UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

From Site to Comparative Relations:

Works by Michael Asher, 1976–1998

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Art History

by

Kavior Moon

2016

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

From Site to Comparative Relations:

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Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

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This dissertation is a study of how U.S. artist Michael Asher (1943–2012) integrated what he called a "logic of comparative relations" into his situational, site-based method from the mid-1970s to the end of the 1990s. Art historians have canonized Asher as a pivotal artist who developed the Minimalist strategy of site-specificity into a conceptual critique of art institutions. Asher is largely understood today through his early architectural interventions in the "white cube" space of galleries and museums in the late 1960s and 1970s, in which pre-existing elements found on-site were temporarily removed or rearranged to reveal the physical, social, and/or economic systems on which the commissioning art institution depended in order to function. This dissertation brings into view how Asher's concept of site transformed by the end of the 1990s to encompass a greater range of spatial, historical, and discursive references by

producing comparative relations between elements found at an institutional site to those outside of it, which in turn determined the institutional site in some foundational way.

By using "comparative relations" to juxtapose elements found inside and outside an institutional site, Asher's later works used a relational logic to redefine site as a location that could be understood through both local and global perspectives and as a point in time linked to both the past and the future. Each chapter of this dissertation is devoted to the conceptualization, production, materialization, and interpretation of one work by Asher, covering the arc of the work's history from its inception to reception. The chapters examine the following artworks: Asher's "Installation Münster" (1977, 1987, 1997) for Skulptur Projekte in Münster, Germany, a recurring exhibition of outdoor public art; his untitled work (1991) for the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego, a permanent collection of site-specific art; and his untitled installation (1998) for the 24th São Paulo Bienal in Brazil, an international contemporary art biennial.

The dissertation of Kavior Moon is approved.

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For my family

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The generous help and support of numerous people made this dissertation possible. I would like to express deep gratitude to my advisor Miwon Kwon for her steady guidance, encouragement, and rigorous feedback throughout the development of this project; the analytical clarity of her own writing has been a model for me. I would also like to thank warmly my committee members George Baker, Steven Nelson, Seana Shiffrin, and Dell Upton for their astute comments, goodwill, and much appreciated patience over the past few years. I am grateful to the board members of the Michael Asher Foundation for allowing me to use their archive and for granting me permission to reproduce images of Asher's works; particular thanks are due to Karen Dunbar and archivist Karin Lanzoni for their invaluable help. All works of art by Michael Asher are © Michael Asher Foundation. Other image permissions were considerately granted by the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and Meyer + Silberberg Land Architects. This project benefitted from research conducted at institutional archives: I am indebted to Melanie Bono at the LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur in Münster; Mary Beebe at the Stuart Collection at UCSD; and Ana Luiza Mattos at the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo for their gracious assistance. Conversations with curators, other institutional staff, and artists who worked with Asher provided valuable insight into the production of these works. In this regard, I thank Mary Beebe again, Mathieu Gregoire, Ivo Mesquita, Lilian Tone, and Andrew Freeman. Anne Rorimer and Susan Rosenfeld kindly took the energy to step back in time to share memories of Asher with me. This research was supported by an American Art Dissertation Award from the Henry Luce Foundation, Graduate Division and the Art History Department at UCLA, and the UCLA Friends of Art History.

Although I was not able to meet Michael Asher before his passing, his works have profoundly opened my eyes to the complexity of the ever-changing realities of the social and material world. His unwavering commitment to a critical artistic practice that persistently interrogated how existing structures order space and knowledge has been inspirational.

My friends and peers provided other kinds of support while I was traveling for research and writing in Los Angeles. I thank Kate Klock and Will Wilmot, Daniel Hatkoff, Sarah Pessagno, and Lindsey May for hosting me, making my trips memorable, and for their longtime friendships. Discussions about art and everything else with colleagues Andrea Gyorody, Nico Machida, Joanna Fiduccia, Jamin An, Natilee Harren, Megan Metcalf, Suzy Newbury, and Christian Berger have enriched and stimulated my thinking. Brian Taylor connected me to Philip von Zweck, who gave me the first opportunity to present on aspects of my research at Columbia College in Chicago. My writing group partners Leksa Lee and Natali Valdez kept me going at key moments. Meg Bernstein read over the manuscript with her keen eye. Special thanks are due to Leticia Alvarado, who was the first to encourage me to pursue a scholarly study of art history, and to Thea Sircar, who has most powerfully shaped my intellectual development through our spirited arguments, mutual love of different forms of art, and her own work in political theory.

Lastly, I extend thanks to my dear family. Their energizing love and unflagging support have nourished and sustained me in the most deeply felt ways. They allowed me to work completely undisturbed exactly when I needed solitude the most and for that I am particularly grateful. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents Jay and Eun Hee Moon and my siblings Kathy Moon, Karoline Moon and Marvell Adams, Jay and Laura Moon, and King and Hee Sun Moon. My sister Kathy deserves an extra heartfelt thanks for our many conversations on Asher and for suggesting that I think further about his notion of “comparative relations.”

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Introduction

"Situational aesthetics" is the name that Los Angeles–based artist Michael Asher (1943–2012) gave to his artistic method, which he explained in a text published in 1983 as follows: "an aesthetic system that juxtaposes predetermined elements occurring within the institutional framework that are recognizable and identifiable to the public because they are drawn from the institutional context itself."[1] In his site-specific installations, Asher worked exclusively by commission and used pre-existing elements found at an institution's site as the determinants for each work. Unlike English artist Victor Burgin, who published an essay in 1969 titled "Situational Aesthetics," Asher did not create new objects for his installations. For example, in Burgin's *Photo Path* (1967–69) [fig. 0.1], the wooden floor of the gallery functions as a contextual "cue" that "reveals the art object" (understood here as the photographs taken by Burgin and stapled to the floorboards that they depict), whereas in Asher's works there was no "art object" in Burgin's sense.[2] The "object" of a work by Asher was the site itself; Asher emphasized that he was "the author of the *situation*, not of the elements" in his installations.[3]

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[1] Michael Asher, *Writings 1973–1983 on Works 1969–1979*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), 209. English artist Victor Burgin had earlier published an essay using the same term, but his concept differs from Asher's; see Burgin's "Situational Aesthetics," *Studio International* 178, no. 915 (October 1969), 118–121. Burgin stated: "Once materials are selected according to largely fortuitous criteria, depending on their location, their individual status is diminished. The identification of art relies upon the recognition of cues which signal that the type of behaviour termed aesthetic appreciation is to be adopted. These cues help form a context which reveals the art object." (119)

[2] A further difference is that Burgin has recreated *Photo Path* for retrospective exhibitions in recent years, meaning that the work is not rooted in space and time. Thus I use the present tense to speak about his work. On the other hand, Asher did not repeat his site-specific installations (one notable exception being his works for Skulptur Projekte in Münster, the subject of Chapter 1 of this dissertation). Thus I use the past tense when speaking about Asher's works.

[3] Emphasis in original. Asher, *Writings*, 209. The full passage reads: "In this work I was the author of the *situation*, not of the elements. The given elements remained a part of their specific context and the dynamics of the situation was a function of the integration of the predetermined elements within the institution."

Additionally, to curtail the objectification of his works, Asher did not title his installations. By using only familiar elements found within a specific exhibition situation, Asher intended his works to resist being read as arbitrary abstractions. Rather, the critiques to be read in his works were to refer directly to the institutional structures themselves.

This dissertation is a study of how Asher's method of "situational aesthetics" changed from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s. Beginning in 1969, Asher produced site-specific works that involved the removal, rearrangement, or reconstruction of elements related to each work's exhibition situation. By the end of the 1990s, however, Asher had developed an expanded repertoire of formal and conceptual strategies to confront new exhibition situations and institutional frameworks. For example, in his work for the 24th São Paulo Bienal, held in 1998, Asher had photographs of impoverished housing developments called *colonias*, found near the U.S.'s border with Mexico, pasted onto a ring of support columns inside the exhibition's building designed by famed modernist Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer in São Paulo [fig. 0.2]. If this work is not to be considered an exception to Asher's method of "situational aesthetics" but a continuation or expansion of it, we must view the pasting of photographs of self-constructed *colonias* inside the Niemeyer-designed São Paulo Bienal building as a juxtaposition of elements that derived from the institutional context itself. But how so? What are the implications of viewing the photographs of *colonias*, located in the U.S., in relation to the institutional context of the São Paulo Bienal, located in Brazil? How had Asher's situational strategies and conceptualization of site changed since the 1970s? And what can these changes in Asher's approach tell us about the changing conditions and sets of pressures governing the operations of contemporary art institutions from the 1970s to the 1990s, a period that saw

tremendous growth in the market economy for contemporary art and an increasingly global exhibition circuit? These are some of the questions to be explored in this dissertation.

Although art historians have positioned Asher as a pivotal artist who developed the Minimalist strategy of site-specificity into a conceptual critique of art institutions, his work remains understudied. Much of the literature on Asher exists in the form of reviews, articles, and exhibition catalogue essays. Although nearly all of his site-specific works no longer exist,[4] Asher's early works have become widely known through his book *Writings 1973–1983 on Works 1969–1979* (1983), a compilation of architectural plans, documentation, and project statements, produced in close collaboration with art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh.[5] To date, art historian Kirsi Peltomäki has published the only monographic book on Michael Asher. In her *Situation Aesthetics: The Work of Michael Asher* (2010), Peltomäki interprets Asher's works through the spectatorial and affective relations set up between the viewer and artwork and organizes her book according to subject positions: viewer, participant, artist, and institutional representative.[6] Other scholarly theses on Asher have interpreted his works in relation to an aesthetics of negation and theories of the "avant-garde," the sociological approach of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory of cultural production, and through a concept of "infrastructure" that

[4] Asher produced only three permanent site-specific works: an untitled work (1978) for a private collection in Los Angeles; an untitled work (1991) for the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego (the subject of Chapter 2 of this dissertation); and an untitled work for Taejon Expo '93 in South Korea (discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation). See footnoted references to Asher's permanent works in Andrea Fraser, "Procedural Matters," *Artforum* 46 (Summer 2008), 464, fn 4; and Kirsi Peltomäki, *Situation Aesthetics: The Work of Michael Asher* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 182, fn 14.

[5] See Michael Asher, *Writings 1973–1983 on Works 1969–1979*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983).

[6] See Kirsi Peltomäki, *Situation Aesthetics.*

addresses the social conventions and physical structures found on a given site.[7]

None of these accounts, however, directly tackles how Asher's concept of site itself changed over the course of his career and how his expanded approach to site shaped his method of "situational aesthetics." Additionally, the focus on Asher's works thus far has largely been on his temporary works produced for galleries and museums.[8] This dissertation seeks to reframe our understanding of Asher's artistic method by analyzing changes in his concept of site. It examines his later works produced for institutional contexts outside the "white cube" space of galleries and museums, focusing on his works for outdoor public spaces and/or global mega-exhibitions.[9] No

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[7] See Frederik Leen's "A Critique of Peter Bürger's 'Theory of the Avant Garde,' preceded by a Historical and Systematical Analysis of the Concept of the Avant-Garde and followed by an Exploratory Investigation into the Aesthetic Production of Michael Asher" (Ph.D. diss, Vrije Universiteit Brüsels, 1991); Elisabeth Fritz's "Michael Asher–Werke 1979–2007" (Mag.phil. Diplomarbeit, Universität Wien, 2007); and, most recently, Jennifer King's "Michael Asher and the Art of Infrastructure" (Ph.D. diss, Princeton University, 2014). In the latter account, King examines select works by Asher from 1965–2011 to argue that they should be seen as a "dual engagement with *conceptual infrastructure* (such as the social conditions or historical conventions informing the display of art) as well as *physical infrastructure* (such as the spatial, material, or architectural elements of an environment)." [her emphasis] (17) King introduces the concept of "infrastructure" to combine in a single term the institutional conventions and physical elements structuring a site, but she does not address how Asher's very concept of site changed over the decades, which is one of the goals of my study.

[8] For example, the texts included in the recently published *October File* on Michael Asher, an edited volume that represents the discourse on Asher from 1970 to 2009, focuses almost exclusively on his works for museums. See Jennifer King, ed., *October File: Michael Asher* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016). Notable essays not reprinted in the recent *October File* on Asher that discuss his works for gallery and museum spaces include Thomas Crow's "Site-Specific Art: The Strong and the Weak," in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 131–50; Thomas Crow, "The Simple Life: Pastoralism and the Persistence of Genre in Recent Art," *October* 63 (Winter 1993), 58–61; Birgit Pelzer, "Entropy," in *Michael Asher, 16 October – 29 November 1992*, ed. Ulrich Loock (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1995), 67–76; Birgit Pelzer, "The Functions of Reference," in *Michael Asher*, ed, Suzanne Ghez (Chicago: Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, 1990), n.p.; Anne Rorimer, "Michael Asher: Kontent als Inhalt," *Texte zur Kunst* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 150–61; John Vinci, "Michael Asher: The Wall as Object, The Gallery as Framework," in *Michael Asher / James Coleman*, ed. Susan Wyatt and Valerie Smith (New York: Artists Space, 1988), 14–19; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Anywhere But Here: Michael Asher's Consortium Installation," in *Michael Asher: Le Consortium Dijon*, ed. Xavier Douroux, Franck Gautherot and Pascal Pique (Dijon: Le Consortium, 1991), 73–77.

[9] The concept of the abstracted space of the "white cube"—and how that architectural and design aesthetic has affected both the perception and production of art since the modern turn—was first proposed by Brian O'Doherty. See his book *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (San

longer responding solely to the structures of a single institutional site—its interior spaces, walls, facades, display conventions, and routine procedures—in his later works Asher expanded his field of references, spatially and temporally, to take into account the larger urban economies, built environments, infrastructural systems, and prior functions of an institutional site on a local, and later global, scale. The three chapters of the dissertation analyze the following artworks by Asher: "Installation Münster" (1977, 1987, 1997) for the decennial public art exhibition Skulptur Projekte in Münster, Germany; an untitled permanent work (1991) for the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego; and an untitled work (1998) for the 24th São Paulo Bienal in Brazil. This study of Asher's works aims not only to critically extend the existing literature on Asher, but also to shed light on structural shifts within the expanding field of contemporary art institutions during this historical period.

Emergence of Asher's "Situational Aesthetics"

Asher is most known for his architectural interventions in gallery and museum spaces from the late 1960s and 1970s. In a significant departure from his Minimal object-based works from around 1966–67, Asher produced a key work at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1969 that would set the basic parameters of his site-specific approach for the rest of his career.[10] For this untitled installation, Asher attached a series of modular wall panels found on-site to create one long interlocked wall that divided the exhibition space into two areas, one filled with natural

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Francisco: The Lapis Press,1986), which is based on a series of essays that O'Doherty originally published in *Artforum* magazine in 1976.

[10] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh made this argument in his "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture," *The Art Institute of Chicago Centennial Lectures* (The Art Institute of Chicago, 1983). A version of this essay was first published in *Penser l'art contemporain: Rapports et documents de la Biennale de Paris*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1980). Asher's 1983 *Writings* book begins with an entry on this work.

light and the other cast in shadow [fig. 0.3, fig. 0.4]. Instead of displaying materials or objects extraneous to the exhibition space, Asher only used pre-existing elements that belonged to it.

In this work, the viewer was confronted with the exhibition space itself, as the architecture of the modular display walls became the subject of his work. The modular walls were positioned at "the threshold between symbolic space and actual space, the ambiguous shift between functional object and aesthetic object," as Buchloh has pointed out.[11] In his 1980 essay "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture," one of the earliest analytical accounts of Asher's works, Buchloh argued that Asher's site-specific works were the result of working through principles taken from Minimalism. In reference to Asher's work at the San Francisco Art Institute, Buchloh stated:

> Michael Asher's first major one-man exhibition, in 1969 at the San Francisco Art Institute, applied the minimal principles of self-referentiality and specificity in spatial and temporal terms with a vigorous directness and analytic immediacy that revealed the unreflected formalist heritage in Minimalism as much as it determined a new understanding of sculptural materiality.[12]

Like the painted plywood L-shaped forms of Robert Morris's *Untitled (L-Beams)* (1965) [fig. 0.5] or the vertical set of galvanized steel boxes of Donald Judd's *Untitled (Stack)* (1967) [fig. 0.6], Asher's work at the San Francisco Art Institute drew the viewer's attention to the "interdependence and interrelationships of the sculpture and its surrounding spatial/architectural container."[13] Morris had emphasized this "interdependence and interrelationship" in his 1966 essay "Notes on Sculpture, Part II." He wrote:

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[11] Ibid., 279.

[12] Ibid., 289.

[13] Ibid., 284.

> The better new work [Minimal sculpture] takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision. The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic. It is in some way more reflexive because one's awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships. One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context.[14]

Asher's work at the San Francisco Art Institute departed, however, from such works by Morris, Judd, and other Minimal artists in that he did not insert discrete sculptural units into the space of a room, but rather reconfigured pre-existing architectural elements found on-site. With this move, Asher's installation in effect stripped away the last vestiges of formal autonomy which Minimal art still partially claimed by engaging directly with the real time-space and material structures of the gallery room: the site itself became the object of Asher's work. As Asher noted: "The presentation at San Francisco was clearly dictated by every element which was available and it suggested a way of working for the future: using just elements which already existed without a great modification to the space."[15]

Beginning with this installation at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1969, Asher strictly adhered to a site-specific practice. His works were not made in a studio, waiting to be transferred to another space for exhibition. They were always conceived in response to an invitation and to the conditions found at the institutional site, often produced using pre-existing materials found there. The particular sites of his works were where they were produced, presented, and received by a viewing public. In her book *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational*

[14] Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part II," *Artforum* 5, no. 2 (October 1966): 23.

[15] Buchloh quotes Asher's unpublished notes in his "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture," 289.

Identity, the first genealogical account of site-specific art since the 1960s, art historian Miwon Kwon has pointed out:

> If modernist sculpture absorbed its pedestal/base to sever its connection to or express its indifference to the site, rendering itself more autonomous and self-referential, thus transportable, placeless, and nomadic, then site-specific works, as they first emerged in the wake of minimalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, forced a dramatic reversal of this modernist paradigm. Antithetical to the claim, "If you have to change a sculpture for a site there is something wrong with the sculpture," site-specific art, whether interruptive or assimilative, gave itself up to its environmental context, being formally determined or directed by it.[16]

Asher is a key artist who represents this historical turn from Minimalism to site-specificity in the late 1960s.

Subsequently, in a text titled "Statement," published in conjunction with an installation he produced at Heiner Friedrich Gallery in Cologne in 1973, Asher differentiated between "constructed" and "situational" works as follows:

> Proposals are based upon the existing space selected for work.
> Prior knowledge of the site is usually needed.
> Previous works are generally not repeated.
> Each site constitutes its own elements to consider. Past works have been both constructed and situational works.
> For example, the California Institute of the Arts (1973) work is situational. Opposing walls were painted the same color but the room's basic structure remained unaltered.
> Pomona work (1970) is an example of a constructed work. Walls and ceilings were utilized to alter what existed.[17]

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[16] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 11. Here Kwon is quoting British sculptor William Turner, as quoted by Mary Miss in "From Autocracy to Integration: Redefining the Objectives of Public Art," in Stacy Paleologos Harris, ed., *Insights/On Sites: Perspectives on Art in Public Places* (Washington DC: Partners for Livable Places, 1984), 62.

[17] "Statement," Box 174, Folder 27, Series IV, Giuseppe Panza papers, 1956–1990, Getty Research Institute, Research Library, Accession no. 940004. For his 1970 work at the Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center at Pomona College, Asher had three walls constructed, one in the exhibition room and two walls that joined in the lobby. The newly constructed walls with the existing walls together created two intersecting triangles—one small and one large—connected by a narrow passageway. The ceiling was lowered (to 6 feet 10 inches), all surfaces were painted white, and the two glass doors in the Art Center's main entryway were removed. For his 1973 work at the California Institute of the Arts, in Gallery A 402, Asher had the east and west walls painted in one shade of white and the north and south walls painted in

Whereas "constructed" works involved the addition of extra materials to the existing architecture, thereby altering its form, "situational" works left the existing architecture's basic structure intact. From 1972–73 onward, Asher would stop making constructed works and continue to produce only situational works.

In 1973, Asher first intentionally used a new strategy that indicated a shift in his critical approach to a work's site: removal of material.[18] In the fall of that year, for an untitled installation at Lisson Gallery in London, Asher had an architectural reveal, 1/4 inch wide and about 1 1/2 inch deep, cut into the walls of the gallery's exhibition room at floor level [fig. 0.7]. This groove followed the entire perimeter of the room, bringing the viewer's attention to the gallery's walls by making them appear to separate from and float slightly above the floor.[19] Asher's installation at Claire Copley Gallery the following year was also striking in its simplicity and the directness with which Asher's work cut away at the gallery's architecture. For this work,

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another shade of white; additionally, the double doors and doorhead at the entrance to the gallery were removed for the duration of the exhibition (see his *Writings*, 31–42, 64–69).

[18] Asher first removed an element from a work's site for his 1970 work at Pomona College, but not intentionally as a critical strategy. For this work, he removed the main entrance doors to the Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center with the intention of creating a constant movement of air. The implications of keeping the gallery open day and night did not occur to him until after the work's opening, when he visited his installation one night. See Marie Shurkus, "Michael Asher: Familiar Passages and Other Visibilities," in *It Happened in Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles 1969–1973*, ed. Rebecca McGrew-Yule, Glenn Phillips, Marie Shurkus, and Thomas Crow (Claremont, CA: Pomona College Museum of Art, 2011), 116.

[19] Though minimal, the cut into the gallery walls was perceptible. Here is how one reviewer described her experience of this installation: "Instead of constructing a total environment, [Asher] began with an existing room, free of any exterior distraction. In this room he incised a fine line all the way round at the point of juncture between the wall and the floor; this groove, two inches deep, was the only mark he made in the room, but its effect was considerable. The separation of the wall from the floor questioned the fundamental function of a wall as an enclosing factor. Instead of safely sealing us in, it appeared to hover, constituting a positive threat to our security. Through minimal means, Asher succeeded in probing our reactions to the basic unit of a room." Fenella Crichton, "London—Lisson Gallery," *Art International* 17 (November 1973), 46.

Asher had a wall separating the exhibition space from the back office area removed for the duration of the exhibition [fig. 0.8].[20] No material objects, such as a press release, were added to the exhibition space for his work; if visitors asked for information about the artwork, the gallery personnel were to inform them that Asher had produced the work and that the partition wall had been removed to disclose the day-to-day activities of the gallery to the viewer.[21] In the stripped down space of Asher's installation at Claire Copley, visitors were confronted with the physical and social reality of the gallery.[22]

The installation at Claire Copley was more pointed than that at the Lisson Gallery in what the removal disclosed about the gallery. In his reflections on this work, Asher wrote:

> Because the gallery dealer must give the work an economic value, the dealer is often unable to reveal its actual function. Paradoxically, the reality of the work can be viewed only through this conduit in which it undergoes the initial abstraction in the accrual of exchange-value.
>
> The function of the work at the Claire Copley Gallery was didactic: to represent materially the visible aspects of this process of abstraction. For this reason, the work's structure was circular in order to reveal its affiliation with the production, the mediation, and the reception of culture. In one sense this could be viewed as a concomitant of economic interest, while other cultural aspects could come under scrutiny as well, from the handling of money to the selection of exhibitions.

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[20] The drywall was stripped from the wall's frame, which was disassembled and stored until the end of the exhibition, when it was to be reconstructed and reinstalled. See Asher, *Writings*, 95.

[21] Ibid., 96.

[22] This work by Asher appears to have had a startling effect on viewers. One reviewer observed: "Entering the gallery, viewers' attention is immediately drawn to the office at the back that was left as is (Asher did not permit tidying up or rearranging). In this area Claire Copley, the dealer, conducts gallery business in a space devoid of the traditional trappings of art. All that stuff on the walls is gone, along with every bit of privacy. Actually viewers don't intend social interaction. They come to look at art. But without knowing it, they are an integral part of the work they see. How unsettling and uncomfortable. There are no visual entertainments to cast intent gazes upon, no security in the altered proportions of the room, which now seems so long and narrow. Are we in the right gallery? No. Yes. Should we walk around a little and then saunter out the door, or should we say the hell with it and stomp on up La Cienega shaking our heads. Oh, of course, the show isn't up yet. Oh, it is! People peeking through the front windows also become part of the work—the subjects of returned stares from within." See Sandy Ballatore, "Michael Asher: Less Is Enough," *Artweek* 5, no. 34 (October 12, 1974), 16.

> Works in storage—those preserved in cabinets and those leaning against the wall—were now also visibly accessible. The material reality of the gallery operations surfaced as questionable and problematic even though the author and viewer might find the gallery to be the most efficient way for the public reception of works of art.[23]

With his Claire Copley work, Asher cut to the essence of the gallery's function within a larger system of art production and its reception: the production (and management) of exchange-value for the work of art. Normally used in reference to the formal language of modern art that sought to sever or negate any referential and mimetic tie to the observable world, here Asher deployed the term "abstraction" to refer to the commercial process that supports the production, circulation, and collection of what he called "autonomous" art. In this and other works of the period, Asher altered the "white cube" architecture of the gallery to frame this material reality—that is, its mode of production—instead of using its walls to hide these activities, as is conventionally done. By 1974, Asher had taken the step "from work to frame" to examine how the architecture of an institutional site functions as part of "the apparatus that the artist is threaded through."[24]

Asher's works in museum spaces from around this same time period took a similar materialist turn; in this case, he moved from a strategy of construction to one of displacement. For example, in the fall of 1969, Asher worked back-to-back on two "constructed" works that experimented with the acoustical effects within a room at two different museums. For a solo

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[23] Asher, *Writings*, 96.

[24] In one of the first essays to articulate the concept of "institutional critique," Craig Owens mentions Asher, along with Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Louise Lawler, and others, as seminal artists working in this mode in the 1970s. Owens quotes Robert Smithson stating: "This is the great issue, I think it will be the growing issue, of the seventies: the investigation of the apparatus the artist is threaded through." See Owens' essay "From Work to Frame, or, Is There Life After 'The Death of the Author'?," (1985) in the volume *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 122.

exhibition at the La Jolla Museum of Art in 1969, Asher had three walls built inside of an existing room in the museum [fig. 0.9]. Its floor was covered with sound-dampening carpet. An audio oscillator, amplifier, and speaker were hidden behind one of the walls and emitted a low sound frequency. Thus the visitor heard different sounds depending on where he or she stood in the room. Asher constructed another room for a group exhibition titled *Spaces*, held at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 1969–70 [fig. 0.10]. For this work, Asher had the ceiling of an existing room dropped from fourteen feet to eight feet. Acoustical paneling covered the floor and ceiling. Two extra wall layers were added to the four side walls and filled with fiberglass insulation. Whereas Asher's previous installation at La Jolla reflected sound, his installation at MoMA functioned to absorb it. In a project statement for *Spaces*, Asher wrote: "My basic idea deals with three fields of perception: audio, tactile, and visual sensations. As a vehicle for perceptual experience, air is used for tactile, noise is used for audio and light is used for visual."[25] Both of these early room installations in museums focused on making the viewers aware of their perceptual experiences within the space structured by alterations to the room's architecture.

By the end of the 1970s, Asher's situational works in museums sought to reveal their institutional function of producing art historical discourse through the collection, organization, and display of artworks. This is evident in two installations by Asher from 1979 that were both exhibited (coincidentally) during the summer of that year at two museums in Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) and the Art Institute of Chicago. For the MCA, Asher had a series of rectilinear aluminum panels from the museum's facade removed and placed in the same order on a wall in a gallery inside the museum for the duration of the exhibition [fig. 0.11,

[25] Untitled project statement, Box 1, Folder 5, Series I, Hal Glicksman papers, 1927–2008, Getty Research Institute, Research Library, Accession no. 2009.M.5.

fig. 0.12]. Asher's work at the MCA pointed out that whereas the panels on the museum's facade likely went unnoticed by visitors, blending invisibly into the museum's International Style architecture to project an image of "technocratic progress," the very same objects hung inside the museum now read as Minimal art. Regarding this work, Asher wrote: "Because of the assumption, within the modernist tradition, that applied art is different from autonomous art, the panels showcased in the museum appeared to have greater importance than the identical panels on the exterior wall, where the aluminum cladding functioned only as a decorative element of architecture."[26] At the Art Institute, Asher performed a parallel move that revealed differences between the MCA, a contemporary art museum established in 1967, and the Art Institute, an encyclopedic art museum founded in 1879. For his work at the Art Institute, Asher had a bronze statue of George Washington on a granite pedestal in front of the museum's main entrance moved to an 18th-century period room filled with European paintings and decorative arts [fig. 0.13, fig. 0.14]. The statue was a bronze replica cast in 1917 of a marble statue by French artist Jean-Antoine Houdon made in 1788. Stripped of its lofty pedestal and placed on a low wooden base that matched the room's other display platforms, the weathered George Washington statue—a 20th-century bronze copy of an 18th-century marble sculpture, depicting one of the most recognizable American presidents and made by a French artist—appeared noticeably out of place, in more than one way, even though it was now placed in an art gallery devoted to carefully preserved artifacts of the same time period and region of the statue's designer. Whereas Asher's MCA work highlighted the museum's ability to signify objects as "art" through the display conventions of its architecture, his work at the Art Institute drew attention to the museological

[26] Asher, *Writings*, 198.

convention of categorizing artworks (and by extension, constructing art historical knowledge) by location and historical periods of time.

The term "situational aesthetics" appears towards the end of Asher's entry on his 1979 work at the Art Institute of Chicago, the last in his book *Writings 1973–83 on Works 1969–79*. In his statement, Asher noted that it was his "application" of "situational aesthetics" that "opened up the possibility of integrating the Houdon sculpture into [his] work."[27] By the end of the 1970s, within a ten-year span, Asher's methodology shifted from construction to removal and displacement. His works had moved from prioritizing a viewer's perceptual experience to revealing aspects of the social, economic, and discursive systems within which different types of institutional spaces carry out particular functions. In his situational works, Asher temporarily intervened into pre-existing situations by constructing *new* site-specific situations through his installations for viewers. In his 1980 essay "Context—Function—Use Value: Michael Asher's Re-Materialization of the Artwork," Buchloh highlighted this operational nature of Asher's situational works, writing:

> In retrospect, we can perceive a plausible continuity leading from what could almost be called a "formalist" attitude with regard to Minimal art—a term applied by Asher to his own work until 1968—to an art concept essentially defined by the *specific concretion of an instrumental-functional use* in a *specific context* (architectural, institutional, or temporal-spatial). That is to say that with Asher, neither the materials nor the techniques employed in the production of a work are determined a priori; they are, on the contrary, dependent upon the particular conditions under which a work is being created as well as contingent on the particular requirements it has to meet in what is in each case a particular situation.[28]

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[27] Ibid., 209.

[28] Emphasis in original. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Context—Function—Use Value: Michael Asher's Re-materialization of the Artwork," in *Michael Asher: Exhibitions in Europe 1972–1977* (Eindhoven: Stedelijk van Abbe Museum, 1980), 36.

After 1979, Asher would continue to produce "situational" works, though new exhibition situations and institutional frameworks would prompt an expanded approach to site and the addition of a new logic that would in turn lead to a transformation in his method by the end of the 1990s.

Transformation of Asher's "Situational Aesthetics"

During the 1980s and into the 1990s, profound shifts in Asher's works could be discerned as he incorporated an analysis of the urban and historical context of an institution's site into the conceptualization of his work. Take, for example, Asher's untitled installation at the Kunstraum Wien in Vienna in 1996. For this work, Asher removed the metal I-beam supports that raised the *kunsthalle*'s offices on the late-modernist mezzanine above the exhibition spaces [fig. 0.15]. In doing so, Asher's work literally and symbolically intervened into the art institution's hierarchy of spaces, recalling some of his earlier projects such as the one at the Claire Copley Gallery. Knowing some background information about the history of the Kunstraum Wien's site, however, opens up other dimensions to interpreting this work. As artist and critic Allan Sekula pointed out in his 1999 article, "Michael Asher, Down to Earth," Kunstraum Wien was located in a building that had been an imperial stable in the 18th century. The site was located next to the city's Ringstrasse, which was designed in the 19th century in part to prevent the construction of barricades by the working-class. Linking these historical details together, Sekula wryly observed:

> Asher [produced] a peculiar historical chain of associations: twentieth-century mock-minimalist object, eighteenth-century imperial stable and nineteenth-century workers' barricade. The dialectical antagonism between the second two terms calls into question the supposed neutrality of the first.[29]

[29] Allan Sekula, "Michael Asher, Down to Earth," *Afterall* 1 (1999): 10.

Here, Sekula argues that the collapsed office structure and the particular ways in which the dropped I-beams divided up the space evoked specters of both the imperial stables and working-class barricades to undermine the claimed neutrality of Minimalist sculpture. The form and spatial positioning of Asher's installation at the Kunstraum Wien produced not only a new perceptual experience of the gallery's architecture, but also opened up a historical perspective of its site, a temporal dimension that became increasingly significant in Asher's later works.

In a 1993 article titled "Michael Asher and the Transformation of 'Situation Aesthetics,'" curator and art historian Claude Gintz also argued that a change had occurred in Asher's situational approach by addressing the increased spatialization of the determinant elements of his artworks.[30] Gintz took as evidence three artworks by Asher from 1991, all exhibited in museums in France. For his work at Le Nouveau Musée in Villeurbanne, Asher had an edition of metal objects made and distributed to local residents who were facing housing problems due to the renovation of the museum's building then taking place [fig. 0.16]. The paperweight-sized objects, made from the museum's discarded iron heaters, provide the names and phone numbers for associations that offered free legal help to those facing housing problems. The objects were distributed by social workers and low-income housing associations in the city while the museum itself was closed for renovations. For his work at Le Consortium in Dijon, Asher produced an installation addressing the city's cultural and tourist economies. Cross sectional diagrams of heating units in Dijon's historical landmarks (such as its state museums, cathedrals, and the main courthouse) were silkscreened onto the walls of the gallery rooms, while a wall text quoting from a booklet advertising the local university's course on tourism was printed onto a wall near the entrance to the galleries [fig. 0.17]. For his work at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Asher

[30] Claude Gintz, "Michael Asher and the Transformation of 'Situational Aesthetics,'" trans. Judith Aminoff, *October* 66 (Autumn 1993): 113–131.

produced an installation of found objects that merged and juxtaposed the spaces and organizational logics of the museum and the library [fig. 0.18]. An entrance was specially built for Asher's installation to connect two separately run spaces within the Centre Georges Pompidou's building: the public library (which is free) and the museum (which charges a fee).[31] Referencing these works, Gintz convincingly asserted that Asher transformed his "system" of "situational aesthetics" through the inclusion of elements found inside *and* outside the museum.[32]

Asher's works from the 1990s represent a crucial turning point in the development of his situational method, as the artist himself noted. Reflecting on his recently completed installation for the 24th São Paulo Bienal in 1998, in an undated document titled "Sao Paulo," Asher wrote:

> At this point in time this project on [the] one hand is concerned with the idea of site work. My description of site work began with a form of production which was generated with available element[s] from the site of the exhibition or surrounding.
>
> One of the conditions of site work in the last 10 years is that it draws on elements which aren't necessarily from the site.[33]

If Asher had earlier defined "situational aesthetics" as "an aesthetic system that juxtaposes predetermined elements occurring within the institutional framework that are recognizable and identifiable to the public because they are drawn from the institutional context itself," then by what new logic would Asher include "elements which aren't necessarily from the site" as the very definition of "site work"?

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[31] For this work, in a set of exhibition rooms in the museum, Asher displayed pieces of paper found in books in the library's psychology section. The papers, which served as makeshift bookmarks, had been left behind by users of the library. The papers were set under glass panes, each sized to the dimensions of the book in which each paper was found. The papers were positioned according to where they had been found on their respective book pages. Above each item was a wall label that provided the library's catalog information for each book.

[32] Gintz, "Michael Asher and the Transformation of 'Situational Aesthetics,'" 129.

[33] "Sao Paulo," n.d., unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

Introducing a "Logic of Comparative Relations"

This dissertation contends that Asher changed his method of "situational aesthetics" through an integration of what he called a "logic of comparative relations." Asher mentioned this concept in an interview, published in 2001, with writer and curator Joan Simon when discussing his untitled work for the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), the subject of Chapter 2 of this dissertation.[34] For this work, Asher added a granite replica of an indoor drinking fountain in physical and conceptual juxtaposition to a pre-existing outdoor landmark that commemorated the transfer of the campus from the U.S. Marines to the present day university. When Simon asked Asher why he chose that particular site for his work, Asher stated that he was looking for a site that would enable him to produce "comparative relations." He mentioned the significance of this particular way of thinking for him as "one of the forms of logic that keeps coming back to me, and that I use to learn by, as well as utilize quite often in my own work and in teaching."[35] Asher did not explain what he meant by the term in this interview, nor did he ever mention this term in other published writings or interviews. One can see, however, that he was consciously thinking in a comparative manner by the early 1980s: he ended his 1983 *Writings* book with a short section titled "Comparative notes on the two installations in Chicago," in which he compared his two untitled works at the MCA and the Art Institute of Chicago, both in 1979.[36]

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[34] Joan Simon, "Interview with Michael Asher," in *Landmarks: Sculpture Commissions for the Stuart Collection at the University of California San Diego* (New York: Rizzoli, 2001), 177.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Asher, *Writings,* 219.

A comparative approach is apparent in Asher's works from the 1980s and became more complex in his works from the 1990s through the inclusion of elements found outside of an institutional site. For example, for his untitled work for the *74th American Exhibition* at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1982, Asher instructed the museum's curatorial department to hire around six people each day of the exhibition to view two paintings displayed in a room of early 20th-century European paintings and sculptures from the museum's permanent collection. The two paintings Asher chose, Marcel Duchamp's *Nu assis dans une baignoire (Nude Seated in a Bathtub)* (1910) and Pablo Picasso's *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* (1910), were, among the artworks in that gallery, the least and most reproduced paintings, respectively, in books found in the museum's library.[37] A decade later, for his untitled work at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in 1992, Asher juxtaposed the careers and legacies of the formally-trained Belgian Art Nouveau architect Victor Horta, who designed the fine arts museum (constructed from 1922–28) where Asher's two-room installation was held, and William Mulholland, the self-taught Irish-born U.S. engineer who designed and oversaw the construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct (from 1907–1913). In one room, the names of the two figures, chronological listings of their respective works, and photographs of the buildings that house their respective archives were displayed. In the second room, the two names appeared again, this time alongside copies of clippings from U.S. newspapers reporting on Horta's visting lectures series in California in 1918; stills from Harry Kümel's film *Eline Vere* (1991), partially shot at a building designed by Horta; copies of clippings from Belgian newspapers reporting on the catastrophic collapse in 1928 of a dam designed by Mulholland that ended his career; stills from Roman Polanski's 1974 film

[37] Both were executed in the same year by notable modern artists, but the painting by Duchamp had been reproduced in nine publications whereas the painting by Picasso had appeared in fifty. For more about this artwork, see Peltomäki, *Situation Aesthetic*, 94, and Anne Rorimer, *Michael Asher: Kunsthalle Bern, 1992* (London: Afterall Books, 2012), 49–51.

Chinatown, a fictionalized origin story of modern day Los Angeles through the manipulation of its water supply and land ownership; critical reviews of both films by local critics; and a copy of a notebook page (found in Horta's archive) in which Horta mentioned that Los Angeles had "installed a water system" and noted Mulholland as the chief engineer of the city's water department.[38] A dizzying welter of factual details, journalistic accounts, and interpretative portrayals of these two historical figures and their works overlaid the walls of the gallery rooms, fragments of multiple and parallel discourses that occurred on two different continents, placed here side by side.

As we can see in this last example, Asher's approach to site had significantly expanded by the 1990s. By then, Asher was thinking about "site" in multiple ways: as an architectural space at a particular location, a network of social and economic systems that enabled the operations of an art institution, *and* through media representation of elements from the site in broader cultural fields of discourse. These three approaches to site align with the three paradigms of site-specificity that Kwon proposed in her aforementioned book *One Place After Another*: the phenomenological or experiential, the social/institutional, and the discursive.[39] Kwon noted that although she presents these three paradigms of site-specificity chronologically in her account, there are no neat historical or periodizing breaks between them; rather, they should be seen as "competing definitions" or approaches that can overlap in site-specific art. Indeed, by the end of the 1990s Asher deployed these three different paradigms of site-specificity in his works, sometimes incorporating all of them within the same work.

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[38] See *Michael Asher: Palais des beaux-arts de Bruxelles* (Brussels: Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 1995).

[39] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 3.

If Asher's earlier works had relied on temporarily removing or rearranging pre-existing elements to reveal the physical, social, and/or economic systems on which the commissioning art institution depended in order to function, in his later works outside elements were included to expand the work's scope of spatial, historical, and discursive references, producing comparative relations between elements found on an artwork's site to those outside of it. In order to understand the critiques of Asher's later works, the present study analyzes how Asher's expanded approach to site—understood simultaneously as experiential, social/institutional, and discursive—redefines site as a location that could be understood through both local and global perspectives and as a point in time linked to both the past and the future.

Methodology

The three chapters of the dissertation are each devoted to the conceptualization, production, materialization, and interpretation of one work by Asher, covering the arc of a work's history from its inception to reception. My analysis of Asher's works frames his final exhibited works through a consideration of the circumstances surrounding their institutional commission and the process of the work's conceptualization and production. Using documents in institutional archives and interviews with curators and others who worked closely with Asher, I trace the sometimes difficult collaborative process that Asher underwent when producing his artworks. It is clear from archived documents that the artist could not always simply execute ideas as he conceived them; initial proposals were often found to be unfeasible and had to be dropped or revised. Through visits to the sites where his works were once installed, I analyze Asher's works through their physical and spatial relationship to the architecture of their sites (in

cases where the overall structures have not been significantly changed) and how the works function in relation to the functions of the work's site.

Guiding questions for each chapter include: What were the terms and conceptual framework of the exhibition situation that Asher was invited to participate in? How did Asher approach each exhibition situation? What was the process of the work's conceptualization? What kind of research did Asher conduct into the site and exhibition situation? How and why did his proposals change over time? What pre-existing materials did Asher choose to remove, reconfigure, or reconstruct? What element/s outside of the work's immediate exhibition context did Asher include and what comparative relations were produced thereby?

Chapters of the dissertation

Chapter 1 looks at Asher's "Installation Münster" for Skulptur Projekte in Münster, Germany, in 1977, 1987, and 1997. A summer-long exhibition of public art, Skulptur Projekte has taken place every ten years since its first occurrence in 1977. Asher was invited to every iteration of Skulptur Projekte, and each time he contributed the same proposal: to have a trailer rented and parked in a specific location in and around the city each week for the course of the exhibition. The chapter focuses on the work produced in 1977, tracking Asher's correspondence with the curators of Skulptur (as the exhibition was first called), his initial ideas in 1976–77 for possible works that were deemed unfeasible, and the work's realization and reception. Asher originally conceptualized his work in 1977 through the notion of mobility; because of its mobility, the temporary placements of the trailer would not result in changing property values and gentrifying a particular neighborhood (as is often the case with permanent works of public art). The last section of the chapter looks at Asher's subsequent correspondence with the curators

of Skulptur Projekte (as it has been called since 1987) and his specifications for the work's repetitions in 1987 and 1997. Although Asher's instructions for the work have remained consistent, the material realization of the work was different each time, since the city as well as the structure and historical context of the exhibition have changed over the decades. Through its repetition, Asher's work functioned to reveal the changes that have occurred in the city as well as the unchanging exhibition concept of Skulptur Projekte itself, which changed "only in form, but not in function," as he put it.[40] By extending the principle of mobility into a temporal dimension, Asher's situational strategy shifted in his repeated works in 1987 and 1997 as he allowed for the comparison of each work's iteration to reveal changes in their sites and exhibition contexts.

