

## "ARCHITECTURAL ART: AFFIRMING THE DESIGN RELATIONSHIP"

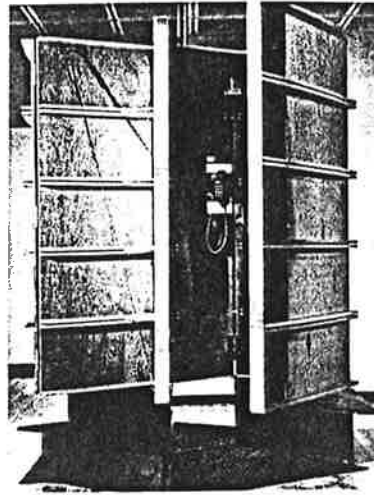
### AMERICAN CRAFT MUSEUM

Despite the claims of its title, this exhibition affirmed nothing but its own naive pomposity, its narrow vision, and its stale premise. The conceptual organization was so vague that it took enormous concentration to see the work—some of which is quite good—amid the curatorial haze. Despite the downpour of information and interpretive materials accompanying this exhibition, all of the effort and activity produced only a drizzle of sense.

One of the explanations provided for staging this exhibition now was that there are finally sufficient examples of architectural art and of collaborations between artists and architects to warrant it. New data creates the opportunity to venture observations, plot directions, and flag problems, if not arrive at conclusions. Unfortunately, this information was handled so arbitrarily that the exhibition was neither a review nor a breakthrough. Architects and their buildings still occupied center ring although this was primarily a display of the work of artists. The high production quality of much of the artist's work enhanced some bland and ordinary buildings, though it seldom challenged the architectural environment conceptually. But the significant questions concerning the idea of architectural art, its relationship to public art and perception, the bureaucratic machinations required to spawn much of this work, and the many forms collaboration can take were never fully formulated.

The exhibition was divided into four parts. The introduction presented a scant and strange selection of historical precedents for architectural art in New York. The second section was devoted to the work of 11 artists who, using a variety of media, make architectural art. In a third area, the focus shifted to four public sites that employed architectural art and artist/architect collaborations extensively. In the final section, four projects by artist/architect teams, specifically commissioned for the exhibition, were displayed. The teams were selected from different cities in the United States, in order to make regional factors a supposedly meaningful variable. This gesture seemed gratuitous, like so many in this exhibition; it was another case of a tentatively presented issue pursued with no intensity.

Among the memorable work, Joyce Kozloff's ceramic tile installations (here represented by photographs, models, and a few sample tiles) show an authority and autonomy that does not defer to the rigidities of the architectural context.



**Tod Williams, Billie Tsien, and Mary Miss, Telephone Booths, 1988, plywood, aluminum, steel, and rubber, 7½ x 6 x 6'. From "Architectural Art: Affirming the Design Relationship."**

Stephen Antonakos' neon projects use a modern, technological medium to challenge the vocabulary and stasis of most architecture while creating moments of exceptional beauty. *Earthquake Shelter*, 1988, a collaboration by architect Fred Fisher, artist Tony Berlant, and fabricator Pamela Burgess, was a witty, rhetorical inquiry into scale, objecthood, domesticity, and regionalism. It featured a full-size bed angled and partially tucked under a huge worktable and chair; all the pieces were made of steel. (These days Californians are almost required to illuminate the effects upon the psyche of living atop a precarious geological foundation.)

Architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, artist Mary Miss, and fabricators Steven Iino and Peter Jevremov created *Telephone Booths*, 1988, a cylindrical container constructed of plywood, aluminum screening, steel, and rubber. Here the sensitive and accomplished detailing of Williams and Tsien meshed well with the material and spatial sensibilities of Miss, creating a seamless but quirky conjunction.

There were also some conspicuous omissions in this narrow and conservative roundup. Where were Vito Acconci, James Turrell, SITE, Mel Ziegler, and Kate Ericson, and others who have produced work that challenges the conventional notion of an architectural art? Ultimately, the exhibition seemed like a tribute to conservatism in the arts: formulaic solutions to the difficulties of collaboration, corporate and civic sponsorship as a new esthetic criteria, and the clubby confederation of certain prominent artists and architects. The exhibition did not affirm architectural art or the design relationship, but it did confirm that categories such as "architectural art" can be somewhat devious: here is one categorization that guides in order to restrict and segregate.

—PCP