

Chiat/Day Offices

Main Street, Venice, Calif.

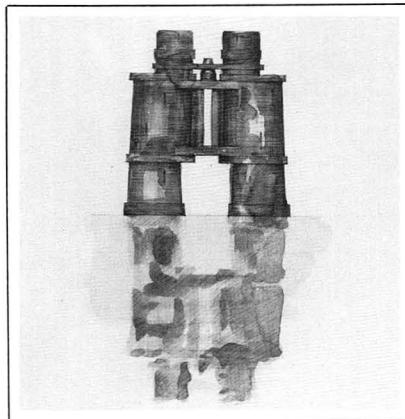
Frank O. Gehry
In conjunction with:
Claes Oldenburg
Coosje van Bruggen

His projects, admitted into the California environment, upset perception and conventional conceptions of habitation, setting the imaginary and the real on the same plane, granting them a common life. This synthesis associates the visible with the invisible, the reproduced with the reflection, the natural with the artificial, the old with the new, the opaque with the transparent. For Gehry, the scalpel of architecture not only allows for the possibility of dialogue, as in the architect's houses, where one structure enters another, but places in doubt the difference between true and false, inside and outside, today and tomorrow. Through the cut, the city no longer appears as the background for an architectural dynamic, but enters into it.

Claes Oldenburg has always had a unique relationship with the commonplace. He has done more than extrapolate it from its habitual context; he has created it. He has exploited its dramatic and spectacular potential, finally giving it hypersignificance. Just as Theodor Adorno, in *Minima Moralia*, sees the obviousness of the commonplace transformed into something unsettling, a "profane enlightenment," so Oldenburg exercises the "object folly" that surrounds human beings. In emphasizing the presence of banal objects of consumption in the world, he opens up a space for them beyond their use value. He makes them appear unexpectedly in art, where they seem enigmatic, absurd, absolute, almost hallucinatory. Yet Oldenburg is aware

that the commonplace is paradoxical. In fact, he chooses it for his work because it needs neither confirmation of nor justification for its existence. Irreducible in its being, it requires no compensatory illusion of an ideal form of itself somewhere "elsewhere." It lives in the here and now.

Oldenburg removes his everyday objects — shirt, a hamburger, a tube of toothpaste, a clothespin, a typewriter, a fan, an ice-cream cone, a saw, a baseball bat, a flashlight, a button, a knife — from the irreversible, anonymous flow of the commonplace. He renders the normal "exceptional," transforms it into the extraordinary, the singular, the anomalous. When Heraclitus, sitting by his hearth, surrounded by the everyday things of his house, received visitors who hoped to find him in some exceptional moment of his life, he remarked, "Here too the gods are present."



Binoculars Sketch — C. Oldenburg



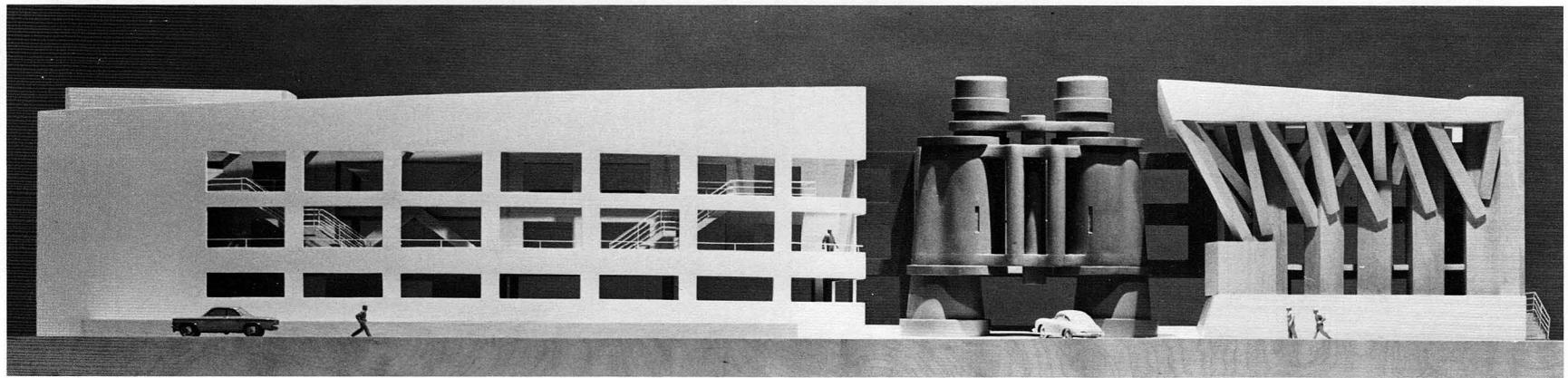
Street view of auto entrance

This three-story, 75,000 square foot office building sits atop three underground stories of parking for 300 cars. The stucco-clad L-shaped building, to be completed in December 1987, will be occupied entirely by the Chiat/Day advertising agency. The facade is divided into three sections, each articulated with a different material and shape. Entry to the building is through a centrally placed pair of 45 ft high binoculars, designed by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. The binoculars, whose two shafts will contain an office and a library, are flanked on one side by a curved

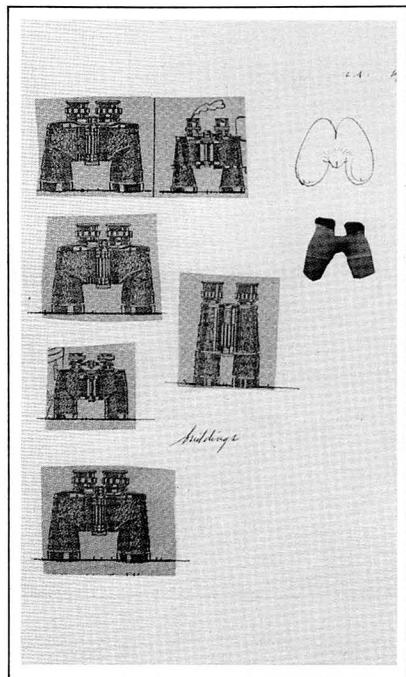
screen wall, and on the other side by a forest of copper clad trees.

