strong light washes the baptistery walls, bathing the initiates with its cathartic intensity.



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## Mason's Bend Community Center

### Rural Studio Project

2000

On a central site in Mason's Bend, Alabama, thesis students have built a Community Center that includes: a transportation stop for a number of county-funded mobile projects such as a "Book-mobile" and a traveling health center, an outdoor area for community gathering, and a small chapel for the local prayer group.

Rural Studio students have worked with the Hale Empowerment Revitalization Organization (H.E.R.O.), which conducts mobile health and reading programs and this project will be a great benefit in their efforts to address the needs of this rural area. The citizens of Mason's Bend will benefit from having a place to come together and build a broader sense of community, as well as a place that facilitates the care of both their physical and spiritual health.

This project also involves two alternative building technologies. The walls of the structure are made of rammed earth, a material which is low-cost and environmentally sound. This method of building is also labor-intensive, and the students intend to involve the members of the community in the construction process. "Sharing the sweat" enhances the community's sense of ownership of the project, and allows the students an opportunity to form more meaningful relationships with their clients.

What began in design as a closed-in structure ended as an open-air pavilion whose fifteen-by-thirty foot footprint is similar to that of an old bus that was moved to build it. The building funnels visitors forward through a narrow entrance, covered by a fold of aluminum, toward a nave topped with a fish-scale glass membrane. The distinction between the raised nave with its gravel floor, and a lower side aisle, covered with black concrete, is articulated by a bend in the roof which explains the barn like appearance of the rear elevation.

Like most Rural Studio buildings, the community center is a lesson in resourcefulness. The rammed-earth walls are thirty percent clay and seventy percent sand. The mixture, combined with Portland cement, was poured into six-by-eight inch forms – lifts, as they are called – and compressed with a pneumatic tamper. To create trusses the students cut down cypress trees on land owned by a studio supporter. They sent the lumber off to be cured and laminated and used left over timbers to handcraft benches. Because there was not budget for buying glass for the roof, they came up with the idea of recycling automobile windshields. The students found a scrap yard that holds "pull-a-thons," which allow customers to have anything they can pull away for a low price. For \$120 they obtained eighty Chevy Caprice windshields. The building's structural steel, meanwhile, was donated by the family of a journalist who wrote a story about the Rural Studio. After these donated materials and deals the center was built for about \$20,000, which like all studio projects, was grants and gifts.

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## Antioch Baptist Church

### Rural Studio Project

2002

The Antioch Baptist Church in northwest Perry County, Alabama has a small congregation based on four families. With the existing church lacking a restroom and baptismal font, it was losing membership.

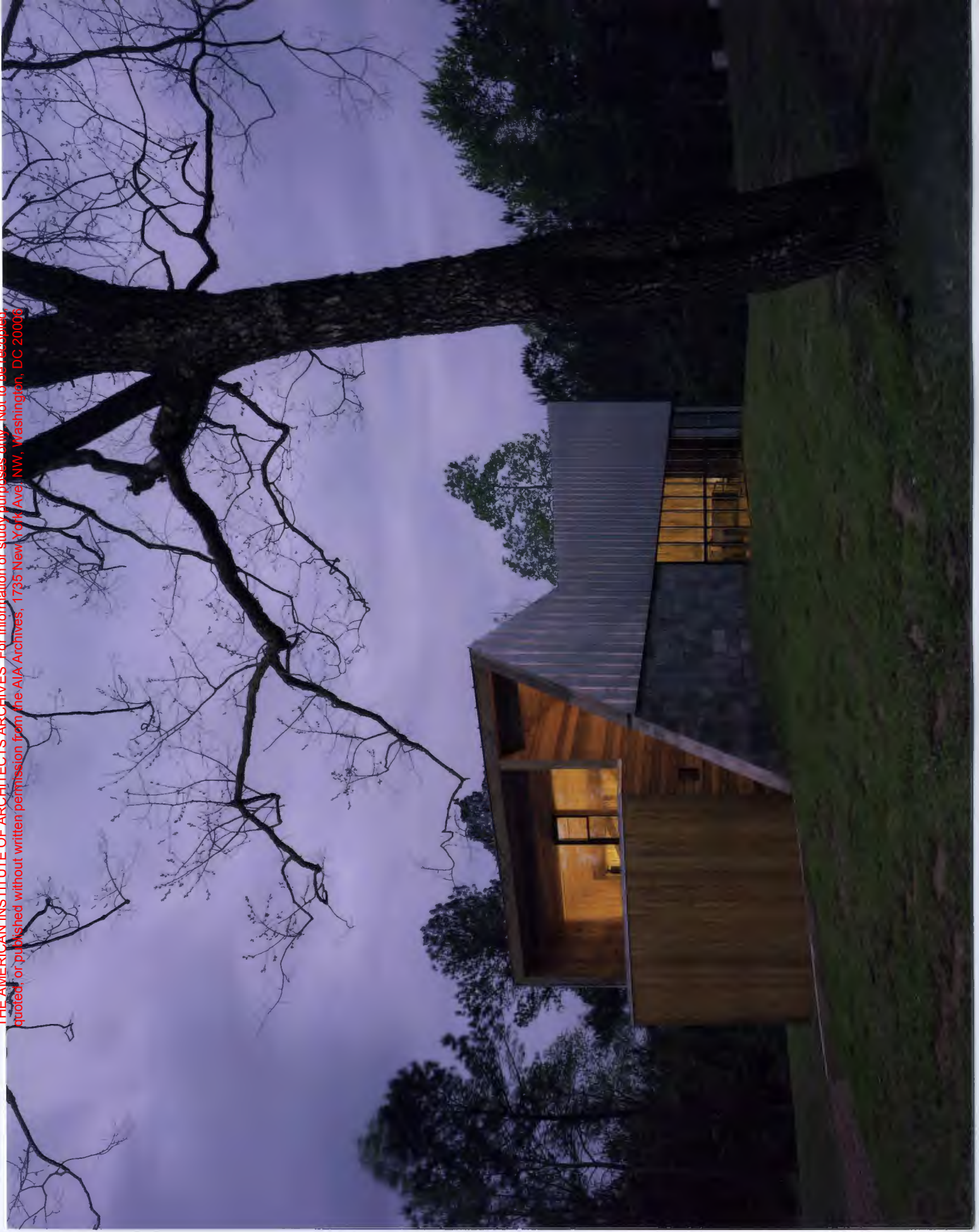
Although a romantic little structure, the existing building had major foundation problems, so a decision was made to replace it. The Rural Studio students charged themselves with using all of the salvageable materials from the original church, including: roof and floor joists, ¾" wood wall paneling, tongue and groove boards, and exterior corrugated metal sheathing. Having demolished the existing church, the students built a small chapel for the congregation, so they were able to continue to hold services on Sunday.

