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# An Architecture in the Making: Young Architects in New York

SHoP; Open Office; Specht, Harpman; Lot/ek; Lewis, Tsurumaki, Lewis

**With a shift in architecture away from theory to making buildings, young architects in New York are investigating unusual uses of materials and new fabrication methods with the computer. These current dialogues de-emphasize formal language and focus instead on how things are made and program operations. Another focus is a gravitation towards found objects, either already used or new ones to be placed in an unconventional realm.**



SHoP: «A-Wall» (all images, if not noticed explicitly, by the architects)

Some architects are exploring the interpretation of the norm with a tweaking to create architectural scenarios and narratives of unexpected program, materials, and juxtapositions. While a new manifesto has yet to be written, the work described in the following article exemplifies a new energy for the future of New York's built environment.

The first generation of computer kids graduated from architectural schools with computer-based design labs in the early 1990s are using their computer skills to direct the production of architecture and building elements. While some of the work is influenced by Frank Gehry's use of CAD/CAM, Bernard Cache's mass customization and Greg Lynn's computer animation, other involves material and fabrication research. This dedication and optimism for production recalls a Bauhaus interest in new industrial production technologies, that went astray on tangential route to Post Modernism and Deconstructivism, which emphasized form-making. Just as the master builders of the Middle Ages were in control of their buildings, from the design to the construction, architects today can approach a symbiosis with construction, after generations have been frustrated with the lack of craftsmanship, and sadden by the condition of the construction industry. Although not always hands-on builders, except for exhibition installations, these architects have a closer connection to the fabrication of a building element with the direct outputting of the architect's computer drawing to the fabricator's machinery. Although some might say that this has been the case for years – since the advent of the computer as a shop tool, now there is a synergy between the fabricator and the architect.

## SHoP

One firm interested in this directness is SHoP, Christopher Sharples, William Sharples, Corey Sharples, Kimberly Holden and Gregg Pasquarelli, which explores the computer-directed fabrication of building elements in their designs for both installations and full-scale buildings. As Gregg Pasquarelli said «We grew up playing computer games; the machine is not an exotic box to us, so the relationship between the eye, the hand, and the mind has been part of our lives. We understand space on the screen as easily as we do the space around

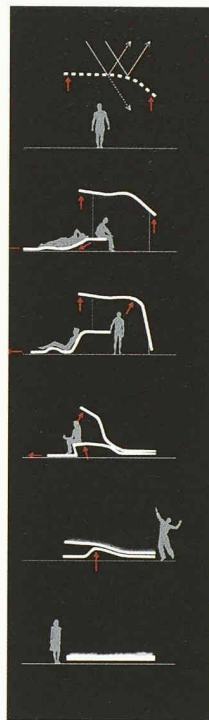


us; the world in the box is merged with the world outside and this interchange is the most exciting.» Gregg Pasquarelli calls this directness capable with the computer, «versioning», as computer drawings can be tested, adjusted and revised, with minimum translation between the mind and the hand. SHoP often engages a fabricator prior to their design to ascertain the material and fabricator's potential in every project.

«A-Wall», a display stand for Architecture magazine's trade show booth, SHoP transferred their drawings for a 20x10 foot high dismountable display, directly to the fabricator's CNC laser machines. The computer program tessellated the titanium wall's curvature into faced panels that unfolded into 496 different panel sizes, which were then cut from fifteen, 3 by 8 foot titanium sheets via the architect's computer files. Laser cut acrylic shelves were set into pockets for the display of magazines. The metal sheets were divided into 17 block pieces that easily fit together for transport and assembly. Like the creases of an unfolded origami project, the surface, although angular, undulates.

