



The Architectural Imprint of Ideas

Amparo Bernal López-Sanvicente^(✉)

Graphic Expression Department, University of Burgos, Burgos, Spain
amberlop@ubu.es

Abstract. Architectural drawings and models are forms of expression of architecture. Architecture is represented using their respective languages, but it is also presented through their respective codes. In the seventies, in New York, while going through an economic crisis that had frustrated the construction possibilities for many architects, there were a series of events aimed at reclaiming the artistic quality of drawings and models as works of architecture. The study of this period allows us to review the sequence in which various exhibitions were unleashed, to identify its' main actors, architects, curators, gallery owners and art collectors, and to attribute them their results, because they achieve to lead the access of the architectures of ideas to the world of American art and art collecting market.

Keywords: Architectural drawings and models · Exhibitions · Art collecting
The seventies · New York

1 Introduction

The drawings are, in many cases, not the plan or façade for a specific construction, but rather the expression of an idea, or an attitude towards architecture. The Museum of Modern Art (2017 [1975])

The history of architecture has been configured with the works built, but also with the projects never materialized, either because they were mere theoretical speculations made in different academic or artistic fields, or because their final destination were architectural contests, and their proposals remained as more or less attractive utopias. In both cases, their architectural imprint was limited to their forms of expression, to drawings and models that, through photography, were recorded in a documentary way.

Therefore, the definition of architectural drawings and models as means of representing architecture is inadequate. It places them in an intermediate phase of the projective process of architecture; between the ideas and built reality, and assigns them a mere instrumental condition. They lose their meaning as forms of expression of architecture and, therefore, they could never be recognized as architectural objects; as works of art in themselves.

Furthermore, in the theoretical field of architectural graphic expression, drawings and models have not had an analogous recognition, neither from the discipline itself, nor by the whole of society. There are several researchers who have highlighted the different recognition given to architectural drawings and models in the history of architecture representation (Cabas 2017, 249). While architectural drawings have been

the subject of numerous studies and classifications, models have never received the same attention, and therefore, one could claim their analysis “even in the light of the possible development of a new theory” (Carazo 2011, 32).

The objective of this paper is to analyse the sequence of a series of exhibitions programmed at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, during the seventies. These events together with the critical and theoretical debate on architecture promoted from *Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies* (IAUS), were decisive for the recognition of the artistic condition of drawings and models as works of architecture, and their incorporation into the American art and collecting market.

At this time most of the New York architects linked to the IAUS, managed by Peter Eisenman, and other artistic and cultural sectors of the city, were claiming for a space in art collecting market that naturally belonged to the architectural drawings and models, as architecture works.

This movement was conditioned by the economic depression unleashed in the United States with the first oil crisis in 1973, which was further aggravated by a second crisis in 1979. The effects of both recessions affected the construction sector in particular and, as a consequence, given the lack of expectations in the field of construction, a group of architects focused their work to promote theoretical studies and artistic creation, whose ideas were materialized in drawings and models (Antonelli 2002, p. 152; Frank 2011, p. 128).

On the other hand, although some architects such as Aldo Rossi or Walter Pichler already presented their drawings in museums and art gallery exhibitions, there was still a very limited market for these works (Hubert 2011, 19) (Figs. 1 and 2). Meanwhile, artists such as Sol LeWitt, Gordon Matta Clark, and Donald Judd, had increased their market and artistic reputation in galleries specializing in conceptual and minimalist art, such as the Leo Castelli Gallery, with sculptural proposals and structural installations, almost architectural, to expand the context of their works and their field of intervention.

