

PIN-UP

Featuring Robert Wilson,
Thierry Mugler '80, K/R,
Tony Duquette, Julius Shul-
man, Hong Kong Cultural
Centre, Gandalf Gavan
and Ball-Nogues.

Magazine for Architecture
Entertainment
Issue 3, F/W 2007-2008
US\$10.00/EUR9.90

ISSN 19339755

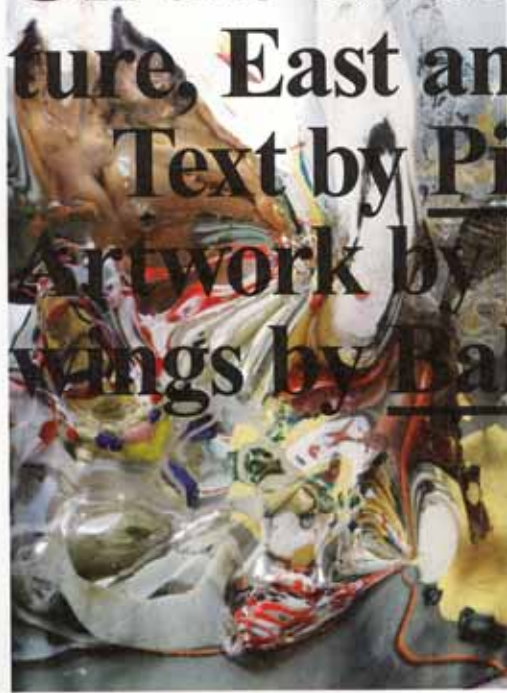


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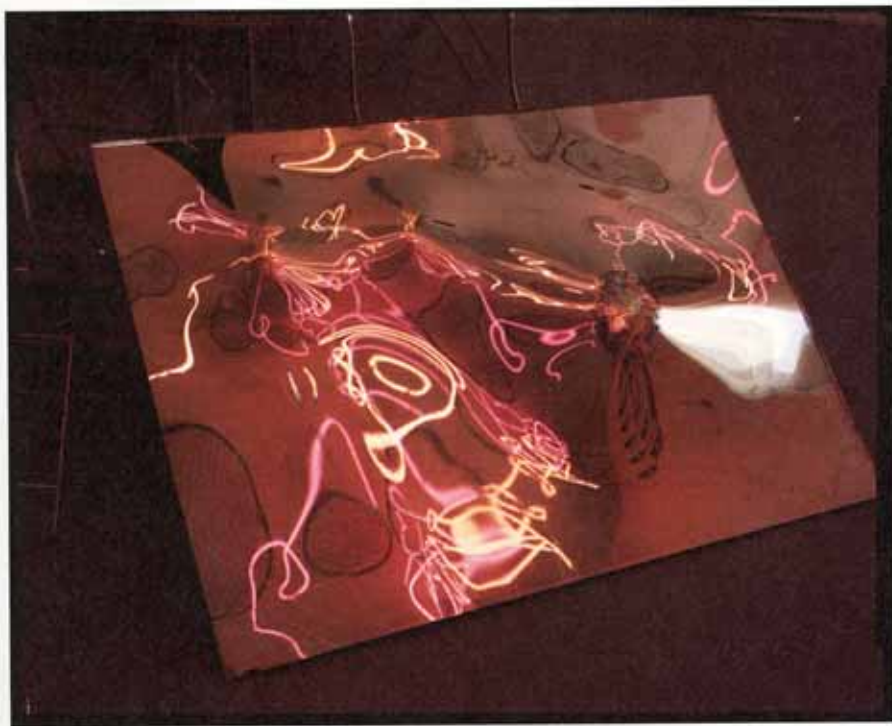
Ball-Nogues & Gandalf Gavan—

On the threshold of art and architecture, East and West Coasts connect.

Text by Pierre Alexandre de Looz,
Artwork by Gandalf Gavan,
Drawings by Ball-Nogues.



1. Gavan's images, which he takes in his own studio and those of his artist friends, are on view at Bertrand & Gruner gallery in Geneva. *Untitled*, 2007, courtesy of Gandalf Gavan.



2. Gavan's mirror reflects one of his light installations in P.S.1's cafeteria. *Untitled P.S.1*, 2007, courtesy of Gandalf Gavan.



3. An artist's studio space reflected in Gavan's anamorphic mirror. *Untitled*, 2007, Courtesy of Gandalf Gavan.

4. Ball-Nogues practice their architecture out of a three-car garage in Echo Park, L.A. Their neighbor Paul's makeshift bar hosts soirées to the tunes of Scandinavian speed metal. Seen here is a drawing of their Liquid Sky installation. Courtesy of Ball-Nogues.