In true Mockbee-influenced style, the new building has a dramatic sloping roof, held up by hand-built composite metal and wood trusses. It also forms a retaining wall and water diverter next to the cemetery. The main view from the sanctuary of the church is through a horizontal window that allows the congregation to be at eye level with the graveyard. The baptismal font is below the baptistery and accessed by a secret tiled stairway.

Architecturally, the building contains two interlocking wrapping forms: one runs North-South containing the soaring South wall, the ceiling and the horizontal glass wall. The other wrap runs East-West and forms the baptistery at the West and preacher's room and restroom at the East entrance. The exterior of the building is clad in student installed "galvalume".



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## The Lucy House

### Rural Studio Project

2002

Originally conceived by Samuel Mockbee, the Lucy House is a collaboration of the Rural Studio and a national carpet manufacturer. The house is home to Anderson and Lucy Harris and their three children. Anderson and Lucy are the children of the owners of the now famous Hay Bale and Butterfly Houses, also Rural Studio projects. This is the one of the last projects Samuel Mockbee directed before his death in December, 2001. It was designed and built by seven "Outreach" students from around the country and world. It was finished eight months after Mr. Mockbee's death.

The 1200 sq. ft. house has two pieces. The main room or "family room" contains three children's bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen, and living area. This room is contained by carpet tiled walls. These walls are built of 72,000 individually stacked carpet tiles that are held in compression by a heavy wooden ring beam. Carpet does not take the roof load, but instead the load is transferred to the foundation through structural metal posts hidden in the carpet wall.

The other major built form is a bedroom for Anderson and Lucy, housed in the crumpled form that sits atop the family's tornado shelter. The tornado shelter also acts as a meditation room and family TV room.

The house is built of carpet tiles salvaged from office buildings throughout the USA. The tiles are older than seven years and therefore have minimal "off gas". They are protected from the elements by the Rural Studio's trademark "big roof." In the future, the carpet company plans to recycle all of their carpet tiles.

In the year since this project was completed, it has been published in magazines and newspapers all over the world, including *The New York Times* and *Architecture*.

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## **The Harris House**

### **Rural Studio Project**

**1996/1997**

The design of the Harris House was sparked by Samuel Mockbee's observation of the Harrises while working on the nearby Bryant House. "They lived on their porch, which wasn't probably six feet wide and maybe fourteen feet long, at most. When I visited them, we'd all sit on that porch. I knew the porch was a big deal, and this wasn't going to be an air conditioned house."

The Harrises' 600-square-foot new house is nearly half porch and fully ventilated. The wing like tin room of the porch, supported by sharply angled timbers, explains the house's nickname, "Butterfly House." The roof's two intersecting rectangles create a 250-square-foot screen porch and make the house look poised for flight. And like a butterfly, it is light and airy. The steeply sloping roof harvests rainwater that goes into a cistern and can be used for toilets and laundry, but the primary purpose of the dramatic roof is to channel cool breezes. In fact, a desire to maximize natural ventilation drove the design: A wall-mounted exhaust fan and operable clerestory windows draw air through the building. In winter, awning-style panels cover the clerestories, and a wood-burning stove keeps the one-bedroom house snug.

To accommodate Ora Lee's wheelchair, the students created an entrance ramp and wide doors and affixed handrails and low fixtures in the bathroom. Costs for the house were kept to about \$25,000 (plus \$5,000 for the cistern and wetlands-sensitive septic system) by using tin as roofing material and cladding the building in heart pine recycled from a 105-year-old church that was being razed nearby. Until the studio completed their house, Anderson and Ora Lee lived in a shack without heat or indoor plumbing.



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## **Yancey Chapel**

### **Rural Studio Project**

**1995**

Yancey Chapel is located on Morrison Farm in Hale County, Alabama. Concerned both with being environmentally friendly and cost-efficient, the students decided to build the walls of the chapel out of recycled tires. The tires were filled with dirt which had been excavated from the site, packed down, and then stuccoed over. A nearby tire dealer had been charged with disposing of his used tire collection, so he donated the tires to the project. The roof of the structure is covered with tin, with the roof beams salvaged from a barn. Rock, which constitutes the floor of the chapel, was taken from a nearby riverbed. The chapel is set into the side of a scenic overlook, and blends beautifully with the surrounding woods.

Approaching the chapel, a visitor steps down into a narrow, dark entryway to face a pulpit made of found metal materials. A little stream spills through a break in the back wall, trickling over a large slate down into a trough. The visitor steps over it on a metal grill, and the water, a soothing touch, continues its flow to the front of the eleven-by-twenty-two foot open room and flows to the wetlands below. Typical of studio projects, the chapel reveals itself slowly. Overhead, to either side of a heavy ridge beam supported by wood rafters, are intervals of sky, then corrugated roofing. The roof lifts as it approaches the pulpit, flooding it with natural light and opening the view.

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## The Bryant House

### Rural Studio Project

1994

The Bryant House was the Rural Studio's first completed building. It established several characteristics that would define the studio's house building program. Most important, it met Samuel Mockbee's credo, "The goal is not to have a warm, dry house, but to have a warm, dry house with a spirit to it." This attitude, plus an insistence on tailoring each house to specific family needs and using inventive building methods and scavenged and unusual materials, distinguishes the studio's approach from that of the low-income housing programs. The emphasis on individuality and esthetics also limits the number of houses the studio can produce.

Ingenious construction gave the house its nickname, the "Hay Bale House." After exploring and rejecting other low-tech methodologies for creating an inexpensive, well-insulated dwelling, the students selected eighty-pound hay bales for the substructure of the walls. They wrapped the bales in polyurethane, stacked them like bricks, secured the stacks with wires, and slathered the result with several coats of stucco. The outcome: inexpensive, super-insulated walls.

The Bryants told Mockbee and his students that they mainly wanted each of their three grandchildren to have a room large enough for a bed and a desk; they also asked for a front porch where they could entertain neighbors and family. They vetoed a two-story scheme as well as the original siting before settling on one story and 850 square feet of living space. In the completed dwelling, three little barrel-shaped niches extend like fingers from the rear of the main interior space, which is organized around a wood-burning stove and has a clerestory window. The Bryants' bedroom, for purposes of privacy, is at the opposite side of the house from the children's rooms and is graced with a stained-glass sidelight.

The Bryants spend much of their time on the front porch. Topping it is a corrugated, translucent acrylic roof supported by exposed beams on a row of pale yellow wood columns on concrete block posts.

Esthetically, the Bryant House is a deft composition of rugged and fragile materials and opaque and translucent ones. Sturdy and low-slung, the house mainly takes its cues from the region's simple sheds and other ordinary buildings. But its porch – especially if called a verandah – suggests local antebellum mansions. David Bruege wrote in *Mockbee Coker: Thought and Process* that Mockbee's work is "a celebration of the commonplace, even as it exemplifies the highest aspirations of high-art culture, in a gentle and almost mystical mix." The Hay Bale House exemplifies that thought.