Chapter 2 analyzes Asher's untitled permanent work (1991) for the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). For this artwork, Asher had a replica of an indoor drinking fountain made out of granite and installed outdoors on the central axis of a grassy median strip. The fountain was placed in physical proximity to and in conceptual conversation with two other objects on the site: a boulder that commemorates the campus's transfer from the U.S. Marine Corps to UCSD in 1964 and a flagpole that was erected in 1943, at the height of the campus's use as a military training camp. This chapter traces the difficulties that Asher encountered, from his early ideas that were deemed unfeasible to the initial resistance of some UCSD campus committee members to his proposal, which was ultimately approved in 1989. Whereas the landmark suggests closure to the military's presence on the campus, Asher's fountain reframes the history of UCSD's founding in terms of changing national priorities and local agendas to retain and grow local defense and defense-related industries during the Cold War. The presence of Asher's fountain functions as a "disturbance": it provides cooled water for

[40] "Munster Project," June 3, 1997, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

individuals on campus while it also provokes them to reflect on the material and ideological requirements that are needed to make institutions functionally possible. The end of the chapter addresses how the significance of Asher's work is meant to unfold and change over time. The significance of the drinking fountain is meant to change, as the historical period represented by the median and its collection of historical objects will inevitably contrast with future campus developments around the grassy strip. In this work, Asher extended his strategy of comparing two objects—the drinking fountain and commemorative boulder—to opening up the possibility of a comparative relation between the median strip, on which the two objects stand, and the future development of the surrounding campus by having no end date conceptually structured into the work.

Chapter 3 looks at Asher's untitled 1998 work for the 24th São Paulo Bienal, the second oldest international art biennial, founded in 1951. For his work, as noted earlier, Asher had photographs of unincorporated, impoverished housing developments called *colonias*, located near the U.S.'s border with Mexico, pasted onto a series of interior support columns of the Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion. The Pavilion, part of the Ibirapuera Park complex designed in 1951 by a team headed by Brazilian modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer, has been the site of every Bienal since 1957. Historically, the mid-century construction of monumental modernist structures, such as Niemeyer's Ibirapuera Park complex, and the establishment of modern art institutions, such as the São Paulo Bienal, played key roles in helping to project an image of an industrially and culturally developed—a fully modern—Brazil to international audiences. The discussion looks at the overarching exhibition theme of "anthropophagy" of the 24th edition of the São Paulo Bienal as well as the category of "United State and Canada" in the sub-theme of "Routes" wherein Asher was included. The chapter tracks Asher's correspondence with curators,

his site visit to São Paulo, and issues that arose during the production and installation of his work. The particular columns selected by Asher framed a view of the Pavilion's stunning interior, an expansive open-air atrium in which a grand, spiraling pedestrian ramp rises from the ground to the building's top floor. By superimposing images of *colonias* onto the building's support columns around the perimeter of this spectacular view, Asher's work brought into focus the dependency of the building's central visual attraction on the less visible peripheral structures that surround it, in literal and symbolic terms. Asher further alluded to the historical circumstances and original function of the São Paulo Bienal: the work connected the visibility of modernist cultural production and institutional development centered in cities driven by Brazil's internationalist agenda to the less visible, ever increasing proliferation of *favelas*, self-constructed houses of the poor and working class, in the country's urban peripheries. Asher's work also raised questions about the contemporary circumstances and function of the São Paulo Bienal at the end of the 20th century: if international art biennials have traditionally relied upon geographical location to represent cultural identity, that logic weakened in the period of post–Cold War globalization as people, goods, and ideas cross international borders with greater frequency and speed. Furthermore, although more territories are nominally represented in international art biennials, the art world system itself has become more centralized, often leading to the same group of curators showing the same group of circulating artists. By setting up comparative relations between two different sites, in this work Asher's situational strategy transformed by the end of the 1990s to reveal the historical and material conditions structuring the institutional site as ones that can be viewed as both local *and* global at the same time.

Chapter One
"Installation Münster" for Skulptur Projekte (1977, 1987, 1997)

In the summer of 1976, Michael Asher was invited by German curator Kasper König to participate in an upcoming exhibition of outdoor sculpture to be held the following year in the small Westphalian city of Münster, West Germany. The exhibition of outdoor sculpture was to be part of a larger two-part survey exhibition titled Skulptur ("Sculpture"), organized by König and Klaus Bussmann, then a curator at the Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte (Westphalian State Museum of Art and Cultural History; hereafter referred to as Landesmuseum).[41] The first part of Skulptur, curated by Bussmann, was to display an overview of modern sculpture in Europe and the U.S., from early 20th-century works by Auguste Rodin to works produced in the aftermath of World War II by sculptors such as Henry Moore, David Smith, and Norbert Kricke. These works would be exhibited in the gallery rooms of the

[41] Klaus Bussmann (b. 1941 in Aachen) and Kasper König (b. 1943 in Mettingen) were both raised in Westphalia. Bussmann studied art history in Berlin and wrote his doctoral thesis at the University of Münster on the Baroque architect Wilhelm Ferdinand Lipper (student of Johann Conrad Schlaun, who designed the main government buildings and palace residences in Münster). From 1968 to 1977, Bussmann was a curator at the Landesmuseum; from 1977 to 1984, he taught as a professor of art history at the Fachhochshule Münster. From 1985 to 2004, he was the director of the Landesmuseum. Beginning in his early twenties, König worked for the dealer Rudolf Zwirner and organized numerous exhibitions and publications with artists in Europe, the U.S., and Canada, working closely with artists such as Claes Oldenburg, Dan Graham, On Kawara, among others. See their conversation on their respective backgrounds in *Alte Hasen: Klaus Bußmann im Gespräch mit Kasper König*, ed. Susanne Pfeffer (Berlin: KW Institute for Contemporary Art, 2011) as well as Walter Grasskamp, *Walter Grasskamp / Kasper König: Energien / Synergien 13* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013). Grasskamp has suggested that the large-scale recurring exhibitions Documenta in Kassel and Skulptur Projekte in Münster, both established in small cities in provincial regions in Germany, owe their success largely to the deep local ties and knowledge of the area of their founders (Klaus Bussmann and Arnold Bode, respectively). See Grasskamp, "To Be Continued: Periodic Exhibitions (*documenta*, for example)," *Tate Papers* 12 (2009), http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/to-be-continued-periodic-exhibitions-documenta-for-example (accessed November 20, 2015).

Landesmuseum and in the garden park of the Palace (*der Schloss*).[42] The second part of Skulptur, organized by König, was to serve as a contemporary counterpart to Skulptur's historical overview and was titled "Project section" (*Projektbereich*). For this section, König and Bussmann invited around ten artists, including Asher, and offered them a trip to Münster to explore the city and to develop a proposal for a new sculptural work "in situ" that would be produced for a specific location outdoors.[43]

König decided to contact Asher about proposing a work for the "Project section" of Skulptur upon a recommendation by artist and mutual friend Dan Graham.[44] At the time, Asher would not have been an obvious choice for an exhibition of outdoor sculpture. Up to that point, nearly all of Asher's site-specific installations had involved architectural alterations of indoor spaces, works that König knew well. Asher and König first met in 1970, during the latter's three-month stay in Los Angeles.[45] From 1973 to 1976, they worked together on a volume of Asher's writings for a book series that König was editing for the Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and

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[42] The former 18th-century residence palace of the prince-bishop has been the administrative center of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster (WWU, commonly referred to as "University of Münster") since 1780.

[43] In a draft of the artist agreement sent to Asher, the term "in situ" is used to describe how the artists were to develop their projects. The first part of the exhibition is described as "the historical survey of sculpture beginning with the XX Century, held in the museum and in the park of the palace." The second part of the exhibition is described as "the contemporary part, under the direction of Kasper Koenig, is inviting you among 10 sculptors to work *in situ* within the Western part of the city (city-hall courtyard, university grounds, meadows bordering the park of the palace, the former grounds of the Zoo and the areas around the Aasee). Related materials of the sculptures *in situ* such as drawings, models etc. will be exhibited in the museum." (emphasis mine) "Draft of Agreement," n.d., Box 9, Folder 7, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[44] Charlotte Neußer, "Dan Graham: Korrespondenz zu Kasper König seit 1969," in *Kasper König: The Formative Years* (Cologne: Zentralarchiv des internationalen Kunsthandels, 2014), 53. König also mentions this in an interview with Elizabeth Schambelan in "Public Offering: Elizabeth Schambelan talks with the Curators of Skulptur Projekte Münster '07," *Artforum* (May 2007), 189.

[45] Brigitte Jacobs van Renswou, "Michael Asher – The Clocktower, New York, 20.3.–10.4.1976," in *Kasper König: The Formative Years*, 163.

Design.[46] From 1975 to the spring of 1976, König helped to organize Asher's 1976 untitled installation at The Clocktower, an exhibition space founded and run by Alanna Heiss for her Institute for Art and Urban Resources (which would open as the exhibition space P.S. 1 later that year) in New York. König thought highly of Asher, about whom he has stated: "Of all the artists in California who were working with space [*Raum*], such as Maria Nordman, he was the most analytical and radical."[47] König's invitation to create a proposal for the "Project section" of Skulptur offered Asher a new type of exhibition situation and space to analyze: an exhibition of outdoor sculpture located in public spaces of a city.

For his contribution to Skulptur's "Project section," chosen after several of his other proposals were deemed unfeasible by König and Bussmann, Asher rented an Eriba touring caravan for the duration of the exhibition and parked in different locations in and around the city. The large white caravan was moved to a new site for every week of the exhibition, held from July 3 to November 13, 1977.[48] During the first week, the caravan was parked in an alley a block away from the Landesmuseum (under whose auspices Skulptur was organized). In the following weeks, the caravan was parked in a variety of locations, such as near government buildings, houses, apartments, schools, businesses, a church, a canal, and parks in different areas of the city. During the course of the exhibition, the parking spots moved away from the Landesmuseum, spiraling out from the city's center to its surrounding suburbs, and then back towards the museum's vicinity.

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[46] Between 1973–76, Asher wrote drafts of his works with König as editor. After König left his position in 1976 to work in Germany, Asher worked on the book with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (whom he first met in 1976 at the Venice Biennale) from 1978 to the book's publication in 1983.

[47] *Raum* can mean both "space" and "room" in German. Walter Grasskamp, *Walter Grasskamp / Kasper König: Energien / Synergien 13* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013), 56.

[48] Asher participated in Skulptur Projekte four times altogether, from 1977 to 2007.

The caravan was often parked in spaces where it would not be easily seen or recognized. Take, for example, its first parking location. In a photograph of the caravan taken during the opening week of Skulptur, later printed in the exhibition's catalogue, one sees parked cars and a row of bicycles cluttering a sidewalk in the middle of the picture [fig. 1.1]. The view in the photograph looks down Pferdegasse, a street that borders the west side of Domplatz, the main public square in the heart of the city. On the left side of the photograph, one sees the modern exterior of the Landesmuseum receding into the background; one end of Josef Alber's sculptural relief *Zwei Supraporten* (*Two Sopraportae*, 1972) is just visible on its facade. On the photograph's right side, one sees the streamlined body of a white caravan, with curtains closed, parked in a small alley. The alley cuts a space between two brick buildings and links Siegelkammer, a back road behind the university buildings, to Pferdegasse. What one cannot tell from the photograph is that directly behind the white caravan, a short flight of stairs leads down to a parking lot that turns into Siegelkammer. The alley is not meant for vehicles, but for pedestrians. It would have been surprising, even puzzling, that someone would have parked a caravan in that particular space. Tucked away unobtrusively in a side alley yet so visibly obvious once spotted, the caravan would have appeared out of place to people casually passing by.

Visitors would have understood that the oddly situated caravan was part of a temporary sculptural installation after picking up an information sheet about Asher's work inside the Landesmuseum [fig. 1.2]. For the duration of Skulptur, Asher had small, brightly-colored paper pads with information printed in German about his work placed on the reception desk of the Landesmuseum. Visitors were encouraged to tear off and take away a sheet from one of the pads. The top of the sheet provides the title of the exhibition, its dates, and abbreviated biographical information about the artist. The title of the work is given as "Installation Münster" and its

location listed as "19 different places in and around Münster." The project is then briefly explained on the sheet as follows:

> This has to do with the placement of a caravan in and around the city of Münster for the duration of this exhibition which is 19 weeks. The caravan (approx. 4 m long) is being relocated every Monday in the proximity of buildings and parks, using 19 various locations in all. The information regarding place and time of the caravan can be picked up at the front desk in the museum's lobby.[49]

Outlined in a box at the very bottom of the sheet are the address or intersection where the caravan could be found that week and the dates when it would remain there. A different color of paper was used for each week, and the pads were switched out regularly so that the parking information they provided would be current for that particular week.

The caravan's familiarity as an everyday object, its architectural form, and its mobility were key features of Asher's "Installation Münster" in 1977. Through the use of a popular recreational vehicle of architectural scale and West German design—a "readymade" element already familiar to Münster's urban landscape—Asher's work engaged both sculptural and architectural discourses, so that the work could not solely be read through the terms of one medium and not the other. Through its mobility, Asher's caravan negated the static monumentality of conventional public sculpture. It did not function as, in the artist's words, "an imposition of individuated space onto the space of collective production."[50] Instead, each week of the exhibition it was situated in a variety of social spaces that facilitated and enabled urban

[49] This translation is taken from the text printed in the exhibition catalogue Klaus Bussmann, Kasper König, and Florian Matzner, *Contemporary Sculpture. Projects in Münster 1997* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1997), 58. The German text on the tear-sheet reads as follows: "Es handelt sich hierbei um das Aufstellen eines Caravans in und um Münster für die Dauer dieser Ausstellung, die sich über 14 Wochen erstreckt. Der Caravan (annähernd 4 m lang) wird jeden Montag in der Nähe von Gebäuden oder Grünanlagen neu platziert, wobei insgesamt 14 verschiedene Standorte gewählt werden. Der Hinweis auf den Standort des Caravans und die Zeit, während der er dort zu finden ist, ist im Foyer des Museums zu erhalten."

[50] Asher, *Writings*, 170.

life. In his 1977 "Installation Münster," Asher expanded his situational approach by siting the caravan in multiple locations throughout his work's "site," defined in this case as the city of Münster, thus spatially and temporally extending the work's situational specificity.

Asher's strategy of mobility in his 1977 "Installation Münster" took on a temporal dimension when he repeated this work for subsequent versions of Skulptur's "Project section." In the mid-1980s and then again in the mid-1990s, Bussmann and König decided to repeat the "Project section" of Skulptur; since 1987, the exhibition of outdoor sculpture has been called Skulptur Projekte and has occurred every ten years.[51] With each iteration, more artists have participated in Skulptur Projekte while the exhibition itself has become shorter in duration. In 1976–77, when Bussmann and König were preparing for the upcoming Skulptur exhibition, they had not planned to repeat the "Project section" at a later date. It was only after Bussmann became director of the Landesmuseum in 1985 that he approached König about reviving the exhibition concept of Skulptur's "Project section" to exhibit the most recent developments in sculpture. About a decade later, the organizers again had no intention of staging a third exhibition of outdoor sculpture but, as König has stated in an interview, "the city [of Münster] really wanted to do it."[52]

Asher participated in every occurrence of Skulptur Projekte, and each time he contributed the same work. Upon each invitation to participate, Asher conducted a site visit in advance of the exhibition, considered different proposals for his contribution, but ultimately decided to have the

[51] The exhibition has taken on a slightly different name for each occurrence, but for the sake of simplicity, I will refer to it as "Skulptur Projekte," as it is most commonly referred to, throughout the chapter. The 1987 version was titled "Skulptur Projekte Münster" and the 1997 version was titled "Skulptur. Projekte in Münster 1997."

[52] Francesco Bonami, "Skulptur Projekte, Münster 1997: An Interview with Kasper König, Curator," *Flash Art* (March/April 1997), 75.

organizers carry out the instructions for his original contribution to the first "Project section" of Skulptur. For each iteration of his work, small pads of tear-sheets of the same colors and design—updated with information pertinent to that specific year—were available to visitors at the front desk of the Landesmuseum. A caravan of the same 1970s model and West German make was rented for the duration of the exhibition. Although the conceptual structure of Asher's work was the same for each exhibition, the work could not be carried out in the same way. Since the length of the exhibition became shorter with each edition, fewer and fewer parking spots were used. Additionally, the city's built environment was altered over time, making some of the caravan's locations no longer available or physically usable. With each passing decade, the caravan itself appeared more and more dated, a historical remnant of the 1970s. In this way, Asher's works for Skulptur Projekte in 1977, 1987, and 1997 were noticeably different each time.

This chapter explores the process of Asher's conceptualization of his 1977 "Installation Münster" as well as how the repetition of this work over the decades ramified the implications of his original work. If Asher's work in 1977 was intended to negate the form and function of conventional public sculpture, the repetition of his work in 1987 and 1997 continued this engagement while allowing for the comparison of each work's iteration to reveal changes in their sites and exhibition contexts.

Skulptur Projekte begins as the "Project section" of Skulptur

The exhibition Skulptur was initiated by Bussmann while he was a curator at the Landesmuseum in Münster. At the time Bussmann was also a member of Münster's arts commission, which was seeking to find works of art for the city to acquire and display in public

spaces. The idea for a survey exhibition of modern sculpture was conceived in response to a local incident of vehement protests that arose three years earlier due to the commission's proposal that the city acquire *Three Rotating Squares* (1969), a large kinetic sculpture by U.S. artist George Rickey [fig. 1.3]. The sculpture, which stands approximately ten feet tall, consists of a spindly pole with three brushed steel squares attached to its top. The squares are suspended in such a way that allows the metal planes to rotate freely upon a touch of wind. Regarding the controversy Bussmann recalled:

> In the arts commission of the city, we thought it was time to begin with public art [*Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*]. And we thought we chose what was almost completely harmless as an artwork, which we all had liked. We had found it in the sculpture courtyard of the Nationalgalerie in Berlin: *Three Rotating Squares* by George Rickey. We were so naive to think, everyone would like this artwork and so it must be fine. But the artwork cost 100,000 [Deutsche] Marks and there was a real uproar in the city: there was a letter campaign against it, that one would pay so much money for so little art.[53]

The opposition to the sculpture grew so strong that the city council did not follow through on the arts commission's recommendation. The Rickey sculpture was acquired only indirectly through its private purchase and was subsequently donated to the city by the Westfälische Landesbank.

The city residents' unexpected response to the Rickey sculpture remained with Bussmann and motivated him to organize a large-scale exhibition of modern sculpture at the Landesmuseum. He explained:

> I actually had the conviction that through modern art, through the freedom it offers to people, one could open themselves up or undergo a process of learning.

[53] Klaus Bussmann, in *Alte Hasen,* 11. Unless noted otherwise, all translations from the German are by the author. Original text: "In der Kunstkommission der Stadt überlegten wir, dass es Zeit würde, mit Kunst im öffentlichen Raum anzufangen. Und wir dachten uns, wir entscheiden uns zunächst ganz harmlos für eine Arbeit, die jedem gefallen wird. Wir hatten sie im Skulpturenhof der Nationalgalerie in Berlin entdeckt: die *Drei rotierenden Quadrate* von George Rickey. Wir waren so naiv zu glauben, die Arbeit gefiele jedem und sei also das Richtige. Aber die Arbeit kostete 100.000 Mark und es gab einen richtigen Aufstand in der Stadt: Leserbriefkampagnen dagegen, dass man für so wenig Kunst so viel Geld ausgibt."

> And after this affair with Rickey we decided that we wanted to put together an exhibition in the museum on the development of abstract sculpture since Rodin....[54]

The large-scale exhibition was intended to be a pedagogical display, one that would educate the local residents on the history of modern sculpture to give context to more recent artworks such as Rickey's austerely abstract *Three Rotating Squares*. The historical section of the exhibition began with Rodin and included sculptural works by major artists in the U.S. and Europe associated with abstraction, Cubism, Constructivism, and Surrealism, including Alexander Archipenko, Hans Arp, Constantin Brancusi, Naum Gabo, Alberto Giacometti, Julio Gonzalez, Henry Moore, Pablo Picasso, among others. The historical section was to be exhibited in the galleries of the Landesmuseum, while a second section of more recent abstract sculptures from the postwar period would be located outdoors in the garden park of the Palace, the former 18th-century residence of the prince-bishop that has been the administrative center of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster (WWU, hereafter referred to as the "University") since 1780. Bussmann indicated his reasoning behind this decision: "The postwar section was exhibited in the palace garden due to the size of the objects but also because it corresponded more to the character of the works."[55] In this section, artists such as Alexander Calder, Anthony Caro, Norbert Kricke, Henry Moore, David Smith, and Mark Di Suvero were included.

Bussmann also wanted to include younger contemporary artists working in sculpture, particularly artists working in the U.S. associated with Land art and Conceptual art.[56] To

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[54] Ibid., 14–15.

[55] Klaus Bussmann, "Skulpturprojekte 1977–1997. Erinnerungen" in *Skulptur Projekte Münster 1997: Fotografien von Barbara Klemm*, ed. Barbara Rommé (Münster: Stadtmuseum Münster; Berlin: Reimer, 2007), 15.

[56] Bussmann, *Alte Hasen*, 18.

develop this section, he visited König, who was living in New York at the time, and convinced him to collaborate. It was König who suggested to Bussmann that a third part be included in the exhibition, one that would be named the "Project section." According to Bussmann: "Kasper König suggested an entirely new concept for the contemporary, non-museum part of the exhibition: for the so-called 'Project section,' artists should be invited to develop in Münster new, site-specific projects and not lend already completed artworks that could possibly be realized somewhere else."[57] It was crucial to the organizers that the artists develop project proposals for the Skulptur exhibition that would be specific to a site located in Münster. To this end, selected artists were invited to visit Münster and given bicycles to explore the city and to locate a site for their proposed artwork. They were also given literature and information about their selected site and the city upon request.[58]

If the Skulptur exhibition was to present a historical survey of modern sculpture since Rodin in the galleries of the Landesmuseum and the formal gardens of the Palace, the "Project section" was intended to display examples of the most recent developments in the medium in locations scattered throughout the city of Münster. The addition of the "Project section" would not only reflect the "expanded" field of sculpture (the "avant-garde" nature of the exhibition),[59] but it would also involve the active participation of a new player: the city. The "Project section"

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[57] Bussmann, "Erinnerungen," 15. Elsewhere, Bussmann has recounted: "And then I invited Kasper König, [I] went to New York, because I had no contact with contemporary American artists and I asked him to collaborate. Finally we, no, *he* suggested organizing a third area for this exhibition; we named it 'Project section.' Here we invited artists, who were meant to realize things on site, things they had not already made previously." *Alte Hasen*, 15.

[58] Bussman: "We were expecting that the artists would come to Münster and not bring with them already completed projects. They were first given a bicycle and allowed to ride around the area. Then they were given a lot of literature.... The artists acquired and read of all of this and occupied themselves with it." *Alte Hasen*, 20.

[59] Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979), 30–44.

of Skulptur was not just a temporary exhibition but also a showcase of possible works that the city might purchase later. Funds were available for the acquisition of outdoor sculptures through a law that required the government to spend two percent of construction costs on public buildings on visual art projects.[60] The "Project section" of Skulptur as outdoor public art would represent a step beyond the previous *Kunst am Bau* ("Art in Architecture," literally "art on building") model, in which public art was placed in relation to architecture by being part of (stuck onto) a building.

Asher's Early Proposals: Interventions into the Landscape

After being invited by König to propose a work for the "Project section" of the upcoming Skulptur exhibition in the early summer of 1976, Asher traveled to Münster to conduct a site visit of the city during the last week of July that year.[61] Although he confirmed his participation in a letter to König dated September 1, 1976, it was not until a second trip to Münster in late June of 1977 that one of Asher's proposals was finally agreed upon.[62] Much of the communication between Asher and König took place through letters. Through this written correspondence, we can trace the development of ideas between Asher and König to see what issues Asher was considering as well as what König deemed technically and financially possible and impossible.

[60] Asher, *Writings*, 166.

[61] This would have been shortly after the opening on July 18 of Asher's work at the Venice Biennale that year.

[62] See Asher, *Writings,* 166. Asher visited Münster from July 27 to 31, 1976.

Over the span of ten months, Asher sent König about fourteen proposals altogether for possible artworks.[63]

Asher was initially interested in creating a work that would take either the form of an arrangement of trees or a tunnel. In a letter to König—the same letter in which he confirmed his participation—Asher sketched out four variations for a work using trees and four variations for a work using a tunnel [fig. 1.4]. For his proposed work using trees, Asher selected a grassy plot of land within a minute's walk from Domplatz and the Landesmuseum (one block away from Siegelkammer and Pferdegasse, the first parking spot for his later caravan work). Asher's four proposals consisted of planting clusters or rows of trees of the same species as those found on-site, arranged in different ways that would frame and highlight the presence and spatial positioning of the existing trees. Using a pre-existing feature of the city's landscape would make the artwork more "discreet," less obvious as a work of art to passing viewers. Trees, he noted, were already plentiful in Münster, a striking feature of the city's landscape.[64] Further down in his letter to König, he continued:

> When I mention discretion, I also feel that trees are being used for a backdrop for art rather than art in itself and if they were utilized as a tool for an installation they can be accepted by the [public] either way without the assertion of art put upon them, until necessary by those who choose to do so.[65]

[63] Asher confirmed his participation in a letter to König dated September 1, 1976. See the exchange of letters published in "*Skulptur Projekte in Münster*: Excerpts from Correspondence 1976–1997," edited by Jennifer King, *October* 120 (Spring 2007): 87–105. In *Writings*, Asher mentioned that he had suggested fourteen different proposals: "During the subsequent period of approximately eleven months I submitted and discussed fourteen proposals for possible contributions to the 'Skulptur' exhibition. All of them were either discarded for technical and financial reasons or turned out to be otherwise unfeasible." (166)

[64] Asher, "Excerpts from Correspondence," 91.

[65] Ibid.

By selecting as his material what is commonly seen outdoors but not usually acknowledged as having been seen, Asher would be executing a move analogous to his earlier architectural installations, such as his 1969 work for the San Francisco Art Institute. In this untitled work (discussed earlier in this dissertation's introduction), Asher used the gallery's modular walls "designed to function as a background for the presentation of paintings and objects" as the medium for his installation. What was meant to recede unobtrusively into the background and to provide "support" for works of art—in this instance, the modular walls—comes into view in the foreground. Similarly, Asher's proposed works using trees would change the viewer's perception of the outdoor landscape, subtly bringing into view its constructed nature.

Similar to his proposals for a work using trees, Asher's ideas for a tunnel were also for a work not immediately visible or recognizable as "art." He stated: "I am interested in the tunnel work because what we think of to be outdoor sculpture must rise from the ground and if it doesn't rise it has unusual ways of calling attention to itself. I assume the didactic part of the show will mostly rise...."[66] Unlike the other kinds of outdoor artworks that Asher was imagining, his tunnel work would be subtractive and subterranean. It would also be functional: the tunnel was meant for pedestrian use. Asher specified the following details about the tunnel: "It is meant to be built to code yet be as close as possible to ground or land-level and not appear as a concrete bunker. As a transit tunnel, it will necessitate lighting to code and meet all safety regulations. The width and length depend upon location and foot traffic."[67] Hidden from view above ground, the work's presence would be most obvious when in use, when one noticed the seemingly

[66] Ibid., 92.

[67] Ibid.

inexplicable disappearance and reappearance of figures from the ground at the two ends of the tunnel.

Unlike Asher's other artworks produced in the late 1960s and early '70s—most of which were indoors and temporary, designed to exist only until the end of their exhibition—these proposals were for potentially permanent works located outdoors in urban space. This may have been because exhibiting artists in the "Project section" were explicitly informed that the city would consider acquiring some of the artworks in the upcoming Skulptur exhibition.[68] In his letter to König that details these initial proposals, Asher mentioned that he had been having a difficult time developing proposals, since he has been trying to "[address] the *issues* rather than the challenge."[69] What were the defining issues of this particular exhibition, and potential collection, situation for Asher? Art historian Jennifer King has pointed out that Asher's early proposals share a concern with and critique of "aesthetic autonomy."[70] It is also clear, however, that from the start, Asher was attempting to address not only notions specific to the autonomy of modern sculpture and sculpture as a medium, but also issues specific to the exhibition context of Skulptur itself: namely, issues of an artwork's permanency, conventions of outdoor sculpture, and an artwork's relation to urban space.

The issue of permanency is one that preoccupied Asher from the very beginning. Explaining his interest in trees, Asher wrote that a work using trees would have "the capability [to address], for all intensive [*sic*] purposes, permanency," a quality typically associated with

[68] In *Writings*, Asher noted: "It was hoped that each outdoor installation of the sculptures in the exhibition would also be of interest to the city authorities in regard to future acquisition of those works." (166).

[69] Emphasis mine. Asher, "Excerpts from Correspondence," 89.

[70] King's introduction to "Excerpts from Correspondence," 88.

monumental outdoor sculpture.[71] An artwork made from trees could be site-specific, permanent, and yet change over time: trees are rooted in one place, even as they continue to grow. This aspect of permanence that embraced perpetual change was key for Asher. Towards the end of his letter to König, he wrote: "But I can't really make a case for the tunnel and the notion of rising because I feel at this point that if the tree installation is successful, it holds the potential to perhaps be more interesting than a set work like a tunnel."[72]

From the beginning, Asher was also conceptualizing works that would negate certain conventions of outdoor sculpture. As in his earlier situational works in galleries and museums, Asher was creating ideas for possible works through reconfiguring or taking away existing elements found on-site instead of designing a new object that would function as a trademark of the artist's style, a marker of autonomous production. Another characteristic of conventional outdoor sculpture that Asher tried to counter in his tree and tunnel proposals is the "notion of rising" or monumentality. In his tree proposals, Asher mentioned that he was interested in the aspect of "filling sideways":[73] multiple trees would be set in a row or in a particular pattern; they would grow upwards as well as spread out laterally. The excavation of a tunnel could be a permanent fixture in the city without adding to the "didactic part" that "rises." Instead of adding a new form to the surface of the city, a work that would occupy a piece of land by imposing its mass and volume on it, a tunnel work would be invisible from above ground and carve out a new space underneath. The type of tunnel that Asher was proposing would also have some use value for the city's inhabitants since it would open up a new passageway for foot traffic in the city,

[71] Asher, "Excerpts from Correspondence," 91.

[72] Ibid., 92.

[73] Ibid., 91.

newly connecting one location to another. Both the tree and tunnel proposals would not function as identifiers of an artist's characteristic style; rather, they would reorganize the space of an outdoor site as opposed to simply looming over the landscape and taking up space, as with conventional monumental sculpture.

The sites of Asher's early proposals for works using trees or a tunnel were primarily located in landscaped, grassy areas on the grounds of the University or the park on the banks of the Aasee, a large man-made lake and idyllic recreation area in the western part of the city. These initial choices were likely influenced by König's suggestions,[74] which in turn were likely informed by what land was owned by the sponsors of the Skulptur exhibition: the Province of Westphalia, the State of Northrhein-Westfalia (which owns the University), and the city of Münster. In his early proposals, Asher was not set upon producing a work for one particular site in the city, but was rather thinking through various possibilities for a particular *type* of site: places designed to beautify urban space through landscaping, spaces through which one strolls to take in the greenery, picturesque areas near the center of the city with its cultural and historical landmarks.

In his subsequent proposals, we can see how Asher approached the site of his work more expansively, taking into consideration not just one type of site found within the city, but the city itself as his work's site. He also began to take into consideration new issues regarding the exhibition concept, format, and function of Skulptur's "Project section," as we will see in his proposals sent to König the following year.

[74] An early draft of the artist agreement (cited in footnote 3) proposed specific areas in the city for artists to use: "the contemporary part, under the direction of Kasper König, is inviting you among 10 sculptors to work in situ within the Western part of the city (city-hall courtyard, university grounds, meadows bordering the park of the palace, the former grounds of the Zoo and the areas around the Aasee)."

Asher's "Caravan Proposal" and "Caravan Implications"

In a letter dated March 17, 1977, Asher sent another series of proposals to König, since his ideas for works using trees or a tunnel were, upon further investigation, likely unfeasible for logistical and financial reasons.[75] With this new set of proposals, we can see that his approach to the exhibition situation shifted. In this letter, Asher mentioned that his thinking was now revolving around the temporary structure of the exhibition itself in addition to the possible acquisition of the work. He wrote:

> Rather than functioning under the format of 18 months (as mentioned on the phone) I will address the 19 weeks 2 days of the exhibit.
>
> I am still not sure as to how to proceed but I will mention a few works that interest me and in almost all of them I feel I can work out an organizational pattern if Münster wishes to purchase the installation I do for the exhibition.[76]

In this letter, Asher mentioned about five different proposals for artworks altogether: using a new or used trailer that would be "moved with regularity by car or truck"; having the Landesmuseum subsidize meals for two or more students at restaurants around the university; creating a "tunnel to nowhere"; building one or a few small islands off the shore of the Aasee; or stocking the Aasee with fish and finding a way to "make the work self-generating for its own upkeep and maintenance" by "selling fishing licenses or something similar."[77]

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[75] The construction of Ulrich Rückriem's *Dolomit zugeschnitten* in late November 1976 across the path from the Petrikirche (the same plot that Asher was considering) meant that Asher's proposed tree work would not make sense, since Rückriem's sculpture would have blocked a vantage point essential to viewing Asher's proposed work. König also mentioned to Asher that it would be risky to plant trees in May, around when Asher was next planning to be in Münster, since trees were usually planted in the fall, or late winter or early spring. Asher also proposed an idea of re-planting existing trees, but the idea was nixed since there was a good chance that the trees would not survive the replanting. The tunnel ideas were nixed because of the enormous expense they would incur. See Asher, "Excerpts from Correspondence," 95.

[76] Ibid., 95–96.

[77] Ibid., 96–97.

This letter is the first time Asher mentioned the idea of having a trailer moved around the city as an artwork, although he does not give many specific details.[78] He wrote:

> [T]he notion of the trailer (house trailer) has been modeled a bit after the usage of a house trailer that once in a while parks on my street, or I often find towed or parked in different places every night on the west side of town [in Los Angeles]. In adapting such a model in Münster, it seems that I might need to regulate where it is towed and the duration it stays in any one place throughout the city. Not only do I consider parking lots the most obvious areas but perhaps some parks would work as well in juxtaposition to some of the existing buildings. Perhaps the trailer can be moved with regularity by car or truck and also does not necessarily need a person to live in it, in order for it to fulfill its function as an installation which is mobile yet has its own architectural qualities. Also, I wonder if new or used trailers in the 20–24 ft. range can be obtained in Münster and parked within the city limits?[79]

With this new idea and inquiry, Asher changed his focus from altering the existing physical landscape of the city (by adding trees or excavating a tunnel) to "an installation which is mobile yet has its own architectural qualities," a work that would use various locations in the city during the course of the exhibition. Unlike his previous proposals, this work would incorporate the use of a large-scale, architectural object: a mobile living unit. Furthermore, due to the object's size and types of locations in which it would be placed, its movements would be subject to the city's zoning laws and parking restrictions. This work would engage the regulatory systems of urban space to a significantly greater degree than his previous proposals to König.

A few months later, Asher returned to Münster in late June of 1977, when his proposal for a work using a caravan, based on his earlier idea of moving around a trailer, was accepted.[80]

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[78] Ibid., 96, fn 10.

[79] Ibid., 96.

[80] Asher, *Writings*, 166. Asher stated that he had submitted three proposals; Bussmann and König selected the caravan project.

In a document titled "Caravan Proposal" that was submitted to Bussmann and König, Asher outlined his project as follows:

> This has to do with the placement of a caravan in and around the city. It ordinarily uses already existing parking spaces. It moves to a separate location once a week. Most of the time it is in the proximity of an already existing building or a park. It is best moved by someone authorized by the museum & outside of museum hours. With approximately 18 1/2 weeks in the exhibition it is to be moved to 18 or 19 positions. The length of the caravan is to be approximately 13-16 ft. I am interested in the form, its mobility and what may be implied. It only serves as a metaphor for its known function, therefore it will not be functional as a living area. I have chosen it to point towards issues of art, communicate and be received by the viewer. This work can be extended into a permanent situation that remains mobile.[81]

There are a few notable aspects regarding the work's conceptual framework in this project description that are worth pointing out. First, Asher specifies that the caravan should mostly use already existing parking spaces, but, significantly, sometimes it may not. Most of the time the caravan should be close to—and therefore seen in visual relation to—preexisting buildings and parks, but not always. Thus we can infer that a general rule will influence the selection of the caravan's locations (generally, the caravan is to be parked in a developed area of the city that has been zoned for parking) but that exceptions to the rule are also included. The caravan must sometimes be parked in unmarked or vacant areas of the city where coming across a parked caravan might seem peculiar or unexpected. Secondly, the caravan should be moved regularly (once a week) when the museum is closed (on Mondays). Although it may not be obvious to a viewer, the rhythm of the work is to be structured according to the operating hours of the museum, so that whenever the museum is open, the caravan installation is ready and "on view." Thirdly, the caravan, though ordinarily a functional object, is not to be entered by visitors. The parked caravan is only meant to be viewed, not used; the caravan is to be read as a signifier of its

[81] "Caravan Proposal," n.d., Box 9, Folder 7, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

known function, not actually function as such. Finally, Asher notably ends his proposal by letting the curators know that the work can be "extended into a permanent situation" (though one that "remains mobile"), implying that the work is available for purchase by the city or the Landesmuseum. In fact, subsequent correspondence between Asher and König confirms that the artist was willing to sell this work to the Landesmuseum.[82]

Attached to Asher's "Caravan Proposal" was another hand-written document titled "Caravan Implications." On this sheet, Asher listed a number of related ideas suggested by the caravan's form and its parking locations around the city:

> 1. The choice of a person in West Germany for social & economic status. First choice would be a house in the country, if not that a caravan & if not that a second car.
> 2. At issue is a mobile form (the windows are left to be a contradiction of terms) a mobile art which can be placed and then replaced in different positions rather than staying in the same.
> 3. Implied is an architectural unit in a static architectural area (a model might include the shipping container to the metabolists* as a trailer is to static architecture).
> 4. The further signaling of a possible lifestyle which would accommodate different places or settings for different personal interests on a day by day basis.

[82] It appears that during Asher's visit to Münster during the summer of 1986, Asher and König had discussed the possibility of the caravan's purchase, although the terms of the acquisition are not mentioned. In a letter dated August 8, 1986, from Asher to König, Asher mentioned: "In order to avoid any future misunderstandings regarding sale and fee for work; I would like to take the time this December to discuss some agreement which the two of us feel comfortable with. This is an exciting venture and worth careful planning." Letter from Michael Asher to Kasper König, August 8, 1986, Folder "C2-40 / Skulptur Projekte Münster 1987 / Adams – Asher," Archiv der Skulptur Projekte, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Münster, Germany.

The topic was raised again around 1997 in a letter from Asher to König: "I would like to go in this direction [purchasing artwork] with you particularly because an artwork would end up in the permanent collection of the Landesmuseum.... It is a most welcome surprise that the Landesmuseum would like to acquire an artwork of mine. In this context I recall discussing and writing to you that the caravan project was for sale either to the city or the museum's collection. I would hope that we could revisit this question again." Letter from Michael Asher to Kasper König, January 27, 1997, Folder "Skulptur Projekte 1997 / Michael Asher," Archiv der Skulptur Projekte, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Münster, Germany.

5. The locations appear to be positions where the caravan is neither being stored nor is it being put to use.[83]

The first aspect Asher points out is the socio-economic status of the person who might own or use such a caravan, relating the caravan to its middle-class user. The caravan might be read as a metonym of such a person or as an embodiment of that person's desire for leisure and travel outside of the city. Secondly, the caravan installation represents a form of "mobile art," one which is contingent upon, yet detached from, its immediate surroundings. Thirdly, the use of a caravan would extend the artwork's frame of reference to the conceptual models and discourse of architecture; here Asher explicitly mentions the Tokyo-based architectural group called the Metabolists, relating their interest in the form of the shipping container as an architectural unit to his interest in the caravan's form (I discuss more on the caravan's reference to architecture below). Finally, we see that Asher intended to have the caravan positioned so that it would be read somewhat ambiguously: it would not be in storage, nor obviously in use. Instead it would appear as if it were purposefully suspended between these two states, casually and temporarily parked on the side of the road, so that a viewer would be uncertain about whether or how it was meant to function.

Caravan as Readymade Sculpture

In selecting to use a caravan in his work, Asher expanded the field of his work's references to include the discourses of sculpture and architecture as well as the interrelationship between the two. In his earliest set of proposals, Asher had approached sculpture through issues related to the conventions of monumental sculpture, namely its permanence or static nature, vertical orientation, and its self-referential or autonomous quality. With his caravan proposal,

[83] At the very top of the page, there is an asterisk with the note "group of architects, in particular [Kisho] Kurokawa." "Caravan Implications," n.d., Box 9, Folder 7, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

Asher continued to counter these conventions of monumental sculpture while also taking a new tack by appropriating an already-made consumer object as material for his "sculpture." With this new move, Asher brought in a reference to the readymade objects of proto-conceptual French artist Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp's readymades are machine-made, mass-produced functional objects that were selected by Duchamp, situated so that they would be rendered functionless, and then presented as works of art. Some examples of readymades include a bicycle wheel attached to a stool (*Bicycle Wheel*, 1913) [fig. 1.5], a coat rack nailed to the ground (*Trébuchet*, 1917) [fig. 1.6], and, most notoriously, a urinal turned 90 degrees and placed on a pedestal (*Fountain*, 1917) [fig. 1.7]. No longer an *objet d'art* created by the hands of an artist, an artwork in the model of the readymade places a "ready-made" manufactured commodity object into an art institutional setting.[84]

Like Duchamp's readymades, with his caravan work Asher proposed to withdraw a mass-produced object from the circulation of everyday life and render it temporarily functionless. An object from a "low" cultural context—that of everyday life—is elevated into a high cultural context—that of art, becoming a sign or metaphor of its function in the process. For Duchamp's readymades, and as it would be for Asher's caravan work, it is the act of selection and the institutional context that frames an object that allows it to be understood as an artwork. The significance of the artwork lies not in the formal qualities of the selected object itself but through the viewer's perception or recognition of its larger institutional framework. The perception of the

[84] Martha Buskirk has pointed out that most of the original readymades do not exist anymore (Duchamp's sister threw away his first bottle-rack readymade; she had not realized that it was an artwork) and that what are exhibited in museums now are copies of the originals, made under careful supervision by Duchamp. Ironically, these exhibited copies were meticulously made by artisans, whereas the original readymades were ordinary, mass-produced objects. See Buskirk's article "Thoroughly Modern Marcel," *October* 70 (Autumn 1994), 113–125.

artwork turns away from the selected object to an overall reading of the entire situation that includes the object: an epistemological approach is used to produce meaning.

Asher's use of a caravan, however, would differ from the readymade model in significant ways. The caravan was selected from the context of everyday life and yet it would also appear in this very same context, instead of being displaced into an institutional setting as with Duchamp's readymades. The institutional frame of Asher's caravan work would not be physical, as in the disjunctive placement of Duchamp's readymades within the interior spaces of art institutions, but rather virtually, discursively, and only temporarily constructed.[85] Further differentiating Asher's caravan from Duchamp's readymades was the fact that the caravan would be rented. The caravan would appear as part of Asher's installation only temporarily, for the length of the Skulptur exhibition. Whereas the readymade object once designated as a work of art by Duchamp remained as such, after the Skulptur exhibition the caravan would be returned to its rental agency and to normal use. The selected object would not always remain a "readymade," in a state of "universal and timeless existence," as Asher put it.[86] The normal function of the object would be temporarily diverted (or détourned, one could say) from a utilitarian purpose to an artistic one—to fulfill the purpose of the exhibition—before being put back into circulation and ordinary use. If, for Asher, the key issues of conventional monumental sculpture to address were permanence, verticality, and self-referentiality, a turn to the epistemological model of the readymade opened

[85] Asher made this distinction between his artistic use of an existing functional object from Duchamp's: "The trailer's declaration as a contribution to an exhibition of contemporary outdoor sculpture could be identified as possibly deriving from the tradition of the readymade. But by being only partly suspended and/or dislocated from its usual function and placement, this installation did not fulfill the traditional criteria for a readymade. Lacking the necessary contextual transformation for that strategy, its presence afforded both a purely functional understanding of it as a recreational vehicle, and as the sculptural work of an individual author." *Writings*, 168.

[86] Ibid.

up a set of counterpart issues regarding temporality, (dis)placement, commodity status, and real-world referent.

