Carlos Khali talks with Judy Lee, a cerebral post-punk rock band explores gesamtkunstwerk, Rachel Gallaher reviews LEGOS, Mutuus's 'resident artist' chats with Anna Coumou, and Recology announces 2024 A.I.R.s, Keith Cote has a bunch of -isms, and Michael Barkin documents Love City Love.

I am so proud that, together with an amazing team and cohort of journalists and contributors, we are on our second edition of the quarterly! I would not have been able to bring this to completion without our new Managing Editor, Camilla Szabo and our designer, Elyssa Yim. I am also pleased to announce that Rob Moura, music journalist and publisher in his own right, has joined our team with a stunning piece about Telehealth's incorporation of architectural theory into their music, and Judy Lee, curator, photographer, and writer, will be interviewing artists from her "My Name Story" project in this and future issues. We are grateful to be able to continue to share these voices with you and are beyond excited for the continued evolution of ARCADE NW Publishing.
Saul Becker: Mutuus Studio's “Artist in Residence”

Written by
Anna Coumou

Interviewees
Saul Becker

Photography by
Mutuus Studios
Jon McAllister
The Mutuus studio in Georgetown is easy to miss — it’s hidden behind a gated courtyard tucked in between Ciudad and Mezzanotte along 12th. Once discovered, the massive steel door to this architecture firm opens into a space that feels less like an office and more like an artist studio: tall ceilings, white walls, and evidence of creativity strewn around abundantly. Mutuus, which is Latin for “reciprocal” or “done in exchange”, was founded by Kristen Becker and Jim Friesz and focuses on high-end, meticulously detailed work — primarily but not exclusively residential architecture. Becker’s role on the team stands out — he joined the team to integrate an approach to art and making that goes well beyond our traditional understanding of art or craftsmanship in architecture.

Becker’s bona fides are many, the most exemplary of which include receiving a 2010 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, NYFA Fellowship, a 2005 Virginia Museum of Fine Art Fellowship, and a 2011 Artist Trust Fellowship. His work has been shown in The New York Times and The New Yorker, he’s had numerous solo exhibitions with Horton Gallery in Chelsea, New York; he’s been featured at Artists Space, the Horticultural Society of New York, and the Socrates Sculpture Park. In March of this year he had a show at the New York Public Library on 5th Avenue. Today, Becker is preparing for his upcoming show at the LA Natural History Museum, opening in September 2024.

Becker’s art is infused into the firm’s projects wherever it can be and in as many ways as there is opportunity to. This integration is different from simply adding a piece of Becker’s artwork. When incorporated, he makes objects uniquely inspired by the location or the client’s story — think of drawer pulls made from brass and shells from a nearby beach, or a light installation that maps the client’s home state of Montana like a constellation of warm, round, metal stars. An even more personal example of his work is a light he designed after a friend’s father, who went by Bud, passed away. Becker received one of Bud’s work shirts and laminated it, forming it into a cylinder and then finishing it on a lathe. He created a pendant that feels emotionally textured in that it maintains the character of the shirt and the marks of wear and age. He called the piece “Bud Light”.

Reflecting the iterative artistic nature of his work, which primarily manifests in the firm’s residential architecture, Becker notes: “A title for myself that I’ve tossed around for a while is ‘artist in residence’, a little play on words.” Becker is not only contributing to residential work, but is also a permanent “resident” at Mutuus.

The objects Becker designs and fabricates, often by hand, are under the Mutuus Made umbrella and are rarely for sale to the public. Instead, they are a byproduct of what it means to work with the firm; a way for clients to take their commitment to art and craft further.

When talking about this work, Becker shows a modesty you might not expect from an artist of his talent and accomplishment. He admits: “I don’t really know where I’m going to take the Mutuus Made stuff”, adding: “My work is very exploratory, and I’ve given myself permission to just design - to follow my interest.” He adds: “The home is the last handmade thing you’re getting. It’s the last custom consumable, and one of the only places where you can pursue this kind of inquiry.” It’s easy to agree — there are few other places in our lives we can infuse with the same level of identity and story.

To this prompt, Becker brings a creativity that is constantly emergent; he has ideas, upon ideas, upon ideas. His skills have a wide range, and he pursues what he is curious about — photography, collage art, material research; working with brass, wood, metal, and fabric to make it react, or collaborate. A recently finished Mutuus project in LA used one of Becker’s experimental finishes on the kitchen cabinetry. By coating plywood with dropcloth, linen, and resin, the materials work together to create a gray tone that is uniquely textured, and feels very organic, as if the cabinets were made of fabric.

If being in a gallery or artist studio loft has ever inspired you, then being inside the Mutuus studio would feel similar, but with the added excitement of knowing that Becker is making art that carries function and can spark consideration in our daily environments. As we look out across the landscape of LMN’s The Shop, JAS’ Corner Store, Housewright, Mutuus Made and beyond, we can see Seattle studios branching out and finding new ways to give their innate creativity more legroom. This seems to be a net-win, not just for their clients, but for the practice at large; creating precedent and permission to design in ways that are increasingly infused with values, identity, and perspective.
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Like most kids growing up in the 80s and 90s, Shane Deegan had a plastic bin chock full of LEGO® bricks—colorful geometric pieces mixed together with little yellow figures from space, pirate, and castle-themed sets—from which he would snap together imaginary worlds. His first LEGO® was a helicopter, acquired in a McDonald’s Happy Meal, and he would add dozens of sets to his collection over the years, eventually moving beyond the predetermined kits to become part of the LEGO® MOC (my own creation) community, where, as the name suggests, creators use LEGO® bricks to construct their own designs. For Deegan, who grew up in the greater Seattle area, that has included models of Pike Place Market, Husky Stadium and Dick’s Drive-In, and T-Mobile park, the latter of which garnered thousands of “likes” on Twitter and a feature in the Seattle Times.

