Art and Architecture
In the decades after World War II there was much discussion about the need for collaboration between the architect and artist, either as embodied in one or as distinctly different creative talents working closely but creatively independently together. Many saw little actual collaboration and questioned the relationship artistically or saw art as a cover for otherwise bland architecture. However, architects like Wallace K. Harrison, Gordon Bunshaft, and others worked regularly with artists like Josef Albers, Isamu Noguchi, Gyorgy Kepes or Richard Lippeid. While many of these art installations remain today, they are under constant pressure because of real estate changes, renovations or simply neglect.

By Theodore Prudon

The two decades directly after World War II in New York City saw a great deal of interaction, theoretically and practically, between architects and artists. The work of many modern artists was incorporated in corporate office buildings, office complexes and public spaces constructed during that time period. What the precise working relationships were and the reason why these artworks were incorporated was a subject of some discussion then and, to some extent, remains so today. Whatever those discussions were, many are still in situ and in good condition but not always fully appreciated or recognized by those owning the building or those walking past. As a practice art continues to be incorporated today and, probably, some of the same questions and dilemmas remain.

Artist and architect

One of the principal points of discussions in the 1940s and 1950s was about what the relationship between architects and artists should be and what the different creative responsibilities ought to be. In the theoretical discussions about art and architecture then the dialogue was frequently found to refer to earlier times when the skills were not separated (i.e., the architect/artist was one and the same person) or, if separate, the work process of the participants was seen as more integrated and collaborative. Art and architecture from the past was held up as the aesthetic and collaborative ideal that was to be achieved in the present time between architect and artist. In the dialogues the work of the architect/artist was seen as exemplified by such Renaissance or Mannerist sculptors like Michelangelo (1475-1564) and Jacopo Sansovino (1486-1570) and the painter Giulio Romano (1499-1564). (Figures 1, 2) In terms of collaboration the building of the cathedrals was touted as the desired example or in the words of Walter gropius (1883-1969): 

"True collaboration must start from scratch, the members of the group stimulating each other, conceiving the idea in mutual exchange as the builders of the old cathedrals who were living at the site devoting their life to the task."

It is important to note that earlier distinctions between the architecture, arts or science disciplines were less formalized and crossovers between architecture and various other disciplines—not just design—were quite common. For instance, Christopher Wren (1632-1723), the architect of St. Paul's Cathedral was trained as an astronomer and mathematician and William Thornton (1759-1828), the winner of the competition for the design of the US Capitol Building in Washington DC was trained as a physician before turning to architecture as his métier.

With the emergence of architecture as a more established discipline and the introduction of formal education and the establishment of licensing and registration requirements, the interdisciplinary crossovers became more difficult and less frequent. The impact of the professionalization is acknowledged in the literature and is reflected in the argument that the realities of practice and the complexity of architecture has necessitated a technical specialization beyond architecture as simply a visual or sculptural art. However, in spite of the emergence of architecture as a formalized discipline, which is only of recent vintage and in most countries dates from the nineteenth century, the examples of earlier periods are continued to be referred to but are probably only of limited value in reality. It is the inherent conflict between the desire for the relationships of the past and the realities of twentieth-century practice that permeates the discussions.

In the early postwar years the consensus among architects and artists—while working together—seems to have been that little or no real collaboration existed nor that any true integration had taken place. The question as to what that collaboration or integration ought to be was never very clear and different points of view were offered. Walter Gropius in his essay “The Curse of Conformity” argues for the artist to be a full member of the design and creative production team. In his work in the Graduate Center of Harvard and later in the former PanAm Building (now MetLife Building) it would appear that artists...
were brought into the design process early but that the commissions had probably little influence on the actual design or layout of the spaces. In the discussion with other architects and artists, Gropius still, extensively quoted, Jean Gorin's La Synthèse des arts majeurs est-elle possible? Del Marie said in 1952 that the question was no longer one of ornamental polyphony, something decorative, something fundamentally sensuous, which would harmonize with the styles of the centuries, but rather one of an architectural polyphony, sprung from the newest evolutions of painting, and the architecture, a modern polyphony, characterized by rationalism, the paradigm of our period. Architectural polyphony was not to be considered as an adjunct to architecture, to be more or less necessary at will; it could not let the color stand in a secondary position vis-à-vis the plan. Indeed, it did not relate to the plan but rather to space. It was not enough to put plaques of color or asbestos cement. The synthesis of the arts cannot consist in putting sculpture and painting in appropriate architectural locations or even natural ones, even when they are very appropriate, because that is, when it is said and done, nothing but the program of a museum. We believe that the true synthesis of the arts is to be found in the architectural work itself and commences from the first stages of the conception.25