Caravan as "Capsule" Architecture

The real-world referent in Asher's work would be a caravan, a mobile vehicle of architectural scale and recreational use. Through its form and scale, the caravan would be placed in dialogue with the surrounding architecture of its settings. In the accompanying exhibition catalog from 1977, Asher published the following statement about his artwork:

> I intend to first use locations in the area of the museum slowly branching out to suburban areas and planted settings with the last few weeks comprising again of settings in town. The settings fulfill the structure of the installation. They consist of supposed places where a caravan can stand without appearing to be in storage or to be functional. *What interests me in the work is the aspect of mobility for a specific unit* [emphasis mine]. The form needs the ground to be positioned but not necessarily anchored. Its settings can change throughout the exhibition but its physical make up remains the same. In this sense it remains a packaged form and does not necessarily have to change physically while being transported to each location. The transit from one position to the other is also part of the installation.[87]

Asher associated the caravan with other architectural forms he had observed in everyday life. In a longer, unedited version of his project statement for Skulptur's exhibition catalogue, Asher indicated other models that may have influenced his decision to use a caravan in his work, including a trailer parked in different locations in his neighborhood in Los Angeles (mentioned to König in an earlier letter) and vendor carts he had seen in Münster's Domplatz during his visit.[88] Although trailers and vendor carts differ in size, visual appearance, and function, both are structurally similar in that they are mobile, self-contained units. In this way, trailers and vendor

[87] Michael Asher, "Statement," *Skulptur—Project Section*, ed. Kasper König and Klaus Bussmann (Münster: Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte, 1977), 40.

[88] "Statement," n.d., Folder "C2-40 / Skulptur Projekte Bereich 1977," Archiv der Skulptur Projekte, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Münster, Germany.

carts are similar to caravans as well. When in use, these architectural units form part of an ephemeral, ever-shifting landscape in the city, a landscape that, unlike the built environment, continually fluctuates and does not remain static.

Mobility was a key aspect of Asher's caravan proposal. As we saw earlier in Asher's "Caravan Implications," his caravan proposal was informed by contemporary architectural discourse, specifically the work of the Metabolists, a modernist architectural group active in Tokyo from 1960 to around 1975.[89] Whereas architecture is conventionally made to be static, if not seemingly permanent, this group of architects took the concept of "metabolism" to conceptualize a model of architecture around the concept of mobility. "Metabolism" was used as a metaphor to interpret the changing built environment as akin to the processes of organic biological growth and development. In the eyes of the Metabolists, the built environment is a landscape that is continually "metabolized" and therefore impermanent. As a unit for construction, Kisho Kurokawa, one of the most prolific and vocal spokesmen for the Metabolists, proposed the idea of "capsule architecture." Regarding the Metabolists and Kurokawa's work in particular, architect Yasuo Uesaka wrote:

> The concept of metabolism is nothing but a sense of impermanence.... Kurokawa's notion of the capsule is not one of parts; the capsule is a self-sufficient component like a living cell, a functioning entity, a meaningful space unit with its own life cycle. It lives and dies, but the *en* [or "intermedia" space as Kurokawa called it, an in-between space in which encounters between things occur] is always there to take on new cells. Likewise, his capsules may be moved

[89] The reference to Kisho Kurokawa was listed on the "Caravan Implications" sheet, cited in footnote 44. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has also mentioned Asher's interest in the Metabolists: "In fact Michael Asher has mentioned his interest in the work of several metabolistic architects, among them Kisho Kurakawa, and one could consider this as one source of information that might have determined the architectural reflections in his 'Installation at Münster.'" See his essay "Context—Function—Use Value: Michael Asher's Re-materialization of the Artwork," in *Michael Asher: Exhibitions in Europe 1972–1977* (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1980).

> or destroyed to make room for new capsules. Constant change, in terms of time and space, is the law of the universe called metabolism.[90]

Shipping containers (one form used by the Metabolists) and caravans (the form Asher proposed to use) are types of "capsule architecture," one could say, self-sufficient and "meaningful space units" on their own terms.

A self-contained unit, the caravan in Asher's proposed work is meant to be polysemous, to be read dynamically through a series of contrasts and conjunctions. One reads the caravan—one understands the further implications of its form—through its continual movement and contrast with the static architecture that surrounds it and the infrastructure through which it moves. The caravan was meant to be read as an object and a structure, as a form that could be read in terms of sculpture, architecture, and simply as a mobile vehicle. When Asher writes: "The [caravan] form needs the ground to be positioned but not necessarily anchored," this could be understood literally (in terms of positioning the caravan in physical space) as well as metaphorically (in terms of reading the caravan through the lens of different mediums or disciplines). About his caravan work, Asher would later write:

> When seen at its various locations by viewers who were unaware of the exhibition context, the trailer could be read as an architectural structure, standing for itself, not representing anything but itself. Perceived within the exhibition context, however, the trailer became an indexical sign in the tradition of the readymade, while simultaneously referring symbolically to both the discourse of sculpture and architecture.... Being neither pure sculpture nor pure architecture, both levels of discourse constantly interacted with one another within the exhibition context of sculpture/architecture. In this way the object with all the features of architecture (a functionalized, human-scale shell suitable for dwelling), and all the attributes of sculpture (a three-dimensional voluminous container, to be seen in the round, attached to the ground by its own mass) attempted to cross-reference, superimpose, or place its separate institutionalized discourses upon one another.[91]

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[90] Review (1974) by Yasuo Uesaka originally published in *Architecture Plus* and reprinted in Kisho Kuraokawa, *Kisho Kurokawa: Metabolism in Architecture* (London, Studio Vista, 1977), 111.

[91] Asher, *Writings*, 171.

By fluidly referring to both art and architecture, the caravan would not be solely read or "anchored" in one discourse or the other, in either purely sculptural terms or architectural ones. The itinerant caravan would represent a situation in which both discourses are activated in the viewer's mind simultaneously, held in productive tension to one another.

Negating "Public Sculpture"

Asher's caravan proposal was formulated in response to problems underlying what he referred to as "public sculpture." In a project statement written retrospectively about this work, published in his book *Writings*, Asher outlined what he viewed as the determinant elements structuring the exhibition concept and function of Skulptur's "Project section." He wrote:

> This work was conceived and realized for an exhibition of contemporary outdoor *sculpture* [emphasis in original]. Therefore it seems useful to recall some of the typical conventions and functions of the category of *public sculpture* [my emphasis]. These range—most generally—from addressing, commemorating, and celebrating individuals to mirroring collective experience. For these purposes individual icons, symbols, and architectural elements were once created from a stock of individual, regional, and national cultural and stylistic conventions for a patron class of aristocrats and their governments, and subsequently, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for the newly instated representatives of the bourgeoisie.[92]

In contrast to the tradition of commissioning sculptural works that use historically specific iconography and historical figures, contemporary public sculpture uses the recognizable stylistic idiom associated with a particular artist and is commissioned by businesses and government agencies.[93] This type of contemporary public outdoor sculpture has no relation to its site and

[92] Asher, *Writings*, 169.

[93] Asher wrote: "Contemporary public outdoor sculpture is commissioned by government agencies as well as private and corporate enterprise. In general it draws on the highly particularized stylistic and procedural conventions of modernist sculpture and in particular on the characteristic features of the work of an individual artist." Ibid.

does not explicitly reflect upon the purpose of its commission or the identity of its commissioner. Instead the artwork presents itself as an autonomous form, detracting one's attention away from its surroundings and the circumstances of its original commission.

Public sculpture conventionally asserts its presence through scale. One defining quality of all the artworks in the "Project section" was their scale: they were "radically large," as König described them.[94] In regards to scale, Asher noted:

> Inevitably an outdoor work must be on a larger scale than sculptural works found in galleries or museums in order to identify itself in opposition to its architectural or natural setting, such as a plaza, mall, or landscape, and to specify itself as an artistic production. If the small-scale objects of sculpture seem to be protected within their discourse because they are contained within the institution, outdoor sculptural objects seem to contain the institution in their scale to authorize their presence in public space.[95]

Here Asher points out that the scale of outdoor sculptures—including his own artwork—is determined by the outdoor context of the exhibition itself. Since they appear next to buildings instead of inside of them, outdoor sculptures must take on a larger scale in order to be legible. Whereas traditionally "sculpture" was signified in part by the work's placement upon a pedestal within the confines of an interior gallery, the outdoor sculptures in Skulptur would communicate their institutional presence—and implicitly, their institutional authorization—through their very size. For his work, Asher would use Skulptur's exhibition structure itself as the work's

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[94] Elizabeth Schambelan, "Public Offering" 189–190. König explained: "Their projects went beyond the parameters of autonomous sculpture, because the artists chose their own sites and did things on a very large—radically large—scale. The works were so big that their size gave them a kind of plausibility in people's minds, as constructs that made sense."

[95] Asher, *Writings*, 168.

"pedestal," explaining: "This installation [uses] the temporal and contextual body of an exhibition of outdoor sculpture as its materially specific and temporally limited pedestal."[96]

Public sculpture does not make apparent the material reality of its production, even though the larger scale of public sculpture typically requires larger costs to cover the increased amounts of material and labor.[97] Instead, it presents itself as an illusion of "unalienated labor." Asher wrote:

> As a monumental public example of pure and particularized unalienated labor, the results of this sculptural practice are effectively legitimizing the universal conditions of alienated labor. It diverts the viewer's attention from the division of labor and offers a retreat of unalienated creativity to the public. As a unique individual production it actually confronts public space—the space of the collective participation in the social production process—with its own individuated space. As a result of this confrontation the public does not only perceive itself as practicing alienated labor and being (systematically) prevented from access to unalienated labor, but it understands the imposition of individuated space onto the space of collective production.[98]

Public sculpture is conventionally used to display a sign of the artist's signature style; it is meant to embody the seemingly unalienated creative labor of the artist. The sculpture claims "its own individuated space," which effectively takes away from "public space," which Asher describes as "the space of the collective participation in the social production process." In this way, conventional outdoor sculpture in effect becomes an "*imposition* of individuated space onto the space of collective production."

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[96] Ibid., 170.

[97] Donald Judd in his project statement published in the *Skulptur* catalogue alluded to this when he wrote: "The categories of public and private mean nothing to me. The quality of a work cannot be changed by the conditions of its exhibition or by the number of people seeing it.... The unusual aspect [of a sculpture for an outdoor location] is the financing necessary to build the piece." For Judd, the site of an outdoor work was understood purely in formal terms, without consideration of its social context. Judd, *Skulptur—Project Section*, 48.

[98] Asher, *Writings*, 170.

Through its monumental scale, Asher noted that public sculpture is meant to signify economic and cultural achievement. Public sculpture, Asher observed, serves as "a cultural signal to the community" and functions "within the community as a mark of identity and differentiation."[99] The presence of such work in a community can have a material effect on its immediate site. That is, the value of the property around a public sculpture's site can rise due to its presence: public art can ultimately function to facilitate gentrification. [100]

In contrast to this, Asher structured his caravan proposal to negate the spectacular and speculative function of contemporary public sculpture. He stated:

> The installation at Münster was intended to function as a negation of contemporary public sculpture. The trailer as a mass-produced object (in contradistinction to an industrially produced unique sculpture) denied invention, special fabrication, and the unique existence that establish the spectacle of individual unalienated labor in public sculptural works. As an industrially produced recreational vehicle it embodied the split and unity between alienated labor and alienated leisure time.[101]

Asher's use of a caravan would function to negate how one conventionally understood public sculpture. Through its reference to the readymade, the caravan would engage discourses of art and architecture as well as introduce the dimension of class and labor into the artwork. Instead of presenting an illusion of unalienated creative labor, the caravan, as a mass-produced, manufactured object, would symbolize "the split and unity between alienated labor and alienated leisure time."

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[99] Ibid., 169–170.

[100] Asher wrote: "In the gentrification of urban areas, the presence of public sculpture as a sign of cultural (governmental or corporate) commitment to a particular area within a community may attract real-estate speculation and enhance the property values of that area. It presents a concretized and monumentalized form of ideology to the public. It is almost always located in centralized plazas or parks where the individual can be addressed by ideology as public individual. Public monumental sculpture is hardly ever found in residential neighborhoods." Asher, *Writings*, 170.

[101] Ibid.

Through his choice of locations around the city, Asher's caravan work would draw attention to places not officially validated as "cultural spaces," but spaces in the city intimately tied to peoples' everyday activities, near places of their public and private lives.[102] Through the caravan's mobility and changing locations, Asher intended his work to resist being abstracted into a generic sign of individual or cultural achievement and resist being abstracted from its contemporaneous surroundings. Through its mobility, Asher's work would counter the static nature of conventional public sculpture: "Once set in place public outdoor sculpture cannot participate in the perpetually changing makeup of its surroundings."[103] One could say that Asher's work then was intended to participate, temporarily, with its urban environment. One's reading of the caravan used in Asher's installation would remain in flux and continue to change throughout the course of the exhibition. To see how Asher's proposal was realized into a material and temporal form, we now turn to a formal and spatial analysis of his "Installation Münster" from 1977 in order to understand how the caravan work would function in the real time and space of the Skulptur exhibition and the city.

Locations of "Installation Münster" in 1977

[102] Asher wrote: "The work addressed those social spaces which public sculpture refuses or neglects to address or those which it wants to conceal. Instead of abstracting the viewers' experience of reality through an ideological address in public cultural spaces, the work suggested a concrete analysis of individual alienation where it is most solidly authored, in the urban and suburban homes, the factories and urban businesses and shopping centers. By drawing the viewers' attention to those placements in social space an imposition through cultural presence was avoided." Ibid.

[103] Ibid., 167.

The Skulptur exhibition opened on July 3, 1977.[104] For Asher's work, an Eriba touring caravan, manufactured by the West-German company Hymer, was parked in a new location every week in and around the city of Münster. An approximately fifteen-foot-long caravan of the "Familia" model, with a streamlined white body and thin metallic trim, was rented from a trailer agency in Münster for the duration of the exhibition. Asher noted that the "Familia" model was selected for its size ("not so large that it would dominate its location") and for its visual appearance: "It was compact, its design well-suited to its function, and recognizable as a West German product rather than unusual or foreign-looking."[105] The specific choice of using a recognizably "West German" caravan echoed Asher's decision to use sleek Italian-designer chairs to create a seating lounge as his contribution to the Venice Biennale just the year before [fig. 1.8]. He wrote: "I feel the furniture should definitely be of the country's origin that is sponsoring the exhibition in order to signify certain symbols and feelings of that country."[106] By selecting an object manufactured in, as well as stylistically associated with, the country of the hosting exhibition, it would not only appear less obviously out of place, but would subtly highlight the nationality of the work's exhibition context on its own terms. This followed Asher's situational method of not introducing foreign elements into an exhibition situation.

[104] The other exhibiting artists were Carl Andre, Joseph Beuys, Donald Judd, Richard Long, Claes Oldenburg, Ulrich Rückriem, and Richard Serra.

[105] Asher wrote: "In order to find a trailer that would fulfill all the requirements of this particular installation, I bought a catalogue containing most of the currently manufactured trailers available in West Germany. The trailer that I eventually selected was not so large that it would dominate its location. It was compact, its design well-suited to its function, and recognizable as a West German product rather than unusual or foreign-looking." (*Writings*, 167)

[106] Ibid., 140.

Depending on the week, the caravan was seen in commercial or residential areas, in the woods or next to grassy stretches of land, in the more densely developed city center or a less populated suburb. This is how Asher described the types of sites he chose for his work:

> I used areas that were zoned for commercial and industrial purposes as well as parks, densely populated areas, and areas with isolated individual family residences. The trailer was located for the first week of the exhibition across the street from the front entrance of the museum in an alley leading to the university. The trailer's final and last location during the last week of the exhibition was also next to the university, but closer to the museum. After the first week the trailer was located on the north side of the cathedral in a parking lot adjacent to an open mall, then in a parking place in front of a car dealer, in a wealthy residential area; next to parks, then in an industrial complex, then next to a canal, to a high-rise apartment building, and a school; at the end of a dead-end street; next to an urban shopping mall in a parking lot, a church, a store, and a torn-down building opposite a number of residences; in an empty lot, in a forest, in a large open parking lot in the city, in a parking lot in front of the train station, and, second to last, in front of a bar.[107]

The parking locations used included sites near university buildings, a government building, churches, commercial buildings, an industrial complex, houses, apartment buildings, a school, a canal, the main train station, a bar, parks, and, of course, the Landesmuseum. In these locations, the caravan was left in parking lots, along the side of paved roads, on a dirt road, near intersections, and at a couple of dead-ends. Placed next to buildings and outdoor areas where people live, work, socialize, and relax, the caravan would have been seen in places of public and private exchanges, amid the flows of activities in and around the city.

In some locations, the caravan would not have warranted a second look from a passerby. Parked in a residential area, such as during weeks five and six, the caravan's presence might have looked normal, as if its owner temporarily parked it on the street [fig. 1.9 and fig. 1.10]. In other instances, the placement of the caravan would have seemed unusual, such as in the pedestrian alley near the Landesmuseum and the University of Münster during week one, or in

[107] Asher, *Writings*, 166–67.

the forested Jesuiterbrook park during week fifteen [fig. 1.11]. In regards to selecting the parking locations for his caravan work, Asher has stated:

> [I]t was important to find locations where the trailer would be seen in context. The trailer was placed in what appeared to be perfectly obvious locations, in places where it might have appeared to be slightly out of context, and in locations where it would have been unlikely to appear altogether.[108]

But even in the locations where the trailer "would have been unlikely to appear," it would not have stood out in an immediately obvious way because of how it was positioned within its surroundings. For example, that first week the caravan was positioned almost completely out of sight from Domplatz and the Landesmuseum; when not approached dead-on, only its hitch peeks out of the alley to catch the wandering eye of a pedestrian walking down Pferdegasse. During the 15th week, one physically needed to enter the wooded park in order to see the caravan (and for those viewers who hadn't picked up a tear-sheet from the Landesmuseum, wonder why it was left there). In many of the photographs, the caravan is just one of multiple parked vehicles [fig. 1.12, fig. 1.13]. We can see how the caravan appears in this quotidian context: inconspicuous, though not invisible, its presence generally unremarkable. This is how Asher meant the trailer to appear, that is, one saw it first and foremost in relation to its everyday surroundings: "The method of placement was intended to create the impression that the trailer was an integral part of its surroundings, rather than an entity in or of itself."[109] In each of its placements, the caravan did not call attention to itself as a work of "sculpture"; in each instance, the work would resist the "notion of rising" and self-referentiality of conventional monumental sculpture.

Navigating the City

[108] Ibid., 166.

[109] Ibid.

Passing by the caravan in one of its temporary positions around the city, one may not have realized that the parked vehicle was part of an artwork. One would only have the assurance of knowing that it was an artwork after picking up one of the tear-sheets available on the reception desk of the Landesmuseum. After picking up a tear-sheet, the viewer was invited to take a journey through the city, to travel from the museum to a destination out "there," to different parts of the city.[110] In this way, the viewer would be "integrally linked in the co-production of meaning rather than its consumption," as Asher later reflected on this work.[111]

One point of orientation within Asher's work was fixed: the Landesmuseum as the point of origin. The work can be said to begin at the front desk of the museum, where one would have picked up a tear-sheet. This sheet was then used as a guide to head out to the part of the city where the caravan was parked in its designated spot for that week. In this way, the work emphasized its relation to the Landesmuseum, which was its starting point throughout the exhibition. Curator and art historian Anne Rorimer has pointed out the caravan's "symbiotic" relationship to its surroundings and names the Landesmuseum as its "center of gravity."[112]

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[110] Based on earlier conversations with Asher, Jennifer King has compared Asher's caravan work to the Dutch conceptual artist Stanley Brouwn's series *This Way Brouwn*. In this series, which began in 1960, Brouwn chose a place in the city and asked passing strangers for directions from that particular point to another location in town. The passerby was asked to draw a map of the path one could take and these drawings were later compiled in a book. Both Brouwn's *This Way Brouwn* and Asher's "Installation Münster" both allude to the diversity of ways to get from one point in the city to another. See Jennifer King, "Michael Asher and the Sculpture Projects in Münster," *Chicago Art Journal* 15 (2005), 11.

[111] "Munster Project," June 3, 1997, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[112] Rorimer wrote: "Stationed one week at a time in a succession of different locations within the city of Muenster and its suburbs, the trailer moved away from the museum during the first half of the exhibition and back toward it during the second half. In each of its positions, the trailer was juxtaposed with and absorbed into a variety of environments, both rural and urban. The otherwise detached trailer, a seemingly self-contained but symbiotic unit, was enlisted by Asher quite literally as the vehicle for realizing his work. It linked itself with the community while the museum responsible for the exhibition provided it with its center of gravity. Figuratively anchored to the museum, the trailer delineated the boundaries of a work that encompassed the entire community." Anne Rorimer, "Michael Asher and James Coleman at

Who would have been able to carry out the work's directive every week of the exhibition? Asher himself admitted that one didn't need to have seen every instance of the parked caravan to understand the work.[113] (There is likely only one person who saw the caravan in every parking location in 1977: the photographer who documented Asher's work for the museum.[114]) But the actual experience of taking the path from the center of the city, where the Landesmuseum is located, out to the caravan's parked locations each week would have opened up another dimension of the work. Moving from the Landesmuseum to different parts of the city, one might have unexpectedly made new observations, encountered new situations, or run into friends along the way. And all the while, while making the trek out to find the caravan, the viewer would have been reminded of how the Landesmuseum as a site was relationally positioned within the overall context of the city and the contingency of Asher's work upon the institutional framework of the Skulptur exhibition.

"A Variety of Contextual Relationships"

Instead of selecting and focusing on one physical location, Asher conceptually structured his "sculpture" through the exhibition format of Skulptur as a temporary event lasting nineteen weeks that took place throughout the city. His work was structured by the choreographed movements of a mobile architectural unit, parked in various locations throughout the city. The caravan's changing locations were as significant to his artwork as the caravan as an object itself.

Artists Space," in *Michael Asher / James Coleman*, ed. Susan Wyatt and Valerie Smith (New York: Artists Space, 1988), 8–9.

[113] Asher wrote: "Complete sequential viewing of all locations was possible, but not a necessary requirement for the viewer's understanding of the work." Asher, *Writings*, 167.

[114] Stephen Pascher makes this point in "Phantom Limb: Michael Asher's Sculpture Project," *Afterall* 17 (Spring 2008): 114–121.

Unlike Donald Judd's large-scale concrete rings embedded into the sloping northwest bank of the Aasee [fig. 1.14], for example, or Claes Oldenburg's enormous concrete spheres meant to represent a scattering of billiard balls on the Aasee's eastern end [fig. 1.15], Asher's work took place in nineteen different locations in about half as many neighborhoods to mark the heterogeneity of the city's built environment. Instead of only focusing the viewer's attention on the caravan object itself, his designated "readymade" object, Asher's work also brought into view the various places and social contexts surrounding it each week.

Because the figure of the caravan remained consistent, one's attention was drawn towards the changing settings of the caravan and the spaces in between. As Asher noted in his exhibition catalogue statement: "The transit from one position to the other is also part of the installation."[115] Asher's earlier situational strategy expanded to encompass multiple locations in his work that would collectively represent its vast site, the city of Münster. The spiraling path of the caravan conceptually linked the Landesmuseum and other locations in Münster's urban center to "those social spaces which public sculpture refuses or neglects to address or those which it wants to conceal," such as factories, storefronts and shopping centers, urban and suburban homes. If Asher's early proposals for sculptural interventions into the landscape revolved around the reorganization of space at a particular type of outdoor location, Asher's caravan work asked the viewer to navigate the space of the city to draw a series of relationships between the different sites and those sites' relationship to the Landesmuseum. Tear-sheet in hand, the viewer would have been reminded of the temporal and discursive dimensions structuring his or her perception of the sited caravan "sculpture." Asher stated: "My work while not being necessarily specific to a particular place, it actively [broke] down into a variety of contextual relationships rather than

[115] Asher, "Statement," in *Skulptur—Project Section*, cited in footnote 48.

particularizing itself as static sculpture, which eventually prohibits contextualization."[116] The temporary nature of the caravan installation gave each of the caravan's sitings an element of site- and situational specificity. Asher pointed out: "By multiplying context as opposed to maintaining any specific, singular context, the work increased its situational specificity."[117] In his 1977 caravan work, Asher expanded his situational approach by fragmenting his work's "site," the city of Münster, into a "variety of contextual relationships," spatially and temporally defined, thus "increasing" the work's situational specificity. Although Asher did not initially intend to repeat his "Installation Münster," ironically it was through the later repetition of his 1977 work that he would be able to deepen even further the work's situational specificity and expand upon its original function and implications.

Re-staging the "Project section" as Skulptur Projekte in 1987

In January of 1985, Bussmann became the director of the Landesmuseum (shortly after the conclusion of the Skulptur exhibition, he left the Landesmuseum to teach at the university in Münster because of a dispute over the museum's refusal to collect Joseph Beuys's large-scale tallow work produced for the "Project section").[118] He revived the exhibition concept of Skulptur's "Project section" to use the space of the city as an extension of the museum and to "bring the work of the museum into the city." He stated:

> After I became director of the Landesmuseum in January 1985, it was clear to me and Kasper König that we should try to take up the experiment of 1977, although without repeating the historical retrospective section. My intent was, in other respects, to bring the work of the museum into the city, to reach citizens who do

[116] Asher, *Writings*, 168

[117] Ibid., 167.

[118] Bussmann, "Erinnerungen," 18.

> not normally come into the museum, to see the whole city in a sense as if it were the exterior space of the museum.[119]

Beginning with its edition in 1987, the outdoor sculpture exhibition has been called Skulptur Projekte.

In a letter dated May 23, 1985, Bussmann invited Asher to contribute a work for the upcoming exhibition in 1987. He wrote:

> For the year 1987 we [Bussmann and König] are now planning a new show—in cooperation with the city of Münster and the country of Nordrhein-Westfalen—that should lead on the basis of 1977's exhibition to concrete answers to the question: What could be today's function of sculpture in public areas?
>
> We plan to invite several artists we think important in international art to take part in this exhibition and hope to realize at least some of these contributions.[120]

Over sixty international artists were invited to participate in Skulptur Projekte, a large increase from Skulptur's "Project section," which included the realization of eight sculptural works out of the twelve projects proposed. As with the previous exhibition in 1977, for Skulptur Projekte artists were brought to Münster to develop project proposals "in situ" and were encouraged to create works that would be located in the city's center.

The 1987 exhibition was intended to be a continuation as well as a development of the exhibition in 1977. König has stated: "The exhibition that took place ten years ago, and of which two works remain, was essential in enabling us to do this one. We re-invited the twelve artists who participated in 1977 in the last third section of the show called "Projects"…. This procedure was important because it provided us with continuity."[121] Bussmann has spoken about how the

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[119] Ibid.

[120] Asher, "Excerpts from Correspondence," 97.

[121] Chantal Pontbriand, "Skulptur in Münster: An Interview with Kasper König," *Parachute* 48 (1987), 36–41. Only the works of eight artists were ultimately realized for the 1977 exhibition. Here König may

ten-year break became an advantage, since in between those ten years, a whole new generation of artists had emerged.[122] As he saw it, this generation of artists was less concerned with landscape (unlike many of the artists from 1977) and more interested in the urbanity of the city, its history and architecture.

Repeating "Caravan Proposal" in 1987

Asher conducted another site visit to Münster in June of 1986, during which time he once again explored the city. In a letter to König dated August 8, 1986, he wrote: "I look forward to receiving the rest of the information from Münster so as to consider a second work. I feel my stay was very productive and I learned quite a bit from coming to Münster for the length of time spent on this trip."[123] The trip in June was evidently a productive one. In a letter to Asher dated August 11, 1986, Friedrich Meschede, a curator at the Landesmuseum, mentioned that he was sending a map of the city in which all of the islands found in Münster are marked and also that an Eriba Familia trailer would be available to rent.[124] Meschede ended the letter: "Please send us your intention or specific proposal for 'Skulptur Projekte' 1987; one or two of those 46 ideas you spoke of, when you left Münster."[125] Among the "46" ideas that Asher shared with the curators at the Landesmuseum that summer, it seems, was the possibility of repeating his caravan work.

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be referring to the twelve artists in all who were asked to submit proposals. Artists whose works were not realized included Bruce Nauman, Walter de Maria, and Dan Graham.

[122] Bussmann, "Erinnerungen," 18.

[123] Letter from Michael Asher to Kasper König, August 8, 1986, Folder "C2-40 / Skulptur Projekte Münster 1987 / Adams – Asher," Archiv der Skulptur Projekte, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Münster, Germany.

[124] Among the ideas mentioned but not outlined in the correspondence are a work using the islands found in the city and a work that would be sited in the bishop's garden.

[125] Asher, "Excerpts from Correspondence," 98.

Asher wanted his project for 1987 to relate "dialectically" to his project from 1977. In a letter to König dated December 8, 1986, Asher explained his decision to drop the idea for a work using the islands: "They do not have a structural significance which would relate, dialectically, to the trailer project due to their scarcity."[126] Although it is not clear how Asher was thinking about using the islands in Münster, we can gather that he was thinking about using multiple (more than just a few) sites again for his work, as in his 1977 work. An island, as a piece of land enclosed on all sides by water, could be seen as similar to the self-enclosed or "packaged form" of the caravan. The key difference, however, would be that the islands as sites would be static, and therefore fixed, during the exhibition, whereas one of the key features of the caravan work was its continual movement over the weeks of the exhibition through its mobile form. In his letter to König, Asher went on to communicate his excitement about the idea of redoing his caravan work from the previous Skulptur exhibition. He continued:

> I am quite excited about the re-installation of the 1977 trailer project.
>
> I would like to rent a trailer like the one in 1977, if it is in very good condition. Can you provide me with advertising of the Familia which would give me an idea of where the decoration is on the new model and what it looks like? This is just in case we have to use one of the new ones. Possibly a want ad could be put in the paper for one of the 1977s since this is my first choice.[127]

How would a repetition of Asher's caravan work relate dialectically to his original work in 1977? If Asher's 1977 work had been structured by a series of spatial movements, in step with the weekly rhythm of the Landesmuseum's operating hours and the Skulptur exhibition, to break down the site of the city into a "variety of contextual relationships," then a repetition of his caravan work would amplify the work's structure by mobilizing the work in time. Furthermore,

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

the more precisely Asher could repeat the instructions for his repeated work, the more precisely the differences between the two works—and thus the repetition's significance—would be revealed.

By spring of the following year, Asher confirmed the selection of his caravan work as his contribution to the upcoming Skulptur Projekte. In a letter to König dated March 17, 1987, Asher sent the following instructions (this text would be reprinted in lieu of a formal project statement in the 1987 exhibition catalogue):

> I would like to go over the locations in Münster so as to make sure we have all clearances and the trailer can be located in its exact position. I would like the option of renting one of the old style trailers, if the new ones are not appropriate for this work. This means both types of trailers must be rentable for this project.
>
> Please use the description of the work from the 1977 trailer work. Each week put the new location of the trailer and a description of the work on a padded sheet of paper so the viewer can take a description and location and drive out to the trailer.[128]

Asher would subsequently determine that an "old style" caravan needed to be used in the repeated installation of his work.

Asher was meticulous in ensuring that each part of the installation was re-created as closely as possible to the 1977 work. In a hand-written document titled "Caravan Work," undated, Asher made the following notes:

> 1. With absolute precision, locate the caravan in the same positions as was located in 1977 Sculptur exhibition
>
> 2. Use exactly the same dates as in 1977
>
> 3. Do all photographic documentation for '87 of each location from the same position as 1977 Sculptur exhibition. Refer to: those photos in Nova Scotia series & Eindhoven catalogue [on the side, he notes: "same point of view"]
>
> 4. Use precisely the same model caravan

[128] Ibid., 99.

5. Use the same handouts with same colors in the museum, as were used in '77 (just change the dates)[129]

In this list, Asher repeatedly emphasized the "precision" with which to carry out each aspect of his installation work, from its weekly positioning to its photographic documentation to the accompanying handouts made available in the Landesmuseum. (It is unclear what the instruction for number two is supposed to mean; presumably, these notes were written to himself, given the casual way in which they were jotted down.) In another document titled "Parking Place Permissions," Asher listed parking locations where permission needed to be secured.[130] In some cases, objects on-site would have to be removed. For example, for the parking place for week two, Asher noted, "Get permission to move garbage container during the second week." For week fifteen, he wrote, "Find way to remove posts to gain access" and for week sixteen, "Permission to remove metal standards in driveway so the caravan can be parked."

In a three-page document titled "Task Sheet: Michael Asher: Contribution to 'Sculptur,'" given to the curators at the Landesmuseum, Asher listed all of the tasks that need to be completed for his work.[131] In his "Task Sheet," Asher was careful to specify that the caravan needed to be "renovated" to look new again. The top of the caravan was to be repainted in its original color, the chrome detailing polished to a high finish, its windows cleaned, and dents

[129] Michael Asher, "Caravan Work," n.d., Box 18, Folder 3, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[130] Michael Asher, "Parking Place Permissions," n.d., Folder "C2-40 / Skulptur Projekte Münster 1987 / Adams – Asher," Archiv der Skulptur Projekte, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Münster, Germany.

[131] Michael Asher, "Task Sheet: Michael Asher: Contribution to 'Sculptur,'" n.d. Folder "C2-40 / Skulptur Projekte Münster 1987 / Adams – Asher," Archiv der Skulptur Projekte, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Münster, Germany. He noted, "Measure the original positions of the trailer from 1977 so it can be positioned precisely the same in 1987. Mark each area with paint or wood stakes, exactly where tires go."

pounded out and painted over. It was critical to the artist that the trailer look seemingly untouched by accident or time. He wrote: "Trailer must be renovated on the exterior. It has to be in concourse condition. This is very important."[132] The tear-sheets were to be designed so as to appear the same as those from the previous exhibition, except for a set of new dates. The paper colors were to be matched exactly with the colors used in 1977, week by week (in one case, he even mentions a Pantone number). He noted: "Visitors ought to be encouraged to take a printed sheet at the desk so as to locate the caravan and to keep as a souvenir."[133] Three to four pads were to be left on the front desk of the Landesmuseum each week, but only for that particular week. Asher specified that no pads from the previous week or the coming week should be accessible to the public, as he had instructed in 1977.

Re-staging Skulptur Projekte in 1997

In the mid-1990s, Bussmann and König again organized Skulptur Projekte, to be opened ten years later in 1997. For the third edition, over seventy artists were invited, instead of around sixty artists as in 1987 and twelve artists in 1977. Bussmann and König sent Asher an invitation letter, dated February 27, 1996, with information about what they were planning for the upcoming exhibition.[134] The invited artists were again brought to Münster to develop a project

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid.

[134] In their invitation letter, Bussmann and König wrote: "In cooperation with the City of Münster the Westfälisches Landesmusem organizes an exhibition titled 'Skulptur Projekte Münster 97,' which is the continuation of the 'Skulptur Projekte' in 1987 and 'Skulptur' in 1977—to which you both contributed—and will be staged in summer 1997. / The sculpture projects of 1977 and 1987 focused on the different aspects of 'art in public spaces.' In contrast to this, we would like to establish both exterior and interior 'laboratories' of new ideas and projects in the inner city next year. The old neogothic building with its interior courtyard is presently being totally renovated for the European historical exhibition of 350 years of the Westphalian Peace in 1998. We shall be able to use the renovated building before the finishing touches have been made as the center of our exhibition. We shall declare this part as a 'public space' and keep it open until midnight without charging entrance fees." Asher, "Correspondence," 101.

proposal on-site. They were encouraged to work with a site in the city's center to make the works more easily locatable and accessible to a visiting public. About working with König to conceptualize Skulptur Projekte for 1997 Bussmann has recalled:

> After we decided that ten years later another try ought to be started, with the same partners—the city, the region, and the regional association—under the same conditions, but this time with a more comfortable financial frame, including the willingness of sponsors from industry and finance to get involved, and also after the city had proven internationally as an ideal place for "laboratory tests" [*des Labortests*] for this open-ended experiment. We met, Kasper König and I, during the Venice Biennale in [1995] in Caffe Florian in Piazza San Marco to discuss the essential features of the conception. We sketched out...the essential features of the formal frame for the new exhibition: concentration on the promenade ring as orientation for the artists and visitors. Even though the city is not very large, the "easter egg hunt" in the suburbs especially for foreign visitors often proved to be very laborious.[135]

One significant difference with the 1997 edition of Skulptur Projekte was the city's changed attitude toward the exhibition: by the mid-1990s, the city was much more eager to support it. In an interview in 1997, König stated: "[Bussmann and I] weren't even planning to do a third exhibition this year, but the city really wanted to do it."[136] In another interview from that year, König spoke about the city's change in attitude over time. In response to a question about if there was great public resistance initially to the exhibition, König replied: "Not exactly, since the works were nonaggressive, though very unfamiliar. But certainly, over the years, the relationship between the show and its audience has changed, from the first incarnation to 1987, which was sort of 'the year of the figurative'…. By '97, however, a certain art-tourism had kicked in

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[135] Bussmann, "Erinnerungen," 21.

[136] Bonami, "An Interview with Kasper König," 75.

globally, and suddenly the city really loved the international attention Skulptur Projekte got, and was putting a lot of marketing resources behind it."[137]

Repeating "Caravan Proposal" in 1997

In June of 1996, Asher visited Münster to conduct a site visit. As in 1986–87, Asher considered coming up with other proposals, but within in a few months' time, he confirmed that he would contribute his caravan work again. In a letter to König dated August 2, 1996, Asher wrote: "I am very much looking forward to the possibility of reproducing the caravan project and all the new problems or aesthetic issues it will address and few of which I really would not have imagined when I first realized this project in 1977."[138]

Asher was again meticulous in ensuring that each part of the installation was recreated as closely as possible to the 1977 work. It was discovered that some of the positions from 1987 were incorrect (they did not match those in 1977) or were not photographed; the photo-documentation from 1977 was used as a guide. In a four-page list titled "Areas to begin to consider for 1997 Skulptur," Asher noted:

> – Where can a trailer be rented or purchased which is the same model as in 1977 and 1987. This was a Familia made by the Eriba Company.
>
> – Please make sure it can (the caravan) can be returned to the same condition as the ones used in 1977 & 87.
>
> – Take black and white photos of the 3 positions…where the caravan can no longer be positioned due to changes in these sites. Please make sure the camera is positioned in the same place as 1977 and frames that site as in 1977. These will probably work their way into the documentation for 1997. If it can't be positioned the same way make photos which document changes. […]
>
> – Add a sentence in the text [of the tear-sheets] about those positions which can no longer be used for 1997 due to their changes in function or limit barriers. Also

[137] Schambelan, "Public Offering," 190.

[138] Asher, "Excerpts from Correspondence," 101.

> think about mentioning that the caravan is in storage this week as opposed to prior exhibitions. […]
>
> – Please use several pads of paper at the reception so the viewer will be encouraged to take a slip of paper (and of course be able to keep it like a souvenir).[139]

Asher was careful to make drawings of the parking positions for each week with notes regarding its exact placement (noting other objects nearby as points of orientation). Parking permissions again needed to be secured for the work, a process that had become more bureaucratic over the years.[140]

Perhaps the most notable difference in the process of producing this iteration of the caravan work was the difficulty of finding a caravan to use in the first place. The caravan had to be of the same make and model as the ones used in 1977 and 1987: an Eriba Familia touring caravan from the mid-1970s. The search for a caravan began in the fall of 1996; it wasn't until spring of the following year that the organizers at the Landesmuseum were finally able to locate one. On April 27, 1997, Ulrike Groos, a project coordinator at the Landesmuseum, wrote to Asher with evident relief: "We have very good news because we found a Caravan for your project which is the same model as in 1977 and 1987! The year in which it was constructed is 1975.... We were really a bit afraid that we wouldn't find a Caravan because we are looking now for one year and were having advertisements in caravan journals in Belgium, Netherlands and Germany."[141] Ironically, the caravan that Groos found was spotted in her own neighborhood in

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[139] Michael Asher, "Areas to begin to consider for 1997 Skulptur," Folder "Skulptur Projekte 1997 / Michael Asher," Archiv der Skulptur Projekte, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Münster, Germany.

[140] In 2007, König remarked: "This time, Michael spent days and days working out how the parking regulations have changed. Münster is kind of cute, but it's as complex as any other modern city." Schambelan, "Public Offerings," 189.

[141] Asher, "Excerpts from Correspondence," 104.

Münster. She continued: "Just by chance one of our colleagues saw a caravan for renting here in Münster, only 200 meters from the place where I live but in another direction where I normally never go."

Differences in "Installation Münster" between 1977, 1987, and 1997

In the 1997 exhibition catalogue for Skulptur Projekte, Asher published the following statement about his project:

> My proposal for *Skulptur. Projekte in Münster 1997* involves the reconstruction of the same project realized for this exhibition in 1977 and 1987. The most recent installation will make use of the same temporal structure as well as the original model of caravan, parking positions and procedure used to inform the public of the caravan's location. It will differ owing to the present exhibition's duration of only 14 weeks rather than the 19 weeks in 1977 and the 17 weeks in 1987. Also, alteration of the landscape in the past 20 years has made access impossible to positions during week numbers 3 and 14. During these two weeks, the caravan will be in storage. Also, as in 1977 and 1987, the weekly repositioning of the caravan and the photographic documentation of this will be handled by members of the museum staff.[142]

As Asher's text pointed out, although the conceptual structure of the work was the same for each exhibition, the work could not be carried out in the same way. Since the length of the exhibitions had changed, the number of parking locations had changed accordingly; fewer and fewer parking spots were used as the exhibitions became shorter with each edition. Additionally, the city's built environment was altered over time, making some of the caravan's locations no longer available or physically usable. In this way, Asher's work for Skulptur Projekte in 1997 was noticeably different from his works for the exhibitions in 1977 and 1987.

Through the repetition of his 1977 proposal, Asher's work continued to draw one's attention to the social spaces of everyday life in the city and to participate in the "perpetually changing makeup of its surroundings." Rorimer wrote:

[142] "Michael Asher," in *Contemporary Sculpture. Projects in Münster 1997*, 58.

> The reconstruction of this work for another exhibition a decade afterwards, organized under the same auspices in the same location and based on the same theme of outdoor sculpture, reinforced its original meaning. The re-placement of the same kind of trailer in the same series of locations as in the previous exhibition was designed to highlight changes or growth in the city. At the same time, the reinstallation of a former work (unprecedented in Asher's career), provided an even greater contrast with the other works of outdoor sculpture that, for the most part, clung to the nearby environs of the museum without venturing to question the traditional nature of sculpture.[143]

There remained a heightened contrast between Asher's work and the other exhibited works each time. Asher's work was the only repeated work in 1987 and 1997, and it was consistently unspectacular. Stephan Pascher observed:

> To be clear, Asher never intended to repeat the work. That was not part of his original thinking. And though he answered each invitation by working on other proposals, he came to realize each time that he could get the most mileage by running the caravan again. He thought the repetition would "yield the most information," that encountering new difficulties would prove interesting. He was inspired by the idea of challenging the "quest for innovation" that seemed to drive the show from the start. How would the caravan hold up against works representing the "newest of latest," a frisson ever more pronounced with each reiteration?[144]

In a set of documents written around 1997, Asher reflected on his thought process and decision to repeat "Installation Münster" for each edition of Skulptur Projekte. In a hand-written, undated document titled "Munster '97 (To repeat or not and possibly why I do or don't)" Asher wrote:

> To change a work each time 10 years is more to succumb to ideas of change for the sake of change or ideas of change to make an exhibition more marketable to the public.
>
> There seems no need for the above particularly when I have done a work which (although the same for each exhibition) is quite different each time I present it due to the changes in the discourse and the changes in the physical composition of Munster.

[143] Rorimer, "Michael Asher and James Coleman at Artists Space," 9.

[144] Pascher, "Phantom Limb," 117, 120.

