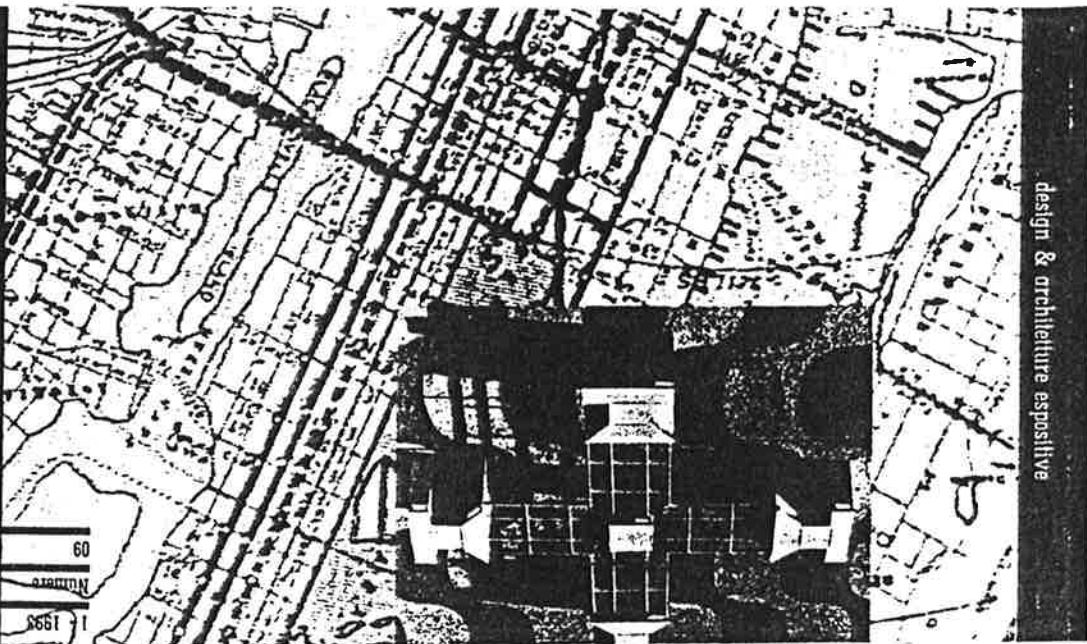


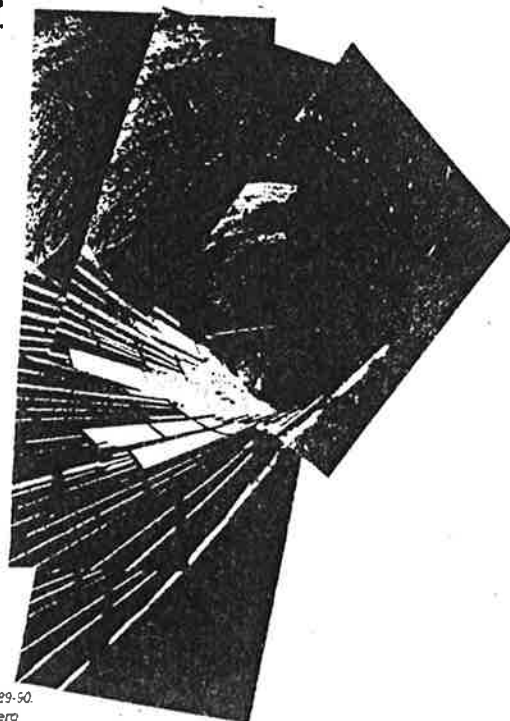
PROSEX



design & architetture espositive

Mary Miss è una delle più note artiste americane che, nei primi anni '60, ha abbandonato il tradizionale modo di lavorare dello scultore all'interno dell'atelier, per uscire nel paesaggio al fine di renderlo oggetto della sua attività artistica. Le sue installazioni, veri e propri allestimenti architettonici, sono accessibili al pubblico e fanno riferimento a forme archetipali dell'esperienza spaziale, agendo sui meccanismi della memoria. Ha ricevuto premi e riconoscimenti tra i più importanti da diverse istituzioni americane. Attualmente vive e lavora a New York.

## Incontri: Mary Miss L'installazione artistica come modello di ricerca



Mary Miss, Untitled No. 2, 1989-90.  
Collage di foto in bianco e nero

**Marpillero:** Ho pensato a te per questo incontro sui valori percettivi dell'installazione artistica e architettonica nell'ambiente, ricordando la presentazione del tuo 'Photo/Drawings' l'anno scorso alla Graduate School of Design di Harvard, nella quale esploravi sia il tuo processo personale sia le condizioni di quella realtà alla quale era indirizzato il tuo lavoro.

Vorrei ritornare attraverso queste fotografie ad alcune nozioni e forme di espressione che hai sviluppato sin dai tuoi primi lavori.

**Miss:** Ricevetti una sovvenzione da Harvard per sviluppare un progetto artistico. Le foto che avevo fatto a scopo di studio erano di piccole dimensioni; fu così che decisi di sviluppare un progetto.

