

AJ

NEWS/Industry 'map' rumpus

Tibbalds' plan for Birmingham

EDUCATION SPECIAL ISSUE

Multidisciplinary teaching debate

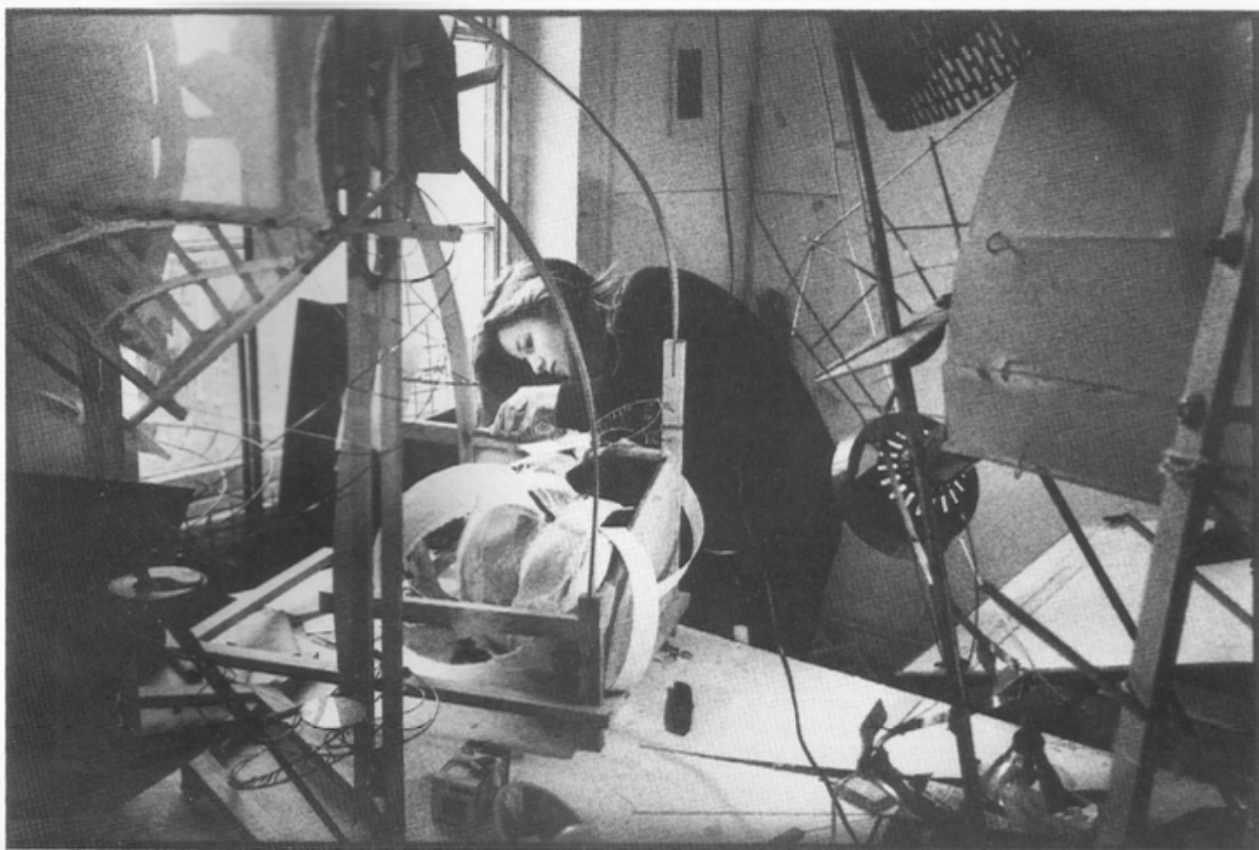
Pre-degree course for women

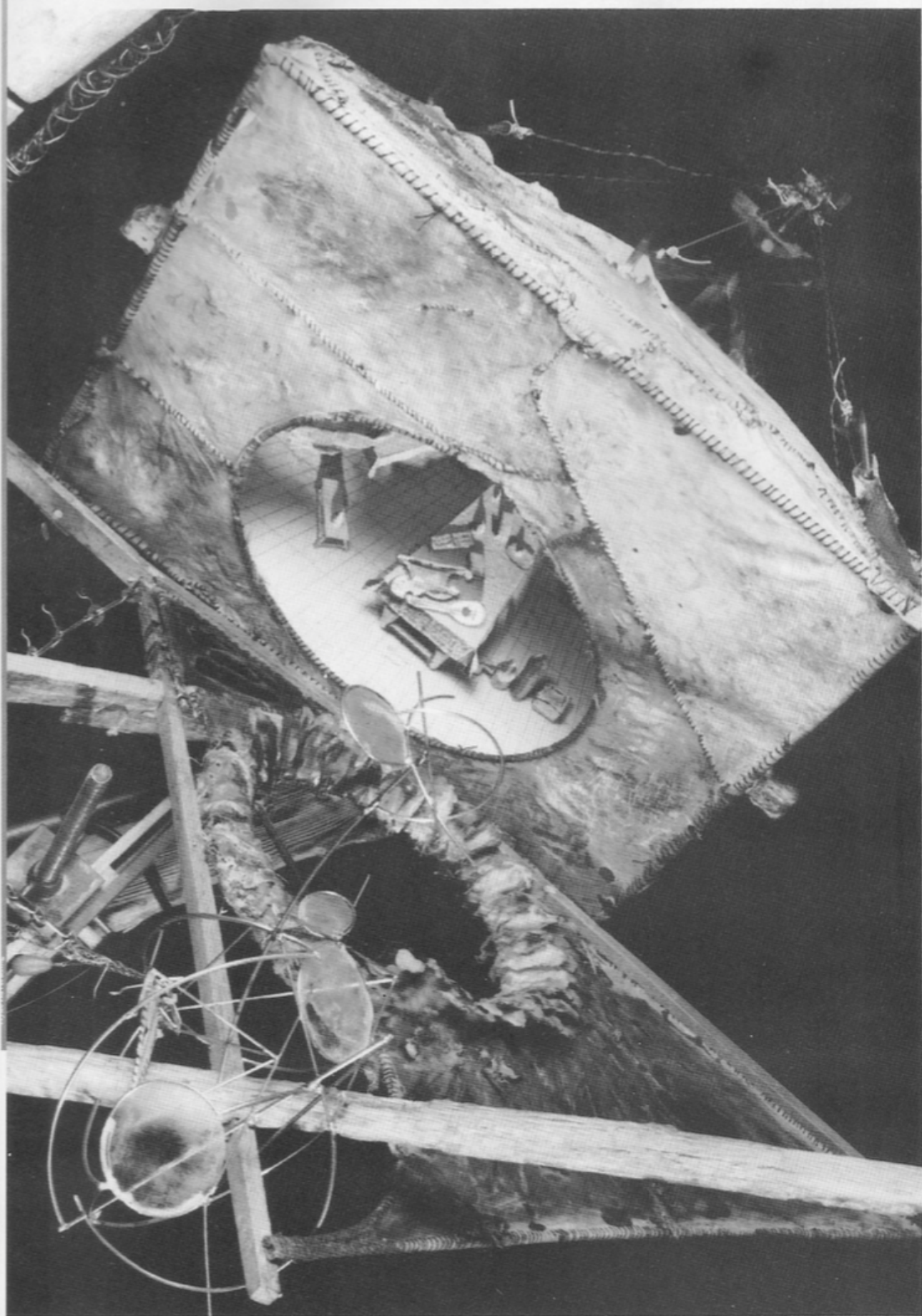


Are there good arguments for studio teaching? Tom Woolley asks why we do it and looks at where next. Then, (p53), Lorna McNeur describes Cambridge first year studio, a broad and broadening education.

