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Early twenty-first century artistic practices can be characterized, in part, by the search for new modes of collaboration. Kuehn Malvezzi are among the very few architects whose work can be interpreted as an effort to affirm the irreducible essence of architecture, paradoxically, through rigorous collaborations with artists. They are part of a generation of architects educated during a time between dominant paradigms; a time of uncertainty when boundaries were dissolving; a time that coincided with architecture's waning influence on the public realm. Kuehn Malvezzi, like many of their contemporaries, had found themselves at a crossroads—to consider architecture as a discipline in need of either expansion or introspection. Rather than choosing one over the other, they have forged a path of a tedious balance between simultaneously looking inwards and looking outwards: keeping one foot inside the discipline of architecture while having the other foot rooted in art. This is marked by an exemplary career to date, a consistent and engaged involvement with the art world, and a prodigious amount of art collaborations, while relentlessly pursuing what is considered purely and irreducibly architectural. To situate their work at the aforementioned intersection, it is beneficial to view the reciprocal relation between the two fields from the vantage point of developments over the last fifty years.

Collaborative practices have been constantly evolving since the eighteenth century, when fine art was separated from functional arts in academia and granted its own disciplinary status alongside architecture. Whereas the separation between artistic fields was non-distinct during Renaissance times, this division imposed in

the eighteenth century was contrived and has been subsequently challenged over the years. From the Arts and Crafts movement at the end

of the nineteenth century; to the promotion of interdisciplinary dialogue in the Bauhaus and de Stijl movements; to the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM)'s interlacing of architecture, design, art, and planning in the early twentieth century; the reciprocal relationship between the disciplines of art and architecture has historically yielded opportunities for reconciliation.¹

Amidst the radical, social, and political changes in the 1960s, when the discipline of architecture and its efficacy came into question, the collaborative relationship with art had eroded. Within public perception, the collaboration between art and architecture had often been reduced to "Kunst am Bau" or "percentage for art" systems in public buildings, where art was often deployed as a supplementary addition to architecture or used as a tool to either dignify or soften up austere architectural forms. Whether it was an Alexander Calder sculpture situated in front of a Mies van der Rohe museum or a Henry Moore sculpture positioned in front of an I. M. Pei building, art was seen not as collaboration with, but as an afterthought added onto, architecture.

A generation of architects who came of age in this period, dissatisfied by this estranged association with art, felt it necessary to rethink and reposition this relationship, and took on two respective directions—to retreat or to assimilate. The first direction viewed art as a threat to the progress of architecture and sought a disciplinary autonomy: reestablishing architecture as its own discipline. Aldo Rossi, who famously purported that "architecture is architecture and art is art," was a key proponent for this direction, although his own work alluded to art, specifically to the work of Giorgio de Chirico. The second direction accepted the role of art as a more efficacious agent than architecture in rapidly changing times; but rather than distancing itself from art, it appropriated and incorporated artistic strategies into architecture. Robert Venturi represented this direction, as an architect who took techniques and motifs from pop art and op art into his own work. With Denise Scott Brown, he reinterpreted Andy Warhol's floral patterns into motifs for the Best Products Catalog Showroom and the oversized letters of the BASCO showroom. In between these two extreme positions represented by Rossi and Venturi, there are architects who have actively collaborated with artists

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Jes Fernie, ed., *Two Minds: Artists and Architects in Collaboration*, London 2006, p. 9–15.

throughout their careers. Instead of assimilating the artists' language into their own, the way that Venturi did, these architects openly accept the infusion of art as part of contemporary practice, inviting artists into the fold of the design process to inform and advance their own work. Foremost among this group are the practices of Frank Gehry and Herzog & de Meuron: architects who are a generation apart, but had a similar longstanding relationship with the art world. Frank Gehry, a contemporary of Rossi's and Venturi's, has openly thrived on the language of artists. He has worked closely with the Light and Space artists in Los Angeles including Robert Irwin, Charles Arnoldi, and Ken Price as well as Richard Serra, Claes Oldenburg, and Coosje van Bruggen, with whom Gehry had a longstanding collaborative relationship. Early on in his career, a competitive relation between architecture and art is evident: as in his installation for Billy Al Bengston at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art or in his house designed for the artist Ron Davis, where Gehry chose the manipulation of perspective to be the central focus. This struggle is more evident in later projects such as the Chiat/Day Building in Venice, California. Gehry invited Oldenburg and van Bruggen to place their binoculars in the center of the tripartite façade. In turn, Gehry had to respond to the sculpture with the two sculptural boat-like and tree-like buildings that flank both sides of the binoculars. Even though Gehry claimed otherwise on many occasions, it is apparent that he aspires to be an artist, and his architecture aspires to be sculpture. Herzog & de Meuron, who were students of Rossi's, never had the direct aspiration for their buildings to be art. Belonging to a generation of architects who came of age in the 1970s, they were exposed to both the autonomy advocated by Rossi and the penchant for the ordinary and the popular professed by Venturi. Since the outset of their career, Herzog & de Meuron have collaborated with various contemporary artists including Rémy Zaugg, Helmut Federle, Rosemarie Trockel, and Adrian Schiess. Many of Herzog & de Meuron's artist collaborators are photographers, painters, and conceptual artists. From Thomas Ruff's façade for the Eberswalde Technical School Library, to Michael Craig-Martin's work at the Laban Dance Center, to Ai Wei Wei's involvement in the Bird's Nest Olympic Stadium, the art is often seamlessly infused into the architecture