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**Barton House**  
**Madison County, Mississippi**  
**1991**

One approaches the Barton House along a winding drive through large, groomed oaks dripping with Spanish moss. The approach is a twist on the traditional Southern allee to an estate. One weaves in and out of these oaks as they lead the way to the shadowy figure of a home.

The architects' actions are based on the relationship between what exists in the landscape and what is added, what is remembered and what is invented. Spreading across the land in two directions, the Barton House is anchored in the middle by a prominent entry gallery. A stainless steel awning, placed specifically for future creeping vines, towers overhead and marks the entrance to the house. The vertical expansion of the entry gallery creates a pause, and a place for collecting one's self. Tight, low halls lead from the entry gallery of exposed concrete block into opposing wings of darkness and light, marking the experience of night and day. The daytime wing cascades down the sloping land. The light wood floor evolves into a dark and seemingly shadowed pattern, terminating at the fireplace. The fireplace becomes a spiritual locator, it dominates the room of the hearth. In the Barton House this room provides an experience of density found in an otherwise expansively illuminated place.

In the sleeping wing, one recollects the cool of evening. Views to the outside are made specific through openings in the hall and bedrooms. A spatial reversal from closed to open occurs at the end of the sleeping wing, as one leaves the inside and moves out onto the walkways. Moving out and upward along a switch-back walk one arrives at a screen porch, allowing exploration of the countryside. The trees of the site thin toward the south, providing a natural vista where one sees the country side fall away.

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**Cook House**  
**Oxford, Mississippi**  
**1991**

The Cook House sits on a 340-acre farm, along a ridge with views through the densely treed land and over the hills below. Its main volume is sheltered by an open-ended, floating metal roof supported by steel columns. The volume of the house is constructed of concrete-block walls with the wood-frame construction for its interior. "Lean-to" extensions built of cyclone fencing provide enclosure for the menagerie of animals the Cooks consider part of their family. With various entrances and windows from the enclosures to the house, the outdoor rooms become active places in their lives. The entry to the house is marked by a massive volume built of concrete block, holding within it the hearth. The room of the hearth, a two-story volume, becomes a tranquil place for collecting dreams and memories. The second floor has open lofts at both ends above the master bedroom and living room. The stair in the loft above the master bedroom leads up to the wood trusses of the gable roof, which serves as a summertime deck for listening to the falling rain.

The public parts of the house focus on a lily pond, its center serving as the pivot point and shift for the house's main building in relation to its secondary structures. The architects have marked water and sky, release and reflection by framing the pond through the opening of the covered walk. The opening holds a mirrored vision of the sky rising above the tree line reflecting on the lily pond. Above the wood-frame screen porch is a night viewing platform that provides a place to catch the evening breeze. A steel trellis extends fingers to the sky, trailing with confederate jasmine and wisteria.

The cook House serves as a guardian of and intercessor into a world of dreams and spirits. It is a place for registering the changing phenomena of day and night upon varied surfaces and rooms.



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**Samuel Mockbee**  
**A New World Trade Center**

The drawing on the front page of this binder is Samuel Mockbee's conception of the World Trade Center Memorial. He conceived of this project from the hospital in the final hours of his life in late December, 2001. He described it over the phone as dark in nature, but, like Mockbee himself, it is in fact uplifting. Two towers rise higher than the originals, but the center piece of the design is a pit dug 911 feet into the ground with a memorial reflection pool and place for worship at the bottom. The underground complex is accessible by elevators and by a spiraling walkway that would allow visitors to gaze back up at the towers and sky above. A subterranean cultural center and memorial chapel, located to the right of the pit in the drawings, are also part of the design.

As someone who respected every individual he met and considered civic and personal responsibility an integral part of his work as an architect, Samuel Mockbee would have been an ideal participant in the effort to rebuild and re-plan the World Trade Center.

These sketches were published in *Newsweek* January 21, 2002.





# McGraw Hill CONSTRUCTION

Robert A. Ivy, FAIA  
Editor-in-Chief  
Architectural Record

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rivy@mcgraw-hill.com

October 28, 2003

Board of Directors  
The American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20006-5292

Re: Samuel Mockbee

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Board:

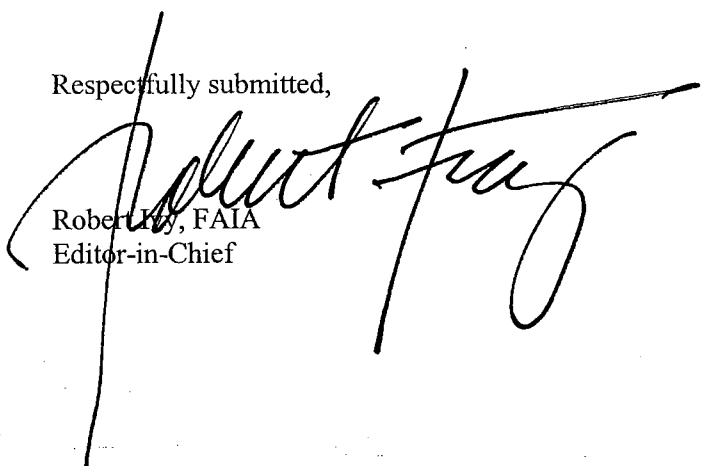
Samuel Mockbee's reputation only grows with time.

In the course of his career, Mockbee forged a strong, ethical role for architects that can serve as a model for the future, beyond the immediate moment. Prodigiously gifted as a designer, he found the means to create an architecture of authenticity among the forms and cultural realities of his native South. That work garnered widespread admiration for its singular viewpoint, combining vernacular motives with contemporary sensibilities.

His real legacy, however, lies in co-founding and directing the Rural Studio at Auburn University, an educational setting that taught architectural students how to care. Fiercely unsentimental, ethically motivated, Mockbee returned architecture to its societal roots. In Hale County, Alabama, Sambo brewed up a cultural stew, redolent of the arts and the people surrounding the Studio. While attending classes and living there, students engaged real people with real-life needs, listening to their voices and assessing their needs. Additionally, they shared stories, reading literature, and practicing the art of building--a hands-on approach so sought after in a technological age.

Other architects have built more than Samuel Mockbee, who died young, but few have captured world attention by the rightness of their actions. His legacy will remain in the lives changed and the generations to follow, as well as his inspirational connections forged to people and place, and in architecture that respects them both.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Robert Ivy, FAIA  
Editor-in-Chief

22 October 2002

Board of Directors  
The American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20006-5292

Dear Board of Directors,

I am pleased to write this letter of recommendation in support of Samuel Mockbee's nomination for the American Institute of Architects Gold Medal Award.

