

ART / ARCHITECTURE

HERBERT MUSCHAMP

Peeking Inside Other People's Dream Houses

MODERN life is long, modern art is short. That's why art keeps getting better all the time. If you don't like it now, just stick around for a while. Eventually, something likable is bound to turn up.

It's a pleasure to report, for example, that the Museum of Modern Art's architecture and design department is back on track after several lackluster seasons. "The Un-Private House," a current show organized by the department's chief curator, Terence Riley, has been a popular as well as a critical success, so crowded at times that it's impos-

Shows at the Modern about home and car raise questions about privacy, voyeurism and sensory stimulation.

sible to see the many fine works on view. "Different Roads," a show of concept cars organized by Christopher Mount, an associate curator, is not brilliant, but it has also been a crowd pleaser. Who doesn't like a car show?

And who doesn't get a voyeuristic thrill from peeking into private houses? That thrill is the subtext of "The Un-Private House," an exhibition of 26 recent residential designs (through Oct. 5). The supertext is the erosion of the borders between public and private realms, as seen from the homeowner's point of view. Media walls, open floor plans, glass walls, Moebius strip staircases, virtual chefs — these are just a few of the devices used to blur or dissolve the oppositional relationship between public and private space. But the subtext — the museum audience gazing into places designed for private clients — is what gives this show its timely appeal.

After all, what would a self-respecting media wall have been showing us in recent years? A world convulsed by the performances of public figures in private places: President Clinton in White House corridors; Princess Diana backstage at the Ritz Hotel; John F. Kennedy Jr. in a single-engine plane. A world in which people may think they know JonBenet Ramsey's family better than the Ramseys know themselves — better, for that matter, than they know the people living beneath their own roofs.



A living room in the "The Un-Private House" show at the Modern; right, the DaimlerChrysler Composite Concept Vehicle.

a private living room, but in fact it more nearly resembles a waiting room, crowded by individuals who do not converse, who have extra time on their hands and loads of



Photographs by Jeffery A. Salter/The New York Times

on constant sensory stimulation. In addition to the photographs, models and drawings, there are video monitors displaying computer animations. Spacy musical soundtracks twiddle away, their overlapping sonorities competing for attention.

Adjacent to the waiting room is a large round table, seating eight, with a Lazy Susan

Taking a Peek Inside Other People's Dream Houses

Continued From Page 37

to which architecture has accommodated itself to a distracted way of life.

The 26 projects in the show span a broad esthetic spectrum but are clustered around two extremes: Hot and Not. Not houses (Francois de Menil, Hanrahan & Meyers, Steven Holl) descend from the tradition of Arts and Crafts. They emphasize comfort, unpretentiousness and serenity, and often evoke the refined vernacular of the Japanese house. Hot houses (Herzog & de Meuron, Hariri & Hariri, Neil M. Denari, Diller & Scofidio, Rem Koolhaas) are the descendants of Italian Futurism. Startlingly unconventional, they make furious display of new materials, new technologies, new ways of organizing space.

Architecture has accommodated itself to a distracted way of life.

Most of us would probably prefer to live in the Not houses. But what are they doing in this show? It's telling that such a question should arise. Modern audiences, at least, would rather have the sensory stimulation of the Hot than the familiar comforts of the Not.

