

L.A.[TEN]

L.A.[TEN]

INTERVIEWS ON
LOS ANGELES
ARCHITECTURE
1970s–1990s

WITH STEPHEN PHILLIPS

LARS MÜLLER PUBLISHERS

L.A. X



neil
DENARI



thom
MAYNE



franklin
ISRAEL



eric owen
MOSS



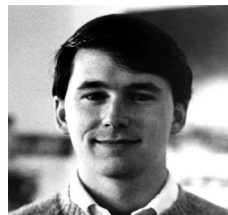
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ROTONDI



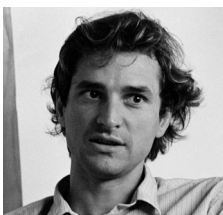
craig
HODGETTS



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FUNG



wes
JONES



frederick
FISHER



coy
HOWARD

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INTRODUCTION

“It was a cool, windy day. I first posed the group in a line stretched across the sand, with a lot of distance between each subject. This solution was to accommodate the unease and tension that resulted from the clash of egos . . . Things loosened up and some camaraderie developed. The last shots reveal Fred [Fisher], Coy Howard, and Craig Hodgetts alternately attempting to tackle Frank Gehry or pay homage to him.”

—Ave Pildas

While they appeared close when they gathered as a pack of young, up-and-coming, hotshot architects at Venice beach for their *Interiors Magazine* photo shoot in 1980, in retrospect, the so-called “L.A. Ten” were not a cohesive group. [Figs. 1–3] Aside from significant attempts to position them as a group in the media, their affiliation remained loosely defined. Media portrayal spoke more to the savvy and ambitions of these architects, alongside their ability to accept and take advantage of serendipitous opportunities.

In 1979 Thom Mayne of Morphosis Architects held his “Current L.A.: 10 Viewpoints” lecture and exhibition series, in conjunction with the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), at his Venice Beach studio and home. [Fig. 4] This ten-week series featured exhibits and lectures from a group of architects and firms comprising ten different viewpoints. Inspiration for this activity, Mayne admits, in part, came from his interest in Team 10—the international group of architects practicing in the 1950s to 1980s, often referred to as “Team X,” who challenged and effectively broke away from the dominant international modernist group Congrès internationaux d’architecture moderne (CIAM), active from the 1920s to 1950s.¹

Similarly, breaking from the modern agendas still prevalent in Los Angeles, Mayne hoped the ten viewpoints presented in his L.A.: 10 lecture and exhibition series would provoke discourse and debate, and garner attention for this younger group of experimental L.A. architects. And it did. John Dreyfuss of the *Los Angeles Times* (*L.A. Times*) promoted these lectures and exhibitions through a series of articles in the newspaper’s “Calendar” section. Additionally, writer Olivier Boissière and photographer Donatella Brun from *Domus* magazine traveled from Europe to Los Angeles to meet the group. Their ensuing *Domus* article “Ten California Architects” from Los Angeles did much to establish international notoriety for the so-called L.A. Ten. [Fig. 5] Boissière did create confusion, however, when he did not feature the same architects as Mayne—as Brun explains, they had a difference of opinion.²

Mayne and Boissière agreed that eight members—Frederick Fisher, Frank Gehry, Coy Howard, Craig Hodgetts, Thom Mayne, Robert Mangurian, Eric Owen Moss, and Michael Rotondi all belonged to this formative group of experimental practitioners. Boissière also included Thane Roberts and James Stafford, while Mayne included Eugene Kupper, Roland Coate Jr., Frank Dimster, and Peter de Bretteville. Of those architects, three of them eventually left Los Angeles; two went to work for larger firms, and one returned to more traditional practice. In effect, there seems to have been a core group of seven or eight architects that comprised the L.A. Ten, alongside the ebb and flow of two or more participants.

Other notable experimental architects soon moved onto the L.A. scene contributing to this dynamic group. Hsinming (Ming) Fung partnered with Craig



Figure 1. L.A. Architects at Venice Beach, 1980. Left to right: Frederick Fisher, Robert Mangurian, Eric Owen Moss, Coy Howard, Craig Hodgetts, Thom Mayne, and Frank Gehry. Photo by Ave Pildas.