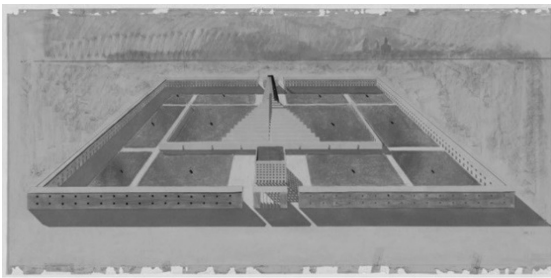


Fig. 1. Aldo Rossi, *Cemetery of San Cataldo*, Modena, Italy, 1971

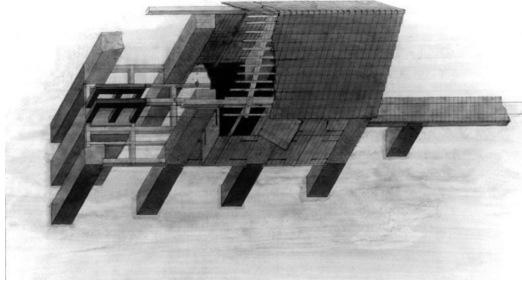


Fig. 2. Walter Pichler, *Barn*, Castelli Gallery, New York, 1977

2 Architectural Drawings and Models in Museums Programme

In the seventies, the MoMA's programming was a main reference in the artistic and cultural panorama of New York, where several exhibitions dedicated to modern architecture had been held. Arthur Drexler was curator of the Department of Architecture and Design at the MoMA for thirty-five years, between 1951 and 1985, and manager since 1956. He was responsible of the universal scope of the exhibitions, and the sensitivity to recognize the pace of the architecture and transfer it to the exhibitions at the museum.

As common denominator, the exhibitions of modern architecture focused their message on the exhibition of photographs of the constructed buildings, through which the architectural work was documented. Neither the plans, nor the models had a leading role in the museums' programmes for architecture. If they were occasionally included in the exhibition, their reading was subordinated to the representation of the built architecture, instead of recognizing their artistic entity.

Drawings and models of the project were recognized only as a representation of architecture. For this reason, their exhibition treatment was limited to the recognition of their instrumental condition in the projective process, without highlighting the intrinsic value of each object as an art work; as a formal expression of an architectural idea. A quality, which in most cases, was not even granted by the architects (Antonelli 2002, p. 149).

However, other architectural drawings—sketches, notes and perspective views—had historically a recognized space in the monographic exhibitions at the MoMA. During the sixties, the museum had held several monographic exhibitions dedicated to show drawings of great masters such as Frank Lloyd Wright (1962), Mies van der Rohe (1966) y Erich Mendelsohn (1969).

In these cases, the noun of architectural drawings was related to the artistic genre and to the architect authorship, rather than their functionality. None of them had the condition of technical drawing that characterizes the two-dimensional representation in plans, sections and elevations of an architecture project.

One of the first exhibitions organized by Arthur Drexler, where the key role was leaded by projects of visionary utopias, or surrealist architecture, was *Architectural*

Fantasies: Drawings from the Museum Collection, held in 1968, where the fantasies of the Austrian architects the fantasies of the Austrian architects Walter Pichler, Hans Hollein y Raimund Abraham were linked.

For the models, we can highlight their presence in the 1970 exhibition dedicated to the contemporary work of three well-known American architects, Philip Johnson, Kevin Roche and Paul Rudolph, where the presentation models had a key role, although their reading was complementary to the reading of the photographs of the projects built.

The first monographic exhibition of architectural models, *Architectural models from the collection*, was held in 1974 (Fig. 3). In this occasion only models were exposed, nineteen in total. Among wall of them, if we adopt the classification established by Carazo according to the purpose of its construction (2011, p. 35), we could distinguish between the presentation models and the configuration models. The three plaster models of Antoni Gaudí for the Sagrada Familia of Barcelona belonged to configuration models. Their form and scale with reference to all the models of the exhibition, gave them a more sculptural than architectural entity. The rest of the models were presentation models of buildings of Bukminster Fuller, Mies van de Rohe, Louis Kahn, Le Corbusier and Gerrit Thomas Rietveld.



Fig. 3. Installation of *Architectural models from the collection*, MoMA, Nueva York, 1974

The sequence of exhibitions related to architecture increasingly focused its interest on the artistic entity of its different means of representation. In this context, the two exhibitions with a greater influence to open new horizons for the recognition of the aesthetic autonomy of drawings and models were *Architectural Studies and Projects* (1975) dedicated to project drawings and *Idea as model* (1976), dedicated to models (Fig. 4).

