



The new  
architectural  
generation

KIERAN LONG

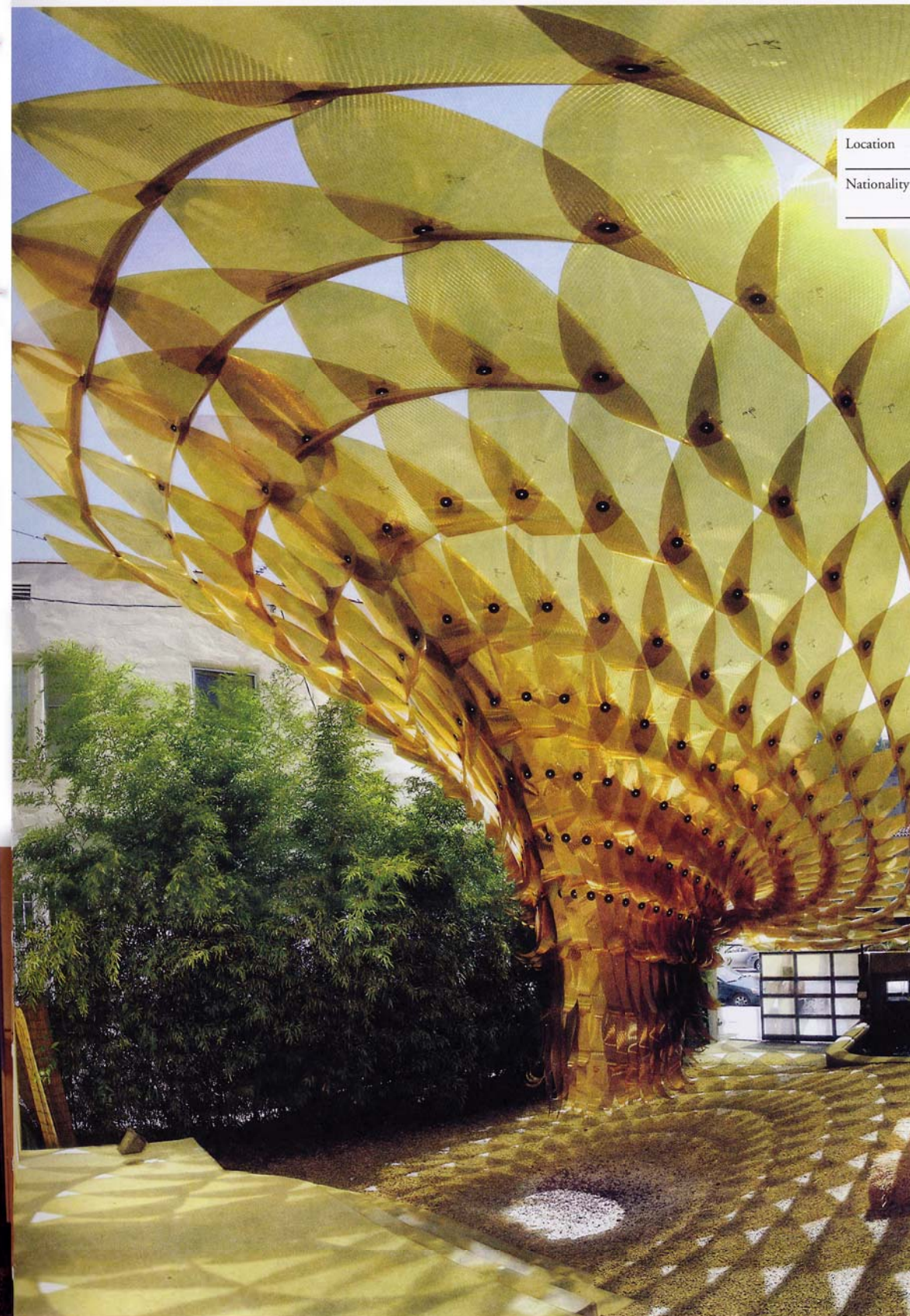
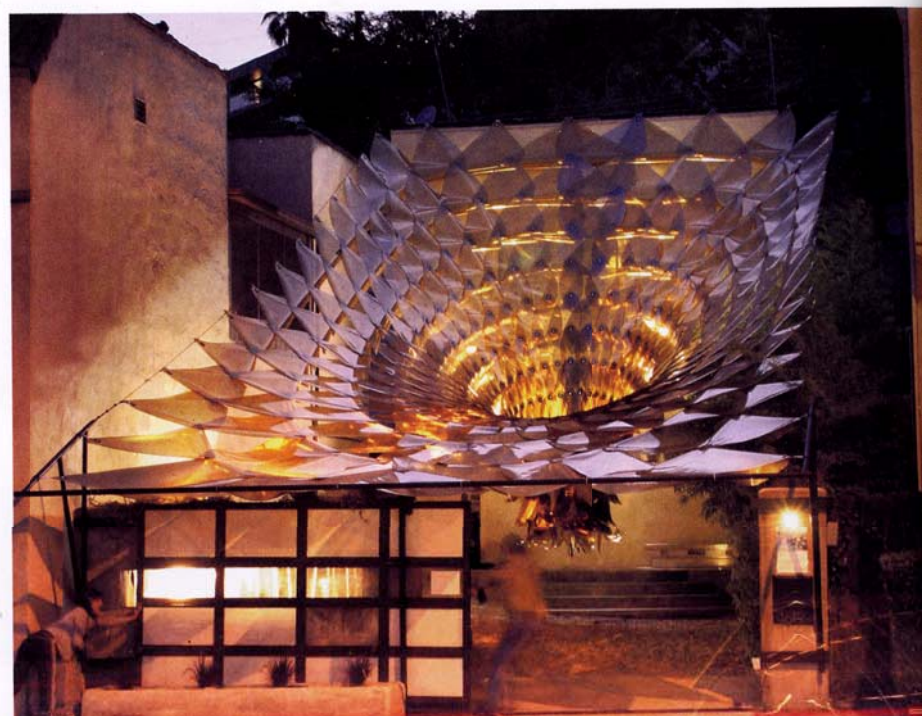