Hodgetts and launched their new firm Hodgetts + Fung in 1984. Hodgetts's former partner Robert Mangurian of Studio Works partnered with Mary Ann Ray in 1987. Neil Denari, Franklin Israel, and Wes Jones, among others (Julie Eizenberg, Steven Ehrlich, and Michele Saee), also contributed to this L.A. architecture community, arguably matching the accomplishments of the original so-called L.A. Ten. The notion of Los Angeles thereby having a group of ten architects leading a school of thought was never definitive.

L.A. [Ten]: Interviews on Los Angeles Architecture, 1970s–1990s seeks to characterize, discuss, understand, and challenge the historically complex position of group formation and the social organization that surrounded the Los Angeles architecture scene in and around the 1970s to the 1990s. It attempts, through a series of interviews, to recall the stories of ten of the most relevant Los Angeles experimental practitioners, who defined their own architectural language through innovative and creative forms of speculation, experimentation, and production. This book begins to compile an oral history of the local and global events and practices that situate and define architecture in Los Angeles near the end of the twentieth century. In so doing, these oral histories hit upon a wide range of themes and strategies on the institutional, historical, social, cultural, and political life surrounding art, architecture, and design during the postmodern period.

Although oral history can appear to be inexact, based on loose memory and hearsay, as an architect and scholar, I've come to understand how cultural politics have a way of distorting historical facts anyway. That old cliché that those in power write the history they want others to remember has a certain validity. Journalists, historians, and biographers are all subject to the politics of their time, and it seems to me the history of Los Angeles architecture in many ways is a product of the complex positioning of varied institutions and individuals involved, rather than a recording of a clear timeline of factual events. As such, oral history provides us with a selective



Figure 2. L.A. Architects at Venice Beach, 1980. Left to right: Craig Hodgetts, Robert Mangurian, Frederick Fisher, Frank Gehry, Eric Owen Moss, Thom Mayne, and Coy Howard. Photo by Ave Pildas.

recollection of those interviewed, based on a lifetime of achievement or effort. It is not necessarily factual, but it is the way those people remember what once happened.

These oral history interviews are thereby an attempt to bring together some of those voices that made a lasting impression on L.A. architecture since the 1970s, while opening up new avenues for research and debate. It was originally conceived and developed in collaboration with Wim de Wit, the Architecture and Contemporary Art Department head of the Getty Research Institute (GRI), with his staff Christopher Alexander and Rani Singh, senior researchers and curators of the GRI, alongside Teresa Barnett, head of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Oral History Program. During the initial research for de Wit and Alexander's *Overdrive: L.A. Constructs the Future, 1940–1990* exhibition and catalogue, we began these recordings that reveal a few of the behind-the-scenes dialogues during preparation for some of the Getty exhibitions and events presented in Los Angeles from April through June 2013. These oral histories had an influence particularly on my article, "Architecture Industry: The L.A. Ten," published in the *Overdrive* catalogue edited by de Wit and Alexander. In that scholarly text, I investigate the cultural, economic, and psychoanalytic relationship between architecture and industry in Los Angeles from the 1970s to the 1990s. I pose the impact of post-Fordism on the formation of a new architecture industry here in Los Angeles that surrounded this loosely affiliated cadre of architects—the so-called L.A. Ten—who were catapulted to fame by international media in and around the seventies and eighties.³

It was not, however, only Mayne's exhibition that established this group of experimental practitioners, but as demonstrated through a series of conferences, events, exhibitions, and lectures in Los Angeles between 1974 and 1980, a new architecture scene interested in industry and technology had begun to emerge predominantly surrounding UCLA and SCI-Arc. As discussed by Hodgetts, Fisher, and Howard in this book, Tim Vreeland, the chair of the UCLA Architecture and Urban Design (A.U.D) department, had originally organized a well-known conference, "White

and Gray Meet Silver.” The “Whites” represented the New York Five: Richard Meier, Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey, and John Hejduk; the “Grays” included Charles Moore, Richard Weinstein, and Jaquelin Robertson, who were affiliated with Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Vincent Scully, Robert A.M. Stern, Romaldo Giurgola, and Allan Greenberg. These two groups (sometimes referred to as the New York School and the Philadelphia School, respectively) had set themselves in opposition to each other through debates on the East Coast. They were invited to speak in Los Angeles alongside a rising group of West Coast architects, defining themselves at the time as the “Silvers.”⁴