The relationship between architect and artist in the creation of corporate and public spaces was interpreted differently, as is to be expected, by the three participating groups: architects, artists and general public. For instance, Ada Louise Huxtable (b. 1921), the former architecture critic of The New York Times, argued that the incorporation of modern art into modern architecture was only intended to soften the austerity and blandness of modern buildings. Furthermore, in defining the role of the architect, she referred back to history and quotes Vitruvius: "Almost 2,000 years ago, Vitruvius said of the architect, 'It is by his judgment that all the work done by the other art is put to the test.'"26

With regards to the position of the architect Peter Blake (1920-2006) expressed a somewhat similar point of view. He dismissed the Renaissance and Mannerist periods as precedent because those periods were 'autocratic' and no longer applicable. He also argued that because the structure—what he called point supported making a conceptual distinction between modern frame architecture and historic load bearing masonry construction—had become so important that the boundaries had to be set by the architect but he did advocate leaving as much freedom to the artists as possible while acknowledging that the divergence of opinion was a result of our democratic not 'autocratic society.' Gropius once again, facing the realities of practice, agreed with that definition of the role of the architect. If architects should have deluded themselves and others into believing that they hold positions of autocratic leadership, it is not clear how this could be so. Anybody who has undertaken to steer a client toward architectural solutions which would transcend the merely practical and economical approach knows that he will have his hands full without trying to add proposals for collaboration with painters and sculptors.27

Opinions among the artists are no less diverse as pointed out by the dominating role of the architect. Whether the display of the art was more important than the limitations placed on their work as some did suggest, some artists did not agree and did not create art. In this instance, it is not easy to accept the works of the artists as a whole, unlike myself who sought to work with the architect. In his own words, "I have taken another attitude in that, as I think everything is relative in size and it is a question of relative scale. I have come to feel that sculpture can only be of significance to architecture and to the public environment as something conclusive in relation to space."28

But even Naguchi towards the end of his life expressed his frustration with architects and began to echo some of the earlier criticism of art in public spaces: 'To say that my work has been a collaborative effort is not, however, quite correct. I think that what most artists want from a sculptor is an embellishment, not exactly a collaboration with each making his own separate contributions.'29

The sculptor Richard Lippold (1915-2002) went even further, in that he sought the public, the spectator as the third collaborator in the execution: "A finished building with its sculpture, painting and other 'embellishments,' stands most successfully when it is 'incomplete,' waiting like a poem, to be read. If the picture presented to the user is so complete as to exclude him, to be looked at from a distance, every detail of scale, space, and equipment so complete in itself that it substitutes for the man who would enter, then I believe that true collaboration of three has failed."30

Whatever their individual points of view, it would seem that a number of architects developed good working relationships with a number of artists and to whom they returned frequently when commissioning a work of art or installation in a particular location. In some instances those collaborations appeared to be more than a simple commission. Nozaki in particular seemed to have developed close collaborations with architects like Gordon Bunshaft (1909-1990) and Wallace K. Harrison (1895-1981), both of whom were modern art collectors and aficionados in their own right.31
In this period, art in the corporate and institutional context was displayed in three ways: as sculpture in front of buildings on plazas and in gardens; as a sculptural application inside either freestanding or attached to walls or ceilings; and three, as paintings or murals applied to walls or even ceilings.