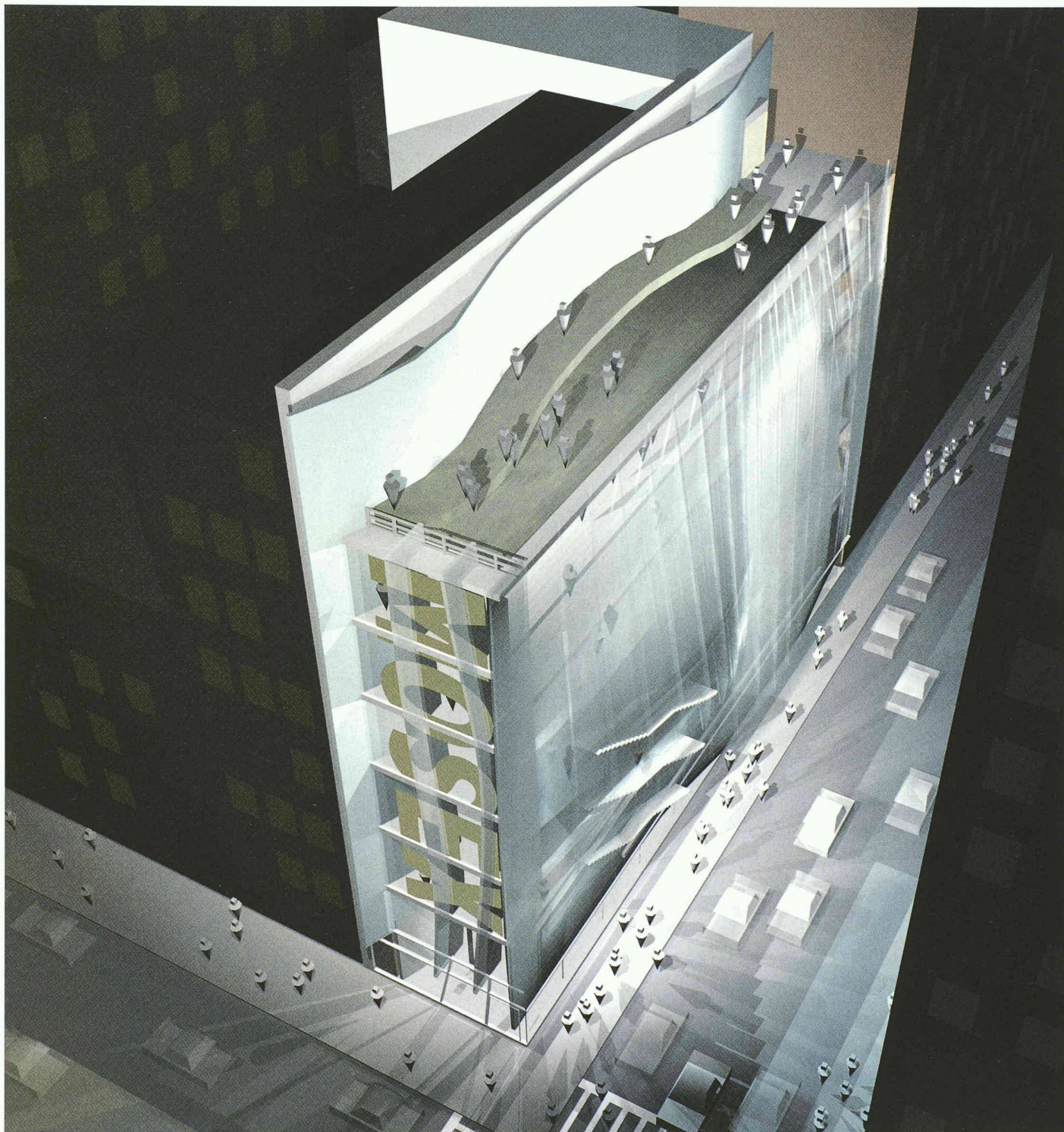
Last summer, SHoP was invited to create an installation for P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center with the Museum of Modern Art, for a relaxation area in their gallery's courtyard in Queens for «Warm Up 2000». SHoP's «Dunescape» was built using a repetitive sequencing system over a 12,000-square-foot structure of wood pieces, which as they were linked together, created a total environment in a continuous structure. Between the folds and valleys, cabana changing rooms, lounging areas, and a recessed pool, undulated as the wood pieces compressed and expanded. Appearing to be malleable, the faceted structural framework became the object itself.

