Responding to Kahn:
A Sculptural Conversation

With a preface by Pamela Franks, photo essay by Victoria Sambunaris, and essays by Timothy Applebee, Sonali Chakravarti, Shannon N. Foshe, Kate Howe, Harriet Salmon, Catherine Sellers, and Sydney Skelton

Yale University Art Gallery

From the Curators

In November 1953, architect Louis Kahn unveiled the first major commission of his career: the Yale University Art Gallery. With this project, Kahn propounded a bold new vision for post–World War II architecture that was equally monumental and humanistic. Beyond creating a functional gallery space, he imbued this building with ambitious social and spiritual ideals.

The years that followed were not kind to Kahn's design. The open plan was modified and sectioned off almost immediately, and building materials and technologies failed. Perhaps most disappointing, the utopian social vision of a communal space for creative exchange was never fully realized. Though the building is a masterwork of architectural history, setting forth most of the motifs that subsequently defined Kahn's influential career, in retrospect, it can be seen as a nascent work. As architect Alexander Purves explains: "From a distance of forty years, the Art Gallery has a certain poignancy precisely because it is not perfect, even on its own terms. One can see Kahn struggling a bit and can identify with the struggle."[1]

Now, just over fifty years later, at the unveiling of the renovated Kahn building, we offer Responding to Kahn: A Sculptural Conversation, an exhibition of sculpture from the Gallery's permanent collection (and one work from our neighbor, the Yale Center for British Art), installed in a gallery that is a sculptural achievement in itself. Our mandate, as set out in an open call to the Yale student community, was to curate a "response to the building." This task has turned out to be a multifaceted challenge. Were we to respond to the form, material, and design process of the building? To the philosophy and ideals behind it? To the postwar historical context of its creation? To the "life" of the building, how it has been used and adapted over the last fifty-three years? Or to the event of its renovation? And then, what form should the response take, and who is responding? Respond by selecting sculpture and placing it in the space. Respond, you the students: the art historian, the designer, the sculptor, the architect, the political scientist, who have answered the open call. Respond as individuals, and as a group, to all of the above.

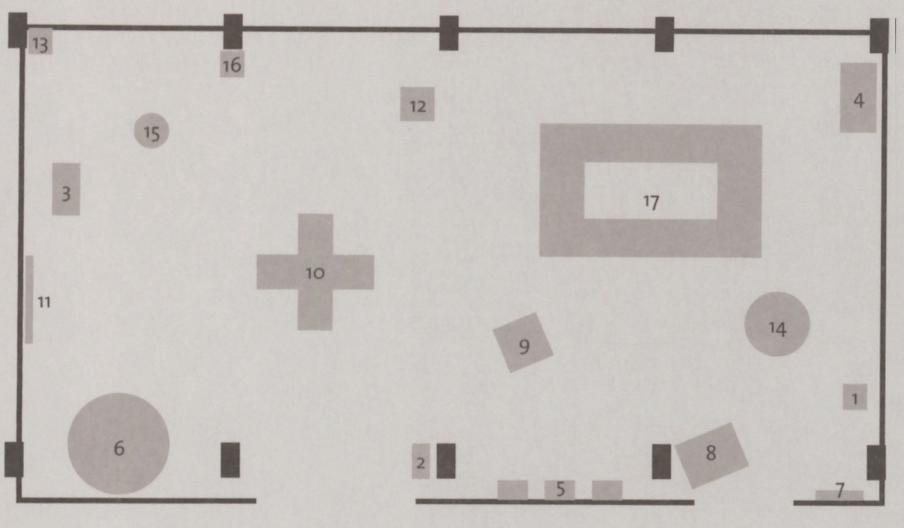
These parameters—building, sculpture, and viewer—established the framework for our discussions and for the exhibition we created. Like three points of a triangle, Kahn's building, the sculptures selected for the exhibition, and the viewer (each of us, and you) create a structure of relationships with endless permutations. What we see in a particular sculpture from a particular vantage point in the building, and what you see in the same arrangement, will inspire a particular conversation between us. The building shapes this conversation, how we view the sculptures and how the sculptures speak to each other. All, in turn, shape our interpretation of the space. Each arrangement of variables creates a new constellation of meaning.

The totality of combinations can never be known, nor can a single, universal meaning be defined. To us, this unknowability is perhaps the most interesting aspect of our project. It resonates with Kahn's struggle and the inability of his building (or, for that matter, any building, any sculpture, any form) to fulfill the aspirations of its making. The individual works of art and the exhibition itself suggest this inability of form to perfectly manifest ideals. They also testify to the fact that we continue to struggle anyway.

Poetically, Kahn designed a representation of this dilemma in his building: the triangles of his famous ceiling extend upward in three-dimensional tetrahedrons. Each point of every triangle rises toward a fourth point, a suggested convergence just beyond the ceiling, always out of sight. We think this hidden fourth point is Kahn at work, investing form with the ineffable. Our exhibition inhabits and is about the active space between our triangle and its fourth point, the ongoing, stubborn struggle for meaning. Now we invite you, the viewer, to experience the sculpture we have selected in response to the space Kahn built, and to engage in unique conversations that, just perhaps, touch the unknowable.

Timothy Applebee
Sonali Chakravarti
Shannon N. Foshe
Kate Howe
Harriet Salmon
Catherine Sellers
Sydney Skelton

1
Alexander Purves, "The Yale University Art Gallery by Louis I. Kahn," Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin (2000), 113. Alexander Purves was a student at Yale in the early 1960s when the architecture studios were still located on the fourth floor of the Kahn building.



1 **Vito Acconci**
American, born 1940
Sound/Body/Weapon, 1984
Gas mask, cartridge belt, cassette tapes, and cassette walkman
24 x 14 3/4 x 10 1/4 in. (variable)
Gift of Ethan Wagner and Thea Westreich, in memory of Jay Tobler
2000.107.2

2 **Matthew Barney**
American, born 1967, B.A. 1989
Unit Bolus, 1991, Edition 5/5
Stainless steel rack, cast dumbbell, petroleum jelly, and electronic freezing devices
28 x 18 x 10 in.
Gift of Robert F. and Anna Marie Shapiro, B.A. 1956
1993.72.1

3 **Lynda Benglis**
American, born 1941
Hitch, 1985
Sand-cast glass
11 1/2 x 16 x 14 in.
The Twigg-Smith Collection; Gift of Thurston Twigg-Smith, B.E. 1942
2001.148.57

4 **Joseph Beuys**
German, 1921–1986
Sulfur-Covered Zinc Box (Plugged Corner), 1970
Two boxes of zinc sheeting, one covered with sulfur, and a gauze plug
7 x 25 x 12 1/4 in.
The Katharine Ordway Fund
1988.95.1

5 **Christian Boltanski**
French, born 1944
La fête de Pourim, 1988
Metal boxes, photographs, lamps, and electric wire
each 92 1/2 x 19 11/16 x 9 1/16 in.
Gift of Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro, B.A. 1956
2000.114.1a–e

6 **Alexander Calder**
American, 1898–1976
The Tulip, 1967
Painted sheet metal and steel wire
58 x 87 in.
Gift of John Hay Whitney, B.A. 1926, HON. 1956
1977.144

7 **Bruce Conner**
American, born 1933
Spider Lady Nest, 1960
Mixed media
31 x 28 1/2 x 7 in.
Lent by Richard Brown Baker, B.A. 1935
ILE1991.3.8

8 **Duane Hanson**
American, 1925–1996
Man in Chair with Beer, 1973
Polychrome polyester and fiberglass
39 x 42 x 65 in.
Gift of Richard Brown Baker, B.A. 1935
2001.128.2

9 **Annette Lemieux**
American, born 1957
Clean Up, 1992
Sponges with dye on wood pedestal
21 x 48 x 48 in.
The Katharine Ordway Fund
1992.71.1

10 **Sol LeWitt**
American, born 1928
1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 Cross and Tower, 1984
Painted wood
72 in. x 10 ft. x 10 ft.
The Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund
1999.37.1a–e

11 **Conrad Marca-Relli**
American, 1913–2000
Boeing 707, 1963
Aluminum
70 x 63 1/2 in.
Gift of the artist
1969.117

12 **David Nash**
British, born 1945
Crack and Warp Stack, 1988
Ashwood
86 x 34 x 31 in.
Gift of Eileen Cohen
2003.55.6

13 **Allison Saar**
American, born 1956
Bat Boyz, 2001
Baseball bats and pitch
34 x 12 x 12 in.
The Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund
2001.101.1a–h

14 **Alan Saret**
American, born 1944
Untitled (Silver Dispersion), 1968–69, remade 1990
Stainless steel mesh
78 x 99 x 89 in.
Yale University Art Gallery
1990.75.1

15 **Joel Shapiro**
American, born 1941
Untitled, 2002
Wood, wire, and paint
8 ft. 6 in. x 17 in. x 14 in.
The Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund
2005.98.1

16 **Richard Shaw**
American, born 1941
Small Pile of Envelopes with Penciled Address, 1980
Glazed porcelain
1 5/16 x 8 7/8 x 4 5/16 in.
Richard Brown Baker Collection
RBB1137.1980.16a–b

17 **Rachel Whiteread**
British, born 1963
Untitled (Ten Tables), 1996
Plaster and polystyrene
28 5/8 in. x 9 ft. 7 in. x 15 ft. 8 in.
Lent by the Yale Center for British Art
B1997.22

In the lobby:

Roni Horn
American, born 1955, M.F.A. 1978
Untitled (Gun), 1994, Edition 2/3
Aluminum and plastic
26 units, each 5 x 5 in. (variable length)
The Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund
2003.79.1a–z

Tony Smith
American, 1912–1980
Smoke, 1967, cast 1977
Cast bronze with black patina
23 1/2 x 47 1/2 x 32 in.
Gift of Susan Morse Hilles
1985.2.12

1 Vito Acconci
Sound/Body/Weapon, 1984

Sound/Body/Weapon evokes memories of the Second World War, in which gas masks were common and readily available in the event of a poison-gas attack. Suspended in space, this multipart suit emphasizes the absent body that would have once filled it, and the cassette tapes, all blank, comment on the inability to retrieve such personal histories. The work is one of Vito Acconci's first explorations involving clothing that an imagined person could wear.

In spite of the Kahn building's completion in 1953, it is often forgotten that it is a product of postwar America; the timeless quietude of the building belies the tumultuous environment that it arose from. Sound/Body/Weapon references this past. As if recycling fear, the work is relevant even today, evoking the threat of biological and chemical weapons in the age of yet another war. CS

2 Matthew Barney
Unit Bolus, 1991

Unit Bolus consists of a cast, petroleum-jelly dumbbell presented on a refrigerated metal rack. The refrigeration unit forces the Vaseline to keep its shape and also references the temperature changes within the human body. Much of Matthew Barney's work combines imagery of the body ("bolus," meaning a soft mass of chewed food), athleticism, and gender.

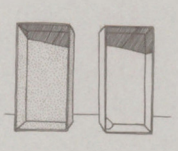
Throughout his career as a sculptor and filmmaker, Barney has authored a complicated language of symbols and personal iconography that play out as characters in his films. His object-based sculptures are props made to star in these visual narratives. Unit Bolus illustrates Barney's fantasy of a self-contained organism, or closed system of desire and discipline, the dumbbell shape being a "mouthpiece that could also be inserted anally." Like Kahn's utopic vision of the building as an enclosed machine, Barney's fantasy leaves no room for individual adaptations over time. Both systems direct the viewer's experience using the human body's visceral reaction to texture and proportion. HS

3 Lynda Benglis
Hitch, 1985

Lynda Benglis uses her body to create and manipulate form. Known for her outrageous antics—she appeared nude in a 1974 exhibition announcement in Artforum holding an enormous dildo—Benglis constantly challenges traditional designations of "feminine" by eroticizing unusual materials. Between 1984 and 1985, she experimented with sand-cast glass, producing tied, glass pieces like Hitch. She poured molten glass into a sand drawing and, with her team of assistants, tied the cooling glass in a slow, ritualistic dance.

This cast piece makes formal reference to the unfinished surfaces of Kahn's cast concrete and, like the building, it preserves the integrity of the material. Her adventurousness with media echoes the blind confidence of Kahn's first attempt at monumental architecture, while her feminist perspective challenges his macho mentality. SS

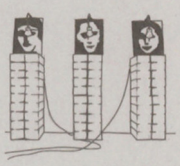
4 Joseph Beuys
Sulfur-Covered Zinc Box (Plugged Corner), 1970



Sulfur-Covered Zinc Box (Plugged Corner) is fabricated from materials specifically selected by Joseph Beuys for their connotations. Sulfur was used for both its destructive associations and healing properties (it is a component of gunpowder as well as pharmaceuticals) and the zinc, used in the ancient practice of attempting to turn metal into gold, references alchemical processes. The gauze plug in the corner insinuates medical supplies or the bandaging of a wound.

Beuys saw himself as a shamanistic healer of the postwar period, a culture in his eyes that was deeply flawed and traumatized. Loosely based around performances, Beuys's objects were often multiples or components made to be rearranged into different configurations. Like Kahn's triangle at the top of the stairwell, which appears to float in space and deflect light, Beuys worked with symbols that were abstractly spiritual and referenced ancient cultures' iconography and rituals (Kahn's notebooks show an interest in Egyptian hieroglyphs and Plato's writings). Many of Beuys's narratives stemmed from the experience of having been shot down in the Crimea as a pilot during the Second World War and supposedly having been rescued by a group of nomadic Tatars, who wrapped him in fat and felt to keep him warm. Both fat and felt are prevalent in his work and, like Kahn, Beuys used materials in their pure form. HS

5 Christian Boltanski
La fête de Pourim, 1988



Christian Boltanski was born in Paris the day the city was liberated from the Germans in 1944. Growing up in the immediate aftermath of World War II, the artist yearned "to erase and forget [his] own childhood," and replace it with a normal childhood. He has further remarked: "Art for me is one way of talking about problems and about the past; sometimes . . . you are a little better for having done so." Boltanski uses found photographs to tell a universal story, intentionally distancing the viewer from his past. These photographs also evoke death, recalling absent subjects—the anonymous and ordinary people for whom Boltanski creates these memorials.

The towers in La fête de Pourim seem to represent buildings as well as bodies. Built from old biscuit tins, they have an organic aesthetic similar to the bricks of the Kahn building. Boltanski has said, "I think the beauty in art is the disproportion of the poverty of means. In this poverty, I search for and obtain a spiritual richness." The bricks are also very personal for Kahn: they were specially measured to be the same length as his own hands. Each brick is a piece of Kahn, a piece of his own "spiritual richness." SNF

6 Alexander Calder
The Tulip, 1967

Alexander Calder's training as an engineer deeply impacted his sculptural imagination. He created a new form of sculpture—the mobile—that combined his technical expertise with a sense of creative whimsy. The Tulip was made late in his career and exemplifies his seemingly contradictory motives: The subject is from nature, yet the material is industrial. It is a mechanical creation, yet moves gracefully, not robotically. His wit shines through in the bold red color and the cartoonish flower shape of the central disk, but its grandeur and the ease with which it slowly spins give it an unexpected elegance.

