



DONALD JUDD'S TEXAS

Donald Judd: Architecture (Peter Noever, ed., Hatje Cantz, 2003, 144 pages, \$35.00, hardback) and

Donald Judd: Architecture in Marfa, Texas (Urs Peter Flückiger, 2007, 154 pages, hardback)

by Tom Colbert

DONALD JUDD IS KNOWN ALL OVER THE WORLD FOR THE MERGER of architecture and visual art that he espoused and ultimately realized in far west Texas. The place where his work is centered, the town of Marfa, has become the best-known architectural pilgrimage in the state. Here he designed, and had built and installed, a host of projects that blur conventional distinctions. The body of work there includes a treasure

trove of Judd's drawings, sculptures (specific objects), furniture, and buildings. Two recent books look at Judd's work, examining its relationship with conventional architectural practice. Taken together these two books contain a significant catalog of Judd's oeuvre,

painting a cogent picture of the many ways in which he operated within the framework of architectural history and tradition, using many of the tools and techniques of practicing architects.

Donald Judd: Architecture contains an impressive collection of design drawings including plans, sections, and details of buildings and furniture, as well as photographs of pieces and settings created by Judd. The volume includes essays by museum director Peter Noever and art historian Brigitte Huck, as well as two essays by Donald Judd himself.

Noever describes his experience as Judd's "client." In terms that academic architects might find familiar, he characterizes Judd as "a devout modernist," a modernist intent on "freeing modernism from the ideal of functionality." In more concrete terms he describes the way in which Judd worked on the design of the installation "Stage Set" in Vienna; first visiting the site and discussing the project with Noever, and then producing drawings to guide

fabrication and construction. Axonometric and hard-line elevation and plan drawings of the project serve as evidence of Judd's command of the tools of the architect.

Huck reflects on the manifold relationships between Judd's sculpture and his architecture. She first examines his "stacks" and "progressions" and their formal and material consistency with contemporary architecture. She then analyzes his built work in similar terms. Like Noever, Huck is impressed with the architectural aspects of Judd's design process; particularly his use of sketches "to record the basic idea for a building, a piece of furniture or an architectural detail, that others—engineers, technicians—turn into detailed plans." She explains Judd's design approach by quoting some of his most architectonic aphorisms: "never just 'plunk down' a simple and isolated piece of art (architecture) somewhere, but rather make something built in place, particular to the site."

Judd's essays focus on his rejection of "fake architecture" and his horror at Mario Botta's art museum in San Francisco, Hans Hollein's museum in Salzburg, Frank Gehry's design for Vitra, and "post-modernism" in general. What he means by "fake architecture" and the basis of his rejection of these architects are left tantalizingly unclear, but his familiarity with the contemporary architectural scene is unmistakable. Hinting at a philosophy of art and architecture he asserts the essential unity of thought and feeling as a foundation of experience and, presumably, of creative production. As Judd writes in the aphoristic style, it is difficult to identify an overarching theory but the significance of architectural history and practice to his thinking is evident. In order to illustrate his argument that the judgment of quality is a central question of artistic practice he says, "The El Paso telephone directory has a list of architects and yet there is no architecture in El Paso." And then to provide an example of a good work of



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architecture, “A good building, such as the Kimbell Museum, looks the way a Greek temple in a new colony must have looked...The Kimbell is civilization in the wasteland of Fort Worth and Dallas.”

Urs Peter Flückiger’s *Donald Judd: Architecture in Marfa, Texas*, published in 2007, examines a selection of projects in Marfa and the Chinati Mountains from a different perspective, that of a practicing architect and professor of architecture. He includes what architects most want to see in architecture books, a rich collection of architectural drawings and photographs of buildings. He begins with a plan of Marfa, showing the location of Judd’s projects. He follows this with a general introduction to Judd’s work followed by chapters dealing with many of Judd’s most important buildings. Each chapter includes photographs, site plans, and sections as well as building plans and sections at a larger scale. The drawings and photographs alone make this volume a valuable addition to the literature surrounding Judd’s work. But Flückiger goes further. He digs into Judd’s personal history and education, even unearthing evidence of Judd’s youthful ambition to practice architecture, an ambition that Judd only abandoned because of what he felt were the onerous aspects of running a firm.

Flückiger brings to light the interesting fact that

while pursuing a master’s degree in art history, Judd was a student of Rudolph Wittkower, the noted author of *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*. In this exposure Flückiger finds the origin of Judd’s seemingly strange admiration for the work of Baroque artist-architect Gianlorenzo Bernini, with whom he shared a fascination with control of light, placement of objects in space, and the unification of art and architecture. Flückiger also documents striking correspondences between the writings and material production of Judd and various architects that Judd would have been exposed to while in graduate school including Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Schindler among others.

One comes away from *Donald Judd: Architecture* and *Donald Judd: Architecture in Marfa, Texas* with the feeling that by nature, education, and self-study, Donald Judd was steeped in architecture. One comes to see Judd’s “specific objects” as architectural studies, not unlike the sort of exercises that are given to entering architecture students, and his buildings as mature works of architecture.

An interesting aspect of these books is the neither one refers to the intense theatricality of Judd’s work in Marfa; especially the theater of the architect’s office. “The Architecture Office,” a permanent shop-front installation, is a virtual display case for architectural models, plans, and other props of an architect’s office. It isn’t mentioned in either publication. Another building is surprisingly little discussed.

“The Architecture Studio” contains eight office settings opening onto one another, each illustrating an architect’s work in progress. In each space the furniture (by Judd, Mies, Schindler, Rietveld, etc.) is arranged with precision just as the drafting equipment and writing implements are arranged on desktops. Everything is left as though the master architect is just about to return and begin work again. This theatrical staging seems to be rooted in the theatricality of Judd’s minimalism, wherein the observer is brought into the space of each piece and the views between spaces and views of the horizon are tightly controlled. Also tightly controlled are the spatial sequences leading to the many dramatized places throughout Marfa where one is made to imagine Judd seated, sleeping, or at work.

Michael Fried described the theatricality of minimalism and of Judd’s early work in his 1967 essay, “Art and Objecthood.” What Fried could not have anticipated at that time was how literally occupiable and theatrical Judd’s later work would become, or that the theater of architecture would ultimately become Judd’s final subject and one of the least discussed aspects of his work. What Judd himself could probably not have imagined is the fascination that architects would come to have with his work. But this is something that *Donald Judd: Architecture* and *Donald Judd: Architecture in Marfa, Texas* explain in considerable detail. ☆