WHY

STUDIO?





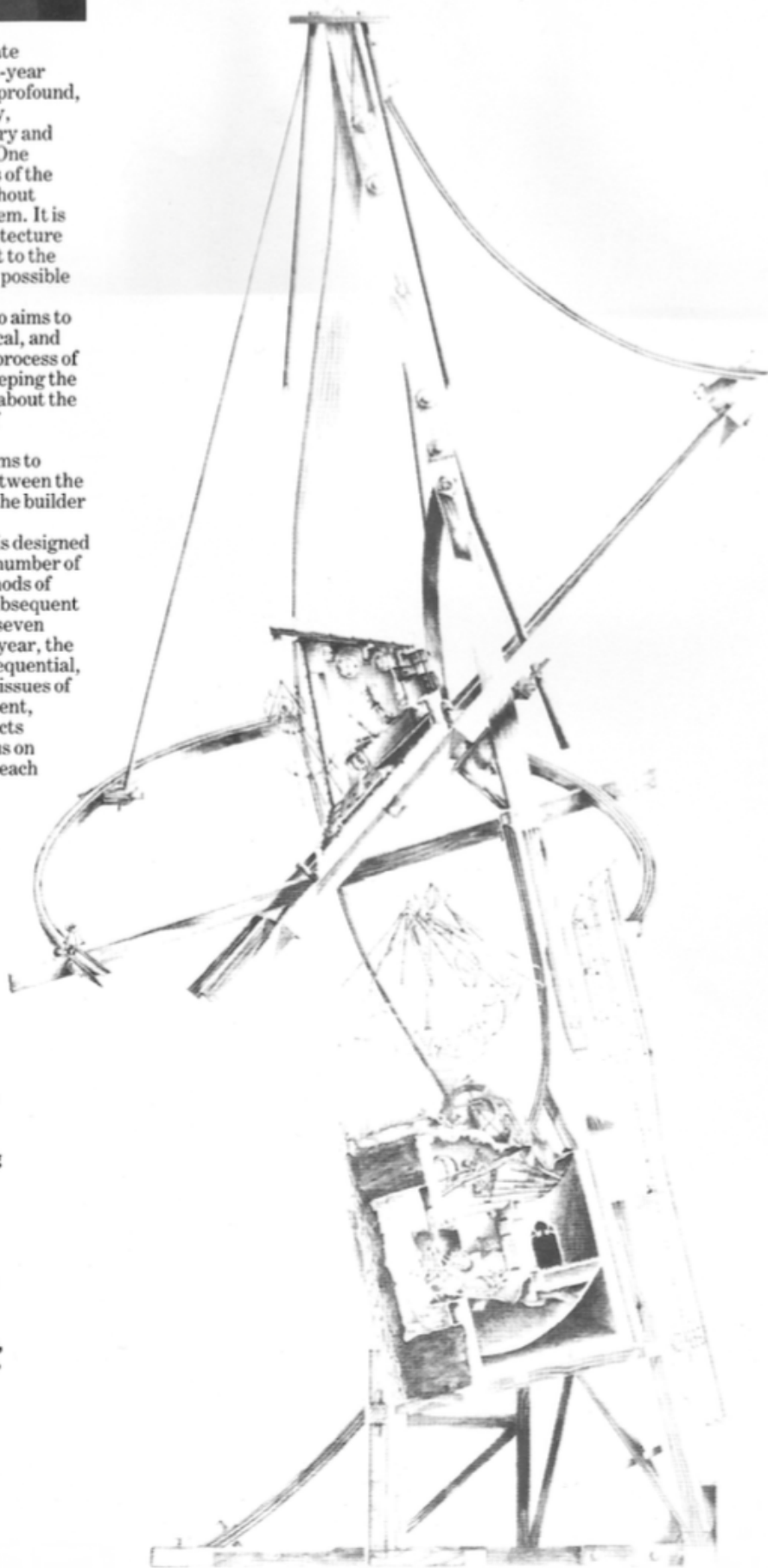
The question of the appropriate knowledge to share with first-year architecture students can be profound, encompassing history, theory, philosophy, sociology, industry and construction, to name a few. One wishes to inform the students of the complexity of the subject without thoroughly overwhelming them. It is the responsibility of the architecture tutor to introduce the student to the 'realistic possibilities and the possible realities'.¹