> Furthermore it seems unfortunate to change when the premise of the exhibition remains rather close each time.[145]

Here Asher makes the point that the central premise of the Skulptur Projekte exhibition had not changed since the original event in 1977. Since the exhibition concept hadn't changed significantly, to produce a different work would seem to do so for the sake of change; to change his work would have the effect of making the exhibition "more marketable to the public" (or for the city). As he would put it succinctly in another document of hand-written notes: "If the basic logic of the exhibition didn't change neither could my work."[146]

Issues regarding "public sculpture," a term he first used in reference to his 1977 work, continued to motivate his thinking and decisions to reconstruct "Installation Münster." In a text titled "Munster Project," dated June 3, 1997, Asher described the exhibition situation he encountered in 1977 and spoke further about his decision to repeat his original work when re-invited to participate in later editions of Skulptur Projekte. He wrote:

> When I first made a proposal for the Skulptur exhibition in 1977, I was searching for a project which would recognize one of the contradictions of public sculpture. Perhaps it could be basically described as follows: On the one hand, public sculpture offers the general public a supposed opportunity for an aesthetic experience unrestricted by the walls of an exhibition container. On the other hand, public outdoor sculpture represents an object from its own discourse which occupies public space, having been autonomously produced and often driven by the assumptions [that] it is a public necessity or a sign of cultural progress and spatial stability. Furthermore, if public sculpture is meant to find its status as permanent, doesn't that run at cross purposes with a temporary exhibition.
> [...]
>
> [W]hen invited again it became increasingly clear that if I came to apprehend that the conditions which shape public sculpture's reception had not substantially

[145] Michael Asher, "Munster '97 (To repeat or not and possibly why I do or don't)," n.d., unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[146] Michael Asher, "Munster," December 25, 1997, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

> shifted by 1987 and again in 1997, and if I understood the city, the museum and the exhibition to have *only changed in form but not in function*, the logic I applied to my practice would have to govern my decision as to how I approach my contribution to the following exhibitions. In each case I only had one choice and that was to reconstruct the same project I originally realized in 1977 and allow it to become a measure of its own value as well as supposedly changing times in 1987 and 1997. [emphasis mine][147]

Here Asher makes an important distinction: the "form" of the exhibition, city, and even the Landesmuseum (which had undergone a recent renovation) changed over the decades, but the function of what began as the "Project section" of Skulptur remained consistent. The same issues defining the problem of public sculpture for Asher were carried over through the years. The exhibition situation had "only changed in form but not in function." As an exhibition of public sculpture, Skulptur Projekte still represented an "imposition of individuated space onto the space of collective production," as Asher noted earlier in reference to his work in 1977.

Not changing his caravan proposal also opened up a new dimension of the work's site to consider: the precise repetition of his work would allow the changing qualities of the site itself to "operate" on the work. In another untitled document, also undated, Asher noted:

> The same painting existing for 20 years may fade a little and collect dust but the trailer project reconstructed with the same structure and same model trailer changes in striking ways.
>
> Rather than trying to decorate a site through a work of art this project [word crossed out] meaning is [*sic*] partly unfolds by *having the site operate upon the work* and modify it through each presentation. [emphasis mine][148]

Unlike an autonomous work of art whose significance is derived internally (for example, its composition, style, iconography), Asher's caravan work was inseparable from its specific sites and situations in real time and space. The "site" of Asher's 1977 "Installation Münster" was

[147] Michael Asher, "Munster Project," June 3, 1997, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[148] Michael Asher, untitled document, n.d., unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

fragmented into a series of linked locations in and around the city, spiraling out from the site of the Landesmuseum to "those social spaces which public sculpture refuses or neglects to address." The "site" of Asher's works in 1987 and 1997 were those same locations, but since those locations had changed, so too did the work's form (though not its function).

In his "Munster Project" text from 1997, Asher also noted that the decision to repeat his work was informed by the principle of site-specificity, which he viewed as defining his practice. He wrote:

> Given my commitment to a site-specific practice and my consistent mapping of function throughout my observations and the logic I employed, it appeared that there could be only one conclusion, particularly where difference could be demonstrated, and this was to redo the work from 1977.
>
> In re-thinking the Munster project in 1987, I was quite surprised to realize that the site-specific approach I was employing seemed to determine I do the same work over again, whereas in other situations it meant never repeating a project.[149]

How did Asher's site-specific approach determine that the same work should be repeated in later instances of Skulptur Projekte? If we understand Asher's site-specific practice as guided by a situational method, in which "just elements which already existed [are used] without a great modification to the space,"[150] then we can say that no external elements could be included in his proposal for a work in 1987. In his 1977 "Installation Münster," Asher used only one element: a rented caravan. Following his situational logic, if Asher wanted his 1987 work to relate "dialectically" to his earlier work, then he was forced to deal with the caravan again. And as Asher realized in 1986–87 as he worked out the implications of redoing his caravan work, the sites of his work—that is, the site of the city itself—would have changed. These changes would

[149] Michael Asher, "Munster Project," June 3, 1997, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[150] Buchloh quotes Asher's unpublished notes in his "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture," *The Art Institute of Chicago Centennial Lectures* (The Art Institute of Chicago, 1983), 289.

have been made most evident to the viewer by keeping the conceptual structure of the work the same. This is why he stated above that "it appeared that there could be only one conclusion, particularly where difference could be demonstrated, and this was to redo the work from 1977."

Asher's repetition of "Installation Münster" in 1987 and 1997 revealed a shift in his situational strategy by recognizing that the work's site itself, understood spatially *and* temporally, would change, and that this change could structure the work's significance. If the series of "contextual relationships" that structured the 1977 work were those situations of viewing the sited caravan during the course of the exhibition, the later instances of "Installation Münster" expanded this series of "contextual relationships" by producing a new set of comparative relationships that connected the sited situations in 1977 with those in 1987 and in 1997. Thus, with each repetition, the caravan work only "increased its situational specificity," an effect that Asher had noted about his original 1977 work.

With each repetition of Asher's caravan work, its public reception, how it was perceived and interpreted by critics, changed. Asher's caravan work became known over the years, and he repeated it again in 2007. Its near invisibility in real life experience became supplemented by its increasing visibility and presence through documentation. Although as an exhibited work Asher's "Installation Münster" would have been easy to overlook in person, it has grown in the discourse along with Asher's increasing stature as an institutional critique artist. By the 1997 version, König pointed out, people were finally able to see more of the conceptual implications of the work. In a 2007 interview with *Artforum* editor Elizabeth Schambelan, König speaks about how the reception of Asher's work has changed over time:

> But each decade the project has a different meaning. Michael was suggested to us for the first Skulptur Projekte by Dan Graham, who said, "This guy is on a completely different trip." And so Michael came and did his "Caravan" project, and of course nobody understood this kind of urbanist California metaphor. Then

> he did it again ten years later, and insiders thought it was a patische of Conceptual technique. The third time around, however, it was taken very seriously. In looking at the project over time, you can see not only how the work's reception has changed, but how the city has changed—even regarding things like zoning, which obviously affects where the trailer can be parked.[151]

This is in stark contrast to the reception (or rather, lack thereof) of Asher's work in 1977. In a letter to Asher dated August 24, 1977, König wrote:

> It might amuse and flatter you to hear the arguments of two "positive" critics of the Münster exhibit who both came out with "very good" reviews. When I approached them personally why they omitted to mention your contribution—because it would have confused the readers! Subtle censorship by omission. Partly also my fault—by a concept too conservative.[152]

By 1997, the city had changed enough, the exhibition situation had changed enough, Asher's reputation also had changed enough that the work's significance could more profoundly register.

[151] Schambelan, "Public Offering,"189.

[152] Asher, "Excerpts from Correspondence," 97.

Chapter Two
Untitled work for the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego (1991)

> *Joan Simon*: And why, to play devil's advocate, shouldn't the author of a work of art be in the foreground?
>
> *Michael Asher*: I think he or she should. Absolutely. It's just in this particular situation, where one is almost involved in making monuments—not monuments, these markers, which are part of autonomous production—I would prefer that that be secondary. It's a little like my trailers in the Münster sculpture exhibition, which I've done three times.
>
> *Joan Simon*: You're referring to the trailer or caravan you parked at different outdoor locations at the 1977, 1987, and 1997 editions of the "Skulptur. Projekte in Münster" exhibitions.
>
> *Michael Asher*: Yes. There, actually, you only find out about the author, who the author is, by going to the museum and picking up a slip about where the piece is. My artwork in the Stuart Collection is very similar to that in a way; well, it's sort of similar.[153]

Between 1984 and 1991, Michael Asher worked on an outdoor sculpture project for the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). Established in 1982, the Stuart Collection is a permanent collection of site-specific artworks located throughout the 1,200-acre campus of UCSD.[154] For his untitled work (1991), Asher had a drinking fountain installed on a grassy median strip in the center of the university's campus [fig. 2.1]. The fountain is made out of mottled gray granite and stands about four-feet high. The rectangular block is topped by a thin slab of darker gray granite whose surface dips down towards a circular drain

[153] Joan Simon, "Interview with Michael Asher," in *Landmarks: Sculpture Commissions for the Stuart Collection at the University of California San Diego* (New York: Rizzoli, 2001), 181.

[154] The Stuart Collection was formally established in 1982 through a partnership between the Stuart Foundation and UCSD. Since its founding, the Stuart Collection's Advisory Board and director Mary Beebe have invited contemporary artists of international standing to propose an artwork for the university's campus. When deemed feasible by the Advisory Board and representative members of UCSD's campus, the artist's proposal is sent to UCSD's Chancellor for approval. At the time of writing, over the past thirty some years, over forty artists have been commissioned to create proposals; eighteen proposals have been realized, and the collection is ongoing. No proposal has yet been rejected by the Chancellor. Mary Beebe, "Introduction," in *Landmarks*, 15–16.

strainer in its center [fig. 2.2]. On one of its upper corners is the gleaming head of a stainless steel bubbler. The fountain unexpectedly takes the shape of an indoor water cooler, the type one might find inside an office building, library, or other kind of shared, public space. Indeed, one side of the fountain's granite top is slightly higher than the others; this is where the fountain would have rested against a wall if it were placed indoors. This particular drinking fountain, however, is freestanding and situated outdoors. Stepping back from the fountain, one sees that it is aligned along the median's central axis with two visually prominent objects: a flagpole with a raised American flag and a large granite boulder on the other end of the median. The towering flagpole stands halfway between the drinking fountain and this flat-faced stone. A bronze plaque on the boulder commemorates the transfer of land from the U.S. Marine Corps to UCSD in 1964 (prior to that year, the campus had been used as a military rifle range and training ground). A cement walkway links the fountain, flagpole, and boulder, underscoring the linear composition of the three objects as if each element is to be perceived in relation to the other two.

As Asher discussed in an interview with writer and curator Joan Simon quoted above, there are similarities between his work for Skulptur Projekte in 1977, 1987, and 1997 and his Stuart Collection work, installed in 1991.[155] Both works were conceived in response to a request for a work of outdoor sculpture and contends with their respective built environments. Whereas the exhibition situation for outdoor sculpture has conventionally relied on the construction of monumental forms, or "markers" of "autonomous production" as Asher put it, in both of these works, the "author" of the work is not foregrounded. For his caravan work, as discussed in the previous chapter, one had to pick up a tear-sheet located in the Landesmuseum to find out who the author of the work was. For his fountain work, still extant, one has to walk over to the median's curb to find a small metal label etched with the author's name. Following Asher's

situational method, both of these works reconfigured elements drawn from the context of their respective sites: in his work for Skulptur Projekte, a caravan designed and manufactured in West Germany was moved to various locations in and around the Westphalian city of Münster; in his work for the Stuart Collection, the design of a water cooler commonly found inside institutional buildings, such as those of UCSD, was replicated to produce a granite drinking fountain placed outside in the center of campus. Both works were unassumingly woven into the living fabric of their everyday surroundings but in such a way that upon closer inspection appeared somewhat out of place. Both works were conceptualized to address the issues of permanent, monumental public sculpture. A key difference, however, separates these two works or, rather, the objects used in them: the caravan was mobile, whereas the fountain is static.

The other artworks in the Stuart Collection take a wide variety of static forms and are often large-scale. For instance, the first work commissioned for the collection, Niki de Saint Phalle's *Sun God* (1983) is a painted fiberglass sculpture of a bird-like figure that stands atop a vine-covered concrete base; both sculpture and pedestal were designed by Saint Phalle [fig. 2.3]. With wings outstretched towards the sky, covered in exuberantly colored patterns, the mythical deity stands monument-like in the middle of a wide, open lawn. From base to crown, the sculpture rises twenty-nine feet high. An easily recognizable image, Saint Phalle's *Sun God* has been adopted by students and the university as a campus symbol. A short walk away, the second work commissioned for the collection, Robert Irwin's *Two Running Violet V Forms* (1983) is located in the thick of one of the campus's eucalyptus groves [fig. 2.4]. The work consists of two V-shaped planes of cobalt blue plastic-coated chain-link fencing suspended in the air by steel poles.[156] The surfaces of the chain-link fencing reflect the soft, uneven light filtering through the grove's ceiling of leafy branches, heightening one's perceptual experience of walking through

[156] The now blue plastic-coated chain-link fence was originally more violet in color.

the trees. The color of the sculpture's geometric planes seems to fade or intensify, depending on the climate, time of day, and particular vantage point from which one views the work. Overall the work is quite large: each fence measures about 196 feet long and the steel poles are about twenty-five feet tall.

In comparison to such works, Asher's drinking fountain has a much more modest presence. It stands about four feet tall and is fifteen inches wide and deep. It is located on a grassy median strip, approximately 300 feet long and forty feet wide, in UCSD's Town Square. This open area is framed by buildings belonging to the Chancellor's Complex, the Student Services Center, and the Price Center, the university's student union. Two rows of well-established pine trees line each side of the lawn strip, which is bordered by a concrete curb and a circular paved road (which has been closed to vehicular traffic since 2008). Tables with attached benches for resting and eating are spread out on either side of the median strip. From a distance, the small blocky form of the fountain does not stand out: it is easy to overlook. The muted tones of the fountain blend in with the dark pine trees and the dappled shade they cast.

When one walks towards the grassy median, visual details of the fountain catch one's eyes. Its polished surfaces and metal parts glint in the patchy sunlight. The dark granite of the drinking fountain's basin provides a striking tonal contrast with the shining stainless steel bubbler and drain strainer. When its lighter colored base is examined in the round, one sees dual columns of precisely cut slits on two side panels, identical in pattern to ventilation grilles one would find on an indoor water cooler. The unfussy, boxy style of the drinking fountain dates it to the 1950s and '60s. The fountain looks generic and a bit old-fashioned, similar to water cooler models manufactured by the Sunroc and Haws companies in the postwar era, not the streamlined designs of more recent models.

As all of these details, each so carefully attended to, might suggest, the fountain is functional. On one of its side panels is a small circular button made of the same dark granite as the upper basin. The placement of the button is discreet: instead of protruding, it lies flush with the panel's surface. When pressed, the button releases a small stream of cooled water. Inside of the fountain, hidden from view, a reserve of water lies filtered and chilled, ready to be dispersed to visitors who come upon it as they walk along the median's cement path.

A cement pathway runs up and down the entire median. The path enlarges around three objects positioned on its central axis: the drinking fountain, the flagpole, and the granite boulder. The fountain and the boulder are both framed by a circle of cement, about three feet wide on all sides, with two perpendicular lines etched into each circle. These intersecting lines evenly divide the circles into quadrants and make the boulder and the fountain appear as if centered in a crosshair.

The image of a crosshair resonates with what is found on the cast bronze plaques embedded into the granite boulder's face: the emblem of the U.S. Marine Corps with the words "Department of the Navy" and "United States Marine Corps" encircling it [fig. 2.5]. Below this is a plaque that reads as follows:

> THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
> OCCUPIED THIS SITE KNOWN AS
> CAMP CALVIN B. MATTHEWS
> FROM 1917 TO 1964 OVER A MILLION MARINES AND OTHER SHOOTERS RECEIVED THEIR RIFLE MARKSMANSHIP TRAINING HERE. THIS SITE IS DEEDED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SAN DIEGO ON 6 OCTOBER 1964 FOR THE PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

The plaque thus informs visitors that the granite boulder is a historical landmark, installed in 1964, to commemorate the transfer of the campus's ownership from the U.S. Marines to UCSD. (Although UCSD was officially established in 1960, the university did not occupy its current campus—previously a military training site and rifle range, the plaque reminds us—until 1964.) A few other references to the military camp's history linger on the campus. The flagpole's concrete base has the date "1-7-43" scratched into it; the pole was erected at the height of the campus's use as a military training camp after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the U.S.'s entry into World War II. Less than a minute's walk away from the Town Square—on the other side of the Student Services Center—is a public square named "Matthews Quad," in reference to the name of the military camp to which the commemorative boulder is dedicated.

The positioning and design of Asher's drinking fountain set up points of formal comparison as well as a number of contrasts with the historical landmark. Most noticeably, the drinking fountain was placed equidistant to the north of the flagpole as the boulder is south of it. The concrete pathway designed by Asher that leads to and visually frames the drinking fountain is identical to that of the boulder. Like the boulder, the drinking fountain is made of gray granite, though the latter is geometrically shaped with highly polished surfaces while the former takes the form of a roughly hewn, seemingly naturalistic boulder with a sawn, unreflective finish on its face. Both objects are about the same height, although the thick girth of the boulder and the text on its plaque encourage one to view it from a distance whereas the drinking fountain invites one to sip from it and is comfortably scaled for individual use.

The presence of the drinking fountain on the grassy median itself raises a number of questions. What conceptual relationship is constructed between the drinking fountain and the boulder? If the boulder functions to commemorate the transfer of the campus's ownership from

the U.S. Marine Corps to UCSD, what is the function of the drinking fountain? If the drinking fountain visually reframes how one views the composition of historical objects on the median strip, how does it conceptually reframe one's perception of those very same objects?

These questions drive this chapter's exploration of how Asher's work for the Stuart Collection addresses the site of UCSD's campus as "both a place and an organization with a history."[157] Asher was first invited in 1984 to create a proposal for the Stuart Collection. By tracking how the artist initially responded to this collection situation, how he conceived of the campus as a site, and how his ideas changed over time, this chapter traces the trajectory of Asher's project for the Stuart Collection, from his early ideas that were deemed unfeasible to his final proposal for a drinking fountain that was realized in 1991. As a fountain, Asher's work engages the sculptural discourse by taking a form of outdoor art that dates back to antiquity. As a functional replica of an industrially-designed indoor water cooler, however, Asher's drinking fountain addresses the institutional nature of its site while offering physical nourishment instead of "transcendent renewal." By juxtaposing the drinking fountain with the Camp Calvin B. Matthews landmark found on the grassy median, Asher's work sets up a comparative relation between the two objects in order to raise questions concerning the history and operations of the university as well as the material requirements needed to make it function in the first place. By integrating a logic of "comparative relations" to his approach in this work, Asher would expand his situational method to include the possibility of constructing a new object that would be inserted into the work's site. This new object would take the form of an element normally found outside of the work's site, but would be conceptually related, so that it would provide a comparative contrast to the pre-existing element found on site.

[157] Beebe, "Michael Asher," in *Landmarks*, 171.

The chapter also addresses how the significance of Asher's work was to extend into the future. In 2008, the first landscape redesign plans of the Town Square were proposed; Asher was consulted on how the plans would affect his work. The proposals were ultimately rejected by the university, but the incident reveals that Asher saw these proposals as presenting new "problems and opportunities": if the work's internal structure within the median remained consistent, a new landscape around the median site would add a new layer of historical meaning to the work while extending its original significance. As with his repeated work for Skulptur Projekte, the site would "operate upon the work," allowing the artwork's significance to unfold over time. Finally, the chapter ends by examining some issues raised by the recent vandalism of Asher's granite drinking fountain in February of 2015.

Establishing the Stuart Collection

The Stuart Collection was the brainchild of late entrepreneur and arts patron James Stuart DeSilva (1919–2002). The idea for the Stuart Collection arose from a sense of discontent, a general disregard for the placement of sculptures perceived by DeSilva during the 1960s while he was living in New York.[158] In a text titled "Founder's Statement," DeSilva recounted seeing what seemed like gross mismatches between contemporary sculptures and their sites (though without giving any specific examples, making it unclear what kind of exhibition situation exactly he was referring to). He explained:

[158] Born in Miami, DeSilva moved to California after serving as a pilot for the Navy in World War II to work for his father-in-law's cannery company on Terminal Island. In 1961, he opened a cannery in Puerto Rico and moved with his family to New York City, where the company's main offices were based. After moving to New York City, DeSilva became more interested in visual arts through regular visits to art museums in the city. As time passed he became so interested that he sold his business in 1969 and studied art history full-time at Columbia University the following year. Around the early 1970s, his interests began to focus on the work of contemporary artists and, in particular, works of sculpture. See his "Founder's Introduction" in *Landmarks* and his obituary by Scott Timberg, "James DeSilva, 83; Funded Sculpture Collection at UC San Diego," in *Los Angeles Times* (September 19, 2002).

> [L]iving in Manhattan at the time, I saw new works being sited so inappropriately as to reflect badly on the artists' skills. It grieved me that most sculptors lost control over their works—a far more serious matter for a sculptor than for a painter. So, over time, I started to fantasize about a perfect world where sculptors might be offered a choice of sites until they found one that inspired them, and then would receive the assurance that their work and site would be maintained and preserved.[159]

This observation prompted him to imagine an alternative model for collecting works by living sculptors. In an ideal sculpture collection, DeSilva thought, sculptors would choose where to place their artworks to help ensure that the works' settings would not clash with the sculptures themselves (and thus "reflect badly" on the artists). Each artwork and its site would then be maintained and preserved to keep the integrity of the former—given its dependence on the latter—intact.

In the late 1970s, DeSilva began to lay the groundwork for establishing such a collection. In 1971, he had moved with his family to San Diego, where he founded a successful tuna fishing company. Based in Southern California, he consulted a number of people, including Franklin Murphy, former Chancellor of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the founder of UCLA's Sculpture Garden; Frederick Wight, director of UCLA's Art Galleries and chair of the Art Department there; and the English sculptor Henry Moore. He visited sculpture parks in the U.S. and Europe and set up the Stuart Foundation in December of 1978 to fund the collection.[160] Around the time DeSilva established the Stuart Foundation, he realized that the campus of UCSD would provide an ideal ground for the art collection he had in mind.

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[159] James DeSilva, "Founder's Statement," in *Landmarks*, 8–9.

[160] DeSilva used his middle name "Stuart" to deflect attention from his family name. In late December of 1978 James Stuart DeSilva established the Stuart Foundation, working with friend and attorney Norman J. Laboe to set up the foundation, and his children contributed to its initial funding. DeSilva, "Founder's Statement," in *Landmarks*, 9.

DeSilva envisioned a collection of sculptures that would be located in an open outdoor space where viewers could encounter the artworks casually as they passed through. He stated:

> It became clear to me that a spacious, parklike setting would be ideal for what I had in mind. I wanted art to be accessible for casual visitation, without any hint of an obligation to the passerby to look at or think about it, let alone treat it with reverence. My personal experience told me that living with art, casual repetitive exposure to it, can lead to understanding and appreciation, if not passion and possessiveness, even among those who profess to dislike art.[161]

It was also important to DeSilva that the sculptures be located at their sites long-term, if not permanently, so that viewers would have a chance to experience the artworks more than once. He continued:

> Any given piece might elicit a strong response—either positive or negative. For me that would be all well and good. Also, I knew that most observers' original feelings would likely change, probably several times—they might experience a sense of discovery one time, then later passion, or boredom, or even rejection.... My feeling was that it was alright even to ignore a work, to make fun of it, or to criticize it. The important thing was to interact with it over time.[162]

Ostensibly, encountering an artwork numerous times would allow for one's opinion of it to change over time and, therefore, to enable a continuous engagement with it. Not only did UCSD's campus fit the description of the kind of site ("spacious, parklike setting") that DeSilva envisioned, but it also provided the "bonus of an educational role, both formal and informal."[163] Integrated into the landscape of the campus and the patterns of campus life, the sculptures in the collection could become part of the school's larger learning environment, yet in a non-didactic way.

In July 1980 DeSilva met with then UCSD Chancellor Richard Atkinson, who enthusiastically received DeSilva's idea for a contemporary art collection on the university's

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[161] Ibid.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Ibid., 10.

campus.[164] In an interview, Atkinson recalled the "tremendous impact" that Stanford's acquisition of twenty-four Rodin sculptures from arts patron B. Gerald Cantor had on the university, where he had previously taught as a professor of psychology.[165] Presumably, Atkinson hoped the presence of an art collection at UCSD would bring prestige and visibility to the school as the Rodin collection had done at Stanford. He supported DeSilva's idea anticipating that "the quality and inventiveness of the art would be such that the collection would ultimately serve as a visual library of late-twentieth-century sculpture at its best."[166] During the summer of 1980, Atkinson introduced DeSilva's idea to the UC Board of Regents, who approved the provisional concept of "Proposed Sculpture Collection, San Diego Campus" in September of that year.

Over the next year, after considering different options, the Stuart Foundation chose to build the collection exclusively by commissioning new artworks from living artists. This program of inviting contemporary artists to produce new works of art on the campus's site would distinguish the collection from other art collection programs on university campuses. In 1980,

[164] Atkinson had begun his position as Chancellor just two weeks prior to his meeting with DeSilva. From 1975 to 1980, he was the Director of the National Science Foundation and before that a professor of psychology at Stanford University, with a teaching stint at UCLA. See Nancy Scott Anderson, *An Improbable Venture: A History of the University of California, San Diego* (La Jolla, CA: The UCSD Press, 1993), 232.

[165] Richard Atkinson in Stuart Collection, *Pay Attention: The Stuart Collection at UC San Diego*, Online video, UCSD TV, 48:00, September 21, 2015. UCSD. http://www.ucsd.tv/search-details.aspx?showID=27754 (accessed December 10, 2015). The Rodin Sculpture Garden was conceived in the 1970s and officially opened in May 1985; the majority of the works had been given by Iris and B. Gerald Cantor in 1974. See Albert E. Elsen and Rosalyn Frankel Jamison, *Rodin's Art: The Rodin Collection of the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University*, ed. Bernard Barryte (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[166] Richard Atkinson, "President's Foreword," in *Landmarks*, 6.

DeSilva established an Advisory Committee to guide the curation of the collection.[167] The Advisory Committee was structured to include at least one highly-regarded representative from each of the following categories: museum director, art critic, artist, and UCSD faculty. In 1981, Mary Beebe, former director of the Portland Center for the Visual Arts, was hired to become the founding director of the collection.[168] Although the Stuart Foundation initially considered collecting artworks from different time periods that would represent "the history of sculpture,"[169] the limited funds available made this idea unfeasible. When asked in an interview in 1980 why the Stuart Foundation would be collecting contemporary art, DeSilva replied, "The answer is that reality forces us to. To collect works by classic or established sculptors—Brancusi or Rodin—would cost a fortune. We have to buy contemporary."[170] The commissioning of only new works by internationally recognized artists made for specific locations on the university's campus became the guiding idea for the collection. For Beebe, a program of site-specific contemporary art seemed an ideal fit conceptually with the school's profile as a research university: "The university was young and research oriented—on the cutting edge in many fields.... 'Site-specific,' 'site-generated,' 'site-related' were terms in the air.... This seemed an opportunity to do something that wasn't happening anywhere else that we knew of—to integrate sculpture with the fabric and life of the campus."[171]

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[167] The founding members of the Stuart Collection's Advisory Committee included James DeSilva, James Demetrion, Anne d'Harnoncourt, Patricia Fuller, Newton Harrison, Pontus Hulten, Allan Kaprow, Patrick Ledden, Pierre Restany, and George Segal.

[168] Beebe was previously the director of the Portland Center for the Visual Arts, where she had worked with contemporary artists for ten years.

[169] Beebe, "Introduction," in *Landmarks*, 14–15.

[170] Cited in an obituary by Jack Williams, "James DeSilva; Visionary Collector of Art for UCSD," *San Diego Union Tribune*, September 14, 2002.

[171] Beebe, "Introduction," in *Landmarks*, 15.

In the fall of 1982, the UC Regents and the Stuart Foundation signed an agreement that officially established the Stuart Collection and outlined the terms of the partnership, the basic terms of which have continued into the present day.[172] As stated in the 1982 agreement, the purpose of the Stuart Collection is to "enrich the cultural, intellectual, and scholarly life of the campus and community."[173] The Stuart Foundation would be responsible for selecting and inviting artists to create proposals for permanent artworks. These proposals would then be subject to a campus review and require final approval from the Chancellor to be realized. All sites on UCSD's campus would be available for the artist's consideration as long as his or her selection did not interfere with areas reserved for other uses or future projects as set forth in UCSD's Long Range Development Plan. The Stuart Foundation would be responsible for funding the proposal process and production of the artworks, while UCSD would be responsible for the artworks' subsequent costs of maintenance and preservation.

By commissioning new works made in response to sites chosen by the artists themselves, the Stuart Foundation consciously set the Stuart Collection apart from earlier models of outdoor sculpture collections. For example, the Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden at UCLA provides an instructive example of what the Stuart Foundation sought *not* to do. UCLA's Sculpture Garden was initiated by, and later named for, then UCLA Chancellor Franklin Murphy. The idea for a sculpture garden came to Murphy while on a walking tour with landscape architect Ralph Cornell in 1960. UCLA's 1959 Long Range Development Plan had suggested the use of landscaping to create a more "campus-like" environment and Murphy had hired Cornell in

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[172] The first agreement with UCSD lasted for 10 years; it has since been extended and amended twice. Beebe, "Introduction," in *Landmarks*, 17.

[173] "Excerpts from Agreement dated October 5, 1982 between the Regents and the Stuart Foundation," n.d., Michael Asher project file, Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego.

response.[174] For the sculpture garden project, Murphy commissioned Cornell to turn an open dirt lot used for parking in UCLA's North Campus into an expansive, landscaped setting for sculptural works and seating where students could study, mingle, and rest [fig. 2.6]. Cornell designed the park-like area before any sculptures for it were acquired; the sculptures—mostly works made of bronze by late 19th and 20th century artists from the U.S. and Europe—were added to the grounds as they were purchased or integrated into the park after its dedication in 1967.[175]

In contrast, artworks in the Stuart Collection are noted as site-specific: sites are selected by artists before proposals are created; logistically and conceptually, most artworks can not be moved to another location and still retain their significance. The Stuart Collection has grown alongside the development and expansion of UCSD's campus since the early 1980s. Although the contract allows the university, which is obligated to maintain and preserve the artworks, to relocate or remove an artwork if its site is needed for "educational purposes," no artwork in the Stuart Collection has yet been removed. In one instance, part of an artwork has been relocated from its original site. One of the three lead-covered eucalyptus trees that comprise Terry Allen's *Trees* (1986) installation had to be placed in storage and then newly re-positioned in front of the university's main Central Library—a landmark 1970 building designed by William Pereira

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[174] Cynthia Burlingame, "Creating the Murphy Sculpture Garden Collection," in *The Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden at UCLA* (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2007), 56.

[175] The first sculpture for the Murphy Sculpture Garden was purchased in 1963 by the UCLA Arts Council. To create the Sculpture Garden, Chancellor Murphy secured the donation of sculptures after the death of UCLA Arts Council member and local art collector David E. Bright, who had acquired sculptural works from modern sculptors around mid-century, in 1965. The arrangement of the sculptures has shifted over time to accommodate new additions to the collection as well as changes in the hardscape and buildings around the grassy park. For a discussion of the Murphy Sculpture Garden in the historical context of landscape architecture, see Marc Treib's "A Community of Sculpture" in *The Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden at UCLA*; for more on issues regarding the process of designing sculpture gardens, see Jane Amidon, ed., *Peter Walker and Partners: Nasher Sculpture Center Garden* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006).

renamed Geisel Library in 1995—after the building was renovated and its surrounding hardscape redesigned in the early 1990s [fig. 2.7].[176]

Because of the nature of these site-specific commissions, artists have the ability to respond to changes occurring on campus in their works, and through their works influence how others see the campus. For example, Irwin's *Two Running Violet V Forms* (1983), described earlier, is positioned in a centrally located eucalyptus grove with several pathways that run through it; it is a well-trafficked area. By 1981, the university had begun a major expansion project and swaths of eucalyptus tress were cut down to clear sites for new buildings. No conscious effort by the university was then being made to preserve parts of this pre-existing landscape. Irwin felt the groves around campus were one of its defining features and devised his work to heighten one's awareness and appreciation of their natural beauty and the respite they offered. Not long after the opening of Irwin's work in 1983, conservation of the campus's natural landscape became an issue and preservation of eucalyptus groves on campus has since been written into UCSD's Long Range Development Plans. Other university expansion projects were underway around campus and more were projected for the near future when the Stuart Foundation contacted Asher just a year later.

Commissioning Asher

In July of 1984, Asher was invited over the phone by Beebe to propose an artwork for the Stuart Collection. Asher had been high on the Advisory Committee's list, and he responded positively to Beebe's invitation.[177] Later that month, he conducted his first site visit to UCSD's

[176] Beebe, "Terry Allen," in *Landmarks*, 91–93.

[177] Beebe, "Michael Asher," in *Landmarks*, 170. At the time, the Advisory Committee consisted of De Silva, James Demetrion, Anne d'Harnoncourt, Newton Harrison, George Segal, Pontus Hulten, Pierre

campus.[178] At the time, the Stuart Collection was still relatively new, with only three artworks completed and about three new works underway.[179]

After his site visit that summer, later that same year, Asher discussed two possible projects with Beebe and Matheiu Gregoire, project coordinator of the Stuart Collection.[180] Asher was initially drawn to two things on UCSD's campus: its signage and an old, disused brick building near Gilman Drive, one of the campus's main thoroughfares. Asher's first idea for a proposal was to re-design the campus signage, which he found to be unstandardized and confusing.[181] After discussions with Beebe and Gregoire, however, Asher dropped the idea by the end of the year since the project would have been too large and bureaucratically difficult as an undertaking.[182]

Restany, and Giuseppe Panza di Biumo. See Hunter Drohojowska-Philip's "A Museum without Walls in La Jolla," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* (1984), 35. In this article, Hunter mentions that "conceptual artist Michael Asher is considering working with signage."

[178] Letter from Mary Beebe to Michael Asher, July 31, 1984, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation. This letter confirmed the Stuart Collection's request for a proposal for a work.

[179] Until Asher was invited during the summer of 1984, three works had been installed for the Stuart Collection: Niki de Saint Phalle's *Sun God* (1983), Robert Irwin's *Two Running Violet V Forms* (1983), and Richard Fleischner's *La Jolla Project* (1984). Terry Allen and Bruce Nauman were invited to create proposals in 1983, and Jenny Holzer was also invited in 1984.

[180] A sculptor by training, Mathieu Gregoire worked with Beebe at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts. He has worked at the Stuart Collection with Beebe since its beginning.

[181] Since UCSD's campus opened in 1964, the university had been undergoing various campus expansion projects, particularly during Chancellor Atkinson's tenure from 1980 to 1995.

[182] Gregoire recalled that redesigning the campus signage would have involved the approval of multiple university committees and would have been delayed repeatedly by various bureaucratic procedures and restrictions. Additionally, the project likely would have necessitated working with outside designers to fulfill university-mandated criteria; if so, chances were good that the final result would have been compromised. Interview with Gregoire, November, 11, 2015. From 1984–85, however, Asher's interest in design would lead to a commission to re-design the Stuart Collection's stationery, a version of which the Stuart Collection still uses today. See Kirsi Peltomäki, *Situation Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 152–53.

Asher's second idea involved the repurposing of a small yellow brick building near Gilman Drive that had been an electrical switching station for the military prior to the arrival of the university. For this work, Asher was thinking about converting the former switching station into a visitor's information center for the university.[183] In addition to having a practical function, in this proposal, the building as historical artifact would have metonymically represented the pre-history of the campus as a military training ground. The physical circulation of informational materials available at the visitor's center on Gilman Drive would have positioned it as a central point of distribution. This would have echoed the former role of the building, which housed power lines, transformers, and circuit breakers to regulate the electrical power enabling the operations of the military camp. About two years later, in 1986, however, the university slated the brick building for destruction, making this idea unfeasible.[184]

Although these early ideas were never developed into formal proposals for the Advisory Committee, we can see that from the beginning, Asher was thinking about the campus in its entirety as the conceptual site for his work.[185] Consistent with Asher's situational method, both ideas involved altering existing elements found on-site instead of adding new ones. Moreover, an explicitly functional dimension was central to both ideas, to which the concepts of circulation and/or distribution were key. With his second idea of converting the former switching station into a visitor's information center, the prior history of the campus as a military training camp began to play a role in his thinking. These aspects of Asher's early ideas—the campus as a

[183] It is not clear what exactly Asher was planning to make available in the visitor's information center and how it would be presented.

[184] The present-day Cellular and Molecular Medicine Research Building was erected on this site instead.

[185] Gregoire noted that Asher spent a great deal of time walking around all parts of the campus, trying to understand how it functioned as a system. Interview with Gregoire, November 11, 2015.

historical site on which bodies circulate and information is distributed—structured Asher's realized project for the Stuart Collection.

Selecting a Location for a Logic of "Comparative Relations"

Over the next couple of years, Asher returned to the campus a number of times to find a location for an artwork, a long and difficult process for the artist. In a note written after the completion of the project, Asher remarked: "For the longest time I thought an idea would be impossible."[186] Asher was looking for a specific kind of location. In his interview with Joan Simon, a segment of which began this chapter, Asher stated:

> In regards to locating a place for a project, many situations would not have been usable since they weren't for multiuse, and were not trafficked by large groups of the college community. Other situations already raised questions due to the juxtapositions the campus designers produced. These questions were not so significant to me.[187]

The functionality of the place—or rather, the *multiple* functions of the location—was of key importance to Asher. A well-trafficked area with high use value, such a location would likely be essential to the operations of the campus. It would likely be easily accessible and highly visible to a large number of people who would come across the artwork and could potentially experience it on a regular basis.

Asher was also looking for a location that would allow him to set up a "problem," or "problems." Again, from his exchange with Simon:

> *Simon*: Why did you pick this site?
>
> *Asher*: Let's see if I can answer this clearly. It wasn't that I had an object in mind that I wanted to install, but there was a problem, or problems plural, that I could

[186] Simon, "Interview with Asher," in *Landmarks*, 178. Gregoire has concurred; for a while, Asher seemed very frustrated. Interview with Gregoire, November 11, 2015.

[187] Simon, "Interview with Asher," in *Landmarks*, 177.

> perhaps describe, at this particular point. One of the most significant was to produce comparative relations—one of the forms of logic that keeps coming back to me, and that I use to learn by, as well as utilize quite often in my own work and in teaching.
>
> *Simon*: In picking a site, you kept looking for something that had the potential for you to trigger this thinking. I know you went to the campus many times.
>
> *Asher*: My notes start with that, because I just had the hardest time finding anything that would function for this logic. Finding a site became almost impossible, compared to projects prior to and after this artwork, where the specific site is designated and the problem is defined from that point. This way of working returned when I finally found the place where the artwork would be placed.[188]

Asher noted that he was looking for a location could produce a particular logic of "comparative relations." Rather than searching for one quality or aspect, the artist sought the possibility of a situation that would allow a relational dynamic between two or more different elements within the context of their locations. Embedded within the site itself would be the "problem(s)" that would structure the work. This principle of "comparative relations" would open up the possibility for Asher to introduce a new object onto the site, one not normally found within its immediate setting but one conceptually related to the site and one that would provide a comparative contrast to a pre-existing element integral to it.

In June of 1988, nearly four years after his first site visit, Asher selected the grassy median located in the center of campus as the location for the work that he would propose the following year. In UCSD's 1989 Master Plan, the open square is referred to as the "Camp Matthews area" (now called the "Town Square"). At the time, back in 1988, to the east was the Political Science building (where the Student Services Center is now located). To the north was a large construction site (where the Price Center is now located).[189] To the west was the

[188] Ibid., 177

[189] The Price Center broke ground during the summer of 1986 and opened in April 1989.

university's administration complex, which includes the Chancellor's office (where it is still located today). To the south was a short road named Myers Drive, which led to the main Gilman Drive (these roads have remained the same). The oblong median was then in the middle of a paved turnaround and lined on both sides with parking spaces. What is now a wide pedestrian walkway was once a circular road for cars and other vehicles.[190] Around the four sides of the flagpole's stepped base were benches where one could sit in the shade of the pine trees. The area functioned as a space of transit and parking for various modes of transportation, a convenient place for drop-offs and pick-ups. It was a place where one could rest, recollect thoughts alone or chat with a friend. It was also a transitional space between administration buildings, classroom buildings, and student hangouts.

The median strip that Asher chose also serves a symbolic—or what he called a "historical/patriotic"—function for the entire university:[191] it holds the boulder commemorating the campus's transfer from the U.S. Marines to UCSD and the flagpole installed during the height of war training at Camp Matthews. The median is located at the present day center of UCSD, which was once the historic center of Camp Matthews. When asked to describe the location as he first found it, Asher replied:

> There was a parkway with a road around it. On the grass, there was just a path, a flagpole with benches, and a rock monument from the Marines. If you looked at it just visually and formally, it was fascinating, because it was structured to be symmetrical but the symmetry wasn't complete, since nothing balanced the memorial. It also appeared to be designed to symbolically give the visitor a sense

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[190] The circular road has been closed to vehicular traffic since 2008.

[191] Asher noted: "What made the parkway different was that rather than having any buildings on it, it had been dedicated to what one might call a historical/patriotic function." "Notes about Stuart Collection," 1991, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

> of stability. This was likely due to the offices that were represented on the parkway.[192]

The location satisfied the requirements that Asher had been looking for: it was multiuse and highly trafficked by different groups of people. It symbolically represented both the university as an operational body in the present day as well as the historical origin of the university's presence on the campus. Finally, the incomplete symmetry of objects that Asher found on the median provided an ideal opportunity to create a composition that would enable a logic of comparative relations.

Asher's proposal for an untitled fountain

Although the process of finding a feasible site ultimately took Asher about four years, after selecting the grassy median as the location for his work, Asher conceptualized and submitted a formal proposal for an artwork in less than one year. When asked how he went about creating a work for this location, Asher replied:

> I wanted to complete the symmetry, in order to produce questions about preexisting elements. I noted [in notes written retrospectively], "I didn't want the object to have the presence of a new marker which must first be identified as part of an autonomous practice." I thought that idea of the autonomous practice could come later. The idea of the marker—I wanted that to remain the large boulder and the flagpole.[193]

By the end of June of 1989, Asher had decided to install a functional drinking fountain on the grassy median, opposite of the boulder, as his work for the Stuart Collection. A two-page proposal, accompanied by a plan of the area where the artwork was to be placed, was presented to the Advisory Committee of the Stuart Foundation at their meeting in January of 1989 and then to UCSD's Campus Community Planning Committee at their meeting in April later that year. In

[192] Simon, "Interview with Asher," in *Landmarks*, 178.

[193] Ibid.

this proposal, we can see the conceptual structure of the work as well as how Asher was thinking through some of the work's implications [Appendix].

The text of Asher's proposal opens with a matter-of-fact description of the object to be built and where it would be situated. The "outdoor sculpture" is to be a granite drinking fountain that takes the form of a "commercial indoor water cooler," one "similar to those found on numerous school campuses, city buildings, and businesses." He gives the dimensions of the object and some of the materials that will be used for its construction: it is to be approximately forty-four inches tall, fifteen feet wide, and fifteen inches deep; it will be made from light and dark colored granite stone and its base will contain a refrigeration unit to chill and hold a reserve of water. The fountain is to be situated on a path that runs through a parkway in the center of Meyers Drive, located between the Political Science Building and the Academic Affairs Building within the Matthews Complex. In a diagram accompanying the proposal, a dotted line encircles the entire median, which is referred to as the "grounds of the sculpture."[194]

The fountain is to be positioned at a point equidistant to the north of the existing flagpole as the Camp Calvin B. Matthews boulder is south of it. A circle of concrete surrounding the fountain will be designed and poured to mirror the existing concrete circle around the boulder. Creating a visual balance and integrating the fountain to make it appear as if it were part of the existing situation found on the parkway was of key importance to Asher: "Its position on the parkway will visually balance the arrangement of all the elements placed there and inherently give the site a certain visual continuity." "Yet," the proposal continues, "the introduction of the sculpture is meant to reveal some clues produced by the landmark which might otherwise be read as representing a closed chapter in U.C.S.D. history." At this point in his proposal, Asher begins

[194] Michael Asher, "Project Proposal for Stuart Collection," 1989, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

to outline some of the implications and readings opened up by the fountain's juxtaposition with the commemorative boulder.

The insertion of the drinking fountain into the parkway is meant to engage the sculptural discourse as a work belonging to the Stuart Collection as well as raise questions concerning the operations of the university and the material requirements needed to make it function in the first place. On the one hand, the drinking fountain is meant to address the context of the Stuart Collection as an example of outdoor sculpture. As a work of outdoor sculpture, Asher's artwork would take the form of a fountain, a form of outdoor art that dates back to antiquity. Asher's fountain, however, would take a form antithetical to what one would expect a work of art to look like: an industrially-designed object, in this case, a commercial indoor water cooler. The sculpture would not only resemble an indoor water cooler, such as those found in the hallways of schools, government buildings, and other institutional buildings, but the object would also function as such and hold a refrigeration unit to produce refreshingly cool water. Asher's fountain would not only "appropriate" the visual language of industrial design, it would also function unconventionally from traditional water fountains. As Asher pointed out in his proposal, his fountain would distribute water (giving it use value) rather than circulate it (only have aesthetic value), providing viewers access to a vital substance.[195] Drinking from the fountain would also give a person a chance to take a break, to refresh oneself and perhaps chat with other people. This utilitarian aspect would "disintegrate" the fountain's formal references to modernist sculptural paradigms. Although with its freestanding form the fountain would appear to be monument-like, through its static nature, its compact composition, its vertical orientation, and the elevated status of its granite material, it would not function as such since it would not refer to any specific historical event or figure. Nor would the fountain function self-referentially as a

[195] See Appendix.

monumental marker of autonomous production. Instead, through its appropriated iconography of industrial design, its reference to public institutional spaces, and its practical functionality, the fountain would provoke the viewer to consider the institutional nature of its site while offering physical nourishment instead of "transcendent renewal."