For the award-winning Museum of Sex, SHoP's design, completed two years ago, is benefiting from their experimentation with their more recent installations. The narrow Fifth Avenue building, with a southern exposure, will have an unusual glass facade that integrates the idea of relationship, sexuality, and sensuousness into a built form. The architect's concepts are evident in their CNC model, a gem in itself, made with CNC milling, where they imbued the building with properties of skin by layering the space. An undulating form of curved translucent glass and acrylic will be supported on a steel framework in layers for circulation through slots and folds of glass. Light will infiltrate the passages to create a visceral space, appropriate to the program of cafe, gift-shop, theater, and galleries with exhibits on sexuality. With recent commissions – the 200,000-square-foot School of Visual Arts for Columbia University and a 400,000 square-foot new apartment building in Brooklyn which shifts to capture light with a wall of glass that carries the elevator – SHoP has made a leap to a large scale in which to implement ideas explored in smaller projects.



**SHoP: Installation «Dunescape» for P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center with the Museum of Modern Art (Images: Eileen Costa [2.], David Joseph [3.])**





SHoP: Museum of Sex



## Open Office

Open Office: Platform, Alan Koch, Lyn Rice, Linda Taalman and Galia Solomonoff, collaborates with artists to create projects across disciplines. The firm's work embodies both an interest in found objects as well as an experimentation with computer-aided fabrication. A recent project that bridges interests in the ready-made and fabrication was Galia Solomonoff's installation, «Defective», funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, shown recently at Artist Space in Soho. Open Office, fascinated by the defective units of bricks, and the morphogenic, used Maya computer animation to gradual deform brick by morphing it in small increments to make a complex structure. They hand-cast 500 Hydrocal masonry units from 14 molds and joined the bricks together with aluminum pipes and silicon joints. The structure appeared unstable, taking the standard masonry material to its limits while still having it function as a structure. The project occupies the area between art and architecture, bridging their interest in tectonics and form. The new deformed wall, unfolds and peels away from its main structure, with the morphing bricks evoking Escherlike sculptural forms. This experimentation will be further explored for a wall on a house in Florida where one wall will be «Defective».

In her design for the Lillian Ball store in Soho, Solomonoff investigated materials and the ready-made, searching medical and technical suppliers for precise and delicate objects that would comfortably co-exist with Lillian Ball's jewelry of objects cast in metal, glass and rubber. The 1,500-square-foot store, with a blue-gray linoleum floor, features medical cabinets; hanging globe-glass medical laboratory flasks; and stools made of rubber, which contrast with the softer faux-fur rug and silk curtains.

Open Office's largest project is a transformation of the former Nabisco Factory in Beacon, New York on the Hudson River, into the Dia Center for the Arts with the artist Robert Irwin. The 292,000-square-foot building, originally designed by Louis Wirching Jr. in 1928, was a carton and printing plant for the biscuit company. The project includes vast permanent galleries, temporary galleries, a bookstore, a cafe and media facilities. Minimal work will upgrade the space: new glass panes, both translucent and transparent will replace the windows and skylights; surfaces are being refinished; and there will be a new heating and ventilation system. Robert Irwin has designed the parking lot with cherry trees, raised burns, and pavers for grass. Other artists work will be installed on site. At Dia's main Chelsea space, Open Office designed the new entrance in conjunction with artist Jorge Pardo for the new bookstore and lobby. In both projects the architecture implicates decisions, by resurfacing the buildings with a restraint in order to present the artworks.







Open Office: Galia Solomonoff's installation, "Defective", at Artist Space in Soho



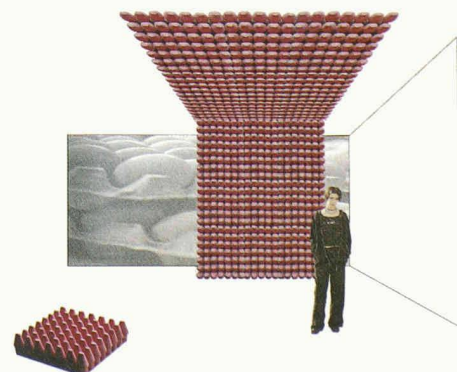
Open Office: Lillian Ball store in Soho







Specht, Harpman: Office features for Good Machine



Specht, Harpman: MTV retail store on Times Square



## Specht, Harpman

Found objects also inspire the work of Specht Harpman, Louise Harpman and Scott Specht, whose office is located in the Garment District in New York. Sewing equipment, button molds, plastic bins, metal form-work, and machinery comprise a collection of their visual vocabulary which they merge with a modernist aesthetic for numerous new technology offices in loft spaces. Rather than using the computer to guide the fabrication of building elements, they find the existing manufacturers of products, associated with a location, creating a materiality of a site. They comb the streets as scavengers discovering form, texture, and repetitive patterns that could be incorporated into projects.