Behind both initiatives there were two architects, who promoted both events; Emilio Ambasz—curator of the Department of Architecture and Design at MoMA between 1970 and 1976—and Peter Eisenman—director of the IAUS between 1967 and 1982—respectively.



Fig. 4. Catalog of the exhibition *Idea as model*, 1976

In 1975, Emilio Ambasz organized the exhibition *Architectural Studies and Projects* with a selection of visionary projects, imaginary creations, because as he said for the exhibition press release, “paper projects have in many instances influenced architecture’s history as forcefully as those committed to stone.” (The Modern Art Museum 2017 [1975]). In his selection there were drawings of twenty-three international architects and studios as Raimund Abraham, Cedric Price, Superstudio, John Hedjuck, Peter Cook and Peter Eisenman (Fig. 5).

A year later, in 1976, Peter Eisenman organized the exhibition *Idea as model*, focusing his interest in models. The call for the event invited the architects to send models “studying a hypothesis, a problem, or an idea of architecture” (Pommer 1981, p. 3).

The aim of the exhibition was to highlight the role of the model in the process of architectural creation by exhibiting models of “configuration” of an architectural idea (Carazo 2011, p. 35). This way of conceiving the model in the projective process disconnected from the merely representative role and gave it an active purpose in the formalization of architecture, as architects like Peter Eisenman had experienced in the “cardboard architecture”, and Richard Meier, whose use of the model as a tool for architectural creation has recently been studied by Cabas (2017).

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Fig. 5. Superstudio, *The Continuous Monument*: Alpine Lakes project, 1969

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The exhibition project of *Idea as model* was different from the previous models exhibitions. It was like the utopian and idealistic vocation of the exhibition that Emilio Ambasz had dedicated to the visionary drawings. In any case, both projects contributed to awaken the interest of the New York art world for the artistic entity of the different forms of expression of unbuilt architecture.

3 Architecture in Art Collecting Market

The access of architecture to the art collecting market would be developed in parallel to its incorporation into museums. In this process, the initiative of the Art Lending Service (ALS) of MoMA would be key. The ALS was created as an extension of the library loan service, in 1951. It offered the possibility of acquiring or renting an art piece during a period of two months before deciding whether to buy it or return it. The option to rent was a privilege only for the members of the museum, while the purchase was offered to the general public.

This initiative was pioneer in its field and, following its example, the service of sale or loan of art works was extended to other galleries and institutions, which represented a very important impulse to promote the careers of emerging artists, in the collecting and the art market of New York. One of the main activities of the ALS was to organize more informally exhibitions in the private space that the members of the museum had in the penthouse restaurant, whose works were included in the loan service (The Museum of Modern Art Archives 2006).

The exhibition *Architectural Studies and Projects*, curated by Emilio Ambasz, in 1975, was the first one that ALS dedicated to architecture. All the drawings exhibited were for sale ranging in Price from \$200 and \$2000 (The Modern Art Museum 2017 [1975])

This exhibition and its initiative to incorporate architectural drawings into the art market were crucial to arouse Pierre Apraxine's interest in these works, as he confessed years later. Pierre Apraxine was curator and coworker of Emilio Ambasz at the MoMA, and he was also art curator of the Gilman Paper Company Collection and the one in charge of bringing together Howard Gilman's collection of Conceptual and Minimalist art. He said that he had considered the possibility of complementing the Gilman collection with architectural drawings after visiting the Ambasz exhibition for the ALS.

Then at around the same time, I saw an exhibition of visionary architectural drawings for unbuilt projects (...) and I thought that a group of similar drawings would complement the Conceptual nature of the Gilman collection. Pierre Apraxine Antonelli (2002, p. 148)

During the following four years, between 1976 and 1980, Pierre Apraxine was dedicated to collect the drawings for Howard Gilman (Riley et al. 2002). At the same time, his growing interest in the different forms of expression of architecture also moved his activity as curator in the selection, installation and assembly of exhibitions for the Gallery of Leo Castelli.