I first met Sambo while he was teaching at Mississippi State in the University's Jackson Mississippi Architectural Studio program. He was teaching with Chris Rischer. Their studio was nothing less than legendary. They had their students for an entire year do watercolor renderings of existing buildings in downtown Jackson. The studio work was the most powerful I have ever seen in any architectural school studio anywhere in the world. The renderings, which were all absolutely beautiful, as it turned out, were only a means by which Sambo and Chris got the students to see past the facades of the buildings and deep into the creative historic and tectonic lives of the buildings, its makers and its inhabitants. The students would know, for example, exactly how many bricks were in a building, where they were made, who the mason was, where his or her kids went to school, what condition caused what kind of weathering on the brick, exactly what color they were under what lighting conditions, etc. Consequently, the students' renderings went well beyond the expression of their knowledge of the architecture. They were a representation of the consequence of architecture rather than its intentions.

Since that time, until his untimely death, I had the pleasure of watching Sambo through the years develop his life in architecture towards an even deeper commitment to exposing the true consequences of architecture on the culture and people of his region. The path he had chose to do so is without a doubt unique in the world of architecture and architectural education today. It moved from the Jackson studio exercise, to his personal practice involvement in providing design and construction services for people in need in rural Mississippi, to the Rural Studio for the Auburn University School of Architecture. It is, through the remarkable work of the Rural Studio, that Sambo distinguished himself as a true innovator in architecture and architectural education. In some ways the fundamental pedagogy of the Rural Studio is simple. Have the students design and construct architectural projects for people or communities in need. To go and live within these communities, with their clients, to learn what it takes to make architecture through a "real world" experience. There is no doubt the work is exemplary by the measure of any standard. However, what sets the program apart from all others and what makes it extraordinary is what I believe to be Sambo's basic motivation for its establishment. This motivation comes from the belief that architecture can be more about the Golden Rule than the Golden Mean, more about reciprocity between people than the mere accommodation of shelter. What the students learn is that they, their clients and their craftspeople are indeed collectively accountable for the consequences of their work. They learn that these consequences change their lives. They establish new beliefs in their own abilities and those around them. They learn that architecture has the power to bring things of enormous difference together into an uncompromised coexistence. And they learn to see the possibilities of things rather than the limitations, arguably the greatest gift of a great education.

I have been to the Rural Studio and seen the work of Sambo and his students and I have spent some time with the amazing people they have touched. The power of this program is palpable. It has changed these peoples' and the students' lives forever. It is something of an inspiring significant difference.

Sambo's personal work in architecture through these past years in many ways reflects the same interests and research seen in the Rural Studio. He has somehow managed to combine pro bono work with the underprivileged, his academic work and a collection of more "normal" commissions into a practice spread between Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama, the Rural Studio in Newbern, Alabama (where he spent

many months of the year living with his students), his former partner's office and home in Memphis, Tennessee and his own home in Canton, Mississippi. He managed to do all of this without sacrificing the intellectual and creative integrity of his own design work. This work which is soundly rooted in the understanding of place and tectonics in construction has been recognized widely to be among the most personal and innovative of his generation of architects.

I know of no one who gave more to and took less from architects and architecture than Sambo Mockbee. His generosity of heart, soul and talent and his enthusiasm for the power of architecture to move the spirit and soften the human condition was limitless. He transcended the normal definition of architect and architectural educator. He and his work moved into that rarified realm where people and things of the creatively unselfish and intellectually personal exist. He created through his personal design work and through his work in the Rural Studio a different world for the potential of architecture.

The effort, the dedication and the sacrifices both personal and professional that Sambo made over the years in order to pursue this direction in his life in architecture were heroic in scope. These sacrifices and for what he gave to others has earned him the love and respect of many people in and out of the profession of architecture. People that because of Sambo see architects and architecture as positive, valuable instruments of our society.

I believe this would be an important award for the American Institute of Architects to make. No one in architecture today deserves this more. It would be received with great joy and appreciation by many. It would make a statement to architects and the public alike that the profession of architecture believes deeply that the value it brings to the world emanates from those individuals within its membership who have the most fervent imagination and biggest hearts.

I offer my most enthusiastic and unreserved support of Sam Mockbee's consideration for the American Institute of Architects Gold Medal Award.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mack Scogin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "M" and a long, sweeping tail.



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13 October 2003

Board of directors

The American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20006-5292

Roto Architects Inc.

600

Moulton Avenue

# 405

Los Angeles

California

90031

Re: Letter of Recommendation for Sam Mockbee

Dear Board Members,

I am honored to be writing this letter in support of the nomination of Sam Mockbee for an AIA Gold Medal.

It may be possible for all of us to be able to tell future generations that a man who dedicated his life to the well being of others, was honored in 2003. Sambo Mockbee. Her stands as evidence of all that is good about our species. This is essentially important in the midst of what the world is reported to be, at the moment.

I believe that when any of us are asked the question of why we became architects, our answers would generally describe the life Sambo invented and lived: as an architect with humility.

I first met Sambo at a conference years ago. I came up to the podium after listening to him speak for an hour about the values and performance of the Rural Studio. As I took my position, I felt weightless and filled with joy and all I could think to say was AMEN. It was the beginning of a long friendship. He had many friends who loved him dearly because of who he was and how he returned their love.

He died too young. That seems to be the case with good people. His vision was fundamentally our vision, and his influence was profound and it feels everlasting because it resides in our hearts. He was a prophet who practiced architecture.

He has influenced the profession greatly, the extent of which will be more evident as time goes on. He has re-established a basic tenet of modern architecture; it is both an aesthetic and social proposition. His name is always present with 2 generations of students now.

Their future work, will in a variety of ways be a continuation of his work as a teacher, builder, and social activist. All of which he accomplished by inspiring others to take action while at his side.

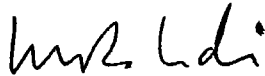
I have had graduates from his program come and work with me in Los Angeles. They were quietly confident and fearless, and their commitment to work was like a call to action with a great sense of purpose.

01

- When Sambo passed away, Nightline replayed the 1 hour special on him introducing the show by saying that this was the first time they had done this, but that he was so special and had such far reaching influence beyond architecture that it was important to do. His fame among architects was for the beauty of his work, his fame among students is because of him helping them
- become all that they could possibly be.

His fame among the general public was for the generosity he had for strangers. He certainly had virtuosity, but more than that, he had compassion. It is now time to honor such a life. Sam Mockbee represents all that we aspire to be as individuals and as a profession.

Respectfully and Sincerely,



Michael Rotondi, FAIA  
Principal  
RoTo Architects, Inc.

## Gehry Partners, LLP

Frank Gehry  
Jim Glymph  
Randy Jefferson  
  
Terry Bell  
Edwin Chan  
George Metzger  
Marc Salette  
Craig Webb

October 15, 2003

Board of Directors  
The American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20006-5292

Dear People,

I would like to add my support for awarding the AIA Gold Medal to Sambo Mockbee.