**Marpillero:** Così fino a quel momento le foto erano solo degli strumenti, la tua piccola biblioteca segreta.

C'è una differenza nel trattamento delle immagini quando diventano in se stesse un progetto?

**Miss:** Quando faccio foto di luoghi, metto sempre insieme diverse immagini, ogniqualvolta un edificio o uno spazio sono troppo grandi. A un certo punto, mentre stavo unendo molte fotografie, vidi che potevo ottenere qualcosa di diverso da quello che era meramente rappresentato, una sorta di secondo livello, che era anche un modo di esplorare strutture, spazi e forme.

**Marpillero:** Kate Linker, nella pubblicazione dell'ICA (Institute of Contemporary Art di Londra), cita dal tuo quaderno di appunti, dove scrivi a proposito di "mettere assieme parecchie sequenze brevi... come scenografie".

Per me, questo fa riferimento nel tuo lavoro a un impulso verso il riconoscere la frammentazione come una condizione dell'esperienza, nello stesso tempo in cui metti le cose assieme in quello che poi diventa una struttura del pensiero, una totalità che ha un centro benché non sia convenzionalmente sintetica.

**Miss:** Immagino che sia l'esperienza di muoversi da una cosa all'altra, l'accumulazione delle informazioni, che produce alla fine un significato complesso, ma specifico, che diventa la totalità.

Sandro Marpillero

*Excerpts from*

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MARY MISS

*English version of text published in Prorex #9 January 1993*

SM: I thought of you because of the way you structured the presentation of your "Photodrawings" last year at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, in which you were exploring both your own process and the conditions of reality addressed in your work and, in your awareness of the interaction of these aspects, the possibility of engaging a public domain. I would like to refer back through these photographs to some notions and forms of expression that you have been developing ever since your first works.

MM: I had a grant from the GSD as the Rouse artist.... The photos were in a small scale study form, so I developed this as a project.

SM: So up until this time, the photos were tools, your own secret library so to speak. Is there a difference in treatment of the images when they become a project in themselves?

MM: When I do site photos I'm always putting together images, anytime a building or space is too large. At a certain point, as I was putting multiple photographs together, I saw that I could get something other than what was strictly being represented-- a second stage which was a way of exploring structures and space and forms.

SM: Kate Linker, in the ICA publication, quotes from your notebook where you write about "putting several short sequences together.... like stage-sets." To me, this references a thrust in your work which acknowledges fragmentation as a condition of experience, while pulling things together in what then becomes a structure of thinking.... a totality that has a center although it is not conventionally synthetic....

MM: I guess that it's the experience of moving from one thing to the next, the accumulation of information, that gives you finally a complex but specific sense when you walk away, which becomes the totality.

SM: You have described yourself as "an armchair traveler."

MM: I am interested in how the experience of going and looking is opposed to the thing that you construct for yourself if you're reading about something.... We are in the midst of our times definitely, when impressions are formed.

*SM: I have identified some photographs, which I think work with different strategies of manipulation. I would like to give you briefly my reading, and ask you to comment, as a way of entering a discussion.*

*In this first photograph, the nature of these shadows results in an intensification of the movement of going down. This is somehow a unifying gesture that gets ... spanning this position... their own spiral condition as they are laid out on the page.*

*MM: .... This was a well in Egypt which I was looking into, an extremely beautiful space, with its light and shadows.... By manipulating the photographs in putting them together, I could get a stronger feeling of what it was actually like, with the light in particular giving you that kind of rotation, that spiral. You see, for instance, this point of lines of light is cheating. It's from the well, but I*

*am repeating and moving the same detail, spinning fragments in both directions to open up the photograph.*

*SM: To go on to the next photograph: it is difficult to understand here the limit between the reproduction of a certain reality and the fact that by the accumulation of particular details, a stage set quality gets emphasized by a multiplication of layers, resulting in the creation of a kind of complexity that is more than what is there.*

*MM: This situation is a Chinese garden outside of Taipei in Taiwan, When you are going through this place it is very maze-like, with all these walls. And yet, looking at the photographs, there was no sense of that complexity.... So what I did was to layer in extra cut-outs, adding on this piece with a window from the top, for example, like a flat, a stage set. I liked it finally because it got back the sense of all those passages, and yet with the stillness of this courtyard juxtaposed to them. This photograph doesn't have for me the physical involvement of the other two. It's more something that you are looking at.*

*SM: And in this image, it's almost an intensification of an emotion of compression.... The disposition of the individual images somehow depict the thing as it is but stretch it, probably by the movement of the camera, to create a space as a whole. One cannot imagine being in this very narrow and super loaded space.... It's like a stopped train in a tight gallery and you walk in there-- it's a lot. Here the manipulation of the elements creates a sensation directed at you, at least in my case, rather than indicating the dynamic of the place.*

*MM: This is from an observatory in Mexico, looking up into the interior space of support between curved walls. The walls were going on separated by these wooden posts, eventually closing at a distance in such darkness you couldn't quite see the closure. To emphasize the separating of these forms, I repeated the wooden support elements, extending the edges by a panoramic swing of the camera.*