On the other hand, the installation of the drinking fountain on the median strip is also intended to set up a logic of "comparative relations" with the Camp Calvin B. Matthews landmark. Whereas the commemorative boulder suggests closure in the military's connection with the campus after it was transferred from the U.S. Marines to UCSD, through his work, Asher intended to present that history as continuing into the present, remaining open-ended. Although formally the presence of the fountain would give the parkway "a certain visual continuity," its juxtaposition with the boulder would function conceptually as a "disturbance." As a functional object, the drinking fountain would need to be connected to the university's infrastructural networks, specifically its electrical and water systems, in order to run. According to Asher's proposal, these invisible, underground, and necessary sources for the fountain can be viewed as a metaphor for the state's reliance on research produced at UCSD and the training of students at the university's research facilities for military and other state needs.

The fountain is meant to provoke questions about the historical transition and the seeming separation between the activities of the military, the previous owner of the campus, and the work done at UCSD, a highly ranked research university and the campus's current occupant. More broadly, one could say, Asher intended his work to raise issues regarding the relations between individual life and state institutions, what an individual body requires for its survival and requirements that the state imposes on individual bodies through institutions to ensure its own existence. Expanding his situational method of using only pre-existing elements as the

determinants of his work, here Asher proposes to juxtapose a visible element found on-site (the boulder) with what is not visible from that site (an indoor water cooler). This would place into dialogue the interior space of the institution with its exterior space, what is visible with what is not visible, translating the material vocabulary of a pre-existing element into comparable terms that would be used to construct a new object in order to counter more effectively, more precisely, the function of the former.

Initial objections to Asher's proposal

When Asher's proposal was presented to the Advisory Committee in January of 1989, its members received it enthusiastically.[196] At UCSD, however, some members of the Campus Community Planning Committee felt differently. They believed the artwork would be banal-looking and confusing to viewers since it would not clearly register as a work of art. A conflict arose among campus representatives over what kind of artwork they felt would be appropriate in such a historically significant site, located in the very center of campus.

In a letter dated May 2, 1989, a faculty member objected to Asher's proposal, calling it the "epitome of a bad idea":

> The Asher proposal of a drinking fountain in the Town Square seems to me...ill-advised. This site will soon become the very "center of the center" of the University, so that idea of an outstanding work of art at exactly this location is an excellent one. Furthermore, I have nothing in principle against a tastefully designed drinking fountain at any location where people are apt to become thirsty. Beyond this, although I do not know Asher's work, I am willing to accept the judgment of experts that this artist is someone of talent, deserving of recognition. Nevertheless, the notion that a drinking fountain, no matter how tastefully designed by how skillful an artist, should become the central expression of artistic

[196] Beebe, "Michael Asher," in *Landmarks*, 171.

> values on this campus, the symbol of UCSD, seems to me to be the epitome of a bad idea.[197]

The author thought that given the centrality of the work's location, the historical significance of the site and its proximity to its administrative center, Asher's work would inadvertently become "the symbol of UCSD." The letter continued:

> In my opinion, this site is probably the most sensitive on campus. It represents the opportunity to express symbolically the ideals for which the University stands: tradition, culture, education, research. Alternatively, and in keeping with the existing counterposed monument to the prior occupancy of the land by the military, the site offers an opportunity to commemorate other previous occupants: the coastal Indians of earlier millennia, whose archaeological sites are on campus, or the Spanish padres, soldiers and land barons. But a drinking fountain? The only symbolic content I heard was your indication that one would bow his head to the flag in taking a sip of water. This site cries out for an appropriate work of art; but I am firmly convinced that a granite-clad drinking fountain will not even be recognized as an artwork—rather than just a drinking fountain—by most passersby, unless a sign is erected to tell them so. If you tell them it's art, some few may believe it.[198]

It is the seeming absence of symbolic content that most upsets the author. The fountain's apparent banality in such a central and historically significant location strikes him as inappropriate and perhaps even offensive. Instead the author suggests another kind of monument—one that appears unambiguously as such—that celebrates previous occupants of the surrounding land be built, offering "the coastal Indians," "the Spanish padres, soldiers and land barons" as examples. The author calls for something more "appropriate" for this "sensitive site," one that is meant to become the "center of the center" of the university. The author acknowledges the symbolic importance of the particular location that Asher selected and agrees that it would make a suitable site for an artwork about the campus's history, but believes that the chosen form—a drinking fountain—and its non-art associations would be unsuitable for it.

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[197] Letter from J. T. Enright to Mary Beebe, April 28, 1989, Michael Asher project file, Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego.

[198] Ibid.

Beebe responded to the author's objections to Asher's proposal in a letter by asserting that it was as yet unclear how the university planned to develop the Town Square area and sought to clarify the objectives of the Stuart Collection. She stated: "The purpose of the Stuart Collection is not "tasteful design " or cosmetic beauty, but thoughtful composition and integration with surroundings (among other considerations)."[199] In her letter, sent on behalf of the Stuart Collection, Beebe (perhaps strategically) did not argue for the legibility of Asher's proposed work as art through its engagement with the sculptural (and larger artistic) discourse, but rather emphasized the work's integration with its site and its intended critical function of countering notions of monumentality and nationalism. This letter helped to persuade the more skeptical members of the Campus Community Planning Committee, and Asher's proposal was ultimately approved unanimously by its faculty members in August of 1989.[200] The proposal was then sent to Chancellor Atkinson, who signed a letter that would bind UCSD to the agreement between the Stuart Foundation and the artist in September of that year.[201]

From plan to material construction and installation

[199] Letter from Mary Beebe to J. T. Enright, May 4, 1989, Michael Asher project file, Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego.

[200] Minutes from Campus Community Planning Committee meeting, August 30, 1989, Michael Asher project file, Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego. The document "Campus Community Planning Committee Recommendations" sent to Chancellor Atkinson for site approval shows that while the faculty recommended Asher's proposal, the Graduate Student Association representative dissented, but no reason is given. "Campus Community Planning Committee Recommendations," November 1, 1989, Michael Asher project file, Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego.

[201] Although Chancellor Atkinson officially gave site approval in November of 1989, he signed a letter binding UCSD to an agreement with Asher and the Stuart Collection earlier that September.

After receiving the official go-ahead, Asher was meticulous in attending to all details concerning the fountain's construction and installation. [202] The fountain was to take the form of a standard issue water cooler, though one that was freestanding, not placed against a wall. To come up with a design, Asher took detailed notes on functioning water coolers and looked through ordering catalogues from multiple water cooler companies. The fountain design that resulted from his investigations was largely based on the cabinet and basin dimensions of a Sunroc water cooler, though its front was designed to mimic an Oasis model and the button design on its front panel was taken from a Haws model.[203] The partially open back of the water cooler (meant to rest against a wall) was enclosed in Asher's fountain design; otherwise, he noted, "all the dimensions and details on the fountain are as precise a copy of the original as possible including the vents and the different contours of the sink as well as the folds of the metal."[204]The refrigeration unit inside the fountain was purchased from Sunroc.

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[202] In a letter to DeSilva, regarding Asher's progress, Gregoire wrote: "Michael Asher has been down several times in the last month, and we speak on the phone every three days or so. He has been moving forward with a deliberateness that is excruciating. He has acquired at least 100 samples of stone in different finishes from several countries. I have constructed an exact full-scale model of the drinking fountain and revised it for him several times.... Asher is deeply committed in his way of working and resists absolutely our efforts to move forward at a pace faster than his own. Several decisions need to be made by him before we can put the stone cutting work out to bid, and we are currently seeking out fabricators capable of doing this very specialized work. Except for the slow pace he has been rewarding to work with." Letter from Mathieu Gregoire to James DeSilva, May 16, 1990, Michael Asher project file, Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego.

[203] Michael Asher, "Final Design" document, August 5, 1991, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[204] Asher wrote: "The design of the granite cooler follows the design of the metal cooler in almost every respect. The only difference is that we had to make the back (which on the original is partly open at the bottom but usually not seen because it is against the wall) enclosed. But all the dimensions and details on the fountain are as precise a copy of the original as possible including the vents and the different contours of the sink as well as the folds of the metal." Letter from Michael Asher to Birgit Pelzer, January 20, 1996, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

After meetings with UCSD's Handicapped Accessibility Office, the design of the fountain was adjusted to meet ADA requirements. The physical interaction of the viewer's body with the fountain was of crucial importance to Asher, and in order to install a functional drinking fountain on the university campus, it had to be useable for all bodies, including those in wheelchairs. One could compare Asher's decision to make the fountain ADA compliant with the decision of another artist in the collection not to meet these requirements in her work. For her artwork, titled *Green Table* (1992), artist Jenny Holzer designed an enormous rectangular dark green granite table surrounded by four benches, all of which are inscribed with truisms (the type of work for which she is well-known) [fig. 2.8]. Holzer had been asked by the (then renamed) Office for Students with Disabilities to remove or shorten one of the benches so that a person in a wheelchair would be able to move directly up to the table, but the artist resisted, arguing that the object was first and foremost a work of art, and a table second. According to Holzer, the artwork could be experienced without having to sit at the table and that removing one of the benches or altering its size would compromise the artwork's aesthetic.[205] The artist prevailed. In contrast to Holzer's work, we could say, Asher's work was meant to be equally artwork and functional drinking fountain.

Gregoire made a detailed plyboard maquette, which Asher used to determine the fountain's final size and design. Finding the right combination of granite for the fountain's basin, cabinet, and base in terms of color, pattern, texture, porosity, resistance to staining, among other factors, required an extensive search. Asher was looking for granite that would "express itself as granite," stone for "a sculpture [that would] express its 'stoneness' while representing the shape of a cooler."[206] The granite had to be able to withstand high pressure for the mirror finish that

[205] Beebe, "Jenny Holzer," in *Landmarks*, 204.

Asher wanted and not degrade or rust over time in the salty air of UCSD's coastal environment. The basin was to be made from one color of granite and the cabinet and base would be made from another.

After months spent gathering granite samples from companies located in the U.S. and Europe, Asher narrowed his choices to companies in the U.S. since they generally offered a greater range of thickness for their granite slabs and since it would be easier to reorder more pieces in case of breakage during the work's fabrication or replacement parts were needed in the future.[207] In November of 1990, a bid was accepted from Cold Spring Granite, a Minnesota-based company more accustomed to fabricating public monuments, memorials, and funerary settings. Specifications and full-sized three-dimensional patterns for each stone piece prepared by Gregoire were sent to the company. Special attention was given to details such as the stone's surface treatment: "In general, and in particular on the polished surfaces of the basin, the surfaces will convincingly duplicate the smoothness and uniformity of sheet metal."[208] The stainless steel drainer and bubbler were made locally, at the machine shops of UCSD's Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

The physical location of the fountain also had to be prepared. The plyboard maquette was used to determine the exact placement of the fountain. The fountain was positioned so that when

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[206] In a notebook, Asher wrote: "Bethel white appears too much like marble & dark spots appear as dust or something along that line. It doesn't express itself as granite.... The European & Brazilian granite signifies upper middle class domesticity but also reveals itself as granite stone. So if I want a sculpture to express its 'stoneness' while representing the shape of a cooler, this would be the type to use." Untitled notebook, n.d., unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[207] Letter from Michael Asher to Dale Klingsporn, May 14, 1990, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[208] Michael Asher Drinking Fountain Specifications, October 8, 1990, Michael Asher project file, Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego.

one drinks from it, the flagpole and boulder come into one's line of vision, with the former appearing to intersect the latter. In a letter in which he retrospectively described this work, Asher wrote parenthetically: "I planned the fountain so when somebody bends to drink their eyes can easily use the flagpole a little similar to a hair-line site [*sic*] on a rifle which then goes through the middle of the bronze plate on the stone. This is [word indecipherable, "more or less"?] incidental but is a part of this artwork."[209]

In the fall of 1991, utility lines were extended to the median strip and a concrete walkway was poured to connect the location where the fountain would be placed to the base of the flagpole. In December of 1991 the granite drinking fountain was permanently installed. Several feet away from the fountain a small metal label was cemented to the median's curb to inform viewers of the work's author ("MICHAEL ASHER"), the work's title and year ("UNTITLED, 1991") and that the work belonged to the Stuart Collection. An opening ceremony for Asher's work was held in April of 1992.

Reception and interpretation of Asher's untitled work

Since its inauguration in 1992, very few responses to Asher's untitled work for the Stuart Collection have been published. An early review published in the *Los Angeles Times* by art critic Leah Ollman criticized Asher's installation for its seeming "invisible" quality, as if foreshadowing the present paucity of literature on the work and echoing the earlier objections by some campus faculty on the Campus Community Planning Committee. Ollman wrote: "At this potentially profound juncture, Asher has planted the most mundane of objects, a conventional,

[209] Letter from Michael Asher to Birgit Pelzer, January 20, 1996, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation. In his interview with Joan Simon, Asher mentioned: "And I don't know if this is particularly important, but when you take a drink of water the flagpole bisects the plaque as if it were in the sight of a gun." "Interview with Asher," in *Landmarks*, 179–180.

free-standing, rectangular drinking fountain. He has replaced the fountain's standard metal skin with a gleaming coat of gray granite, but otherwise the fountain is as bland and invisible as that in any institutional hallway."[210] This is the kind of response that the skeptical committee members had feared.

A few art historical accounts have compared Asher's drinking fountain to the conventional model of monumental public fountains as well as Marcel Duchamp's pointedly conceptual *Fountain* of 1917. For example, Kirsi Peltomäki has written:

> Asher's drinking fountain has rich metaphorical significance. On the one hand, it co-opts the classic form of a public monument: the grand water fountain. Formally, Asher's fountain conforms to the monumental tradition of public sculpture: it is crafted of the same traditional sculpture materials and polished to a deep glow. Yet the fountain's claim to conventional monumentality is counterbalanced by the fact that it is not strictly decorative but resolutely practical. Asher's fountain also flirts with the art historical legacy of the readymade in terms of its relationship to its 1917 cousin, Duchamp's *Fountain*. But these fountains differ in two respects. First, Asher's fountain is custom-made, as opposed to Duchamp's mass-produced object. Second, Asher's fountain remains prosaically functional, producing its own filtered and treated water in a manner comparable to any drinking fountain placed in offices, schools, museums, or other public facilities.[211]

Unlike Gian Lorenzo Bernini's opulent Four Rivers fountain (1651) in Piazza Navona in Rome or, more recently, Jean Tinguely's whimsical Tinguely Fountain (1977) in Basel, Asher's fountain offers no spectacular water display.[212] The scale and style of Asher's fountain signify not wealth or plenitude, but the prosaic and bureaucratic. Asher's fountain both references but

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[210] Leah Ollman, "UCSD Fountain Is a Drink of Cold Water," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1992, F7.

[211] Peltomäki, *Situation Aesthetics*, 59–61.

[212] Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean Tinguely were both initially considered by the Advisory Committee of the Stuart Collection. Beebe has noted: "Tinguely wanted to create a fountain. Concerned about droughts and the long-term cost of maintenance, the university, sadly, was not predisposed to encourage this idea, and after considerable deliberation the Committee chose Niki to make the first work on campus." See "Niki de Saint Phalle," in *Landmarks*, 48. In contrast, Asher's fountain would use a very economical amount of water.

fundamentally differs from Duchamp's *Fountain*, a porcelain urinal turned upside down and signed by "R. Mutt" (a play on J. L. Mott Iron Works, the name of the manufacturer). Not only is Asher's fountain functional and meant to be used, it is uniquely sited in a particular location.

Robert Storr and Birgit Pelzer have focused on the tension between spatial symmetry and semiotic ambiguity that the presence of Asher's drinking fountain creates within the median's landscape. Storr argues that Asher's fountain functions conceptually by not "fitting in." He wrote:

> [W]ith bland thoroughness, the Conceptual artist Michael Asher has seen to the fabrication of a ringer amenity that stands out over time in inverse proportion to the degree that it begs to be overlooked on first inspection.... [W]hen the fountain's sentinellike rigidity is aligned with the flagpole and the intractable monument, the absurdity of the trial is revealed, as if an SAT question asking which of three objects did not belong to a given set had been posed by the Surrealist mischief-make René Magritte. The longer one considers the problem, the more what one initially assumed to be the least significant of the three objects eclipses the two most aggressively symbolic ones, and the more what would normally have seemed the most expendable of them becomes the defining element of the ensemble. Such is the fine art of not quite fitting in.[213]

Pelzer linked the three objects' significations into a chain of associations—"The elements project onto one another the cycles of business and ideology on which they are based as if an exponential dynamism were unfolding—the American flag, the marines and their shooting-range exercises, university education and its military-industrial offshoots"—but offered no specificities regarding the campus as a site and its particular history.[214]

In the years leading up to the moment when Asher selected the median site in 1988 as the location of his work, his approach to site had begun to take on a historical dimension. We can see this conceptual development in the changes in the initial projects he discussed with Beebe and

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[213] Robert Storr, "The Fine Art of Not Quite Fitting In," in *Landmarks*, 24.

[214] Brigit Pelzer, "Space Transfers: Sculptures by Dan Graham, Michael Asher, and Isa Genzken," in *White Cube/Black Box*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Vienna: EA-Generali Foundation, 1996), 203.

Gregoire for the Stuart Collection. His first idea of redesigning the campus signage at UCSD was succeeded by a second idea in which a disused building dating to the Camp Matthews era would be repurposed into an information center for the university campus. Facilitating the circulation of information and bodies around the campus was central to both projects, but the particular identity of the building he selected for his second project was key: the building's significance resided in its historical use as a point where power was regulated and distributed for the former military camp.

Asher's historical approach to site is apparent in another exhibition project he was working on concurrently in 1987 (the year before he chose the median strip as his site). For this work, as in his later fountain work, Asher constructed a new object by borrowing the formal vocabulary of a found element, one that referred to the prior use of the work's site. In January of 1987, Asher was invited to work on a project for a group exhibition titled *Intentie En Rationele Vorm* ("Intention and Rational Form"), which opened at Fabrick Van Dooren located in Mol, Belgium, in September of that year.[215] The building Fabrick Van Dooren was a former wool factory that the town of Mol had recently purchased with the intention of renovating it into a cultural center.[216] Founded in 1885, the factory expanded after World War I and production rapidly increased during the interwar period; this "golden age" was also marked by a series of strikes and stand-offs between workers, who organized into a trade union, and the Van Dooren family, owners of the factory. For his work, Asher had the exhibition's title painted on the building's facade in the same location and using the same colors and Art Deco typeface of the

[215] Asher was invited by Frederick Leen in a letter dated January 3, 1987. See Leen's account of this work by Asher in Leen, ed., *Intentie en Rationale Vorm* (Mol, Belgium: Fabriek Van Dooren), 1987; and Leen's essay "Asher's Model of Mimetic Reality / Rational Mimesis," in *Michael Asher* (Villeurbanne: Le Nouveau Musée), 1991.

[216] Factory was founded in 1885 and fell into disuse by 1975. Leen, *Intentie en Rationale Vorm,* 7–9.

former factory's name. At the front entrance, a brass plate with the name of the town's arts commission (VRIJ GENOOTSCHAP VOOR DE BEELDENDE KUNST) was installed in same location where the factory's nameplate was originally placed. Through its resurrection of historical details and their translation into the contemporary exhibition situation, Asher's work can be read as a critique of how the arts commission was planning to renovate the building, which would have left little of the factory's original structure or details, only "the ideological connotations that it had for the community."[217]

The median strip that Asher selected as the location for his work allows one to relate the present day site of the campus through its prior function. About the historical aspect of his work for the Stuart Collection, Asher noted: "So one of the main aspects this work responds to is land use and how the historical reality of land can be so easily paved over and attempt to be forgotten. There is no other place on the campus of this university (University of California at San Diego) which explicitly refers to the university's [*sic*] prior use except the bronze text on the rock."[218] The boulder that captured Asher's attention marks a historical *transition*, from the campus's development as a rifle range and training base by the U.S. Marines to its use as the grounds for a research university by the University of California. The history of the campus reflects the larger urban and economic history of San Diego, which, beginning in the mid-1910s, grew as a Navy town.[219] San Diego expanded rapidly during the 1930s and 1940s, through significant amounts of

[217] Leen, "Asher's Model of Mimetic Reality / Rational Mimesis," 38. Leen wrote: "Apart from the intended structural redirection of the building, most of the original architecture was going to be covered. The initial facade in particular would be covered with a skin of square, 1 x 1 m, glazed tiles with the purpose to—according to the architect—'improve the industrial look' of the building."

[218] Letter from Michael Asher to Birgit Pelzer, January 20, 1996, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[219] San Diego can be seen as a "martial metropolis." Historian Roger Lotchin wrote: "This interface between the city and the sword was so close that, for example, by the 1970s, 42.7 percent of all

federal funding and the growth of defense and defense-related industries. In 1940, it was referred to as a new "Federal City" by the administration under President Franklin D. Roosevelt; subsequently, about $44.5 million from the federal government was used to improve and expand infrastructure throughout the city.[220] This included the construction by the U.S. Navy of a badly-needed aqueduct from the Colorado River in 1945 (droughts and water shortage problems remain a persistent threat in the region into the present day). [221]

The campus where UCSD is presently located was opened in 1917 as the Marine Rifle Range, La Jolla. There was a low level of activity until the entry of the U.S. into World War II, when, in 1942, it was renamed after Brigadier General Calvin B. Matthews, a Marine coach of rifle and pistol teams. The campus greatly expanded through the construction of more target ranges and a number of new facilities during the 1930s and early 1940s, when activity peaked after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. At the height of the military campus's use, around 700 men stationed at the camp and 9,000 men rotated every three weeks for training.

The change in the campus's ownership came about after the end of World War II as national priorities and local agendas changed: whereas the military had been San Diego's prime "industry" up to 1950, city leaders "grasped the forces that were changing the character of that

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manufacturing employment in Los Angeles and Orange counties was dependent on aerospace contracts, which represented only a part of the military expenditures in Southern California. Even as early as the 1930s, one third of San Diego's payroll derived from a single employer—the U.S. Navy. A city whose economic base is predominantly military, whose morphology is determined in part by its military ties, whose formal and informal governmental institutions like chambers of commerce and city councils are dedicated to nurturing their ties to the services...can accurately be called a martial metropolis." Roger Lotchin, "Conclusion," in *The Martial Metropolis in War and Peace* (New York: Praeger, 1984), 224.

[220] Abraham Shragge: 'A New Federal City': San Diego during World War II," *Pacific Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (August 1994), 333.

[221] Ibid., 357–58. There was only about one month's supply left by the time the water came through. The threat of water shortage remains an issue.

industry and, in particular, the growing importance of R&D."[222] During the 1960s and 1970s, a number of research institutes were established, or relocated to, the Torrey Pines Mesa in La Jolla, an expanse of land that overlooks the Pacific Ocean and includes the old Camp Matthews site. Initially located on a small campus northeast of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, UCSD was founded in 1960 as a graduate school with an Institute of Pure and Applied Physics and an Institute of Mechanics. A year earlier, in 1959, a bill had passed in Congress that secured the future transfer of the campus of Camp Matthews from the U.S. Navy to the UC Regents for their planned campus in San Diego. On August 21, 1964, closing ceremonies were held at Camp Matthews and, in October of that year, the Marine base was officially closed. That fall, UCSD's first class of undergraduates began the school year on the site of the former military campus.

Originally founded as a research institution oriented towards the sciences and technical fields, UCSD transformed into a more comprehensive university by the late 1960s. Its early graduate programs, which concentrated on biology, oceanography, applied physics, and chemistry, were merged with a system of undergraduate colleges that began in 1964. Faculties for the humanities and social sciences were added, as were schools for engineering, medicine, and other fields. The tide had turned regarding the UC's involvement with the defense department: whereas the University of California had collaborated with the military to operate a UC Division of War Research at Point Loma in San Diego from 1941–46, in 1971 UCSD's Academic Senate passed a resolution calling on the school's administrators to ban classified defense-related research on campus. Support for research at the university expanded from a reliance on public grants to include funding from various industries, particularly during

[222] Mary Lindenstein Walshok and Abraham J. Shragge, *Invention and Reinvention: The Evolution of San Diego's Innovation Economy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 95.

Chancellor Atkinson's tenure from 1980–95.[223] Since its founding, UCSD has become a major center of learning as well as one of the largest employers in San Diego county; the historical expansion of a local research and development economy—in which UCSD played a central role—not only helped to retain and grow the military and defense contracting industry in the region but also fostered the more recent emergence of high technology industries in the city as well.

The juxtaposition of Asher's fountain and the boulder contextualize the founding of UCSD during the Cold War boom, a period symbolized by the iconography of Asher's fountain. Asher's drinking fountain is a copy of a pre-existing fountain—it is a drinking fountain in that it operates as such, but it is also a *representation* of a historically specific model of drinking fountain. Regarding his choice of this particular design, Asher stated:

> The granite water cooler that I had fabricated is a copy of one of the most popular I could find. I started looking on different campuses and started noting, not only in industrial buildings but even in office buildings, what was most popular. I tried to figure it out. Actually it's one model, which I think was designed maybe in the '50s, maybe the '60s, and it's meant to be placed up against a wall.[224]

Asher's fountain represents a model of drinking fountain that dates from the postwar period, one that could commonly be found in institutional, industrial, and office spaces, or public places of work and bureaucracy. Drinking fountains from this period would have been installed in the hallways of buildings at UCSD itself. The significance of the water cooler's design lies in its being both ubiquitous (thus familiar) and from a particular time period (historically specific). Asher stated that "the cooler (fountain) is meant (in this context) to also be a monument, not only

[223] This helped the growth of the city's high-technology sector, the economic rebirth of the region during the 1980s as known as "the Atkinson miracle." Patricia Pelfrey, *Entrepreneurial President: Richard Atkinson and the University of California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 37.

[224] Simon, "Interview with Asher," in *Landmarks*, 179.

a monument to human productivity (as opposed to the rock commemorating Camp Matthews) but a certain type of pragmatism I sometimes encounter in the same industrial designs generated in the 1950s."[225]

The position of Asher's drinking fountain on the median strip mirrors the position of the historical landmark. This spatial composition invites a comparative reading of the two objects; indeed, Asher designed the fountain specifically in response to the landmark. The sculptural form of the fountain was intended to be a conceptual "tool." According to Asher:

> It is granite, a traditional material. I decided to go all the way and see if the same material could operate in completely the opposite way from the original monument, and could this become a tool to reevaluate how the representations of different institutions are displayed in public.[226]

Whereas the landmark takes the form of a roughly surfaced granite boulder to evoke the open, timeless space of nature, Asher's sculpture takes the form of a polished granite drinking fountain to reference the enclosed spaces of labor and the social institutions that regulate them. Whereas the landmark represents a specific historical moment through the date of its own dedication (written on its plaque: October 6, 1964), Asher's sculpture represents this same historical era through the design of the fountain's stylistic model. Whereas the landmark holds symbolic value, Asher's fountain provides symbolic *and* use value.

Asher's fountain differs significantly from the landmark since it is meant to be used. One experiences the work not simply by looking at it, but also through activating the fountain by drinking from it. By complying with ADA requirements, Asher designed his fountain to be inclusive of as many bodies as possible. Approaching the fountain and drinking from it offers one a moment and a space to pause briefly, to take a break from one's routine during the day. It

[225] Letter from Michael Asher to Birgit Pelzer, January 20, 1996, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[226] Simon, "Interview with Asher," in *Landmarks*, 181.

provides access to an elemental substance that a body needs to consume in order to survive. As one stands before the fountain to take a sip, the university's administration complex looms in the background; this is the "wall" the fountain symbolically rests against. When one drinks from the fountain, one's head is not bowing in the direction of the flagpole, but askew to it. In the corner of one's eyes, with head lowered towards the bubbler, one sees the flagpole seem to skewer the boulder. Standing up, refreshed from sipping a bit of cooled water, one becomes more aware of how one's body is positioned in relation to the fountain as well as to the larger compositional situation found on the median strip.

How does the viewer's body relate to the three symbolic objects found on the median strip, and how is the individual represented by them? The landmark commemorates the military site ("Camp Calvin B. Matthews") and the training of individuals on that site ("From 1917 to 1964, over a million Marines and other shooters received their rifle marksmanship training here"); it only indirectly refers to the bodies of soldiers, who were preparing for war, and the extraordinary sacrifice required of them. The raised flag makes no direct reference to the bodies of individuals (only states as political bodies) but one reflexively associates the flag with the pledging of national allegiance and the bodily gestures and recitation involved in performing that action. More ambiguously, the drinking fountain recalls the anonymous labor of individuals in factories, offices, and schools. It can be read as a "monument to human productivity," as Asher put it. It is the only object out of the three that recognizes the material requirements of an individual's body for survival while also representing the productive labor required of the individual for his or her social existence.

Through its positioning, Asher's fountain counters the story of UCSD's historical emergence as represented by the landmark: whereas the text of the commemorative boulder

represents closure to the military's occupation of the campus as the site was deeded to the university "for the pursuit of higher education," Asher's fountain brings a representation of the Cold War to the fore. The juxtaposition of the landmark with Asher's drinking fountain opens up a perspective of the university's founding within the historical context of the changing nature of war itself and, relatedly, the methods of warfare production. The presence of Asher's drinking fountain on the median strip also suggests the lingering interests of the military in activities happening on the university's campus. Asher wondered about the possibility of military-related research projects occurring on campus: "The monument can't help remind us of the role UCSD played in the war effort during the Vietnam years but also in defense research today and hopefully the viewer is left with questions about whether the campus should be used for military needs or questions about war itself or else train its resources on human needs rather than destruction."[227] Elsewhere, he stated: "[W]hat is so important about this idea is to understand that UCSD is now one of the largest research campuses in the U.C. system for the Department of Defense. There are no signs of this on campus as to this happening. So the question turning around this project is something like the following: Is UCSD perhaps more engaged in this country's defense and the perpetuation of its war machinery and destructive power than when it was Camp Matthews?"[228]

Given that classified defense-related projects have been prohibited at UCSD since 1971, one could say that only indirect relationships now exist between research taking place on campus and their use by the armed forces and defense-contracting industries in the area. The economic

[227] Michael Asher, "UCSD Stuart Collection, 1991, La Jolla, California," n.d., unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[228] Letter from Michael Asher to Birgit Pelzer, January 20, 1996, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

ties in the region between the civic and the military, so foundational to the city's history, however, do persist. The city of San Diego is popularly known as a tourist destination and for its robust life sciences and high technology sectors, but it has also remained a major site for defense and defense-related industries since the end of the Second World War.[229] An integral part of San Diego's economy as a site of learning and training, UCSD is also a vital source for recruitment by industries in the region. As Atkinson observed from his discussions with industry leaders, it is often the students themselves that they are most interested in: "Perhaps more important than the direct technology transfer that the above university-industry relationships point to is the indirect technology transfer that results from the employment by industry of university-trained M.S. and Ph.D. degree recipients. I have been struck by the number of industry supporters of the university who have said that they like our research, but what they really want from us is access to our students."[230]

Asher wrote in his proposal: "The sculpture does not reflect upon the complex networks of pumps and pipes which make it possible to distribute water as a drinking fountain just as the landmark does not reflect upon the degree to which education is at the service of the military, and so on." Asher's drinking fountain offers a life-sustaining substance to the viewer's body while prodding him or her to reflect on how such an object is made functionally possible in the

[229] Tourism is San Diego's third largest source of income. In and around the city are 14 major Navy and Marine Corps installations, over 100,00 sailors and marines, and tens of thousands more military family members. The Department of Defense employs around 19,600 civilians and military retirement, and disability benefits amount to about $1 billion a year to the county; to these figures one could add contracts with major defense contractors like Northrup Grumman and Science Applications International Corporations. Even in San Diego's "technical services" sector, military applications have a significant lead within the industry. Walshok and Shragge, *Invention and Reinvention*, 7.

[230] Richard Atkinson, "The Future of the Research University," 1994 paper delivered at "Reinventing the Research University" Symposium, published on "Speeches, Articles, and Commentaries" page for Richard C. Atkinson, UC San Diego website. http://rca.ucsd.edu/speeches.asp (accessed November 15, 2015).

first place. The presence of Asher's fountain functions as an ideological "disturbance" within the symbolic composition found on the median strip: on the one hand, it serves the institution of the state represented by the flagpole's raised flag by providing for the bodies of individuals, without which the state could not function; on the other hand, it serves the university's mission of " the pursuit of higher education" by framing one's understanding of the campus through a critique of the landmark seen across the way and by provoking one to question to what ends institutions are founded and run. The juxtaposition of the fountain with the boulder asks the viewer to consider the relationships (direct and indirect) between UCSD and the military, in the past and in the present. The work's function, its source of power, lies in how it reframes one's perception of the institutional site. As Asher noted: "The marker is a memorial to governmental power and the cooler is an object not invested with power. But if it can animate meaning throughout all the objects it can be the most powerful object."[231]

Unfolding significance of Asher's untitled work

The idea for what would become the Stuart Collection arose from an observation by DeSilva: sculptures are perceived depending on how they are sited. Dissatisfied with how he would often find sculptures sited, DeSilva felt the solution would be to have the artist select the site for his or her own sculpture and to preserve the artwork in its chosen place. The Stuart Fountain formalized a version of this approach by establishing a collection of contemporary artworks commissioned for particular locations on the campus of UCSD. In this way, the artworks in the collection have been called "site-specific." The artworks were produced for a particular location and, in many cases, could not be moved logistically to another location or would not make sense conceptually if relocated. But what if the artwork's location, its

[231] Michael Asher, "San Diego," unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

surrounding landscape, were to change? Would this change an artwork's "situation" and thus its significance? How much or what kind of change would be acceptable?

When Asher was conceptualizing his proposal, he was consciously thinking about the campus in terms of its future expansion. In a letter dated January of 1987, Asher wrote to thank Gregoire for helping him during his last site visit. He also mentioned seeing a map of the future spread of the campus in the library and requested a copy of it.[232] About two years later, Asher would submit his proposal for the drinking fountain to the Stuart Foundation's Advisory Board and UCSD's Campus Community Planning Committee.

The members of the Campus Community Planning Committee were also considering Asher's proposal in relation to the future of the campus's expansion. According to the minutes of a meeting in April of 1989, a conversation ensued regarding the future of the Town Square site. The meeting began with a reminder that judging the merit of an artwork is not within the purview of the committee. One member expressed concern that approving the drinking fountain would lock in the design of the area and that "in the future it may not be at appropriate scale." Two other members responded by saying that there was no conclusive plan for the area and that the question of what would be "an appropriate use of the space" is not likely to be settled in the near future. The discussion concluded with an agreement that the permanence of the drinking fountain cannot be guaranteed; the artwork may have to be moved in the future.[233] On a document dated November 10, 1989, signed by Chancellor Atkinson to give site approval for Asher's work, a summary of the committee's discussion regarding the artwork's relation to its

[232] Letter from Michael Asher to Mathieu Gregoire, January 12, 1987, Michael Asher project file, Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego.

[233] Minutes from Campus Community Planning Committee meeting, August 30, 1989. Michael Asher project file, Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego.

site is given: "The site is located on the 'Town Square'...opposite the monument stone. The committee also approves the concept that the flag pole, stone and proposed fountain be viewed as an integral unit. If the land that they are located on is ever needed for other purposes, all three components should be moved together as one."[234] Thus, Asher's work was approved under the condition that if it needed to be moved in the future, "the flag pole, stone and proposed fountain" would be treated as one unit.

This issue of relocation is expressly addressed in the contract between Asher and the Stuart Foundation signed in the fall of 1989. Although the contract is between Asher and the Stuart Foundation, UCSD is mentioned in "Recitals" (Atkinson would submit a signed letter binding UCSD to the terms of the agreement): "The Foundation and the University of California (hereinafter 'The University') through procedures duly adopted by the Regents, has selected the Artist to design certain art work (hereinafter called 'The Work') for the University of California, San Diego campus."[235] The section titled "Removal/Relocation" reads as follows:

> It is understood that the specific location of the sculpture, as defined by Exhibit "B" (plan/photo), is an integral part of the Work. The University shall agree to make all efforts to maintain the integrity of the work as defined by its location. The University shall further agree that if the surrounding grounds are developed by the University for academic purposes, the University will coordinate such activities with the Foundation. If, in the opinion of the Artist and/or the Foundation, such changed use of the grounds on which the sculpture is located destroys the integrity of the work, the Foundation shall cause the sculpture to be relocated to a site agreed upon by the Artist, the Foundation, and the University.[236]

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[234] "Campus Community Planning Committee Recommendations," November 1, 1989, Michael Asher project file, Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego.

[235] "Sculpture Agreement between Stuart Foundation and Michael Asher," Michael Asher project file, Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego.

[236] Ibid.

This issue of removal or relocation of Asher's work remained untested until the mid-2000s. In February of 2006 the university held a meeting to discuss future programming and redesigns of centrally located open spaces on campus, namely, Matthews Quad, Town Square (where Asher's work is located), and Market Place Plaza. Towards the end of 2007, the university commissioned Meyer + Silberberg Land Architects, a landscape design firm based in Berkeley, to conceptualize possible redesigns of the Town Square, a process in which the Stuart Collection and Asher were involved. A meeting was held in December of that year during which David Meyer and Ramsey Silberberg, the founding principals of Meyer + Silberberg Land Architects, discussed their approach to the Town Square project and presented preliminary design schemes, which were aimed to create a "greater sense of place" and to improve pedestrian circulation.[237] Asher, in turn, presented on what he considered to be the most important elements of his work, which included the alignment of the drinking fountain, flagpole, and boulder; the equidistance of the drinking fountain and the boulder to the flagpole; the concrete pedestal of the flagpole (but not the square concrete path around it); the concrete circles around the drinking fountain and boulder; the patina and surface quality of the aged concrete (to recall the time when the land belonged to the military); as well as the presence of grass in the median strip (to make viewers mindful of environmental concerns regarding water conservation). The trees do not contribute to the overall meaning of his work, he mentioned, nor would the concrete curb have to be kept if it were not functionally needed due to the future closing of the area to vehicular traffic.[238] During the meeting, Meyer suggested that Asher's ideas about his work's site might change as its context changed.[239]

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[237] "Meeting Notes for Art Coordination Meeting #1," December 30, 2007, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[238] Ibid.

To a degree, what Meyer predicted turned out to be true: when confronted with two proposed design schemes in March of 2008, Asher changed his mind and decided that the trees and grass of the median strip were equally important to the work as other parts.[240] In an email sent to Beebe and others that relayed Asher's response to the design schemes, Gregoire stated: "Michael is certain that the existing trees and grass must remain unchanged, and their age and unevenness speak to the past and future and the passage of time in a way that has been central to the piece and will become even more important with the new surroundings."[241]

Asher deemed both proposed design schemes by Meyer and Silberberg possible, with modifications. In one scheme, titled "Eucalyptus Grove," eucalyptus trees would be planted on all four sides of the Town Square, enclosing the median strip in a kind of "grove" [fig. 2.9]. The fountain, flagpole, and landmark would be left in their existing locations, and clustered patches of grass would carpet the grounds of the open area. The problem with this scheme, for Asher, was that the eucalyptus trees would impose a new scale into the area and dwarf the three historical objects on the median. Additionally, the patches of grass surrounding the median strip would interfere with the reading of the three objects. Gregoire wrote, indirectly quoting Asher, "The site and therefore the work would lose its intimacy and much of its history—it would become three objects that could be anywhere."[242] Another landscaping solution would need to be devised.

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[239] Ibid.

[240] Mathieu Gregoire, "Asher 'Town Center,'" March 12, 2008, Michael Asher project file, Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Ibid.

In another scheme, titled "Bamboo Wedge," trapezoidal plots of bamboo trees would be planted down the middle of the Town Square, regularly increasing in size from north to south [fig. 2.10]. The entire median strip, with the fountain, flagpole, and boulder, would be shifted to the west end of the square, adjacent to the administrative complex and away from the Student Services Center. Although Asher deemed this scheme possible, its main drawback was the complicated process and high expense of moving the median strip. If moved, the composition of fountain, flagpole, boulder, cement pathways, lawn and existing trees would all have to be faithfully recreated.

In the end, Asher expressed a preference for the "Eucalyptus Grove" scheme because of the simpler and more economical nature of the proposal, though thinking through the implications of the design schemes brought new aspects of the work into view for the artist. Each scheme had opened up "a different set of problems and opportunities" for the artist.[243] A new landscape around the median strip in the "Eucalyptus Grove" scheme could potentially heighten the original "intimacy" of the objects situated on the median strip. In the "Bamboo Wedge" scheme, the contrast between the space of the median strip on the west end of the square and the newly designed area on the east end could potentially "extend the critique that already exists within the work itself," as Gregoire put it.[244] Asher had considered the possibility of moving the work to Matthews Quad, on the other side of the Student Services Center, but decided that it would not be possible to "insert" the work there. The work had to remain in the original Town Square.

Asher's willingness to relocate his work, within certain boundaries, reveals that the specific physical location of his fountain does not equate with the work's "site," which can be

[243] Ibid.

[244] Ibid.

understood as the entire campus itself (represented symbolically by the Town Square, the historic center of the campus). The significant elements in his work included not the original physical location of his fountain, but its spatial positioning in relation to the flagpole and the boulder, the concrete pathway and pedestal that linked them, and the grass and pine trees that visually and conceptually framed the composition. Furthermore, as we can see in his repeated works for Skulptur Projekte, Asher viewed his works' sites as ones that changed, and that this historical dimension could be integrated into the conceptual structure of an artwork to extend its significance over time. What Asher stated about his caravan work also applies to his fountain work: "meaning partly unfolds by having the site operate upon the work and modify it through each presentation."[245]

In the end, the university did not end up realizing either proposal. No other landscape design firms were subsequently commissioned. In the fall of 2008, minor changes were made at the south end of the Town Square to close it to vehicular traffic, but the plan to renovate the entire Town Square has been indefinitely postponed.

Although one could say that Asher had taken into consideration the temporal dimension of a work's site since he began producing his situational works, his work for the Stuart Collection (not unlike his repeated work for Skulptur Projekte, as discussed at this chapter's beginning) allowed for the work to change over time as its site changed. Asher's situational approach to conceptualizing a collected work had significantly shifted since the late 1970s, as we can see in a comparison to his 1979 work sold to the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in

[245] In this way, Asher's concept of "site-specificity" is strikingly different from that of Richard Serra, who famously declared about his sculpture *Titled Arc* (1981) that "it is a site-specific work and as such not to be relocated. To remove the work is to destroy the work." Richard Serra, "Letter from Richard Serra to Donald Thalacker," *The Destruction of Titled Arc: Documents*, ed. Clara Weyergraf-Serra and Martha Buskrik (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 38.

Chicago for their permanent collection.[246] For this work (discussed in this dissertation's introduction), Asher had two horizontal rows of aluminum panels removed from the museum's facade and hung in the same order inside a glassed-in viewing gallery directly above the museum's entrance. The MCA purchased Asher's work five months prior to the opening exhibition of his installation. When the work was not on display, the panels were to be placed back on the building's facade so that his work would be in "public storage." Before selling his work to the MCA, Asher was aware that the museum was already planning for a future expansion. In writing about this work, he noted: "This installation was meant to operate only until the next phase of the museum's construction." In this case, the work was intended to have an end date: the removal of this work from the MCA's permanent collection was to mark a transitional moment in the museum's history. In writing about this work, art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has stated: "The specificity of Asher's installations in regard to all the elements that enter the conception, production, and reception of a sculptural construct results in a model of historicity."[247]

The concept of "historicity" also structures Asher's artwork for the Stuart Collection, but its significance is meant to unfold over time, indefinitely. It does not have a specific end date built into its conceptual structure like Asher's work for the MCA's permanent collection. One's perception of the drinking fountain is meant to change, as the contrast between the median strip—and the historical objects collected and juxtaposed on its landscape—and the changing environment of the campus that surrounds it heightens over the years.