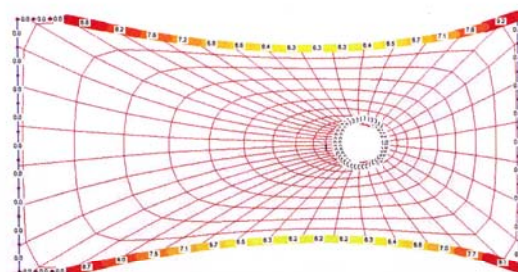
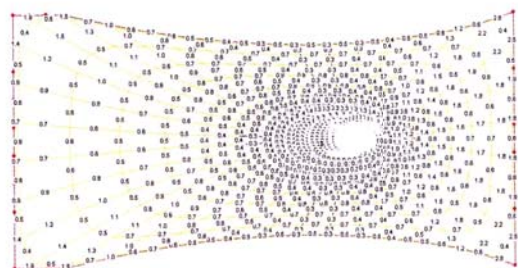
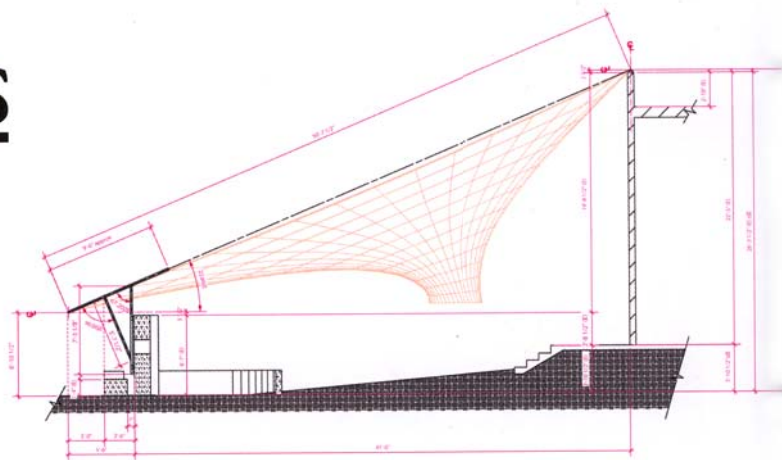
# Ball Nogues

