

ARCHITECTS DRAWINGS MODELS

Gallery at the Rep
1050 Old Pecos Trail, Santa Fe

THE ART OF ARCHITECTURE IN THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN MUCH MALIGNED IN RECENT DECADES. BADLY designed and unsuitable buildings rampantly clone themselves throughout our urban landscape. We are forced to interact with structures that lack both character and ingenuity, structures whose economy of construction is matched only by the economy of thought that went into their design. Indeed, it would be easy for the casual observer to believe that the only architecture that is valued is that which is both cheap and bluntly functional. Such buildings and those who design them do a profound disservice to a highly complex and sophisticated field, a field that requires the diverse sensibilities of a sociologist, an engineer, an artist, and a philosopher.

It is these sensibilities that are showcased in *Architects Drawings Models*, a show curated by Dean Balsamo, that ambitiously and intelligently attempts to expand the definition of architecture while probing the questions raised by its practice. Many of the participants are visual artists who, by and large, have a fresh approach towards architecture that is unencumbered by traditional architectural teachings. All have devoted energy to exploring how the human form and spirit mold and utilize space, and all are committed to the idea that bricks and mortar alone do not constitute architecture.

The manner in which we interact with our surroundings is the subject of Steina Vasulka's hypnotic video presentation entitled *Tokyo Four*. The piece illustrates the symbiotic relationship that necessarily exists between us and the spaces we pass through. Four television monitors are stacked in a square to the right as one enters the gallery, forming an architectural grid of electronic windows. They display diverse images from Japan including footage shot in a department store elevator, images of a garden being tended, and a subway station. Individuals are shown participating in the repetitive and mundane rituals that occupy so much of our existence. Yet the images ultimately show that it is through those rituals that we humans understand and grant meaning to otherwise unremarkable spaces.

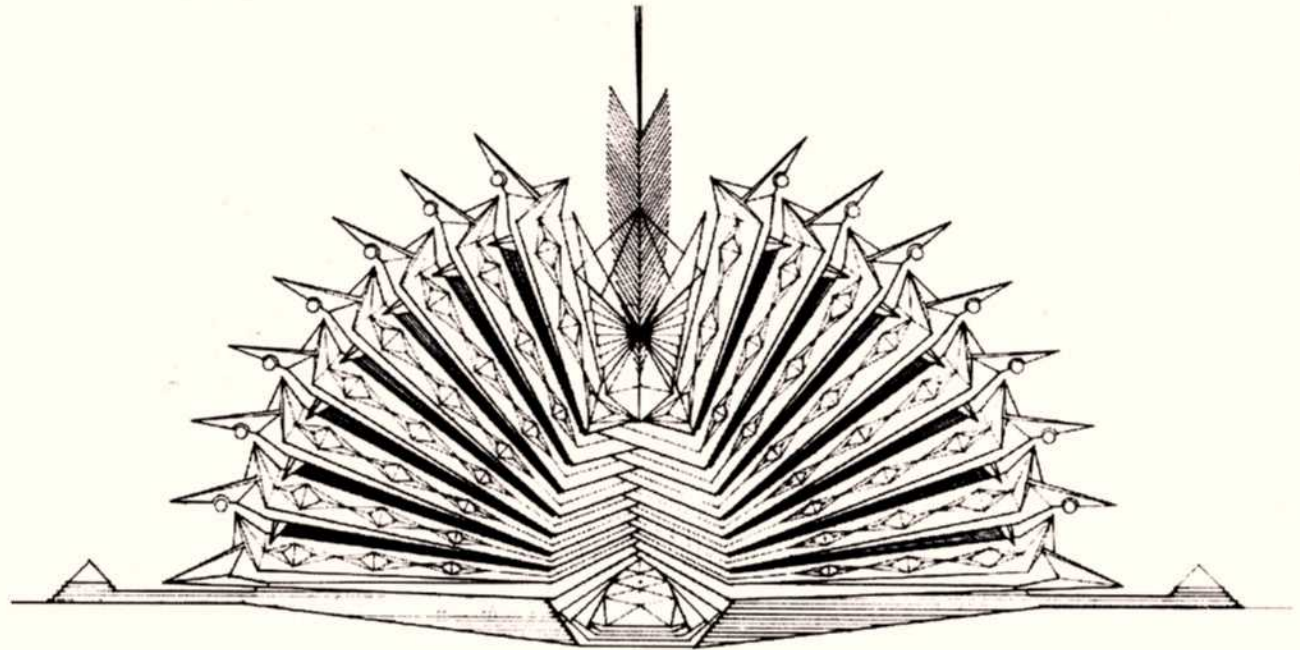
While *Tokyo Four* deals primarily with anonymous public arenas, the work of Diane Armitage engages the viewer on an intimate and psychological level. The work is highly introspective and attempts to illustrate the architecture of memories and emotions via the juxtaposition of assorted elements. In a piece entitled *In Situ/place of four dimensions (Debris of dying stars)*, a number of carefully considered found elements including the mangled viscera of a watch and some miniature, bronze oriental figures are placed in a small, rectangular wooden box. The work occupies the genre pioneered by the late Joseph Cornell, who did it first and did it best. Nevertheless, Armitage creates miniature surrealist stagesets which are metaphorical microcosms, work that is highly aesthetic and intriguing, and that has as many interpretations as viewers.

The show is graced by the drawings and models of the Albuquerque-based architect Bart Prince. Prince has received wide recognition—even notoriety—for his designs, which are remarkable for their utterly untraditional, organic appearance and an exemplary attention to detail. For Prince, understanding and communicating with the client is of primary importance, so much so that the resulting structure often resembles a portrait of the clients, embodying their very personalities rather than a home. Prince states in the catalogue accompanying the show that, "A work of architecture should have a quality of surprise and mystery as does any great musical composition or painting." Certainly, upon seeing the work, it is impossible not to see how limited and constrained generic American architecture has become, and how much potential lies in an approach that is both aggressively inventive and finely tuned to the clients' needs.

Both Jon Alexander Dick and Holly Meier contribute drawings that raise more questions than they answer. The inkwash sketches of austere desert architecture executed by Alexander Dick, while a pleasure to view, question the type of architecture required for human habitation in a desert landscape and, like a great deal of architecture, illustrate the unease with which we occupy a fundamentally hostile natural environment. Meier examines the architectural qualities of clothing and has produced geometrical fashion drawings which suggest the roles of architecture and clothing as imprisonment. The viewer is left to ponder whether these artists condone or disapprove of architecture that is so rigid and confining.

This show has the potential to act as a catalyst for intellectual contemplation about one of our most basic and integral needs, shelter. It contains ideas that can only be touched upon in a review as brief as this, but for the attentive viewer the show will educate and entertain as it reveals many of the concepts that are inherently concealed in a field as formidable as architecture. It is all too rare that Santa Fe hosts a show that both entertains and stimulates in a way that this one does. If you missed this show, it may be a while before you get another opportunity to see one of similar quality.

RICHART HERBERT



Bart Prince, *A Study in Resultant Space*, Indian Arts Center, Taos, New Mexico.