The Tulip enlivens the space around it. Its flat construction becomes three-dimensional as its components trace circles of varying radii. It casts moving shadows on the surface of Kahn's cylindrical stairwell drum. And, of course, it hangs from Kahn's impressive geometric ceiling. The effectiveness of these formal interactions between the mobile and the building are reinforced by the artist's and architect's shared diligence and attention to detail. SS

7 Bruce Conner
Spider Lady Nest, 1960

The imagery Bruce Conner sets before us in Spider Lady Nest is familiar: a forgotten window, decaying, overrun with cobwebs and unused objects. It is that corner of the attic or basement that you never go near. This piece is grotesque. At the same time, it is sensual, real, moving, and thus beautiful. The spider-web imagery can be sexualized and materialized, but it is also connected to the idea of artist as storyteller: The spider is a descendant of Arachne, the great mythical weaver who challenged the Goddess Athena at the loom.

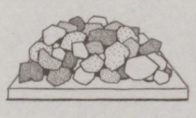
Conner is also obsessed with playing the social commentator. Here, he seems to describe visually how modern commercialism and conveniences have allowed us to shut our windows, turn on the air conditioner, and watch television instead of looking through the window to the world outside. Conner fills these windows with webs, fur, dust, and decay; but even further, he strips the window completely of its usefulness by attaching an opaque backboard, so that the viewer is denied a view outside, and must instead look inside. It becomes a story box of Conner's perception of the modern world—the spider's nest invested with a mood of dread and paranoia of contemporary society. Even so, he describes our worst fears of the fate of the Kahn building. The grand renovation of the Kahn building could be seen as a way of avoiding this decay by reconceiving the original, perhaps imagined beauty of the building when it opened in 1953. SNF

8 **Duane Hanson**
Man in Chair with Beer, 1973

Duane Hanson was a sculptor who stood at the intersection of Pop Art and Photo-Realism. He was strongly influenced by the life-size casts of George Segal and is best known for his fiberglass and resin casts, to which he added clothes of the period and accessories to give as realistic a portrayal as possible. Hanson's subjects are often based on working-class people. He tried to capture individual personality and emotion in his sculptures, but an overall theme of the emptiness of consumer culture prevails.

This piece is the conceptual inverse of the Kahn building—instead of abstraction, it aspires to realism; instead of transcendent idealism, it embodies disappointment and failure. The clothes and beer label betray an era that is in the near past, but the sculpture remains a relevant commentary about the numbing influence of television and consumer culture. Man in Chair with Beer represents the passive viewer who aspires neither to engage with the world around him nor understand his own complicity in it. SC

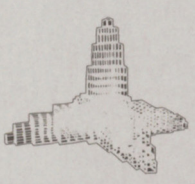
9 **Annette Lemieux**
Clean Up, 1992



Annette Lemieux works in photography, sculpture, and mixed media. Her style and choice of material is constantly changing, and it is the concept of the pieces, rather than the formal qualities, that unite her work over time. Themes of history and family have a strong presence in her art, which often evokes a feeling of nostalgia and the small achievements and disappointments of times past.

Clean Up stands in stark contrast to the architectural formalism of Kahn's design. While the sponges have a geometric quality, they also contain a narrative and bodily component. The sponge forms straddle the line between plant and animal, organic and inorganic. The shape and color seem to be of the human body, while the scale does not. The globular shapes seem to multiply and suggest disease and reproduction, bringing a tension between health and illness to the work. Although we may connect the color and form to our body, we do not necessarily feel an emotional connection to the piece—it is of the body, but in such an abstract way that we feel detached rather than understood. SC

10 **Sol LeWitt**
1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 Cross and Tower, 1984



1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 Cross and Tower is a classic example of Sol LeWitt's open-cube structures. Modular in form, they define space with a skeleton-like infrastructure that is created by following a geometric concept or rule.

LeWitt describes his art as conceptual, meaning that the idea or concept is the most important aspect. He views the geometric systems that he follows as machines that produce a final object. The equations aren't always logical and often come from intuitive decisions. This attitude toward creation is similar to Kahn's, where scale, proportion, and repetition have a symbolic and spiritual tendency. LeWitt wrote: "Using simple form repeatedly narrows the field of the work and concentrates the intensity of the arrangement of the form. This arrangement becomes the end while the form becomes the means." This connection between form and idea relates to Kahn's many lectures on form and design, as well as to the key themes in this exhibition concerning the conceptual implications of renovating an architectural creation and the distance between an artist's thoughts and the physical realities of making an object. HS

11 **Conrad Marca-Relli**
Boeing 707, 1963

On a 1953 trip to Mexico, abstract expressionist Conrad Marca-Relli ran out of paint. He experimented with oil and canvas collage and found in this new medium a way to control the illusion of depth in the picture plane. Boeing 707 is one of a group of aluminum collages executed in 1963. Inspired by commercial aircraft, the riveted and polished machine surface alludes to recent industrial innovations and pushes this work into the realm of sculpture. It also reflects Marca-Relli's fascination with travel.

Like Kahn, Marca-Relli lets the construction of the piece dictate its aesthetic quality. He ingeniously made the functional grommets holding the cut shapes together into a decorative element, and the bright red paint serves to highlight the sharpness of the metal edges. This work tests the boundaries between painting and sculpture, and between decoration and function. It is a monument to its time, both in concept and in appearance. SS

12 **David Nash**
Crack and Warp Stack, 1988

David Nash is interested in the effects that time and the elements have on his work. He began Crack and Warp Stack by taking a saw to a solid piece of wood, slicing into it on all four sides, leaving it supported by a column running up the center—standing like a pile of pancakes. As changes in humidity naturally warped the wood, the individual changes from one slice to another surprised the artist.

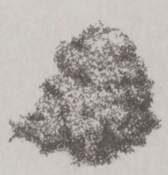
In this work, Nash discovered the unpredictability of movement in wood and watched the material resist the form he had imposed on it. The Kahn building has likewise experienced its own series of changes over the years. An artist creates an object (or a building) with the awareness that changes will occur. What Nash found, and what Kahn might find were he here today, is that those changes—physical, conceptual, or relational—cannot be planned or prevented. And to Nash's delight, they often prove even more moving. SNF

13 **Allison Saar**
Bat Boyz, 2001

Allison Saar studied with Samella Lewis, a scholar of African and Caribbean art, and completed her thesis on self-taught African American artists in 1978. Saar's sculpture often incorporates an array of figural artifacts and folkloric influences. In her figuration of baseball bats, ganged in a corner, she creates contemporary totems: active symbols of nameless American youths. These bat boys are as necessary for a Major League game as they are unheroic and culturally discarded.

Common material carries profound sociopolitical associations for Saar, as it does for Kahn. Like the architect, Saar critically examines our social rituals with the inventive treatment of such material, evoking the lore and hierarchies of baseball in simple wooden bats. She blackens the bats with sticky pine tar beyond the regulated limit of an eighteen-inch grip and more heavily than any player would expect. Faces are carved into the slamming end, while feet are made from handles. Saar flips the typical position of these sluggers upside down, questioning their function and, in turn, their larger game. TA

14 **Alan Saret**
Untitled (Silver Dispersion), 1968–69, remade 1990



Simultaneously wispy and compact, Untitled (Silver Dispersion) evokes volume and form as if pulled forth from the immateriality of space. Alan Saret's work has helped define post-Minimalism, a style that disdains illusion and emphasizes process and materials. Disorder, dispersion, and disintegration are common themes employed in his work.

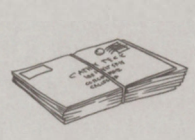
Beyond the use of industrial materials, this work resonates with the renovation of the Kahn building; it was remade by the artist in 1990 when the materials of the original from two decades earlier began to degrade. Like many artists of the postminimalist generation, Saret supports the view that a work of art exists in its "concept" and not in its form, allowing this refabrication to take place. Renovation is akin to refabrication, in that parts of the building are reconstructed using modern materials, but all changes are made with the original in mind. CS

15 **Joel Shapiro**
Untitled, 2002

Untitled represents a major shift in Joel Shapiro's career. He entered the art scene in the 1970s with small sculptures arranged on the floor in vast spaces. These compact objects created an intense concentration of energy. After 9/11, Shapiro's work exploded. Untitled is a hanging wire-and-wood assemblage on a human scale. Its deconstructed form illustrates the artist's struggle to come to terms with the body in a new age of uncertainty.

Shapiro's figure physically engages the architecture of the Kahn building by drawing the eye from the ground up to the tetrahedral ceiling from which it is hung. The visibility of each individual part of Untitled, including its connecting elements, falls in line with Kahn's notion of "served" and "servant" spaces, whereby the "guts"—electrical and duct work, for example—of a building are given as much space and attention as the public areas. The exposed wire makes Shapiro's sculpture appear naked, stripped of the solid, finished surfaces of his earlier works. SS

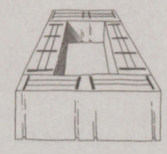
16 **Richard Shaw**
Small Pile of Envelopes with Penciled Address, 1980



Richard Shaw's surreal, trompe l'oeil sculptures of the mundane communicate a quirky and intimate relationship with everyday objects. Small Pile of Envelopes with Penciled Address is a delicate slip-cast porcelain sculpture that recreates a personal correspondence. Its fragility can be felt not only in the technical skill of its creation but also in the suggestion of a friendship or love separated.

Shaw is considered part of the California funk movement of the 1960s to 1970s that was centered on a group of Bay Area artists, including Robert Arneson and Ed Keinholtz. A reaction to what they considered inaccessible, "high" art being generated on the East Coast at the time, the funk movement often embraced absurdity and humor. This example of Shaw's painstaking re-creation of reality in ceramic is a more tranquil example of his assemblages and is relevant to the current exhibition's themes of loss and nostalgia. Kahn's ideas of intimacy, communicated using scale, are present in both the accurate size and shape of Shaw's envelopes as well as the proportions of the cinderblocks in the Kahn building, which were made using the dimensions of the architect's hand. HS

17 **Rachel Whiteread**
Untitled (Ten Tables), 1996



Untitled (Ten Tables) was the centerpiece of Rachel Whiteread's exhibition at the 1997 Venice Biennale. By casting the spaces under ten, ordinary, mass-produced tables, Whiteread recalls the forgotten space of everyday experience. As void becomes solid, what was once familiar office furniture becomes both monumental and strange. This manipulation of the lost-wax casting technique results in work that implies absence, memory, and loss. The remaining sculpture is a spectral, negative space that once existed but doesn't any longer.

The use of plaster relates to Kahn's philosophy that a building should become "what it wants to become." Rather than impose form, Whiteread allows it to emerge out of the plaster, leaving traces of the original object behind. The marks from the tables on the plaster in this piece echo the wood grain left on the columns in the Kahn building, remnants of the architect's own mold-making process. These traces, still visible today, also comment on the passage of time, which is central to renovation. CS

In the lobby:

Roni Horn
Untitled (Gun), 1994

Roni Horn earned her M.F.A. from Yale University in 1978, at the age of twenty three. As an artist, Horn grapples with the complex psychological effect of sculptural work. In Untitled (Gun), she reworks an Emily Dickinson quotation ("My life had stood a loaded gun") into a precarious column of pristine cubes. Stacked in a corner, her work assumes the place where a rifle would have rested in Dickinson's era—loaded, but latent. If the standing gun is a reference for the poet (a symbol of her unassuming life), then her words are a referent (her means of self-actualization). Horn's minimal corner sculpture relates both the modesty and surprising potency of Dickinson's words.

The sculptor, playing with history's canon, reaches accord with Kahn, the tinkering and revisionist architect. The formal qualities of Untitled (Gun) also resonate with the formal hierarchies and aesthetic of the Kahn building. Basic components of Horn's sculpture—capital letters, dashes, modernist cubes—merge into a single column like bricks in a wall. The object-letters maintain their autonomy, though they become words. Words are then a sentence, standing in testament to a longer poem; in essence, a woman, an architect, still waiting to be read. TA

Tony Smith
Smoke, 1967, cast 1977

Tony Smith's Smoke is an investigation in both organic modular geometry and the object's negative space, or surrounding environment. Working in architecture as well as sculpture, Smith concentrated on creating forms that exist on multiple axes in space and contain a formal gathering of tension. A colleague of the abstract expressionists in the 1940s and often associated with Minimalism, Smith preferred to see his works as the product of personal explorations in mathematical form.

Smoke's structure is built from identical modules joined by a tetrahedron, the same shape that Kahn used in his ceiling. Like the growth of a crystal or the expansion of a plume of smoke, Smith builds a system that can grow infinitely. This pattern, like that of the tetrahedral ceiling, gives the piece both a spatial presence in the gallery and an aura of limitlessness and mystery. Smith's use of bulk and weight are also similar to Kahn's ideas concerning forms such as the cylindrical stairwell; both use a vocabulary of geometry to symbolize more ephemeral subjects, like spirituality, energy, and potential. HS


ΤΟ
ΚΑΗ

Photo Essay
Victoria Sambunaris

The gallery, before installation

The installation in progress

Back left: Alexander Calder, The Tulip

Front right: Rachel Whiteread, Untitled (Ten Tables) (detail)

Rachel Whiteread, Untitled (Ten Tables)

Front: Annette Lemieux, Clean Up (detail)
Back left (hanging): Alexander Calder, The Tulip
Back left (on wall): Conrad Marca-Relli, Boeing 707

Center: Sol LeWitt,
1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 Cross and Tower
Back right (on pedestal): Lynda Benglis, Hitch
Back right: Joel Shapiro, Untitled
Back right (in corner): Allison Saar, Bat Boyz

Front left: Joel Shapiro, Untitled
Back: Alexander Calder, The Tulip

Front right (on pedestal): Lynda Benglis, Hitch
Front right (on wall): Conrad Marca-Relli, Boeing 707 (detail)

Front left: Richard Shaw, Small Pile of Envelopes with Penciled Address
Back left: Joseph Beuys, Sulfur-Covered Zinc Box (Plugged Corner)

Front center: David Nash, Crack and Warp Stack
Center: Rachel Whiteread, Untitled (Ten Tables)
Back right (on floor): Alan Saret, Untitled (Silver Dispersion)
Back right (hanging): Vito Acconci, Sound/Body/Weapon

Left (on floor): Annette Lemieux, Clean Up
Back left: Christian Boltanski, La fête de Pourim

Back center: Matthew Barney, Unit Bolus
Front right: Sol LeWitt, 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 Cross and Tower

Front left: Annette Lemieux, Clean Up
Back left: Alan Saret, Untitled (Silver Dispersion)
Back center (hanging): Vito Acconci, Sound/Body/Weapon

Front right: Matthew Barney, Unit Bolus
Back right: Christian Boltanski, La fête de Pourim

Front left: Rachel Whiteread, Untitled (Ten Tables) (detail)
Back left: Duane Hanson, Man in Chair with Beer

Center: Annette Lemieux, Clean Up
Back center: Christian Boltanski,
La fête de Pourim

Right: Matthew Barney, Unit Bolus

Left: Vito Acconci, Sound/Body/Weapon
Back left: Bruce Conner, Spider Lady Nest

Front: Alan Saret, Untitled (Silver Dispersion) (detail)
Right: Duane Hanson, Man in Chair with Beer

View of the gallery from York Street at night

Responding to Kahn: A Sculptural Conversation

Director's Foreword

What better way to celebrate the opening of the renovated Louis Kahn building at the Yale University Art Gallery than with an exhibition of works from the collection curated by Yale students themselves? Responding to Kahn: A Sculptural Conversation brings together nineteen postwar sculptures selected and installed to resonate with Kahn's landmark building. Organized by a team of seven students, both graduate and undergraduate, from the Schools of Art and Architecture and the Departments of History of Art as well as Political Science, the exhibition highlights the conversations that inevitably arise in any effective museum installation. The discourse that emerges between the works of art in this exhibition is wonderfully complemented by the dialogue that also occurs between these sculptures and the building in which they are installed. It is equally exciting to see the student curators' commitment to displaying each work of art to its best advantage and to including the Kahn building itself as one of the works of art on exhibit.