For Good Machine, a high-end independent film distributor located in a loft building, Specht Harpman design the normal office features of desk, storage systems, and wall dividers. They then created a «ready-made» wall composed of plastic water cooler bottles, found on the project's site, for a wall installation. The pattern, created by the repetition of the bottles, imbues the space with a subtle and unexpected richness, glowing from its back-lighting, at the end of the office's central axis.

The Starrett Lehigh Building on Manhattan's West Side, an icon of industrial buildings, was the distribution site for manufacturing in the 1930s. Now this «found object» has been transformed into offices for numerous internet companies – the new industry. Here Specht Harpman designed a 40,000-square-foot office for an internet business, Concrete Inc., respecting the original industrial structure and bands of steel casement windows. By deploying the interior space with meeting rooms, technical centers, workstations, and service areas they left the perimeter unobstructed, following the layout of traces of heavy machinery on the concrete floor. In this central area, Specht Harpman designed five small cylindrical meeting rooms, inspired by the omnipresent rooftop water tanks. These cylindrical «tanks» also play on the phrase «Think Tank» as the space for the company to brainstorm. Crafted by boat builders, the tanks with gaps for windows, are made of a translucent resin, giving a luminous quality to the space. The custom steel work for the sliding display armature and steel platforms for interior offices, were fabricated by the local garment-industry welders – another found industry.

A Specht Harpman project in-the-making is an MTV retail store on Times Square, which focuses on youth culture and stuff – shirts, souvenirs, music and interactive games as well as a Total Request Line for live music. Since, as Louise Harpman said, «music often gets made on the street, we looked at items on the streets around us for inspiration.» Walls will be covered with individual textured elements, creating fields of plastic cartons and ice-cube tray molds, purchased directly from the manufacturer and linked together on a metal armature display grid in an array. The containers will double as storage space, interchangeable for future needs. Pencil erasures will be used as a bedding for the background of display vitrines for smaller items such as watches.



Specht, Harpman: Office for Concrete Inc.  
in The Starrett Lehigh Building on Manhattan's West Side



## Lot/ek

Ready-made objects are key to the work of Lot/ek, Giuseppe Lignano and Ada Tolla, which juxtaposes unexpected objects weaving them into normative life as raw materials creating new forms and giving them new meanings and functions, reinterpreting the way people interact, in unconventional modes. As Italians in New York, their perception and identification of these objects is keen. Out of place, these objects adjust to their new place, just as Lignano and Tolla do as ex-patriots. Inspired by technological needs and the transient global world, they reassemble these displaced objects, from empty detergent bottles and TV's, to large scale shipping containers, creating new forms with layers of purity and contamination.

The Morton Loft, is representative of Lot/ek's adaptation of prefabricated containers normally used by heavy industries, which they domesticated to the scale of the individual. In a New York loft space they inserted a new petroleum trailer tank, forming encapsulated womblike rooms. By cutting the tank in half they raised one portion to the ceiling, for a loftbed, accessible from large doors. The second half was mounted vertically in the living space and contains two stacked bathrooms, with the upper one accessible from the bed capsule, via metal walkways.

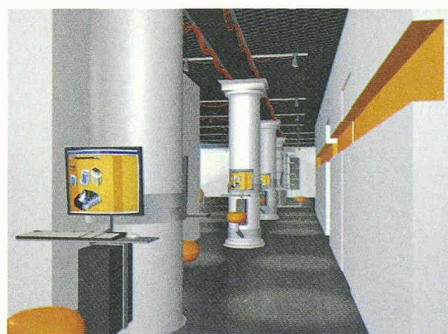
Lot/ek is intrigued with high-technologies deployed in the environment in a low tech way. Their 1997 art installation of a ceiling of TV's, and installations for special events for the Brooklyn Academy of Music, as well as media art viewing rooms for museums, led them to the commission for a recently completed multimedia gallery on the lower level of the New Museum in Soho. There they transformed the large existing columns, which line the center of the space, into nodes for computers, monitors, keyboards, and padded seats. Long orange-padded benches provide seating for a reading area, while a horizontal orange strip serves as a bulletin board. The entire space can be wired for multimedia installations with ample seating and display areas.