Gavan's Brooklyn studio's major distinction from the exterior isn't the junkyard of odd collectibles, lawn chairs, and hammock, but a big boulder on the street he painted pink, the kind you'd see in Venice Beach. Untitled, 2007. Courtesy of Gandalf Gavan.



Whether art and architecture are cut from the same cloth is debatable, but LA architects Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues, and Brooklyn-based sculptor Gandalf Gavan are working hard to stitch it all back together. Gavan connected with Ball-Nogues, winner of this year's P.S.1 courtyard design, while completing his own installation for the museum's summer show. Exhibiting side by side, the indie architecture duo and outer-borough material maverick hit it off. Around Gavan's specially designed studio table, PIN-UP's own Pierre Alexandre de Looz eavesdropped on the madness for 6 hours of late-night conversation about bombs, movies, gender reversal, art, and architecture.

Gandalf Gavan: So, why are we doing what we are doing?

Benjamin Ball: Ego!

GG: That's the easiest and the un-truest answer.

What are you after in your work?

BB: I am chasing that "aha!" moment. Where I make something and then say, "that feels right!" It's more of a feeling or an experience that I have while making it; and if I have that experience perhaps somebody else will. If something moves me, it might move someone else.

Gaston Nogues: I am interested in something that is absolutely effortless and that just belongs that way, like "that's the only way that could exist."

GG: Even in architecture, like a building?

GN: Installation art is about space and architecture is about space.

GG: But I am talking about how architecture is organized and how it affects us. There is a big difference. With architecture you build in a public sense, erecting "stele," as I call them, signs of sacrosanct power. Your project at P.S.1 is different because it is direct, close, and comfortable. But what if someone approaches you to make a corporate piece—how do you deal with it?

BB: It has to do with how I interpret the political, aesthetic, and social climate I am making it in. Also, it's about what I'm into at that moment.

Pierre Alexandre de Looz: What's the nuttiest thing you've made to date?

GN: I've made a lot of things. I made some pretty good bombs before. Not because I want to kill people. It's just because I really like the noise and something shattering into a million pieces in front of me. There is something fascinating about looking at something that's been destroyed.

PADL: So how do you consider the dismantling of your projects?

BB: That's usually something that's considered in the planning.

GN: The biggest project we had to think about dismantling was "Rip-Curl" at Rice because logistically it dealt with a lot more volume and weight. We had seven to eight tons of cardboard and maybe one ton of wood. And they gave us a very narrow window between one show and the next to strike the material. That dictated how we thought about putting it together, the kind of fasteners that we used.

GG: Architecture operates out of the supposition of permanence, and instead it seems you're asking technically how will it be dismantled and subsequent to that, what does it mean?

BN: With PS1 one of the first considerations was how do we make something that speaks about being impermanent. Based on the kinds of requirements we faced we decided the canopy elements would be Mylar, we designed multiple components that possess the same geometric DNA and could respond to different dimensional parameters.

PADL: Are we talking about the canopy petals?

It seems the petal can be reiterated over and over, but it will stretch and contract depending on its location.

BB: Right. We thought we had proven that thesis with "Maximilian's Shell" on Silver Lake Boulevard [June 2005 -Jan. 2006]. So, how do we take that a step further? Wouldn't it be interesting if those petal shapes were a useful object after the project was taken down? So we worked under the assumption that the petals were going to be reformed into products.

PAdL: Mylar handbags?

BB: Mylar bags, raincoats, lampshades.

GN: We thought of taking each individual part and turning it into something else. You might fold it and put something into it and it would become something that had a purpose different from its original incarnation.

BB: Which has sort of become a cliché: I mean Freitag, which makes messenger bags from old truck tarps has done it, although theirs is a repurposing process. We are trying to design with a cross-manufacturing scheme in mind and integrating more of the down-stream manufacturing process up front.

PAdL: There is a little bit of the "repurposing" in your work too, Gandalf. It's different, because some of the objects in the studio right now will end up in some of your installations and then come back to the studio and then end up in another installation.

GG: Our approaches are totally different and so is our language. The ground rules we have differ according to the professions that we are involved in. In the visual arts it's more a thing of learning to access underlying ideologies of meaning, of how things are read and how they are placed. What I do is recontextualize objects. Architecture deals in the straight-up *real* world. Of course there are concepts, there are ideas, there are presuppositions of how it's going to be, but they are only defined through exterior modes. Except that your kind of architecture gets closer to my realm.

