



COURTESY RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS

Artist, architect, and designer Allan Wexler has long brought the thinking and strategies of an artist to bear on the richness of architectural ideas. His works are frequently exhibited here and abroad, and his solo show *Overlook* is on view at the Ronald Feldman Gallery through October 24.

Could you talk about your background and what has most influenced the kind of work you do now?

I graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1971. Because of an economic recession, some architects began to work more theoretically and conceptually. I wouldn't consider the work really anti-architecture; it was a type of meta-architecture. The strongest influence on me then was [Austrian architect] Raimund Abraham. As my teacher, he encouraged me to work on the edge. I enjoyed being a troublemaker. I wanted to become the Andy Warhol of architecture, pushing and redefining the definitions of architecture.

I work alone in my studio, where I can control the variables of a particular project. I reduce the complex issues of architecture to basic and primary ideas. Many pieces in my current exhibition at the Ronald Feldman Gallery look back at these basic principles. I feel I am reinterpreting and perhaps updating Vitruvius' *The Ten Books on Architecture* and Alberti's *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*. I title a series of manipulated digital prints/paintings/drawings *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*. Some of the basic issues explored ask how to excavate into the earth, how to float a horizontal plane or how to position a chair on a surface. I feel as if I am an architect trapped in an artist's body.

Can you expand on that?

I love the actual making of physical objects and environments. I thrive on the smell of wood, the texture of stone; I love tools. I will buy a tool and invent a project in order to justify its purchase. I need to touch, smell, saw, drill, and chisel. I need to become physically exhausted at the same rate that I become intellectually exhausted.

Did you ever want to build buildings?

Yes, but I need to be able to physically construct them myself. Many of my early works were small pavilions, sheds, and gazebos. I believe that a little building can have as much impact as a large building. The conceptual and theoretical content can be the same as a big building.

Menking, William. "Allan Wexler's Ways." *Architect's Newspaper* 7, no. 16, October 7, 2009, p. 9.

The luxury of working small is that there is less delay between idea and reality. Small buildings are inexpensive and I could take more risks. But even these relatively small buildings became cumbersome, so I began to explore the generic chair as a model for architectural ideas. I could work even more rapidly in an almost subconscious way. The chair has become an armature for many ideas over many years of work.

Have you always been drawn to construction?

In the '70s, my wife and I rented a floor-thru on Abingdon Square in the West Village and removed some of the interior walls, as "loft living" was in vogue at the time. I stockpiled the two-by-fours and began to use them to build what I called then *Temple Buildings*. I never considered them to be models for larger structures, but they had that possibility. I established rules through which I would manipulate the materials to construct these "buildings." A time limitation, a particular tool, size of lumber, an overall dimension. I was influenced by John Cage. I've always enjoyed exploring that line between the model and reality. You might look at the *Temple Buildings* and see them as proposals for buildings; at another glance, you would see them as small ritual objects.

Some of your models are done on a computer now. Do you still make handmade models?

Even the digital photography in this show is manipulated with my hands. The photographs are made as a group of 8x8 prints and are glued together with the registration marks revealed. I let the glue ooze out between the individual panels, and I use graphite to draw into the image. I want them to be handmade, constructed images, so they are ambiguously digital and physical simultaneously. They are buffed, polished, and waxed, since the surface is as important to me as its photographic content. The scars and the glue stains are intentional.

How has your work changed in the 24 years you have shown at the Feldman Gallery?

I've used the chair, the table, and the archetypal peak-roofed building for many years as a reference and as an armature for attaching ideas. I think of it as a type of tofu. You can add content to the chair or "typical" building and it picks up that particular flavor. I've always been very interested in serials and transformation. Perhaps an early interest in pursuing a career in the sciences led me to the scientific method as a means to explore architectural ideas.

I was exposed to minimalist composers like Steve Reich and artists like Sol Lewitt, who both worked in serials. With the combination of axonometric drawings of chairs and peaked-roof buildings, I could add in series a line, another line, another line, a bend, a warp, a twist, a slice, a cut, a dissection, a rearrangement, a realignment. At the show, there's a group of transformed axonometric drawings called *54 Studies for Chair Transformations*.

I am trying very hard to not introduce any new ideas to my work. I am trying to go deeper and deeper while keeping constant the same issues.