Since its founding in 1832, the Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest university museum in this country, has held its mission as a teaching museum foremost among its priorities. In recent years, the Gallery's major renovation campaign, in combination with a University-wide renewal of attention to the central role of the arts in a Yale College education, have refocused our efforts on our closest constituencies, the Yale students and faculty. Classes using the Gallery's collection as a teaching tool have proliferated: faculty from departments across the University are joining their colleagues from History of Art and guiding students in the study and enjoyment of original works of art. More and more, students have also begun to seek out additional opportunities to become engaged with the collection. We now have graduate students teaching our K–12 audiences and undergraduates leading tours for our adult visitors. The students who teach at the Gallery learn as much—perhaps even more—from teaching as they do from the training that prepares them to teach. Involving students at this level has already shown itself to be a vitalizing force for the Gallery's education program; ramping up the involvement of students in the Gallery's curatorial program is a logical next step.

This exhibition and publication kick off what will be a steady stream of student curatorial projects generously supported by the Jane and Gerald Katcher Fund for Education and The Nolen-Bradley Family Fund. Exhibitions such as Responding to Kahn: A Sculptural Conversation provide an unparalleled opportunity for students to manage an exhibition from conception to completion. Throughout the planning of Responding to Kahn, the student curators have worked collaboratively with each other and with their curatorial mentor, Pamela Franks, Curator of Academic Initiatives. They join me in thanking her for sharing her time, expertise, and enthusiasm and for granting them the opportunity to not only curate an exhibition but publish their thoughts on the Kahn building and the works they have chosen to display within it.

Additionally, the students have worked with a wide range of Gallery staff from every area of expertise: Archivist Elise Kenney lent her knowledge and materials of the Kahn building and past exhibitions at the Gallery during the students' research; Curators Jennifer Gross, Helen Cooper, Robin Jaffee Frank, Patricia Kane, and John Stuart Gordon all met with the group and discussed object and installation choices; Chief Conservator Mark Aronson and his team were involved at several points during the exhibition planning phase; Art Handler David Norris led the installation of the show with insight and humor, and the entire installations staff made works in storage available to the students throughout the selection process; Installations Manager Clarkson Crolius deserves special recognition for his ongoing dialogue with the students, which was truly formative to their vision; finally, Renovation Project Manager Leslie Myers participated in the group's discussions about the Kahn building and facilitated their access to it.

Likewise, this exhibition catalogue was also a collaborative process. Christopher Sleboda, the Gallery's Director of Graphic Design, worked with Kate Howe, an M.F.A. student and member of the curatorial group, as she created the design. As content editor,

Anna Hammond, Deputy Director for Education, Programs, and Public Affairs, was an expert guide for the students as they developed their ideas in written form, and Dacia Ray provided superb copyedits to their texts. Associate Editor Tiffany Sprague made significant editorial contributions and managed the book project through to completion. We also thank Amy Jean Porter, Associate Director of Communications, for her efforts to publicize the show and its catalogue.

Beyond the Gallery walls, we owe a special thanks to photographer Victoria Sambunaris, M.F.A. 1999. A lecturer at the Yale School of Architecture whose work is represented in the Gallery's collection, Sambunaris has created a beautiful photographic rendition of the building and exhibition for this publication. Jules Prown, the Paul Mellon Professor Emeritus in Yale's History of Art Department, led the group through a critical early discussion, generously offering insights gained from his experiences at the Gallery over the years. Our colleagues across the street at the Yale Center for British Art have been wonderful partners in this project. Director Amy Meyers graciously agreed to lend a central work in the exhibition, Rachel Whiteread's Untitled (Ten Tables) (1996). Also from the YCBA, curators and staff, including Michael Hatt, Angus Trumble, Morna O'Neill, and Cassandra Albinson, were all generous with their time and thoughts. Similarly, colleagues from the School of Art—Richard Benson, Sam Messer, Henk Van Assen, Karel Martens, and Linda Van Deursen in particular—deserve special thanks for their work with the students. Penelope Curtis, Curator of the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds, England, met with the student curators and discussed images of her many innovative installations of sculpture. Artists Joel Shapiro and Erwin Hauer generously opened their studios to the group and shared insights about their work and process with the group. The staff of Matthew Barney's studio and Rosalie Benitez from Barbara Gladstone Gallery were tireless in their advice on the challenges of exhibiting Barney's Unit Bolus (1991).

No other experience allows students to immerse themselves more thoroughly in a museum collection than taking on the role of curators. I joined the group periodically as they developed their exhibition, and I am proud to say that I not only thoroughly enjoyed but also always learned from their lively discussions. It is inspiring to recognize that these Yale students now know the collection of postwar sculpture at the Yale University Art Gallery as well as anyone.

Jock Reynolds
The Henry J. Heinz II Director
Yale University Art Gallery

Roni Horn, Untitled (Gun)

Preface

Eighteen months before the renovation of Louis Kahn's building at the Yale University Art Gallery was complete, the Gallery issued an open call inviting Yale students to curate an exhibition for the reopening. The students organizing the exhibition could come from any discipline, but there were some parameters: the exhibition should relate to the building; it should be an exhibition of sculpture; the selection should be limited to works in the Gallery's collection;[1] it should keep within the set budget; and it should be a collaborative endeavor. The undertaking was experimental. We set conditions but then let the process unfold naturally, not knowing what the results would be. It was also idealistic, both an effort to honor Kahn's design and a dramatic realization of the Gallery's ongoing commitment to engaging students at the University.

1
This requirement was later broadened to include other Yale collections when the Yale Center for British Art generously agreed to lend their sculpture by Rachel Whiteread.

Meetings during the first months of the project involved as many as twenty students; this phase focused on studying Kahn's work and preliminary research on hundreds of sculptures from the collection. As the semester progressed, some students turned their attention to classes and other activities. Ultimately, a core group of seven students saw the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue through to completion. With the emergence of this core group, we entered a new phase of complex and intensive discussions, considering works of art in relation to each other and to the building. During this phase, a more empathic appreciation of the building developed, a result of our growing historical knowledge of it and our direct experience of inhabiting the structure during repeat visits. Deepening familiarity brought increasing respect and affection for the building, calling to mind Kahn's belief that beauty "cannot be built into architecture by design," but rather "evolves from acceptance and love."[2]

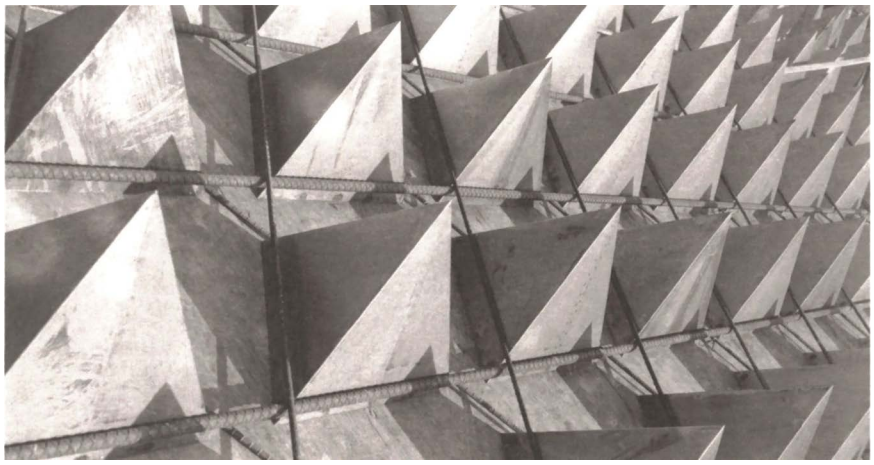
2
Sarah Williams Goldhagen, Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 59.

The final selection of works was made over months of looking, researching, and discussing. Access to the original works of art, all in storage during renovation, was essential. In several instances, research suggested that a work of art would resonate conceptually with the building, but upon viewing the original it became clear that the resonance would not communicate visually and spatially. The danger that selection-by-consensus could dilute the clarity of vision was ever present. A mandate not to give in for the sake of cooperation fueled lively debates, during which one student would convince another or, just as often, not. Objects exited and reentered the ongoing discussion again and again, raised at different times by different students, and increasingly in relation to other works of art.

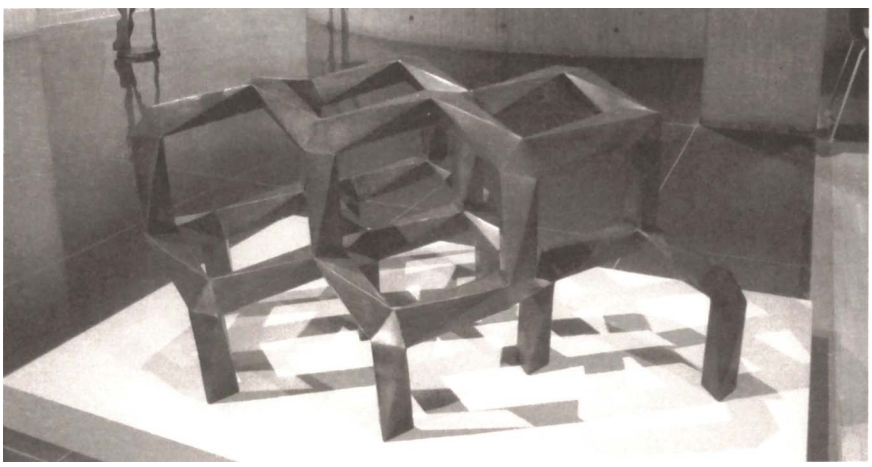
Once the final selection of objects was made, the design of the installation evolved through a similarly dynamic exchange of ideas. The potential for resonance identified in the selection process was played out in the placement of the chosen objects within the exhibition space, emphasizing the conversations that emerged about and among works of art, including the building. Given the commitment to showcase the building as well as the art, the decision to leave the gallery space as Kahn built it—without concealing the original materials or dividing the expansive space—was obvious. This was perhaps the only immediately unanimous conclusion of the entire curatorial process. During installation, the group realized that there was not suitable space in the gallery to display two essential sculptures: Roni Horn's Untitled (Gun) (1994) and Tony Smith's Smoke (1967, cast 1977). The decision was made to let the exhibition spill out into the lobby, fittingly extending the conversation beyond the gallery's walls.

As a visiting critic at Yale in the late 1940s, Kahn taught interdisciplinary studios for architects, sculptors, and painters, assigning students from the three disciplines single projects to work on collaboratively.[3] The current exhibition project shares a similar willingness to explore the hybridization of creative perspectives. With students coming from the fields of sculpture, design, architecture, history of art, and political science, communication within the group was fueled by divergent outlooks rather than shared assumptions. The intellectual and creative community among them formed around the central aesthetic and conceptual challenge of responding to the building through the collection.

3
Goldhagen, Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism, 51.



Molds for the tetrahedral ceiling of the Kahn building, ca. 1951



Tony Smith, Smoke

And, while the exhibition embodies a shared curatorial vision that was hard earned, it is our hope that the individual essays of the catalogue capture something of the particular perspectives each student curator brought to the project—and something of the lively conversations enabled by such diverse points of view.

"Why bother conceal how it was made?," Kahn asked, just as his building for the Yale University Art Gallery was being completed. "We're proud of it."[4] As the curatorial process developed, it became clear that an important aspect of responding to the architect's achievement was to reveal, even highlight, the process of the exhibition's making. A critical moment in the group's thinking was a return to fundamentals: In a Kahn-like intellectual move, they distilled the notion of "exhibition" down to the basic components of art, space, and viewers. The structure offered up seemed auspicious, since, as institutional interlopers, the student curators enjoyed the freedom to position themselves overtly as viewers rather than experts. Embracing this role enabled the group to emphasize the continuity between curator and audience, and between creating aesthetic potential and knowing that potential would only be fully realized through the viewers' experience. They could strive to extend the community they formed around this building and these sculptures to include the future viewers of the exhibition, who would also participate in the making of meaning. From a position of openness, prioritizing authentic experience and communication, the student curators created an exhibition for their fellow viewers. In the spirit of Kahn, they have made an offering to those who come next.[5]

Pamela Franks
Curator of Academic Initiatives
Yale University Art Gallery

4
Goldhagen, Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism, 58.

5
Kahn, in his 1973 lecture at Pratt Institute, said that the architect's job is to make "a certain offering of man to next man." Robert Twombly, ed., Louis Kahn: Essential Texts. (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2003), 280. In the context of this quotation it is worth noting that, of the seven student curators, six are women.

Perpetual Revision: Defining the Corner at Chapel and York

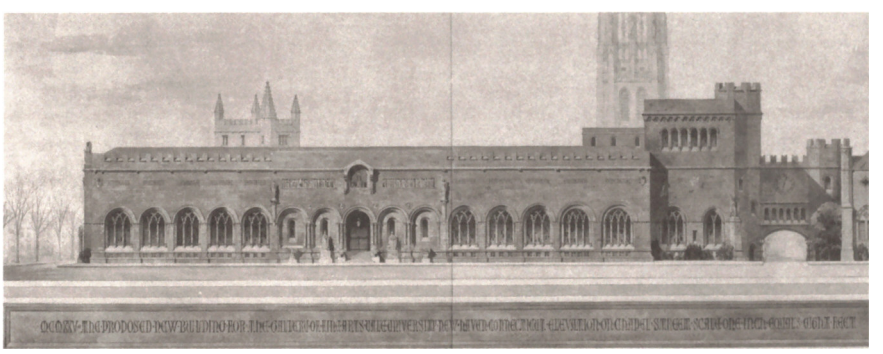
Timothy Applebee

Louis Kahn's building for the Yale University Art Gallery, his first major commission, is a place of paradox, actively resisting simple description. Beyond the evidence of the photographs and drawings that document the evolution of Kahn's design, the written history of his original masterwork highlights the multiplicity that surrounds the building. We find in these texts the various architects, changing architectural styles, conflicting ideologies and politics, and evolution of programmatic functions that contribute to the history of the site. The building is, in effect, undergoing perpetual revision; an unmoving structure that shifts over time.

The images of the site included here provide a visual reckoning of these revisions as the architecture shifted in concept, form, and use. Side by side for comparison, these documented moments at once collect and contrast the various plans, architects, and phenomena that the corner lot has endured. In some instances, they record a physical transformation of the site: both the intended transformations, which replaced one design for another, as well as the unintended physical deterioration of the architecture erected upon it. The photographs of the building also contrast aesthetically and structurally with the proposals found in Kahn's drawings, indicating the shifts that occurred as the formal ideals of the architect translated into a realized architecture. Indeed, the evolution of the drawings of the Chapel Street façade of the Gallery (which together span close to an entire century of architectural proposals for the site) also indicate a shift in the stylistic conceptualization of the building.