Now, the public can see Deegan’s latest Northwest-centric creation—a miniature replica of the Museum of History and Industry (MOHAI)—as part of the organization’s new exhibition, Towers of Tomorrow with LEGO® Bricks. Produced by Museums of History NSW and toured internationally by Flying Fish, a creator of traveling exhibitions, Towers of Tomorrow features 20 iconic skyscrapers from around the world, among them Chicago’s Willis Tower, Toronto’s CN Tower, the International Commerce Centre in Hong Kong. MOHAI also included a brief history of LEGO®, and—because it’s nearly impossible to be around so many models and not get an itch in your hand to touch them—200,000 loose LEGO® bricks for the construction and display of creations by patrons.

“This is an opportunity for families to come in and have fun but also learn together,” says Devorah Romanek, MOHAI’s chief of exhibits and interpretive services. “Seattle is a center of innovation, so we think this exhibition is perfect for the city. It’s an interesting way to experience creativity and analytical thinking through play. There’s something for everybody, whether you’re interested in art, engineering, or architecture.”

The models, all built at a 1:200 scale by Ryan McNaught—a LEGO® Certified Professional—contain more than 600,000 bricks. Shipped from Australia in segments, each one is constructed onsite. “Good crating is the key to ensuring they don’t arrive in a million pieces,” says Trent Brown, vice president of operations for Flying Fish Exhibitions. “Each crate is specifically designed to hold a specific piece or pieces. They are well cushioned, protected, and held in place by strapping, special foam, and a little bit of pressure to ensure they don’t come apart. We also use freight specialists who move precious goods throughout the world. They ensure the crates are not being mistreated throughout their journey.

McNaught, who, along with his team, spent more than 2,000 hours on construction for the exhibition, is one of just 23 LEGO® Certified Professionals (LCPs) in the world. Although they aren’t employed by LEGO®, LCPs do work with the company, evangelizing the joy that comes from working and creating with LEGO®.
We all operate independently, and mostly undertake LEGO®-based business that the LEGO® Group does not have a mandate to do or doesn’t have resources for,” says Canada-based LCP Robin Sather, a lifelong LEGO® enthusiast who helped the company create the LCP program, becoming its first LCP in 2005. Sather, who also works in the Information Technology field, is the head “Brickmaster” at Brickville DesignWorks. “That could be public LEGO®-centric events and activities, custom commissioned builds, created gift models, and of course, exhibits like Towers of Tomorrow.”

Sather has toured with the exhibition throughout North America, having the opportunity to view and interact with the installations at length. “What impresses me about the buildings are the wide variety of building techniques that Ryan used in creating these towers,” he says. “They are all very unique in their style, and clever use of LEGO elements. I won’t spoil it for you, but one of the buildings is actually built with all the bricks upside down!”

Models of this size (the towers stand as tall as 14 feet and three of them had to be displayed in the lobby) are often mapped out in render programs in advance of a build. According to Deegan, many members of the MOC community use these programs. “It’s safer, more efficient, lets you recreate the experience after you’re done and allows you to understand your needs before you start building.” He, however, prefers the old-fashioned method of cracking open a box and letting his imagination run. “I like the tactile experience of just digging into a bin and finding the bricks I need, figuring out how to solve challenges with my available materials,” he explains. “It creates a ton of inefficiency and trial and error, but it also gives me the sensation of play! It leaves it in the realm of art more than science.”

Deegan’s MOHAI model, which is proportionally accurate, took just over a month to build and contains up to 4,279 bricks. (Deegan notes that this is how many pieces he ordered for the project but can’t say if they all made it in in the end.) “I worked nights for an hour or two at a time until my brain turned off,” he says. “The biggest challenge with MOHAI was knowing that my build would be sitting inside the actual MOHAI. It is incredibly cool art deco building, so if I cheated anything or didn’t quite pull it off everybody would notice.” Fun moments—a stand-up paddleboarder in the nearby water, the rows of windows, museumgoers looking at towers from the exhibition—make the model feel familiar and demonstrate Deegan’s attention to detail.

There’s just something about LEGO®. Its simplicity, universality, and potential—its ability to unlock within people of all ages the itch to create—make it an enduring form of play. For Deegan, the balance of creation and limitation intrigues him. “If you have enough bricks you can build anything in the universe,” he says. “The possibilities are literally endless. But within that endless imagination, your bricks have to match up to click into place or it doesn’t work. So, you get to a spot in a puzzle that you have to solve, or you can’t move forward. Sometimes providing limitations to an artist and saying, ‘How far can you push yourself within the constraints of this medium?’ feels more freeing and creative than saying, ‘Here’s a blank canvas, do whatever you want.’”

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Carlos Khali is an emerging artist who could easily and harshly be judged and dismissed. He is a light-skinned Black male, lanky and of modest height. He has tattoos on his neck and arms and wears his jeans belted well below his waistline. A durag covers, what he refers to as, his massive forehead. You don’t see too many men like him frequenting the Art Walks in downtown Seattle, yet he is a refreshing presence. Vulnerable and emotionally intelligent with a desire to connect deeply to others are just some of the qualities that come through when speaking with him. It is easy when you do not fit into the crowd, especially in Seattle which was ranked the 6th Whitest city in America (2020 Census), to feel like you do not belong. But Khali is quick to reassure others like him that “you belong here,” something he recently told a young Black artist during Art Walk when he overheard him say he couldn’t go in because “you don’t see durags in galleries.”

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Telehealth: Inside the Twilight Exit, Alex Barr is blowing my mind.

Written by Rob Moura
Interviewees Alex Barr from Telehealth
Photography by Michael Barkin
“There’s a term that Wright used a lot: GESAMTKUNSTWERK, a total work of art,” he says. “His whole thing was that he wanted to create every element.”

“A lot of people see architecture as a progression of buildings,” he explains to me, “but we’re talking about architecture as a way of seeing and thinking and questioning the world around you. What is the weight of one decision? How does that change your structural system, your material costs, your aesthetic of the building, the purpose of the building?”

As a neophyte to the design world but no stranger to the musical one, Barr’s words enthral me. They guide my eyes to the tiny details of the bar that I’d normally overlook. There’s nothing quite like it in the area, its surreptitious alleyway entrance guards a cloistered cluster of time-worn tables and benches, their dark confines glowing under the faintest of orange incandescence. “A good building,” he continues, “is a nice, sexy piece of shit that serves its purpose.” The term he uses is “vernacular,” domestic, functional, and of substantive use to the layperson. “It’s something that the neighborhood can give a definition. It’s not giving a definition and then people trying to make do with it.”

