

# The Museum of Modern Art

## *Fabrications: The Tectonic Garden* by Terence Riley

At the close of the twentieth century, architecture not only enjoys a preeminence in contemporary culture but, as a subject of social, political, and cultural theory as well as philosophical and historical speculation, it has proven itself to have a near infinite capacity for analysis and interpretation. The purpose of *Fabrications* is to add to this discourse; to inquire as to what architecture may have to say about *itself* and how it might, in its own terms, speak of philosophy, history, culture and other, broader issues.

*Fabrications: The Tectonic Garden* comprises installations by Henry Smith-Miller and Laurie Hawkinson, Alfred Munkenbeck, Monica Ponce de Leon and Nader Tehrani, and Enrique Norten. The architects conceived the installations individually following group discussions and analyses of the site—the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden.

Henry Smith-Miller and Laurie Hawkinson's construction focuses on the steel and glass façade of the East Wing, designed by Philip Johnson, examining the relationship between viewing, structure, perspective and transparency. Monica Ponce de Leon and Nader Tehrani's light-weight, shop-fabricated aluminum canopy comes to rest on the massive brick wall which bounds the northern edge of the Garden, highlighting the differences in their respective constructions. Enrique Norten's excavation, covered with a glass bulkhead, investigates the archaeology of the site and makes it evident as yet another layer in the ongoing development of the Garden. Alfred Munkenbeck and Steven Marshall's structure, made of a thin-gauge roof and walls of ice, will spring from the eastern reflecting pool, providing an image of temporality and transformation.

True to the definition of tectonics, literally the "poetry of construction," the four installations, as a group, not only reveal certain aspects of their materials and construction but also various aspects of the site and its specific context. Like the full-scale fragments in a beaux-arts museum, the installations are seen as having an intrinsic aesthetic dimension as well as a didactic one: each of the pieces also engages broader issues, speaking to individual concerns.



**Contact:**

Sandra Farish Sloan, 415/357-4174

Victoria Sutton, 415/357-4176

Libby Garrison, 415/357-4170

**FABRICATIONS  
A Curator's Statement By Aaron Betsky**

*Fabrications* is an exhibition about making things clear. It posits architecture as a structure that condenses a confusing physical world into a clear, simple frame through which we can understand how that environment works, what it is made up of, and how we fit within it. It does so not in the manner of a science experiment, but by building fragments whose composition, shape and materials are so exaggerated, allusive and articulated that they clarify what is inherent in the act of construction: by making a shelter, a frame or a defined place for ourselves, we create a second, fabricated version of ourselves in the real world.

When the four teams assigned to the San Francisco venue of *Fabrications* first met with me in September 1996, all agreed that the human body should become the focal point for their investigations. The body was chosen because we can recognize ourselves as bodies in architecture. Yet architecture is a construction, not a biological organism that grows out of itself. It is something that we gather together from pieces that exist outside of us, in the world around us. There is thus an essential difference between the sticks and stones of buildings and the flesh and bones of our bodies. Buildings may be our second skins and may take over many of our body tasks, but it is exactly that transferal that transforms what is essentially human into an artifice or manmade object. This is not necessarily a negative process. Through architecture, we extend our bodies out into the world around us. Buildings enlarge our skins with their own facades, replace our lungs with air conditioning, and allow us to inhabit spaces our feet and hands would never reach.

The challenge in *Fabrications* was to make evident rather than bury the articulations of the architectural body in a building. To achieve this, the designers chose to concentrate on four aspects of the body: the somatic or physical body, the body at rest, the body in action, and the body in equipoise. The viewer will be confronted with a quartet of installations upon entering the fifth floor galleries. The entrance itself will be a maze of building materials representing the somatic body. Upon negotiating these layers of lath, plywood, screws and connecting devices, one will enter the main space, where a giant lung-like object will breathe in and out to the rhythm of the museum's air conditioning, representing the body in motion. At the end of the space and in a line with the entrance, a seesaw bridge will bring the visitor's body into equipoise before confronting the fire exit at the end of this formal axis. Along the side of the space and seeping into alcoves, layers of felt will express and support the body at rest. Together, these four pieces will present us with a monumental version of our body that both enlarges us to a grand scale and makes the built institution in which they are placed seem more human.

# # #



***Fabrications: Full Scale***

Curatorial Statement by Mark Robbins

Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio State University

Like the full-scale casts that once played such a prominent role in architectural pedagogy, the full-scale architectural projects in the Wexner Center component of *Fabrications* offer a direct experience of architecture within a gallery space. They share the didactic role of such casts, but the newly built works in *Fabrications* are not reproductions of preexisting buildings, nor are they historical fragments, not even properly fragments at all. Moreover, these contemporary structures reveal and address ideas quite different from those regarding ideal proportions and the canon of architectural forms demonstrated in those monolithic plaster casts.

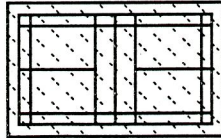
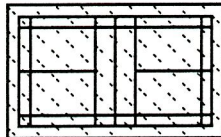
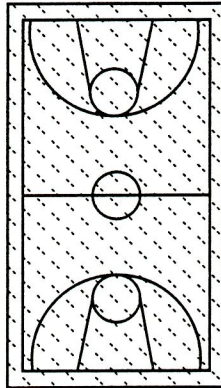
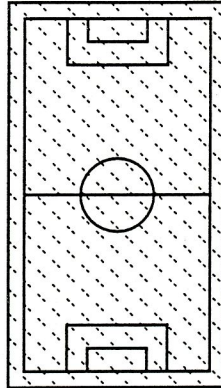
The architects in *Fabrications: Full Scale* encompass a spectrum of architectural production within a modernist lineage. These designers —Mockbee/Coker Architects, Eric Owen Moss, Patkau Architects, and Stanley Saitowitz —stress the particularities of program and site, taken in the broadest sense to include materials, climate, economics, and topography, as generators for their work. They draw from these varied sources to make their work serve beyond programmatic utility.

Within the four-thousand-plus square feet of the gallery at the Wexner Center, each architect or team took a different approach to the gallery and the expressive potential of architectural form. The projects span abstract and figurative strategies and encompass much of the modern material palette, including wood, metal, and glass. Approaches to the gallery also vary. Moss's project is directly site specific, the Patkaus' open to more general applications. Although all four projects were produced with the same budget, the economics of production also varied, with different teams working with student interns, an interested fabricator, or donated materials. In an era with few architectural patrons, one realizes the overwhelming expense of architectural work and how cost is a prime limiting factor for architects whose practice depends on building.

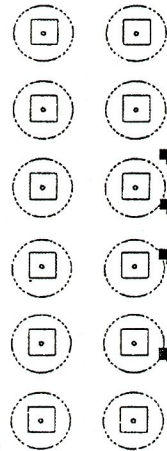
A specific framework for the Wexner Center's presentation of *Fabrications* did not exist in advance, although the selection of this group of architects, all noted for their built work, delimited some common ground. Planning discussions with the architects centered on the curatorial charge of working within a gallery space and making an architecture about itself. The architects expressed a general reluctance to work on projects without function and a desire to use some elements of their projects after the exhibition, not wanting to waste materials and effort. These interests are evident in the ways the architects have developed their projects as responses to perceived needs within the exhibition and in terms of ongoing interests in their work.

RIEGLER RIEWE ARCHITECTS  
OUTLINE

ÁBALOS & HERREROS  
TOWARDS A SOFT AND  
HAIRY ARCHITECTURE



VICENTE GUALLART  
WEB HOUSE: A CITYSCAPE



MVRDV  
SPORT