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Art of the design

BOOKS: Flourishes take flight in photos of works of 'starchitect' Santiago Calatrava

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Santiago Calatrava just may be the architectural counterpart of glass artist Dale Chihuly. Both are modernists with populist touches, both making much of biomorphic forms even as they push the technical boundaries of their fields.

For years, the Spanish architect, who has a doctorate in engineering from the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, was best known for his delicate suspension bridges. Dallas, ever mindful of the prestige value of luxury labels, tapped him to design three as-yet-unbuilt bridges to span the Trinity River.

Dr. Calatrava has become a certifiable "starchitect," acclaimed for his spreading-wing addition to the Milwaukee Art Museum, tapped to design a new transportation hub at New York's World Trade Center and a new concert hall for Atlanta.

He's now the subject of a generously illustrated coffee-table book, hefty in both size and weight at 528 pages, by Philip Jodidio. (Don't take a chance if you've got a flimsy glass coffee table.) Starting with some unrealized 1970s designs for bridges in the Swiss Alps, the book ventures forward to sexy computer renderings of plans for the WTC sta-



Calatrava
Complete Works 1979-2007
Philip Jodidio
(Taschen, \$125)

tion and a Chicago skyscraper shaped like a drill bit.

Dr. Calatrava's first interest was art, which he planned to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. But that plan was disrupted by the 1968 student uprisings, and he made a detour into architecture.

In English, German and French, Mr. Jodidio's book portrays those artistic inclinations as a persistent counterpoint to Dr. Calatrava's architecture. Photos of buildings and bridges are interspersed with the architect's watercolors of stretching, bending and twisting human figures. Dr. Calatrava should prob-

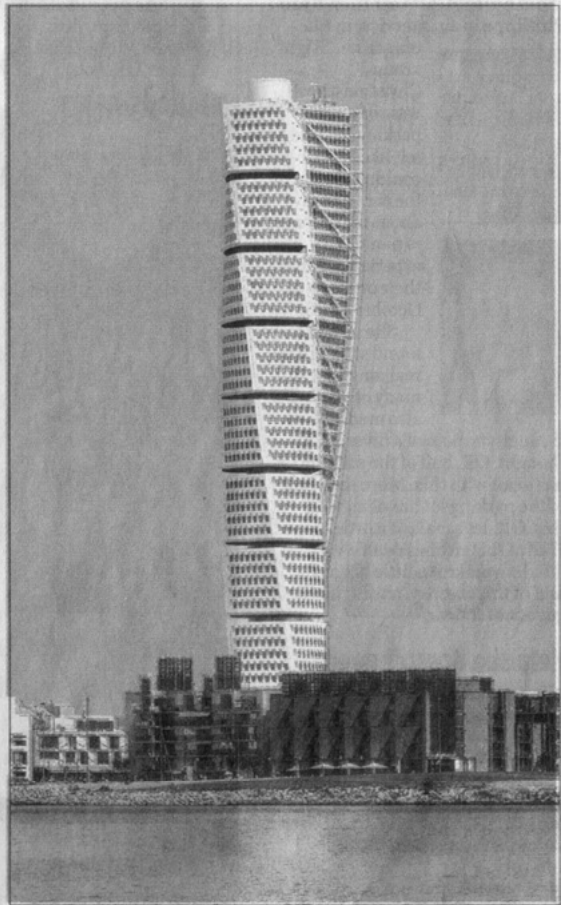
ably keep his day job, but his studies of bodies in tension do illuminate his 3-D designs.

The delicate fretwork of the architect's Olympic Sports Complex in Athens, Greece, leaves one fantasizing about what he might have supplied in place of the dumpy red-brick nostalgia of Dallas' American Airlines Center. The Turning Torso skyscraper in Malmö, Sweden, is a sleek, quirky beauty.

Wavelike roof undulations for Bodegas Ysios in Spain are echoed in the *Wave* moving sculpture awkwardly crammed against Southern Methodist University's Meadows Art Museum. Of the three Trinity River bridges designed for Dallas, only the least interesting, if largest — for Interstate 30 — is illustrated and only in the index.

After a while, all these skeletal white frameworks and wing-like flourishes can look gimmicky, and the eye sometimes craves relief from a surfeit of symmetry. One can be grateful that his spider web crossing and tower for New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine won't be built.

But the best of Dr. Calatrava's bridges and buildings are some of the most arresting structures of our time, and some of the most virtuosically engineered. With extensive quotations from the architect, this big book doesn't pretend to be a critical study, but it's handsomely produced and illuminating.



ABOVE: Turning Torso building in Malmö, Sweden.
BELOW: Bridges over the Hoofdvaart in The Netherlands.