The first-year design studio aims to integrate historical, theoretical, and cultural phenomena into the process of architectural design while keeping the student constantly informed about the construction and structure of materiality and its power to communicate ideas. It also aims to encourage communication between the historian, the architect, and the builder during the process of design.

The first year programme is designed to introduce the student to a number of architectural issues and methods of working in preparation for subsequent years in architecture. Out of seven projects assigned during the year, the first six are cumulative and sequential, introducing the fundamental issues of analysis, place, path, monument, section and facade. The projects encourage the student to focus on individual places or spaces in each

1 Opposite, project one, analysis, the first first-year project. It leads to modelling a room on a painting. David Hutton based this on the Cabalist Alchemist, an etching from 1604 by Heinrich Khunrath.

2 Project five, section, by Gerald Roberts. This combines the work of the previous four projects: project one, analysis, led to making the upper room based on *The Annunciation* by Robert Campi, 1441; project two, place, led to designing and making the lower room; project three, structure, is his framework; project four, path, is expressed in the wire path (fine lines) linking the two rooms. Project five included drawing this self-built assemblage in section.





3 Project two, place, leads to modelling 'a room of my own', this by Kate Biro.

4,5 The first four projects combined into a 'cabinet of curiosity'. 4 is by David Hutton which includes the room shown in figure one; 5 is by Isobel Wroe.

design to ensure that he/she has a thorough understanding of these issues prior to working simultaneously with the numerous complexities of architecture.

Throughout the year, the student becomes familiar with these issues through designing and constructing and researching.

The culmination of these first six projects is an architectonic building which contains two rooms, vertical circulation, and a facade, as well as drawings which document it in plan, section, and elevation. Each project is considered to be a culmination of everything learned in the previous project, as well as those new issues introduced in the present project. The last project, which occurs during the entire third term, is considered as a synthesis of the year and includes the design of a building with a site and a brief.

One primary intention of this programme is to encourage the student of architecture to consider seriously the implicit relationships between culture, architecture, history and human inhabitation, as integral to the process

of designing a building. Despite the intentions of some of the original thinkers of the Modernist Movement, its popularisation has resulted in a preoccupation with systems, technology, efficiency, finance, function, and formal design. The issue of human beings living their lives in the buildings that we make has been subordinated to the point of deprivation. Too many cities and landscapes have been built up with clever products of efficient systems, ignoring the necessity to respectfully cohabit with the environment in which they are located.

If we are to return to a civilized understanding of the role of architecture, one essential consideration will be its contribution to the quality and dignity of people's lives. Acknowledging the necessity for efficient systems in the twentieth century, this programme aims to establish a healthy balance of considerations, to reinstate inhabitation as one of those primary factors in the making of architecture.

Although these projects require a great deal of building with carpentry tools and materials such as wood, metals, concrete, plaster, and so on, the students do not need a knowledge of construction or architectural drawing prior to beginning this design course. Regardless of his/her previous experience, each student is taught all that is necessary to complete the requirements of the projects.

Project one — analysis

The first project centres on the analysis of a painting from the late Medieval/early Renaissance period. Owing to its particular location in history, the student becomes familiar with some of the issues of symbolism and perspective, and their historical and theoretical relevance to the twentieth century.