PAdL: Similarly, Ben and Gaston are resituating cultural references. The P.S.1 installation is named "Liquid Sky" after a rather probing cult movie. What about the movie are you pointing to?

GG: The way I see it, *Liquid Sky* is about the notion that you become an alien once you immerse yourself in a certain mode of consumption and alteration of your brain.

BB: But there's gender reversal, too, in the movie. There is a character that plays a man and a woman.

PAdL: And obviously you wanted to make that connection?

BB: Not exactly. Titles are a moving window through which I keep looking at a project. There was the idea that the film came out of the culture of nightclubs. We also wanted to clash something that was a digital technology-based process with what you might call low technology or traditional craft.

PAdL: Is it the same way you plopped cardboard on Rodeo Drive? I am thinking of your installation for Tiffany's Gehry collection.

GN: Yeah—those Gucci suits on Rodeo drive were hanging out with this crappy-ass material!

BB: What about bringing together the computational process behind the development of the canopy surface, the cutting and the instantiation of the canopy with parts that require a lot of computational energy into a project where we also use hammocks that are crocheted by an artist who doesn't understand the technology we're using. It's creating a tension between two different realms of design. There is also an aspect which addresses the politics

of class: the crochet artist deals with something that you can relate to and is recognized as familiar. But the canopy leaves you guessing... "What kind of craft is this?"

GG: As a visual artist, why am I interested in what you are doing?

GN: Because everything in your living space has been repurposed, the rough-cut log shelving, the plumbing pipe and c-stud chairs...

PAdL: Gandalf, why did you choose these found materials?

GG: I grew up with them and basically, anything can be restituted.

PAdL: One word that comes up about your work is "psychedelic."

GN: It's such a poverty-stricken word.

BB: It's a terrible word. But what is so beautiful about a psychedelic experience is that there is not necessarily any thought. It means a release from thought and a way of seeing.

GN: To me it means a vacation into a visual realm entirely.

GG: I don't agree with that at all, because it's become so politically negative. I think "psychedelic" has to do with an acknowledgement that perception and how one puts together visual information, both optically and mentally, is a mode of construct. And construction is what we need to create a stable environment and mode of existence. It occurs in architecture and architectural rhetoric and visual art talk. Psychedelia has taken a beating starting from the '70s into the '80s, but all it has to do with is an enlarged mode of thinking about the differentiation of how subjectivity takes place within your own perception and how you put something together as compared to the rest of the world. We put it together historically speaking through a Cartesian perspective, however psychedelics pull it apart and offer a different mode of viewing. Why do you think I make anamorphic mirrors? They are surfaces. I call them "empty paintings." It's no longer a straight mirror. It is something warped, pulled, and pushed. Anything you see through it seems "distorted" according to normative modes of how any image is put together. Guess what? The world doesn't work like that and our memory doesn't work like that. Your own memory if you look at something, your past, your memories, your histories, how things come together—they are already shaped and moved according to your emotions and memories, according to how you put one event together with the other. It's never linear. It's never Descartes or Cartesian. But it's necessarily topological. It's already moving like a river. That's psychedelia.

PAdL: But, if the space of our consciousness is already warped, why give us a warped mirror? And let's extend that to architecture in general. The warped surface is an amazing thing to see, but it is a representation of something at the end of the day, so do we value it simply because it is *physically* warped?

GG: Any time you think about the notion of your own self as self—individuality—you are also confronted with the notion of subjectivity, of how to define individuality—that's why I make those mirrors.

GN: You know, Gandalf, I never look in the mirror.

PAdL: How can you avoid mirrors in LA where everything is reflective?

GN: Ask my wife. I don't look in the mirror.

GG: The fact that you don't already means you are aware of it.

GN: OK. You can't escape the mirror; you always



6. Placed on the ground in P.S.1's courtyard, Gavan's anamorphic mirror reflects Liquid Sky, an installation by L.A. architects Ball-Nogues. Untitled P.S.1, 2007, courtesy Gandalf Gavan.