To describe the flux of the building that was "designed by Kahn," we must also note the other architects involved who provided Kahn with precedent. The 1919 scheme drawn up by Hyman I. Feldman was modest in height but comprehensive in plan, extending the Department of the Fine Arts along Chapel Street from High to York. Dated 1928, the grand scheme of Egerton Swartwout, B.A. 1891, was palatial in design but only two-fifths completed [cf. figs. 1.1–1.2]. Following the Great Depression, the University delayed construction on this second major proposal; building was halted before the structure reached York Street, leaving the wall that now abuts Kahn's building without ornament, relatively unfinished as it awaited further development. In a bit of irony, the portion of this wall untouched by the Kahn addition remains today as raw, simple brick.[1]

1
Since most of the brick wall was destroyed for the sake of the addition, one can understand the extant brick as an intentional component of Kahn's design.



[fig. 1.1] Original plan for the Swartwout building, extending to York Street, ca. 1925

[fig. 1.2] The corner of Chapel and York Streets, with the Swartwout building at right, 1951

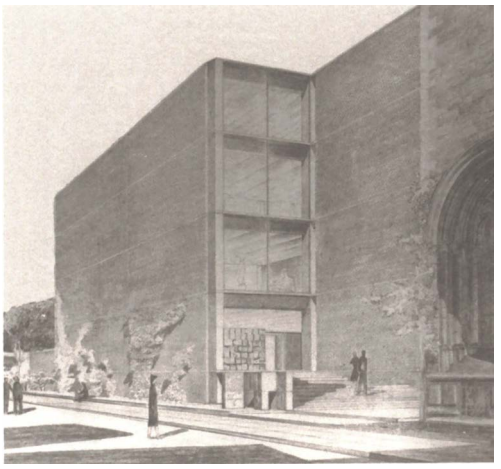
In the winter of 1941, Yale commissioned Philip Goodwin, who had just completed his 1939 design of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, to finish the design of its Gallery. Where Swartwout saw the corner lot at Chapel and York Streets as a continuation of the classical stonework of his 1928 building, mirrored about the axis of a midblock main entrance, Goodwin envisioned a work of modern architecture, with simple and flat walls bearing little ornamentation. His design was approved, interrupted by World War II, and then revisited after the war in 1948. This third proposal and its revisions were never brought to fruition, however, because Goodwin withdrew from the project. Louis Kahn was proposed as his replacement in 1951, partway through the fourth attempt to complete the Gallery, and was commissioned as its next lead designer in partnership with the New Haven office of established architect Douglas Orr.

Kahn assimilated a number of elements from these earlier schemes into "his own" design, notably the midblock entrance [figs. 1.3–1.4], proposed by Swartwout, and the rear court, open floor plan, and minimally adorned enclosure, which were originally proposed by Goodwin. When this fourth design of the Gallery actually began, however, Kahn was working in Europe as an early recipient of the prestigious Rome Prize. George Howe, the chairman of the architecture department at the time (and himself a previous recipient of the Rome Prize), played a pivotal role in transforming Kahn's career. Howe, an established American modernist, had personally recommended Kahn for the Rome Prize and for the commission of the Gallery. By that time, Kahn was the chief critic in Yale's architecture program, and in fact had recommended Howe for the chairmanship. Kahn accepted both assignments in an apparent trade of favors. Charles H. Sawyer, Dean of the School of Fine Arts at the time, also joined Howe in recommending Kahn to Whitney Griswold, the president of the University. While Kahn was sketching the classical ruins of Western civilization, Howe and Sawyer represented Kahn's interests in discussions and decisions about the design of the Gallery. Such facts further diminish the idea that Kahn was the singular architect of the building as it stands today, although he did become the veritable figurehead of the project—capping more than thirty years of university planning to finish the construction of the Gallery.

Kahn's spatial, structural, and material inventiveness—infused with an archaic historicism and geometry derived from his studies in Rome and Greece—employed certain assumptions of the modernist style in order to resist them. At the time, the field of modern architecture was greatly influenced by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's catch phrase, "Less is more," and Le Corbusier's description of modern architecture as "machines for living." Kahn's Gallery design critically, albeit idiosyncratically, redefined these general prescriptions of modernism. In other words, as much as Yale University officials were inspired by and sought to replicate the style of Goodwin's Museum of Modern Art, Kahn's eventual design would bear little aesthetic resemblance to MoMA.

In an early version of his distinct "service spaces" and "served spaces," for example, he reworked the open floor plan[2] that was present in Goodwin's proposal for the Gallery. Kahn clearly differentiated the spatial organization of the Gallery, one where service spaces (such as elevators, stairs, vertical plumbing, electricity, and ventilation) are located centrally and flanked by the served spaces (the expansive and curatorially permissive exhibition floors). The spatial clarity of the objectlike service spaces, notably the cylindrical stairwell standing independent of the perimeter wall, interrupts the liberating intent behind the fully open floor plan, but it also simplifies the Gallery's performative function. Gallery visitors see the cylinder from the exhibition space and use it as a reference. To see its unmistakable form is to know how to access other exhibitions, and how to exit the upper floors. Kahn, equally an educator and an architect, likely saw the self-evident organization of the building's different functions as a prime lesson to the architecture students who were to inhabit its fourth floor.

2
Modern building construction using concrete slabs and columns (as per Le Corbusier's Maison Domino), instead of load-bearing partition walls, allowed for uninterrupted floor space.



[fig. 1.3] Louis Kahn, rendition of the Kahn building, ca. 1951

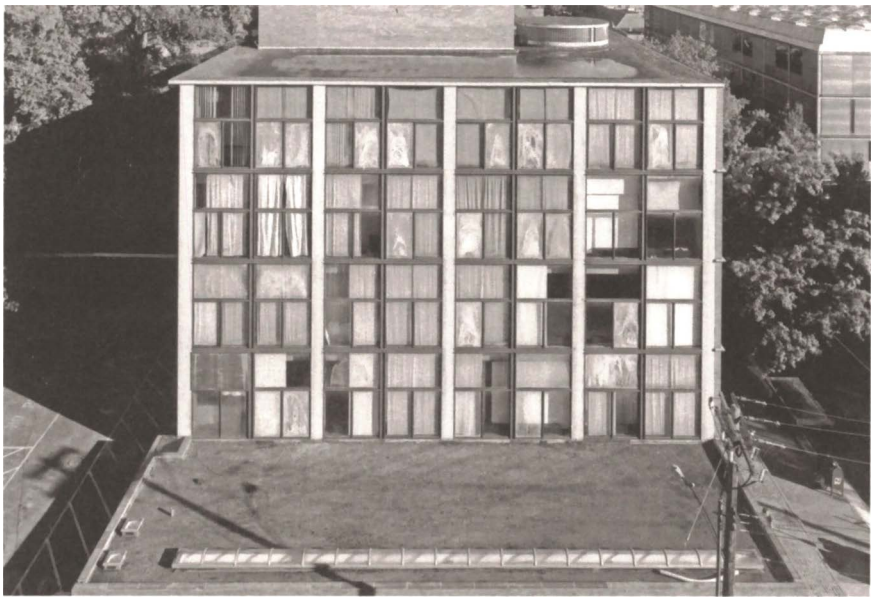
[fig. 1.4] Chapel Street, showing the newly completed Kahn building, 1953

He similarly invested modern architecture's austere use of industrial building materials with his own didactic symbolism, using them to visibly demonstrate the hierarchy of a building's design.[3] The materials—the concrete, steel, glass, terrazzo, and wood—each formally symbolize their particular order within the sequence of the construction of the building. Concrete is first in the sequence; it is the primary structure of the Gallery addition and so its rough-hewn finish remains a visible testament to the building's coarse beginning and structural integrity. Leaving the concrete unfinished, Kahn willingly exposed the marks of its formwork. For the student, these markings act as a literal index of the cast-in-place construction method. After the primary structure was determined, Kahn's material choices for the secondary structure (the perimeter walls) seem, in part, determined by the need for tempered light. The solid brick of the Chapel Street façade simply and forcibly precludes glaring southern light. The remaining glass curtain walls help give morning light to the east-facing entrance, fill the Gallery with diffused northern light, and provide warm western light in the evening. The smooth terrazzo tile and warm oak, used later in the construction, act in visual contrast to raw concrete and provide a perceptible buffer between the user and the brutish "machine" of the structure. Kahn designed these material juxtapositions in order to legibly reinforce, for the student, the relationship between the necessary components of the Gallery and its everyday use.

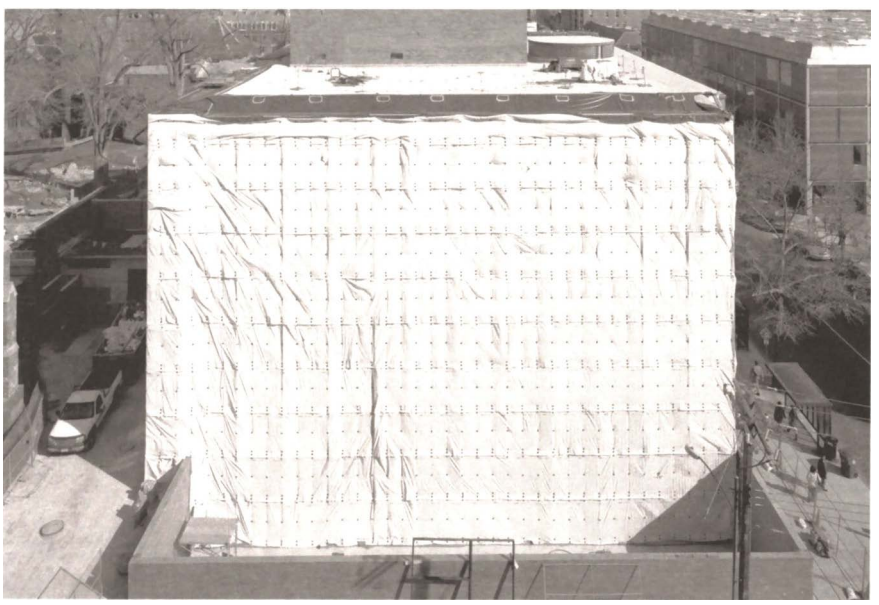
This didacticism within Kahn's design seems intent upon revising another modernist prescript, where form should follow function. The form of Kahn's Gallery is not simply the result of addressing the functional needs of a gallery. The final form is, importantly, the result of Kahn's desire as an educator; he believed that people could learn from a building. If form should follow an understanding of its function, and we students are able to learn as we utilize and regard such architectural form, then the designer of that form should actively consider its educational potential, or function. In this building, Kahn propounds a form that is, by its very nature, both functional and educational. Consequently, we are left with a building that is at once recognizably modern and, for the sake of its students, at odds with the tenets of modernism.

Our ability to recognize a single, simple definition of the Gallery is further complicated by Kahn's ideal vision of its architecture, itself locked in a state of struggle, perpetually revised and compromised. The realized building—celebrated on opening day late in the fall of 1953—and Kahn's idea of the building, before and beyond that which was built, fail to coalesce. The finished building was fraught with compromise, from the ceiling structure to the finished floor. Unable to obtain a building permit for his tetrahedral ceiling without supplementing its structure with massive girder beams (though its original structure was supposedly self-sufficient), Kahn settled for the girders and subsequently for a more decorative, less structural version of his ideal ceiling. In another example, the floor he imagined for the Gallery, entirely tiled with terrazzo in the tradition of grand

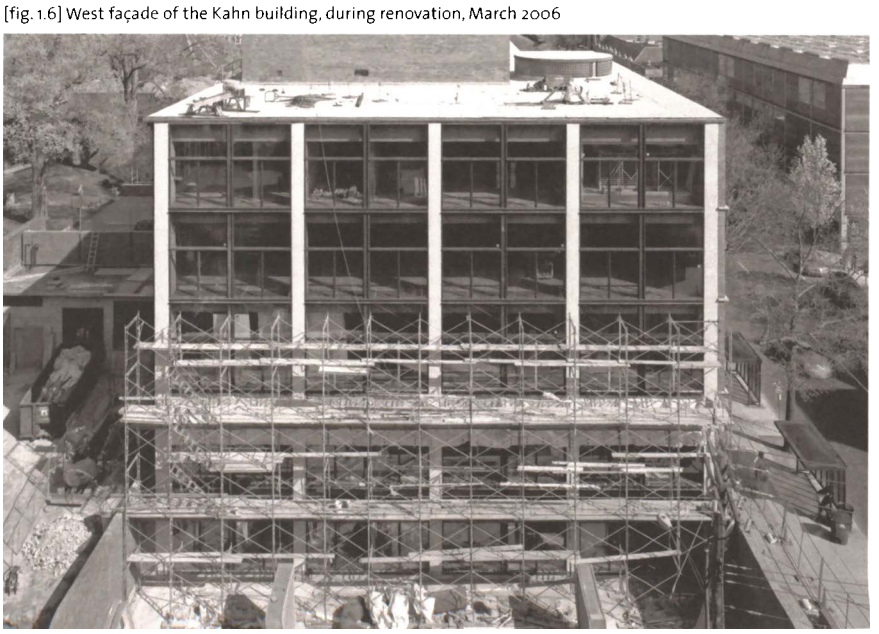
3
For a more complete formal analysis of the building, see Alexander Purves, "The Yale University Art Gallery by Louis I. Kahn," Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin (2000): 105–13.



[fig. 1.5] West façade of the Kahn building, just before renovation, October 2003



[fig. 1.6] West façade of the Kahn building, during renovation, March 2006



[fig. 1.7] West façade of the Kahn building, at the completion of renovation, April 2006

European architecture, was cost prohibitive; oak flooring outlined with terrazzo became its substitute. Kahn even halted the bricklaying of the Chapel Street façade in order to propose a different brick, one that he had found at another construction site. Howe and Sawyer, however, decided upon the original brick. In addition, the furniture Kahn designed for the Gallery was not well received and thus never put to use.

If only for our present curatorial purposes we accept that Kahn's vision was realized, howsoever constrained to economic and political limitations, we must also accept that it did not last. Certain things fell apart. The window wall ran amuck with condensation. The cinder block walls were sheetrocked and painted white, and the powerful, cylindrical stairwell was similarly obscured on two floors. Kahn's beloved "pogo walls," the essence of the building's programmatic adaptability, were altered. Architecture students were removed from the fourth floor and more offices and exhibition space were added. In a further degradation of Kahn's design, the sculpture garden behind the building went to seed as a grassy "beach" for the undergraduates of the Yale residential college Jonathan Edwards. The open-air sculpture court, sunk beneath York Street, also gave way to a variety of functions and eventually was roofed in the early 1970s to enlarge the Gallery's display space.

Meanwhile, the site remains unmoved, quietly enduring this deluge of historical nuance, awaiting its next transformation. Kahn, with his sketches of ancient ruins and cities in hand, did not likely overlook such particularities of impermanence and permanence while designing the building. Within the evolution of both the conceptual and realized design we are able to recognize that which endures—the vision, purpose, and intent of humanity—and that which inevitably transforms itself beyond our recognition. As Kahn's architectural vision acts and relies upon a much larger, expanding frame of time, so do the exhibitions of the Gallery. For the purpose of this exhibition, the description of these physical and conceptual shifts over the course of history—far more than the description of some unerring architect and the absolute form of his architecture—most accurately describe Kahn's first, major effort, newly revised.

This Catalogue Does Not Yet Exist

Kate Howe

This essay is about a piece of graphic design that does not yet exist: the catalogue in which you are now reading this essay. Although I am the designer of this catalogue, I am writing this description of it before setting mouse to screen on the design. This is very apt for my topic: an exhibition inspired by the work of architect Louis Kahn.

