Hybrid Practice: The Cross-Cultivation of Art and Architecture

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Historically, architecture and design were directly related to the fine arts: drawing, painting, sculpture etc. The master architect was skilled in the various genres of art and building. Over time, with the advent of 'professionalism,' these disciplines separated. During the 1900s, the architect continued to collaborate with those proficient in the arts. These artists, or cooperation of artists, became known as artisans. The mystique and allure of architecture is born of the means, methods and intellect possessed by the traditional master architect and artisan.

The modern era in architecture has rid buildings of ornament and symbols and as a result, critical engagement with artisans. And although the delight of modernism is its bare essence, the current authors of this nakedness are less skilled at clothing space, buildings and landscapes. Equally, contemporary artists have become less apt at integrating art with building and context given the distance between disciplines established by the modern movement.

The return to a hybrid-practice or cross-cultivation of art and architecture in an increasingly on-demand world is a difficult effort indeed, for the work itself is dependant on research and innovation.

The RDG Dahlquist Art Studio, lead by David B. Dahlquist, has made this return passage. This recently established venture between two independently established agencies has given both entities distinction. This merger now operates as a single corporation in effort to creatively influence life for the better through purpose-driven design. As a result, RDG has increased its ability to meet additional design challenges while gaining the capability of fabrication and manufacturing; RDG Dahlquist Art Studio acquires direct commission potential and delivery expertise. Collaboratively, the union enjoys an expansion of their means and methods repertoire.
The art works depicted in this article are merely the beginning of such effort. They represent a typological challenge before us as designers; the reintegration of artistry into the production of meaningful environments. Both of these installations, the “Flying Shuttle” and the “Parade of Floats,” are fabricated primarily of terra-cotta and take their symbolic form from the heritage of the people who make up their respective communities. As the collaboration between RDG Planning & Design and RDG Dahlquist Art Studio matures, perhaps a deeper integration of both the sculptural forms and the constructed environments will develop.

Essentially an applied art, architecture tends toward prescriptive means for making. This type of knowledge application is dependant, in every respect, on innovation. To engage in the research and development of new methods and means with other disciplines, then, should be the basis of any architectural practice. The true benefit of such an arrangement is its potential dialogue or exchange of knowledge.

Studio discourse regarding scale, proportion, chromatic variation, volume, materiality, craft, meaning and culture is critical to good design as a matter of experience as well as aesthetics. In contemporary practice, discussions of this sort have narrowed or even fallen silent given our discipline’s lack of fervor as it relates to issues beyond utility, cost, schedule and code compliance. This has been compounded and even excused due to ‘specialization’ and shortened delivery schedules. The direct cooperation of an architectural office and an arts studio provides a platform for the revival and perhaps expansion of this qualitative debate regarding the act of making.

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