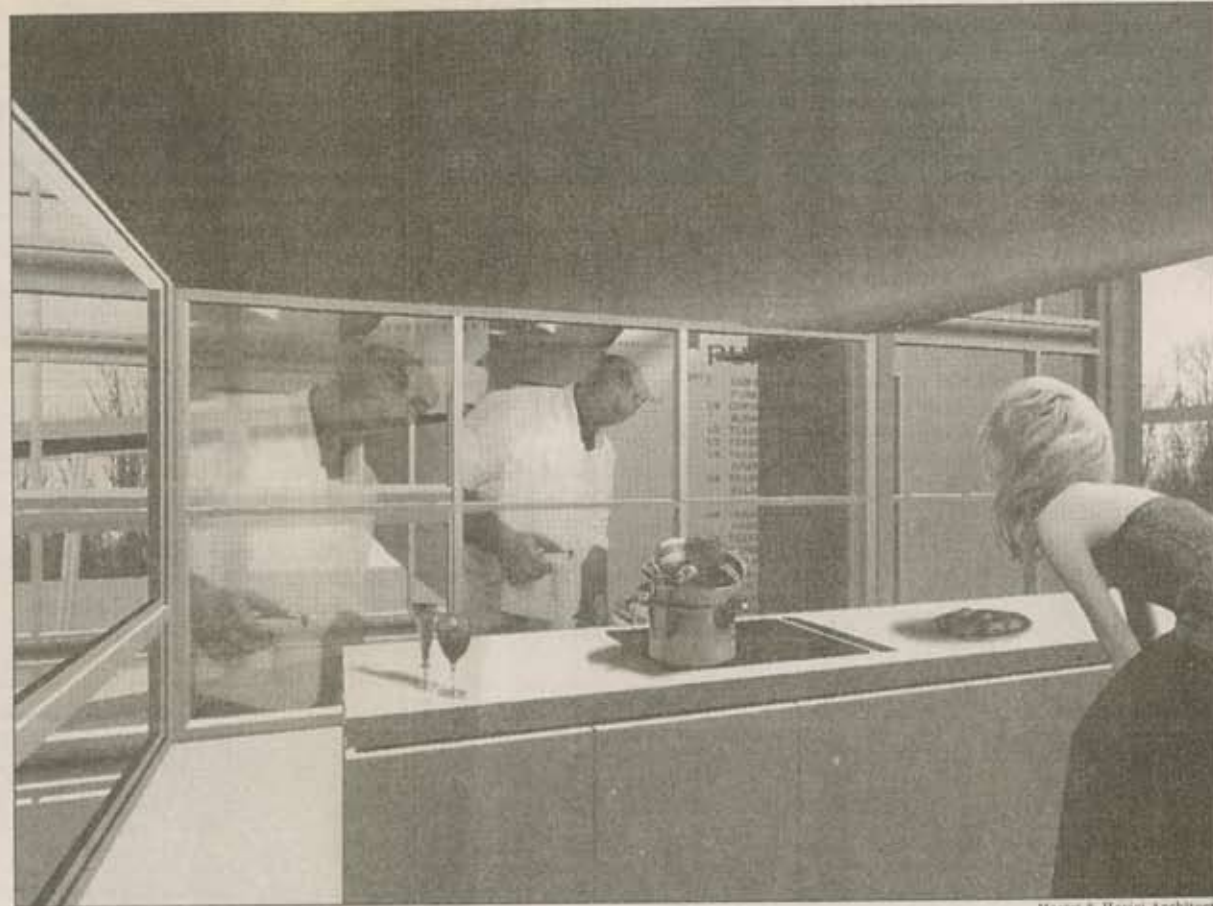
Delivering shocks of the new has been central to the Modern's mission since its inception. Shows like "The International Style" (1932) and "The New Italian Landscape" (1972) are landmarks in the history of rapid-

fire culture. The museum would be failing at its job if it didn't transmit the innovative spirit of the Futurists, the de Stijl group, the Bauhaus, the Constructivists and other nerve centers of the Modern Movement. In 1933, Alfred H. Barr Jr. famously compared the Modern's collection to "a torpedo moving through time."

"Different Roads," a show of recent and prototype cars, isn't strong enough to stand on its own, but as a complement to "The Un-Private House" it is very useful (through Tuesday). It may strike you, for example, that the cars look far more substantial than the houses. This is partly because the houses are represented by models and photographs, while the cars appear as themselves — in person, so to speak. "Different Roads" also presents at rest objects that are designed to move. As displayed in the Modern's sculpture garden, the cars could pass for metallic pavilions.