In contrast, he skews the brewery on Broadway and Union formerly known as Optimism. The Olson Kundig design certainly has research involved, once a dealership for luxury cars, Kundig’s team was “able to retain the ambiance of the original masonry building while still incorporating necessary energy and structural upgrades.” But such ambience perhaps does not fill a communal gathering space and Barr recalls being in the brewery with his architect friends, all of them chating against the sacrifice of utility for the sake of aesthetics. “That space is way too fucking loud,” he says. “It’s an assault. You can’t hear shit in there.”

Barr’s currently speaking to an audience of one, in Telehealth, the band he leads with his partner Kendra Cox, he extends his love of architectural theory to tens of thousands more, and counting. Last year’s debut LP Content Oscillator found fast fans at legendary local establishments like radio station KEXP and record label Sub-Pop, both of whom caught on to the album’s combination of accessible new-wave pastiche and dense intellectuality.

Ever since then, the band has toured multiple times across America and discovered legions beyond Seattle who connect with the music and the messaging. You don’t need to be a student of the field to appreciate the band, but it helps decode the inside jokes imbedded in songs like “Hyper Tech Green Investment Guy” and “Talesin Grid,” the latter an ode to Wright’s cursed utopia. The music behind those lyrics — cerebral post-punk a la Devo decorated with squally synth and bearing the subversive edge of Sparks — also feels perfectly aligned with the detail-oriented design realm. In the music video for their latest single “Mindtraps,” two nary guitar lines mesh over a claymation portrayal of working professionals cranking out products and whiling away idle time with their pocket toys. The characters, each lovingly crafted by Kelton Sears to be of different colors and shapes, are forced to adhere to the rigid standards of the workplace. Yet though it could be about any corporate environment, the fragments of astroform cracked out by its captive workers point somewhere a touch more specific.

The idea for Telehealth stemmed directly from Barr’s Master of Architecture degree, which he initially pursued out of a quarter-life crisis but quickly found to be a catalyst for his love of architectural theory. Though he loathed the real-life application of the pursuit, the University of Washington program turned him on to the ways that resonated with his artist’s brain. Donna Haraway’s A Cyborg Manifesto, Jill Sterner’s Toward a Minor Architecture, and the holistic fastidiousness of Frank Lloyd Wright.

For his graduate thesis, Barr constructed a sprawling multimedia work of videos, an interactable website, fabricated wearables, and an art installation involving feedback loops that took place over three days. Advised by Nicole Huber, the thesis represented his first exploration of architecture through the lens of art. “I started to think of architecture that way;” he says of the thesis, “where it’s not really buildings, it’s this act of becoming and questioning and thinking and performing.” Such tutelage informed the conscientiousness with which Barr treats every element of Telehealth. “There’s a term that Wright used a lot: GESAMTKUNSTWERK, a total work of art,” he says. “His whole thing was that he wanted to create every element.” It’s not just the music and the lyrics, it’s the album art, the videos, the social media captions, the outfits and accessories, everything. One merch item, a shirt with a burning condomium with the words “This Is Telehealth” underneath, speaks a thousand words. Another, a lime green hoodie laden with monumental imagery and dollar signs, says a thousand more. The color green, in particular, overwhelms the band’s aesthetic. It’s all over the band’s album artwork and music videos, and its members rarely play shows without being bathed in a vibrant hue on stage.

Thematically, the color pulls double duty. It’s an ironic commentary on the penury of contemporary musicianship, but it’s also a scathing critique of the obsession with sustainability that plagues today’s architects. Barr encountered that obsession firsthand during an internship at Miller Hull, the firm that designed Seattle’s world-renowned Bullitt Building. “Architects buy into it like it’s cocaine,” he says. “It makes them feel good at justifying the fact that they are maybe one of the biggest ecological harm businesses in the entire world, as far as resource mining and utilization.”

The whole time we’re sitting, Barr never passes on an opportunity to express vexation at the egomania plaguing the field of architecture. “In the design world, ego is everywhere,” he says. “In architecture, it is very defining. It’s terrifying.” Yet if his version of ideal architecture minimizes the self, then how does he reconcile that with how much contemporary art (and especially music) values ego? In today’s musical climate, to play music is to essentially sell your personality.

Perhaps that’s why Barr performs in the band as Alexander Altus, a nom-de-guerre that allows him to explore that tension without cracking under it. It affords himself an ego to sell without it being his own. But besides that, it’s also a way for Barr to play with a sense of scale. “Similar to Prince and Bowie,” he says, “it’s also a way for Barr to play with a sense of scale. Similar to Prince and Bowie,” he says, “it’s also a way for Barr to play with a sense of scale. "Similar to Prince and Bowie,” he says, “it’s also a way for Barr to play with a sense of scale.”
I headed to Love City Love on Seneca Street on a dark, dank night. I recalled visiting an earlier iteration of LCL, though memory can be as ephemeral as these temporary art spaces. This was the second time I visited LCL at its Seneca Street location on Capitol Hill in Seattle. The spot on Seneca is humble in its ebullience. I dried-off and warmed up from the humid drizzle while Otis Calvin spun electronic beats. There were maybe four or five people milling about, including local hip-hop artist Specs Wizard.

Beats flowed while someone rolled around on a vintage bicycle. I snapped images of a phone booth installation, which evoked a street art vibe. The tone was urban, refined, and sophisticated. Tilson was cozying up on a couch when Lucien Pellegrin arrived. I had met Mr. Pellegrin there prior when he was making an espresso but I saw no remnants of that past experiment.

Tilson greeted Lucien. I later learned Lucien is the motivation behind the phone booths. A couple folks absorbed the occasion on folding chairs and a couch. A stuffed husky— not taxidermy— guarded the booths. I exited past the glowing, active, and east-facing neon.
Otis Calvin performs at the UPSETTERS:UNION in the Love City Love venue on Capitol Hill in Seattle, Washington, USA on December 5, 2023.

