

SPECIAL EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS POSTMODERN HOUSEWARE DESIGN BY ARCHITECTS, SEPTEMBER 25, 2007–JANUARY 6, 2008

The Architect's Table: Swid Powell and Postmodern Design

The Architect's Table: Swid Powell and Postmodern Design celebrates the Swid Powell Collection and Records, now housed at the Yale University Art Gallery. The company, founded in 1982 by Nan Swid and Addie Powell, produced innovative housewares designed by the foremost architects of the time, including Frank

Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Stephen Holl, Richard Meier, Robert A. M. Stern, Stanley Tigerman, and Robert Venturi, among others. Its blend of architecture, fashion, and decorative arts made it arguably the most important American design undertaking of the 1980s.

Through meticulous research and marketing, Swid Powell helped architect-designers transform their ideas into finished objects. The company made progressive architecture accessible to a wider audience, introducing a generation of consumers to high-quality, well-designed tablewares. The marketing of Swid Powell was crucial to its success: novel advertising campaigns, bold graphics, and the role of famous architects helped solidify the prestige of the brand. Within the architectural community, Swid Powell had a lasting impact as its efforts inspired many architects to reevaluate their own relationships to decoration and fostered a trend of architect-designed housewares that continues to this day.

The Architect's Table features a selection of objects and archival materials from the collection's holdings of over 1,200 prototypes, realized products, sketches, and design drawings. Examples of best-selling designs, including Gwathmey-



Michael Graves, *The Big Dripper Coffee Pot and Filter*, ca. 1985. Porcelain, red-brown and blue-green enamel, gilding, 8 3/4 x 11 1/4 in. (coffee maker), 4 1/2 x 6 1/2 in. (filter holder). Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Lindsay S. Suter, M.A.RCH. 1991

Siegel's "Tuxedo" pattern plates and Richard Meier's silver candlesticks, complement lesser-known works, like a place setting by then-emerging architect Zaha Hadid. Numerous prototypes explore the design process, as seen in a series of coffee pots by Robert Venturi, each with a different proposed decorative scheme. The exhibition also includes original advertising images and brochures, as well as examples of architect-designed furniture from the Gallery's permanent collection.

The Architect's Table is divided into seven sections that underscore the breadth of Swid Powell's activities. The first section explores the design process through sketches and prototypes, including a model for a water pitcher by Italian designer Ettore Sottsass. Stanley Tigerman's designs for Swid Powell,

which blend wit and fantasy with postmodern architectural theory, are the focus of the second section. Included is an important tea set that recreates in porcelain a complex of buildings he constructed in Michigan.

In 1990, Swid Powell commissioned the “Architect’s Collection,” a sumptuous group of designs that form the third section. Produced at a time when popular interest in Swid Powell was beginning to falter, these unique, often impractical objects were bold statements of architectural ideals intended to capture public attention for the company and architects. The fourth section focuses on the work of Zaha Hadid, Steven Holl, and Michael Rotondi. In the early 1980s, these young architects were more famous for their writings than for their buildings, and these objects can be understood as three-dimensional manifestations of their abstract theories.

The fifth section looks beyond architecture to works designed by painters and sculptors, including a plate emblazoned with a photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe. The importance of artists and architects within contemporary society surfaces in Swid Powell’s advertising, which focused as much on the personalities behind the products as on the products themselves. The final section celebrates the myriad architects and designs that made Swid Powell famous. Emulating a table set for a dinner party, it brings together many of Swid Powell’s most iconic objects in a lively conversation about design, architecture, and style in 1980s America.

The Architect’s Table is organized by John Stuart Gordon, the Benjamin Attmore Hewitt Assistant Curator of American Decorative Arts.

Related Programming

John Stuart Gordon presents an exhibition talk for the public on Wednesday, September 26, at 12:20 PM. A master class, “Design by Architects,” will be given in three sessions by Mr. Gordon on Thursdays, September 20, 27, and October 18, at 5:30 PM. The series will investigate the role of architect as designer from the mid-twentieth century through today. Fee: \$30 for series to members; \$45 for nonmembers; free for students with valid ID. Enrollment limited to twelve participants. To register, please call 203.432.9525.

Swid Powell Collection and Records

Now on long-term loan to the Yale University Art Gallery, the Swid Powell Collection and Records is an unparalleled, comprehensive collection of arguably the most important American decorative art and design undertaking of the 1980s. It constitutes the materials retained by Nan Swid after the company ceased operations in the 1990s. The breadth of its holdings charts the development of their products from idea through to finished object. The collection and records hold valuable information for art historians,



Robert Venturi, *Pair of Candlesticks*, 1984. Silver plate, 10 1/2 x 6 1/2 x 6 1/2 in. (26.7 x 16.5 x 16.5 cm). Yale University Art Gallery, Bequest of Doris M. Brixey, by exchange

architects, graphic designers, artists, and students of marketing and product design, as well the general public.

Yale University Art Gallery

Founded in 1832, when patriot-artist John Trumbull donated more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College, the Yale University Art Gallery is the oldest college art museum in the United States. Today, the Gallery's encyclopedic collection numbers more than 185,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present day. These holdings comprise a world-renowned collection of American paintings and decorative arts; outstanding collections of Greek and Roman art, including the artifacts excavated at the ancient Roman city of Dura-Europos; the Jarves, Griggs, and Rabinowitz Collections of early Italian paintings; European, Asian, and African art from diverse cultures, including the recently acquired Charles B. Benenson Collection of African art; art of the ancient Americas; the Société Anonyme Collection of early twentieth-century European and American art; and Impressionist, modern, and contemporary works. The recently completed renovation of the Gallery's 1953 Louis Kahn building is part of a comprehensive renovation and expansion of the museum's entire facility, scheduled for completion in 2011.

Located at the corner of Chapel and York Streets in New Haven, the Gallery is open to the public free of charge: Tuesday–Saturday 10:00 AM–5:00 PM, Thursday until 8:00 PM (September–June); Sunday 1:00–5:00 PM. For additional information, the public may visit <http://artgallery.yale.edu>, or call 203.432.0600.

For additional press information, please contact Amy Jean Porter, Associate Director of Communications, 203.432.0611, or amy.porter@yale.edu.