This project is designed to integrate history and theory into the process of design, and to introduce the student to some of the relationships between architecture and art. Through researching and then making a model of the space in the painting, which has been created by one of the masters, he/she will soon become familiar with such phenomena as qualities and sources of light, perceptual and symbolic weight of objects and space, materiality and meaning of place. Through dwelling in a period of time substantially different from our own, the student begins to gain some insight into the state of contemporary architecture.

Project two — place

While the first project includes the intellectual and perceptual analysis and construction of a given space, the second project, 'place', introduces the students to the process of design. After researching and discussing some of the modern movements of art and

architecture in the twentieth century having to do with perspective and Cubism, they then proceed to design a significant space called 'A Room of One's Own', inspired by Virginia Woolf's book of the same name.

Although it may seem a large leap from the late Medieval/early Renaissance period to Cubism, it is more easily understood when one remembers that the shift of perceptions between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was marked in the art world by the shift of two-dimensional symbolic space to three-dimensional perspectival space, and that Cubism marked the shift in perceptions from three dimensional perspectival space into four dimensional simultaneous space.²

Project three — structure

Having now constructed two rooms, the student is required to design and construct a structure to house them. Whereas the two previous projects involved the use of materials to create a small-scale place which at least implied that it could be a full-scale room, the third project introduces the student to the use of materials on a scale closer to 'one to one'.

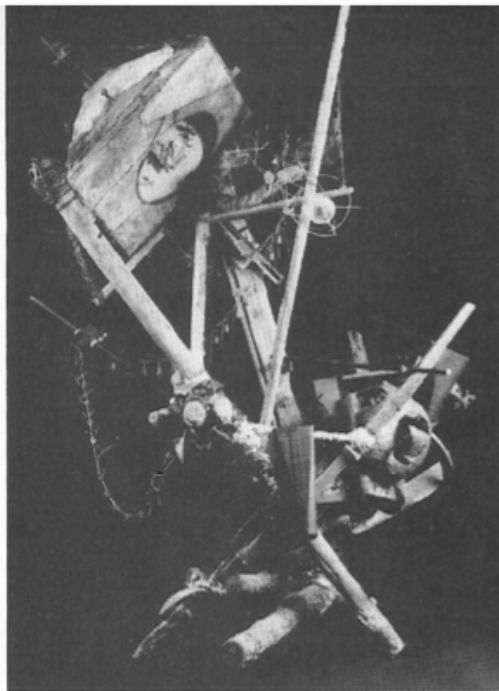
The focus of his/her attention is primarily on the design of details as well as the gesture and form of the structure. In that the two previous spaces were inspired from markedly different points in history, there remains the possibility of this structure metaphorically representing the bridging of the centuries which lie between them.