Ball Nogues is a practice with a very coherent portfolio. Each of the practice's remarkable installations exhibits the same fascination with material research and advanced computational processes, allied to a sensuous and organic imagery that adds spectacle and delight.

The practice's most high-profile success so far has been the *Maximilian's Schell* installation, a canopy that shaded the courtyard of the Materials & Applications Gallery in Los Angeles in 2005. The project was named after an actor in the Disney movie *The Black Hole*, who had a maniacal mission to 'harness the power of the vortex'. The form of the canopy is a vortex composed of 504 translucent petals made of reinforced Mylar polyester film.

The architects explain: 'Every petal connected to its neighbours at three points using clear polycarbonate rivets to form the overall shape of a vortex. As though warped by the

Above and right: Drawings of the complex vortex of plastic pieces that form the *Maximilian's Schell* project. Below and opposite: Views of the piece installed at the Materials & Applications Gallery in Los Angeles.



Location Los Angeles, USA

Nationality American  
Argentinian

Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues began working together as Ball Nogues in 2005, and have since completed a number of works at the scale of the art gallery or temporary installation. Both partners studied architecture at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) in Los Angeles, and both worked for Frank Gehry, before setting up on their own. Ball's previous experience includes designing and building film sets (for films such as *The Matrix*), while Nogues worked for Frank Gehry making mock-ups and prototypes using advanced computerized processes. Ball Nogues has carried out a number of high-profile and widely published installations, including the award-winning *Maximilian's Schell* in 2005. In 2007 they won the annual competition to build a temporary installation at the PS1 Gallery in New York.

gravitational force of a black hole, the petals continually changed scale and proportion.' The entire structure was modelled in a computer and is constantly in tension across its surface, giving the piece a smooth appearance. The amber canopy cast a remarkable series of fractal shadows on the floor when it was installed, and was

combined with a sound installation by American composer James Lumb.

The two partners both spent time working for Frank Gehry in Los Angeles, an office renowned for its use of advanced computer technologies to realize its formally hyperactive buildings. Nogues says that while the sensibility of that office was influential, the practice's formal repertoire is influenced by much more than just computer technology: '[At Gehry's office] we built tons of mock-ups to test everything, and that influenced me. But also my childhood. My father used to take me to aircraft factories and I would walk around there completely fascinated by materials, by machinery, by process.'

The practice's projects always seem to be made in a context where they are intended to animate a space temporarily, for parties or exhibitions, and attempt a theatrical effect that goes beyond the technology of the projects' making. Their sinuous series of CNC-cut cardboard forms at the Rice Gallery

in Houston, Texas entitled *Rip Curl Canyon* (2006) used advance computation again, but, Ball explains, was inspired by the mythical forms of the American landscape. 'The topography of it, the forms, for me come out of a background of living in Colorado. They just seemed very natural to me,' he says.

Nogues adds that the tangible reality of mock-ups is vital to the practice's working processes. 'We're interested in being able to pull it off – and to do that you have to know the material you are working with. It's a lot easier to take a 5-axis milling machine and have it mill a form that you want, but we're not interested in that.'

Right and bottom: Views of the *Rip Curl Canyon* installation at the Rice Gallery in Houston in 2006. Opposite bottom: Drawing for design of Gehry Jewelry Launch on closed section of Beverly Hill's Rodeo Drive for Tiffany & Company in 2006.