Each group—the “Whites,” the “Grays,” and the “Silvers”—represented a different stance on architecture and its practice. The “Whites” represented the New York architects who were interested in evolving modern International Style architectural forms in new and creative ways. The “Grays” attempted to recover outmoded historical motifs and reposition them as popular architectural pastiche. In resistance to such overtly intellectualized approaches to this emerging postmodern architecture, the Los Angeles architects, the “Silvers,” claimed to use high-tech, postindustrial means, methods, and materials to create their own unique architectural language. The “Silvers” were thus formed as a group here in Los Angeles, spearheaded by Cesar Pelli and Hodgetts at UCLA, surrounding their mutual interests in industry and technology. Gehry, if not a participant in the conference at the time, formed an alliance with this group. According to Howard, Gehry hosted the conference party.

Such inclinations to form groups surrounding a school of thought or geographic location were certainly, by the 1970s, not new to architecture. CIAM and Team 10, aforementioned, had strategically defined architectural trajectories for their participants, as well as the future of the profession. The effort to gain attention and notoriety, and commit to varied positions by forming groups does, however, seem particularly prevalent during the postmodern period. Even though architecture critic Paul Goldberger argued that many of the participants in these groups (specifically



Figure 3. L.A. Architects at Venice Beach, 1980. Left to right: Coy Howard, Craig Hodgetts, Frederick Fisher, Robert Mangurian, Eric Owen Moss, Frank Gehry, and Thom Mayne. Photo by Ave Pildas.

CURRENT L.A. : 10 VIEWPOINTS

SCI-ARC DESIGN FORUM 79

LECTURES

Oct 3 INTRODUCTION BY COY HOWARD
Erosion Discontinuity Incompleteness Transformation:
A Critical Review of Recent Work in Los Angeles : PART 1

Oct 10 EUGENE KUPPER

Oct 17 ROLAND COATE

Oct 24 FREDERICK FISHER

Oct 31 FRANK DIMSTER

Nov 7 FRANK GEHRY

Nov 14 PETER deBRETTEVILLE

Nov 21 MORPHOSIS : THOM MAYNE & MICHAEL ROTONDI

Nov 28 STUDIO WORKS : CRAIG HODGETTS & BOB MANGURIAN

Dec 5 ERIC MOSS

Dec 12 CONCLUSION BY COY HOWARD : PART 2

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTURE
1800 Berkeley Street
Santa Monica, Ca
8pm Wed

EXHIBITS

Oct 9 - 13

Oct 16 - 20

Oct 23 - 27

Oct 30 - Nov 3

Nov 6 - 10

Nov 13 - 17

Nov 20 - 24

Nov 27 - Dec 1

Dec 4 - 8

THE ARCHITECTURE GALLERY
209 San Juan Street
Venice, Ca
12 - 6pm Tue - Sat

Figure 4. Morphosis Architects: Poster for Fall 1979 lecture series at SCI-Arc. Sheet: 50.8 x 51.4 cm (20 x 20 1/4 in.). Courtesy of Morphosis Architects.

in reference to the New York and Philadelphia Schools) were not like-minded, since their work varied considerably, such affiliations went a long way. The media acknowledged the “Whites” as the New York Five or New York School, the “Grays” as the Philadelphia School, and the “Silvers”—repositioned by Boissière in his “Ten California Architects” article as the “Quick-silvers”—as the official L.A. School in 1983, as recast by Charles Jencks.⁵

Moss, however, will argue carefully and intelligently that there was never much of an L.A. School. For unlike the New York School, the Philadelphia School, or even the Chicago School (the Chicago Seven), the Los Angeles School architects did not often meet together and position themselves as a group. Antithetical to the East Coast “Whites” and “Grays,” as Jones explains in his oral history, this group of L.A. architects was far more casual and more full of humor and jest. The group as a whole seemed less important to them than their own individuality. L.A. seemed to support, as Denari articulates, a very different do-it-yourself (DIY) mentality and architectural aesthetic that served more to encourage a place of free expression, that as Jones explains often parodied established professional practices and ideals.