Architecture is a small piece of the human equation, but for those of us who practice it, we believe in its potential to make a difference, to enlighten and to enrich the human experience, to penetrate the barriers of misunderstandings and provide a beautiful context for life's drama. Sambo Mockbee did this through his work as an architect and through his students in the founding of the Rural Studio in Alabama.

Regionalism may be a title applied to an architect that cannot get a job out of state. In Mockbee's architecture, regionalism was a belief in the distinctive power of buildings to show us the weather. Nowadays, architecture, like painting, exists amid talk of its irrelevance – at least until it rains.

Education may be an even tougher job than architecture. I have continued to teach for the past twenty years because I believe in, and am inspired by students. There have been few programs as radical as the Rural Studio in helping students to believe in their role for the future.

There are certainly others deserving of this award. There are few who deserve it more.

Best regards,

Frank Gehry  
Architect





October 22, 2003

Board of Directors  
American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Avenue  
Washington, DC 20006-5292

Dear AIA Board of Directors,

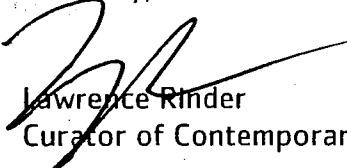
I am writing to voice my support of the nomination of Samuel Mockbee for the AIA Gold Medal award. I am happy to give my endorsement as I had the privilege of including work by Samuel Mockbee and The Rural Studio in the *2002 Biennial Exhibition* at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

The work of Samuel Mockbee/The Rural Studio was some of the first architectural work to be featured in a Biennial exhibition at the Whitney. The vitality of The Rural Studio and its resulting structures made the decision for its inclusion in the 2002 Biennial a natural one. The process, product, and spirit of The Rural Studio merited its inclusion in a show in which I had hoped to reveal an expanded view of artistic practice in America.

Under Samuel Mockbee's direction, The Rural Studio has developed a distinctive style and powerful working ethos. The contributions of the Studio have not been small and the impact of each project is deeply felt. The projects not only provide shelter or community space to the residents of Hale County, but an education for young architects, and the development of new and innovative building techniques.

Mockbee's visionary and progressive conception of architectural education and practice is so urgently needed in America today. It is my great honor to support his nomination for the AIA Gold Medal in the hopes that through garnering this award his legacy will extend and inspire other architects, professors, and students to continue the amazing work he has begun.

Sincerely,



Lawrence Rinder  
Curator of Contemporary Art

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Board of Directors  
The American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20006-5292  
October 21, 2002

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to give the strongest possible support to Samuel Mockbee's nomination for the 2002 AIA Gold Medal.

Mockbee embodied the profession at its best. He was an inspired designer and a charismatic teacher, a painter, a poet, an environmentalist, and a humanist who acted on his convictions. He fashioned an alternative vision of architecture that embraced social welfare, education, sustainability, and inherent beauty.

In his private practice Mockbee created formally powerful work, including a striking competition entry, designed on his deathbed, to rebuild the World Trade Center site in Manhattan. But his proudest and most lasting contribution is the Rural Studio, which he founded in 1992 and directed until his death in December of 2001. Not unlike a junior year abroad, it is located in impoverished Hale County, Alabama, an unlikely world bellwether of architectural design. Mockbee established the Rural Studio for Auburn University students at a time when many well-known designers pursued eye-popping buildings for wealthy clients around the world. Instead, close to his own Mississippi roots Mockbee and his students created modest yet innovative buildings for poor clients.

The students, instead of just contemplating theory and producing paper architecture, engage in hands-on design and construction involving nose-to-nose negotiations with real clients. For many students the Rural Studio provides a first intimate encounter with poverty. Mockbee believed in sowing what he called "a moral sense of service to the community."

The Rural Studio has also distinguished itself for its experiments in the use of materials and recycling. Mockbee encouraged students to use all sorts of salvaged and curious materials--haybales, concrete rubble, colored bottles, cast-off automobile tires and windshields, old license plates and road signs, and other odds and ends. Transmuting ordinary materials into extraordinary objects, Rural Studio students have are ambassadors of beautiful, sustainable architecture.

While reporting *Rural Studio: Samuel Mockbee and an Architecture of Decency* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), I met students galvanized not only by Mockbee's brilliant designs but also by his bone-deep decency and belief in the worth of the individual. In the Socratic tradition of teaching through self-knowledge, he let students make their own mistakes, find their own solutions. They, in turn, identified closely with a teacher who took them into a landscape they'd not previously experienced, a place close to them in miles but distant in social terms.

More than 400 students have been through the Rural Studio, and it has attracted the attention of media throughout the world. In 2000, as the first architect to win a MacArthur "genius grant," Mockbee brought renown to the Rural Studio and honor to the architectural profession. He, in turn, deserves to be honored with architecture's highest award. In giving Samuel Mockbee posthumous recognition almost exactly one year after his death, the AIA will associate itself with a humble and great man, the best of the profession.

Yours sincerely,



Andrea Oppenheimer Dean





THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

School of Architecture

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24 October 2003

Board of Directors  
The American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20006-5292

Dear Sirs

**Samuel Mockbee – Recommendation for AIA Gold Medal**

In our obituary of Sambo Mockbee in the *Architectural Review*, we wrote: "for us, Sambo was the most important architect and educator operating in the world". It is now a great honour to expand and justify that sentiment in making a recommendation for Samuel Mockbee to receive the AIA Gold Medal

We first encountered Sambo's work when we heard him lecture in Chicago; this still goes down as the most influential lecture either of us have experienced, one of those moments of revelation when what one has clumsily been thinking about is both articulated intellectually and enacted practically. Since then we have closely followed the work of Sambo and his greatest contribution to the architectural profession and education, the Rural Studio. The extraordinary achievement of the Rural Studio is that it widens the territory in which architectural education and the profession can and should operate. Where both the profession and education is so often circumscribed by issues of style and technology, Sambo brought to his work a clearly articulated social and political structure. He expanded the definition of architecture way beyond the production of crafted objects, and placed it as a process in a much wider and more complex social context. In this move, he also expands what architecture can achieve – it becomes an act of empowerment. This alone is a vital contribution and Sambo provides an exemplary role model for a profession that, at least on this side of the Atlantic, is increasingly marginalised in its inability or unwillingness to engage with the social context within which architecture is produced.

But there is much more than this to Sambo's contribution to the profession and the future of the profession. Indeed, it would be an undervaluation if Sambo's work were designated into the category of social worthiness. At the level of education, which is where the future of profession lies, Sambo's work is truly pioneering. The Rural Studio takes the idea of context-based learning to the limit – and thus exposes students to a range of issues that they are sheltered from in normative architectural education. These issues are central to the practice of architecture – group working, social responsibility, lateral thinking, building skills, new ways of building procurement, sustainability, contingent creativity – but are so often overlooked. Sambo developed a method of working with these issues in a way that empowers the students and the community as well. As an educational model alone, it has international significance and is a model that we hope others will follow.