Lot/ek's most recent project, The Mixer, an independent commission exhibited at the Henry Urbach Gallery in November, transformed a new steel concrete mixer into a self-contained room. Similar to a space capsule, it is unexpected in its fixed vertical position, as it transports places to people, rather than people to places, via a Web-cam, TV, computer monitors, surveillance, and sound systems in a total media environment. Instead of mixing concrete, the capsule mixes images and sound. Measuring 7 foot 4 inches x 10 foot high, it is made of 3/16inch thick bands of steel, which when bolted together on site, weighs 3000 pounds. The Mixer comes with a humorous operating manual written by Mark Robbins, with a text of a scenario of what could happen inside the limited space for two.

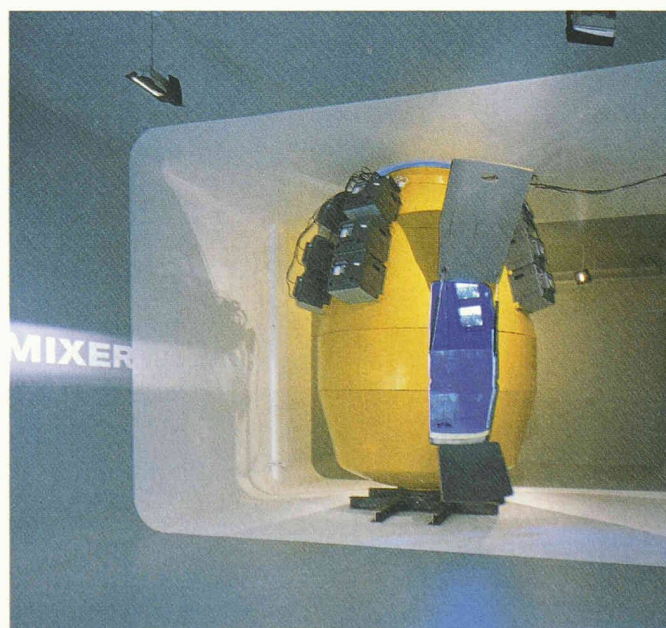


Lot/ek: The Morton Loft (Image: Paul Warchol)