The use of sculpture in both plazas and gardens was quite widespread and in many locations appears to remain largely intact. For instance, Noguchi worked all across the United States and his work with Gordon Bunshaft at SOM in the interior courts of the original IBM Headquarters in Armonk is both sculpture and landscape (Figures 3, 4) 11 or the installation sunk in the plaza of the Chase Manhattan Building in lower Manhattan 12 in a few instances, in the corporate suburban settings, the entire surroundings of corporate facilities were turned into a sculpture park. However, the future of some of these complexes is in question as the business, the role and the position of the American corporation in society has substantially changed.13

In Manhattan itself many of the corporate buildings received lobbies and other spaces with art work installed mostly on walls. As noted the few architects designing these buildings seemed to have been working mostly with the same group of abstract artists, among them: Josef Albers (1888–1976), Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988),

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Figure 5. Gordon Bunshaft (SOM), branch bank (formerly Manufacturers Trust and most recently Chase), New York. 1954. The second floor banking hall a screen designed by Harry Bertoia is partially visible from the street.

Figure 6. Gordon Bunshaft (SOM), branch bank (formerly Manufacturers Trust and most recently Chase), New York. 1954. The screen as installed originally by Harry Bertoia separated the bank's customers from the bank's officers.

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The former Manufacturers Trust Company branch bank, 510 Fifth Avenue, designed by Gordon Bunshaft and completed in 1954, housed until recently a branch of Chase Bank and was, at the time, considered an innovation in banking design. The metal and glass curtain wall made the entire interior transparent and the main vault was directly on the street and was opened daily for everyone to see (Figure 7). This was in direct contrast to earlier banking design that with its heavy stone façades and metal grates symbolized the safety of the bank and its deposits. In the interior on the second floor the public banking hall was separated from the office space by a western end of the floor by one of Harry Bertoia's distinctive metal screens (Figure 5). The screen, made of steel fused on the surface with bronze, copper and nickel, does remain and is partially visible from the street. However, the bank no longer occupies the building and the space at the end of 2009 was offered for lease as a "big box retail opportunity" making it unclear what will be the fate of the interior in general and the screen in particular.

The Fishman Building, 606 Fifth Avenue, designed by the corporate firm of Carson & Lundin and completed in 1957, has in its lobby a wall installation by Isamu Noguchi called the "Waterfall" and a ceiling installation in the elevator lobbies with undulating white metal screens that recall the rippling effect of water that was also intended to run on the ridged glass wall behind the vertical stainless steel screens of the "Waterfall" in the main lobby (Figures 7, 8). The original building plan had an arcade coming from Fifth Avenue towards the entrance and elevator core. The "Waterfall" was the focal point over the full width of that arcade and visible from Fifth Avenue. Both elements of the sculptural installations are in place but in a 1990s renovation, the arcade to Fifth Avenue was closed and converted to retail, a very valuable commodity on the avenue. The building is now only entered from the side streets, which has changed how the sculpture is approached and seen (obviously rather than frontal when entering the building and thus experienced differently. This installation is also different than many of the others in that it is not a permanent installation but attempts to shape the entire environment suggesting a closer working relationship than an assignment to just fill the assigned space as was so often suggested for the work of these artists.

The Time Life Building on Avenue of the Americas, designed by Wallace Harrison then of the firm Harrison & Abramowitz & Evans, contains in its lobby the work of the major modern artists, Fritz Glamer (1890–1979) and Josef Albers (1888–1976). In the east corridor is a mural by Glamer, titled "Relational Painting #88", and in the west corridor is a low relief by Albers, named "Portals". Both artworks are located on the wall of the core, which determined the dimensions of each from the very beginning. Glamer had initially prepared a maquette of his design for the two-story interior of the Time Life Reception Center but a reduced version was installed in the lobby. The multi-colored geometric mural remains. Harrison had known Albers since the 1930s and worked with him also on the white marble relief titled "Two Constellations" in the lobby of the Coming Glass Works building on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. "Portals" in its geometry is reminiscent of the studies "Homage to the Square" and is made from strips and plates of nickel, and bronze and gray Carrara glass with the intent, according to Albers's own words, to "create a surface of receding squares, which, in two dimensions, gives a sense of depth to the wall." The two other elements distinctive in this lobby are the floor with its swirling tezzerato pattern, most likely inspired by Brazilian examples, and the dark maroon ceiling made of glass tiles and incorporating the lighting. In the renovation of the lobby of the building the murals remained and the ceiling was carefully restored.

