

FORM

THE ART ISSUE

PIONEERING DESIGN

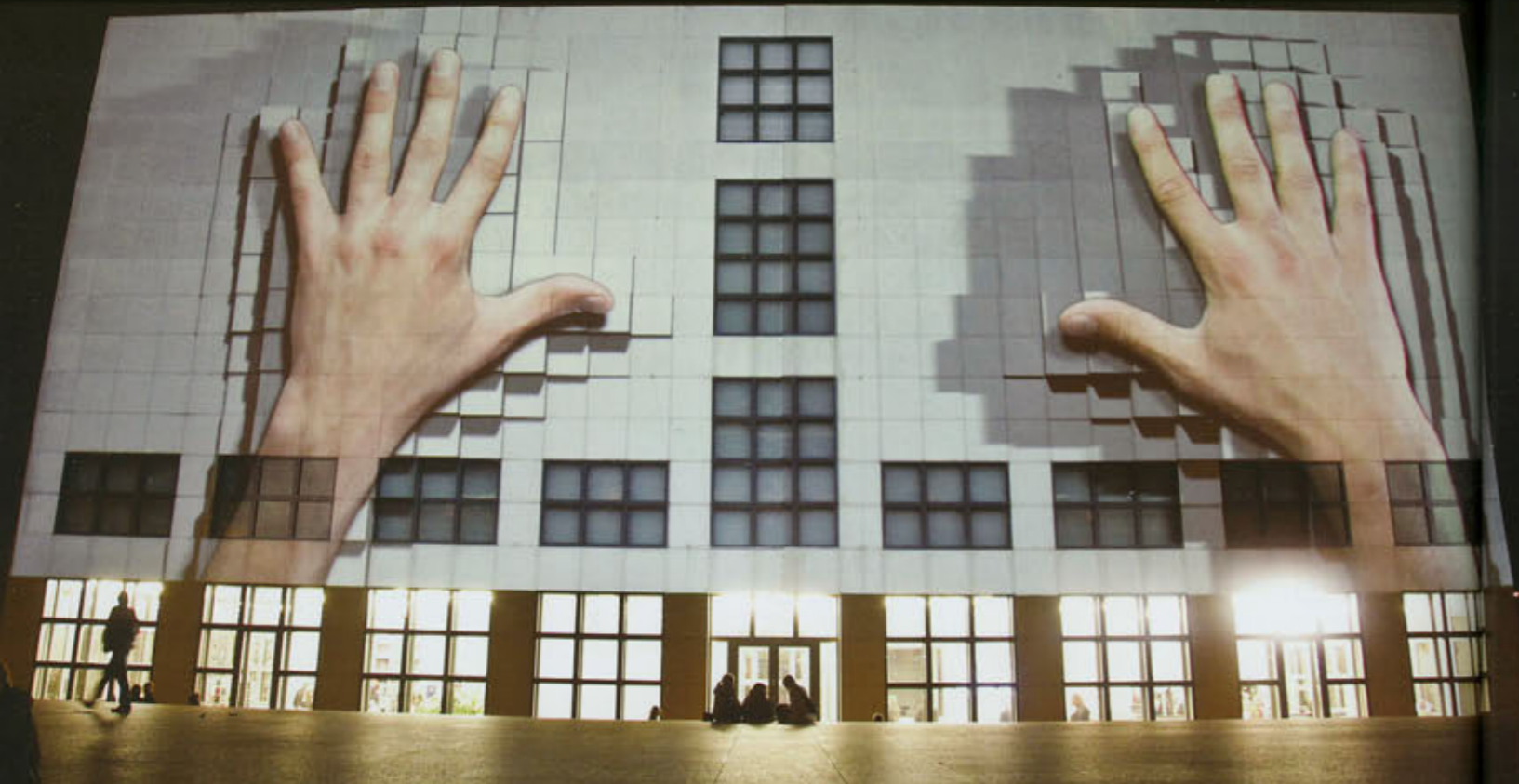


U.S. \$6.95 / CANADA \$8.95



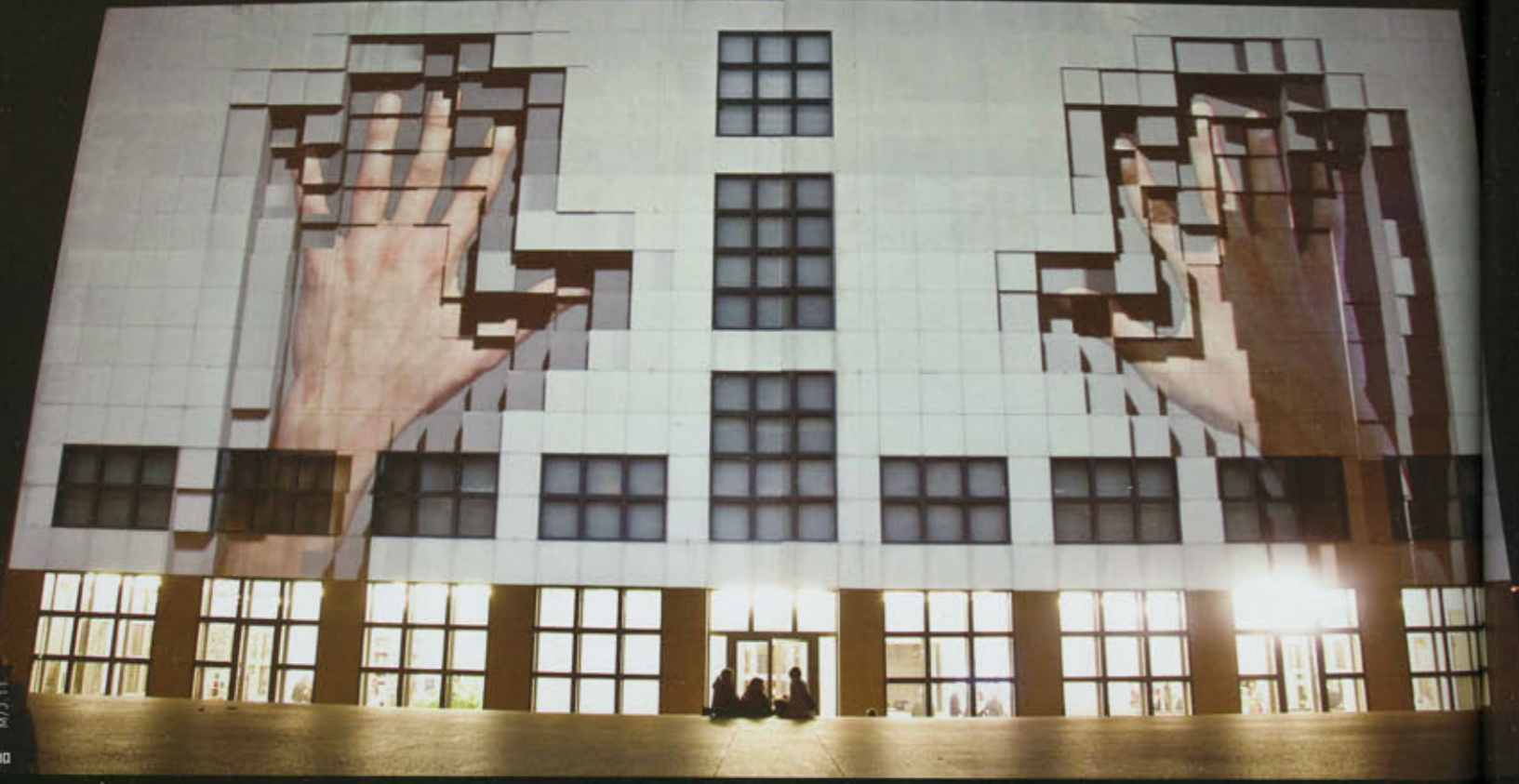
6 86345 97698 1

A PUBLICATION OF BALCONY MEDIA, INC.



URBAN CANVAS

Artists find innovative ways to explore the built environment BY JENNIFER QUAIL



LEFT: *Cradle* by Ball-Nogues Studio is made up of stainless steel spheres suspended from the side of a parking garage. OPPOSITE: A site-specific video projection by Urbanscreen appears to break through its architectural canvas.

