

## Architectural Strategies in Contemporary Art

Isabelle Loring Wallace

Title: Architectural Strategies in Contemporary Art

Call for Abstracts: February 1, 2010

Due Date for Completed Papers: December 31, 2010

Visual art has long functioned as a form of architectural history and criticism and as a site for the interpretation of the built environment. A critical and highly recorded chapter of this interchange begins in the 1960s with Gordon Matta-Clark, Michael Asher, and Mel Bochner, for whom architecture was a site for institutional and cultural critique. A second, equally well-documented chapter within this ongoing history comes with the self-conscious adoption of Postmodern principles by both architects and designers of the built environment. Indeed, with the advent of postmodern architectural experiments, architecture's history, its function, its meanings - became the explicit subject of architecture, a development that in turn paved the way for a third chapter, in which art again takes up architecture and space as subject. Indeed, contemporary art is now a crucial, if under-theorized site for architectural discourse, developing histories, theories and interpretations which stand alongside the history and theory imagined and written by architecture.

If this phenomenon is largely unacknowledged by art and architectural historians, much contemporary art nevertheless functions in tandem with art and architectural history as a supplementary form of discourse in which the meanings of buildings get recorded, mapped out and articulated, often in conjunction with specific histories and narratives - as in, for example, Jane and Louise Wilson's disorienting video installation, *Stasi City* (1997), the action of which unfolds in the abandoned headquarters of the East German secret police, or Paul Pfeiffer's *Dutch Interior* a complex, multi-media installation of the staircase featured in *Amityville Horror* (1979). Likewise, Damian Ortega's three hanging sculptures, together entitled *Skin* (2006-2007), take as their subject three housing projects in Mexico City, Warsaw and Berlin, 'skinning' from individual housing units full scale floor plans and translating them into leather, to be exhibited hung from a

gallery ceiling by meat hooks. More straightforwardly, there are the photographs of Hiroshi Sugimoto and Andreas Gursky, many of which imagine architectural monuments anew, purposefully complicating the normative understanding of modern architecture and its imaging, or, equally, or the two-dimensional works of James Casebere and Julie Mehretu in which generalized architectural tropes such as entrances, tunnels and stadia are subject to intensive analysis and interpretation. It is our contention that sustained engagement with these works will inevitably entail careful analyses of the architecture therein, thus resulting in a mutually beneficial dialogue between disciplines that were never not entangled at the level of practice.

At the same time, contemporary art is equally concerned with advancing potentially a-historical readings ? just as Postmodern architecture arguably did in several of its key monuments. As such, we are as concerned with illegitimate appropriations, as we are with those that seek to dutifully comment upon the historical significance and meaning of architecture and architectural forms. Consequently, we take seriously the possibilities implicit in misquoting specific buildings and typologies, such that established meanings are transformed, put under pressure, and perhaps lost. Just this phenomenon is evident in Martin Kippenberger's *Psycho Buildings* (1988), which together expose the contorted forms of Berlin architecture, suggesting a tortured subconscious within the everyday built environment. Similarly, *Cremaster 3*, one in a series of five feature length films by Matthew Barney, narrates a fictitious account of the construction of the Chrysler Building, which itself becomes both a location and a main character within the film, host to the encounters between 'The Architect' (played by Richard Serra) and the 'Entered Apprentice' (played by Barney). The cultural meaning and understanding of such architectures are completely transformed by these artists' interventions.

With such possibilities in mind, we are soliciting essays for an anthology on the subject of key intersections between contemporary art and architecture. As we see it, this collection will establish and analyze contemporary art's contribution to architectural history and theory over the course of the last twenty-five years. We therefore encourage submissions that concentrate on a single work of art or series, or on a particular building or building type as it appears in the work of multiple artists. Essays that address the strategic deployment of the concept or the medium of 'space' within contemporary art are also welcome. Essays may focus on traditional as well as new media, and contributions may adopt strategies not limited to the approaches outlined above.

Interested parties should send a 500-word abstract together with a curriculum vitae and brief bio to Nora Wendl and Isabelle Wallace by February 1, 2010. Completed essays of no more than 5,000 words will be due December 31, 2010. Initial inquiries are welcome.

Nora Wendl

Assistant Professor, Architecture

School of Architecture

University of North Carolina Charlotte

Email: [nwendl@uncc.edu](mailto:nwendl@uncc.edu)

Isabelle Loring Wallace

Assistant Professor, Contemporary Art and Theory

Department of Art History

Lamar Dodd School of Art

University of Georgia, Athens

Email: [iwallace@uga.edu](mailto:iwallace@uga.edu)

Reference:

CFP: Architectural Strategies in Contemporary Art. In: ArtHist.net, Nov 20, 2009 (accessed Dec 7, 2025),

<<https://arthist.net/archive/31987>>.