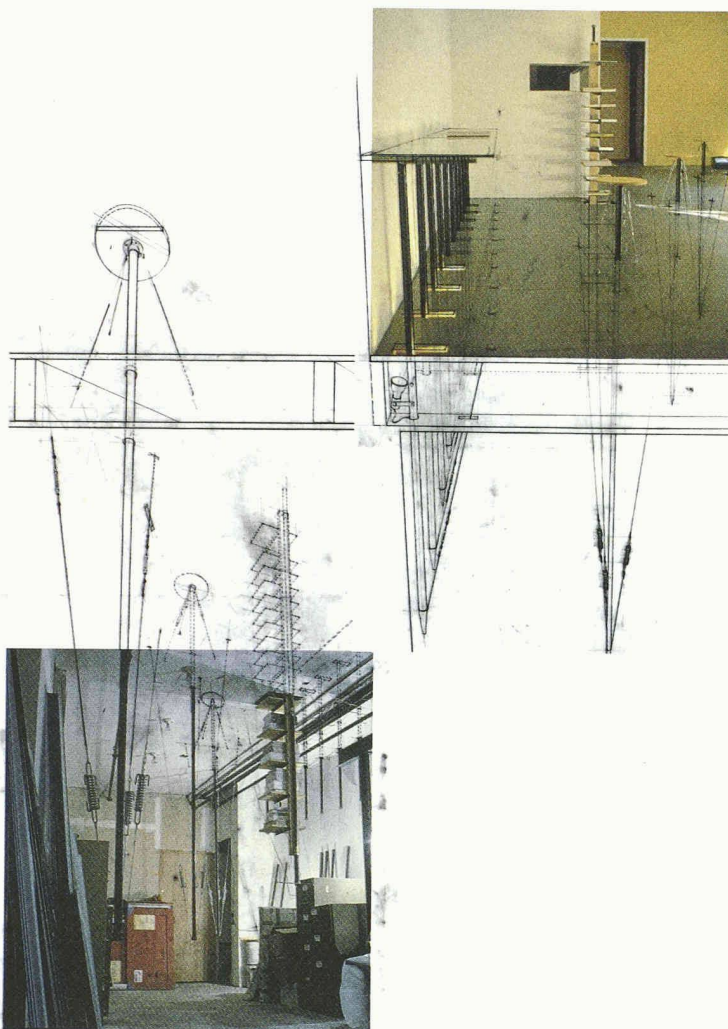


Lot/ek: Multi-media gallery,  
at the New Museum in Soho



Lot/ek: The Mixer, at the Henry Urbach Gallery (Image: Paul Warchol)





Lewis, Tsurumaki, Lewis: Installation «Slip Space»,

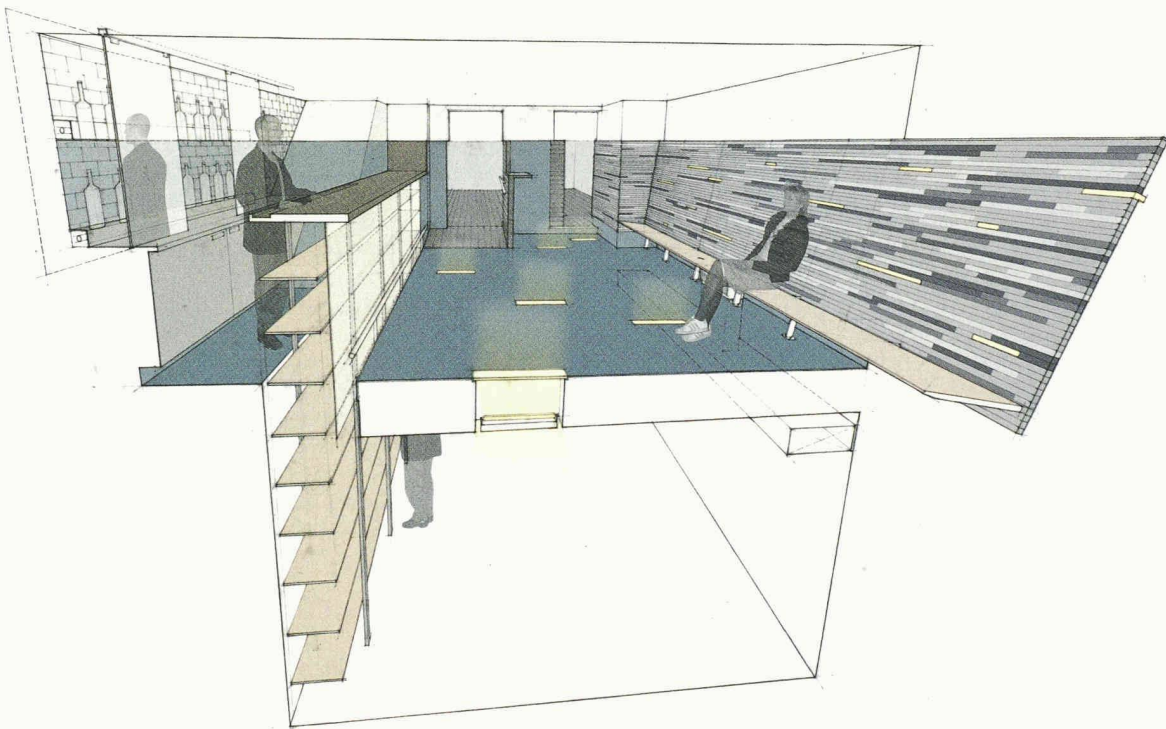
### Lewis, Tsurumaki, Lewis

The work of Lewis, Tsurumaki, Lewis (LTL), David Lewis, Marc Tsurumaki and Paul Lewis, is also bound in the making, as they build and install many projects, especially for galleries. But a different dimension to their work involves the altering of the norm by questioning conventions of program with a heightened almost surreal, or surrational, awareness of the way things operate. By tweaking a condition, not just taking things out of their usual place, they create a slight adjustment to a point of irony or absurdity. In a heightened awareness of situations that are already strange, although considered normal, they magnify abnormality in a critic of program and form. With this comes a language play in the creation of puns, twists, and clever interpretations of objects as well as titles. This distortion of the norm and exacerbation of logic to the absurd is described in Pamphlet Architecture 21, *Situation Normal...* (Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1998).