This gesture, describing the perfection of the catalogue in my mind's eye, as opposed to its actuality after it has been produced, is appropriate for Kahn because he was an architect who worked toward Platonic ideals. In his "Form and Design" thesis of 1960, Kahn explains, "In the differentiation of a spoon from spoon, spoon characterizes a form having two inseparable parts, the handle and the bowl. A spoon implies a specific design made of silver or wood, big or little, shallow or deep. Form is 'what.' Design is 'how.'"[1] Kahn believed each project had a transcendent form that it "wanted" to be, and that his work as an architect was to realize this form as clearly as possible while minimizing bastardization by the practical constraints and requirements inevitable to a building.

Hence, the present essay is a record of my hopes and aspirations for the catalogue, its ideal Form, before it has been realized by the process of Design. The book you now hold in your hands (months after I have written these words) is the physical evidence of how my aspirations translated into paper and ink. Doubtlessly, there will be a great gap between the two. And that fact is also deeply representative of this exhibition; both Kahn's building and the sculptures included in the show are also material representations of the hopes and ideals of their creators, and thus in some way, always pale imitations. Design always falls short of Form. This gap has become one of the prevailing themes of this exhibition: the inherently doomed activity of attempting to manifest an ideal, and the artistic, human hopefulness of continuing to attempt anyway.

Now, my thoughts on the ideal Form of this catalogue:

My conceptual goal is to create a book according to the same principles by which Kahn created his buildings. It will be an experiment in translating the concerns and vocabulary of architecture into the concerns and vocabulary of graphic design. This act of translation seems a way to both make a piece in homage to Kahn, and also to understand his principles more deeply for having to think through their transposition to an alternative medium. The starting place, then, is Kahn's architecture.

Stylistically, Kahn was a master of the modernist vocabulary. However, he can perhaps better be described as a classicist who "paired history with a superimposed geometric order."[2] Having worked primarily on residential projects throughout World War II, the Yale University Art Gallery was the first building that allowed Kahn to apply his vision to a "monumental" scale project. To Kahn, this meant creating a building with "a spiritual quality inherent . . . which conveys a feeling of its eternity."[3] In approaching this task, he looked to learn from historical, particularly Italian, buildings, stating, "The architect must always start with an eye toward the best architecture of the past,"[4] and, "I firmly realize that the architecture of Italy will remain as the inspirational source of the works of the future."[5] In order to apply the same strategy to the book format, the catalogue you are holding must then be of large stature and classic proportions. Its roots, in terms of size, page proportion, and layout, should be in classic book design—perhaps something from Aldus Manutius, the acclaimed fifteenth-century Venetian printer. This classic format, however, will be stripped of ornament, "superimposed" with geometry, and printed with contemporary technology.

Structurally, Kahn was a master of devising architectural form born of functional systems. He had a defining revelation a few years after completing the Gallery that "space made by a dome and then divided by walls is not the same space . . . a room should be a constructed entity or an ordered segment of a construction system."[6] The corollary in book structure would be to let each functional section, each type of information, define itself: its page size, grid format, typography system, paper stock, etc., all determined

1
Louis Kahn, "Form and Design," Architectural Design 31, no. 4 (April 1961): 145–54.

2
David B. Brownlee, Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 66.

3
Louis Kahn, "Monumentality," in New Architecture and City Planning, ed. Paul Zucker (New York: Philosophical Library, 1944) 577.

4
Louis Kahn, "Training the Artist-Architect for Industry," in Impressions, Proceedings of the Design Conference, Aspen, Colorado, June 28–July 1, 1951, ed. R. Hunter Middleton and Alexander Ebin, Box LIK 63, the Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Penn.

5
Louis Kahn, letter to Dave [Wisdom], Anne [Tyng], and others, December 6, 1950, "Rome 1951," Box LIK 61, at ibid.

6
Louis Kahn, Notebook K12.22, 1955–ca. 1962, at ibid.

[fig. 2.1] View of the Kahn building from Chapel Street, ca. 1953

based on the information to be contained within that section. Built from the ground up, such a book would be a structure determined by its contents, rather than having its contents molded by a uniform codex structure. However, while there are indications of Kahn's tendency toward individual definition of spaces in the Kahn building, it is still a subdivided loft. Therefore, this catalogue should probably use a hierarchy of distinct paper stock, grids, and typography appropriate for each section of content, but maintain a single book block, akin to the Gallery's loft space. This will have the added serendipity of creating a "sedimentation" on the fore edge of the book, a structural system for navigation through the book's contents, echoing Kahn's representation of the floor levels on the exterior wall of the Gallery [fig. 2.1].

A virtuosic use of material was another of Kahn's signatures. He worked to reveal the intrinsic nature of each material and celebrated all scars from the building process. Kahn employed a hierarchy of materials from rough concrete to refined wood and polished glass, each used to indicate the individual natures of various parts of the building. He also prioritized between "served" and "servant" spaces, grouping utility functions together, separated from the main centers of primary activity. Hence in both material and layout, this catalogue must also make clear the structure and hierarchy of its content.

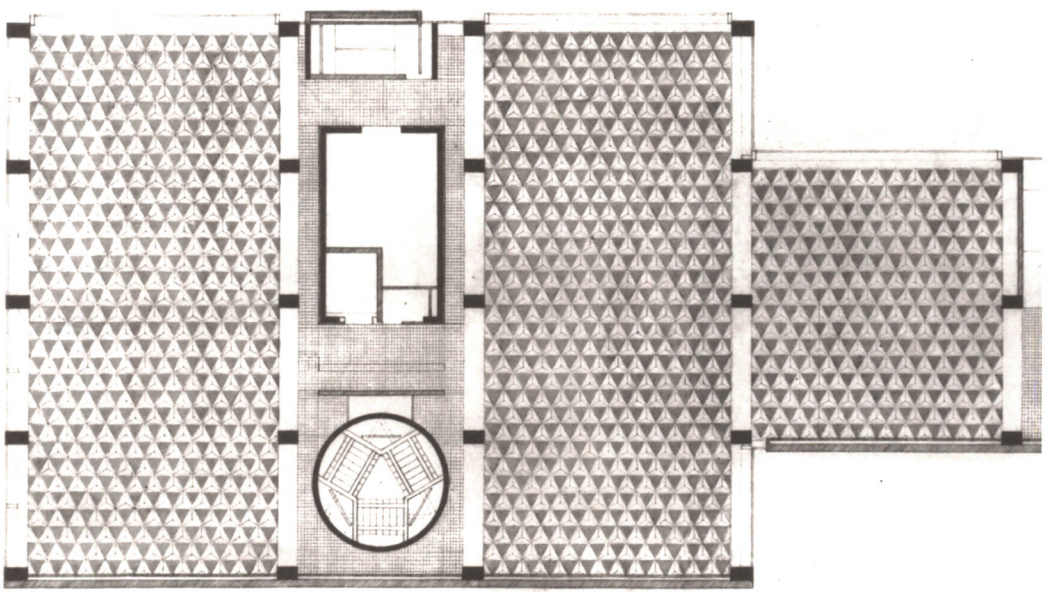
In terms of embellishment, Kahn preferred to achieve visual interest through the patterned repetition of building materials and structurally based motifs [fig. 2.2]. He was a master of joints, relishing in the beauty of the edge between two distinct materials or functional parts. Thus, the structural components of the book—such as the binding, the block of paper, and the grid—should be treated and considered to such an extent that they become ornamentation. And, speaking of the binding, it will have to be visible, unembellished, displaying its workings for all to see—no book cloth for this catalogue!

In any translation, there is the question of truth to facts versus truth to poetics. While on one level my goal is to conceptually translate Kahn's specific architectural moves into the book format, I also want to make a book that feels like Kahn. My simplest aspiration is that this book creates as beautiful a space to be in mentally as Kahn's buildings are to be in physically—yet this is also the most difficult goal to realize. In "Form and Design," Kahn also states that a building "must begin with the unmeasurable, must go through measurable means when it is being designed and in the end must be unmeasurable."[7] This means, then, that I can't achieve the book I want, the book that has a Kahn-like aura, by

7
Kahn, "Form and Design," 149.

rigidly or reductively translating his architectural moves. There will need to be, sometime between this writing and your reading, an act of inspiration and transmutation.

There is another way in which this catalogue does not yet exist. On its own, it will be a passive, latent pile of paper covered with ink markings. It won't really live until you come along and engage with it, read it, think about it, and incorporate your personal narrative. Like Kahn's building and the sculpture in this exhibition, this book exists especially in its interaction with viewers and users, in a unique experience for each one.



[fig. 2.2] Reflected ceiling plan of the Kahn building, n.d.

Kahn and the Failure of Utopia

Sonali Chakravarti

It is ironic to note that just as Yale was planning to restore the Kahn building at the Yale University Art Gallery, housing projects like Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis and Cabrini-Green in Chicago, equally ambitious modernist structures of the same era, were being torn down across the country. These housing projects were considered to have outlived their usefulness and had come to represent the betrayal of the residents they were supposed to serve, often poor, non-white people. Because of this legacy, emotions of disappointment and cynicism are now intertwined with the history of housing projects and by extension, with the architectural movement known as modernism. Reflecting on Louis Kahn's work as an urban planner and architect fifty years after the construction of the Yale University Art Gallery raises the question: How do we make sense of modernism after the failure of the modernist vision of utopia?

A theorist of cities, Jane Jacobs is well known for her vision of urban utopia; her vision of urbanism was based on mixed-use areas in which people from different class backgrounds would live, work, shop, and go to school in the same vicinity, providing many opportunities for informal interactions between citizens. These everyday interactions would add not only to the quality of life for individuals and families but to the safety and prosperity of the community. She was critical of the trend of modernist architecture, embodied in the work of architects such as Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Philip Johnson, which saw the formalism of geometry and clearly defined parts as the most functional way to spatially organize life and human interaction. Implicit in their outlook was a hope for efficiency combined with the beauty of minimalist form, and it is this logic that led, in part, to the creation of housing projects like Elm Haven and Quinnipiac Terrace in New Haven. The building of these often high-rise projects was encouraged by the federal and city housing authorities in the 1950s as the most efficient way of responding to the perceived needs of low-income citizens and, at the same time, placating middle-class residents who associated racial differences with crime. Advocates of such projects claimed that by clustering affordable housing in one area, and including space for retail, health, and educational services, the lives of low-income people would be better served than in previous eras; this view was in direct contrast to Jacobs's sentiments about the benefits of an integrated urban environment. But the modernist dream of self-sufficient communities was a goal that would never be realized. The housing projects instead became areas that quickly fell into disrepair and were centers of crime, drugs, and gang violence; New Haven, in particular, with a concentration of public housing units per capita that is nearly the highest in the nation, has acutely experienced these effects.[1]

In the 1930s and 1940s, during the early part of his career, Kahn was very involved in urban planning and with designing housing developments in particular. Kahn believed that architects must shoulder the responsibility to design spaces that would encourage thriving political and social communities, and not hide behind narrow artistic visions or functional concerns. He coauthored Why City Planning Is Your Responsibility with Oscar Stonorov (1943) and worked on an ambitious plan to make center-city Philadelphia a pedestrian-only zone in the 1940s, taking the Greek concept of "agora" and the New England town hall format as his inspiration. Striving for a utopian vision of residential and political life is a trademark of Kahn's work, and his early work embodied this commitment to examining the social implications of architecture and planning.

However, when the time came for Kahn to design the Gallery, he seemed to give up his role of urban planner in order to take on the role of architect-artist and saw the building as a monument in itself, rather than part of a larger plan. Instead of looking at how the Gallery could nurture the relationships between the university, commercial, and residential communities in New Haven, Kahn's architectural plan was a way for him to express very personal concerns of creating a building that was a work of art, a monument that would reflect the flourishing of the individual. His turn away from his earlier community-

1
Douglas W. Rae, City: Urbanism and Its End, The Yale ISPS Series (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 279.

oriented vision was consistent with the larger changes happening in New Haven in the 1950s. These changes made the city more dependent on cars, destroyed working-class neighborhoods, and encouraged suburbanization.[2] In contrast to the Philadelphia project with which Kahn had been involved, New Haven city planners were leaving behind the idea of a pedestrian-friendly urbanism with the goal of a diffused suburbanization as a way to revive industry and construction. Thus, the Kahn building, the architect's first major commission, sits at the crux of this debate between community and efficiency, urbanism and modernism, integration and isolation.

[2] Ibid., 333.

Kahn's design was consistent with many of the tenets of modernism—an attention to and exposure of industrial materials, a machine aesthetic, and a commitment to geometric abstraction. Critics have commented that the Kahn building is a work that reflects existential considerations, such as a confrontation with mortality and a need for authenticity. Kahn was pleased that the proportions and exposed materials of the Gallery made people feel uncomfortable—he did not want to hide the concrete and steel that make up the building or to give the building an appearance of weightlessness and delicacy. Forcing people to confront the realities of the materials used and appreciate the geometry of the building was part of his idea of authenticity.

At its conception, the Kahn building was meant to be more of a multiuse space than it is now—it had classrooms, a printmaking studio, offices, and gallery space. Kahn wanted to create an interaction between architecture students, artists, and other members of the Yale community. Its relationship with the larger New Haven community is less clear. On one hand, the entrance of the building on Chapel Street, one of the busiest commercial streets in New Haven, makes it appear that the museum is reaching out to pedestrians and inviting them to come in. The wall of windows along York Street serves a similar purpose, piqueing the public's curiosity about what is housed inside. Yet, the wall that faces Chapel is an imposing concrete one, and the sculpture garden behind the museum suggests that the museum, though embraced by the Yale campus, is not easily accessible to outsiders. Although stark and imposing from the outside, Kahn envisioned the building as a type of creative commune, a place where students could come to exchange ideas and strive for social change and excellence in the arts. These high standards for life inside the building also implied that those who were not familiar with the language of art and architecture would not be comfortable in the space.

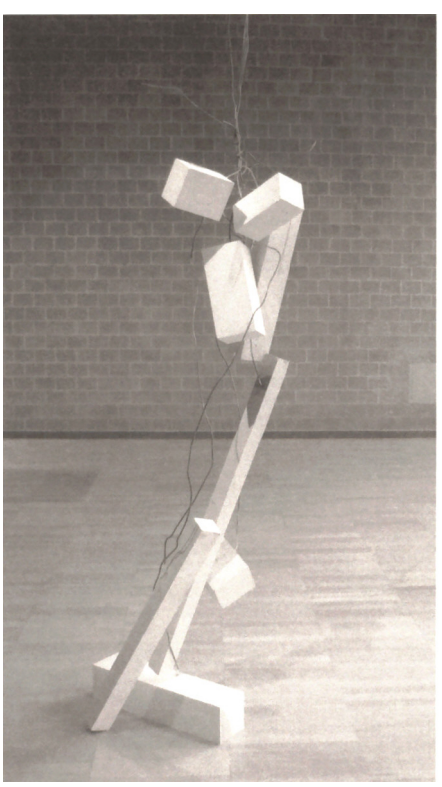
This is one of the harshest realities of utopia—the high standards we may set for ourselves in a small community cannot be replicated on a larger scale. Kahn's design for the Gallery embodies this paradox. It is an inward-looking, almost solipsistic work that closes off the opportunities for dialogue that it purports to be opening. The fate of housing projects across the country is another example of how a utopian impulse can go very wrong. Clustering low-income housing in one area may have been the result of the desire to build a strong community, much as Kahn wanted to do, but in fact it created isolation based on income and race. Similarly, the Kahn building may be equally isolated and accessible only to certain groups.