Other factors make the cars look uncommonly down-to-earth. Though varied in concept, size and styling, they are all molded around common elements: wheels, doors, windows, seating, engine, instruments, safety features, head and tail lamps, aerodynamics, ergonomics and scale. Americans are primed to see the car as a spiritual home, the house as an extension of the garage. In a society economically rooted in the consumption of gas and in the cars that burn it, the house is a waiting room where people get to rest up between rides. In a twist on "The Un-Private House," "Different Roads" offers a look at the vehicle for injecting the private sphere into public space. The car phone, coffee holder, CD player and seats add up to a living room on wheels. It is the fulfillment of the Futurists' dream.

In the Modern's garden, you see people pressing their noses against



A digital house by Hariri & Hariri in the show "The Un-Private House" at the Museum of Modern Art.

the windows. This is partly just to check out the interior, but it is also because the appeal of driving resides mainly in being on the inside looking out: watching the world go by, passing other cars, choosing routes, speeds and music. It is about controlling the world of objective reality from within a subjective frame.

As Mr. DeGrandpre argues, Ritalin's function is to alter conscious-

ness — to modify subjective space. It brings perception into closer alignment with the objective reality of cultural acceleration. It is a short step, in other words, from the DaimlerChrysler Concept Vehicle to the ingestion of a Ritalin capsule. One capsule is driven, the other is swallowed. But both have the effect of speeding up consciousness so that people can remain in place.

"The Un-Private House" is so full of arresting visual images that the show's social content is easily undervalued. Why these rich people's dwellings? Why isn't the Modern leading the way with prototypes for affordable housing? In fact, this is one of the most socially informed architecture shows the museum has ever presented. It shows that there is a range of possible responses to rap-

id-fire culture, from Hot to Not. That range, more than any individual work, displays the pivotal role architecture plays in modulating the social, intellectual and psychological forces of contemporary life.

And the implications of this lesson extend far beyond the design of suburban houses. For if you turn the show's theme inside out, you arrive at the Un-Public City. You reach the metropolis in which many of us now dwell — with its privatized services, its business improvement districts, mall-like festival marketplaces and public-private partnerships in major real estate developments.

But where is the architecture that responds with creative verve to the accelerating urban condition? That is the question to which "The Un-Private House" indirectly leads us. Thus far, what we've seen mostly are Not solutions. Retro theme parks like Battery Park City. Cheap cast-concrete versions of prewar stonework. Bishop's-crook lampposts, fearful interpretations of context, oom-pah-pah celebrations of formerly faded landmarks.

This slow-down mentality only masks the changes overtaking older urban centers. Like a gated suburban community, it keeps the reality of acceleration at bay. Masks can be witty, even profound. Wearing them is a perfectly reasonable option for people in a modern democracy. The problem is that the city isn't offering other options. Where are the office buildings, apartment towers, theaters and airport terminals that explore the changing boundaries between public and private space? Designs that deal with porosity, flexibility and subjectivity in the public realm? These options are seldom seen, or even contemplated. That's one reason modern life keeps getting worse.

A Timepiece All About Time

Continued From Page 37

the facade of their new building, designed by the architectural firm Davis Brody Bond, on the south side of Union Square. It's a high-profile spot, both figuratively and literally, and visible from some angles for dozens



which a storm periodically raged, complete with fog, rain and wind.

During the next few years, they produced works for galleries and museums from New York to Italy to Switzerland; designed stage sets, costumes and lighting for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, and began to receive commissions for public artworks, the first of which



highlighted sections of their plans are projected from beneath the table onto its translucent white surface.

All this has been designed to provide more information than is usually found in architecture shows, but the effect is rather the opposite. The works on view become a kind of disturbance, a distraction from the rapid-fire environment in which they are presented. I don't mean this as a criticism. Rather, the presentation reveals the extent

Continued on Page 38

A Giant Timepiece That's Also a Piece About Time

AP - CAT/MONNA note book

By JEFFREY KASTNER

IF you took all the faxes we've sent back and forth about this project and weighed them, it would be about equivalent to that rock," said Kristin Jones, laughing as she nodded toward a dark lump on a nearby flatbed truck and hugging a cup of coffee to ward off the chill.