DECEMBER 2023

Detail of a phone booth installation by Lucien Pellegrin at Love City Love on Capitol Hill in Seattle, Washington, USA on December 5, 2023.

DECEMBER 2023
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Tilson (L) and Lucien greet at Love City Love in Seattle, Washington, USA on December 5, 2023.

DECEMBER 2023
After getting the introduction from my inaugural column out of the way, perhaps the first problem to tackle is a critical examination of today’s architectural trends. What is the state of contemporary architecture? How did we get here? What should we fear or hope for in the future?

Is there anything truly “new” in architecture, or is the physical architectural output stuck in a rut similar to the early 20th century that resulted in the modernist revolution. The narrative goes that just over 100 years ago Western architecture was in a crisis: what got built was yet another superficial iteration on ancient and medieval styles with diminishing returns to the extent that there was no longer any originality. A self-awareness of this dilemma, along with a rejection of bourgeois tastes and developments in industrial technology, resulted in the new paradigm of Modernism. Are we at the cusp of a similar revolution? Does contemporary architecture have a discernible “style”? Should there be? Why have the promises of emerging technologies and techniques such as 3D printing and mass timber been so slow in coming? What are the implications of already pervasive technologies such as computer-aided design, algorithms (Parametricism), and the coming threat/promise of AI? Are we on a trajectory toward a state of post-architecture?

As I recently promised (or warned), I tend to offer more questions than answers. In this second iteration of my column, I will attempt to give the aforementioned questions due consideration so that you will have the means to formulate your own conclusions.
What is Contemporary Architecture?

The deceptively simple question of what is meant by “today” and “contemporary” relative to the world of architecture has no definite answer. Surely, everything built or designed in the small window of this post-Covid era counts as contemporary, yet most of the trends we see today are little changed from those at the turn of the century. The umbrella of contemporaneity can go back much further when considering that the trajectories of Postmodernism, Modernism, and even Neomodernism have not yet run their courses; the scope of contemporary architecture can go back much further. But it is impossible to fully analyze and understand the architecture of today until we are decades into the future, after the nebulous trends have fully crystallized. Although it may seem impossible to answer and is truly unfathomable. The “post” era is misleading, for example, Postmodernism, a trend that not really what came after Modernism, but rather falls under the general umbrella of Modernism. I won’t dwell too long on Postmodernism as I will have much to say on it in a future column, but it will suffice to say for now that PoMo was a distinct style with its own beginning (1965), middle (1985), and end (-2000, if it every really ended). Thus, our current architectural environment is paradoxically both Modern and Postmodern. Whatever comes after Modernism (if when Modernism ends) will certainly be perceived as alien to us and may very well be considered “Post-architecture.” Not that I am taking the hyperbolical stance that architecture may someday come to an end, but it is impossible to ignore the looming specter of artificial intelligence, which will inevitably infiltrate every facet of the design world.

Modernism, Postmodernism, or both?

Almost paradoxically, by beginning our exploration of contemporary architecture with Modernism in general, we find that there is no definite end. What began over a hundred years ago is still going strong today, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future; unless some drastic paradigm shift causes a sudden end to Modernism’s influence. But what comes after Modernism? This is of course impossible to answer and is truly unfathomable. The “post” era is misleading, for example, Postmodernism, so not really what came after Modernism, but rather falls under the general umbrella of Modernism. I won’t dwell too long on Postmodernism as I will have much to say on it in a future column, but it will suffice to say for now that PoMo was a distinct style with its own beginning (1965), middle (1985), and end (-2000, if it every really ended). Thus, our current architectural environment is paradoxically both Modern and Postmodern. Whatever comes after Modernism (if when Modernism ends) will certainly be perceived as alien to us and may very well be considered “Post-architecture.” Not that I am taking the hyperbolical stance that architecture may someday come to an end, but it is impossible to ignore the looming specter of artificial intelligence, which will inevitably infiltrate every facet of the design world.

Artificial Intelligence – The end of architecture, or the means to transcend its limitations?

AI’s ever-increasing pervasiveness warrants a discussion of the implications. Besides the obvious question of whether AI will replace human architects, the proliferation of AI renderings on social media raises some thought-provoking questions. Can AI-designed buildings have more “soul” than human-designed buildings? In the world of contemporary architecture populated with endless variations, from the minimalist glass box, it is easy for those disenchanted with the status quo to look to the AI-generated dreamscapes as a better alternative to our current built environment. Perhaps AI will result in the true democratisation of architecture, in which anyone can simply provide the prompts for designs varying from conservative replications of any historical style to anything beyond our wildest dreams. Most of these AI buildings are likely impossible to build or are at the very least prohibitively expensive. Even so, perhaps the only buildings that will matter in the future are the infinitely imaginative virtual buildings that will live in the ether of the “Metaverse”, while we dissociate ourselves from physical reality. A more hopeful outlook may simply be a future in which humans work with AI to streamline tedious processes and give architects more time to dedicate to thoughtful design.

21st Century Architecture – Deconstructivism, Parametricism, and Neomodernism

If architectural trends cover the span of a decade or two, constraining the classification of contemporary architecture to the start of the new millennium shall suffice. Interestingly, it was around this time that the stylistic pendulum began to swing from the perceived superficial decorativeness of Postmodernism toward a newfound emphasis on minimalism – inspired by early Modernism. The history books are still being written on such recent developments, but the descriptor ‘Post’ has stuck and is often used in tandem with Modernism. Look at New York City’s One World Trade Center for an internationally renowned exemplar of this new style, which might not be so new at all. We may leniently see this as architecture taking one step back to take two steps forward, but the lack of a discernable forward trajectory in the development of architectural trends can be artistically alienating to the casual observer. Indeed, when minimalism is taken to the logical extreme, i.e. perfect glass volumes, it is difficult to plot any trajectory at all with some built examples not used to being anything other than an example of this new style. The narrative of the state of 21st Century architecture, and ignores trends of Deconstructivism and related offshoot styles facilitated by increasingly sophisticated CAD software, such examples are the exception to the rule of what typically gets published. Deconstructivism and Parametricism are only ever used on Megaprojects that receive the lion’s share of press coverage, but do such projects truly reflect the general trajectory of architectural trends, or just the egos of the individual “Starchitects” such as Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas, Santiago Calatrava, and Zaha Hadid? Deconstructivist architecture, when taken to the high art extreme, never could become the new status quo of mainstream design simply because of the impracticality and expenses that go into building such projects. They can’t all be Guggenheim Museum Bilbao! For every bombastic MoPop and Seattle Downtown Public Library that gets built this century, you will find that the next 100 or so buildings are exceptionally modest in comparison with more conventionally Modernist designs.
Minimal Maximalism or Minimal Maximalism?