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[246] Other works by Asher that have been or are owned include the following: his 1979 work for a private collection; his 1979 work for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and his 1993 work for the Taejeon Expo '93. Asher's untitled 1971 work for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art was acquired by the museum, but this installation-based work no longer exists.

[247] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture," 293.

There is no final fixity to Asher's work for the Stuart Collection. The contract in this case functions less to fix a rigid conception of what the work is, but rather keeps an ongoing dialogue between artist and owner to ensure that the work's conceptual structure and function are maintained in the face of changing externalities. Asher's response to the redesign proposals in 2008 reveals that the sculptural addition of the drinking fountain itself could physically move as long as its site (what locks it into a specific position—that is, the boulder, the flagpole, the cement pathway, and the landscaping) moves along with it. Or, if the environment around the site changed, the changes would have to maintain the visual and conceptual integrity of the original composition. In this way, Asher's work should be understood not as a final product. It is not about preserving a final installation but rather recalibrating the work to once again re-present the original concept and to maintain the function that drove the original production of the work. It is about maintaining a set of relations that comprise the work's site.

Coda

When presented with possible design schemes for the university's Town Square by Meyer + Silberberg Land Architects in 2008, we saw how Asher responded to proposed changes in the work's location. Asher clarified that the work's most significant elements were the granite drinking fountain's position in relation to the flagpole and the boulder, the concrete pathway and pedestal, and the grass and pine trees within the median. If these elements remained unchanged, then the continuous development of its surroundings (within certain parameters) would in fact extend and expand the work's significance over time. But what if the granite drinking fountain that Asher designed and had so meticulously produced were damaged or ruined beyond repair?

In the early hours of January 13, 2015, Asher's granite drinking fountain was devastatingly sledgehammered by a masked vandal. The same person destroyed surveillance cameras in the Mandeville Center at UCSD, disabled other security cameras by smashing a junction box on the Chancellor's complex, and tagged in gold spray paint "YOU CAN PAINT OVER ME YOU CAN CATCH ME YOU CAN EXPELL [*sic*] ME I WILL STILL BE HERE" on a nearby wall.[248] This unexpected incident, which occurred after the artist's passing in 2012, raised the question of whether or not the drinking fountain should be reproduced and replaced. Was the original fountain itself, whose production Asher had carefully overseen, fundamental to the significance of the work?

Within a couple months following the fountain's vandalism, with permission from the Michael Asher Foundation, the Stuart Collection (still directed by Mary Beebe) commissioned the production of a replacement drinking fountain from the same company they had contracted earlier (Cold Spring Granite), with the production supervised again by Mathieu Gregoire.[249] By

[248] For news coverage of this incident, see Samantha Tatro, "$1K Reward for UCSD Graffiti and Vandalism Suspect," Local News, 7 NBC San Diego, February 11, 2015, http://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/1K-Reward-for-UCSD-Graffiti-and-Vandalism-Suspect-291431071.html (accessed March 15, 2015); Derek Staahl, "Vandal with Sledgehammer Destroys Prized Artwork at UC San Diego," CW6 San Diego, February 10, 2015, http://www.cw6sandiego.com/vandal-with-sledgehammer-destroys-prized-artwork-at-uc-san-diego/ (accessed March 15, 2015); and Henri Neuendorf, "Masked Vandal Destroys Michael Asher Sculpture with Sledgehammer," Artnet News, February 19, 2015, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/masked-vandal-destroys-michael-asher-sculpture-with-sledgehammer-260450 (accessed March 15, 2015). The identity of the male culprit and his exact motivations have not been made public.

[249] Benjamin Sutton, "Smashed Conceptual Art Water Fountain Will Flow Again," Hyperallergic, February 23, 2015, http://hyperallergic.com/184903/smashed-conceptual-art-water-fountain-will-flow-again/ (accessed March 20, 2015); and "UC San Diego Confirms Plans to Repair Vandalized Michael Asher Sculpture," February 24, 2015, http://artforum.com/news/id=50408 (accessed March 15, 2015).

the end of 2015, the drinking fountain had been completely replaced and is now running once again.[250]

The uniqueness of the original drinking fountain as an object itself is not significant. As Asher pointed out in his proposal for the work: "the sculpture lacks the same reference [that a monument has] to a specific event."[251] The drinking fountain's significance lies in its comparative relations to the historical boulder, flagpole, and grassy median, compositional and conceptual relationships that tie the ensemble of objects to the present site of the campus.

[250] Phone conversation with Jane Zwerneman, Program Representative at the Stuart Collection, October 5, 2016.

[251] See Appendix.

Chapter Three
Untitled work for the 24th São Paulo Bienal (1998)

Since 1977, when Michael Asher submitted his "Caravan Proposal" for the "Projects" section of Skulptur, urban space had played an increasingly significant role in how he conceived of a work's exhibition situation.[252] The specific institutional sites of his later works were often framed within the larger context of the urban economies and infrastructural systems to which the commissioning art institutions were connected. Whereas this aspect is implicit in Asher's 1991 work for the Stuart Collection, as represented by the underground pipes supplying his drinking fountain, it became more explicit in later works in the 1990s. For example, in 1993 Asher participated in an outdoor sculpture exhibition titled Devant, le future (The Future Lies Ahead), organized by Pontus Hulten for the Taejon International Exposition '93 (hereafter referred to as Taejon Expo '93), staged in the city of Daejeon, South Korea.[253] (This work would become Asher's only other permanent installation for a public collection besides his work for the Stuart Collection.) The exhibition was installed in Expo Science Park, constructed for Taejon Expo '93 and located near the mega-event's main venues. To this exhibition, Asher contributed a large boulder, which was situated at the park's entrance and near a sidewalk. The boulder's face was inscribed with a text in Korean: "Assuming that the array of structures which constitute the

[252] There are several examples of works by Asher that address the urban context of their institutional site. Some of the most significant works include his *Michael Asher Lobby* (1983) for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; his installation (1988) for Artists Space, in New York City; his postcard series (1989) for D&S Ausstellung, part of Hamburg Projekt '89; his edition of cast-iron objects (1991) for Le Nouveau Musée, in Villeurbanne; his installation (1991) for Le Consortium, in Dijon; his work (1991) for the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego; his work for Devant, le future for the Taejon Expo '93, which I discuss shortly; his installation (1998) for the 24th São Paulo Bienal, the subject of this chapter; as well as his works for Sonsbeek '86 and Sonsbeek '93 and "Installation Münster" for Skulptur Projekte in 1977, 1987, 1997, and 2007.

[253] Taejon Expo '93 took place from August 7 to November 7, 1993, in South Korea and had the theme "The Challenge of a New Road to Development." Due to the revised romanization of the Korean language by the South Korean government in 2000, the spelling of "Taejon" has been changed to "Daejeon."

immediate surroundings were designed for us spectators, it enables us to ask: who benefits from our navigating between displays of corporate legitimation and representations of power?"[254] The seemingly antiquated design of the boulder and typeface of its inscription resembled another stone located at the other end of the park, a sign for "Daeduk Science Town," a district of Daejeon established in the 1980s as one of the country's high technology and research-and-development centers: an element found on the fringes of the mega-exhibition's site was included in Asher's work.[255] By appropriating the design of the city sign, Asher's sculptural object connected its urban context to its exhibition situation of Taejon Expo '93 while explicitly asking visitors to the park (and passersby on the street) to consider who can be said to benefit from the vast, technologically sophisticated constructions seen around them. Five years later, Asher would pose a similar question using different means in his work for the 24th São Paulo Bienal in Brazil, another (mega-)exhibition situation in a non-Western country. For this untitled work, however, Asher included an element found not on the edges of the exhibition's site, but from a site located on another continent, in response to the explicitly global framework of the São Paulo Bienal's exhibition context.

In a photograph taken during the opening weekend of the 24th São Paulo Bienal in early October of 1998, one sees crowds of people dressed in dark formal attire clustered around artworks and milling around inside the northeastern end of the brightly lit Ciccillo Matarazzo

[254] This translation is taken from a footnote in Andrea Fraser's "Procedural Matters," *Artforum* (Summer 2008), 464, fn 4.

[255] See Kim YoonSeo's short essay, based on her Masters thesis, on this work, "Heavy, Too Heavy: Words Engraved on the Rock" (2012), published on the website *sitecited*: http://sitecited.com/2012/kim-yoonseo-heavy-too-heavy-words-engraved-on-the-rock/ (accessed October 14, 2014)

Pavilion [fig. 3.1].[256] The Pavilion, designed by famed Brazilian modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer, has been the site of the São Paulo Bienal since 1957. In the photograph, the enormous interior of the Pavilion is bustling with activity. The building's most iconic feature, its wide spiraling horseshoe-shaped ramp, can be seen in the distance, massed with people who jostle their way up and down the path connecting the ground, second, and third floors.[257] The undulating lines of the white painted handrails on the second and third floor balconies frame an expansive free-form atrium, which provides a glimpse into goings-on occurring simultaneously on all three floors of the Pavilion. On the ground floor, visitors gaze at South Korean artist Choi Jeong Hwa's *Encore, encore, encore* (1998), an inflatable parody of a victory column made from gold-colored plastic that rises two stories high. Not far from the base of Choi's sculpture, visitors encircle and inspect Puerto Rican artists Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla's *Charcoal Dance Floor* (1998), a large rug-sized, photo-realistic charcoal drawing, placed directly on the ground, of youthful people dancing. One visitor, hands in pocket, stands in the middle of the finely rendered drawing, but no visitors have yet accepted the artists' invitation to the audience to erase the image by dancing upon it. On the second floor, visitors read a colorful text-covered wall, part of Brazilian artists Mauricio Dias and Walter Riedweg's multi-media installation about the lives and working conditions of doormen and janitors in São Paulo titled *The Raimundos, The Severinos, and The Franciscos* (1998). In the midst of all of the lively socializing and viewing captured in the photograph, one artwork seems to go unnoticed by the visitors: no one is looking

[256] The color photograph appeared in the weekly Brazilian celebrity magazine *Caras* 5, no. 41 (October 9, 1998). The caption for the photograph reads, "Maratona cultural seduz vips como Theresa Collor, Marisa Orth e Raul Cortez. [Cultural marathon seduces VIPs such as Theresa Collor, Marisa Orth and Raul Cortez.]"

[257] In Brazil, as in other parts of the world, what would be referred to as the "first" floor in the United States is called the "second" floor. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to the floor above ground level as the "second" floor since that is how it is referred to in documents related to the production of the exhibition in the São Paulo Bienal Foundation's archives.

at Asher's color photographs of small, simply-constructed houses in developments called *colonias* in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, pasted onto a series of columns on the second floor.[258]

Asher's untitled work would have been easy to overlook. His artwork took the form of an installation in which fourteen photographs, each measuring approximately twenty-seven by seventy-two inches, were pasted onto the fourteen columns that ring around the Pavilion's main architectural attraction, the stunning spiraling ramp and free-form atrium mentioned above. Each photograph was positioned well below eye level, the top edge falling at about the height of one's waist. The photographs punctuated a series of low spaces that quietly activated a frame around the building's symbolic center, an area "historically occupied by works of major artists selected for clout, eye appeal, appropriate scale and emblematic resonance," as one art critic has noted.[259] In other words, Asher's photographs were dispersed around the periphery of the venue's prime real estate, so to speak, and yet the visual field that they created collectively, rather inconspicuously, was vast.

The peripheral positioning of the photographs in Asher's installation echoed the subject matter of the images: colonias in southern Texas near the U.S.–Mexico border. The word "colonia" in Spanish can be translated into English as "colony" or "community." In Mexico it can refer to a well-to-do residential neighborhood. In the United States "colonia" specifically refers to often unregulated, unincorporated housing developments that lack basic infrastructure

[258] The word "colonia" is only italicized in the first instance, since the term has taken on a specific meaning in the English language; thus, it will be treated as an English word.

[259] Edward Leffingwall's makes this remark in his extensive review of the 24th São Paulo Bienal titled "Report from Sao Paulo: Cannibals All," *Art in America* 87, no. 5 (May 1999): 46–55.

located in the outskirts of U.S. cities that border Mexico.[260] The fourteen photographs depict views of some of these housing developments, photographed at a distance from the road. The houses in the photographs are rather small, generally unremarkable and irregular in appearance. They are spaced out from one another and often divided by chain link or other types of fencing. The houses have pitched roofs and walls that appear to be sheathed in sheets of plywood, often colorfully and sometimes unevenly painted. Only in one photograph does a residence stand alone, isolated in a flat, seemingly endless expanse of dirt and low lying scrub. In all of the photos, a brilliant azure sky streaked with clouds stretches over the houses. The landscape appears still and barren: no bodies appear in any of the images, neither human nor animal.

To give the visitor to the Pavilion a clue as to what he or she was looking at, accompanying the photographs was a series of wall labels, each affixed to the top of the handrail closest to the columns. Parallel with the floor and placed where one would normally rest a hand, the wall labels, too, were easy to miss. Fourteen wall labels functioned as captions for the photographs, one per image. The captions, written in English and Portuguese, included the artist name, nationality, and birth year; the name of the pictured colonia and county; the estimated population size in 1996; the name of the photographer; and the month and year the photograph was taken.[261] Some captions included a bit of additional information, such as the materials a

[260] Section 916 of the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990 defines "colonia" as "any identifiable community that: (a) is in the State of Arizona, California, New Mexico, or Texas; (b) is in the United States –Mexico border region; (c) is determined to be a "colonia" on the basis of objective criteria, including lack of potable water supply, lack of adequate sewage systems, and lack of decent, safe, and sanitary housing; and (d) was in existence as a "colonia" before the date of the enactment of the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act [Nov. 28, 1990]." See the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development webpage on colonias: http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/communitydevelopment/programs/colonias (accessed January 20, 2015).

[261] The text for the labels presented here are taken from a hand-written fax by Asher to Mesquita, dated September 20, 1998, Michael Asher file, São Paulo Bienal Foundation Archives.

pictured house was made from: "House trailer enclosed in cinderblock wall and wooden roof." Or a detail about the site's location and the economic conditions of its residents: "Across the border from Piedras Negras, Mexico, owners live in their Texas homes while they save enough money to build the second half." Or a quotation from a scholarly journal article that gave a glimpse into how some of the houses were built and the living conditions these houses afforded their inhabitants: "'A husband, his wife and their two small children marked out a 20 ft. x 30 ft. single-room house with a string during one site visit to the Del Mar Heights colonias, and by late evening of the same day, this pier-supported house was equipped with floor, walls, and roof. The two-window, one-door structure was in obvious non-compliance with the most rudimentary urban code restrictions.' ("Settlement Evolution of 'Colonias' along the U.S.–Mexico Border" by Christopher S. Davies and Robert K. Holz; Habitat International Volume 16, Number 4, 1992)."[262]

On a corner of the handrail closest to the spiraling ramp was a larger introductory wall label, written in Portuguese, for the entire installation.[263] Its upper section, up to the end of the first paragraph, lay on top of the handrail like the other fourteen wall labels; its lower section was folded over and down the handrail's side, towards the floor. The text of this wall label, presented here in full, read:

> Michael Asher (United States, b. 1943)
>
> The photo documentation on the fourteen columns adjacent to the second floor ramp represents parts of the colonias in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. In 1996 according to The Texas Water Development Board's Waste and Waste Water Survey of Economically Distressed Areas, there was an "estimated 392,188 residents living in a total of 1,495 colonias."[1] Dr. Jose R. Hinojosa writes:

[262] Ibid.

[263] It appears this introductory text only appeared in Portuguese whereas the wall labels for the individual columns had texts in both Portuguese and English, but this needs to be confirmed.

Colonias are unincorporated, quasi-rural communities on the United State's [*sic*] side of the U.S.–Mexico border. They are often characterized by substandard housing and the lack of potable water, wastewater systems, garbage collection, paved roads and streets, and other public services. Colonia residents endure the absence of flood drainage systems; police, fire, and emergency services; and the lack of accessibility to common city services such as electricity, running water, telephone and cable television linkages and public transportation. Colonia dirt roads are often quagmires after spring and fall rains and dust raising dry deep-set ruts in the summer.[2]

"Colonias are not part of any governmental unit and they therefore lack the jurisdiction to entertain legal complaint."[3] "While colonias vary greatly in size and appearance, some have the superficial appearance of Third World slums, such as *biddenvilles* [*sic*] in North Africa, *favelas* of Brazil, and *barrios* of Mexico."[4] The State Comptroller of Texas remarked in 1989 that "Tens of thousands of our fellow Texans are living in Third World conditions that are virtually unknown in other parts of Texas and other parts of the country."[5] Russell Pankratz, GIS Data Coordinator of The Texas Water Board, notes that the colonias were built on useless agricultural land. The Texas Water Board points out that "in eight years, a $479 million program has brought water and sewer services to just 13% of those it is meant to help in Texas' poorest areas."[6] "The average yearly income for a colonia household in Texas is $6,784."[7]

Special thanks to Leticia Dellorusso [*sic*], research assistant

[1] Texas Water Development Board, "Texas Water Development Board's Water and Wastewater Survey of Economically Distressed Areas—December 1996," report prepared for the Texas Water Development Board. Austin, TX (December 1996).
[2] Jose R. Hinojosa, Ph.D., "Legislative Responses to the Colonia Problem of South Texas," paper presented at the annual meeting of The Southwestern Political Science Association of Corpus Christi, TX (March 20, 1998)
[3] Robert K. Holz and C. Shane Davies, "Settlement Evolution of Colonias," *Habitat International* 16, no. 4 (1992): p. 135.
[4] Robert K. Holz and C. Shane Davies, "Remote sensing Techniques for Population Estimation of Colonias in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas," *Geocarto International* 7, no. 2 (1992): p. 22.
[5] Robert K. Holz and C. Shane Davies, "Settlement Evolution of Colonias," *Habitat International* 16, no. 4 (1992): p. 119.
[6] Ralph K. M. Haurwitz, "Scant relief from filth, disease for the poorest of Texas," *Austin American Statesman* [Austin, TX] (Jul. 12, 1998), p. A1.
[7] Ralph K. M. Haurwitz, "Facts on colonias," *Austin American Statesman* [Austin, TX] (Jul. 12, 1998), p. A8. [264]

Strikingly, and somewhat awkwardly, the body of the introductory text for the work is structured as a tissue of citations. The text does not embody a single anonymous voice of scholarly

[264] Ibid. Leticia Dello Russo was a former student of Asher's from CalArts and helped Asher conduct research for this project from June to September of 1998.

authority, such as one might find in an encyclopedia entry, or a unified, authoritative voice of the artist. Nor does the text's voice embody the didactic address of a curator or art institution. Instead, facts, definitions, and descriptive statements about the colonias are directly quoted, with a web of sources listed below for further reference.

Upon first glance, the insertion of the photographs and wall texts in the Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion might seem out of place to the visitor. For a visitor who was familiar with Asher's situational works, the installation might seem particularly puzzling: what are images of colonias in southern Texas doing in São Paulo? In the Bienal's exhibition catalogue, Asher is introduced as an artist in this way:

> Since the end of the 60s, one of the fundamental premises of the work of Michael Asher is that a "work" cannot be brought from outside an *exhibition situation*, but rather the situation is what should be articulated to become the object of labor ("work"). His practice engages in a systematic critique of institutions which present and represent works of art. Thus, all of his work is produced starting from the architectural, social, and historical specificity of the *place of exhibition*.[265]

How can images of colonias found in the United States that comprise this work serve to articulate the exhibition situation of the 24th São Paulo Bienal?

To answer this question requires asking another question: what can we consider the work's "exhibition situation" to be exactly? Asher was one of six artists to represent the region "United States and Canada" in the group exhibition within the biennial itself called *"Roterios. Roterios. Roterios. Roterios. Roterios. Roterios. Roterios.*" (hereafter referred to as *Roteiros*,

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[265] Emphasis in original. Ivo Mesquita, entry for "Michael Asher," in *Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros.*, ed. Adriano Pedrosa (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1998), 130. The original text is written in Portuguese, with no English translation: "Desde o final dos anos 60, uma das premissas fundamentais do trabalho de Michael Asher é que uma "obra" não pode ser trazida de fora para uma *situação de exposição*, mas sim que essa situação é que deve ser articulada para transformar-se no objeto do trabalho ("obra"). Sua prática empenhase numa crítica sistemática às instituições que apresentam e representam obras de arte. Assim, todo o seu trabalho é produzido a partir da especificidade arquitetônica, social e histórica do *lugar de exposição*."

which translates to "Routes").[266] The *Roterios* exhibition was organized by ten curators who selected over fifty contemporary artists from seven global regions that were meant to represent the world within the context of the Bienal. *Roterios* appeared as a "biennial within the Biennial" one reviewer of the 24th São Paulo Bienal remarked,[267] and was only one of four exhibitions that comprised the entire Bienal, which was organized around the theme of *antropofagia*, or "cultural cannibalism." Should the exhibition situation be understood to be *Roterios,* the 24th São Paulo Bienal specifically, the São Paulo Bienal as a historical institution founded in 1951, or large-scale international biennials as a type of exhibition more generally?

What is the relationship between the "exhibition situation" and "the architectural, social, and historical specificity of the *place of exhibition*"? Should the latter be understood as the building designed by Niemeyer in 1951 now called the Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion? Since the Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion is one of five buildings that comprise an architectural complex called the Ibirapuera Park complex, should the "place of exhibition" be understood as the Ibirapuera Park complex instead [fig. 3.2]? (The Ibirapuera Park complex is connected by a marquee-covered walkway situated in the city's leafy 180-hectare [approx. 445 acres] Parque do Ibirapuera [hereafter referred to as Ibirapuera Park]). Or the city of São Paulo, or, more broadly, Brazil as a whole? What are the physical and conceptual limits of the work's "exhibition situation" and its "place of exhibition"?

This chapter explores the layered exhibition situation of the 24th São Paulo Bienal and how Asher's insertion of colonia photographs into the Bienal's Pavilion reveals a historical as well as a global perspective of its institutional context. The discussion tracks the research that the

[266] The other five artists representing "United States and Canada" were Janet Cardiff, Andrea Fraser, General Idea, Sherrie Levine, and Jeff Wall.

[267] María Elvria Iriarte, "24th São Paulo Biennial: A Cannibalist Proposal," *Art Nexus* (February–April 1999): 63.

artist conducted, his correspondence with curators and others regarding his project, and his site visits to two different locations: São Paulo and the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. By wrapping images of colonias around the columns in the Bienal's Pavilion, Asher's photo-based installation analogized the peripheral status of colonias in Texas with favela settlements that proliferated in São Paulo as the city became industrialized and sought to raise its international profile through large-scale modernist architectural projects, such as the Ibirapuera Park Complex, and the founding of major art institutions, such as the São Paulo Bienal, in mid-century Brazil. Asher's images of colonias, found on the border between the U.S. and Mexico, also questions the system of representing artists by location-based identity that international art biennials have traditionally relied on. As with his Stuart Collection work, in his work for the São Paulo Bienal Asher would coordinate a comparative logic; however, instead of juxtaposing two objects, he would bring one site in relation to another in order to reveal the historical and material conditions structuring the institutional site as ones that can be viewed as both local and global.

Key themes of the 24th São Paulo Bienal: Brazilian modernism and globalism

Although the São Paulo Bienal had been staged regularly since its founding in 1951, the 24th edition in 1998 was the first Bienal to take up a specifically Brazilian theme: *antropofagia* ("anthropophagy"). Whereas the 23rd São Paulo Bienal in 1996 took the theme "the dematerialization of the object of art"—referencing U.S. art critics John Chandler and Lucy Lippard's 1968 essay on conceptual art of the same title[268]—the 24th Bienal set out to assert an

[268] John Chandler and Lucy Lippard, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* (February 1968), 31–6. Lippard would extend her study and later publish the book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

explicitly Brazilian perspective.[269] The concept of *antropofagia* is intimately tied to a fervent period of 1920s Brazilian modernism. The concept, selected by curatorial director Paulo Herkenhoff, derives from Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto antropófago* ("Anthropophagite Manifesto") of 1928, in which Andrade cunningly reclaims the alleged indigenous Tupi Indian practice of consuming their most valiant enemy warriors as a foundational metaphor for a modern Brazilian identity, one based on the omnivorous "consumption" or appropriation of other cultural languages.[270] In the *Manifesto*, Andrade wittily declares: "Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question."[271] The manifesto appeared in the wake of the *Semana de Arte Moderna* ("Modern Art Week"), held at São Paulo's Municipal Theater in 1922. This landmark event of poetry readings, lectures, concerts, and exhibitions galvanized for the first time a modern art movement within the country and sparked a series of debates and competing models of nationalism and modernist art production in a drive to represent a new, self-consciously "Brazilian" national identity.[272]

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[269] The organizers of the Bienal did an about-face from the 23rd São Paulo Bienal, curated by Brazilian art history professor Nelson Aguilar. The previous Bienal edition in 1996 was loosely themed around "the dematerialization of the object of art at the end of the millennium," taking as its main reference American art critic Lucy Lippard's study *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object 1966–1972* (1973). See Edward Leffingwall's detailed review, "Report from Sao Paulo: Nationalism and Beyond," *Art in America* 85, no. 3 (March 1997): 34–40.

[270] "Tupi" is the generic name for the indigenous people of Brazil. They are the subject of Michel de Montaigne essay "On Cannibals" (1580).

[271] A pun on Shakespeare, this phrase is written in English, whereas the rest of the Manifesto (save for a few other words and phrases) is written in Portuguese. See Leslie Bary's translation with helpful annotations: Bary, "Cannibalist Manifesto," *Latin American Literary Review* 19, no. 38 (July–December 1991): 35–37.

[272] The concept of *antropofagia* was most thoroughly worked out in the sprawling historical survey exhibition *Núcleo Histórico: Antropofagia e Histórias de Canibalismos* (Historical Nucleus: Anthropophagy and Histories of Cannibalism), which took over the entire third floor of the Pavilion and was composed of twenty-seven subsections, organized by twenty-five curators, including Herkenhoff and Pedrosa. The smaller exhibition *Um e/entre Outro/s* (One and/among Other/s), which took up one third of

While prioritizing a specifically "Brazilian" perspective, the organizers of the 24th São Paulo Bienal, like so many exhibitions of this kind by the end of the 1990s, also attempted to be more globally inclusive. A core feature of the Bienal since its founding had been the National Representation section, which included the works of artists selected by a curator appointed by their respective country. In the 24th edition, the National Representation section included artworks representing sixty-six nations and took over the ground floor. The *Roteiros* exhibition was meant to complement the National Representation section. Instead of depending on the cooperation of foreign embassies to select their own curator for the National Representation section, *Roteiros* was created to ensure more curatorial control and sought to provide more equal geographic representation by exhibiting approximately the same number of artists for each of the seven transnational regions that were to represent the "world."

The *Roteiros* exhibition was organized by ten curators chosen by Herkenhoff and Adriano Pedrosa, adjunct curator of the 24th São Paulo Bienal. The seven regions represented in *Roteiros* were the United States and Canada, Latin America, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Oceania. In his introductory essay to the *Roterios* catalogue, Herkenhoff stated: "Africa, Latin America, Asia, Canada and the United States, Europe, Middle-East and Oceania constitute our 'Roteiros…,' defined not by a single criteria, but as a continent, economic block, or cultural regions."[273] *Roteiros* was situated on the second floor and included the works of fifty-three artists. The curators of *Roteiros* were requested to respond to the theme of *antropofagia*. In a working document sent to Asher in December of 1997 that listed drafts of summaries of the different sections comprising the upcoming Bienal, *Roteiros* is presented as follows:

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the second floor and featured the works of twenty-three contemporary Brazilian artists, also referred to the theme.

[273] Herkenhoff, "To come and go," *Roteiros*, 26.

> The title of this exhibition, which will feature about 50 contemporary artists from all over the world, was taken from Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropófago." In the "Manifesto," the word "Roteiros" [Routes] is repeated seven times, and seven are the regions from which the nine curators, some of them working in pairs, will be selecting artists.... All curators will respond and seek resonances to the "Manifesto" and the concept of *antropofagia*. Each individual project will maintain its curatorial and conceptual cohesion but will also be articulated through installation to provide and underline parallels, similarities, areas of dialogue, clash, and friction among the several "regional" exhibitions thus integrating the entire segment globally.[274]

The United States and Canada region in *Roteiros* was to be represented by artists associated with institutional critique. Ivo Mesquita, the curator of this section, loosely interpreted *antropofagia* as a strategy in which an art institution or the notion of art as an institution can be treated cannibalistically as "a ready-made-in-waiting (*ready-made retificado*)."[275] To him, the concept of institutional critique, a term and a category of art formed by art historians, critics, and artists in the 1980s, seemed particular to North American art.[276] In an essay for the Bienal's exhibition catalogue, he wrote:

> Museums and exhibitions in Canada and the United States have been the raw material for the work of artists found within what has been called *institutional critique*. This kind of production is not exclusive to these countries…but it

[274] "XXIV Bienal de São Paulo," n.d., unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[275] In his fragmented essay in the *"Roteiros"* catalogue, Mesquita explained: "The strategy of anthropophagy is analogous to the strategy of the ready-made. Both indicate the determination of choice, involvement with a less pure language, cultural renewal, 'the world's only law.' But this choice is, above all, a critical operation. It is not just any object, idea, or situation appropriated by an artist to constitute a ready-made, but before that it is an option for a particular object, idea or situation and their relation to particular contexts that confers meaning to it. Anthropophagy confiscates values, celebrates the memory of the dead, reinvesting them with meaning, through the 'renewed personal experience.'" (119) Mesquita was born and educated in São Paulo, but teaching at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College in New York at the time. Mesquita was very familiar with the São Paulo Bienal as an institution, having worked as a researcher and assistant curator for the São Paulo Bienal Foundation from 1980 to 1988 and as a guest curator for the 20th São Paulo Bienal in 1989. By then he was also familiar with art institutions in the U.S. and Canada, having organized exhibitions and art projects at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the public art program inSite '97 around the San Diego–Tijuana border, among other activities abroad, as an independent curator.

[276] Interview with Mesquita, April 18, 2014.

> presupposes societies in which cultural institutions present a high degree of specialization and are effectively inserted in the system of production and circulation of the economy. It assumes that the institutions institutionalize not the artistic production caught randomly but a sociocultural project where programs, roles, duties and responsibilities are made explicit.[277]

As an artist whose practice has been positioned as foundational to the discourse of institutional critique by art historians, critics, and artists, such as Craig Owens, Benjamin Buchloh, and Andrea Fraser, among others, Asher was high on the list of artists whom Mesquita contacted.

Site investigations

Around early October of 1997, Mesquita and Pedrosa went to visit Asher in Los Angeles and invited him to participate in the *Roteiros* exhibition of the 24th São Paulo Bienal, which was scheduled to open in about a year.[278] Pedrosa had been a student of Asher's post-studio class in 1993 at CalArts, where Asher had been teaching since 1973. Mesquita knew about Asher from his artworks as well as from mutual friends and colleagues who had worked with the artist, but he had not met him previously.[279] At the time of the visit, Asher tentatively agreed to participate in the Bienal, although his final decision was contingent upon a site visit to the Bienal's building in São Paulo. To prepare for his work, Asher would later conduct extensive research on informal housing areas in the U.S. as well as site visits to another location: the Rio Grande Valley in southern Texas. By tracking his research and activities during his site visits, we can see what

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[277] Ivo Mesquita, untitled text in *Roteiros,* 129.

[278] Letter from Adriano Pedrosa to Michael Asher, October 8, 1997, Michael Asher file, São Paulo Bienal Foundation Archives.

[279] At the time, Asher was also working closely with Mesquita's friend and colleague Lilian Tone, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, in New York, for the upcoming MoMA exhibition *Museum as Muse* (1999). Interview with Mesquita, April 18, 2014.

kind of materials Asher collected in order to understand better how he was defining and approaching the exhibition situation of the upcoming São Paulo Bienal.

Asher visited São Paulo in late January and early February of the following year. During his visit, Asher conducted research into the Bienal's Pavilion, the Pavilion's architect Oscar Niemeyer, and "the Bienal as an institution and an exhibition."[280] Asher was also taken around São Paulo by Mesquita. The two drove around to view the city's built environment and well-known works of architecture, particularly those designed by Niemeyer. Mesquita and Asher also went around the district of Morumbi, which includes some of the city's wealthiest neighborhoods as well as *Paraisópolis* ("Paradise city"), one of the city's largest favelas.[281] Mesquita recalled that Asher would repeatedly ask him about the real estate prices in different parts of the city. By the end of his two-week site visit, although he had not yet settled on a final project, Asher confirmed his participation and specifically requested to use the surfaces of the fourteen columns surrounding the Pavilion's atrium for his work.[282]

After his visit to São Paulo, Asher conducted research into informal housing areas on land under jurisdiction of the U.S. government, looking at locations within its fifty states as well as Puerto Rico, one of its territories. In an undated notebook filled with research notes, Asher wrote the following list:

> Possible sites
> Buffalo Hollow near Clairfield, Tenn.

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[280] In an email sent to other *"Roteiros"* curators at the end of January, Pedrosa updates them on the status of some of the invited artists. He mentions that Asher is presently "in São Paulo doing meticulous research for his work" and thinking of possible projects that include "considerations of the building, Niemeyer, the Bienal as an institution and an exhibition." Pedrosa also mentions that Asher is exploring "the possibility of 3 different projects." Email from Adriano Pedrosa to "Roteiros" curators, January 26, 1998, Michael Asher file, São Paulo Bienal Foundation Archives.

[281] Interview with Mesquita, April 18, 2014.

[282] Ibid.

(near trailer) (not enough)
Appalachia
Cumberland Mountains
Chicago (West Side)
Knoxville (sleeping in cardboard on streets)
Tchula, Mississippi
Lexington Miss
Egremont Miss
Greenville Miss
Freedom Village
Belle Glade, Florida – Haitian farm workers – Okeechobee projects
Chihuahuita slums, El Paso
Tulsa (East side)
Los Angeles (under freeways)
Puerto Rico / commonwealth to vote on statehood / Tras Talleres & Barrio Gandul in Santurce
(See if any spontaneous housing exists in the Florida Keys and in Alaska)[283]

From this list, we can see that Asher was initially considering and gathering information about a variety of types of sites, from a town (Buffalo Hollow in the Appalachian Mountains) to an entire mountain range and cultural region (Appalachia); from particular areas within a city (the West Side of Chicago, the East side of Tulsa) to types of building materials or locations in relation to a city's infrastructure (cardboard constructions on streets in Knoxville, under freeways in Los Angeles); diasporic communities near or in cities (Haitian workers in Belle Glade near Lake Okeechobee, Chihuahuita in south El Paso); from states to parts of states on the geographical boundaries of the U.S. (Florida Keys, Alaska) to U.S. territories (Puerto Rico).

Asher was looking for locations that would exemplify a particular type of housing construction. In an undated letter, Asher indicates what he has been researching and asks the recipient for suggestions of what to look up and where to look.[284] He wrote:

[283] Michael Asher, "Possible Sites," unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[284] Letter from Michael Asher to Carlos, n.d., unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation. It is not clear who "Carlos" is from this letter, nor are there other saved letters addressed to him that would give a clue as to his role or relationship to Asher's project.

> Enclosed are the best keywords I have found in the data bases [*sic*] other than the internet for the subject I am now searching.
>
> Shantytowns
> Squatter settlements
> Squatter housing
> Spontaneous housing
> Spontaneous settlements
> Ad hoc construction
> Do it yourself housing
> Self-built housing
> Colonias
>
> What I am looking for is where in the U.S. would one find the largest or best examples of this type of housing?
> What I am looking for are specific locations. IE where are these examples in relation to other cities?
> I'm also looking for more source material or databases which I haven't used such as journals and the like.[285]

From this letter, we can see that Asher was looking for areas in the U.S. defined by the prevalence of informal or self-constructed houses and locating them in relation to cities. He was also tracking and navigating the discourse through keywords and scholarly databases. At the bottom of this list, the term "colonias" appears. In contradistinction to the other terms on the list, "colonias" as a type of informal housing is linguistically and regionally specific to the southern parts of U.S. states that border Mexico, with Texas having the largest number of colonia developments and colonia residents. It is the term that Asher would eventually select as he investigated further into colonias located in Texas.

As he conducted research in libraries and databases, Asher took note of the names of organizations and people in Texas mentioned in publications to find out more information about colonia developments. Beginning in early June of 1998, Asher and his research assistant Leticia Dello Russo contacted the Texas Natural Resources Information Systems, Texas Water Development Board, Texas Low Income Housing Information Service, Border Association for

[285] Ibid.

Refugees and Colonia Advocacy, the Center for Housing and Urban Development at Texas A&M University, the Community Outreach Partnership Center at the University of Texas Pan-American, among other governmental, non-profit, and university-based centers to inquire about recent reports, maps, and references to other sources.

Asher also corresponded with a professor at the University of Texas Pan-American who had published on colonias in the region, mentioning that he was working on an artwork that would compare the uses of the terms "first world" and "third world." In a letter dated June 12, 1998, to Dr. Jose Hinojosa, a professor in the school's Political Science Department, Asher introduced himself and his project for the São Paulo Bienal as follows:

> I am an artist in California and am beginning to assemble an installation in Brazil which isolates contradictions in the uses of the terms first world and third world. Having read your name in the Progressive magazine of January 1996 regarding the settlements along the Rio Grande I have taken the liberty to write and find out if you could help.
>
> In this installation I would like to use the Favela/Colonia comparison. This would be represented through images of colonias which have similar characteristics as Favelas (providing this is possible).
>
> I was wondering if there is source material which could help me in finding such a comparison or if you had suggestions of particular Colonias?
>
> Also you mention in the article that one can find such settlements all over Texas. Since I am also interested in spontaneous shelter elsewhere (other than the Rio Grande area) again, perhaps you have some suggestions or can help me find source material on settlements in the greater part of Texas? Likewise do you know of sources for other states in the U.S. which might cover similar information? [...] [286]

The *Progressive* article, titled "Shantytown, U.S.A.: The boom on the border," that Asher referred to in his letter to Hinojosa includes the term "Third World" to describe the conditions in the colonias: "Public officials point to the Third World conditions in the colonias with a

[286] Letter from Michael Asher to Jose Hinojosa, June 12, 1998, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

combination of alarm and disgust."[287] An article in the journal *Habitat International* that Asher consulted (and would later cite in his introductory text) begins: "The State Comptroller of Texas remarked in 1989 that 'Tens of thousands of our fellow Texans are living in Third World conditions that are virtually unknown in other parts of Texas, and other parts of the country' (*Texas Observer*, 1989)."[288] In *Spontaneous Shelter: International Perspectives and Prospects*, a volume of essays edited by urban planner and scholar Carl V. Patton (and a copy of which Asher owned), the term "Third World" is defined in a footnote as follows:

> The terms *Third World*, *underdeveloped*, and *developing* countries tend to be used as synonyms. McGee (1971) defined "Third World" as: "that group of nations frequently labelled 'underdeveloped' which contains almost two-thirds of the world's population. Geographically it includes virtually all the countries of Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America and omits 'developed' nations such as South Africa, Israel and Japan. [It also excludes] the Communist countries of China, North Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba for their problems of development are being tackled in a different manner from that occurring in the non-Communist Third World nations.... A politically neutral term, the 'Third World'...distinguishes its countries from those of the capitalist developed world or the Communist World."[289]

Asher was seeking to "isolate" the "contradictions" in how the terms "first world" and "third world" were used in the different articles and books he was reading. One way to express this, as he mentioned in his letter to Hinojosa, would be through a comparison of "favela" and "colonia." Doing so would set up "comparative relations" between the housing constructions found in those types of settlements as well as the sites themselves: two types of spaces with generally rudimentarily constructed houses that have proliferated in the absence of governmental oversight but in different geographic locations, one in a nation considered "Third World" and another as

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[287] Philip True, "Shantytown, U.S.A.: The boom on the border." *Progressive* 60, no. 1 (January 1996): 25.

[288] Christopher Davies and Robert Holz, "Settlement Evolution of 'Colonias' Along the U.S.–Mexico Border: The Case of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas," *Habitat International* 16, no. 4 (1992), 125.

[289] Carl V. Patton, ed., "Introduction," in *Spontaneous Shelter: International Perspectives and Prospects*, xv, fn 1.

"First World." Doing so would not only implicitly put into question the "political neutrality" of the term "Third World," but question as well the presumed distinction between the terms "First World" and "Third World," between the "capitalist developed world" (and the "Communist world") from other countries. Although at this point Asher was still searching for areas of "spontaneous shelter" in different parts of the U.S., by the end of the month he would choose to use colonias in the Rio Grande Valley as his point of comparison for favelas in Brazil. (In late August, Hinojosa would reply to Asher and send him two conference papers he had recently given, one of which Asher quoted in his introductory wall label.)

Asher took two ten-day trips to southern Texas in July and August of 1998.[290] He flew there with Andrew Freeman, an artist and former student of his at CalArts. An artist who works in photography, Freeman used a large format camera to photograph houses in colonias as the two drove along the Rio Grande from Brownsville to El Paso, from the southernmost tip of Texas to its western end. The two stopped by colonias in about eleven different counties in the state. Once parked, at each location, they moved slowly through the neighborhoods, carrying around a large, bulky camera and necessary equipment. They moved unhurriedly in order to move predictably to anyone who might be watching, to give locals a chance to approach them and inquire what they were doing.[291] Freeman is credited for taking thirteen of the photographs; Asher is credited for one.

The photographs that Freeman and Asher took show parts of neighborhoods: clusters of individual houses, their spatial arrangements in relation to one another, the roads that connect

[290] Interview with Andrew Freeman, January 20, 2015.

[291] Ibid.

them, and their surrounding landscapes.[292] One notices the variety of construction styles and building materials used (plywood, trailers and other prefabricated structures, cinderblocks, sheets of corrugated metal, wooden pallets, stucco, tar paper). The houses take a range of different sizes, forms, and colors, often eye-catchingly bright ones. From the images, one senses what infrastructure is or is not available in the areas (some photos show telephone lines, others do not; one photo shows a fire hydrant). Nearly all of the roads in the images are unpaved; in one photo, one can see a large puddle in the middle of the road as clouds darken and gather in the horizon (One recalls from Asher's introductory text: "Colonia dirt roads are often quagmires after spring and fall rains and dust raising dry deep-set ruts in the summer"). A few cars appear parked next to houses. Some photographs show glimpses into the desolate expanse beyond.

The vividly colored photographs are composed to bring focus on their subject matter: examples of architecture in the colonias. There is much the photographs do not (and perhaps cannot) convey, such as the isolation of many of these colonias from towns and cities and the inhospitable landscape in which many of them have developed. From the photographs one cannot sense the unbearable heat that Asher and Freeman experienced during their trips to Texas. During their first trip, many of the negatives buckled, making the images out of focus. (This is the reason for Asher's return during the summer: to shoot better images.)[293] The photographs do not show any people, although Freeman recalled that they did encounter some, such as one

[292] A full count of the photographs taken in the archive would have to be conducted, but the number of negatives is in the hundreds.

[293] Freeman used a larger film format the second time around, 6 x 9 instead of 4 x 5.

person who was hauling large plastic containers of water in the back of a truck, or another person fishing in an agricultural runoff.[294]

Asher did not simply go to the physical sites of the colonias, however. He also spoke with people who had first-hand knowledge of the housing developments and, when possible, with some of their residents. In a fax to Pieter Tjabbes, the Bienal's international manager, Asher explained certain project expenses noting, "It was impossible for me to know my material without discussing problems with field workers assigned to the colonias."[295] Asher sought to find translators who were familiar with some of the colonias he planned to visit on his trip in August, specifying that the photos would only be of "colonia architecture and not of its people."[296] On the road, Freeman and Asher were prepared with a short project statement written in English and Spanish (the two artists could not speak Spanish). It read:

> To those who are interested in this photo project.
>
> We are taking photographs of several colonias in South Texas.
> The photos will be exhibited in Brazil where settlements with similar characteristics are located.
> This project uses images of housing to suggest that the term "First World Nation" is sometimes based upon what hasn't been represented.[297]

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[294] As Freeman remembers, he and Asher reasoned that few people seemed to be outside because of the unbearable heat, but also perhaps due to the fact that a number of colonia residents are thought to be migrant workers, and so traverse the country seasonally depending on opportunities for work. Interview with Freeman, January 20, 2015. In a study on colonias published in 1992 (one of the articles cited by Asher in his introductory text), Robert K. Holz and C. Shane Davies state, "Unemployment in colonias hovers around 40% with the most frequently cited occupations being field work (30%), construction (24%), factory work (15%), custodial services (10%), and retail/sales or 'other' absorbing the remainder." Holz and Davies, "Settlement Evolution of 'Colonias' Along the U.S.–Mexico Border: The Case of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas," *Habitat International* 16, no. 4 (1992), 125.