It was just after 1 o'clock on a bitter March morning and Ms. Jones was standing on a windy corner at 14th Street and Broadway in Manhattan, just as she had on dozens of other nights during the preceding six weeks. Across the lanes of traffic, a hail of sparks suddenly showered the darkened sidewalk, illuminating a half-dozen construction workers as they clambered over what appeared to be a colossal hunk of granite, working to cut it loose from a steel frame before attaching it to a crane. Nearly two tons of concrete shaped like a large boulder, the rock was being readied to take its place as part of "Metronome," an artwork designed by Ms. Jones and her partner, Andrew Ginzel, for the facade of a new retail, entertainment and residential complex on Union Square.

When the artists left the site just before dawn, the object had been painstakingly positioned and anchored some 40 feet in the air. And the complicated artistic puzzle of "Metronome" — which Tom Eccles, the director of New York City's Public Art Fund, has called "the most prominent commission of a public artwork in the city since the Statue of Liberty" — was one piece closer to completion.

The elaborate allegorical ensemble of "Metronome" has been slowly evolving at the site, 1 Union Square South, since construction began in February. A 98-foot-high by 50-foot-wide wall of gravity-defying, rippling brick went up first, creating a kind of stage on which Ms. Jones and Mr. Ginzel choreographed other sculptural elements — the rock, a 67-foot-long bronze cone and an enormous hand, cast from the square's

Jeffrey Kastner's most recent article for Arts & Leisure was about the installation artist Sarah Sze.



Marion Harders

"Metronome," by Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel, on Union Square, with George Washington's hand seen from below.

equestrian statue of George Washington and then enlarged.

These parts are arrayed around a central five-foot void that puffs steam throughout the day and emits an ever-changing tympanic tone at noon. To one side of the brick wall, a sphere slowly rotates in sync with the lunar phases. On the other, a 15-place digital clock simultaneously registers the time both elapsed and remaining within the current 24-hour cycle (at precisely noon, for instance, the digital panel will read 12000000000000012).

Functionally, "Metronome" is obviously meant to be a kind of grand clock for the thousands of people who pass through Union Square every day. But, the artists say, the work is less a timepiece than a piece about time, a meditation on both how we define it and how it defines us.

Getting the many parts of "Metronome" to function in harmony — compositionally, technically and administratively — has required a finely tuned collaborative effort. For the developers who initiated it, the work represents an unprecedented commitment

ambitious undertaking in the history of a personal and professional partnership that goes back nearly two decades.

Sitting in their Greenwich Village apartment on a warm spring morning several weeks later, the two artists were amiable, if still a bit bleary, from the late nights spent on the "Metronome" site. Discussing their long partnership, they often turned to each other to verify historical facts, frequently finishing each other's sentences. Mr. Ginzel, a wiry 45-year-old with sharp features and a shock of sandy hair, typically weighs in

A new building on Union Square is getting a complicated artistic puzzle for its facade.

when talk turns to the technical big picture. Ms. Jones, two years younger and quick to laugh, usually fields the more detailed questions about the project's nuts and bolts.

Although the two conceptualize and design their artworks together, Ms. Jones is clearly the project manager, repeatedly jumping up to take calls from members of the far-flung team involved with "Metronome." While she acknowledges that such administrative slogging is essential, that doesn't mean she particularly enjoys it. "I do moan about it," Ms. Jones admitted, settling back into her chair after yet another interruption. "Though it is sort of fascinating to try to do the impossible in the middle of all the banality and monotony. But we believe in the concept of the art. That's what keeps us alive."

The concept for "Metronome" was first developed more than three years ago when the Related Companies — a New York-based real estate firm involved with more than \$7 billion of developments around the United States, including the Coliseum site at Columbus Circle — asked the Municipal Art Society and the Public Art Fund to help identify someone to create an artwork for

Continued on Page 38