When taking a closer look at the current trends within Neomodernism, it quickly becomes obvious that for the most part architects are not simply repeating the past with iterations on the minimalist glass box aesthetic. My theory is that the hyper-complexity of Deconstructivism has become fused with minimalism as there is a new culmination consisting of a seemingly endless variety of geometric forms which are invariably clad in shiny glass and neutral-toned panels. Even when architects resort to the tried and true boxy forms, façade designs enveloping the boxes have become increasingly complex, especially since the 2010s. Perhaps another simplification but you could summarize the past 10 years of architecture as a collision between minimalism and maximalism. Is a better descriptor for this current architectural trend “Maximinimalism”? (In fact, a quick Google search just after writing this reveals that I am not the first to come to the realization that the forces of minimalism and maximalism are in conflict.) Whether or not the irony is lost on the “Barcode Style”, in which many contemporary buildings, especially in Seattle, have staggered and irregular grids that either literally or abstractly resemble barcodes. Whether or not the irony is lost or if the irony is lost on contemporary architects, whether future history books may associate this period in Late Stage Capitalism with the barcode as the dominant design motif remains to be seen.

A Return to Ornamentation?

The bizarre trend of Maximinimalism has resulted in the resurgence of façade ornamentation, usually limited to simple protruding fins, Amazon’s Denny Triangle campus, or prismatic panels. Rainier Square Tower, I like to speculate that this trend could culminate in a new era of architectural decadence. If one of the reasons for a relative lack of ornamentation in contemporary architecture is the high cost of labor to produce this craft, one of the solutions could be technological advancements. A superficial review of architectural history illustrates some instances of the trend of technology compensating for labor costs. For example: stonemasons demanded fairer wages in the 19th century and as a result, finely hand carved stone ornamentation became financially out of reach. The labor intensive craft was subsequently replaced with the industrialization of ornamentation in the form of machine-etched stone blocks, hydraulic-pressed decorative cast iron panels, and terra cotta blocks molded into any shape imaginable. Even these techniques have more likely than not become cost-prohibitive by the mid-20th century, but perhaps the 21st century solution is 3D printing, assuming architects and clients have regained an appetite for decorative adornments. Despite some rare examples with 3D-printed concrete homes and bridges, I have not seen this technology take off (yet) for decorative façade elements. Perhaps I have been overly optimistic in anticipating this ornamental renaissance.

Book Recs

Architecture’s Evil Empire? The Triumph and Tragedy of Global Modernism, Miles Glendinning

If Postmodernism helped to foster individualism of architectural designers, one of its extreme after-effects was the rise of egotistical architecture. This book provides a critical assessment and cynical outlook of the state of “iconic” buildings from the 1960s to 2000s by Starchitects within the framework of Deconstructivism and Parametricism, and provides some hopeful outlook for the future of architecture.

Architecture: From Prehistory to Climate Emergency, Barnabas Calder

I don’t see this book supplanting any of the well-established general architectural history books, but it provides a fresh perspective for comparing the built environment since industrialization with everything that came before within the context of energy expenditure. Personally I found the book’s tone a little self-righteous and the narrative too contrived, but it provides the latest critical evaluation of architecture’s ever-increasing carbon footprint and offers a convincing rallying cry for radical sustainability.

Cross Laminated Timber - What’s old is new again

If 3D printing is one emerging technology that has yet to show results, there is another architectural technology that is already bringing one of the longest standing building materials into the 21st century. Climate scientists have well established that we are in the midst of a crisis, and it turns out that the built environment is one of the largest contributors to energy consumption and CO2 production, with concrete and steel being the main culprits. One solution is to replace those carbon-hungry structural materials with cross-laminated timber (CLT), an engineered wood product consisting of multiple layers of kiln-dried dimension lumber oriented at right angles to one another and then glued to form strong structural panels. Yes, this is essentially structural styrene, which has comparable strength to concrete, is five-times lighter, enables prefabrication and faster construction, and is even fire resistant. While the silver bullet for the climate crisis, you will see a lot more of CLT in coming years as this building technology is scaled up and more municipal building codes allow for mass timber mid-rises and even towers.

I am more curious as to what the aesthetic implications will be for this new technology. It seems the ornamentation in contemporary architecture is the pendulum of collective taste is perceptibly shifting from the imperatives of the climate crisis. Additionally, the pendulum of collective taste is perceptibly swinging back toward maximalism, while the architectural average is a hesitant interlude of refined Modernism. Is this a sign that architecture is in a rut, or is the crucible of styles simply simmering until architecture emerges more triumphant than ever?

For over a decade, Seattle’s largest outdoor design gathering has pondered these questions alongside a growing local community—from top architecture firms, to students, to independent creatives and volunteers. Every August, this free festival, hosted in conjunction with non-profit AIA Seattle, transforms South Lake Union Park into a cornucopia of interactive installations, speakers, and events, inviting the public to experience design firsthand.

“Design touches everybody,” explains Bray Hayden, Senior Communications Manager at SDF and AIA Seattle. “I feel like the [Seattle] public is very open to that, and the [festival] is community driven... [and] a container for the community to come together.”

SDF will celebrate its 14th year this August in South Lake Union park. Presenters will create exhibitions built around the question of “What If?”—a theme chosen by the general public in February earlier this year.

