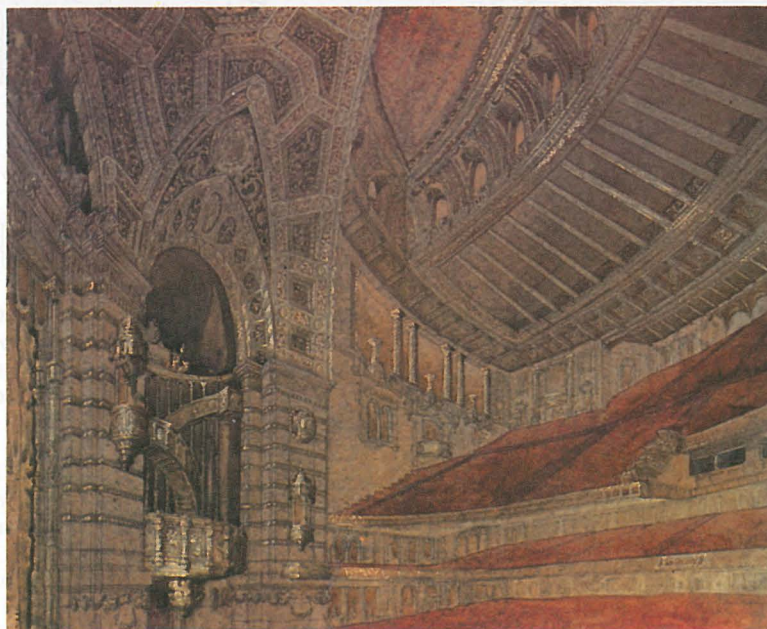




*'A Spanish patio garden in gay regalia' (photo Glenn Loney)*



*Hallelujah! Lourdes comes to Queen's, New York City, via Spain. (photo Iain Mackintosh)*



*'Inside a copper kettle'. (photo Rambusch Studios)*

if not incense (these are, for all the show biz, *low church* cinemas, if you understand me) to the third of these reborn palaces, the Valencia in Queens.

In the Bronx kids are playing in the spray of the fire hydrants, those reassuring pieces of street furniture unchanged since Chaplin films and as sure a signature of New York as the West Side Story fire escapes. In a graffiti emblazoned city it is a relief to find one new art form unscarred, the naive paintings on the roller shutters which protect the small shops from the gangs. The town is ugly, brashly commercial and everywhere is the rusting ironwork, monuments to a past industrial power, of fly-over, of rail bridge, of wharf and of empty factory. But inside these two Palaces all was glitter and ecstasy. Was it thus in seventeenth century Rome: outside squalor and poverty, inside Bernini's St. Teresa swooning in voluptuous ecstasy? Have the new churches, in borrowing the cinemas of the thirties, simply copied the cut of an older Catholic cassock?

We pull up outside what the marquee (= canopy) announces to be The Tabernacle of Prayer. Inside the assistant Pastor greets us with charm and courtesy but also firmness: 'Please to keep away from the rear of the mezzanines so as not to disturb the Counsellors who are even now speaking unto five Continents'. We wonder at what turns out to be a true 'atmospheric'. Building Magazine of 1929 on John Eberson's 3,440 seat masterpiece: 'The auditorium is a Spanish patio garden in gay regalia for a moonlight festival. Low garden walls executed in palmed plaster and rough cast ornament richly enhanced with statuary, treetops, climbing vines and plants, add illusion of open air treatment by a great sky dome'. Lord, oh Lord – the Heavens declare the glory of the Lord. Even if the sunset effect does not work any more, the firmament does. All the stars are winking, obscured only around Orion by the largest Greek Orthodox chandelier in the Western World, hanging by sky hooks in space, too close to the ceiling and thus too clearly an encounter of the ill-conceived kind.

What are those fifteen, life size figures standing over the proscenium? Our guide: 'The Pastor, he had a vision. And he sent for the sculptor and said: "Clothe those naked bodies"'. And now you see the wings he added. These angels watch over our prayers in this our Tabernacle where you are all welcome. Alleluia'. But plaster robes cannot conceal the sassy poses of M.G.M. goddesses.

Out then into the Spanish Mexican foyer, decorated with the help of countless widow's mites after the gift by Loew's Picture Corporation to this House of Prayer. Against the wall of green, mauve and purple hang rows of crutches, walking sticks and braces of all sorts. This is the American Lourdes.

We've seen in a single day evidence of a great new movement. These later houses were failures almost from the start – the Depression cut the audience while the vaudeville performer undoubtedly found them unmanageably big for his own stand-