*SM: All of the photographs operate explicitly at the level of interpretation. They catch you by your guts.*

*MM: Something that has interested me since my earliest work is trying to get a physicality expressed... that is not about looking at the sign but is physically, emotionally and psychologically engaging and compelling. For instance, in the Circles Descending towards the Battery Park City landfill, the piece was so flimsy from the side, but in front of it, it was as if you couldn't resist ... a pull.*

*.... At a certain point I made a couple of films, and I found that you could get a kind of physicality that you couldn't get through a single image. One was based on the medieval "sapping" process (the sappers being the ones who go to the wall of the fortification). In this process a single man would start digging a trench only as deep as he was and he would put the earth into a container made of stakes about 3 feet high.... The person who came after him dug a wider trench and would add more dirt. The people who came after him would be like ants marching, filling the containers completely, and adding more, making a passage that an army could go through. What was happening was that something very fragile was eventually becoming a solid wall.*

*.... I could barely afford to build the pieces, so I did not do any more films. But as I proceeded with the work, the idea of breaking things up, instead of trying to put everything in a single object, in some ways came out of the experience of making films.*

*SM: In order to counter the misunderstanding that would be generated by a piece being read only as an object?*

MM: Yes. I had been trying different strategies to avoid the object, for instance by making it transparent, or very flimsy.... So the films were what got me to start taking the pieces apart, like in "Perimeter Pavilions Decoys."

.... Now, another thing is that I have never done drawings for their own power; the ideas come out of the geographic and social realities of the place. The photodrawings have been a great release because I could investigate things without actually building them, looking for that thing that was so compelling to me, a situation....

SM: Now in what sense does this pursuit of "the experience of interior life, represented in a public realm" (as you wrote in *Perspecta*), encounter a threshold in the possibility of framing experience? Isn't all this web of connection to a place one of the big problems in large scale public art? In other words, where is the threshold between this intensity of experience in a situation and its presentation to a public, its accessibility and yet a lack of control about the key of its interpretation?

MM: One thing I have been happy about in the South Cove at Battery Park City, is that it does provide, at the level of a public domain, an overlaying of a place for the private, interior kind of life-experience-- the psychological, emotional, sexual levels of feeling and thinking. That it's not only meeting functional needs of the society.... There are unstated needs within the culture that aren't being met, and one that I feel most strongly about is letting the public and the private coexist, or play off against one another.... So that in terms of the public domain, you are thinking of the individual that you are working for....

I must say that the greatest thing the photographs hold for me is their directness. A large public project like the one for Riverside Park South in New York that I am working on now, is a nightmare of indirectness. To do something where I can just come in here, shut the door, get out the photographs and the scissors and start ....

SM: But does your interaction with the complex reality of the public world and your description of this photographic work as being a regenerative moment, indicate the possibility of a process which allows you to complete a cycle of reactions? Would you say that this outlines a sort of strategy, a way of opposing certain tendencies of the current culture that seem to be so flattened?

MM: A lot of artists now are taking the language of the culture and manipulating it. I intend my work to state that we are overlooking a certain type or level of experience that can and should be re-introduced.

SM: Or defended, given the aggressivity of media bombardments to which one is exposed as our daily conditions of reality.

MM: Yes, but it's difficult. Having been building things in permanent form since the beginning of the 1980s, I'm a bit discouraged. I've gone into situations where my budget was so small compared to that of the building project that I could barely touch the issues.

SM: But are you talking now about politics, about what shapes consensus?

MM: It is politics, because it ends up being what gets done.... So few of the ideas that one feels strongly about actually get into the final project, as a negotiated result.

Finally, artists can only have a limited impact. We are not politicians. We don't have power. Or rather, the power that we have is very limited. What we can do is set forth examples of attitudes. If the conceptual framework that came out of the Riverside Park South project could affect other waterfront areas in Manhattan: that it is necessary to take a stronger ecological ap-

proach, not just wiping the slate clean of the industrial remains, but using them as a base for building something.... I would be happy if we could just do that. I think that artists have to assume active roles within the culture and the society and be willing to explore and define these other possibilities.

SM: I think that the political implications of the way you frame your own statements, relating them with a strategy of engagement, is the point. It is as much politically as one can do by being an artist.

MM: But that's not necessarily what everybody would say. There are a lot of artists now who are taking political content as the basis of their work. I am coming from a different point of view, but the implications I intend to have are specifically political.

SM: You don't operate as, for instance, Barbara Kruger, at the level of the manipulation of political messages. This is a potent approach, because it assumes the techniques of mass communication.

MM: I don't want to assume those techniques! In all of the cases, especially in the art of the 1980s, where there was this ambiguous position of assuming and criticizing at the same time.... I'm not comfortable with it.

SM: It's like saying: the situation is complex, therefore I foster an aesthetic of complexity.... As in the field of architecture, where drawings and eventually buildings are fragmented and manipulated so as to appear almost anarchistic-- a commentary by assimilation, maintaining an ambiguous and parasitical posture.

MM: I really have a problem with that because it ends up being a completely formal exercise, which is distant from my active concerns.

*Edited by Linda Pollak*