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1998 2000

What is truly remarkable is that the architecture that comes out of this process in itself stands the test of any scrutiny. It is far from the hair-shirt worthiness often associated with community initiatives. The buildings are innovative spatially and technically, using and reinventing a whole range of everyday technologies and scavenged materials. Most importantly, they are entirely appropriate to the place and to the people who were to use it. It is by any standards architecture of the highest quality; given the circumstances of its making it is really extraordinary. In years to come, it is likely that the work of the Rural Studio will be held up as an exemplar of how to respond to a world of diminishing resources and increasing poverty gaps. In its dialogue with the local, the architecture - as product and process - will also be seen as a pioneering counterpoint to the homogenising tendencies of globalisation, a critical regionalism in the true sense of the word critical. It is here that Sambo's contribution shows both depth and breadth. Breadth because in its engagement with wider forces it provides an example as to how others may operate. Depth because work of such complexity, and in its attention to the making, does not arise out superficial encounters with context; it comes from a profound understanding of the issues at stake in the processes of architecture.

We were honoured when Sambo agreed to publish that lecture in a book we were editing. We defy anyone to read that piece and not be moved, inspired, and also angered. Sambo ends it by saying: "Go above and beyond the call of a 'smoothly functioning conscience'; help those who aren't likely to help you in return, and do so even if nobody is watching"? It is a tragedy that this sentiment now reads as Sambo's epitaph rather than ongoing manifesto. However, the work and his writings remain for others to be influenced and directed by. The clear evidence is that the work of Samuel Mockbee has broken out from the constraints of Hale County; it has, and will increasingly continue to have, international significance. We can think of no more worthy a recipient of the honour of the AIA Gold Medal - and we say this in full knowledge of the prestige and historical importance of the award.

Yours sincerely



Jeremy Till  
Professor of Architecture and Head of Department, University of Sheffield  
Partner, Sarah Wigglesworth Architects



Sarah Wigglesworth  
Director, Sarah Wigglesworth Architects  
Professor of Architecture, University of Sheffield

# WILLIAM A. RYAN

DISTRICT JUDGE

SUITE 36 AA

HALE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

GREENSBORO, ALABAMA 36744

P.O. BOX 156  
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October 30, 2003

Board of Directors  
The American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Avenue, N. W.  
Washington, DC 20006-5292

Re: Letter of Support of Nomination of Samuel C. (Sambo) Mockbee

The excellent quality of Sambo Mockbee's work had already been recognized before he and D.K. Ruth began the Auburn University Rural Architectural Studio. Sambo is quoted as saying that architects should create "warm, dry, noble spaces for people." In the ten years since the Rural Studio came to Hale County, Sambo and the Rural Studio students have created many warm, dry, and noble spaces in Hale, Marengo and Perry Counties in the Black Belt of Alabama. Sambo's body of work has been featured in magazines, books, television and museums. More importantly, Sambo's work can be seen in the lives and work of the many architecture students who have been a part of the Rural Studio experience.

Aristotle wrote, "Whatever we learn to do, we learn by actually doing it; men come to be builders by building, and harp players by playing the harp. In the same way, by doing just acts, we come to be just; by doing self controlled acts we come to be self controlled...." These words describe the philosophy of Sambo Mockbee. Sambo brought the Rural Studio and its students to Hale County to learn by doing. Restoring "Old South" buildings in Greensboro was the focus of the first class of Rural Studio students who were to experience hands-on learning. Many such buildings needed restoration, but Sambo soon learned of more pressing needs that the Rural Studio could address. These were the needs of Hale County's "invisible people."

Utilizing the learn-by-doing model, his students learned to create more livable spaces for people living in squalid conditions. By having direct contact with their clients, the students learned that poor people are people like anyone else, except they had very little money. This exposure has led to the construction of six "charity houses." Each house features some unique construction method or nonconforming use of a standard material (e.g. hay bales, rammed earth, corrugated cardboard, or carpet squares used as wall building materials). The unconventional use of these materials makes the building less expensive. This use also looks forward to acceptance of the material or method by financial institutions. Acceptance of the materials or methods would make it possible to build a less expensive house so that a poor family might qualify for financing under an existing loan program.

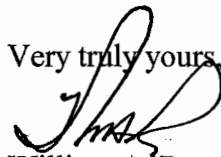


In a county of 17,000 where there are 1500 substandard homes, one can easily see the importance of a program to bring the possibility of affordable housing to the area. This is and has been a goal of the Hale Empowerment and Revitalization Organization (HERO) and the Rural Studio for several years. The efforts to develop this affordable housing program have led to the award of a grant to HERO to begin the actual building program this fiscal year. Without Sambo and the Rural Studio, this program would remain simply a dream. There is no doubt in my mind that this program will be successful and become another legacy left behind by Sambo.

Sambo's students also completed many design-build projects to improve Hale County and the surrounding area. Through the partnership between the Rural Studio and HERO, the students have designed and built playgrounds, a pre-kindergarten classroom and children's center. In addition, they have renovated buildings including the Knowledge Café (home of the Community Career Resource Center) a workforce development program. An open air market, the Akron Senior Citizens Center, the Akron Boys and Girls Club building, the Newbern baseball field, the car-window chapel and community center at Mason's Bend, and the award winning tire chapel are examples of the many other community projects completed by the Rural Studio students. These are examples of what the students have done to use their education to better people's lives in Hale County. Few of these projects would have been possible without Sambo's leadership. Each thesis student who comes through the Rural Studio has what seems to be a life-changing experience for having been a student here. As the students complete their projects, they say that learning by doing has been their most valuable learning experience. They believe that their project is the most important work they will ever do. Sambo's lessons have left an indelible mark on them. I have no doubt they will use what they have learned to become active citizens creating warm, dry, noble spaces for people in their communities. Inspiring these students is the most important legacy that Sambo leaves. In the last year the Rural Studio has designed and built a new church building for a community and a pavilion and rest rooms in a park in Perry County, Alabama. There have also been exhibits of the Rural Studio's work at museums in New York City and Birmingham, Alabama as well as Barcelona, Spain. These exhibitions underscore the impact of Sambo Mockbee's work.

Truly Sambo Mockbee has left his mark on the landscape of this area of Alabama, not only on the landscape that one can see but also on the hearts of so many people who came to love him because he truly cared about them and treated them with dignity. Sambo was a just man as can be seen by his just acts. The architecture of the future will include many just acts performed by his former students because of the lesson Sambo Mockbee taught them. I urge the selection of Samuel C. (Sambo) Mockbee as the recipient of the AIA Gold Medal Award.