“We really want people to think from the standpoint of making things better,” explains Hayden. “It’s reimagining and re-augmenting... continuing in a positive, open, and curious way to think about some of our hardest issues today.”

It’s through these types of conversations that Hayden hopes design-minded individuals—veteran or not— can inspire actual community-informed solutions. In years past, she has watched festival participants construct innovative green parklets, tackle systemic racism, and even create the tiny home blueprint which was later adopted by the City of Seattle to shelter unhoused individuals.

SDF has attracted over 3,000 curiosity seekers and featured close to 40 installations. Like many events and cultural happenings in the city, during the pandemic this festival incorporated virtual programming to supplement what was not possible in person. This year, the festival is looking to expand its audience further by launching a hybrid Virtual Mainstage - running live programming from South Lake Union that will be broadcast to design enthusiasts around the world.

But one of the most impactful changes that we will see this year has the potential to bring the festival’s mission full circle - Seattle Design Festival is launching a pilot project called “The Sustainability Commitment,” a three-pronged approach to reusing materials from installations after the end of the festival. When submitting their proposals this spring, design teams were asked to choose from three options: 1) determine a community organization who will take over the installation after the festival to reuse or repurpose the structure, 2) commit themselves to reusing the installation’s materials in a sustainable manner, or 3) sign on with a re-use non-profit designated by the festival and AIA.

“We want to connect these teams so it’s easy for them to drop those materials off and we can feel confident that they will have a second, third, or fourth life,” says Annalee Shum, Associate Director of Programs and Community Engagement at AIA Seattle.

SDF has partnered with the University of Washington’s Fabrication Lab as one of the partners helping to relocate and reuse festival materials. Not only does The Sustainability Commitment initiative aim to reduce waste, says Shum, but it also has the potential to help build a stronger base of young makers.

“We want to make sure the next generation has the materials they need to create whatever designs they are coming up with,” says Shum. “We don’t want people feeling limited by a lack of resources.”

Shum adds that while this year is a pilot for the re-use program, she hopes to add more nonprofits to the mix in coming years. In many ways the move is a natural evolution, from celebrating established designers to lifting up a rising generation of creators.

“Over time, our mission has really shifted to thinking about what we mean when we talk about designers, who is included,” says Shum. “What makes [Seattle Design Festival] different is that we are inviting everyone into that conversation. We want everyone to feel empowered to design.”
“IT’S FUNNY TO THINK OF TRASH IN A WOO-WOO SENSE, BUT BEING IMMERSED IN A NEVER-ENDING STREAM OF MATERIAL AT RECOLOGY—IT CHANGES YOU”
If you’re anything like me, you’ve often wondered what happens to our recycling after we chuck it in the big blue bin. At Recology, one of the major recycling collection services in King County, it’s being turned into art.

“It’s funny to think of trash in a woo-woo sense, but being immersed in a never-ending stream of material at Recology—it changes you,” says Seattle artist Amanda Manitach, who now co-manages Recology’s artist in residence (AIR) program alongside Maria Phillips after completing her own residency at the south Seattle facility in 2023. “It rips the blinders off and makes you feel connected to the material world.”

The King County Recology AIR program has been running since 2015 and was inspired by a similar program begun in San Francisco in the 1990s. “It all began thanks to a San Francisco-based artist named Jo Hanson, who was an activist passionate about urban clean-ups,” explains Manitach. “In the ‘70s she worked with the city to develop a program for artists that granted them access to the city dump to utilize discarded materials, and voila! The AIR program was born.”

Every year from May to September, Recology welcomes two artists to take up shop in their main facility off Marginal Way, which is where material comes to get processed after being collected across the county. Here, a massive structure houses “the machine”: a giant green, Willy Wonka-esque sorting apparatus that runs piles of cardboard, glass, plastic, and other recyclables through its many chutes, tubes, and conveyer belts. A crew of commendable Recology employees helps sort the stuff, yanking out anything that doesn’t belong, like the VHS tape ribbon and sparkly pink plastic unicorn I saw on my visit.

“I had always been a bit of an environmentalist nerd, even as a kid growing up in a very non-recycling-friendly part of rural Texas in the ‘90s,” says Manitach. “But being immersed in the residency completely shifted how I think of material, from the atomic level to the Milky Way. And especially how I think about plastic.” For her residency artworks, Manitach continued her signature text-based work, her cheeky aphorisms becoming all the more audacious when rendered in detritus. It’s clear the residency hit home with Manitach, who rattles off facts about the recycling process as she tours me around the facility.

For 2024, Recology is hosting Seattle artists Kalina Winska and Margie Livingston, who will have access to any materials scavenged from the main facility, as well as the North Transfer station and Recology stores (where folks can drop off hard-to-recycle items like styrofoam, e-waste, and textiles). While the artists are not yet sure what they will create, they are diving head first into the discovery process, and it’s clear the dearth of materials at their fingertips is already inspiring them. Winska is interested in continuing her previous work around the environment and its technological transformations through map-related imagery, while Livingston is looking forward to starting a new body of work after wrapping a major exhibition that opened in May of this year.

For both artists, the culmination of their residency will be an exhibition at Mutuus Studio in Georgetown opening September 7, with a reception on September 6 from 6-9 pm. While the final outcome for Winska and Livingston is yet to be formed, if Manitach’s experience is any indication, their relationship to the “stuff” of our everyday lives will likely never be the same.
Paul Elliott swore he would never live in another co-op again. Prior to his current residence at Eastlake’s historically landmarked L’Amourita, he lived at two other co-ops, one in Washington DC, and another in Seattle’s Roosevelt neighborhood. Both experiences were fraught with co-op complications: rising HOA fees, looming repair costs, and rental prohibitions that ultimately culminated with him, then in his forties, enduring a slow sales process and moving back to his childhood home. After that move, his yearly comical Christmas card depicted a classic bedtime scene; him in his pajamas with his mother saying prayers at his bedside, captioned “Still home for the holidays!”