Many efforts have been made to claim the members of the L.A. Ten or L.A. School are truly individual, idiosyncratic, if not antiauthoritarian themselves. Whether this

sentiment plays into a California mystique of casual serendipity, or unpretentiousness fitting into a localized DIY beach culture mentality of 1960s liberalism long since past, or a pointed act of pseudohumility—to mislead and distract competition in order to take power—is unknowable. There were certainly power struggles within and surrounding this group that unfolded in time. Rotondi, for example, fascinatingly outlines the politics surrounding the formation of SCI-Arc and its “institutionalization” as he became the first director to succeed SCI-Arc’s founder Ray Kappe. Rotondi offers a fresh perspective on the making of an institution and the complex effort to gain meaningful recognition, authority, leadership, and power.

Cultural and political relationships within this core L.A. group of architects (most of whom were not from Los Angeles in the first place), shifted dramatically over the decades. Several of these architects went on to produce some of the most notable work in twentieth- and twenty-first-century architecture; others took less experimental paths toward more commercial success; while others virtually disappeared. Nonetheless, they continue to this day to restate, restructure, and represent the history of their formation and influence on the field of architecture, urbanism, and design. Ultimately, proudly, and consistently, they prove to rally behind each other and future generations of younger architects in mutual support and respect for experimental design, while remaining either suspect or ambivalent toward vanguard practices (even their own) that successfully cross over to become institutionalized norms—a subject well discussed by Fung and Mayne.

For my part, it has been an absolute pleasure to engage with this group—and I cannot help but call them a group—of renowned and accomplished architects who, regardless of knowing or unknowing intentions, made a very real and extremely significant contribution, not only to the history of Los Angeles architecture but also to the profession of architecture nationally and globally. They are remarkable talents who have held their belief in experimental practice, for the most part, above financial reward. They have fought to maintain and advance their voice in their profession, even in the face of their own mortality—as with Israel who passed away on his rise to the top of a starlit career. They have defined the field in so many ways and accomplished what many architects can only hope to achieve. The opportunity to record their history has certainly been an educating and rewarding experience.



Figure 5. “Ten California Architects”, a.k.a. “Quick-silvers”, *Domus*, March 1980. “With my friend Olivier we arrived in Los Angeles in November 1979. I met a dozen architects, all nice and friendly, struggling in their profession, and surprised to be photographed for *Domus*, the stylish Italian magazine. The article was published . . . and Frank was on the cover. He called me up, “You made me famous.” It was not true but . . . Thank you.”—Donatella Brun. Photo by Donatella Brun.

It should be noted that the order in which these oral history interviews are presented is neither arbitrary nor entirely scripted. The first speaker in this series is Denari, followed by Mayne, Moss, a retrospective for Israel with his former staff and colleagues Barbara Callas, Annie Chu, Joe Day, Mitchell De Jarnett, and Steven Shortridge, followed by Rotondi, Hodgetts and Fung, Jones, Fisher, and Howard. This order was determined based on the stream of discourse developed as the project progressed. Although there are certainly other important contributors to L.A. architecture during the time period, it remains my impression that the ten architects that comprise this oral history—the *L.A. [Ten]*—were some of the most active in the L.A. community over time and/or have contributed most significantly to the academic and professional field of experimental Los Angeles architecture. The most significant omission in our oral history is, of course, Gehry. Although he is senior to this group by many years, he is a critical figure discussed by every architect represented in this book; he is thereby clearly not absent. [Fig. 6]

We recorded this oral history before the contributors were entirely clear on how such material might be repositioned historically, these stories are fresh, original, and unrehearsed. This book is an archive of primary source material, and a precursor to the ever-evolving historical record. During the editorial process we therefore aimed to include all content from these interviews with the minimal copyediting necessary to enhance sentence flow, as reviewed and approved by the architects.

The history presented in this book—if focused on pedagogical, formal, and material strategies of Los Angeles architecture—is however not a regionalist discourse. Local materials, building culture, and the film and aerospace industries did have a remarkable impact on these L.A. architects, as best explored by Denari, Fung, and Israel (Callas, Chu, Day, De Jarnett, and Shortridge), but the conversations encompass more global influences and concerns.