and its effects are diverse. To that end, Herzog & de Meuron's collaborations with artists have led to instances where architect directly appropriates artist. Even in these instances—such as assimilating Karl Blossfeldt's photographs of plants onto the façade of the Ricola-Europe Building in Mulhouse—it is done in a more direct and Warhol-like way of reproduction and displacement than Venturi Scott Brown did with Warhol's flowers fifteen years earlier. Another critical aspect of Herzog & de Meuron's work with artists is the involvement of art in both the pre-production and post-production of architecture. Rather than the traditional documentation and photography of their projects, they have invited artists such as Jeff Wall, Balthasar Burkhard, Thomas Ruff, Margherita Spiluttini, and Hannah Villiger to photograph aspects of their buildings in order to interrogate new forms of representations. In many ways, Herzog & de Meuron have cultivated the collaborative approach between art and architecture into an expanded field.² The expanded arena of collaborations generated by Frank Gehry and advanced by Herzog & de Meuron opened the doors for Kuehn Malvezzi, and a new generation of architects, to forge a new territory of artistic practice with different ways of engaging art with architecture. While the collaborative nature between architects and artists is moving towards a return to a Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk and becoming much more fluid in certain ways, this generation faces new challenges. Having an intrinsic understanding of the many facets of art and its relation to its environment, Kuehn Malvezzi emerges as a prescient model for art collaborations at a moment when a new model of collaborative practices is needed. They had worked with artists such as Marko Lulić and exhibitions such as Documenta even before the official formation of their office. Three critical elements in their collaborative practices separate Kuehn Malvezzi from the previous generation and distinguishes them from many of their contemporaries. First, they involve artists at the beginning of a project and delegate them with tasks outside of their realm. Second, an equal amount of focus is placed on involving artists in both the pre-production and post-production phases of a project. Finally, they concisely outline the territory where art could operate—where it takes on a performative role in the architecture.

As stated, a Kuehn Malvezzi project will involve artists at the outset, when the parameters and definition of the project are still nebulous. Since many of the artists with whom Kuehn Malvezzi work are not medium-specific and are often times conceptual artists, their involvement does not have a foreseeable conclusion or the predictability of sculptors or muralists. Consequently, the artists' output could be on a conceptual and immaterial level or of a nature more formal and concrete. This degree of indeterminacy and uncertainty is offset by Kuehn Malvezzi's insistence that the artists are asked not only to solve artistic tasks, but pragmatically architectural



2
Kuehn Malvezzi / Heimo Zobernig,
Verbindungsgang Belvedere Wien / Walkway Belvedere Vienna, 2009.

matters. In the Schloss Belvedere Walkway in Vienna, Kuehn Malvezzi and multimedia artist Heimo Zobernig collaborated on a pergola-like glazed walkway to connect the historical building and adjacent greenhouse as well as the interior and the exterior. Kuehn Malvezzi asked Zobernig to solve the problem of birds injuring themselves when flying into the walkway's glass

façade. Zobernig responded by developing a thermal dynamic pattern that was printed on the glass, creating a heat diagram with different gradations of reflectivity that made the glass surface perceptible to the birds. By asking the artist to provide artistic answers to unartistic questions typically relegated to architects, engineers, or planners, Kuehn Malvezzi probe the artist's ability to solve problems, providing an unconventional way to approach the issue as one of the goals in bridging the gap between art and architecture.