"To be in the middle of Venice, so close to Palladio — and so much of architecture today refers to Palladio — in that situation to be talking about disorder, another kind of order, is a bit irreverent, I think, a kind of poking. But the performance is not only about being irreverent, for there is a grain of truth in saying that Palladio is too orderly.

Western culture just thinks of one kind of order — it comes from Europe — of symmetry, classicism



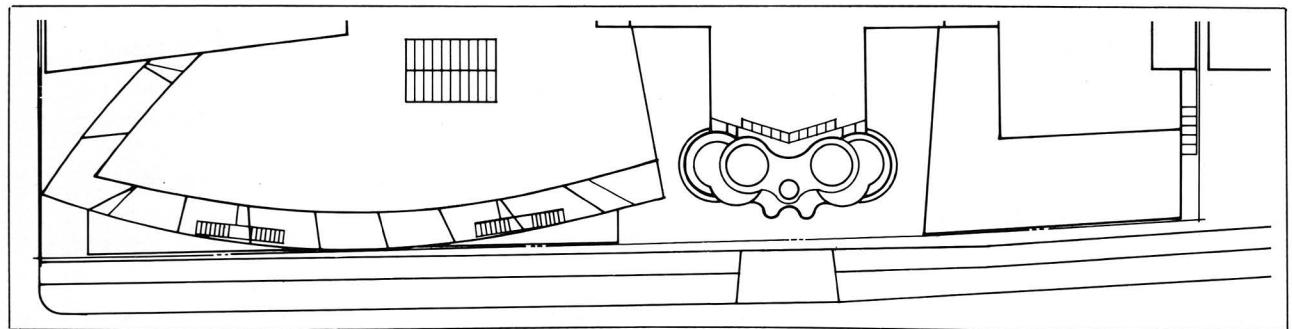
Main Street elevation



Pelvic Region Characters, 1969.

and the idea of a central focus. But the whole world can't be built on axes alone. Growing up in California, there's a closer relationship to the Orient. For instance, Japanese gardens such as the Ryoanyu may appear to be scattered, but have their own inherent kind of order. The relationships between the pieces — which are sculptural, stressing the negative spaces — unfold as you walk past them. Emphases shift, it's more open-ended, more engaging because you have to think about it more."

—Frank O. Gehry



Site plan

For Gehry, architecture is a well-honed, two-edged scalpel that crosses, cuts, separates, distinguishes and illuminates, cutting to the core of spatial, architectural and urban problems.⁶ It is an active instrument of modification and cognition, an intellectual and environmental knife that penetrates buildings and building technology to reveal their infinite meanings.

Similarly, Oldenburg redeems the banal. His process resembles the dadaists' extrapolation of objects from the homogeneous expanse of daily life and their insertion of them into the context of art, but his stance is more wide-ranging. He considers the thing accepted not as a kind of generic fragment of the world, to be made to vanish in a collage of other pictorial and sculptural elements, but as something to be exalted for its own identity, for the fascination and distinction that differentiate it from everything else. Thus he refuses to humble the commonplace object, as Marcel Duchamp does when he twists its function or its name. Oldenburg exalts these things in their most absolute singular-

ity. He erects monuments to their identities, which, as in the best psychological literature, are always fragile, lacking, defenseless, secret.

If, for Gehry, the first subject of architecture is the tie between the fragmented zoomorphic figure and the dwelling, and if, for Oldenburg and van Bruggen, the matrix of art lies in the fall and the explosive, ubiquitous dissemination of the giant whose name is "Everyday," then for all three, creation springs from an initial state of chaos, a catastrophe of meaning. The consequence of this event is a liberation from the power of a single and monolithic vision. These artists seek architecture or objects in which the parts fall, twist, seethe, and whirl, in which perspective is dislocated and multiple. Any visual sense of the whole falls apart in the uncertain relation between support and image. Verticality and horizontality are confounded; there is a progressive loosening up, a rupturing of continuity, of rhythm, of fixity, of art and architecture's sense of absoluteness and totality.

Since 1984, Oldenburg, Frank O. Gehry and van Bruggen have built an architecture that oscillates between a cosmology of usually zoomorphic images and the archetypal permanence of the city, juxtaposing, in other words, the primitive and the technologically evolved.

Gehry pushes into areas quite distant from the primitive, yet while Oldenburg revives contemporary objects (some of them unspeakably, disturbingly beautiful, others repellently ugly), this California architect dedicates himself to a realm of natural and zoomorphic forms. He reminds us that the original figures of architecture were not circles or squares, but animals and human beings.⁵ His use of the images of a fish or a serpent, an eagle or a crocodile doesn't so much threaten the architectural tradition as it deepens it iconographically and, in consequence, technically.

EDITORS NOTE

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