The Castelli Gallery, known in the art market for its support for Conceptual and Minimalist art, held the first exhibition of architecture entitled *Architecture I*, in the autumn of 1977, curated by Pierre Apraxine (Fig. 6).

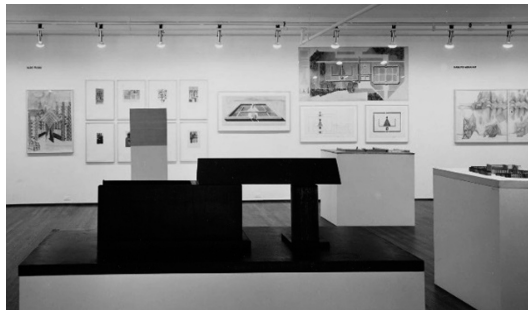


Fig. 6. Installation of *Architecture I*, Castelli Gallery, New York, 1977

Apraxine put the accent again on the projects of utopias, futuristic cities and mega structures (Apraxine 1977). The works exhibited belonged to well-known architects in the art market, either for the prior recognition of their drawings in other exhibitions, such as Rossi or Pichler, either for their work as curators, in the case of Ambasz, or for their recognized prestige in the sector of the built architecture, which endorsed the success of this first sample whose works were all for sale.

Subsequently, the content of the exhibition was transferred to the Institute of Contemporary Art of the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, where an

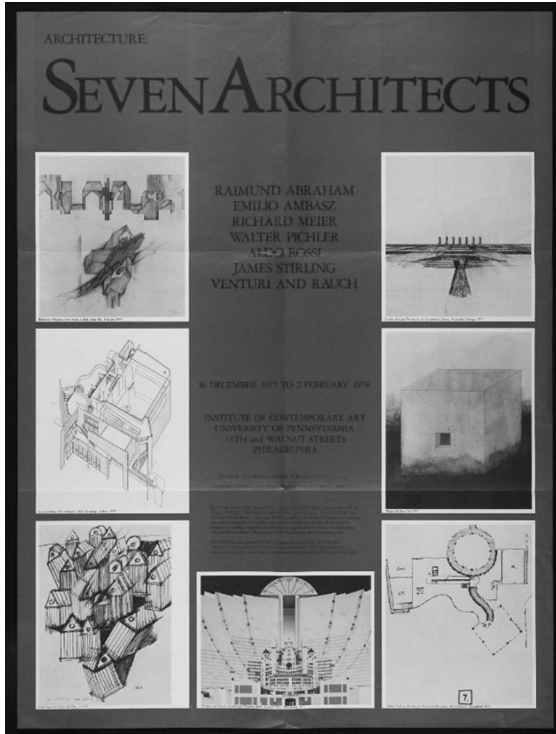


Fig. 7. Poster of *Architecture: Seven Architects*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1978

expanded version was exhibited under the title *Architecture: Seven Architects*, from December 15th, 1977 to February 2th, 1978 (Fig. 7).

After this first success, the Castelli Gallery decided to become even more involved in opening channels to facilitate the access of architecture to the art market. In 1980 he organized the exhibition, *Architecture II: Houses for sale*. Its title evidenced the purpose of the gallery that, on this occasion, presented to the public a sample of architecture with houses for sale. The exhibition project, materialized by the curator Archer for the Castelli Gallery, had arisen from a proposal by Emilio Ambasz that he intended to give continuity to the project directed by himself for the ALS.

In *Houses for Sale* the architecture was shown to the public using the same channel of diffusion that painting and sculpture had been using to show their works since long time ago (Archer 1980, xiv). The exhibition project reversed the usual process of architectural creation, in which, for the conception of a project was dependent on the initiative of hiring a client. Therefore, the architectural creation arose from the beginning conditioned by the existence of this commission.

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On this occasion, the architect could freely design the project in response to the program of needs of a home proposed by the gallery. In the exhibition, customers could choose between the projects of different architects.

