

P.S.1
MoMA

Summer 2009 NEWSPAPER YAP 10th Anniversary Celebration



IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK *A History of YAP*

From the time that it was transformed from an abandoned schoolhouse into an exhibition space in 1976, P.S.1 has always employed architecture as an active and accessible part of an artistic experience. What was once a closed off structure for nearly fifteen years became invigorated with site-specific and building-incorporating installations created by budding artists in the inaugural exhibition *Rooms*. These artists were encouraged to create works out of and in response to the building that housed them—an unlikely but charmingly gritty three-story Romanesque Revival school. A trend had ignited. P.S.1 would continue to discover new ways of activating architecture, changing it from an impenetrable structure into a tangible experience.

With *Rooms*, P.S.1 presented a new dynamic perspective of a public art space, one that cleverly shifted architecture into the heart of an exhibition. In Gordon Matta-Clark's *Door, Floors, Doors*, a rectangular cutout in the floor extended from one door in the same position on each of the building's three levels allowing visitors to peer through and observe the physical core of P.S.1. The cutouts made it impossible to take the building for granted as one was confronted with the basic foundation of the architecture.

Nearly two decades later, at the "reopening" of P.S.1 in 1997, Eric Orr engaged the concrete walls of the courtyard as his medium by cutting

three slits directly through its surface, offering a glimpse of the building from the sidewalk on Jackson Avenue as well as transforming the nature of the wall itself. Like Matta-Clark's revealing cutouts in each floor, the slits provided an unexpected view of the building, one that asserted the architecture's presence and made interaction with it a necessary component.

The Young Architects Program is the lovechild of P.S.1's experimentation with accessibility and tangibility in architecture. In its formative stages starting in 1998, it began simultaneously with the WarmUp music series. The Austrian collective Gelitin created the courtyard installation *Percutaneous Delights* that served as an interactive environment for a huge crowd dancing to subversive music all summer long. The installation included a large inflated globe of water and a towering column of furniture that stood in the center of the WarmUp excitement. The gathering crowd did more than just observe *Percutaneous Delights*, they took cue from its seductive title and unabashedly entered the ballooning globe and climbed the tower of furniture.

The following year in 1999, Philip Johnson, founder and former director of The Museum of Modern Art's Department of Architecture and Design, constructed a performance area, dance floor, bleacher-style benches, and platforms as one unified architectural entity in the courtyard. This large-scale installation accommodated and

engaged the burgeoning WarmUp crowd. Like Gelitin, Johnson had created an alluring work that encouraged the audience to become active participants. After the groundbreaking success of the two courtyard installations, an official annual architectural program was created by P.S.1 and The Museum of Modern Art in 2000.

YAP along with WarmUp have both grown into much-anticipated summer events. Several months before the season, design firms are called to propose temporary installations for P.S.1's distinctive outdoor space. Winning installations of each year, selected by a jury of P.S.1 and MoMA staff, always incorporate recurring elements of shade, water, and seating that can withstand a three to five month exhibition cycle and thousands of people, both general and WarmUp visitors, coming into contact with the structure.

This notion of temporary architecture that the Young Architects Program presents challenges the very definition of architecture itself. It becomes much more of a sensory experience. Each summer, a towering structure that can often be seen outside of P.S.1's grounds ignites curiosity and beckons visitors to not only observe provocative architecture but to participate, touch, and interact with the environment created. The result pays homage to a rich history of engaging, experimenting, and reacting to an uncharacteristic space for contemporary art.

The Young Architects Program transforms the highlighted spaces into innovative areas for summertime gathering and celebration.

Ball-Nogues and Tom Wiscombe of EMERGENT were two of the lucky competitors who were chosen to build their envisioned design. P.S.1 Newspaper asked the firms for their impressions of the competition, of winning, and what they might have done differently.

QUESTION 1: What impact did winning have on your career?

QUESTION 2: What design aspects of your installation did you keep for your future processes and why?

QUESTION 3: Is there anything you would do differently?

2007 BALL-NOGUES

Ball-Nogues won YAP in 2007 with *Liquid Sky*, an installation that combined advanced digital computation with more traditional forms of craft to yield an exhilarating creation of tinted Mylar petals. Based in Los Angeles, Ball-Nogues is known for creating experimental built environments.

Q1 Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues, Ball-Nogues: In terms of our aim to integrate concept, computation, and fabrication, it codified an approach that we have developed in all our previous work: focusing on what we call "designing production" to establish parameters that yield built work. The integration of evolving forms of craft into design methodology has become central in our work as our practice has grown and we've taken on permanent projects.