This book and its material begin the research on a very underdiscussed but clearly relevant set of topics initiated by our burgeoning Cal Poly Los Angeles Metropolitan Program in Architecture and Urban Design (Cal Poly L.A. Metro Program) in support of our larger institution, the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly). The Cal Poly L.A. Metro Program is new to Los Angeles and was first conceived while I was a fellow in the Scholars Program at the Getty Research Institute in 2009 and 2010. While at the Getty, I met with my then Cal Poly Department Head, Henri T. de Hahn, and together we imagined a new opportunity for our students to live and study here in Los Angeles. Cal Poly is a top-ranked architecture school, located near the beach on the Central Coast of California in San Luis Obispo, and is one of the largest architecture schools in the United States. Its unaffiliated sister campus is California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona). The bucolic San Luis Obispo campus is somewhat isolated from the day-to-day urban concerns and immediate interests of metropolitan life. Bringing some of our students to study and intern alongside the great architects of L.A. seemed to offer immense potential. With support from former Dean R. Thomas Jones and our architecture faculty, we were able to initiate a new program now maintained by our new Dean Christine Theodoropoulos and Interim Department Head Margot McDonald.

Relevant to my interests as an architect and scholar, it also became clear to me there was a need to research the untapped resources of L.A. architecture of the 1970s to the 1990s. In particular, I was very interested in rethinking the history of architecture surrounding what I understood at the time to be Deconstructivism, purportedly beginning with the work of Gehry in 1978 but also in relation to the many L.A. architects of the postmodern era that I have very much admired for most of my career. As we were looking to develop a unique event series for our students, it

seemed impossible for us to compete with the UCLA, SCI-Arc, and the University of Southern California (USC) rosters. Instead we initiated something completely different; we began to assemble with our students the history surrounding the birth of the L.A. architecture scene from the 1970s to the 1990s. Given there was no oral history since Kappe's compiled on L.A. architecture, our school's research entered into the local dialogue. Singh assisted with my training in the complex art of oral history. She introduced me to Barnett, and from there, I began my tutelage, which has proven altogether enormously fulfilling.

¹ Thom Mayne, "Thom Mayne: March 03, 2011," in *L.A. [Ten]: Interviews on Los Angeles Architecture 1970s–1990s*, ed. by Stephen Phillips (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2013). My use of the L.A. Ten is also here referred to as L.A. 10 or L.A. X.

² Olivier Boissière, "Ten California Architects," *Domus*, no. 604 (1980): 17–31.

³ Stephen Phillips, "Architecture Industry: The L.A. Ten," in *Overdrive: L.A. Constructs the Future, 1940s–1990s*, ed. by Wim de Wit and Christopher James Alexander (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2013): 184–99. See also Nadia Watson, "The Whites versus the Grays: Re-examining the 1970s Avant-Garde" in *Fabrications* 15, no. 1 (July 2005).

⁴ "White and Gray," *a + u: Architecture and Urbanism* 4, no. 52 (1975): 25–80.

⁵ Charles Jencks, "LA Style/LA School," *AA Files* 5 (1983): 90. Note: In 1976 the "L.A. 12" exhibited at the Pacific Design Center surrounding Bernard Zimmerman of Cal Poly Pomona. The work of the L.A. 12 however, was very modern in their approach. Frank Gehry and Robert Coate Jr. proved the only L.A. Ten architects to participate in the L.A. 12 show. Gehry included his 1975 Concord Pavilion, a large modernist amphitheater. See N. Charles Slet; James R. Harter; Pacific Design Center (West Hollywood, CA); California State Polytechnic University, Department of Architecture, *12 Los Angeles Architects* (Pomona, CA: Cal Poly Graphics Communication Department, 1978).



Figure 6. L.A. Architects at Venice Beach, 1980. Left to right: Robert Mangurian, Eric Owen Moss, Frederick Fisher, Coy Howard, Craig Hodgetts, Thom Mayne, and Frank Gehry. Photo by Ave Pildas.