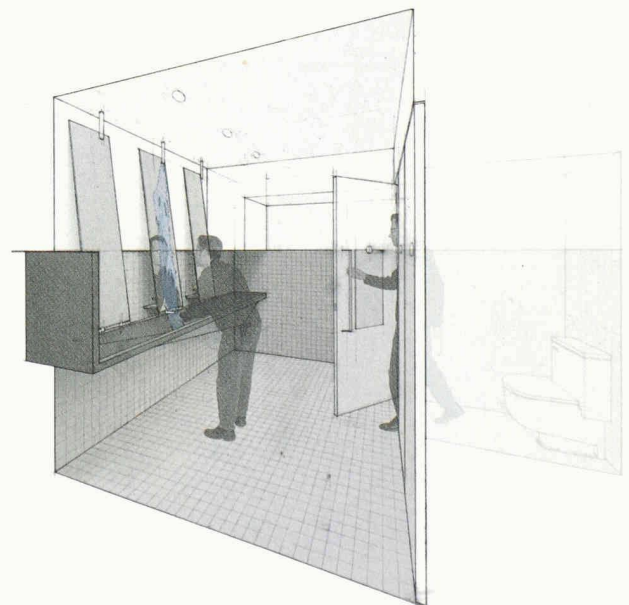
LTL's early projects consist of numerous installations for galleries, exhibition designs and office interiors as installations. Projects such as «Mantel Piece», «Pull of Beauty», «Eavesdropping», denote a double meaning of other lives hidden in the objects they create. For a New York architecture space, The Storefront for Architecture, they designed an installation-as-exhibition, creating a heightened awareness of the engagement between the zone of floor to the basement. Furniture, a bookshelf, stools and a table, slipped between the zones of the gallery and the basement via moveable apparatus bringing the idea of storage and dirt from the basement into the normally pristine gallery and visa versa; the floor became the zone of tension between the two. When additional books were placed on a shelf it descended and as books were sold, it rose. Tables lining a wall, made from the cut out pieces of flooring, provided views to the basement and three stools suspended on springs and cables in the cellar descended with different body weights. For a dramatic connection to the world below, peepholes in the stools allowed for views to the basement.

This theme of slippage and the question of «normal» spatial divisions is carried through in LTL's 160-seat restaurant Lo/Zoo, now under construction in Soho. Beyond the normative tables, chairs, benches, they are connecting the existing disparate levels of the original interior by means of two elements that will be continuous through the space - a stainless steel datum line, which maintains a constant height, and a continuous 80-foot long felt banquette, which extends from the bar to each of the three dining areas. Different materials wrap the interior up from the floor or down from the ceiling to join the steel line along the walls, creating a field surface. The back of the banquette is formed with alternating strips of felt and translucent acrylic, backed with lighting. The limited ceiling height in the entrance-lounge encouraged LTL to explore «slippage» with the floor as an unnecessary spatial boundary. Just as in the installation, «Slip Space», the bar/storage rack descends into the basement, so that the bar becomes a display and service area with storage below and is vis-





Lewis, Tsurumaki, Lewis:  
Restaurant Lo/Zoo in Soho





ible through a slot in the floor from which lighting penetrates the space above.

For the Cooper Hewitt's Triennale exhibition last summer in the theme «Reclaimed» they created an new installation, called «Refiled», where they featured their own work playing upon the idea of a light-box, treasure box, and filing system, which challenged standard organizational and display systems. The architects drew images of their projects on film laminating it to four vertical backlit Plexiglas vitrines. By cutting away portions of the vitrines they inserted shelving and filing systems, models TV's and motors into the display. A Rolodex projected from the facade and functioned as an index for the project and flat file drawers were mounted vertically, revealing the cross section of each project as the drawers opened. The installation questioned representational systems by literally turning the objects on end, a dominant theme in their work.