By the nature of their purpose and existence, art and architecture are born to very similar fates. The moment a project conceived in the creative is submitted for public viewing and interpretation, its life begins to morph and change from eye to eye and thought to thought. But when the two disciplines intersect and an installation is created for a specific structure, the result can be an immersive experience, where art utilizes its intended space as both canvas and boundary.

Benjamin Ball, who, with Gaston Nogues, founded Ball-Nogues Studio—the Los Angeles-based creative team behind award-winning installations including *Table Cloth*, a hanging fabric of connected tables designed to activate a UCLA courtyard—notes that it's easier to discuss an intersection between art and architecture when looking at art in the public realm. "I think public art and architecture are now expected to communicate with a general audience in ways that a lot of artists and architects are only now becoming comfortable with," he says. "An artist working in the public realm has to be able to play both sides of the fence, they have to critique from within."

The studio's installations—from stainless steel spheres hanging from the side of a Santa Monica parking garage to wisps of strings spiraling across the atrium of the Indianapolis Museum of Art—connect with the public while energizing their structural canvases. "Our interests are not monolithic," Ball says. "The works share their physical context with architecture as well as sharing a relationship to the general public and the city. These are very different contexts than

galleries. So, in these cases, we can't ignore the lessons we learned while working as architects."

Los Angeles artists Jenna Didier and Oliver Hess, who work collaboratively as Didier Hess and serve as co-directors of the outdoor exhibition space Materials & Applications in Silver Lake, also consider architecture as a central factor in their work. Hess explains that they see art as "the infrastructure in which architecture and other systems-related disciplines can condense expressive forms of space with a minimum of dogmatic restrictions." The partners believe the large-scale projects they envision and bring to life allow them "to really interface with the public at a level very few tend to."

For a project Didier and Hess are currently developing, the team is fusing "a prostheses of nature" onto a fire station in Baldwin Park. A system of lights suspended within brass origami flowers—"vaguely inspired" by the chalk dudleya plant, otherwise known as the "live forever" plant—will drape around the corner of the brick facade. A moisture sensor will be used "to create animations of gradual waves

traveling over the surface of the building, illustrating the history of sensor readings taken at the site and creating a connection between us and the natural systems of the environment," says Hess.

The creative team behind the Germany-based Urbanscreen has a different approach to creating site-specific works. "We perceive our work as being a temporary occurrence in public space," says cofounder and managing director Manuel Engels. "We provide an alternate view

Aphidoidea, a design collaborative based in downtown Los Angeles, defines the purpose behind their work as "striving toward a more creatively built environment." The group produces installations tailored to specific venues—such as creating a suspended, undulating ceiling made from paper cups for a coffee house—but sees the completed work as only one possible variation. "You could say that an installation will not lose impact but rather gain different reactions when it's

"You could say that an installation will not lose impact but rather gain different reactions when it's readapted into another context." – ANDREW JASON HERNANDEZ

of one's architectural environment." Urbanscreen realizes this view through Lumentecture, custom video projections that have "the potential of converging two different realities," Engels says. Through exact measuring, projections are tailored to interact with specific buildings. Normally static facades appear to undergo physical changes or become animated with the choreography of virtual figures moving in and out of windows.

The building itself is not only a crucial player but a virtual stage as well. "We are emphasizing a certain kind of calmness that honors the sublime atmosphere of the architecture," says Engels. "It enables the building to tell a story, shifting between witness and narrator. The interplay between projection and architecture is essential."

readapted into another context," explains architect and member Andrew Jason Hernandez. "An original, great idea or concept doesn't necessarily have to change if the location changes, but it must evolve and adapt to its new surroundings, which will circumstantially generate a different reaction."

Though their work is naturally tied to its constructed environment, as with an upcoming interactive lighting project for the Santee Court lofts, the group shares the belief that both the art and architecture are derived from the same place. "In its initial stages," explains Hernandez, "a concept is not defined as artistic or architectural. In its pure essence, it is just that—an idea." ■

■ To see a selection of Urbanscreen's video projections, visit FORMmag.net.

RIGHT: Didier Hess designed brass origami flowers to light up in waves around a fire station in Baldwin Park. **OPPOSITE:** A rippling ceiling installation by Aphidoidea was crafted from 4,000 paper cups and 15,000 staples.



Courtesy of Didier Hess