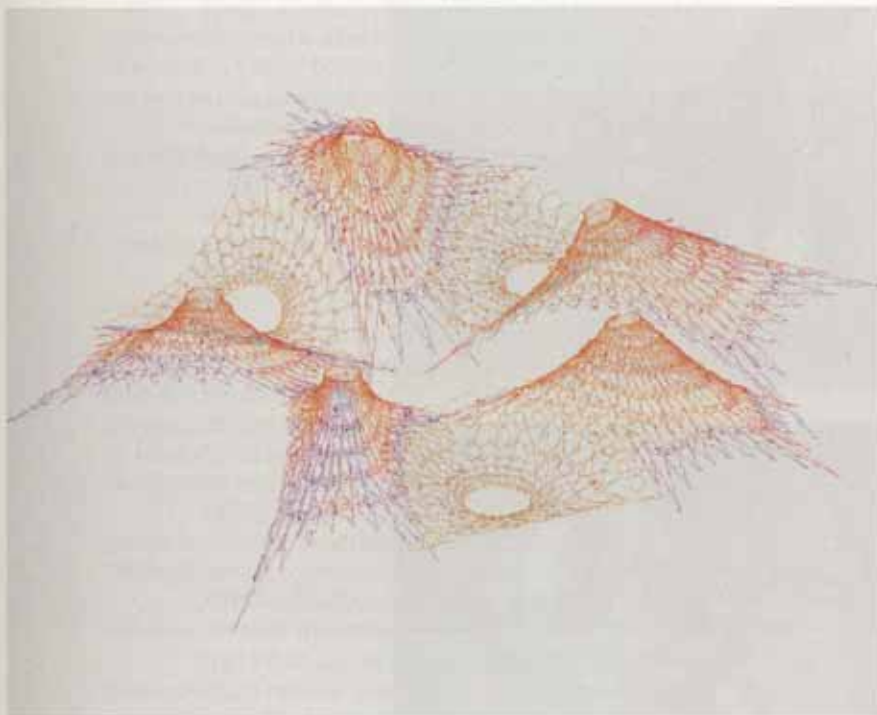
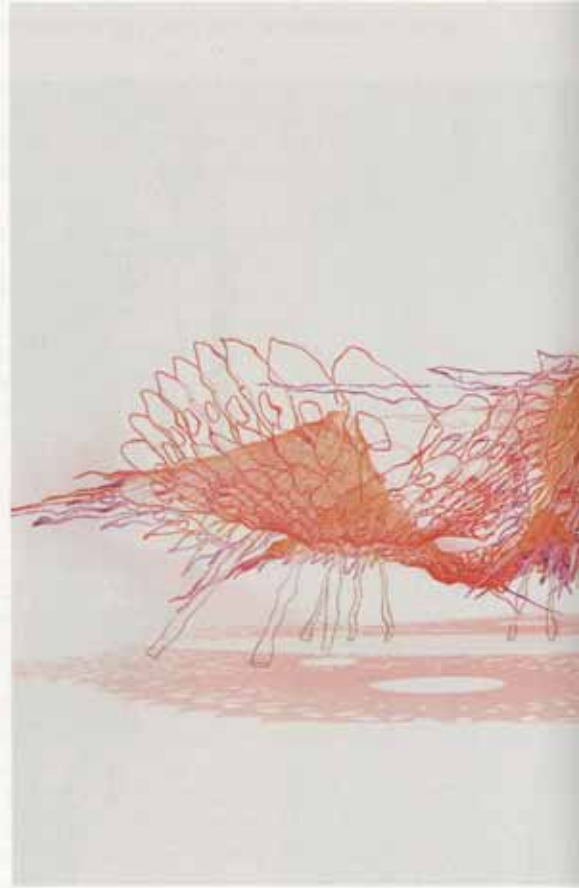
7. Turning life into art: Gavan's Brooklyn studio is a sprawling lair of repurposed factory buildings-turned-funhouse. Untitled, 2007, courtesy of Gandalf Gavan.



8. Gavan's mirror sits on pink insulation foam, capturing the orange smoothie-colored canopy of Liquid Sky. Untitled P.S.1, 2007, courtesy of Gandalf Gavan.



9. Blurring the line between creator and creation, Gavan's mirror spins a psychedelic portrait of the architects and their installation. Untitled P.S.1, 2007. Courtesy of Gandalf Gavan.



10. A lacework-like drawing by Ball-Nogues explodes in striking color. Liquid Sky, Courtesy of Ball-Nogues.



catch glimpses of yourself, but I tend to look at myself as if someone else is looking at me in passing.

GG: You look at yourself and look away and that's the same tactic I am using with my mirrors. The whole point is subjectivity and individuality and how the notion of the individual is constructed through subjectivity. There is no such thing as objectivity once you go through the notion of being an individual; and that's the point of the mirror.

PAdL: Well, in some way both you and Gaston and Ben are messing with the comfortable notion of an authoritative perspective. In one of your pieces, Gandalf, you mark that point of view with a chair of slumped glass; it's monstrous but it is also see-through; it seems to jokingly invite the viewer to take in the installation, but then you offer a disorienting array of stuff. Gaston and Ben, you seem to prefer laying out a number of seating options that don't look like seats, like hammocks and bushels of hay, as if no formal perspective exists.