Project four — path

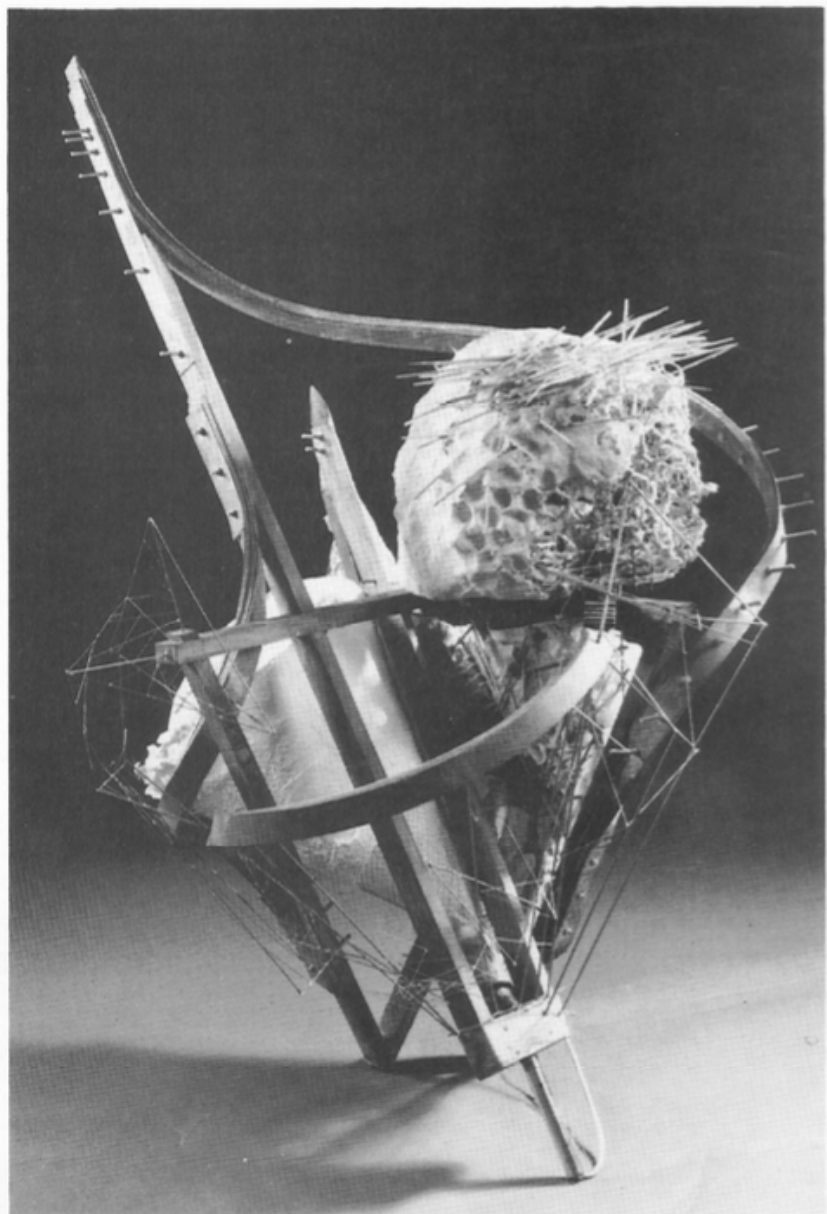
Having now positioned the two rooms of project one and two within the structure constructed in project three, the issues of movement in architecture are now introduced. It is a study of the space of movement as a significant experiential condition. This project is intended to counteract the unconscious assumption that the space between rooms is less important than the rooms themselves, resulting in nonspaces called corridors. This particular project focuses on vertical circulation, employing the use of elements of intrigue and surprise, by designing an experiential path as the inhabitable space of transition between the realities of the 'Medieval' and 'Cubist' spaces that have been created thus far.

Project five — section

Having completed this architectonic building of two rooms, a path, and the structure, it is now appropriate to construct measured drawings of it in plan and section. This is exclusively a drawing project in which various kinds of drawings are discussed and studied such as: measured drawings, historical sections, and perceptual drawings involving qualities of light, shadow, and texture. The section is discussed



4



5

6 Project seven, a house for an artist. Aled Evans' design for a house for Julian Bream.

7 Project six, facade, goes on to develop facade elements for the structure. As part of the project Annabel Chown drew this medieval mask from the Fitzwilliam Museum.

8 Another house for an artist, this a section of a house for Dr Seuss by David Hutton.



7

relative to the structure of the human body and architecture along with the perceptual interior and the inhabitation of space.

The body can be seen as the house for the mind and the soul. The building can be seen as the house for the body, the mind and the soul. As the house for one's entire being, architecture can embody both our physical needs for shelter as well as our intellectual and emotional dreams and desires. A self-portrait can reveal the nature of one's physical state as well as the spirit of one's existence. The section of a building can reveal both the structural composition as well as the quality of the spaces, which contain the intimate stories present in the journey through the structure. Architecture can be seen as the physical manifestation of human space.

Project six — facade

Returning to the structure, the design of the facade is discussed relative to its ability to reveal and conceal the structure and the spaces and qualities of the interior. Upon completing the design of the facade, the student then constructs drawings of it. Having studied section as a way of revealing the structure and perceptual qualities of the spaces within bodies and buildings, the facade is now studied; first through the making of a self-portrait and then through the constructing of a facade.