You would think these experiences would have put him off from co-ops for good, but when a unit became available at L’Amourita in 2016, Mr. Elliott was enamored. Against his better judgment, and largely due to the stunning views from the living room, he moved in. The distinctive Mission Revival building sits proudly at the northernmost edge of the Eastlake neighborhood, its dramatically curved facade, terracotta tiled roof and arched porches cutting a striking figure against the neighborhood otherwise consisting of single-family homes and boxy condos. Built in 1909 by prominent suffragist Edith DeLong Jarmuth and her husband, Adoloph Jarmuth, the building originally consisted of four townhouse style units with roughly eight rooms apiece. Over time, these units were subdivided until they reached their current configuration of 21 single-bedroom and studio condos. Many of the units in the building, including Mr. Elliott’s, are railroad style and boast peekaboo views of Lake Union to the west and less stunning views of I-5 to the east.

This western facing “poor man’s view,” as Mr. Elliott fondly calls it, is what ultimately convinced him to move into this building and risk co-op life once again. It’s this very view that greets me as I step into his living room on a warm spring evening, his cheerful yellow walls glowing in the sunset and music from a favored all-blues radio station playing in the background. One glance around the cozily decorated room pulls the eyes immediately to the large fireplace centered against the large fireplace centered against the far wall of the fireplace. It spans nearly a third of the wall, but what really catches the eye is the collection of presidential memorabilia that sits atop it. Commemorative glass plates sit alongside campaign buttons, framed newspaper articles, and a cartoonish teapot in the shape of Ronald Reagan’s head; when in use, hot tea pours gracefully from his nose.

These objects may seem like mere kitsch, but in Mr. Elliott’s space, they are cherished possessions indicative of a life’s passion. Bookshelves are full of presidential histories, campaign posters lean against dressers, and walls adorned with framed photos feature an equal proportion of family to those with political figures as their subjects. The most notable of these shows Mr. Elliott as a teenager with Richard Nixon in 1968 - whose campaign he worked on at the time. This also happened to be the same year that Mr. Elliott worked alongside Ted Bundy, who had a penchant for Seattle politics before turning his attention to more nefarious activities. Mr. Elliott and Mr. Bundy’s paths thankfully diverged, but they both developed a fascination in another topic of shared interest: death. While Mr. Bundy’s was a horrifically vile sort of interest, Mr. Elliott’s was nothing but virtuous, focusing on the mortuary arts and funeral industry. Over time, his interest in politics merged with his interest in mortality, and created a rather unusual sort of bucket list, to visit the burial sites of every US President. At the time of this interview, Mr. Elliott had only six locations left.
Moving from the western to the eastern side of the apartment indicates a shift in both tone and function. While the western side is all daylight, warm yellows and reds, cozy furniture arranged in a sociable setting, and beautiful views, the east forms its necessary counterpart. Walls shift to a cool green, outward facing windows are shielded from the highway with room dividers and trinkets, and furniture becomes more inwardly focused as bookshelves, a single rocking chair, and a double bed come into view. The open concept room functions as both the kitchen and bedroom, with bay windows and arched doors that open onto a shared patio. More often than not, the patio is occupied by one of the building’s many cats, who Mr. Elliott does his best to keep from slinking into his room. The views on this side feature what can only be described as Seattle’s biggest eyesore—a colossal convergence of twelve lanes of the I-5 expressway leading to Ship Canal Bridge. He does his best to distract from this view by filling his bay window with an assortment of delightful objects. A fishnet-clad leg lamp sits prominently within the large bay window, illuminating hanging papier mache acrobats from Belize and well-organized souvenirs. Most of these items, including the leg lamp, were gifted to him by his sister, who shares both his love of traveling and unusual keepsakes. It is possibly the one place in the condo free from presidential memorabilia. When not telling the story of a man with a love of political history and mortality, Mr. Elliott’s possessions speak of an all-American boy with a love of popular culture; a boy whose father gifted him a cherished poster from Seattle’s Century 21 Exposition in 1962 and has hung onto it for sixty years since, who proudly displays a framed photo of himself in a newsboy outfit paired with an award for spectacular delivery service, whose kitchen possesses a working 40s Coke machine purchased for $12 at the Kingdome’s demise and whose walls are adorned with candid photos of jazz and blues musicians. Photos of him and his long-time girlfriend sit adjacent to snapshots of famous burial sites. Theatrically staged Christmas cards share the same space as newspaper articles featuring horrific headlines and morbid moments (Skeleton of Lindbergh Baby Found Near Home! Will Rogers, Post KILLED!!). Wherever you look, the quietly comical and morbidly fascinating live alongside each other, the light and the dark blending together and creating a view of Mr. Elliott’s life that is just as stunning as the sunset view from his western facing living room.

Although Mr. Elliott claims he was never a huge fan, JFK hangs in a favored position over the bed. A gift from Mr. Elliott’s long-time girlfriend. Franklin Roosevelt, not shown, sits opposite within the closet.
In the first entry of this series, the uncertain role of historic sacred spaces in an increasingly secular world was introduced as the cornerstone of my ongoing research funded by the Arizona Architecture Foundation. As a Jewish architect largely shaped by my ancestry, I've felt particularly drawn to the issue. For the second installment, I dive into the origins of Jews in the West to understand the communities they shaped, how their traditions evolved, and the ways these historic narratives might foreshadow potential futures.

Then Yisra’el sang this song: “Spring up, O well,” sing to it! A well dug by the Princess, which nobles started with their staffs. And from the desert, a gift...

Bamidbar (Numbers) 21:17-18
The decision to study desert communities in Southern Arizona was a result of the arid landscape itself. The desert has always held a grip on our collective imagination. From the Freya of Arabia to the ancient Egyptians, the desert has been seen as a place of mystique, myths, and prospects. For the ancient Egyptians, their flight from slavery in Egypt did not directly into the land of milk and honey. Instead, they traversed a desolate wilderness of nearly three miles wandered the Sinai Peninsula for 40 years. While many sources contain stories of 10 plagues and 10 plagues for their pain the punishment for idolatry by a jealous deity, others regard the Sinai as a desert of the mind as much as a physical place. A concept that is often forgotten is the sheer physical adaptation, that the desert was as much a gift as it was a trial.

