



PRECEDENT + INITIATIVE IN THE DESIGN FOR
A TEMPORARY ART PAVILION

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“The works of the past always influence us, whether or not we care to admit it, or to structure an understanding of how that influence occurs. The past is not just that which we know, it is that which we use, in a variety of ways, in the making of new work... The typology argument today asserts that despite the diversity of our culture there are still roots of this kind which allow us to speak of the idea of a library, a museum, a city hall or a house. The continuity of these ideas of type, such as they are, and the esteemed examples which have established their identity and assured their continued cultural resonance, constitute an established line of inquiry in which new work may be effectively grounded.”

- John E. Hancock.
The Harvard Architectural Review. Volume 5.
*Precedent and Invention. Between History and Tradition:
Notes Toward a Theory of Precedent.*

The nature of architectural precedents, as Hancock describes, are essential to the design process of any architect or designer. Whether an architect looks to preceding work as a way to inform his/her own design in an intelligent way, or to come to better understanding of particular typologies in order to reject them out-right, certain precedents can help shape the development of contemporary architecture in a significant way. It is through both analyzing the buildings and work of our predecessors, as well as absorbing the qualities of architecture in our everyday lives, that we are able to learn a great deal about how particular building types function, and come to a better understanding of how these buildings and typologies can help to inform one in the development of their own, particular work. In the design for a temporary art pavilion three precedents stand out as particular works that have helped to inform both the nature, elements and materials of the project. These works include the Storefront for Art and Architecture (Steven Holl with Vito Acconci), the Gagosian Gallery (Gluckman / Mayner Architects) and the Dirty House (Adjaye / Associates).

The challenge of the Peepshow 2005 competition for a temporary art pavilion, calls for an interpretation of what “TRANSarchitecture” can mean and ultimately be. Our design for a temporary art pavilion aims to address the nature of TRANS in a number of ways.: For TRANSsexuals / TRANSgendered people, and for all of us, our idea of self and our public persona are inconsistent. This pavilion aims to reflect this discrepancy between our ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ selves. The exterior ‘shell’ or surface of the pavilion is covered in a layer of the winning postcards from the current Arcity competition, that when taken by passers-by, reveal the rough, ebony stained plywood cladding that will inevitably be appropriated by others with posters, graffiti and postings, further emphasizing the TRANSitive nature of urban public space; while the interior presents itself as an immaculate, smooth, white, glazed, and mirrored environment. The art is mounted inside lit, sealed glass wall panels. Mirror film is applied to the glass irregularly above and below the art, juxtaposing the reflected image of the TRANSient viewer and the static art.

Two of the four walls are TRANSposable, and can be used to TRANSform the quality of space in and around the pavilion. Viewers may enclose themselves, surrounding themselves with an intense array of art and light in this hall of mirrors. It is this nature of the transformative architectonics of the project that find a precedent in the Storefront for Art and Architecture (Fig. 1) by Steven Holl and Vito Acconci. The project, constructed in 1993, is a façade renovation for a small gallery on Kenmare Street in New York City: a converging point of three distinct neighborhoods (SoHo, Chinatown and Little Italy). The storefront pushes the concept of interior becoming exterior, and finds its achievement with a number of revolving and rotating panels that make up the façade (Fig. 2 & 3). It is the configuration and relationship of each panel to another, as well as their unique shape and the degree of openness that effectively creates a different façade each day. This idea of ‘transposability’ is further explored in the design of the temporary pavilion where users, viewers and passers-by have the