The second crucial element in a Kuehn Malvezzi collaboration is the involvement of artists in both the pre-production and post-production phases of a project. One example is *The House of One*—a religious building in Berlin that would contain a synagogue, church, and mosque. For this project, Armin Linke created a portfolio titled *Model of Gestures* to show the liturgical gestures of a rabbi, a priest, and an imam in their respective sacred spaces. Marko Lulić created a performance piece related to the project titled *Model of Relations*, exploring the simultaneous intimacy and distance between the three religions. While these images and performances were created after the designs were completed, they differ from the images produced in many post-production collaborations of yesteryear. Instead of simply presenting an alternative way to represent or document architecture, these works serve as a feedback loop for Kuehn Malvezzi to both inform the further development of each project and of future work. A radical example of post-production as a form of practice is the Kuehn Malvezzi exhibition and accompanying catalog at the Aedes gallery in Berlin. After completing the catalog, Kuehn Malvezzi decided to give the gallery space to the artist Michael Riedel to produce an installation, instead of having a traditional exhibition of the catalog's content. As a multimedia artist whose artistic production often consists of work generated from existing material in endless loops and permutations, Riedel conceived four installations that reflect the four situations involved in the production of the catalog. The result is four tables that record the process of designing,

printing, binding, and selling. By engaging in the post-production of architecture as the beginning of a new cycle instead of the end

2
Philip Ursprung, Herzog & de
Meuron: *Natural History*, Baden /
Switzerland 2002, p. 13–39.

of another one, Kuehn Malvezzi turned collaboration into a process less stagnant and more interdisciplinary.

This provides a perfect segue into the third important element in Kuehn Malvezzi's collaborative practices: their awareness of how art can operate and take on a performative role in architecture. Again, the collaboration with Michael Riedel for the Modern Gallery of the Saarlandmuseum, Saarbrücken, is a clear demonstration of this ability in delegating a territory for art to maximize its consequences. Inheriting a complex palimpsest of buildings from the 1960s and 1970s as well as an unfinished recent addition, Kuehn Malvezzi and Michael Riedel approached the problem in an unconventional way. Riedel often uses recordings and transformations of what he has captured as a way to explore new meaning. During the public committee's process to determine if the Kuehn Malvezzi project would be approved for construction, Riedel originally wanted to use a recording device to document the debates regarding the museum extension and its complicated backstory as a source of his work. But when it was not allowed for reasons of legality, he instead transcribed the public parliamentary debate of the Saarland in which Kuehn Malvezzi and Riedel's proposal was debated and particularly on the question of whether an artwork could be accepted for the façade. This text was then inscribed on over four thousand square meters of surface in the shape and size of the footprint of the building. Used as a pattern that extends towards the surrounding landscape, it accentuates the serial sequence of the existing buildings. This figured surface is installed on the landscape surrounding the building, covering the square and the façade with fragments of text from the debate. A notable detail is the focus on the word "museum" within the transcript, which appears prominently—drawing attention to its own context.

This conceptual approach undertaken by Kuehn Malvezzi and Michael Riedel deals with the reflexive engagement with history. By making the consideration concerning the inception of the building public and part of the art, the museum is able to tell the story of its own extension. Further, in retrospect, making the political process transparent actually helped create a positive outcome and the realization of the project. The career of Kuehn Malvezzi could be described as the embracing of two general modes of production related to art that are diametrically

opposite to one another. The first is the framing of art: designing or providing spaces where art could be shown, displayed, or interacted with in an optimized setting where architecture often



4
Michael Riedel, *Ausstellungsansicht / Installation view*
Aedes Galerie, *Momentane Monumente*, Berlin 2005.

recedes into the background. The second is the incorporation of art into the architecture, where art and architecture act as sparring partners to interrogate and bring out the best in each other: where the result is often in the foreground and cannot escape one's attention. To reconcile and strike a balance between these two modes of production—one often reticent and the other often extroverted, one looking back into architecture and the other looking outwards to art—is not an easy task. The ability of Kuehn Malvezzi to oscillate between both realms with confidence and aplomb is not only a testament to their well-cultivated sense of *mise en scène* from their work in exhibition design; it is exemplary of their experience being in proximity to both the production and consumption sides of art. Their immersive way of engaging multimedia artists into their projects, their emphasis on the role of art before and after construction, and their instrumentalization of art as means for pragmatic and political ends open up new territories and more effective marriages between art and architecture. Their work serves as a constant reminder that new modes of collaborations test the boundaries and strengthen the foundations of one's own discipline.