[295] Fax from Michael Asher to Pieter Tjabbes, August 6, 1998. Michael Asher file, São Paulo Bienal Foundation Archives.

[296] Letter from Michael Asher to Katy Kowierschki (spelling unclear), August 9, 1998, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[297] Letter from Michael Asher to Jose Hinojosa, August 29, 1998, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

The statement lets residents know that the photographs of housing taken in South Texas would be exhibited in Brazil, where areas of housing with "similar characteristics" (favelas) are located. Asher also indicates that the project will be examining the term "First World Nation" through what such a term excludes, or its reliance on what has not been represented in relation to it, which in this case would be the colonias in the U.S.

As Asher was conceptualizing his work, he kept in touch with organizers at the São Paulo Bienal Foundation to update them on his thinking. In a letter to Pedrosa sent in late February of 1998, Asher spoke of an idea that would involve sites in the U.S. using the term "shantytown": "I am sorting out information at the library so I will have a clear route through the U.S. if I follow the Shantytown project."[298] By early May, Asher had notified Mesquita that he was still working out ideas for his project, which would involve the term "favela."[299] By early June, Asher told Mesquita about his idea to photograph colonias.[300] Although it appears that Asher never wrote a project statement sent in advance of installation to Mesquita, in a hand-written text titled "Sao Paulo Bienal Description," written in November of 1998 (after the exhibition's opening), we can see how the artist articulated the conceptual structure of his work as well as the perspective through which he saw the colonias. Asher stated:

> My intent in this project had to do with the assumption that the U.S. was advanced in every way in relation to Brazil. Likewise I wanted to begin an inquiry

[298] Letter from Michael Asher to Adriano Pedrosa, February 23, 1998, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

[299] Letter from Ivo Mesquita to Tjabbes and Roteiros curators, March 3, 1998, Michael Asher file, São Paulo Bienal Foundation Archives. Mesquita informs the group that Asher's project is still in progress and notes that the theme of the work will be "favelas."

[300] Letter from Monica de Carvalho to Michael Asher, June 12, 1998, Michael Asher file, São Paulo Bienal Foundation Archives. De Carvalho writes to Asher to say that Mesquita informed her of the colonias photography project and requests a price estimate for the project.

> about the supposed differences of a developing nation and the industrialized ones or the common third world/first world comparison.
>
> To begin this inquiry I employed images of spontaneous housing areas in Texas (or the Texas Colonias) as a point to begin to stand in comparison to the favella [*sic*] which turns out to be a commensurate structure in Brazil.
>
> To begin with I didn't use images of utter poverty or people living in crates or holes in the ground. Neither did I use complete ramshackle housing for fear that the viewer would think I sought isolated conditions of housing to make my point.
>
> The colonias were similar in many ways particularly in lack of infrastructure. The homes were put together often with that which could be recycled. Lack of money seemed to be the most consistent measure of describing the building conditions which were almost always substandard. It also expressed on [*sic*] how things were built. Often each home was constructed as the owner had money whether it was completing a home which was only half for a number of years or it was expressed through a series of add ons over time.[301]

In his project, Asher intended to juxtapose the country in which the institutional site was located (Brazil) with another country that would provide a comparative contrast to it (the U.S.) in such a way that would weaken assumptions about how these two places are conventionally thought to differ. By drawing attention to marginalized spaces with self-constructed housing and poor living conditions that exist in both countries, through his project Asher would point out that one cannot be viewed as more "advanced" than the other as the terms "First World" and "Third World" would indicate or imply. Asher was deliberate in picturing a certain kind of imagery. As he mentioned, no images of "utter poverty" or "ramshackle housing" were used to avoid representing "isolated conditions of housing." Instead, the images were chosen to convey clearly the material circumstances of their making and to bring out their commonalities: the recurring

[301] Michael Asher, "Sao Paulo Bienal Description," November 1998, unprocessed file, Michael Asher papers, Michael Asher Foundation.

use of recycled materials, substandard building constructions, houses that reflected the saved earnings of their owners over time through cumulative add-ons.[302]

Installation issues

In the months leading up to the opening of the Bienal, Asher sent, with greater frequency, faxes to Mesquita and Monica de Carvalho, an assistant of Tjabbes's, regarding updates, questions, and concerns about his project and the work's upcoming installation. A great deal of consideration was given to the work's technical and material details, such as what type of glue would be used, what type of print process would be used for the photographs, and how to insure against problems that might arise during the installation of the work. Asher imagined handling the photographs as a kind of "wall paper."[303] In a fax to Carvalho, Asher explains:

> I have been trying to adapt wall paper adhesives to inkjet media which is not used as such in the U.S. The wall paper hanging that I am aware of uses water on the front and adhesive on the back which allows the paper to shrink, equally, as it dries. It also allows the paper to pull into the wall (a condition which is important to my idea).[304]

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[302] Asher also noted the non-visible factors that condition these housing developments: the "lack of legal jurisdiction" of the land on which colonias are built and the widespread lack of sewage systems. He wrote: "Lack of infrastructure not only included unpaved roads in many colonias but went as far as there being a lack of legal jurisdiction on what was believed to be useless land." (Ibid.) The legal jurisdiction of the colonias in relation to the concept of "invisibility" is an area to be further explored.

[303] For example, in a fax to Mesquita, Asher states: "I have communicated with Ronaldo about an expert to handle putting up the wall paper. He mentioned that there are good wallpaper people there (in Sao Paulo) but not necessarily the type I need. Actually, I think ["most people"? text is illegible here] with a little background in hanging wallpaper can put this work up if they are extremely careful. The reason I hope to find someone like the woman who has been helping [to] test the glues and prints, is if something goes wrong such as in the expansion and contraction of the paper or picking up edges or lifting a part off which was already down. I would like to have someone very knowledgeable of the medium to catch these problems." Fax from Michael Asher to Ivo Mesquita, August [date illegible], 1998, São Paulo Bienal Foundation Archives.

[304] Fax from Michael Asher to Monica de Carvalho, September 4, 1998, Michael Asher file, São Paulo Bienal Foundation Archives.

This effect of the photographs "pulling" themselves into a surface was critical for Asher and would eventually determine the type of printing process used for the photographs. Ink-jet prints using pigmented dyes were eventually made from the 6 x 9 negatives since their water-resistant nature would better prevent the images from blurring when water-based adhesive was applied, although as Asher regretfully noted, "unfortunately, they alter the color by 20%."[305] The photographs were not to read as "fine art" in themselves, protectively encased behind a frame or a glossy surface. Instead they were to be seen as thin sheets of paper delivering images, wrapped around parts of the building's architecture, glued in such a way that they seemed to merge with the building's inner skin. This way, one would not be able to read the images apart from their architectural supports, as it would become physically one with it.

Asher arrived in São Paulo a few weeks before the Bienal's opening to oversee the installation of his work. One particular moment of tension occurred during the installation period that is revealing about how Asher intended his work to be perceived. Before going to São Paulo, Asher had requested Mesquita to prepare the columns for the photographs, to even out any irregularities and to re-paint parts as needed to prevent the photographs from tearing when installed. The photographs, he warned, were "very fragile and there would be only one [copy of each print]."[306] Due to a miscommunication, however, Mesquita had whole parts of the fourteen columns repainted before the artist's arrival. What Asher had meant, as Mesquita found out shortly after the artist arrived in São Paulo, was for the columns to be prepared *only* in the areas where the photographs were to be pasted. Mesquita recalls that when Asher saw the newly

[305] Ibid.

[306] Asher, fax to Ivo Mesquita, dated August [date illegible], 1998. Actually, Asher had two sets made. He made the Foundation document the destruction of the second set so that the photographs could not be saved or used in any way.

painted columns, the artist went "wild."[307] Asher was adamant that the columns had to be "the way they were" and insisted that the new paint be taken off despite the worrying delay this would cause, in order to recover the columns' accumulations of marks, their previous scratches, peeling layers, leftovers from accidents. The blanketing layer of new paint had changed the significance of the columns for Asher. They had become seemingly timeless, abstract space, "white columns" that essentially functioned as a kind of "white cube." The photographs were intended to be viewed as yet another incidence of use onto the visible histories of the columns. Asher did not want to cover over the past use of the columns, and their re-painting had rendered those other histories invisible.[308]

Re-framing how one views the Bienal's architecture

Unlike most other artworks in the Bienal, such as Choi's *Encore, Encore, Encore* and Allora and Calzadilla's *Charcoal Dance Floor* mentioned earlier, Asher's installation intended to make the visitor more cognizant of the surrounding architecture. The sheer size of the installation, and the extended experience of looking while walking around the atrium it would have required, is itself striking. The atrium is located between two rows of seven columns, which stand 10 meters (approx. 33 feet) apart, meaning that a visitor would have had to walk 140 meters (approx. 460 feet), at bare minimum, to view all fourteen photographs [fig. 3.3]. Through Asher's installation, one would have become aware of how the building's interior structures allow and facilitate certain bodily movements, and impede or restrict others. The vast installation

[307] Interview with Mesquita, April 18, 2014. The subsequent details about the process of installing Asher's work come from this interview.

[308] Interview with Mesquita, April 18, 2014.

also would not have been visible as a whole from any vantage point, parts always hidden from view, obscured by the columns, the snaking handrail, or the large spiraling ramp.

Even some of the work's separate elements would have been difficult to grasp visually. For example, the photographs were large enough to take up nearly the entire circumference of each column. Therefore, the photographs would have appeared to be constantly slipping out of view, no matter from which angle they were approached [fig. 3.4]. Viewers would have had to walk around each column to see a photograph in its entirety, which would not have been visible in one glance, but unfolded over time. Nine of the fourteen columns used in Asher's installation are freestanding; the photographs on those columns could have been seen all the way around at a close distance. The other five columns used in his installation, however, are located at different points along the atrium's curvilinear edge; the visitor is physically separated from those columns by a handrail. To look more closely at the photographs on those columns, one would have had to crane his or her neck over the handrail, only to receive a partial view of the image. One could attain a more complete view of those photographs from the opposite side of the atrium, but only from a gaping distance.

The main visual focus of the exhibition space is a sweeping, horseshoe-shaped pedestrian ramp located in an atrium created by a free-form shape cut out of the second- and third-story floor slabs on the northeastern end of the Pavilion [fig. 3.5]. The long and rigidly rectilinear shell of the Pavilion seen from the exterior belies—and once inside, it enhances—the dynamic rhythm governing its interior. The eye-catching pedestrian ramp grandly and circuitously advances upwards from the ground to the top floor (and in the reverse). The ramp's handrails temporarily depart from the circling path of the ramp to become the curvilinear handrails for the second and third floor balconies, seamlessly transitioning from vertical to horizontal, and then back again.

Niemeyer's signature curvilinear contours—which were first showcased in a design produced in collaboration with his former teacher and mentor Lucio Costa for their widely acclaimed Brazilian Pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair in New York—takes on a new dimension in the Bienal's Pavilion, designed in 1951. The free-flowing mezzanine slab floor and handrail of the Brazilian Pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair irregularly weaved their way through a line of steel columns only to end tamely in a short staircase that shot down in a straight line [fig. 3.6]. Instead, in the Bienal's Pavilion, the staircase is transformed into a ramp that itself becomes the main visual feature. The curvilinear contours of the slab floors join the ramp and draw visitors in as if into a swirling vortex, only to release them on a different floor.

The overall design of the Pavilion functions to awe incoming visitors—to keep them looking around in surprise and delight—as much as to keep them moving. Supplementing the main spiraling ramp is an escalator, and a set of stairs just adjacent to it, in the center of the building on the second and third floors [fig. 3.7]. A technological novelty when the building first opened to the public in 1953, the escalator would have been an object of wonderment in itself, in addition to facilitating a frictionless sense of movement between floors. Facing off the ramp's visual unleashing of the expanded sculptural possibilities of reinforced concrete (supported by technological advancements invisibly embedded into the densely opaque material), the escalators efficiently carry out the same purpose in a more subdued fashion.[309] An additional entrance and exit route is provided by a freestanding linear ramp outdoors connected to all of the building's levels on the far southwest end of the building. Coming from outside, visitors are encouraged

[309] The works at Pampulha, especially the Casa do Baile and the chapel, illustrate Niemeyer's first attempts to push reinforced concrete to its sculptural limits. "Here Niemeyer freed modern architecture of the rigid prescriptions of orthogonal design by demonstrating the plastic and expressive potentials of reinforced concrete and by achieving lyrical structural lightness, sculptural freedom, and curved monumentality." David Underwoood, *Oscar Niemeyer and Brazilian Free Form Modernism* (New York, 1994), 65.

into the building, visually beckoned by its soaring, sinuous features; once inside, they look around and circulate. Nowhere is this viewing dynamic more charged than around the ramp, opening unto a view of the building's curving features and the swarming bodies of other visitors, a shifting panorama of ever-changing sights continuously unfolding into an extravagant and seemingly endless spectacle set up by and within the building's interior.

In contrast to this, the experience of viewing Asher's installation would have interrupted the flow of bodies facilitated by the Pavilion's architecture. In order to see the entire photographic series and to comprehend the installation's spatial layout, the visitor would have had to circle around each column (when possible) in addition to circling the atrium. A viewer who might have been intrigued by the colorful photo series, these regularly occurring images of modest housing developments, would have been circulating around inside, but at a much slower rate than the other visitors, out of step with them. The photographs punctuate the space around the ramp and atrium, causing the viewer to decrease his or her speed periodically, and perhaps come to a momentary rest at times.

Whereas most of the other artworks might be said to have been contained and framed by the building's architecture, Asher's artwork "frames" the architecture in the sense that his work makes one aware of it and re-directs how one sees and navigates it. Asher's installation explicitly involved the building's inner architecture, thus implicitly involving the viewer's engagement with it as well. The placement of the photographs on the columns causes one to *see* the columns, to acknowledge their material presence and function. They are what support the entire weight of the building. The top edges of the photographs were positioned to align with the top edges of the curving handrail. This would have given continuity to the photographs and further integrated the images into the surrounding architecture. It would also have made one more aware of the

material existence of the handrail and its function. The handrail is essentially a barrier, one that keeps people from falling headlong into the atrium. It also serves a less obvious function of producing a visual frame through which to view the ramp and the atrium. The handrail plays a crucial role in creating visual coherence and thus in directing one's visual focus towards the ramp and the space around it. Asher's work would have reframed the visitor's perception of the building's interior by dispersing its central visual focus, nudging the visitor to see the supporting columns meant to disappear from view and to see the handrail as a handrail and as a mechanism of visual control. His work asked the visitor to keep looking around, and to question what he or she was seeing.

Asher's work can also be read in relation to Niemeyer's original plan for the Pavilion. In the original plan, the ground floor was to remain completely open—not glassed in on all four sides as it is presently.[310] Following a method developed by Swiss-born, Paris-based architect Le Corbusier—whose architectural work, writings, and person were of enormous influence on Niemeyer and other modernist architects in Brazil[311]—the building was to be lifted off the ground by a grid of exposed *pilotis*, in order to allow air, light, and people to circulate freely outside and underneath its massive elongated structure. In its original design, then, the curving pedestrian ramp, which begins on the ground floor, would have bridged the ground outdoors and the building's voluptuous interior, the open space of the atrium registering in this scenario as located both outside *and* inside. Had Niemeyer's original design for the building been faithfully

[310] As co-curatorial director of the 28th São Paulo Bienal in 2008, Ivo Mesquita proposed to temporarily dismantle the glass walls on the ground floor of the Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion to realize Niemeyer's original design. See Mesquita and Ana Paulo Cohen, "Introduction," *28th Bienal de São Paulo: Em Vivo Contato* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2008), 18. The proposal was not carried out due to prohibitive costs. See Vinicius Spricigo's "Changes in the Strategies of (Re)Presentation at the São Paulo Biennial," in *The Biennial Reader*, ed. Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, Solveig Øvstebø (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall and Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010): 346–59.

realized, the area around the building's ramp and atrium—highlighted by the guiding lines of the handrails—would have revealed an intrinsically confusing space, in which the indoors fuses with the outdoors, and verticality with horizontality.

Asher's installation, in bringing images of houses of the working class and poor located on urban peripheries into the building's interior, could be seen to have slyly carried out what was implicit in the building's original conceptual premise: to bring the outside in. But if Niemeyer's design was to execute this concept only abstractly, in formal terms of mass, surface, light, and space, Asher's installation opened the work to the outside using terms normally deemed *ex*trinsic to discussions of form: the material conditions and social relations that make such aesthetic production possible in the first place. From this perspective, Asher's approach in this work is as a historical materialist, as Karl Marx would define the term.[312] As Asher's drinking fountain for the Stuart Collection contextualized the founding of UCSD during the Cold War boom, so did his untitled installation for the 24th São Paulo Bienal situate the origins of the Bienal "as an institution and an exhibition" within the social and political context of the Pavilion's construction at mid-century, a momentous period in Brazil's history.

History of the São Paulo Bienal's Pavilion and Origins

> By its own definition, the Bienal should fulfill two principle tasks: to place the modern art of Brazil not simply in confrontation, but in living contact with the art of the rest of the world, while at the same time seeking to conquer for São Paulo a position as a world art center.

[312] In a preface to his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Karl Marx famously stated: "Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production."

—Lourival Gomes Machado, "Introduction" to *I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo*, 1951[313]

The building now named the "Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion" was originally designated as the "Pavilhão das Indústrias" ("Pavilion of Industries," also translated as "Pavilion of Industry"), part of a sprawling outdoor multi-Pavilion complex in the northern part of what was being developed as Ibirapuera Park.[314] Although government officials in São Paulo had first discussed the creation of a large municipal park in the 1920s, concrete movement towards that goal only

[313] Original text: "Por sua própria definição, a Bienal deveria cumprir duas tarefas principais: colocar a arte moderna do Brasil, não em simples confronto, mas em vivo contacto com a arte do resto do mundo, ao mesmo tempo que para São Paulo se buscaria conquistar a posição de centro artístico mundial." A translation can be found in Michael Asbury's "The Bienal de São Paulo: Between Nationalism and Internationalism," in *Espaço Aberto/Espaço Fechado: Sites for Sculpture in Modern Brazil* (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2006), 73.

[314] The construction of Ibirapuera Park and its Niemeyer-designed complex should be seen in historical context of the heavy investment in modernist architectural projects that began during the presidential regime of Getúlio Vargas. After campaigning unsuccessfully as the reform candidate for the presidency of Brazil in 1930, Vargas led a revolution later that year supported by factions of the growing urban middle class and the military that effectively marked the end of the ruling power of coffee growers and *café com leite* ("coffee with milk") politics. If Brazil's economy towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century had been dominated by the export of primary agricultural products—especially coffee beans, but also rubber, cocoa, and cotton—and the import of manufactured goods, the impact of the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Vargas administration that came into power in 1930 caused the country to switch gears. Whereas the Old Republic (1889-1930) dominated by the coffee oligarchy has been characterized as a federation of autonomous states dominated by rural landholders and financed largely by the proceeds of agricultural exports, Vargas quickly centralized authority in the country and focused on promoting industrialization, urbanization, social welfare, as well as nationalism. As architect and architectural historians Michael Hensel and Rumi Kubokawa have noted, "Although bureaucratic and authoritarian, it [the Vargas administration] established the basis of the technocracy, the welfare state, and the industrial plant of modern Brazil, as well as a growing political patronage for modernist culture and architecture." Michael Hensel and Rumi Kubokawa, "Building Brazil, Part I: 1900–1964," *AA Files*, no. 37 (Autumn 1998): 50. For a more nuanced account of how the Vargas administration consciously shaped the cultural and political landscapes as state-centered and nationalist through public building projects and canon formation, see Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime, 1930–1945* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007). In 1945, Vargas was overthrown in a coup d'état but elected as President in 1950. In the following years, growing inflation and the decision by the United States to cut public investment in Brazil led to an economic crisis. Vargas committed suicide in 1954, the year that also marks the 400th anniversary of the founding of São Paulo. Styliane Philippou notes that the Bienal's Pavilion was originally the "Pavilion of Industries" in *Oscar Niemeyer: Curves of Irreverence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 169.

began in the late 1940s and early 1950s as the city started to prepare for a massive celebration to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the founding of São Paulo, which was to be held in 1954. The Comissão do IV Centenário da Cidade de São Paulo (Commission of the Fourth Centenary of the City of Sao Paulo) was established in 1951 with the wealthy industrialist and cultural patron Francisco "Ciccillo" Matarazzo Sobrinho as head of the steering committee. To design a complex of "pavilions" that could function as spaces for exhibitions, the centennial commission led by Matarazzo selected a design team headed by Niemeyer, who was based in Rio de Janiero, and included local architects Zenon Lotufo, Eduardo Kneese de Mello, and Hélio Uchôa Cavalcanti, and their associates Gauss Estelita and Carlos Lemos.[315] Roberto Burle Marx, who was the country's foremost landscape architect and a frequent collaborator of Niemeyer's, was commissioned to design the grounds of the park. Although the initial idea was to produce a set of temporary structures, plans soon changed in favor of constructing an array of permanent buildings, ones that still stand and are in use today.

In the final version of the architectural plan for the Ibirapuera Park complex that was officially approved in 1953, a core of five buildings are connected by a sinuous, free-form marquee in the northern end of the park, a network of white geometric forms that would be set into a vibrant green landscape. Three rectangular block-shaped pavilions made of glass and concrete—the Pavilion of Industry, the Pavilion of Nations (Pavilhão das Nações) and Pavilion of States (Pavilhão dos Estados)—are directly linked to the marquee, while the Pavilion of the Arts (Pavilhão das Artes) and Auditorium (Auditório, which was not built until 2002–05) were to

[315] The first design team consisted of São Paulo–based architects Rino Levi, Oswaldo Arthur Bratke, and Eduardo Kneese de Mello.

be indirectly linked to the marquee by a narrow walkway and entrance platform.[316] The plan represents an image of a microcosm, in which a global exchange of exhibitions representing the states of Brazil, nations outside of Brazil, domestic and foreign industries and the arts could commingle, with the underlying implication that dialogue and collaboration with these political, economic, and cultural representatives could facilitate the rise of São Paulo and, by extension, Brazil.[317]

The architectural complex at Ibirapuera Park opened to public fanfare when the site was inaugurated in 1954 for São Paulo's Fourth Centennial celebration. The site was successful at projecting an image of São Paulo as a modernized city, an engine of industry and culture that would spearhead the construction of a fully modern Brazil.[318] Structural engineer Joaquim Cardoza, in a 1952 text supplementing a publication of Niemeyer's earlier design scheme, presents the project's aim as being "to communicate... the importance and the degree of technical and industrial development of this great state during its four centuries of existence."[319] Recognizable forms and features deriving from the modernist vocabulary of renowned architect Le Corbusier—including *brises-soleil*, curtain walls, open plans, and *pilotis*—and the use of advanced engineering and construction techniques by local firms and laborers using Brazilian

[316] The Pavilion of Agriculture (Pavilhão de Agricultura) and a lakeside restaurant (never built) were to be built on the perimeter of the site. The relative isolation of Pavilion of Agriculture is indicative of the demoted status that agriculture would take during the rise of Brazil's new industrial face.

[317] Adele Nelson makes this point in her dissertation "The Monumental and the Ephemeral: The São Paulo Bienal and the Emergence of Abstraction in Brazil, 1946–1954," (Ph.D. dissertation, New York: New York University, 2012), 236–37.

[318] Ibid., 242.

[319] *Ante-Projeto da Exposição do IV Centenário de São Paulo*, 1952. Quoted in Philippou, *Oscar Niemeyer*, 167.

steel, iron, aluminum, and concrete provided hard evidence of the city's—and metonymically, of the nation's—cultural, technological, and economic development.[320]

Matarazzo was an instrumental force behind both the construction of Ibirapuera Park and the founding of the São Paulo Bienal. In 1951, Matarazzo became chair of the Commission of the Fourth Centenary of the City of São Paulo and commissioned Niemeyer to design the Ibirapuera Park complex. That same year Matarazzo also organized the first São Paulo Bienal, modeled after the Venice Biennale founded in 1895.[321] Modernist architectural projects and the development of modern art institutions were both key strategies in mid-century Brazil to promote the visibility of its cities and nation to international audiences. This was particularly the case in São Paulo, whose economy and population had risen quickly beginning in the late 19th century and both of which surpassed those of Rio by the 1950s. In his introduction to the exhibition catalogue for the first São Paulo Bienal, artistic director Lourival Gomes Machado announces that the objectives of the Bienal are twofold: to place Brazilian art (and artists, presumably) in "living contact" with works of art from abroad while also securing São Paulo's position as a "world art center." If images of Brazilian modernist architecture and Brazilian architects working and traveling abroad were helping to raise Brazil's visibility through their circulation, the São Paulo Bienal would help to raise the visibility of its city and nation through an institutional

[320] Architectural community was divided. See Max Bill's criticism "Report on Brazil," *The Architectural Review* 116, no. 649 (October 1954): 235–40.

[321] From 1946 to 1947 Matarazzo traveled around Europe, viewing and purchasing works of art. During this time, in a health clinic in Davos, Switzerland, Matarazzo met German art gallery owner Karl Nierendorf, who had re-located to New York. Matarazzo had extensive discussions with Nierendorf about modern art; Nierendorf would help Matarazzo organize his first exhibition of modern art that would open two years later. It was also during this trip that Matarazzo visited the Venice Biennale for the first time in 1946.

model that would require the active engagement of numerous players, locally, nationally, and internationally, on a regular basis of every two years.[322]

The São Paulo Bienal has become synonymous with the Niemeyer-designed former Pavilion of Industry, which has housed the event since its fourth edition in 1957 and has often been featured in some form in their exhibition catalogues over the years. The first Bienal in 1951 was held in a temporary pavilion of modernist design and the historic ballroom of the Terraço do Trianon (Trianon Terrace), which would be demolished shortly thereafter. The choice of site was significant: the Trianon Terrace was one of the most important gathering places for São Paulo's upper class in the 1910s and 1920s located on Paulista Avenue, a main thoroughfare lined with the mansions of once-powerful coffee barons, which was then being transformed into a business district. The São Paulo Bienal moved to Ibirapuera Park for its second edition in 1953–1954, which was delayed to coincide with the Fourth Centennial of São Paulo. If the First Bienal, which exhibited over 1,800 artworks from twenty-three countries with about 50,000 visitors in attendance, had received enthusiastic applause, the Second Bienal received the equivalent of a standing ovation, as well as unprecedented government funding.[323] The Second Bienal, often referred to as the "*Guernica* Bienal," exhibited over 3,300 artworks from 33 countries and featured a series of special monographic exhibitions on Pablo Picasso (whose monumental *Guernica* painting, on loan from MoMA in New York, was on display), Alexander Calder, Piet Mondrian, Paul Klee, Edvard Munch, James Ensor, among other major European and U.S. artists. Held in the Pavilion of Nations and Pavilion of States for its second and third editions, the

[322] Nelson, "The Monumental and the Ephemeral," 103.

[323] Artigas, "São Paulo de Ciccillo Matarazzo (Ciccillo Matarazzo's São Paulo)," 67.

by then established São Paulo Bienal settled permanently into the former Pavilion of Industry in Ibirapuera Park for subsequent editions.

By establishing the São Paulo Bienal, Matarazzo created an institution that would engage key figures, within and outside of Brazil, in its exhibition production. The São Paulo Bienal would be an international venue for the visual arts as well as a medium for cultural diplomacy that could lead to economic gain, since it would be less likely for a foreign government to refuse to participate in an international art biennial.[324] At the time Brazil was an attractive market for U.S. and European exports and was becoming a significant economic force abroad. Another important consequence of founding the São Paulo Bienal was gaining support from private individuals and enterprises and various levels of governments within Brazil (with the founding of the Bienal, Matarazzo convinced other wealthy members of São Paulo's elite to sponsor various prizes at the event, which would be named in honor of them).[325] The goal of presenting large-scale international exhibitions of current art that seemed difficult to achieve in Brazil through the traditional structure of a museum could now be realized to a greater degree with the establishment of an international art biennial.

Peripheral Developments

Asher's installation brings into the interior of the São Paulo Bienal's Pavilion images of houses of the working class and poor on the urban peripheries. In this way, his work can be viewed as referring to the presence of favelas outside Ibirapuera Park and the center of São Paulo, in neighborhoods such as Morumbi, which Asher had seen the previous year. The placement of these images around the atrium and around each column echo the peripheral status

[324] Nelson, "The Monumental and the Ephemeral," 103.

[325] Ibid., 104.

and locations of these developments. Asher's images of these houses remind the viewer of what and who is excluded or rendered invisible in the projection of an industrially and culturally developed—a fully modernized—Brazil to international audiences, an image supported by monumental modernist structures (Niemeyer's Ibirapuera Park complex) and the establishment of art institutions (the São Paulo Bienal).

Asher's work, however, only indirectly spoke about the phenomenon and conditions of favelas: it did so through analogy. Favelas developed in Brazil as squatter settlements in undesirable areas of the city, on the hillsides of Rio considered too steep to build on, or, more commonly, on the fringes of cities when unclaimed land was still historically available, as in the case of São Paulo and Brasília. Historian Janice Perlman has remarked that although favelas may differ widely in appearance—for example, some more spread out than overcrowded, or some made from more durable construction materials than others—"what ultimately distinguishes a favela…is its illegal status in terms of land use." She cites an official description of a favela published by the Brazilian Secretariat of Social Services: "a group of dwellings with high density of occupation, the construction of which is carried out in a disorderly fashion with inadequate material, without zoning, without public services, and on land which is illegally being used without the consent of the owner."[326]

In contrast to the illegal use of land in favelas, colonias in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas are planned subdivisions on unincorporated land from which individual lots are purchased by legal contract.[327] As geographers Christopher Davies and Robert Holz point out, this fact is

[326] Ibid., 12–13.

[327] The first significant stage of colonia development occurred in the late 1940s and 1950s, spurred in part by the Bracero Agreements between Mexico and the United States from 1942 to 1964; the number of colonias has increased dramatically since the 1970s. Most residents of colonias are first- or second-generation U.S. citizens from nearby areas in Texas or Mexico. Rural-urban migration within Brazil led to

detectable in the visual appearance of these neighborhoods: "Whereas utility networks shape and modify the direction and spread of the modern American city, the 'growth follows the pipe' dictum of traditional planning theory is irrelevant in colonias—there is no pipe. Colonias are carefully planned to maximise the number of plots carved out of the available acreage, and even the poorest of colonias has an orderly plot arrangement."[328] Housing lots remain affordable for purchasers since the lack of basic services keeps prices extremely low, though at the same time, the lack of running water and sewage facilities and the contamination of ground water have led to high rates of shigellosis, salmonella dysentery, hepatitis A, and other endemic diseases. Disagreement between city and county governments over who should be responsible for providing services and basic infrastructure for colonias contributes to their general neglect. The isolated location of colonias in a "no man's land," as sociologist Peter Ward has pointed out, means that "land can be developed cheaply without interference from the more watchful city authorities, who would otherwise be concerned about downline infrastructural needs and costs of newly divided colonias."[329]

One re-reads the introductory text to Asher's work installed with the photographs of colonias: some colonias *superficially* appear like "Third World slums," such as favelas in Brazil. Although these neighborhoods of the working class and poor in different countries may or may not resemble one another in appearance, what unites them is their structural condition: they are formed when people cannot afford to live in the cities in which they work. Although the peripheral spaces in which this class of workers are compelled to live may be outside a city's

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the development of favelas; the first major wave took place in the 1930s after the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and then again from the 1950s to around 1980.

[328] Davies and Holz, "Settlement Evolution of 'Colonias,'" 130.

[329] Ward, *Colonias and Public Policy*, 118.

limits, these spaces should be seen as part of the city in the sense that they are directly produced by its economy, which residents of those spaces help to support. What Davies and Holz state about colonias can be said about São Paulo and Brasília: "Colonias are, therefore, an exurban rather than a rural phenomenon. Some colonias are relatively large subdivisions of cities. Colonia distribution is thus a reflection of the spatial requirements of the capitalist mode of production, in which cities are the loci of manufacturing and accumulation."[330] In the same way, what Holston states about São Paulo and Brasília can be said of the colonias in Texas: "In both São Paulo and Brasília, therefore, the construction of spatial relations between center and periphery is constitutive of the lived experiences of social stratification….These plots indicate the perversity with which space correlates with life chances in Brazil and thus the logic by which its society is organized in space."[331]

Biennials and Globalism

The organizational complexity and conceptual tension between the desires to prioritize a specifically Brazilian point of view and yet to present a more inclusive representation of the world, without relying on the mediation of foreign embassies and thus acceding curatorial control, that characterized the 24th São Paulo Bienal reflect the changed circumstances governing the São Paulo Bienal since its founding in 1951. If the organizers of the first edition of the São Paulo Bienal had openly emulated the national representation model of the Venice Biennale, this convention was first put into question in the 23rd edition of the São Paulo Bienal in 1996 with the addition of a section titled "Universalis," an extensive global art exhibition, divided by geographical region and organized by a group of international curators, that took over the ground

[330] Davies and Holz, "Settlement Evolution of 'Colonias,'" 125.

[331] Holston, "Autoconstruction in Working-Class Brazil," 450.

floor of the Pavilion. The "Universalis" format was adapted for the subsequent edition of the Bienal and re-named *"Roteiros"* to fit the overarching theme derived from Andrade's *Manifesto antropófago*. Beginning with the 26th São Paulo Bienal, the national representation section would be discarded altogether in favor of thematically organized exhibitions only. If the São Paulo Bienal was originally founded as a venue to exhibit artworks by established artists from abroad, especially those from Europe and the United States, for audiences in Brazil, by its 24th edition the Bienal would begin to function as a space to *advance* contemporary art discourse. In contrast to preceding Bienals which had unquestioningly privileged artists, art movements, and thematic concepts deriving from the contemporary art discourse centered in the United States and Western Europe (for example, the 23rd São Paulo Bienal took the "dematerialization of the object of art" as its theme), the 24th Bienal's theme of *antropofagia* explicitly took a Brazilian concept as a point of departure. The selection of *antropofagia* as the organizing concept for the 24th São Paulo Bienal not only integrated Brazil's own cultural history into the discourse of contemporary art, but this curatorial move can be claimed *as* advanced precisely because of its focus on Brazil's postcolonial cultural identity, its self-reflexive recovery of an alternate modernity to challenge the Euro-U.S.–centricity of contemporary art discourse.

The changed circumstances of the São Paulo Bienal reflect larger structural changes in the expansion of international contemporary art biennial production over the course of the 20th century. Although a small first wave of recurring international contemporary art exhibitions emerged following the end of World War II and during the first few decades of the Cold War (including, for example, the São Paulo Bienal [est. 1951]; Documenta in Kassel, Germany [est. 1955], the Biennale de Paris [1959–85], the Tokyo Biennial [1952–1990]; the Sydney Biennale [est. 1973], and Skulptur Projekte, in Münster, Germany [est. 1977]), a larger second wave of

biennials occurred beginning in the mid-1980s in various cities in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, in addition to other locations in North America and Western Europe (including, for example, the Havana Biennial [est. 1984]; Cairo Biennale [est. 1986]; Istanbul Biennial [est. 1987]; Lyon Biennale [est. 1991]; San Diego InSite [est. 1992]; Dak'Art in Dakar, Senegal [est. 1992]; Johannesburg Biennale [1995–97]; Gwangju Biennale, South Korea [est. 1995]; Manifesta, various locations in the European Union [est. 1996], among others). From the founding of the Venice Biennale in 1895 to 1981, only around eleven biennials were founded, the majority of which were located in Europe or the U.S.; in contrast, from 1984 to 2000, about thirty-two biennials were founded in those two decades alone, the majority of which were located *outside* of the U.S. and Western Europe.[332] In his introduction to an international survey of landmark exhibitions in the latter half of the 20th century, art historian Bruce Altshuler remarks: "[Until] the 1980s the world in which these shows [large-scale recurring exhibitions] operated was essentially a Euro-American one, for…the most well-known international exhibitions took place in Western Europe and the United States. This is what would change in the last two decades of the 20th century. With the coming of age of postcolonial states in Africa and the Caribbean, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakup of the Soviet Union, and with significant ideological change and economic development in China, along with the economic growth of other Asian nations, new demands—economic, political, and ideological—arose for the expansion of the international exhibitionary system."[333]

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[332] Remarkably, in the first decade of the 21st century, about fifty-one new biennials were founded worldwide. These statistics are taken from Joe Martin Lin-Hill, "Becoming Global: Contemporary Art Worlds in the Age of the Biennials Boom," (Ph.D. diss, New York University, 2013). His various "Biennials Dataset" tables organized by founding date, location, and region in the appendix of his dissertation are particularly useful.

[333] Bruce Altshuler. *Biennials and Beyond—Exhibitions That Made Art History 1962–2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013), 18.

Art historian and curator Rafal Niemojewski has argued that the founding of the Havana Biennial in 1984 marks the beginning of the "biennials boom" as well as a paradigm shift in the conceptual organization of large-scale international contemporary art exhibitions that would become an important point of reference for subsequent biennials.[334] From the very beginning the Havana Biennial has prioritized exhibiting artworks produced outside of Europe and the United States that focus on issues of postcolonialism, cultural hybridity, diasporic identities, marginalization, or other experiences related to positions on the geographical and cultural peripheries. Instead of categorizing artworks by national representation as in the Venice Biennale model, artworks have been curated into thematic exhibitions since the first edition of the Havana Biennial.[335] Niemojewski points out the changed geopolitical context of the period of the Havana Biennial's emergence: "The Venice Biennial was founded as a celebration of the 19th century idea of the nation-state [one recalls that the first modern Olympic Games took place in 1896, one year after the founding of the Venice Biennial], while the Havana Biennial, in contrast, emerged with the advent of major historical transformations concurrent with the unprecedented acceleration of the processes of globalization, and thus reflected the new transnational, multicultural, and diaspora identities….The acceleration of the processes of globalization and the passage from a polarized political situation in the world (during the Cold War) to the far more complex arrangement that Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt describe as the 'Empire' provided

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[334] Rafal Niemojewski, "Venice or Havana: A Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial," in *The Biennial Reader*, 88–103.

[335] The first edition of the Havana Biennial only exhibited works by artists who were citizens or had lived for at least five years in a Latin American or Caribbean country. Other non-Western regions were included in subsequent editions of the Havana Biennial: artists from Asia were invited to participate in the second edition and artists from Africa in the third.

the conditions of possibility for the proliferation of today's contemporary biennials."[336] Although the São Paulo Bienal was originally self-consciously modeled on the Venice Biennial, one discerns a significant shift marked by the Bienal's 24th edition nearly half a century later that echoes the model set forth by the Havana Biennial: prominence is given to a postcolonial worldview and thematic exhibitions organized by internationally recognized curators begin to prevail over exhibitions of national representation (the latter seems to parallel the decline of national sovereignty in the face of growing transnational power structures, as Negri and Hardt have proposed).[337]

The presentation of colonias in Asher's installation for the São Paulo Bienal can be read as pointing to a contradiction within the expanded system of biennial production by the end of the 20th century. The vast majority of residents of the colonias in Asher's installation are themselves or are descendants of those who have crossed borders from Mexico to the United States; a number of these residents continue to cross state borders as migrant workers who depend on seasonal work. Analogously, as an expanding biennial network creates more opportunities for artists to present their work to larger audiences and for arts professionals to work on these large-scale productions, borders become more porous as people cross them more frequently, driven by opportunism or leisure. In this way, Asher's work can be viewed as subtly alluding to the "nomadic" status of many art world participants who contribute to the production of international art biennials and the loosening of cultural identity from geographical location

[336] Niemojewski, "Venice or Havana," 100.

[337] See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

which itself became a topic in the contemporary art discourse by the end of the century.[338] Asher's work highlights the fluidity of cultural identity caused by the increased frequency and volume of people crossing borders by representing a border zone located within the United States, one that cannot be understood without reference to the neighboring country of Mexico, thus blurring the division between the categories of "United States and Canada" and "Latin America" in the *Roteiros* exhibition and, more fundamentally, the logic of structuring exhibitions by geographical location that has been a convention historically associated with the international art biennial from its beginning. The very term "colonia" itself evidences a shifting, relational significance: as mentioned previously, it is a word that is Spanish in origin but has entered the English lexicon while taking on a very specific meaning when used in the United States, a meaning that differs from its common usage in Spanish-speaking countries.

Asher's work can also be seen as a critique of the conventionalization of site-specificity in works produced for large-scale international exhibitions and a related turn to ethnographic or anthropological methodologies in the production of site-specific work, which was not yet the case when he was working in 1970s for Skulptur Projekte. In a roundtable discussion on site-specificity published in *Documents* in 1994, art historian Helen Molesworth remarked on the "international art scene's dependence on site-specific work," observing that although site-specificity was once historically aligned with the development of institutional critical practices, much of the current site-specific work no longer engages with this reflexive type of criticality.[339] Molesworth also noted a dominant tendency of artists to rely on ethnographic or anthropological

[338] See for example Carol Becker, "The Romance of Nomadism: A Series of Reflections," *Art Journal* 58, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 22-29; and Miwon Kwon, "Wrong Place," *Art Journal* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 32–43.

[339] Helen Molesworth, in the roundtable discussion "On Site Specificity" with Hal Foster, Renée Green, Mitchell Kane, Miwon Kwon, and John Lindell, *Documents* 2, no. 4/5 (Spring 1994): 11.

approaches in their projects: "Many of the artists visit sites, do research, and then act as outside commentators and/or translators of the site for both the people in the community and an art world audience."[340] Compounding this situation, Miwon Kwon has pointed out, is the increasing attraction that site-specificity has attained for art institutions and funders precisely when places themselves have become seemingly more homogenous due to the increasing pervasiveness and connectivity of an expanding capitalist order: "It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the efforts to retrieve lost differences, or to curtail the waning of them, become heavily invested in reconnecting to 'uniqueness of place' or more precisely, in establishing authenticity of meaning, memory, histories, and identities as a *differential function* of places."[341] In contrast, in his untitled work, Asher conceptually linked the site of colonias in the United States and other peripheral spaces in the world, such as "*bidonvilles* in North Africa, *favelas* of Brazil, and *barrios* of Mexico" as mentioned in his wall text, on the spatial, social, economic, and cultural margins of urban life as part of a larger condition. In doing so, Asher's work underlined the structural nature of these spaces found globally: these spaces are not created spontaneously, only locally, but systematically as the result of an economic and social contradiction in that this class of meagerly compensated workers on whose labor the city depends are priced out of that same city. In excess of urban planning, in which rationalized calculations and designs try to contain and account for the total material and social lived reality of a functioning city, favelas in Brazil historically emerged as an unintended result of urbanization and modernization through industrialization. In comparison, colonias developed as spaces outside of city and county

[340] Ibid. For an analysis of the critical possibilities as well as methodological problems of the anthropological or ethnographic approach in contemporary art, see Hal Foster's "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996): 171–204.

[341] Emphasis in original. Miwon Kwon, "One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity," *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 108.

jurisdiction purchased by developers to produce housing lots with no governmental oversight for the purposes of profit. The photographs of colonias in Asher's installation make visible how even seemingly useless land can be transformed to produce exchange value, subdivided to maximize profit so that "even the poorest of colonias has an orderly plot arrangement," as Davies and Holz pointed out.

While the photographs of evenly spaced colonias in Asher's installation evidence in bare terms the capitalist logic of maximizing exchange value for minimal use value in order to produce the highest amount of surplus value, the captions of Asher's photographs insistently direct our attention to the living conditions such inhospitable space affords (or does not afford) its users. If Henri Lefebvre has claimed, "The space of a (social) order is hidden in the order of space," one can see how the production of space also produces and reproduces unequal social relations and thus conditions the relations of production, so that the ordering of space also facilitates and seems to naturalize the perpetuation of a social order. The introductory text of Asher's work informs the viewer about the lack of basic infrastructural resources and services that characterize the colonias, and the residents' "lack of jurisdiction to entertain legal complaint" since these areas are unincorporated. We are told the average yearly income for a colonia household: "$6,784" (the poverty level for a household of one in the U.S. in 1998 was $8,050[342]). We are reminded of Holston's observation regarding the ordering of space in São Paulo and Brasília and the implications of this spatial arrangement for the lives of the people who occupy these spaces: "These plots indicate the perversity with which space correlates with life chances in Brazil and thus the logic by which its society is organized in space."

