

CONCEPT



ARCHITECTURE

FOR A POST-CONCEPTUAL AGE.

"Concept Architecture for a Post-Conceptual Age" is the result of three years of scheming, dreaming, and planning. Initially designed as a maverick show which could give the public the opportunity both to view the work of new talent and to reevaluate the accepted regional notion of what constitutes an "architectural exhibition," it has evolved into a forum for concepts that may well galvanize the regional arts community.

These exemplars of "new talent" are not really new arrivals. Each of the four architects has been practicing in northern Ohio for a number of years and each has attained a respected level of professional recognition, including design awards in both the architectural and fine arts milieu, professional and teaching appointments, lectures and publications. What makes them "new" is simply that, not yet having garnered "reigning dean" status, they have not been afforded the opportunity to exhibit their designs in a gallery context.

But a series of mini-retrospectives or staged design problems is not what this exhibition attempts to accomplish, although features common to both genres do appear. A rehash of these frameworks, although they are

well established (particularly in this area, would evidence a singular limitation of vision. For what is really interesting in architecture today is what Thom Stauffer calls "layering," and Paul Westlake terms "stratification." Inherent in both of these terms is a conception of design that abjures simple frameworks of any kind. If one-sided and one-dimensional approaches to architecture are now retro and superseded by the richness of interpenetrating ideas and juxtaposed fabrics, why should not an architectural exhibition follow suit? Why, as Vince Leskosky claims, should the "combination or overlaying of ideas and images" not be fused into a "new reality"?

Thus, *Concept Architecture* posits two interleaved givens: four design architects who work in the realms of both architecture and fine art, and

the residence, an issue central to each of their concerns. Initially the architects proposed to design fragments of an ideal or evolving structure, such as a staircase, interior elevation or fireplace. But quickly such a program proved both elusive and reclusive, and the concept of fragment itself proved to be fascinating as it intersected the realm of other formal and contextual ideas.

What has remained from the initial planning stage, however, is a singular ideal: that architecture should be understood not as "building," which implies the separation of exterior from interior space, but as an experience capturing both in a dynamic continuum of personal and interpersonal histories. At first glance this might itself appear retardataire, a throwback to the utopian and idealist dreams of early twentieth century

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modernism. But in effect it is not. To give just two examples, Picasso's Cubist paintings and Mies van der Rohe's sleek office towers succeed by encompassing a breadth and depth of human experience within a flexible, yet simple and eminently reliable grid. Picasso and Mies are cited as sources for two of the architects here. But grids for them and for their two co-exhibitors do not idealize, capture or reassure. They are psychological actuators of tension, and tension encodes their notions of architectural experience.

The concepts of this exhibition having been introduced, the rationale for the "post-conceptual" part of its title remains as yet unspecified. Have the arts that little to say about late twentieth century life? Certainly not, but rampant commercialism,

insensitivity and a lackluster response to genuinely innovative design (on both sides of the arts/arts consumer equation) have sapped the creative juices of many a worthy design professional, northern Ohio not excepted. Initiating new dialogues within technology, design and personality in two and three dimensions, these four architects have created provocative concepts which may serve to reinvigorate post-conceptual sensibilities. However, as Ronald Reed comments, "the installation makes the true argument."

**Geraldine Wojna Kiefer**

Guest Curator