YAP was also a platform to collaborate with a group of designers outside Los Angeles. While we might do this with engineers on a regular basis, the collaborators that supported *Liquid Sky* were exceptional. These connections have multiplied exponentially since the YAP experience. Part of each project involves creating a building community, which is integral to the development of our practice and for young architects in general. People talk about social networks today as happening remotely through the internet; we foster social networking in meatspace. We create a web of skilled people with whom we work and socialize.

Since *Liquid Sky*, we continue to think about the nature of temporary, installation architecture. We believe this is very important to consider—YAP projects have short lives. We are skeptical of the view of YAP as a kind of surrogate, or an exercise for young architects who will one day start making "real" buildings.

Provisional architecture, which has lower financial risks, will have to do some of what buildings once did. We continue to develop installations, temporary public art, festival structures, and exhibitions; they compliment our permanent works. We believe that recontextualizing these spatial events reflects both their mediated longevity and their physical impermanence. What keeps them culturally relevant is the rapid dissemination of images into the media by designers. Architects can almost never match this pace because permanent building construction moves at a snail's pace while discourse via electronic media is nearly instant. The provisional aspect of YAP installations has a different relevance today than when it began ten years ago. We continue to explore temporality in our practice while viewing impermanent environments as potentially rich experiential moments in public space and investigations into the physicality of building.

In terms of our computation and fabrication processes, we continue to investigate "shagging the surface" through developing lightweight structures, a core concept of the P.S.1 project. We are currently developing a structural skin of variable petals for a new, permanent wild life observation structure for a client in Woodstock, N.Y. Rather than Mylar, the skin is made of flexible stainless steel. The project also utilizes the wood utility pole tripod we debuted at P.S.1. Because a good deal of our work involves developing then reworking our methods of computation and craft to yield new effects and improvements in structural performance, we build knowledge through the incremental innovations in our processes; *Liquid Sky* comprised a huge amount of research into some of those processes.

Q3 We viewed the P.S.1 courtyard and WarmUp as a space of public pleasure—we wanted to underscore the populism and spectacle of it. In hindsight, we would have added a dunking tank to the events. Perhaps we could have had a "dunk the curators day," or something like that.

2003 TOM WISCOMBE

Tom Wiscombe of EMERGENT was the winner of YAP 2003 with his entry, *Light-Wing*, which was inspired by tension-structures traditionally found at the beach as well as in natural formations. It was defined by two elements: a translucent, permeable roof of interconnected canoe-shapes and a leisure landscape of two large pools.

Q1 Tom Wiscombe: Winning YAP has been huge for two reasons. One is clearly

FORSYTHE + MAC

Winning isn't Everything

Forsythe + MacAllen Design was a finalist in the 2005 edition of YAP. Now called *molo*, the firm is based around the idea of building things with one's hands at various levels of scale. The duo created *Paper Softwall*, now in the permanent collection at MoMA.

P.S.1: What was the perception of YAP in your office at the time?

Stephanie Forsythe and Todd MacAllen, Forsythe + MacAllen Design / molo: We were really curious about the competition. I know that the perception is often, "This is the beginning of my career!" but we already knew what we wanted to do. The competition was going to be a potential distraction. We were very close to saying, "Thank you but we're not going to participate." In the end, it was an opportunity for us to push our work and ourselves, as well as to develop the textile softwall.

MATERIAL LAB

Changing Conditions

Anna Dyson and her collaborator David Riebe were finalists in the 2001 edition of YAP with an ecologically conscious project that mixed art, theory, and research with the process of making.

P.S.1: How were you nominated for YAP?

Anna Dyson, Material Lab: The P.S.1 opportunity came right out of the blue. Alan Balfour who was the Dean of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute at the time nominated David Riebe and I for the competition. In fact, many of the RPI faculty have been YAP finalists—Jefferson and Nona of Ellinger/Yehia Design, Bill Massie. For whatever reason there was a cast of characters who were really into radically experimental work that was interesting for that particular competition.

P.S.1: What was your relationship with your collaborator David?

ML: In 2001 David and his partner Beth Weinstein had a small practice at the Essex Studios. We looked at the YAP competition as an interesting theoretical project into which we might deploy some of the experimentation that was initiated with RPI engineers and some manufacturers that we were associating with. That year the theme was "Paradise Island," which for us meant a chance to focus on questions of ecology. I must say that this was very early on in some of our research so there was no way would have been able to do hydroponics at P.S.1 in 2000, even though we wanted to.

P.S.1: Do you mean right now or back then?

ML: Back then! It may seem hard to believe from this vantage point, but ecological considerations were at that time definitely marginalized by many in the design professions, as they sometimes still are considered granola...tacky, maybe too instru-

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