The deeper history of class, race, and politics that lies beneath the modernism of the Kahn building is part of a relationship that is replicated within the sculptures that were chosen for the present exhibition. When we first began the process of looking at the permanent collection in order to find pieces that "respond" to Kahn's architecture, we, the curatorial team, were drawn to the minimalist pieces. They embodied a commitment to the purity of materials and an attention to geometric form that was complementary to Kahn's architectural plans. Sol Lewitt's 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 Cross and Tower (1984) and Tony Smith's Smoke (1967, cast 1977), for instance, fit with the modernist vision embodied by Kahn's design. Their stark beauty operates in a visual register that appears to transcend race, gender, and class, and for that matter, any marker of humanity.

Untitled (2002) [fig. 3.1] by Joel Shapiro, suspended in midair, is also suspended between the triumph and collapse of minimalism. Its industrial materials and rectangular forms evoke a cold geometry, but one that cannot hold together, and so the piece can only exist in its deconstructed form. Shapiro's Untitled was made in response to the events of 9/11, and it is explicitly grounded in a place and a specific time, in contrast to the ahistorical transcendence of high modernist architecture. The human scale of the piece, along with its hanging presentation, imbue it with the emotionality of death and brokenness, as if it were the reconstructed shards of a modernist sculpture. The pure geometry and abstraction of modernism has been tarnished, but its detritus is still part of a relevant aesthetic vocabulary.

Although the curatorial team felt that the Gallery's modernist and abstract works fit within the framework of the Kahn building, we also believed that there was something missing, a feeling of emptiness, a sense that the potential of sculpture to evoke a range of emotions that we saw as connected with this project (joy, sadness, disappointment, imminent mortality, and the smallness of the individual in the course of history) were not being conveyed by these pieces. Like the abstract potential of a housing project, we relished in the austere beauty of these pieces but wanted to see how the representation of lived experiences would allow us to see them, and the building, in a new way.

We let these gaps guide our choices—works by David Nash, Annette Lemieux, and Duane Hanson entered into our discussions as sculptures that do not deflect attention away from the difficult experiences of human existence. Nash and Lemieux stay within the realm of nonfigurative art and are thereby thematically connected to the geometric pieces described above, but they convey emotions that more formal minimalism cannot. Nash's Crack and Warp Stack (1988) [fig. 3.2] is made of wood that has almost been sliced through, and the design highlights the fact that the piece warps over time. The alterations in the shape of the wood force us to consider change and disintegration as a natural process. The bright red sponges of Lemieux's Clean Up (1992) [fig. 3.3] feel like they are of the body, their shape and color tie them to flesh, blood, and reproduction. These pieces do not need to represent the human form in a direct way in order to show human presence and mortality. The redness of the sponges and the repetition of the globular form make



[fig. 3.1] Joel Shapiro, Untitled

[fig. 3.2] David Nash, Crack and Warp Stack

[fig. 3.3] Annette Lemieux, Clean Up

[fig. 3.4] Duane Hanson, Man in Chair with Beer

Clean Up seem almost like a mutant strain of a virus, latent but aggressive. The human emotions it evokes are not those of love, intimacy, or community, but illness, medicine, and the struggles of being stuck in a human body without an escape. The wood of Crack and Warp Stack has the imprint of a human presence in its carefully constructed shape and incisions into the wood, but there can be no human control over nature and time. Similarly, the idealism of modernism has warped over time, its reliance on the abstract convergence of form and function aging with and without human intervention. Disease and disintegration are not something that have been imposed on the modernist vision; they have emerged from within.

Hanson's Man in Chair with Beer (1973) [fig. 3.4] is perhaps the clearest antithesis in the exhibition to the utopian modernism of Kahn's design. Instead of fervently searching for some abstract form of expression in order to convey authenticity and idealism, the man in Hanson's sculpture has given up. There is no point in trying to find a greater system of symbols and meaning because it cannot ever be relevant to his own life. The numbness of alcohol and the invisible TV that we place in front of him are the closest approximations of an authentic experience. When we look at Hanson's piece, we see ourselves, even if we do not think we have given up in the way the Man in Chair with Beer has, and if we look long enough, we become grateful that all the sculptures in this show do not reflect the same disappointment and sad ordinariness. We become grateful for

the pieces that gesture toward the idea of balance, wholeness, and shaky progress, in its figurative and abstract forms.

Our process of choosing the pieces for this exhibition went from minimalist sculpture to abstract pieces with more emotive reflection to works that directly evoked the body, in all of its imperfections. And then we found our way back to minimalism. This trajectory shows that no one piece, like no one ideology, can speak to all of the contradictory needs of art or of a utopian vision. Just when we felt one theme or style was the most appropriate response to the building, another one emerged that filled a need of emotion or idealism, or a new way to think about materials. Art, like the hopes for the utopia of a flourishing city, has the impossible task of being both ambitious and acutely aware of its own limitations. Each piece in the show adds something to Kahn's vision, a human form to his geometric abstraction, or whimsy and extravagance to his functional proportions. Kahn's ambition to create a monument that would inspire expansive and creative thought may not have accounted for the inevitable costs of utopia, but it has provided a foundation on which to posture equally ambitious alternatives.

In the half-century since the creation of the Kahn building, New Haven as a city has seen both a decline and a mild resurgence. Visitors still note the stark contrast between the Yale campus and the rest of the city, lines clearly drawn by race and class. The wealth and resources of the University are not seamlessly integrated into the rest of the city but, with the renovation of the Kahn building, there is an opportunity to integrate Yale with New Haven in a renewed way. We can take what was most promising about Kahn's vision—a dramatic space that challenges us to think in universal terms about the possibilities of utopia and societal progress—but we must acknowledge that this vision may be different than what its creator and renovators, all of us, imagined. When talking about his ideal vision for a school, Kahn said, "The gallery is really the classroom of the students, where the boy who didn't quite get what the teacher said could talk to another boy, a boy who seems to have a different kind of ear and they both could understand."[3] The understanding that can only come from listening to a "different kind of ear" was lost in the current of modernism and in Kahn's desire to create a monument that reflected his own existential questions. With the renovation of the building we have the great benefit of hindsight: we have seen the limitations of both urbanism and modernism and cannot pretend that we do not see the tense divide between the University and the city.

This is not to deny the trade-offs that will always be a part of a utopian vision—the community that can grow out of the Kahn building will not be the small artistic commune that Kahn envisioned, but a larger community with a multiplicity of experiences that go beyond those of academic art, architecture, and the elite museum world. This may mean using the space to hold gatherings that are not only connected to art, but also for other events, like performances, lectures, and community forums—events that will attract people who do not normally come to the space. Acknowledging the relationship between the Gallery and the city also means letting the people and concerns of New Haven be reflected in the type of art that is acquired and promoted. The ideals found in the work of Kahn—community, individual expression, and authenticity—should be the guiding themes of the art and events in the space, but these works should not be tied to one aesthetic sensibility. The Yale University Art Gallery can and should be known as a university gallery committed to socially relevant and thought-provoking exhibitions, ones which do not deny the failures and mistakes of the past but harness the creative potential of the present.

3
Louis Kahn and Dung Ngo, Louis I. Kahn: Conversations with Students, Architecture at Rice, 2d ed. (Houston, Rice University School of Architecture, 1998), 25.

A Shared Language of Making: Louis Kahn and Process Art

Sydney Skelton

More than just an architect, Louis Kahn was an artist set on fully developing his design ideals into a physical presence. No element of his buildings was too small to escape his attention. Throughout the process of assembling this sculpture exhibition, the curatorial team always considered the Kahn building at the Yale University Art Gallery, the architect's first masterpiece, to be one of the artworks in the show. One way we responded to the architecture was to choose sculptures that spoke the same language. Process art, and its legacy in contemporary sculpture, was a natural fit with Kahn. Four pieces in particular, by Lynda Benglis, David Nash, Alan Saret, and Rachel Whiteread, embody the primary motive of the movement: to highlight the act of making and the role of the artist's hand—values shared by Kahn's architectural vision.

Until he was fifty years old, Kahn built no major buildings and was known primarily as an academic, an "architect-philosopher." With his first major commission in 1951, he was finally able to build that about which he had theorized for decades. He rejected the International Style practiced by contemporaries like Philip Johnson and instead chose to create a building through which he could completely rethink the relationship between material and form. While the International Style is characterized by seemingly light and airy buildings that deny and defy the heavy materials and equipment used to build and support them, the Kahn building frankly acknowledges and celebrates the process of making the building and showcases its structural components. Kahn honored his building materials by allowing their unfinished surfaces to act as the main decorative elements of the building.

In the late 1960s, a group of radical young artists took a similar approach to sculpture to that which Kahn took to architecture when they reacted against the dominant art movement, Minimalism. These Process artists, including Benglis, Robert Morris, Eva Hesse, Saret, Richard Serra, and Richard Tuttle, rejected the flawlessly finished, dehumanized surfaces of Minimalism in favor of works that revealed the process of making by letting the inherent nature of the material dictate the sculptural form. This break, which so closely paralleled Kahn's reaction to the slick illusionism of the International Style, was articulated in "Anti-Form," an article by Morris published in Artforum in 1968.[1] Morris made his personal transition from Minimalism to Process art by hanging felt from a wall and letting the weight of the material and gravity shape the sculptures.

Morris's article highlighted the influence of Jackson Pollock, who, he wrote, "was able to recover process and hold on to it as part of the end form of the work." This, he noted, "involved a profound rethinking of both material and tools in making."[2] Pollock began making his famous drip paintings at the same time that Kahn was developing his architectural theories. Though Kahn never explicitly cited Pollock as an influence, he effectively brought Pollock's breakthrough in painting to architecture, a full fifteen years before it was realized in sculpture by the artists of the Process art movement.

Both Benglis and Saret, two pioneers of Process art, have acknowledged the connection between their sculptures and Pollock's drip paintings. Throughout her career, Benglis has exploited gesture in her works. In media ranging from latex pours to wax paintings, she has used her body to draw in space, conjuring up an obvious comparison to Pollock's dramatic, dancelike arm gestures as he flung paint onto canvas on the floor. For Hitch (1985) [fig. 4.1], she drew a shape in a sandbox and poured molten glass into the cavity. She and her assistants then manipulated the form into a knot in an erotic, ritual-like dance choreographed by Benglis. These gestures were frozen as the glass cooled, and the twisting of the form after it was cast is visible in the finished piece.

Saret's wire bundles appear to be three-dimensional realizations of the intertwined lines of Pollock's paintings. Untitled (Silver Dispersion) (1968–69) [fig. 4.2] exemplifies how he drew in space by building up a mass of twisted wire. Like the paint in Pollock's work, Saret's wire is made to do that which it would tend to do naturally: "it bends, coils, snarls, twists, and wriggles."[3]

1 Robert Morris, "Anti-Form," Artforum 6, no. 8 (April 1968): 33–35.

2 Morris, "Anti-Form," 34.

3 Ken Johnson, "Three Radicals, Two Generations: Revisiting Sculpture from the '60s," New York Times (March 12, 2004): E2.

[fig. 4.1] Lynda Benglis, Hitch

[fig. 4.2] Alan Saret, Untitled (Silver Dispersion)

"Anti-Form" announced the arrival of new materials, like Saret's wire, and the ongoing investigations into their properties. Rather than force form onto material, Process artists let the material dictate form, just as Kahn attempted to do in his architecture. Kahn was famous for allowing the building to be "what the building wanted to be."[4] He never used materials against their will but rather honored their natural tendencies. In a 1971 lecture at the University of Pennsylvania, he addressed this issue:

> When you want to give something presence, you have to consult nature . . . If you think of brick, for instance, you say to brick, "What do you want, brick?" And brick says to you, "I like an arch." And if you say to brick, "Look, arches are expensive, and I could use a concrete lintel over you. What do you think of that, brick?" And brick says to you, "I like an arch." And it's important, you see, that you honor the material that you use.[5]

David Nash may have imagined a similar conversation with wood. His sculptures rely on the nature of wood and its propensity to change over time. His Crack and Warp series, including the 1988 ash column in this exhibition, Crack and Warp Stack [fig. 4.3], embraces the inevitable unpredictability of the material. To make the piece, he partly cut into a tree trunk horizontally on all four sides with a chain saw, leaving an invisible solid core for support, and let nature take its course. Exposure of the cuts in the untreated wood to the warm, dry air of its indoor environment induced a process of warping, curving, and cracking. Nash discovered that the type of wood used and the specific environment in which it was placed produced varying results; his Birch Crack and Warp Column (1989), for example, warped a great deal more than the ash column. Though often categorized as an Earth artist, Nash's interest in form derived from material illustrates the influence of Process art.

The focus on material in the 1960s led to the popularization of a raw and unpolished aesthetic. Aside from the wood and terrazzo floors, the surfaces of all of the materials in the Kahn building are unfinished. Kahn used cast concrete extensively. This material is the least refined in the building and the most revealing of the process of its fabrication. As Kahn said, "We didn't smooth off the impression left on the concrete by the mold we poured the concrete into. Why bother to deny how it was made? We're proud of it."[6] Throughout the building, visitors can see the impression of wood grain on the ceiling beams, the bubbled surface of the tetrahedral ceiling, and the holes and joints on the stairwell drum. The texture of Benglis's sand-cast glass piece Hitch is equally revealing

4 Patricia Cummings Lord, The Art Museums of Louis I. Kahn (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 1989), 76.

5 My Architect, DVD, directed by Nathaniel Kahn (New York: New Yorker Films, 2003).

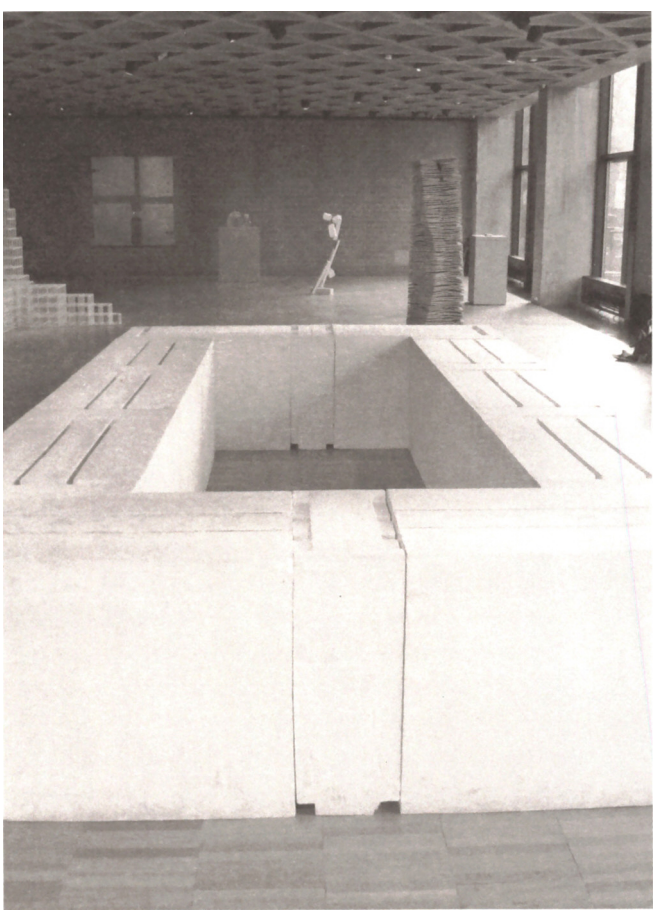
6 Susan Braudy, "The Architectural Metaphysic of Louis Kahn," New York Times (November 15, 1970): SM 86.

of the process of casting, as the area where the glass touched sand is rough and colored, and that where it cooled against the air is clear and liquid-smooth. To the experienced practitioner, this piece appears to exemplify "Sand Casting 101," but it is precisely that simplicity and rawness that connects Benglis so well to the Kahn building.