Very truly yours,



William A. Ryan

# Dewhurst Macfarlane and Partners

CONSULTING CIVIL AND STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS

41 North Road, London N7 9ER. Tel: 020-7609-9541. Fax: 020-7607-6419

A03.0100/TGM

22 October 2002

Board of Directors  
American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Avenue NW  
Washington  
DC 20006-5292  
United States of America

Dear Sirs

## **AIA GOLD MEDAL NOMINEE: SAMUEL MOCKBEE**

I am always impressed when a good cook can assemble an exquisite meal from the simplest ingredients.

Samuel Mockbee chose the rural county of Hale in Alabama as his architectural kitchen and in a period of ten years produced a range of extraordinary small architectural gems.

He worked with anything he could beg or borrow, including straw bales, side lights from abandoned Chevrolets, disused road signs, rammed earth and recycled tyres to produce homes, chapels and community buildings for some of the country's poorest residents.

Sambo inspired and educated a generation of Auburn architectural students and together with a team of dedicated teaching assistants and day release workers from the local penitentiary, wrought transformation for the small closeknit communities of this rural backwater.

Mockbee had breadth in the way that he could reach out and inspire the most deprived members of our community to trust him, and to provide him with the opportunity of giving them the fruits of his talents – buildings simple, yet serene, modern and timeless.

At the same time he was in his element mixing in the upper reaches of society raising money for the Rural Studio's stream of projects.

Mockbee had depth and deep pockets.

He was rich.

He was rich in vision.

He was rich in energy.

He was rich in quiet wisdom.

He enriched architecture and all those who were fortunate enough to experience his generosity firsthand.

### Partners

Laurence Dewhurst MA, MSc, CEng, FICE, FIMStructE, FICONS E Timothy Macfarlane BSc, CEng, HonFRIBA, FRSA, MIMStructE, FICONS E  
Paul Byrne BSc, CEng, PEng, FIMStructE, FICONS E Stephen Bandy BSc, CEng, MIMStructE, FICONS E  
Scott Nelson BSc, CEng, MIMStructE Colin Francis FCMA, FBIM

### Senior Associates

Arnold Baker BSc, CEng, MIMStructE James O'Callaghan BEng, CEng, MIMStructE Damian Murphy BEng  
Russell Thomas BSc (Eng), CEng, MIMStructE

### Associates

Raymond Hoyte IEng, AMICE, AMIMStructE Philip Khalil BEng, MSc, CEng, MIMStructE Matthew Innes BEng, MSt, CEng, MIMStructE

# Dewhurst Macfarlane and Partners

To build an architecture of merit is one thing. To also build a community's self-confidence and to refresh it's very spirit is another. It takes a big heart and a poetic vision to achieve this.

Mockbee was an alchemist. He turned base metal into gold as only great souls can.

Yours sincerely  
for DEWHURST MACFARLANE AND PARTNERS

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Macfarlane", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tim Macfarlane



October 29, 2002

Board of Directors  
The American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20006-5292

Dear Members of the Board,

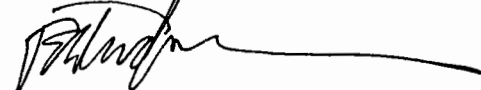
Education moves as slowly as architecture. Both have been affected and directed towards a greater significance through the work of Samuel Mockbee. He was an enormous person who put compassion before passion in inspiring a generation of students to become "citizen architects."

He loved barbeque, Auburn football, and Mississippi. He grew up with the inequity and myth of the Delta and a belief that architecture could make a difference by sheltering the imagination as well as the body.

With recent events debilitating our sense of the rational, a heightened sense of the possible and the ethical feels even more important. In Hale County, Alabama, a place where the possible had been forgotten, the ethical dimension of building was carried out through Mockbee's Rural Studio, which built both shelter and possibility. The authenticity and audaciousness of the results remind us that these are dimensions of Modern Architecture well worth remembering.

Mockbee's final call was to "proceed and be bold." No pretense to sickness or sentimentality, just a statement to the power of taking action in the face of all odds. It is important for architecture to do likewise in awarding him, his work, and especially his students its most significant endorsement through the award of the AIA Gold Medal.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Eisenman, FAIA

**Sambo Mockbee** <sup>1944-2001</sup>  
GOLD MEDAL PRESENTATION  
September 2003

Presentation  
by nominator  
Jamie Aycock  
9/03

slide INTRODUCTION

Sambo Mockbee and I went through the rigors of Auburn University's architectural program at the same time during the late sixties and early seventies. But it was only about ten years ago, that I grew to know Sambo and learned to admire not only his design, but his work at Auburn's Rural Studio, which he founded in an impoverished, almost third world part of Alabama. There, Sambo focused on teaching a unique blend of architectural localism, community involvement, and social responsibility, through an invigorating creative design process coupled with hands-on building experiences. The students learned, by Sambo's example, and are continuing to learn today, that architecture is a discipline deeply rooted in community and to embrace the belief that everyone, rich or poor, deserves a shelter for the soul.

\* \* \*

**Role: call**

- 2 Hale County, Alabama: 100 miles west of Auburn, 100 miles south of Birmingham, 40 miles north of Selma, is in the center of the state. Home to
- 3 the Black Warrior River, and the photographs of Walker Evans in James Agee's 1939 book Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Agee writes:

*...the question, who are you who will read these words and study these photographs, and through what cause, by what chance, and for what purpose, and by what right do you qualify to, and what will you do about it?*

- 4 Samuel Mockbee, nicknamed Sambo, a fifth generation Mississippian, a professor in Auburn's School of Architecture, knew what to do and he answered the call. In 1991, along with professor D.K. Ruth, he planted a

seed, the Rural Studio, aka the “Redneck Taliesin”, in the Black Belt of Hale County, Alabama. It has brought forth a tree, whose branches have literally reached around the world. Sambo Mockbee was a husband, a father, a teacher, and a “*citizen architect*”. He knew that architecture had the capacity to connect people to people, and people to places, so they knew who and where they are.

### Depth

5 The waters of the Black Warrior River run deep with the history of this part of the United States that W. E. B. Du Bois, in his 1935 book, Black Reconstruction in the South, proclaimed would be haunted by the fact that after the Civil War reconstruction was prematurely stopped. As a young man growing up in Mississippi, Sambo knew African Americans only as maids, caddies, and manual laborers. Later, he described the invisible presence of their houses as a “taboo landscape” for the white man. This landscape provided the context for his earliest paintings and would later plant his feet firmly in the Hale County mud.

6 When visiting the grave of James Chaney in Mississippi, a martyred Civil Rights worker, who risked and lost his life accepting responsibility for who and where he was, Sambo asked himself the question, “Do I choose fortune or virtue? Do I have the courage to make my gift count for something?”

