

Touchy Feely



In the early 1980s a debate was gaining steam within architectural circles. At its center was a series of essays by critic Kenneth Frampton, outlining an approach he termed "critical regionalism," in which the architect attempts to synthesize the vernacular of a particular region or culture, delivering back to the local person an experience of place that was both in tune with theirs, and yet decidedly unhindered by regressive scenographics. In his formulation, Frampton proposed that the critical regionalist counter the hegemonic force of visibility by a return to the "whole range of complimentary sensory perceptions which are registered by the labile body: the intensity of light, darkness, heat and cold; the feeling of humidity; the aroma of material; the almost palpable presence of masonry as the body senses its own confinement; the momentum of an induced gait and the relative inertia of the body as it traverses the floor; the echoing resonance of our own footfall."

Exactly how the so-inclined architect (as "master builder") was to honor the human propensity to experience space via a melange of sensory perceptions was bound in the tenets of a new professionalism: the heroic destruction of universalist junkspace hiding beneath an "individuated" armature. If "anarchitectonics" would purport to classify all activities, structures, and interactions in the developed world as irrational, regionalism then set out to tackle the collusive forces of postmodernity via stratagems which today retain an oddly elegiac currency. Natural light falling on a sculpture trumps its commodification. Geographic features are augmented, not flattened. Structural

elements organically form interior spaces. Flora is the only acceptable facade. Air-conditioning is out. Locally abundant materials are preferred. These techniques would result in a spatial poetics utterly at odds with today's proliferation of Green Building stemming from the programmatic application of codes, ratios, and use-scenarios. One imagines, perversely, Dupont's "Corian" as regionalism's totemic apotheosis.

Neither a show about Los Angeles, nor a thematic on the local, this exhibition borrows from the regionalism debate the notion of an apologetic interlocutor who intervenes in the proliferation of placeless spaces. As progenitor of authentic culture, can the regionalist artist (as "minor builder") readily engage in a-tectonics, or is this simply an anthropology of the nearly available? 10 artists have created works in response to this prompt: Diana Al-Hadid, Sam Anderson, Constance Armellino, Nathan Azhderian, Darren Bader, Erik Frydenborg, Miles Huston, Fawn Krieger, Lisa Lapinski, and Jacques Vidal.

"Touchy Feely" opens Aug 13 at Human Resources Los Angeles and is curated by Peter Harkawik.