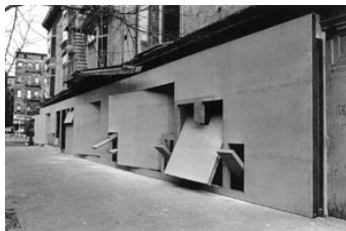


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

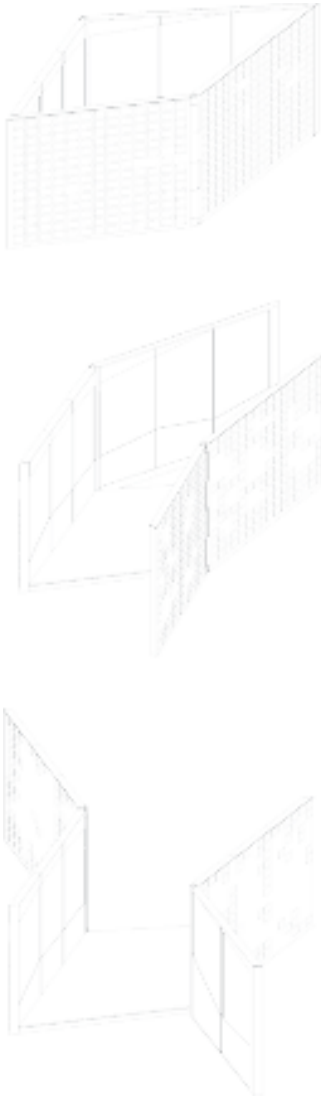


Fig. 4

ability to continually transform both the environment in which the art is viewed, as well as the urban space around them by moving the adjustable walls that swing about their hinged connections. (Fig. 3) These two walls act as armatures that can be opened up to make fins or vanes that channel traffic through the pavilion, or alternatively redirecting traffic around it: effectively changing the nature of its urban environment. When closed at one end the pavilion becomes a small room in which the viewer becomes reflected again and again in the mirrored surfaces of the walls. This mirrored environment is meant to bring further this idea of transformation in that its appearance is forever changing; seeking to address the ephemeral nature of the transient city dweller who's reflection, along with that of the city itself, essentially make up the visual characteristic of the project. At night the pavilion can be closed entirely to create a solid, locked island in the pedestrian street. Perhaps the most dramatic effect of the Storefront, as well as the pavilion, is the relationship they seek to create between both their interior spaces and the exterior urban context. The variety of configurations of each panel, as well as the continually "changing exterior weather conditions creates unique vignettes of the city from the inside, while changing the framed glimpses into the gallery..."¹ In this sense the pavilion project is also, in a way, informed by the design for Storefront in that they both seek to effect their exterior environments: a strive toward an kinetic architecture.

In designing an environment for view art, one naturally looks to other contemporary galleries. The most significant architects of high end gallery spaces in recent years are the firm of Gluckman Mayner Architects in New York City. This office has been responsible for many of the most highly recognized gallery spaces in Chelsea including galleries for Cheim & Reid, Mary Boone, Paula Cooper, Andrea Rosen and the largest of them all: the Gagosian Gallery (Fig. 5). The gallery, located



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

at the corner of 11th Avenue and 22nd Street in New York. The gallery work of Gluckman Mayner represents the epitome of the fashionable white walled gallery in a converted industrial space. This aesthetic of the pristine interior environment juxtaposed with the rough, industrial exterior (Fig. 6 & 7) acted as a precedent for the aesthetic of the art pavilion. The slick, reflective nature of the interior of the pavilion is meant not only to mimic these kinds of spaces, but through the use of glass and mirror, push this kind of aesthetic to an extreme. The exterior of the pavilion is sheathed in plywood that is stained ebony: meant to create a bold and rough, shell for its precious contents.

This relationship between interior / exterior is also present in the work of Adjaye / Associates in London, particularly the Dirty House (Fig. 8), and Elektra House (Fig. 9), both in rough parts of East London. Both projects present rather tough and dark facades to the urban conditions in which they exist. The massive corner slab of Dirty House, completed in 2002 for artists Tim Noble and Sue Webster in Shoreditch (a rough but now hip and artsy neighborhood in east London) is “coated in thick, rough, anti-graffiti paint the colour and texture of chocolate fudge...”². The cantilevered roof rises above the dark 2 storey box, appearing to float on a white glowing light, hinting at the bright, bleached interior (Fig. 10) on the other side of the façade. The interior of this house is a place where both art work is produced and exhibited. This juxtaposing relationship between a bright interior and dark, tough exterior is the primary principle in the art pavilion. This house, however, seeks to prevent graffiti with the use of anti-graffiti paint, whereas the aim of the pavilion’s exterior (once it has been exposed by the removal of the postcards) is to welcome the inevitable, and embrace the transformative nature of the acts of tagging, poster-ing and claiming of urban space that effectively transforms, and gives character to every city.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

These three built works represent a range of architectural precedents that have proved to be both informative and inspirational to the design of this temporary art pavilion. It is through both visiting these buildings themselves, as well as studying their drawings and details in published works that an understanding of these works and the typologies they represent emerges. It is through this experience and understanding that, as a designer of this pavilion I was able to both interpret certain ideas, forms, and materials in a particular way, as well as bring certain elements of one building type to a somewhat different typology of building. These three projects vary from galleries to residential but to all, art is central to the design and nature of the buildings. By drawing on certain ideas and forms from these projects, whether about the nature of architecture as a transformative element in the urban environment as in the Storefront for Art and Architecture, or the environmental qualities for the presentation of art, and the relationship between interior spaces and their exterior shells exemplified in the work of Adjaye / Associates, hopefully the design for this art pavilion can emerge from the precedents drawn on as a singular work that pushes these similar ideas in a way that is ultimately responsive to this particular project and its challenges.

IMAGE SOURCES

Fig. 1, 2 & 3

<http://www.nyc-architecture.com/SOH/SOH063.htm>

Fig. 5, 6 & 7

<http://www.gluckmanmayner.com>

Fig. 8, 9, 10

<http://archrecord.construction.com/projects/portfolio/archives/0212Adjaya.asp>

NOTES

¹ <http://www.archidose.org/May99/053199.htm>

² "Behind the Façade" Tom Dyckhoff, Saturday, February 8, 2003
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/features/story/0,11710,889980,00.html>