In a self-portrait, the face, the hands and the gestures of the body can reveal or conceal the feelings, the thoughts and perceptions of the being within. The facade of a building can reveal or conceal the qualities of the spaces within. The face of the building is the

masque which reveals or conceals. A sixteenth century author of emblems discusses this phenomenon in another way, implying that it is possible to 'conceal in order to reveal'.³

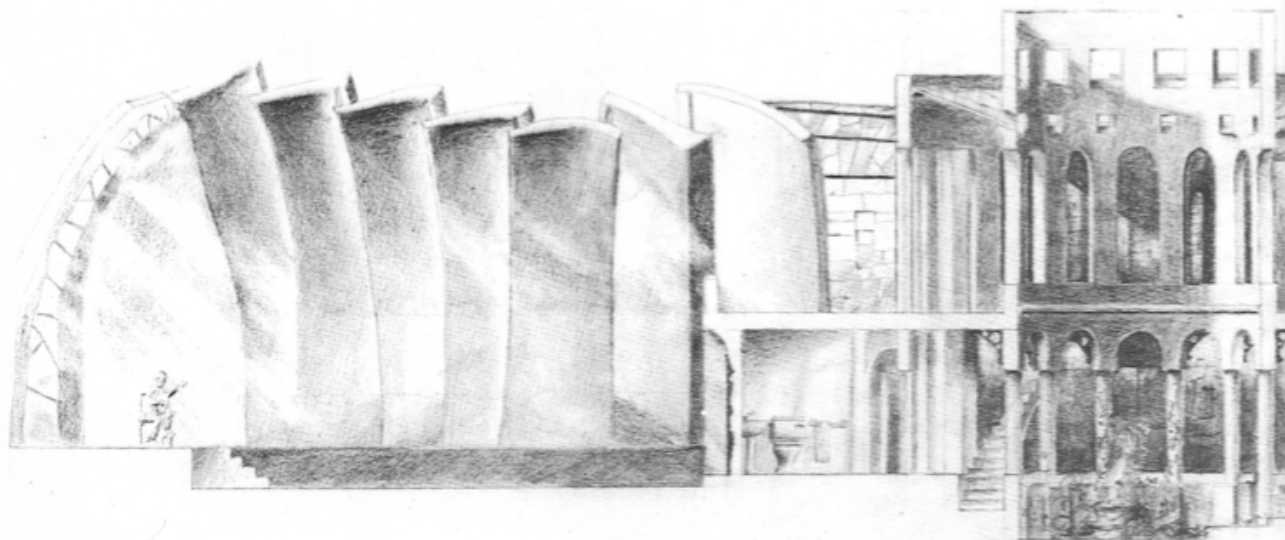
Project seven — artist's house

This project is designed as a transition between architectonics and architecture as well as a bridge between first and second year, particularly focusing on making conceptual issues physically manifest as inhabitable form and space. Having dwelt on analysis, place, structure, path, section, facade, and the numerous issues associated with them, the student is now prepared to design a building dealing with all of these issues simultaneously.

The student is asked to choose an artist and design a house and studio for him/her. This house is seen as a retreat from the complications of city life where the artist will be able to concentrate on his/her work in the quietude of a peaceful setting. The house should reflect the sensibilities of the artist chosen, as well as be respectful of the context in which it is created. The considerations of the context include such things as history and character of the 'place', the dialogue between the new building and the existing environs such as qualities of building materials and spaces, heights, pastoral views, 'city' frontage, and so on. Since this project is located between the 'city' and a pastoral view, it affords the opportunity to develop the design according to the theme inherent to the site, the transition from culture to nature in some way appropriate to the artist chosen.