With this purpose, eight internationally renowned architects were invited: Emilio Ambasz, Peter Eisenman, Vittorio Gregotti, Arata Isozaki, Charles Moore, Cesar Pelli, Cedric Price and Oswald Mathias Ungers. The housing project should be understood as an artistic proposal and a practical solution at the same time (Figs. 8 and 9).

Customers could purchase any of the plans, drawings or models of the exhibition,

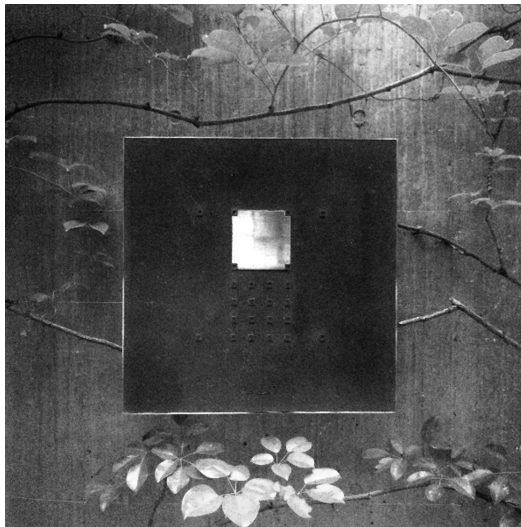


Fig. 8. Arata Isozaki, model of *House of Nine Squares* at the exhibition *Houses for sale*, 1980

regardless of contracting project for its construction. Once again, the call was a success due to its uniqueness and the triumph of the initiative in New York favored the James Corcoran Gallery of Los Angeles requesting the material of the exhibition to be exhibited in its rooms with the same content.

The architectural critic of the New York Times, signed by the prestigious journalist Ada Louise Huxtable (1977, p. 27) enthusiastically welcomed the initiatives of the Castelli Gallery, because they implied the definitive recognition of drawings and models as works of art. She also underlined the importance of these events for the approach of architecture to the general public. However, the eccentricity approach of the second project exhibition, *Houses for sale* (Sorkin 1991), did not make possible its continuity in the art market.

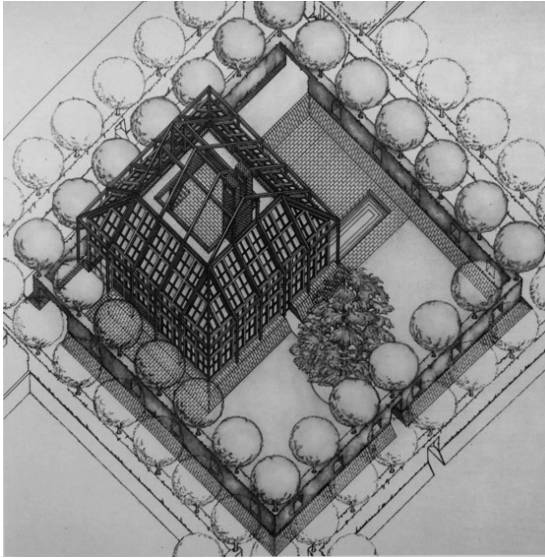


Fig. 9. Oswald Mathias Ungers, *House within a house*, at the exhibition *Houses for sale*, 1980

4 Conclusions

The objective of this communication was to recreate the New York cultural context in which the architectural drawings and models were accepted as works of art in themselves, for their ability to express an idea of architecture.

The sequential study of the exhibitions dedicated to architecture in the seventies, in three reference institutions of the New York art panorama such as; the Museum of Modern Art, the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, and Castelli Gallery, has allowed us to identify the leading role of architects, curators and gallery owners who succeeded achieving the access of means of expression of architecture to the art collecting market in the United States.

The incorporation of architectural drawings and models to the programs of galleries and museums, together with the most avant-garde contemporary painting and sculpture of the seventies, was a definitive boost in the acceptance of their artistic nature. Nowadays this recognition has been consolidated and has been assumed in society and the world of contemporary art.

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