Figure 7. Carson & Lundin, office building, New York, 606 Fifth Avenue, 1957. A wall installation designed by Isamu Noguchi (c. 1956–1957) of the Fifth Avenue entrance originally. The sculpture remains in the same location but, because the original entrance was converted into retail, the sculpture is seen somewhat from the interior by Noguchi.

Figure 8. Carson & Lundin, office building, New York, 606 Fifth Avenue, 1957. The sculpture named Waterfall is accompanied by a ceiling design also by Isamu Noguchi (c. 1956–1958), suggesting the movement of water. The ceiling remains in its original location.

Photos from The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York.
Figure 9: Emory Roth & Sons [architects of record] collaborated with Walter Gropius and Pietro Belluschi [design consultants] for the former PanAm Building, now MetLife Building, New York, New York, 1963. The mural Manhattan, designed by Josef Albers, shown here in its original location over the escalators into Grand Central Terminal, was removed in a 2002 lobby renovation and placed in storage, where it remains awaiting restoration and reinstallation in an appropriate location.

Photo © The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation.

by the artwork in the former PanAm Building, now MetLife Building. A well-documented history of the collaboration between the architects of record Emory Roth & Sons with Walter Gropius and Pietro Belluschi (1899-1994) as design consultants is particularly of interest because it addresses the participation of several major artists. Josef Albers, Richard Lippold and Gyorgy Kepes were invited as early as December 1950 to participate, almost three years before the building was completed in 1963. Albers created a large mural named "Manhattan" over the escalators into Grand Central Terminal (figure 9). Richard Lippold did one of his wire sculptures in the Vanderbilt Street lobby and Gyorgy Kepes designed aluminum screens around the information desk. Upon completion the building itself was greatly disliked by the general public. As a result since 1963 the lobby spaces have seen two renovations, first in 1987 when the modernist decor was substantially changed into what could be best called neo-Egyptian and a subsequent renovation in 2002 that removed the 1987 additions and returned a more modernist architectural vocabulary.

With the 2002 renovation the Albers mural was dismantled by the building owners with the stated intent of creating more light access in that end of the building. The
important the location is if the artwork is to be considered site specific and not just a "pointing on the wall." The merit of the lobby entrance at 606 Fifth Avenue maintains the sculpture but changes its experience entirely. How the debate about the integration of art into architecture continues unabated in the next generation of architects and focuses today not as much on the collaborative approach but more on individuals seeing themselves as both architects and artists and claiming that earlier tradition. Michael Graves (b. 1934), Frank Gehry (b. 1929), Frank Stella (b. 1936) were all discussing their work at this point when discussing their work. Or in the words of Graves: "No one over would have thought it was a question of the Artists' Board if they were a painter or a sculptor on an architect, I don't make a great distinction between those aspects of my work."}{-2}{-2}

Notes
1. "Reference to the works of these early artists is made in all of the publications and studies from the post-war period dealing with the collaboration and the perceived lack thereof between architects and artists.
3. As quoted in Michael Libeskind, The Building: The Making of the Organic Modern (Reading, MA: MIT Press, 1984). Libeskind created a New York Times article that mentions, at how much letlay was the artists this given in the design of rooms and sculptures. The book is a comprehensive study of how the building came about, in its significance and the subsequent perspectives. The book is a comprehensive study of how the building came about, in its significance and the subsequent perspectives. The book is a comprehensive study of how the building came about, in its significance and the subsequent perspectives.
6. "With architects' important sites refers to the artist's monographic exhibition. The article "Art and Architecture: A Conversation," 70-73. For the text of the speech given to the artist's monographic exhibition.

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