BB: We are making ephemeral structures: they were designed to create the shared memory of a fleeting moment but not prescribe a shared viewing point.

GN: To me the moment of making is everything. I have a very physical relationship with things: they are how I feel them in my hands, not really how I conceive of them.

PAdL: Do you ever draw something out before you make it?

GN: I don't really draw stuff. It's just not how I think. My sketch book is all notes, like I'll write down the number of screws...

PAdL: Gaston, you spent a lot of time making things for Frank Gehry. What did you work on?

GN: I was there for 10 years, I worked on nearly everything. I worked on models and watches, furniture, and full building mock-ups. It was fun. It was a great job.

BB: Concept cars.

GN: Yes. The thing that was great about it is that I have such a visceral relationship to things and that place that was like a candy factory. You want \$3,000 worth of weird glue? Go get it! Play with it! It was a playground.

PAdL: Of all your Gehry projects, what stands out?

GN: Sanding 1,500 square feet of stainless steel just because I wanted it to look a specific way, and the rhythm of the sanding, how the rhythm of sanding was translated into a manufacturing process. This was for the Disney Concert Hall. I remember writing down on a sheet of paper how many passes of 120 grit on a sander, and the kind of motions you had to do, and the sequence.

BB: Let's talk about the light at P.S.1.

GN: It is about the light, because light is tangible. It has a physical effect on you.

GG: It is the most effectual thing. But the light in the "Liquid Sky" installation sucks.

GN: It does suck. It's really shadowy.

BB: We thought the material for the canopy had to be stronger, so it got thicker and doesn't allow enough light to pass through it to get the desired effect.

GN: The only thing that saves the light for me is that spot between 4 and 5 in the afternoon, when the canopy bounces the light on the walls. But there is usually nobody there or nobody pays attention to it.

GG: Most people don't go to museums at a specific time of day to catch the daylight. Part of my work is about the arrival of light into the eye and how your mind constitutes it into a generative, normative mode of what we call reality. Once you start stretching our understanding of time and space and how they are put together, everything

shifts—we are all so trained on a literal interpretation of point A to point B to point C; and the mathematics have been created for it within western society until Newton and Leibniz—what ends up happening? Topological modes of an ability to interpret events; and what kind of mathematics do you think you were using at P.S.1? It's topological. As I see it, the structure you built is an interface between digital design models which are non-linear and topological and something entirely practical, like "I have to attach the come-along hoist on there somehow."

PAdL: I have to say that when I read that you had Fellini's *8 1/2* in mind, I thought it was so funny. The movie is about a director who can't make his movie, so we are given a glimpse of his internal drama and the twists and turns of his thought process.

BB: Yes, there's some irony to that. He is caught in a cult of celebrity, which he can't escape. He is being pursued from all directions, which is kind of what happens when you win this competition [for P.S.1].

PAdL: To get back to the warped surface, it is happening at corporate scales around the world. But somehow the visceral power of that kind of form is falling away, maybe because it's gotten extra slick. It is evident that you construct your spaces and forms to keep them tactile; they maintain an associative value; they bear an evident hand and that speaks to a whole tradition of making things.

BB: Gaston identified the problem really well. He said a lot of this kind of work looks too much like it was made with modeling software.

GN: To me there is something tragic when what you see on the two-dimensional screen is the same thing you get in the three-dimensional form.

BB: It is the dismissal of the potential of the material and its articulation.

PAdL: I would imagine that "Maximilian's Shell", once built, was different from what you saw in the computer.

GN: It was completely different. In the computer it was a series of zeroes and ones, it was all about the math. We never rendered it.

BB: Well, we made one and it was terrible. You can't imagine it in its entirety. You also can't control it en through digital representation.

PAdL: This comes back to the regime of the image in any contemporary cultural practice; we are made to feel like the image must be respected.

BB: Yes. We are constantly asked for pictures which will create a clear impression in the minds of the people who are overseeing or paying for the project before we've even experimented with its materials. This exchange can limit a project's potential. In our recent work we were dealing with materials whose behavior is not entirely calculable by a computer—fabric for instance. It requires so much computational energy to predict a fabric's behavior that we don't bother making a simulation. If we approach the project accepting uncertainty, we create an entry to exploration. Lately we've been considering catenary strings and other droopy structures. Modeling these in the computer wouldn't be tremendously beneficial: what is required is physically making the structure. Because these structures and materials behave in non-linear ways you try to develop an intuition for them. In the architectural realm you might stop creating things with these properties because they are too unpredictable.