The surface of Rachel Whiteread's cast-plaster piece Untitled (Ten Tables) (1996) [fig. 4.4] is similar to the texture of the tetrahedral ceiling. Of all the aforementioned pieces, this cast of the space beneath ten conference tables most effectively calls attention to the human element of process-based art. Process art is a celebration of the human contribution to creation, an ode to the ordinariness of art making. Whiteread makes tangible the most basic element of any form: the surrounding space that defines it. Similarly, Kahn never hid or ignored the functioning elements of his building: even the duct and electrical work is on view through the open tetrahedrons in the ceiling.

Process art and Kahn's building march in step with each other because they both evoke the intuitive complexities of the human experience. By focusing on the ordinariness and humanity of art making, these artists—Benglis, Nash, Saret, Whiteread, and Kahn—reintroduced themselves into the finished product. Each artwork, including the Kahn building, relates to the viewer because it is raw and exposed, communicating a range of emotions based on the individuality of human expression. None of these pieces could be exactly replicated because they rely on the natural tendencies of the materials of their making. Renovating Kahn, therefore, has meant preserving as much of the architect's hand as possible.

[fig. 4.3] David Nash, Crack and Warp Stack



[fig. 4.4] Rachel Whiteread, Untitled (Ten Tables)

Casting a Void

Harriet Salmon

When you cast something, you pour a liquid into a mold in order to shape an object. Physically, you are creating form from the negative space within the mold, defining a volume with a fluid. The mental process of creating art has a similar evolution. The artist is making an object from a desire, a negative space within them. Louis Kahn talked about these spaces within the creative process using the metaphors of silence and light: "I sense Light as the giver of all presences, and material as spent light."[1] Others made similar comments on Kahn's ideas: "Silence is a void, not a place but a desire . . . of every person to create, which for Kahn was the same thing as being alive . . ."[2]

The relationship between the artist's desire and the physical artwork is much like the relationship between a mold and a casting; with both, there is a notion of loss. The physical casting is never the same as the original object. It's a reproduction indented with the residue of the mold, the surface of a space that no longer exists. As with creating a casting, creating sculpture is the process of representing the ephemeral in concrete form. Concrete doesn't always mean bulk and mass but rather physical proof that is used to dispel doubt. Sculpture becomes the evidence that we can see and touch that proves this space—and this desire—once existed. It is again, however, never quite the same as the original. Sculpture represents not only the impression of desire within the artist, but also the sadness and loss that are an intrinsic part of struggling to physically express the human condition. Kahn struggled with this gap between desire and reality, articulating it by saying:

> I suddenly realized that everything that lives cannot live again. And any action which has happened cannot be re-enacted. Forms simply are still. There was a first action of movement: somehow it disappears. But that which man has done, somehow, doesn't live.[3]

Kahn considered his design at the Yale University Art Gallery to be a combination of the monumental and the human. His attention to scale, from the palm-sized cinder blocks to the expanse of the ceiling, were all carefully considered and made to mirror the body's proportions. Yet, like the monuments of Greece and Egypt, which inspired him throughout his early career, Kahn wanted the totality of the building and the iconography within it to evoke spiritual contemplation. To him, the building functioned as both a machine and a body. He wanted it to be a symbol—both utopian and intimate—as well as a malleable tool to be used by its occupants. These desires did not necessarily stand the test of time. Over the years, staff found the workspace and galleries awkward. Because it was far from the white cube that we now consider the norm for exhibition spaces, people were compelled to add walls, and Kahn's original floor plan was lost.

Because the building didn't function over time as Kahn had hoped, the need to renovate the building back to its original state could point to a failure of his design. Rather than view this evolution as a failure, our exhibition instead treats the renovation as a chance to explore an artist's desires and struggle to physically express ideas. The distance between Kahn's original vision and the building we now experience is the same as the distance between the artist's desire and the sculptures that now stand before us—each object containing the residue of its own ambitions. Kahn articulates this relationship between desire and creating a physical object in his notebooks:

> Silence to Light. Light to Silence. The threshold of their crossing is the Singularity, is Inspiration (where the desire to express meets the possible), is the Sanctuary of Art, is the Treasury of the Shadows. (Material casts shadows, shadows belongs [sic] to light.)[4]

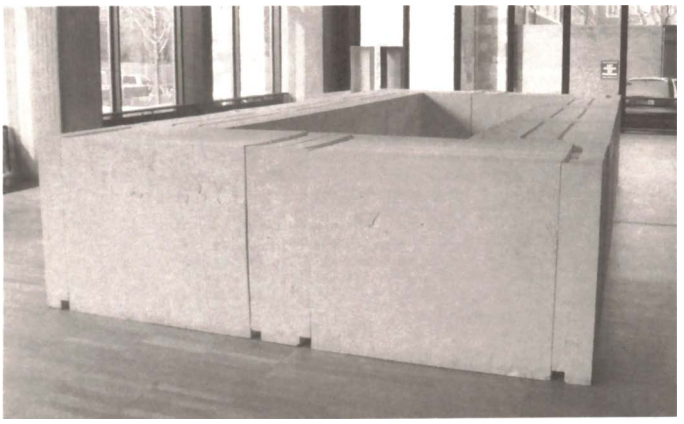
Kahn's Yale University Art Gallery illustrates many of the architect's philosophies. Within the building's construction, Kahn used casting processes in the fabrication of the columns and tetrahedral ceiling. Both were cast using a system of plywood or metal molds

1
Louis Kahn, "Silence and Light," lecture at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, December 3, 1968, in Louis Kahn: Essential Texts, ed. Robert Twombly (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 229.

2
Twombly in ibid., 228.

3
Louis Kahn, lecture to Boston Society of Architects, 1966, in ibid., 199.

4
Louis Kahn, Notebooks and Drawings, ed. Richard Saul Wurman and Eugene Feldman (Philadelphia: Falcon Press, 1962), n.p.



[fig. 5.1] Rachel Whiteread, Untitled (Ten Tables)

and reinforced concrete. Kahn left the imperfections, scaring, and bubbles produced by this process visible on the surfaces and walls. Like Kahn's building, many of the works in the present exhibition show the implications of both physical and mental casting. When placing these cast objects into a gallery designed by an architect who was so intrigued with the monumental, the visceral, and the physicality of loss, we become acutely aware of the narratives implied by their making. The cast works are the physical leftovers of the original desire, objects cast from a moment and a story, the remnants of which are now the only remaining representation. The object fails to document the true essence of its inspiration. The artist, the desire, and the object are caught in a triangular conversation while striving to make meaning. The struggle between failure, meaning, and physicality is explored in our juxtaposition of the works within the building. This exhibition explores our dialogue about the struggle and universal distance between an idea and an object.

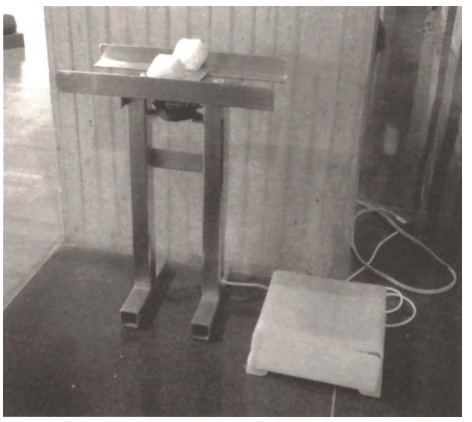
Rachel Whiteread's Untitled (Ten Tables) (1996) [fig. 5.1] is a plaster casting of the negative space beneath a group of conference tables. The bulk of this object gives it the weight of a monument or mausoleum, although the space beneath tables usually reflects a small and intimate place, an area associated with hiding or emotional vulnerability. The atmosphere here is entombed, frozen at a moment in time only to age as an object in space. Whiteread harnesses this formal language of both the tomb and the monument in a similar way to Kahn. The proportions of the object also relate to the viewer's body in space. Unlike Kahn, however, Whiteread is uninterested in a system of symbols; she is more engaged with the formal space from which the objects were taken than any abstract meaning.

Richard Shaw's Small Pile of Envelopes with Penciled Address (1980) [fig. 5.2] is a porcelain sculpture slipcast by sloshing liquid clay around in a plaster mold, then drying it into a skin and removing it. The fragility of the piece can be observed in both the delicacy of its construction and the narrative it inspires. Shaw's sculptural trompe l'oeil draws special attention to a mundane object by painstakingly recreating it in porcelain. The letters document a friendship or lover lost and the sentiment of collecting the correspondence. The imagination envisions them hidden away in a bureau drawer, encapsulated in the same way as Kahn's notion of silence—as a void or a desire. There, the letters are the physical remnants of a desire, a narrative, and a theatrical moment. Their inability to fulfill its complicated and nuanced reality gives them the same sadness and loss that Kahn describes in his work as being "simply... still."

Unit Bolus (1991) [fig. 5.3] by Mathew Barney consists of a dumbbell cast out of Vaseline and preserved on refrigerated metal scaffolding. The mold that Barney fills in Unit Bolus is one conceptualized from the human body. But rather than the void of memory and sentiment Shaw describes in Small Pile of Envelopes with Penciled Address, Barney chooses to fulfill the desire for self-containment.

> Unit Bolus ... like much of [Barney's] early work(s), fuses biomedical terminology with the trappings of the locker room. In physiological terms a bolus is a wad

[fig. 5.2] Richard Shaw, Small Pile of Envelopes with Penciled Address



[fig. 5.3] Matthew Barney, Unit Bolus

> of indigested or digested food. Here it serves as the title for a cast petroleum jelly dumbbell . . . The artist described this inherently malleable, double headed form as a "mouthpiece that could also be inserted anally," an action that would essentially "close the circle" and seal off the body in a hermetic, perfectly self-contained state.[5]

5
Nancy Spector, Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002), 6.

Barney accompanied his series of films The Cremaster Cycle with an extensive publication. In it he details the mythologies and personal drives behind his work. Calling this particular drive the hubris pill, Barney strives for a masturbatory medical condition that will allow him athletic perfection. This, of course, is not only unattainable but also dangerous and alienating. Barney seems aware of the futility of his aggressive attempts to reproduce the body as the idealized physical expression of the human condition. The dumbbell, with its visceral messiness, must still rely on a complicated armature to survive. It is a pampered trophy that also appears vulnerable compared to the self-confident pageantry of his film narratives. Casting an object out of Vaseline is an absurd task due to the inability of the material to hold a rigid form and its sticky consistency. Unit Bolus embraces the absurdity, just as Barney embraces the absurdity of sealing himself in a contained loop. Both resign themselves to the need for complicated support systems (be it refrigeration units or encrypted personal mythologies) in order to make physical the futile. They revel in the distance between the desire and the object, a celebration that borders on a fetish.

It is the distance between the mind's desire and the physical world, between the inspiration and material, form and design, mold and cast that I invite the viewer to contemplate within this exhibition. Although the process of making inherently contains undercurrents of loss, sadness, and sometimes a need for renovation, the artist's and architect's attempts should not be considered failures. Rather than comply with common styles of expression, these artists choose to keep struggling with ways to negotiate the space between their thoughts and physicality. It takes an admirable stubbornness to continue trying while knowing the process itself will always have a residue of inadequacy. Because of this, the struggle to make the ephemeral into concrete is a fraught, but ultimately rewarding challenge. It is this struggle, perhaps, and the determination to keep creating, that is the most honest physical expression of the human condition.

Robert Twombly wrote the following regarding Kahn's personal struggles with the artistic process:

> Not reaching nirvana drove him onward, in fact, because he understood that the pleasure and meaning of life was in the search. Kahn ended one of his last speeches, in 1973 at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, by noting that when all was said and done the architect's job was to make an "offering of man to [the] next man." That, to him, was "joy." "If you don't feel joy in what you're doing," he told the assembled students, "then you're not really operating." You will probably experience great frustration as architects, "but really," he concluded, surely referring to himself, "joy will prevail.[6]

6
Twombly, ed., Louis Kahn: Essential Texts, 19.

Maintaining Memory: Art, Artist, Architect

Shannon N. Foshe

Memory is a valuable possession for an artist—be it a memory experienced, a memory invented, a memory read about, or a memory felt in the moment of creation. The artist translates the reflection of that memory into visual form and presents that to the public as the object. The museum is a house that gathers together a group of individual memories, which are then arranged by a person (or people) designated to tell a story. And the narrative is flexible. Memory has the potential to speak to the museum visitor, to tell the stories of the artists, their fellow countrymen, their generation, as well as our stories, our fellow countrymen, and our generation. Art and architecture are like time capsules that hold ideas, emotions, moments, and childhoods. The Kahn building at the Yale University Art Gallery has become a storyteller of the community in which it stands: Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, America. We look today to recover the memory of the building as it originally came from the architect—such is the basis of this renovation. The building houses memory, preserves memory, creates memory, and is memory.

Ideologically, the museum preserves the history and memory of the art—affording conservation, historical scholarship, preservation, and historical repute—but the Kahn building has also become a memorial piece itself. We speak of the building as a work of art created by a great artist, one of the greatest architects of the twentieth century. It is an object just like the objects it keeps within. The building protects the works, just as we must protect the building. Recognizing the ideas that have flowed through these walls over the last fifty years, we come face to face with the histories this building encompasses.

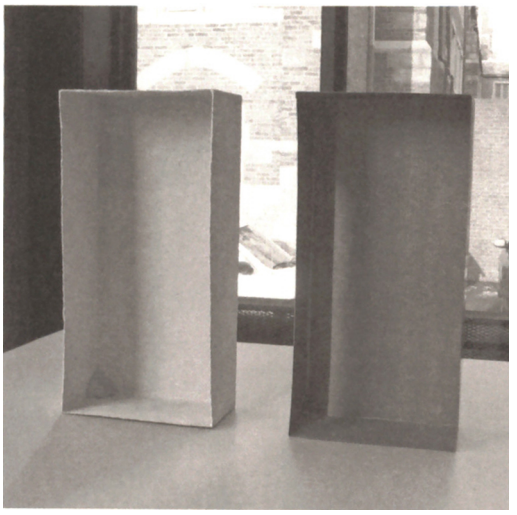
The works in this exhibition, along with the building that houses them, were all created during the fifty years following the Second World War. Some of the artists included in the show lived through the war, perhaps even fought in it, while others were born either immediately following the war, or several years later. Regardless, the world they all lived in was a world in reaction to the collective memories of that period.

The German artist Joseph Beuys is widely known for his culturally centered work, which focuses on healing the wounds of his national community. Beuys's multiples, like Sulfur-Covered Zinc Box (Plugged Corner) (1970) [fig. 6.1], provide an ideal example of Beuys's belief that everything is in a constant state of change. Here, he presents a zinc box that he has treated chemically in order to render the color a pastel yellow. Each piece is unique among its 199 siblings (multiples) depending on the chemical reaction to the zinc, alternative decisions made by the artist, care by the individual owner, change over time, and other variables. In this example, the sulfur-covered box is accompanied by a plain box—the "control" in the project. Beuys is creating an example of memory in the boxes before us, as an entire history unfolds before our eyes, seeing the beginning in the plain box, and the end still moving forward in the sulfur-covered box.