### Breadth

7 Sambo was an architect, always an artist, and a teacher. Teacher is an ethical distinction, marked by the messiness and humanity of relationships. He believed that the place to start re-discovering the ethical dimension of architectural practice was to work with the students. He said:

8 *It had become clear to me that if architectural education was going to play any socially engaged role, it would be necessary to work with the segment of the profession that would one day be in a position to*

9        make decisions: the student. *The main purpose of the Rural Studio is to enable each student to step across the threshold of misconceived ideas and opinions and to design and build with a moral sense of service to community.*

So, at the Rural Studio, the students are challenged to accept their role in shaping communities not only for those who can afford it, but most importantly, for the very least among us.

The building actually began with the Hay Bale House for Shepard and  
10 Alberta Bryant in Mason's Bend, one of the counties poorest communities. Located in a curve in the Black Warrior River, the one hundred residents  
11 are all part of four extended families. Shepard is a fisherman and taught his son what he knew, but it was a point of great pride to Sambo that  
12 Shepard's grandson was the first in the family to attend college. The students and the house they built had something to do with that.

13 There have been many other major projects in this community as well as a number of "neck down" ones such as a baseball backstop, wheel chair  
14 ramps, and even a wetland septic system. Among the most notable are the Butterfly House for Anderson and Ora Lee Harris and the Lucy House for  
15 Lucy Harris and her four kids, completed in July 2002, which was constructed from recycled carpet tiles. While Sambo's influence on the Lucy House was present only in drawings and spirit, a team of 8 students from the United States, France, and the Netherlands developed and built it.

16 Also notable is the Mason's Bend Community Center with its origami wall  
17 made from salvaged Chevy Caprice windshields and stabilized rammed earth foundation walls.

The Rural Studio stands unique in architectural education. The students, over five hundred in twelve years, have come from all over the country through Auburn's School of Architecture. With more than forty projects



18 involving donations of materials and labor from thousands of people and companies, a generation of students is being transformed into “*citizen architects*”. This past year the work of the Rural Studio was part of the Whitney Biennial in New York City, which included the recently released documentary “If Walls Could Talk” by filmmaker Chuck Schultz. Projects have appeared in over fifty magazines including People, Architecture, and Casabella. The studio is the subject of a book written by Andrea Oppenheimer Dean and published by Princeton Architectural press. Now in its fourth printing, it was the publisher’s best seller of 2002. Sambo states:

19 *For me these small projects have in them the architectural essence to enchant us, to inspire us, and ultimately, to elevate our profession. But more importantly, they remind us of what it means to have an American architecture without pretense. They remind us that we can be awed by the simple as by the complex and that if we pay attention, this will offer us a glimpse into what is essential to the future of American Architecture: its honesty.*

20 The breadth of Sambo Mockbee and his work is not bound by disciplinary lines and, while it is inspired by the soil of the south, it is clear that he has  
21 been able to show those students from afar where they are, and remind them of where they are from.

### **The Futures Past**

22 Houses, long since burned with only chimneys breaking the horizon, trailers, cotton bales in red dirt, and falling down barns – The south is not  
23 only a different landscape, but for an important time in our history it was literally a different country. While that past is still present it has always been tempered with a deep belief in the power of history to lead forward.  
24 Seeing that much of modern architecture had lost its social conscious, Sambo believed that through the *subversive leadership* of architects, architecture could reclaim its place in society, including the dream of an authentic *American* architecture that was made where it is and out of what

25 exists there. When architecture's function includes the shelter of the soul  
as well as the body, we have reclaimed more of architecture's potential and  
projected its future.

26 Sambo, the architect, is difficult to separate from the artist and teacher.  
Before he founded the Rural Studio, his work with Coleman Coker was  
already inspired by local materials, vernacular forms, and a gestural  
27 response to the site and climate. Through private houses, churches, an  
award-winning tractor shed, and charity houses their work was generated  
from regional typologies and landscape, and transformed through a  
28 rigorously modern sensibility that allowed it to transcend its local origins.  
Appearing on the cover of national magazines, that work brought attention  
29 to an overlooked region of the South. Sambo inspired a generation of  
architects and taught them that the origins of great architecture could be  
30 found in their own back yards. His buildings look like nothing we have seen  
before, yet feel familiar, and through their optimism remind us that  
architecture matters.

Sambo received over 23 national, regional and state AIA Honor awards for  
his projects, a Progressive Architecture Award, the National Trust for  
31 Historic Preservation Award, and the Apgar Award from the National  
Building Museum. He was elected to the AIA College of Fellows in 1989,  
two years before he planted the Rural Studio. And, in the year 2000, he  
was awarded the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur foundation genius  
fellowship.

32 Art is lonely business, while architecture is collaborative. Sambo's work as  
an artist provided another door to his architecture. His paintings are  
haunted by the mythology of snapping turtles, the innocence and emotion  
33 of color, the scale of catfish ponds, children, and frequently Aldo Rossi,  
often in the guise of an African mask made of beaver sticks.

## Transcendence

- 34 Architect Jason Young says that words have the capacity to gather things up: catfish, bird dog, horsefly, lean-to, moon pie. So do names. Dick Pigford, a classmate and long-time friend of Sambo's, said in a poem written after his death:

35 To Know by Name  
is a different game,  
gathering *every* one  
under the mast

the we and the them;  
the we and the them;  
the we and the them;  
the day long

36 and the them...  
well you see..  
they are  
Alberta and  
Lucy and  
Ora Lee

- 37 Sambo gave us the lightning bolts, juke joints and fairy dust, which he sprinkled liberally on troubled students. He delighted in the awkwardness that his name presented to new acquaintances, saying, "Call me Samuel, Sambo, Mock, or His Largeness, but never call me Sam". As he entered the hospital for the last time, he advised his students to "Proceed and be
- 38 bold" and, from his hospital bed, three months after the terror of 9/11, one of his last accomplishments was sketching a memorial for the World Trade Center, which was featured in Newsweek magazine.

- 39 In closing, in an interview, Sambo quoted Mark 12:31, *“Love your neighbor as yourself”*, and explained that in so doing, an architect will act on a  
40 *foundation of decency that can be built upon. He said, “Help those who aren’t likely to help you in return, and do so even if no one is watching!”*

Sambo Mockbee, FAIA

Thank you.

sambo903

\* \* \*



**The American Institute of Architects  
Is privileged to confer the**

**GOLD MEDAL**

**On**

**Samuel Mockbee, FAIA**

**Whose greatest design will not be found  
in any monument carved or built by hand,  
but discovered in something far more durable:  
the example of genius in the service of everyman.  
Founder of the Auburn University Rural Studio,  
he salvaged and gave a voice  
to overlooked and rejected materials—  
whether tires, windshields, bales of hay,  
or the forgotten poor—  
making them God's cornerstone  
and marvelous in our eyes.  
An example to his profession,  
and a light unto the world,  
he believed in the future,  
devoting his life to making architects  
and architecture worthy of its promise  
and worthy of humanity's noblest dreams.**

**3 March 2004**

**Eugene C. Hopkins, FAIA  
President**

**Lawrence R. Livergood, AIA  
Secretary**