Like their ancestors, 19th-century Jews perceived the deserts of the American West in much the same way. They fled antebellum, and prejudice everywhere from Eastern Europe to the American Northeast, traveling long distances through precarious wilderness searching for a place where their ancestry didn’t mark them as pariahs. The mere prospect of sovereignty warranted the arduous journey. The frontier was far removed from the overpopulation, competition, and bigotry of urban life. A vast territory that, with the proper faith, carried a familiar promise. Jewish craftsmen, miners, bankers, merchants, cowboys, and their families made their way westward. Their skills and willingness to adapt allowed them to overcome much of the discrimination they were accustomed to. The practical necessities of frontier life forced people from different backgrounds to rely on each other for survival. American settlers, European explorers, Chinese laborers, and local Mexican and Indigenous communities lived side-by-side in a delicate ecosystem. While there were certainly conflicts, there was also cooperation. These groups shared and traded goods, services, and building practices, enabling a steady expansion of the territory.

Despite economic successes, Jewish families still confronted unique diasporic challenges. Being removed from centers of cultural life made otherwise mundane facets of Judaism inaccessible. Without determined planning and community organization, far too many historic buildings remain abandoned and in disrepair. Diaspora is largely about adapting to the circumstances of the moment. Whether relaxing cultural restrictions, going outside the community to share resources, or modifying ancestral rituals to fit the present course, the act of remembering is often enough. Survival allows memories to endure and evolve. It allows synagogues to be built, to change hands, to become sites of memorial, and to tell stories that recall, educate, and inspire. While there are many lessons to be learned from Temple Beth Israel over the past century, one of the most essential is the importance of responding to the moment, to accommodate the necessities of survival instead of stubbornly imposing naive visions. In the Torah, the word Israel refers to a forefather and a territory, but most often, it refers to the people. Their survival, recorded and witnessed in the text, is a legacy. As such, the spaces we build must thoughtfully engage how they serve the past, present, and future all at once.

“In the years following the cornerstone’s dedication, Congregation Beth Israel struggled to realize its communal vision. Early services were difficult due to lack of air conditioning, forcing the cancellation of summer services. The community also failed to retain the services of a Rabbi due to the city’s distance from centers of American Jewry. A Rabbi was finally appointed in 1929, but the congregation was never able to fully sustain and expanded the floor. Through regularly performed services, an extension of national affiliations, and a focus on interfaith relationships around the Valley, the community outgrew its first home. In 1949, the congregation sold the downtown property to the Southern Baptist Church in a smudged sale. While there were certainly conflicts, there was also cooperation. These groups shared and traded goods, services, and building practices, enabling a steady expansion of the territory.”

“When designers (present company included) wax poetic about the potential for historic structures to function as market halls, experimental theaters, or pop-up restaurants, the reality is that without determined planning and community organization, far too many historic buildings remain abandoned and in disrepair.”
Seattle is a moneyed city, but is it a cultured city?

Written by Gregory Scruggs

Seattle’s best-dressed weekend will soon be celebrated on the opening of the Seattle Art Fair, which rolls into Lumen Field Event Center on July 25-26, the fashion Mcpion in Pioneer Square temporarily increases tenfold. Who are these smartly attired art aficionados, and more to the point, where are they the rest of the year? Seattle Art Fair, for all its pizzazz, presents a conundrum. Seattle is a moneyed city, but is it a cultured city? The two frequently, but not inevitably, go hand in hand. In Seattle’s case, our high-tech economic engine has translated into a take-true embrace of high culture. As we near the halfway point of a halting decade, art fair season in the Emerald City. That same year, Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen minted the first Seattle Art Fair through his cultural investment arm Vulcan Arts and Entertainment. For all his faults, Allen had a surprisingly sharp collector’s eye and a vision that the Seattle Art Fair seems to be in the right place at the right time.

Rewind the clock to 2015, the year that Seattle posted its fastest population growth during the height of the Amazon boom, when 57,000 people per day were moving to the Emerald City. That same year, Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen minted the first Seattle Art Fair through his cultural investment arm Vulcan Arts and Entertainment. For all his faults, Allen had a surprisingly sharp collector’s eye and a vision that the Seattle Art Fair seems to be in the right place at the right time.

Nearly a decade later, Allen is dead, but the art fair seems to be in safe, if low-key hands. New York-based Art and the Seattle Art Fair, for all its pizzazz, presents a conundrum. Seattle is a moneyed city, but is it a cultured city? The two frequently, but not inevitably, go hand in hand. In Seattle’s case, our high-tech economic engine has translated into a take-true embrace of high culture. As we near the halfway point of a halting decade, art fair season in the Emerald City. That same year, Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen minted the first Seattle Art Fair through his cultural investment arm Vulcan Arts and Entertainment. For all his faults, Allen had a surprisingly sharp collector’s eye and a vision that the Seattle Art Fair seems to be in the right place at the right time.

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Arkade Publishing currently lives at Peter Miller Books in Seattle’s Pioneer Square Neighborhood

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ARCADE
ARCADE is a registered 501c3 nonprofit and has been and continues to be generously supported by ArtsFund WA, The Graham Foundation, ARTSWA, The Wyman Youth Trust, Miller Hull and through 4Culture’s Arts Sustained Support Award for the years 2014 through 2023 and currently.

Special thank you to our organizational supporters who provide multiple layers of programming and structural support, Girlie Press, Seattle Arts Book Fair, Space Theory, Peter Miller Books and Ratatouille Designs

Fonts
BianZhiDai (Ring) by Xiaoyuan Gao
Neue Haas Grotesk by Commercial Type
Permanent Headline by Ludwig & Mayer

Cover Art
Carlos Khali's work We Still Can't Breathe was selected as the cover art for this edition of ARCADE's digital magazine as part of a portrait / interview series curated, photographed by, and written by Judy Lee. Khalil is a multimedia artist who fuses classical training and raw talent to create gritty yet vibrant pieces that speak both to the individual and the world at large. His work is meant to evoke emotion, thought, and to convey the weight of civilization on society, self, and soul.

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Carlos Khali's work We Still Can't Breathe

We Still Can’t Breathe