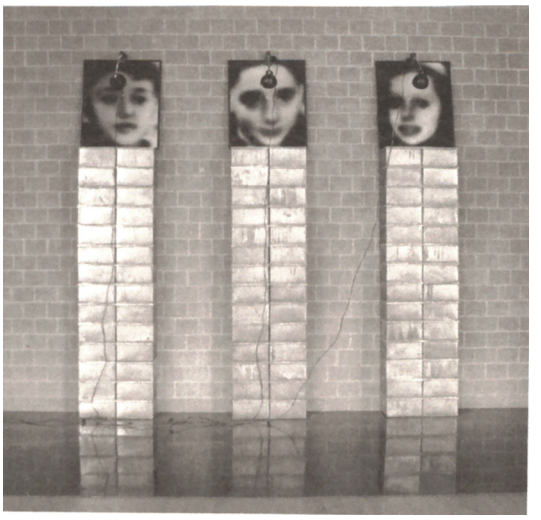
Beuys uses these multiples as physical vehicles that build a collective memory through the ongoing development of ideas. He has described his work as "a sort of prop for the memory . . . in case something different happens in the future."[1] Beuys believes that when the public acquires one of his multiples, fully aware that their piece is one of many, they become interested in how that piece develops. And in this way, he spurs a process for that public as they follow along the path of that piece, of this artist, of this story. He is thus able, through this ongoing and developing dialogue with his public, to create a community based on change, and the acknowledgment of change stems from the memory of originality that he provides. As a "prop for the memory," projects such as these maintain Beuys's community's attention on the conversation between his past and future work, just as the artist focuses his artistic goals on the past and future of his people. He encourages his community to look forward with anticipation, as if saying that while the past is important, there are so many more exciting things to come.

While still trying to heal the wounds of war in his own way, French artist Christian Boltanski attends to a wider cultural memory. Born in 1945, Boltanski had no personal experience with the war, only its aftermath, and his nonvisceral memory stemmed from

1 Joseph Beuys, in Joseph Beuys, Multiples: Catalogue Raisonné, Multiples and Prints, 1965–80, ed. Jörg Schellmann and Bernd Klüser, trans. Caroline Tisdall (New York: New York University Press, 1980), n.p.



[fig. 6.1] Joseph Beuys, Sulfur-Covered Zinc Box (Plugged Corner)

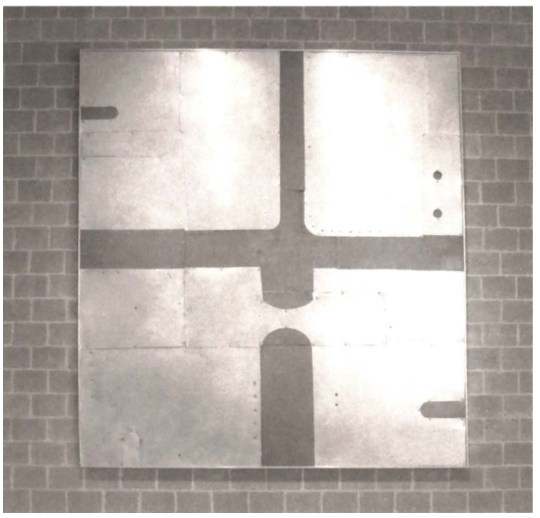


[fig. 6.2] Christian Boltanski, La fête de Pourim

the postwar environment in which he grew up. In his work, Boltanski provides close-up images of faces, blurred and monochromatic, that evoke a sense of death [fig. 6.2]. As viewers in the museum, we stand before these body-like towers supporting the spot-lit photographs and feel as though we are regarding images of people who have died. The truth is, we don't really know. The artist himself may not know what memories his photographs have frozen. These found images could have come from a dumpster in an alley or from a child's birthday party just a year prior to the creation of the piece. Yet that is not how we perceive them. They are intimate, but anonymous. The people presented in these photographs are memorialized for us, set up on a pedestal of tin boxes aged by acids, which rust and deteriorate beneath the vulnerable photographs struggling against the light that shines upon them like an interrogation lamp in a police station. What do we want from these images, from these people? Explanations for the war that devastated the world? For the social change driving that world out of its grief and into the future? For death itself? Boltanski refers to his works, like La fête de Pourim (1988), as "monuments." They are monuments to the ordinary people whose photographs his works mount; monuments to the public that views them, searching through the blurry images to find small vestiges of themselves within; and monuments to the artist's own childhood and memory. Boltanski states: "The viewer is part of the work. I try to communicate with him by stimulating his memory . . . I want to bring out the viewer's interior and invisible powers." The boxes creating the towers are made of biscuit tins familiar to Boltanski's own generation as they grew up in dark and hunger-driven times. And he prematurely ages the tins, putting those dark memories behind, though never forgetting they existed.

American artists Conrad Marca-Relli and Vito Acconci rely on the social history of the postwar period. Marca-Relli's collages from the 1960s present flat sheets of aluminum held together by rivets [fig. 6.3], evoking the image and memory of the World War II jet aircrafts that the home front men and women built, that flew their soldiers overseas, that protected them at some times and took them barreling to the earth or ocean at others. In his 1970 book Art as Design: Design as Art, Sterling McIlhany wrote, "Every age can be characterized by a single vital form that acts as a symbol for its energy and aspirations . . . The jet aircraft is the most compelling form of our time."[2] Planes were one of the greatest technological achievements of the twentieth century, changing the face of war forever. These pieces by Marca-Relli look like the side panels of planes, stirring up the ghosts of war, and with titles like Boeing 707 (1963), the theme is unmistakable. The 707 was a commercial jet aircraft developed in the early 1950s. Commercial flying changed the connotation of the purpose of planes. Instead of sending loved ones and fellow coun-

2
Sterling McIlhany, Art as Design, Design as Art: A Contemporary Guide (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1970).



[fig. 6.3] Conrad Marca-Relli, Boeing 707

[fig. 6.4] Vito Acconci, Sound/Body/Weapon

trymen overseas to fight, these aircraft brought loved ones in New York home to Iowa for Thanksgiving. Aircraft became a symbol of unity, of fear, of future development, and of social change. Today, it is a reminder of disaster. Marca-Relli's work relies on this historical memory, using a material and an imagery that needs memory to survive, with a title that moves the viewer through history to our present day.

Acconci indulges memory inside the gallery itself. As a performance artist, Acconci engages in a moment of action, which afterward remains in the form of a sedentary object for display. These objects are mementos, left to keep alive not only the memory of his actions, but also to invoke the reasons why he made them. In Sound/Body/Weapon (1984) [fig. 6.4], Acconci presents a gas mask as a piece of apparel, vested with a microphone, earphones, and tapes that could potentially record an audial memory. Here, however, there is no performance; there is only the illusion of an action that never existed. And yet, this reality has existed for countless others in the past—through war, through survival, through fear. Looking like a limbless body, the piece conjures up the image of a victim of war, on display, left only with the stench of poisoned air, the pain of dismemberment, the taste of blood, and the sound of death. Acconci creates a memory especially present in the minds of Americans during times of war. It is the image we dread for every young soldier fighting overseas. With this image, Acconci connects us to the past wars in Europe, the modern wars in southeast Asia, and even the present war in the Middle East.

In many ways, history haunts the future. The past is always present in our lives, either as warning or encouragement. Nonetheless, we still need to be reminded of these memories, and of the importance of memory. These artists have physically manifested memory for their publics. Joseph Beuys institutes memory in order to direct his community's focus to the future, toward the ever-changing world. He shows how the past is important to keep in mind but not to dwell on when the future holds so many new possibilities. Conrad Marca-Relli takes on the task of using existing memory devices to recall the past, then launches the viewer step by step through history to the present day. Christian Boltanski personalizes memory through anonymity. His work is dark, and the light is harsh, but the challenge of the photograph is to persevere. And Vito Acconci uses the imagery most of us have only seen on television to evoke our worst fears—fears that have continued to thrive over the last fifty years and will continue to thrive. The maintenance of all these memories is entrusted to the building that houses them, and which prevents them from ever being forgotten.

Settling In: A Few Thoughts on Renovation

Catherine Sellers

As I sit here now, actively trying to articulate my thoughts in response to the Kahn building, I feel slightly at a loss. How do I, as a new intern at Yale, respond to something I have never seen? How do I "respond" to a building—a space, a time, a history—that I have only experienced during a time of renovation, as it's been projected toward the future?

After months of group meetings, tours of the building, discussions with Gallery staff, and independent research, it seems I am still, to this day, stumped by the term "renovation."

> To renovate: to restore to a former better state (as by cleaning, repairing, or rebuilding). From the Latin term renovare. re- "again" + novare- "make new." To make new again, or re-new.

By renovating, we say we "restore" something to its "former better state," but this seems contradictory. It implies that renovation lies in a precarious position in time, and in a sense, defies time. While under renovation, the Kahn building is not the icon it once was. It is not yet the icon it is being reconceived to be. It is in flux. It straddles a past and a future, while seemingly omitting the present state. That is, in our efforts to realize the building's past—its most "articulate" or "ideal" state—we are also making revisions with its future in mind to provide for the next fifty years, so that it can function as a twenty-first-century museum. And it seems that one step toward this "ideal"—this imagined past and future—effaces the present moment, this period now, as I sit here, and the building is under renovation.

The present moment, then, exists as a void, in a wobbly state of redefinition, in which the building essentially doesn't exist but lies between two distinct bookends. If this is true, renovation is thus the fugitive space where this transformation occurs. Our interpretations and desires become imprinted on the building as it is pulled through this duration of time. The strains of what the building wants to be, what it actually is, and what we need it to become enter into struggle. We want the building as Kahn designed it in 1953 but also know this is not fully possible, because we need it to be modernized. And yet we still try. We add and subtract walls, patch holes, replace tiles, rework existing structures, and reimagine space, all with the intent of reaching this preternatural ideal. This "ideal"—Kahn's original ideal for the building—which was possibly never achieved in the first place.

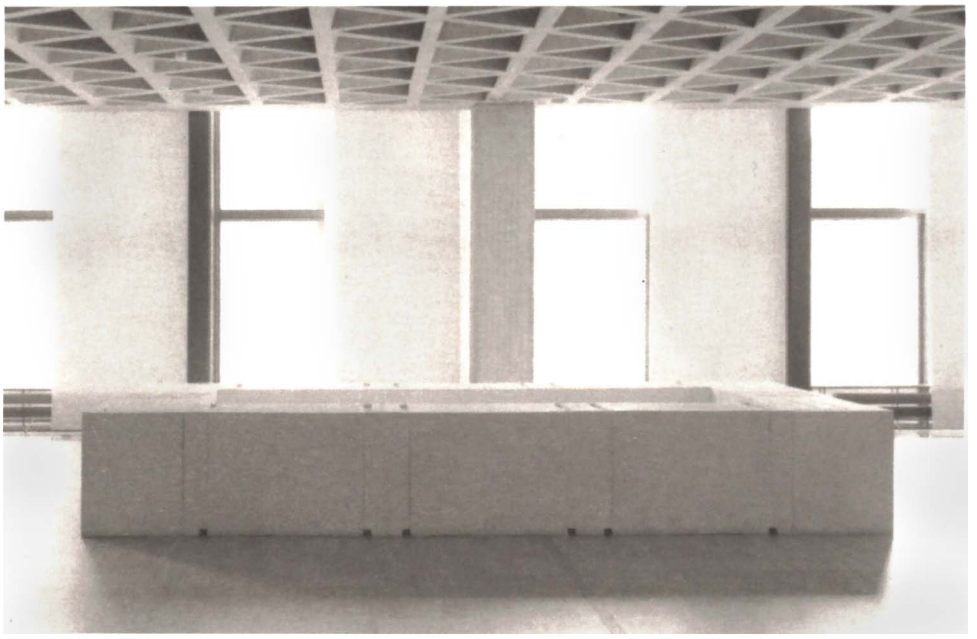
One could see renovation as violent, yet so precise. It's like an operation—a cold, calculated excision of time, space, and history, followed by a patchwork of reconstructions. It's an attempt to achieve perfection, to realize the building as it needs to be, as it should have been long ago. We can bring it back! Resuscitate it and perfect it. We can finally make the building that which it "wanted to become." Or so we believe.

And as experts work toward achieving the building's "ideal," changes are inevitably made. The building is interpreted. The debris that is inauthentic, added, or simply of no value is removed. The past is returned. Or at least the past as we conceive of it is returned—with modern technology, of course.

To yearn for this past and never achieve it is sad. We, as humans, take stock in the past because it is easy, because we think we know it. The future we can imagine; we own it as well. But the present, this dark void of actuality, time as it actually occurs, slips away from us the moment we try to harness it. The present becomes the past the second we recognize it. And this scares us.

If the building exists in this liminal state and is constantly being defined by experts—directors, curators, conservators, historians, architects, builders, etc.—then what does this mean? How or where does the building exist now, as I am called to "respond" to it? The past? The future? This void of a present?

Perhaps these questions draw me to Rachel Whiteread's Untitled (Ten Tables) (1996) [fig. 7.1]. The work embodies what I see in the renovation of the Kahn building. Whiteread's



[fig. 7.1] Rachel Whiteread, Untitled (Ten Tables)

sculpture is a massive plaster reminder of time and of space, of life as it seemingly existed but doesn't any longer. By casting the spaces under ten office tables, Whiteread records the tables' presence through the negative space that surrounds them, the void that finally defines them. As the plaster hardened and fossils formed, a new object emerged, a substitute for the tables.

Installed in the Kahn building, the sculpture stands as a testament to the imperfect transfer from one state to the next, and it is characterized by physical loss. Deep holes perforate the plaster where the legs of the tables once stood, signs of their fading existence. These recesses, now decorative and geometric, meander and cast shadows, uniformly signaling design. Rust and dirt from the tables speckle the surface, staining the otherwise monochromatic color of the plaster. The detritus of past human use—of progress, of time—is recorded at the surface, when really all traces of this past have been overwritten.

Like renovation, Whiteread's work bridges a past and a future. The moment of making the molds destroyed all actuality in the tables. As is often characteristic of Whiteread's work, the original tables were ruined in the process of bringing about this new form. Could the renovation also raze the original, the Kahn building as it was?

Still, even in Whiteread's work, we know that the past is never completely gone. Traces of the past linger, cling to the work, hide within it, and are oftentimes buried inside of it, ultimately locked in place—solidified and trapped in the materiality of its making.

If renovation is the fugitive space where transformation occurs, it can be compared to the moment the plaster is wet and the mold of the building is being made. It is the period before form is defined. It is the moment we impress our interpretations, desires, and ultimately our presence on the building. We may honor the building's past, carefully reconstruct its form, and celebrate its idiosyncrasies, but in the end, it is our ideal that we search for. We insert the building into history—our history—by determining its future. We reawaken a past by renovating it, changing it, and then allowing it to settle with our updated design.

During renovation, the Kahn building shifts between its past and its future. It is pushed and pulled between two states of existence, each with radically different demands. The Kahn building has to settle somewhere, somewhere along this continuum. Bit by bit, moment by moment, parts of the building fall like sediment to the base of the pool, surrendering to the struggle. Slowly it is reified. Another moment of time, of actuality, is documented and is frozen. Renovation is complete.

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