Learning objectives

The architect must be prepared to use a great deal of imagination, not only in design but also in the



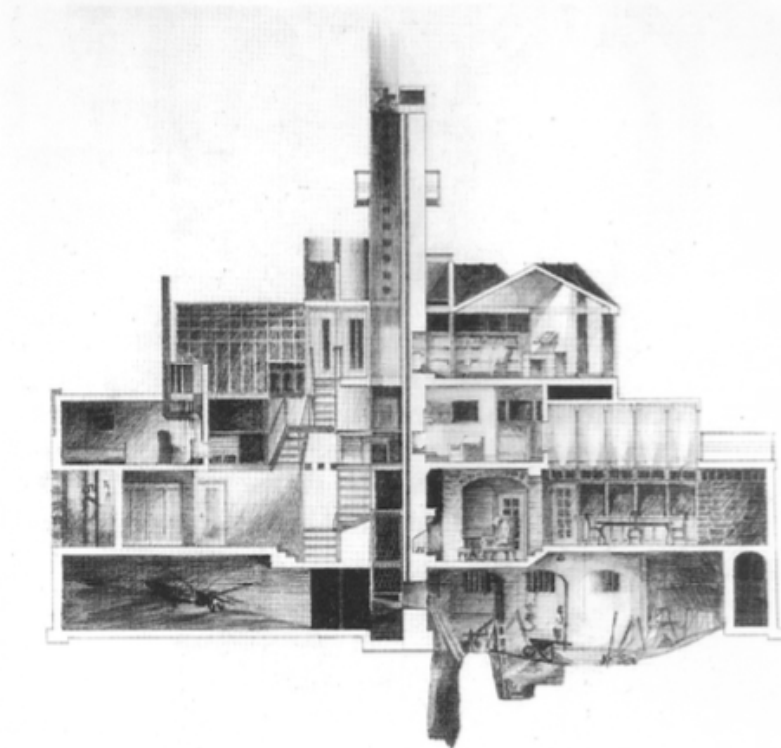
approach to problems.

The unconventional forms of the first six projects stretch the imaginative capabilities of the students and encourage them to discard some of their preconceptions about buildings that can sometimes be a hindrance to them in discovering more innovative solutions to previously unresolved problems in architecture.

Having developed this programme over the last eight years, experience has shown that the transition from architectonic structure to the design of a building is very smooth. In approaching the seventh project, the students have developed their confidence in thinking and working creatively, are unintimidated about working with almost any material, understand many aspects of the building through having studied them so carefully during the year, and are very enthusiastic about the prospect of designing a building. The students have also practised their ability to articulate their thoughts through participating in weekly design theory seminars and sometimes being critics during design presentations. They have gained a tangible understanding of the relationships between history, theory and design, through having simultaneously designed, discussed and written essays during the year.

The evaluation criteria we use for the first-year studio are:

- the ability to conceptually interpret the project in a significant manner
- comprehensiveness, cohesiveness, clarity, and a high degree of resolution in the project
- the ability to embody meaning in form
- attention to detail, form and materiality which serve to reinforce the ideas
- high quality of craft in construction
- the ability to plan a work schedule



8

to complete projects by the due date.

The students enter second year with confidence and enthusiasm. Tutors initially sceptical about the 'too imaginative' approach now express delight at working with the students.

Thinking hands

Throughout the entire year the basic underlying assumption is that one thinks with one's hands,¹ rather than predetermining a design in one's head. While the hands build, the eyes

perceive and the mind learns, constructing more ideas for the hands to think about, while building. Thinking, making, perceiving and learning occur simultaneously in the thinking hands, the precious gift of the architect. ■

References

- 1 A. Perez-Gomez *Architecture and the crisis of modern science*. MIT Press, 1983.
- 2 J. Berger 'The moment of Cubism' in *The sense of light*. Pantheon Books, 1985.
- 3 G. Corrozet *Hecatographie* Ch. Oulmont (Editor) Champion, Paris, 1905. Translated by Irene Bergal.