Nina Rappaport, Editor of the Yale School of Architecture magazine «Constructs»



Lewis, Tsurumaki, Lewis: Installation «Refiled»

#### Zusammenfassung:

(hg) Die jungen Architekturbüros in New York interessieren sich nicht mehr in erster Linie für Theorien und formale Fragen, sondern für die Art, wie Bauten gemacht sind und woraus sie bestehen. Sie spüren ungewohnte und ungewöhnliche Materialien auf – wie Halbfabrikate aus der Industrie oder Fundstücke vom Bauplatz – und integrieren sie in ihre Projekte. Sie benutzen den Computer dabei nicht nur als selbstverständliches Werkzeug, sondern auch als Mittel, innovative Fertigungsmethoden auszuprobieren. Die Kombination von freier Kreativität und gezieltem Interesse für Produktionsprozesse erinnert an die Arbeitsweise am Bauhaus.

SHoP: Wie eine aufgefaltete Origami-Figur sieht «A-Wall» aus, eine gewellte Ausstellungswand aus 496 Titanblech-Paneele für ein Architekturmagazin. «Dunescape» ist eine Raumsequenz aus Holzelementen mit Sitzgelegenheiten, Umkleidekabinen und einem Pool, die das Büro im letzten Sommer für den Hof des P.S.1-Kunstzentrums gebaut hat. An der Fifth Avenue wird das «Museum of Sex» zu stehen kommen. Die Vorstellung von Haut als Organ der Sinnlichkeit und deren geschichteter Beschaffenheit hat zu zonierten und geschichteten Räumen geführt.

Open Office: Mit der Künstlerin Galia Solomonoff haben Open Office eine Installation («Defective») zwischen Kunst und Architektur gebaut, deren 500 individuell gegossene Einzelsteine an Eschers Formverwandlungen erinnern. Für die Ausstellung der Schmuckobjekte im Lillian Ball Store haben Lieferanten für Medizinbedarf Vitrinen und kugelförmige Glaskolben geliefert, die auf dem blaugrauen Linoleum-Fussboden mit Seidenvorhängen, Fellimitation und Gummi kombiniert werden.

Specht, Harpman: Für Good Machine haben die Architekten eine normale Büroeinrichtung entworfen und sie mit einer von hinten beleuchteten Wand aus blauen Plastikflaschen, die sie auf dem Baugelände gefunden hatten, kombiniert. Für das Starrett Lehigh Building haben Bootsbauer fünf zylinderförmige Raumzellen aus durchsichtigem Kunststoff hergestellt, die als Besprechungsräume dienen und formal und als Wortspiel («Think-Tank») an die allgegenwärtigen Wassertanks auf den Dächern erinnern. Im gegenwärtig entstehenden MTV-Shop am Times Square werden die Wände mit verschiedenen plastischen Texturen gestaltet sein, beispielsweise Eiswürfel-Formen; auf Unterlagen aus Radiergummi werden die kleineren Objekte in Vitrinen liegen.

Lot/ek: Fundobjekte sind bei Lot/ek ein zentrales Thema. Für den Morton Loft wurde ein neuer Öltank entzweigeteilt. Aus der einen Hälfte entstand ein Schlafkloven, aus der anderen zwei übereinander gestellte Badezimmer. Aus einem aufrecht stehenden Betonmischer (The Mixer) machten die Architekten eine Raumkapsel, in der die Welt per Web-Cam, Fernsehen und Computer-Monitor zu den Insassen kommt. Statt Beton mischt der Mixer Bilder und Töne.

Lewis, Tsurumaki, Lewis: Leichte Ironie und Absurdität sind die Spezialität von LTL. Für The Storefront for Architecture, einen Ausstellungsraum, haben sie Büchergestelle bauen lassen, die in den Boden sinken, wenn sie belastet werden, und aufsteigen, wenn Bücher entnommen werden. Tische aus herausgeschnittenen Fussbodenteilen und Durchblicke ins Untergeschoss nehmen dieses irritierende Spiel von Unten und Oben auf. Im Restaurant Lo/Zoo greifen Deckenmaterial und Fussbodenmaterial auf die Wand über und treffen dort auf einer «Datumslinie» aus Stahl zusammen; die raumdefinierenden Elemente verschwimmen, die Welt kippt aus den Fugen.