[342] See 1998 poverty guideline published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/98poverty.htm (accessed March 10, 2015).

With all of this in mind, we can direct these issues of spatial production and, relatedly, the structuring of social relations and relations of production that Asher's work raises in the mind of the viewer towards the surrounding context of the Bienal: What can the spatial organization of the Bienal reveal about the nature of its spatial production and the relations of production that it structures? Who can be said to produce the space of the Bienal and who are its consumers? Should the Bienal's curators or its funders be seen as the producers of the Bienal? Should participating artists in the Bienal be seen as producers of this space or its consumers? Whom is the Bienal structured to benefit? In what ways?

Limits of viewing

The specific cultural knowledge and memory of a visitor viewing Asher's work would have mattered in terms of what meaning he or she would have been able to elicit from it, which points of reference the viewer could bring to the work. To someone who had been living in the United States during the 1990s or had seen the media representation of colonias in the U.S. news around that time, one would have been aware of how Asher's photographs flatly counter the sentimentalizing representation of colonias circulating at the time. Religious organizations in Texas, outraged by the unsanitary living conditions to which the colonia residents were subjected, began to organize help for the residents in the colonias and bring more publicity to the matter. This led to a series of news stories that brought more local and national attention to the issue, including a TV segment produced by Ed Bradley and John Wells for CBS News that ran on an episode of *60 minutes* in 1995 and multiple articles in the *Austin American Statesman* by journalist Ralph Haurwitz in 1998.[343] The *60 minutes* segment, called "The Other America,"

[343] Some of these articles are quoted in the introductory text for Asher's work. See, for example, Ralph K. M. Haurwitz, "Disease rates show cost of sewer, water woes; Rates of illness," *Austin American-*

opens with a view of laundry strung out in the open on clotheslines and on top of wire fences. Dogs and children run around discarded objects outside and around the houses. A look into one of the houses shows more objects densely piled up on various surfaces and into corners of the room. Later scenes depict women washing laundry and a man working on a truck. The spaces are framed to seem disorderly, the residents diligently at work. In an interview with Bradley, Dan Morales, then Attorney General of Texas, emphasizes that the health crisis of the colonias is potentially of international scope, not just a local problem, since the cholera, tuberculosis, hepatitis, and other diseases infecting residents, many of whom are migrant workers, have the potential of being transmitted wherever they go for work. Instead of focusing on residents of colonia neighborhoods, on the intimate interiors of their personal spaces and their bodies (and evoking fear from the viewer for the safety of his or her own body), Asher's photographs are distanced from their subject, focused on the public faces of the houses, with a high clarity of detail that communicates to the viewer information about the specificities of the construction of the houses. The view of the houses from the road give a sense of an orderly landscape, the lots divided evenly by developers in a desire to maximize profit.

Asher's work thwarts the tourist function of the international biennial in which the visitor forgets where she or he comes from and becomes a passive, amnesiac receptor waiting to be taken over by the next, new experience. In a review of the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999, art critic Peter Schjendahl only half-jokingly coins the term "festival art" in an attempt to name the type of artwork that tends to dominate large-scale exhibitions like biennials. He defines "festival art" as follows: "It is anything that commands a particular space in a way that is instantly diverting but not too absorbing. It is anti-contemplative. Viewers must never forget that they are

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Statesman (July 13, 1998), A5. Public health issues were in fact a major force in drawing widespread attention to the colonias and instigator for federal and state aid.

in a crowd. Nor should the crowd pile up for too long at any point. The drill is ambulatory consumption: a little of this, a little of that, thank you, *arrivederci*."[344] In contrast, Asher's work asks the visitor to make more and more connections, to reflect critically on in what way the colonias might seem "familiar" and then use that point of reference to unpack the work's implications in terms of its spatial and conceptual positioning within the São Paulo Bienal's Pavilion and within the context of the Bienal itself.

Asher's work helps the visitor to *see* the architecture of the São Paulo Bienal's Pavilion and to locate oneself in relation to the disorienting space of the sprawling three-floor Bienal exhibition, which involved the collaboration of nearly eighty curators altogether to organize its four sections. Political theorist and cultural critic Fredric Jameson has used the term "hyperspace," or a "mutation of built space itself," to characterize postmodern architecture, which in his view "has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world."[345] A similar claim might be made regarding the space of large-scale international biennials. In this regard, art historian and critic George Baker has remarked: "[We] are faced with exhibitions that are *too big*, they suffer from a gigantism that echoes and serves the contemporary gargantuan scope of a newly global economy. Mega-exhibitions cannot be taken in, digested, understood, or read in any complete manner, and this sublime scale serves the function of obfuscation."[346] Other critics have likened the space of the

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[344] Peter Schjendahl, "Festivalism," *New Yorker* (July 5, 1999): 86.

[345] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 44.

[346] George Baker, "The Globalization of the False: A Response to Okwui Enwezor," *Documents* 23 (Spring 2004): 21. This essay was originally delivered as a paper in response to Okwui Enwezor's "Mega-Exhibitions and the Antimonies of a Transnational Global Form," presented on February 14,

large-scale, international exhibition to Marc Augé's concept of "non-place," spaces of transit and traffic that precipitate "an emptying of consciousness."[347] To resist this "breakdown of spatial experience in both perceptual and cognitive registers" as Kwon has put it,[348] Asher raised the specter of political economy and class, reorienting the viewer to recognize how the capitalist order has structured the built environment and how this spatial organization actively perpetuates existing social hierarchies, economic inequalities, and uneven relations of production. Asher's work attunes the visitor to a here and now, hence the crucial importance for the artist that the columns on which the photographs were pasted retain their specific histories, a starting point in the immediate present for a process of critical reflection.

There is a certain degree of indeterminacy at the core of the work, which insists that one's view is always partial. One only ever partially grasps the work, which is reflected in its spatial layout: there is no one privileged point of view from which one can comprehend the entire work. At certain points while walking around, the visitor would have been able to see some images of the colonia buildings suddenly align and come together, presenting a collective image of individual buildings, an image of an outdoor landscape, a neighborhood, and a socio-economic class. This view would have been only temporary and only visible from particular orientations, points of view. The work remains elusive at every turn. Even over the dimension of

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2002, at Columbia University as part of the Sawyer Seminar organized by Andreas Huyssen. In his essay, Enwezor draws a distinction between the view of large-scale, international exhibitions (what he terms "mega-exhibitions") as a medium for spectacle, in Guy Debord's use of the term, and a medium for resistance against the homogenizing tendency of capitalist-driven cultural production by claiming the mega-exhibition as a privileged site in which to highlight the problematic relationship between the global and the local, to present different modes of modernity, and to rethink the Western-centric art historical canon.

[347] See, for example, Carol Becker's discussion of Augé's "non-place" in "Romance of Nomadism," 28. The quotation above is taken from Marc Augé's *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso 2008 [1995]), 75.

[348] Miwon Kwon, "Wrong Place," *Art Journal* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 38.

time, in its delayed reception by the art historian: one is retrospectively able to amass more information through research, but the crucial, lived experience of the work is missing or lost. The work functions to dispel one's focus on the center in order to direct attention onto the incalculable surround of the periphery.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined how Asher's approach to site expanded from the mid-1970s to the end of the 1990s. If Asher's method of "situational aesthetics" in the 1960s and 1970s was driven by an investigation of a site's material conditions, understood in terms of a site's spatial and architectural structures and then its mode of production, by the end of the 1990s Asher had integrated a logic of "comparative relations" to incorporate a larger field of spatial and temporal coordinates into his understanding of site. This aspect of Asher's works has not previously been addressed in the scholarly literature on the artist.

As discussed in the Introduction, Claude Gintz was the first to observe in 1993 that Asher expanded his method of "situational aesthetics" to include elements found both inside and outside an institutional site in his works. Gintz asserted that Asher had to transform his situational method in order to maintain a functional value for his art within the "various changing parameters of historical determination."[349] But Gintz did not directly address what these changing parameters were: How had the various parameters within which Asher was working changed from the late 1960s to the 1990s?

One significant difference from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s was the changing reception and increased popularity of site-based art. Miwon Kwon has pointed out that by the 1990s, works of site-specific art often only "[represented] criticality rather than performing it."[350] As early site-specific artworks from the 1960s and 1970s by artists such as Richard Serra, Barry Le Va, and Alan Saret were later collected, relocated and sometimes refabricated for retrospective exhibitions, Kwon argued that through this process of de-contextualization—

[349] Claude Gintz, "Michael Asher and the Transformation of 'Situational Aesthetics,'" trans. Judith Aminoff, *October* 66 (Autumn 1993): 129.

[350] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 38.

presented as historical recontextualization, ironically—the concept of "site-specificity" became understood as a "stylistic preference rather than a structural reorganization of aesthetic experience."[351] By the end of the 1990s, site-specific art had not only become yet another genre or convention within the art world, a mere "stylistic preference" for artists, but more significantly, this method of producing art had arguably been co-opted by art institutions, public art programs, and other funding agencies as a means to produce more economic value for a place, such as a city, and to ultimately abstract meaning from place—forces that early practitioners of site-specific art, such as Asher, had tried to resist. The issue for site-based art in the present, Kwon has proposed, is a question of "relational specificity," that is, how to recognize "the uneven conditions of adjacencies and distances *between* one thing, one person, one place, one thought, one fragment *next* to another, rather than invoking equivalences via one thing *after* another."[352]

As discussed in Chapter 1, in his 1977 "Installation Münster" Asher took the city of Münster as his conceptual site, temporarily positioning a rented caravan in various locations spread throughout the city's built environment. By repeating the same proposal for his work in 1987 and 1997, Asher expanded his concept of site by opening up a temporal dimension, one which would allow for comparisons between the different iterations of his work and for the site itself to "operate" upon it. In Chapter 2, I examined how Asher took the entire campus of UCSD as the conceptual site for his untitled 1991 work for the Stuart Collection. By juxtaposing a granite replica of an indoor drinking fountain with a boulder commemorating the campus's transfer from the U.S. Marines to UCSD, with both objects equidistant from a flagpole holding the U.S. flag, Asher placed three institutions into comparative relation to one another: the school,

[351] Ibid.

[352] Ibid., 166.

the nation-state, and the military. Furthermore, by not having an end date conceptually structured into the work (as he did in an earlier work also commissioned for a permanent collection), Asher again allowed for the site to "operate" upon his work. His untitled work's meaning is intended to unfold over time as the comparative contrast between the three historical objects (and the median in which they stand) and the surrounding campus develop over time. Finally, in Chapter 3, I analyzed how Asher related the peripheral spaces surrounding the site of his work for the 24th São Paulo Bienal to other peripheral spaces found in other countries including the U.S., the country which he represented in the context of the international contemporary art biennial. This comparative relation between the two different sites opened up a perspective that revealed the historical and material conditions structuring the institutional site as one that could be viewed as local and global.

The three artworks by Asher discussed in these chapters bring into view the "uneven conditions of adjacencies and distances" discussed by Kwon. By integrating a comparative logic into his situational method by the end of the 1990s, in his site-based works, Asher was able to speak to conditions structuring a site through a perspective that was simultaneously local and global, and a site's present state could also be temporally linked to its past as well as its future.

The depth with which I analyzed each work by Asher in the present study represents both its strength and its weakness. By devoting a chapter to each work I was able to examine in close detail changes in Asher's thinking as he developed possible proposals for a commissioned work as well as the particular issues he encountered during its production. Such details make clear that the artist could not simply produce what he wanted and suggest that each work should be viewed as an implicit, if not explicit, agreement between artist and institution. Indeed, one could argue that the institutional limitations that Asher had to work within (or around) effectively sharpened,

and made more precise, how his final works responded to their exhibition situations and institutional sites (see, for example, Asher's process of deciding what to contribute to the Skulptur exhibition in Münster in 1977 as discussed in Chapter 1).

The present study makes a claim about a development in Asher's method over the course of nearly three decades largely based upon three artworks. In order to further substantiate this claim, more research will have to be conducted into Asher's concept of "comparative relations" as well as, more generally, into his later works produced after 1979, an area that is sorely lacking in the field. Such research is greatly needed in order to examine more closely how one of the foundational figures of site-specific, institutional critical art was able to adapt his method and continue his critical resistance to the increasing abstraction of space.

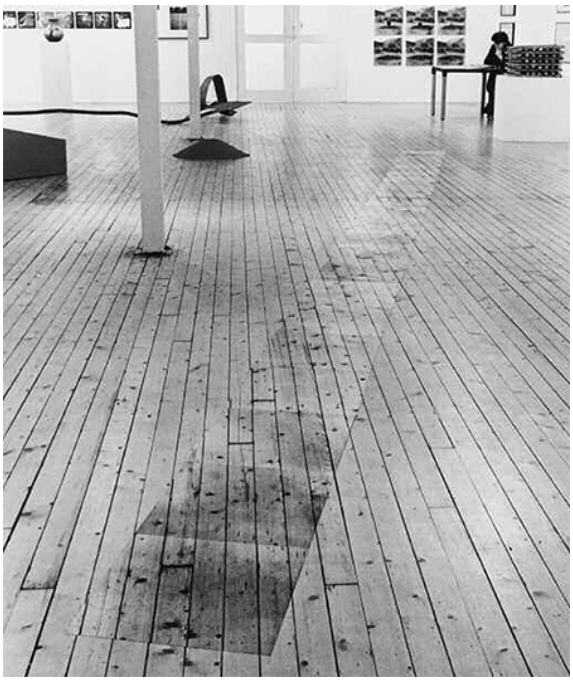


Fig. 0.1. Victor Burgin, *Photo Path*, 1967–69.

Fig. 0.2. Installation view of the 24th São Paulo Bienal, São Paulo, Brazil, October 3–December 13, 1998, held in the Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion. A partial view of Asher's project is visible on the column to the left.

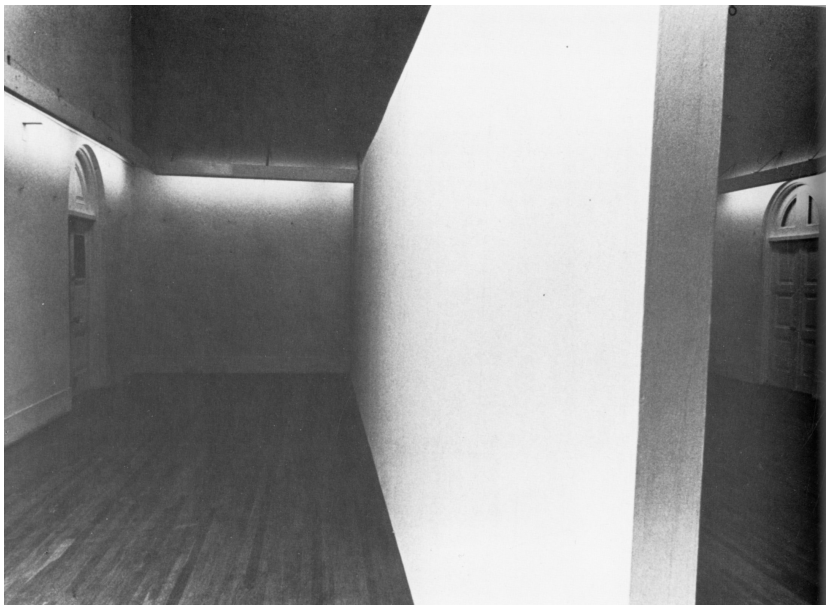


Fig. 0.3. San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California, U.S.A., *18'6" x 6'9" x 11'2 1/2" x 47' x 11 3/16" x 29' 8 1/2" x 31' 9 3/16"*, April 11–May 3, 1969, completed partition wall installation photographed from the passageway between the entry/exit area on the left and the open area on the right. Photograph by Phil Linars.

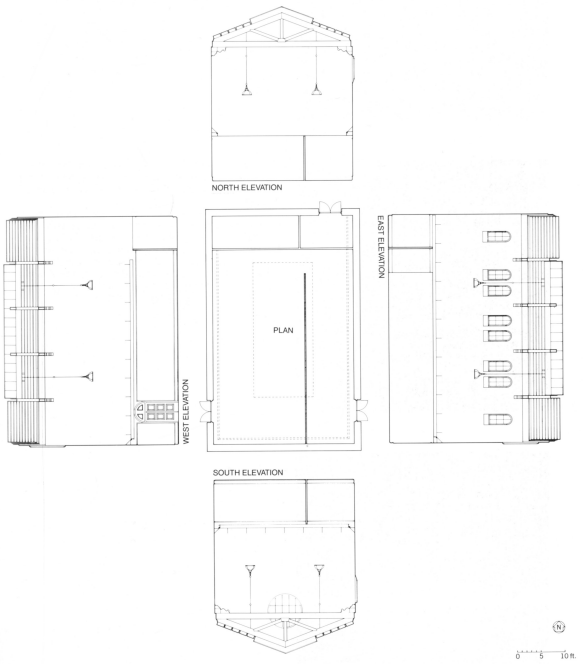


Fig. 0.4. San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California, U.S.A., *18'6" x 6'9" x 11'2 1/2" x 47' x 11 3/16" x 29' 8 1/2" x 31' 9 3/16"*, April 11–May 3, 1969, groundplan and elevation of the installation in the Diego Rivera Gallery. Drawing by Lawrence Kenny.

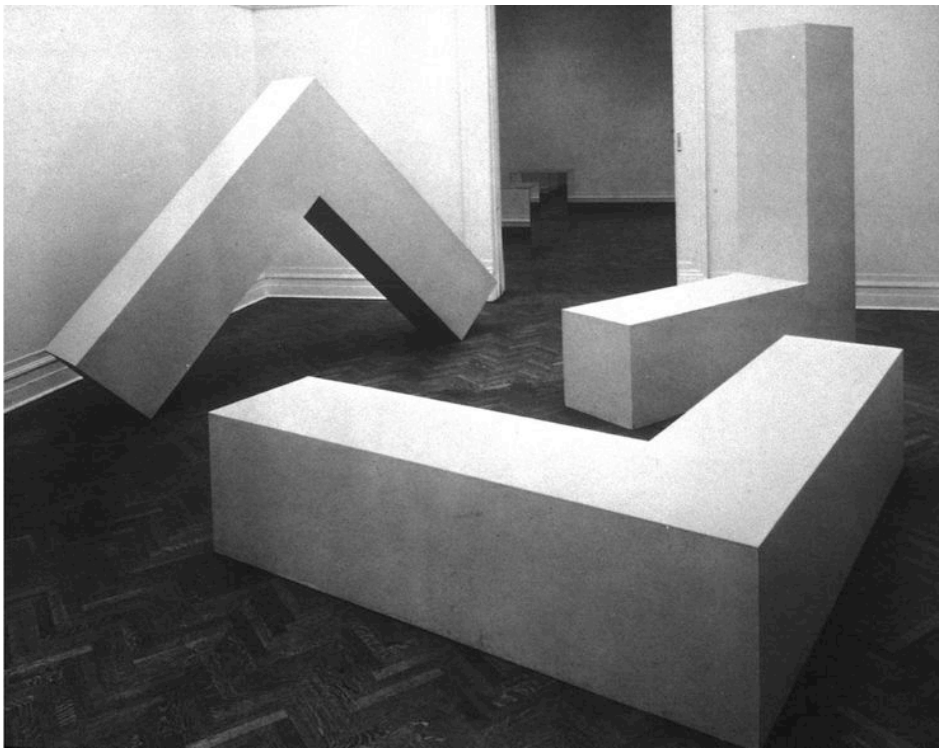


Fig. 0.5. Robert Morris, *Untitled (L-Beams)*, 1965.

Fig. 0.6. Donald Judd, *Untitled (Stack),* 1967.

Fig. 0.7. Lisson Gallery, London, England, August 24–September 16, 1973, installation view, south wall.

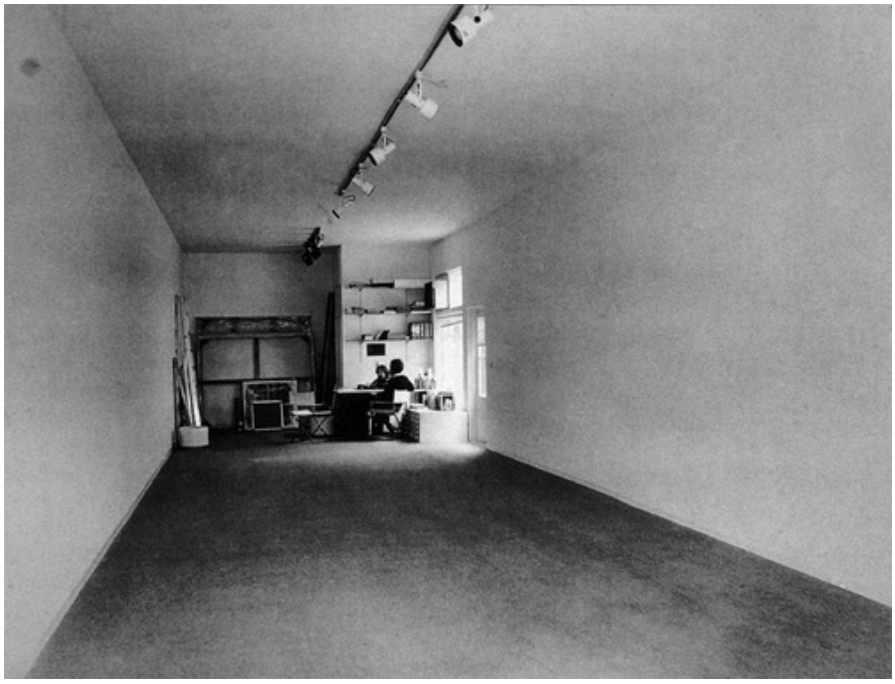


Fig. 0.8. Claire S. Copley Gallery, Los Angeles, California, U.S.A., September 21–October 12, 1974, view through the gallery toward the office and storage areas. Photograph by Gary Kruger.

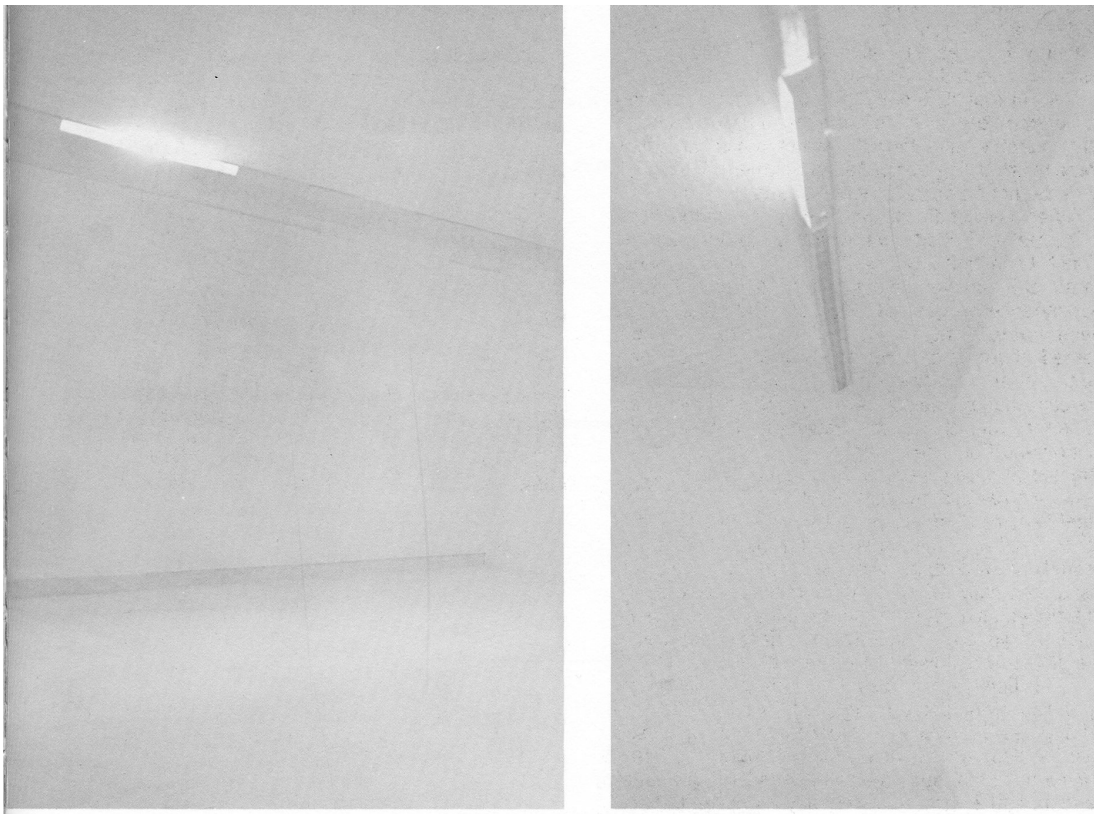


Fig. 0.9. La Jolla Museum of Art, La Jolla, California, U.S.A., November 7–December 31, 1969. Left**:** view of northwest corner of constructed wall and existing wall. Right: view of north wall on east-west axis showing detail of constructed light baffle (aluminum shields).

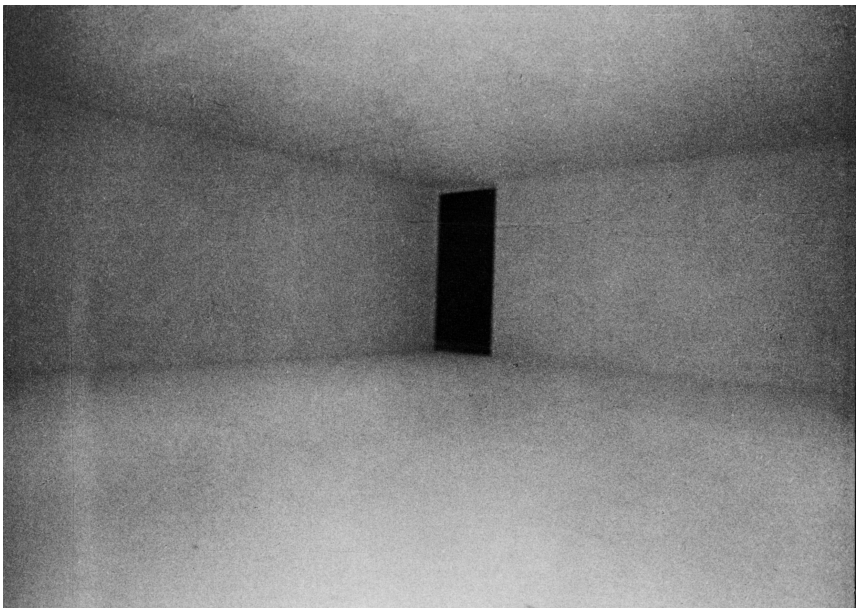


Fig. 0.10. Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York, U.S.A., *Spaces*, December 30, 1969–March 1, 1970, view of the installation and the south-west entry/exit. Photograph by Claude Picasso.

Fig. 0.11. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A., June 8–August 12, 1979, facade of the Museum of Contemporary Art during the exhibition.

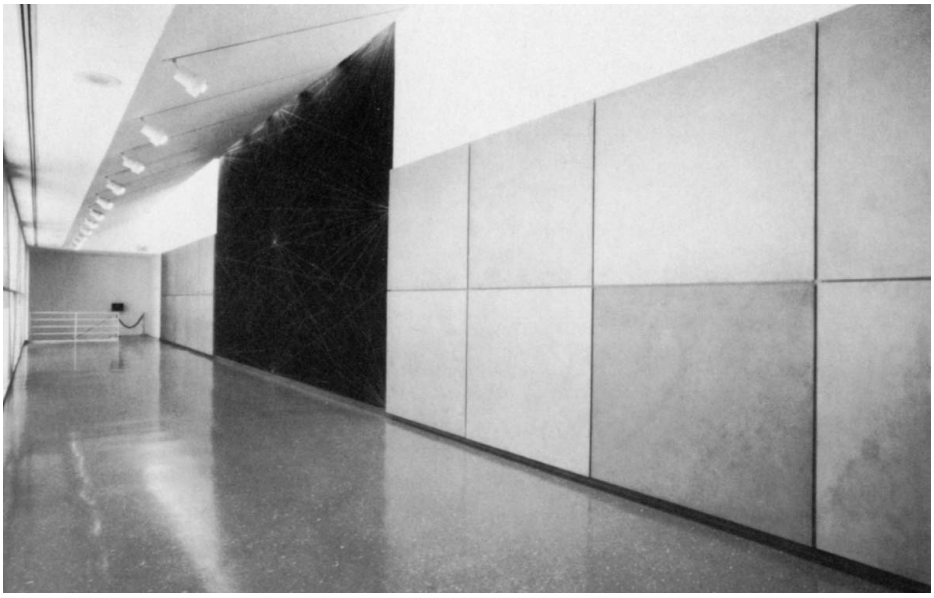


Fig. 0.12. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A., June 8–August 12, 1979, installation view looking west into the Bergman Gallery. Photograph by Michael Asher.

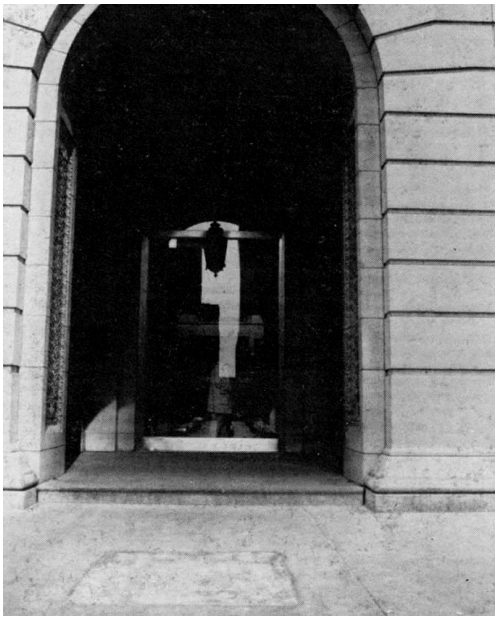


Fig. 0.13. The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A., *73rd American Exhibition*, June 9–August 5, 1979, detail of facade of the Art Institute of Chicago at Michigan Avenue and Adams Street, showing original location of statue. Patch of concrete indicates former placement of base.

Fig. 0.14. The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A., *73rd American Exhibition*, June 9–August 5, 1979, installation view of Gallery 219, showing the 1917 bronze replica of Jean-Antoine Houdon's *George Washington* after its relocation to the eighteenth-century period room. Photograph by Rusty Culp.

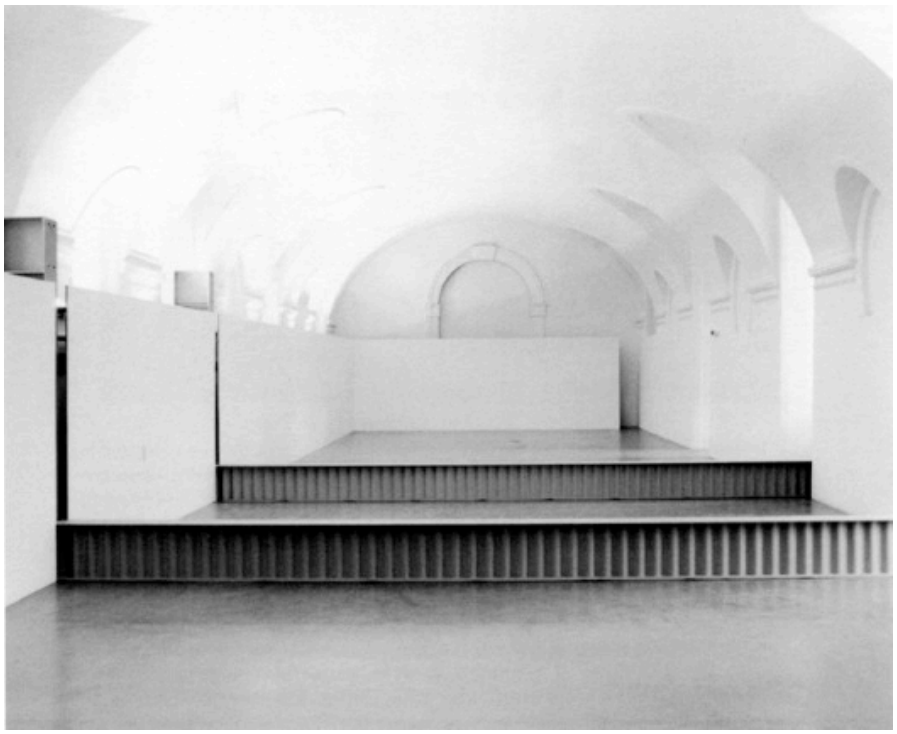


Fig. 0.15. Kunstraum Wien, Vienna, Austria, October 31–December 22, 1996, view south. Photograph by Hans Schubert.

Fig. 0.16. Le Nouveau Musée, Villeurbanne, France, examples of 700 cast-iron objects, 7.5 x 10 x 1.1-1.5 cm, distributed beginning of May, 1991. Photograph by André Morin.

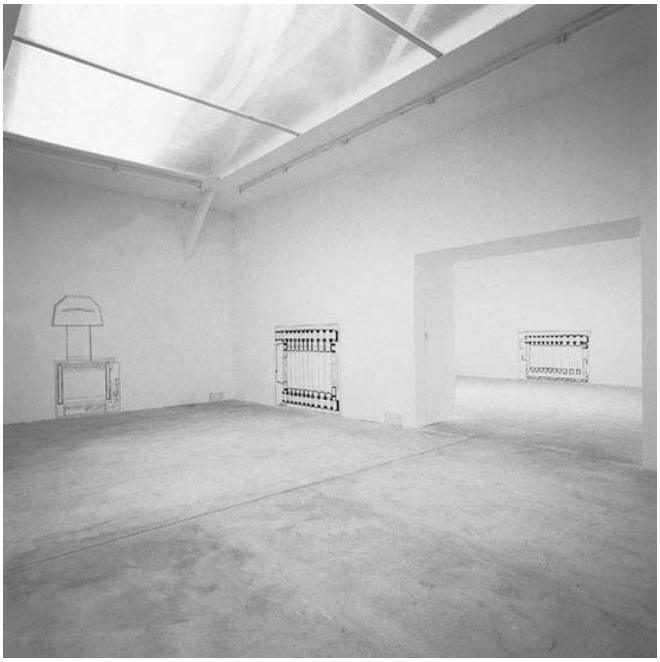


Fig. 0.17. Le Consortium, Dijon, France, June 7–July 27, 1991, installation view.

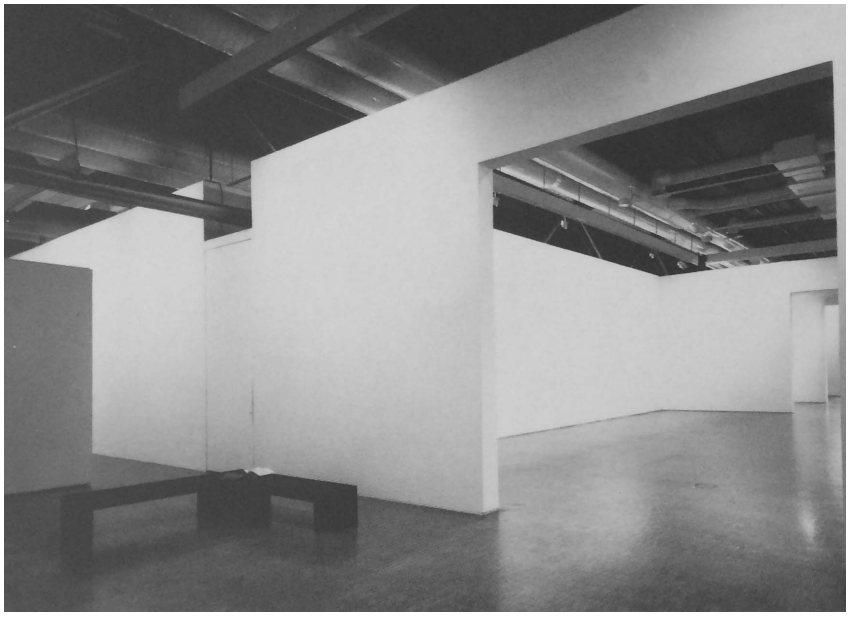
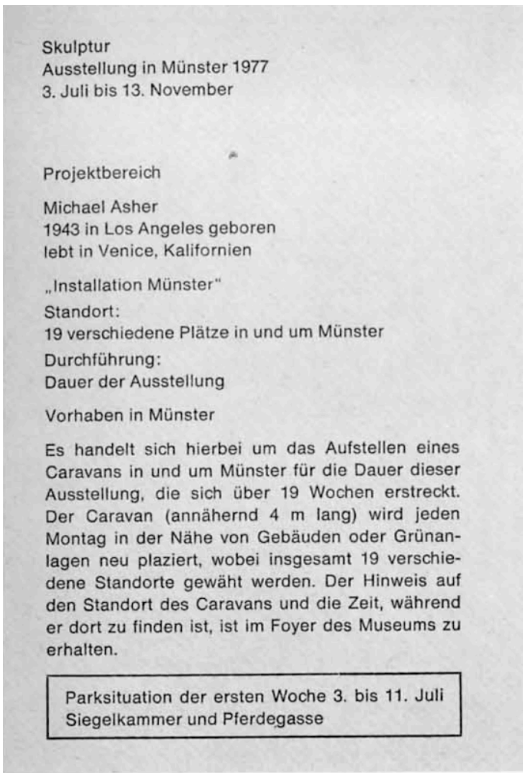


Fig. 0.18. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France, July 10–September 15, 1991, installation view. Photograph by Luc Monnet and Adam Rzepka.

Fig. 1.1. Skulptur Ausstellung in Münster, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, West Germany, July 3–November 13, 1977, photograph from exhibition catalog showing the parking position for 1st week.



Skulptur
Ausstellung in Münster 1977
3. Juli bis 13. November

Projektbereich

Michael Asher
1943 in Los Angeles geboren
lebt in Venice, Kalifornien

„Installation Münster"
Standort:
19 verschiedene Plätze in und um Münster
Durchführung:
Dauer der Ausstellung

Vorhaben in Münster

Es handelt sich hierbei um das Aufstellen eines Caravans in und um Münster für die Dauer dieser Ausstellung, die sich über 19 Wochen erstreckt. Der Caravan (annähernd 4 m lang) wird jeden Montag in der Nähe von Gebäuden oder Grünanlagen neu plaziert, wobei insgesamt 19 verschiedene Standorte gewäht werden. Der Hinweis auf den Standort des Caravans und die Zeit, während er dort zu finden ist, ist im Foyer des Museums zu erhalten.

Parksituation der ersten Woche 3. bis 11. Juli
Siegelkammer und Pferdegasse

Fig. 1.2. Skulptur Ausstellung in Münster, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, West Germany, July 3–November 13, 1977, exhibition hand-out available at the front desk of the museum during the first week of the exhibition.

Fig. 1.3. George Rickey, *Three Rotating Squares*, 1969.

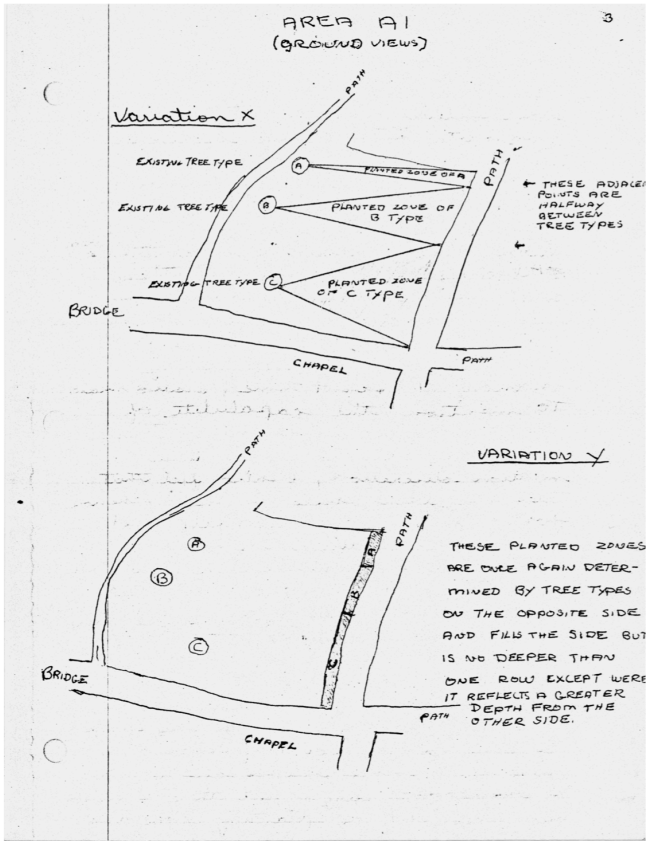


Fig. 1.4. Michael Asher. Letter from September 1, 1976, verso.

Fig. 1.5. Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, 1913.

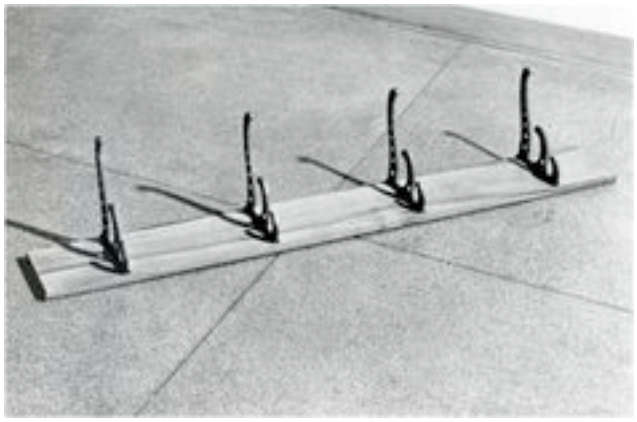


Fig. 1.6. Marcel Duchamp, *Trébuchet*, 1917.

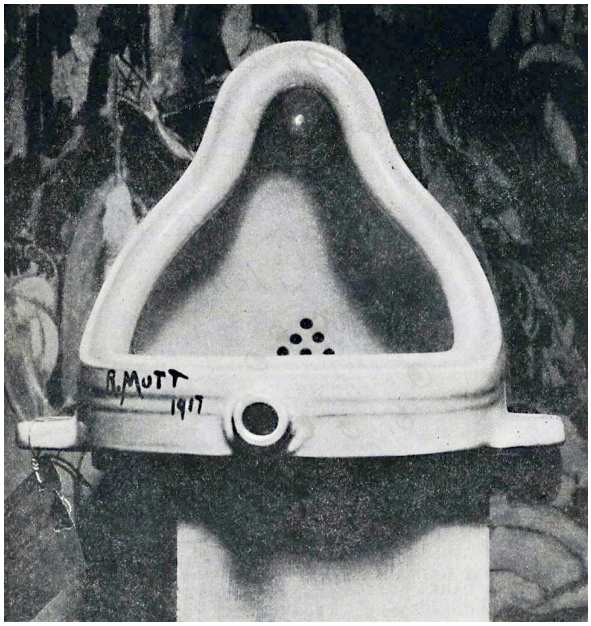


Fig. 1.7 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917.

Fig. 1.8. Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, *Ambiente arte, dal futurismo ad oggi*, July 18–October 16, 1976, view of installation with passage toward other exhibition areas.

Fig. 1.9. Skulptur Ausstellung in Münster, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, West Germany, July 3–November 13, 1977, parking position, 5th week (August 1–8), Am Hörster Friedhof/Piusallee. Photograph by Rudolf Wakonigg.

Fig. 1.10. Skulptur Ausstellung in Münster, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, West Germany, July 3–November 13, 1977, parking position, 6th week (August 8–15), An der Kleinmann-Brücke 17. Photograph by Rudolf Wakonigg.

Fig. 1.11. Skulptur Ausstellung in Münster, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, West Germany, July 3–November 13, 1977, parking position, 15th week (October 10–17), woods at Jesuiterbrook, near Hünenburg. Photograph by Rudolf Wakonigg.

Fig. 1.12. Skulptur Ausstellung in Münster, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, West Germany, July 3–November 13, 1977, parking position, 4th week (July 25–August 1), Alter Steinweg, across from Kiffe pavilion, parking meter no. 274 or 275. Photograph by Rudolf Wakonigg.

Fig. 1.13. Skulptur Ausstellung in Münster, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, West Germany, July 3–November 13, 1977, parking position, 8th week (August 22–29), Königsberger Straße 133–135. Photograph by Rudolf Wakonigg.

Fig. 1.14. Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1977.

Fig. 1.15. Claes Oldenburg, *Giant Pool Balls*, 1977.

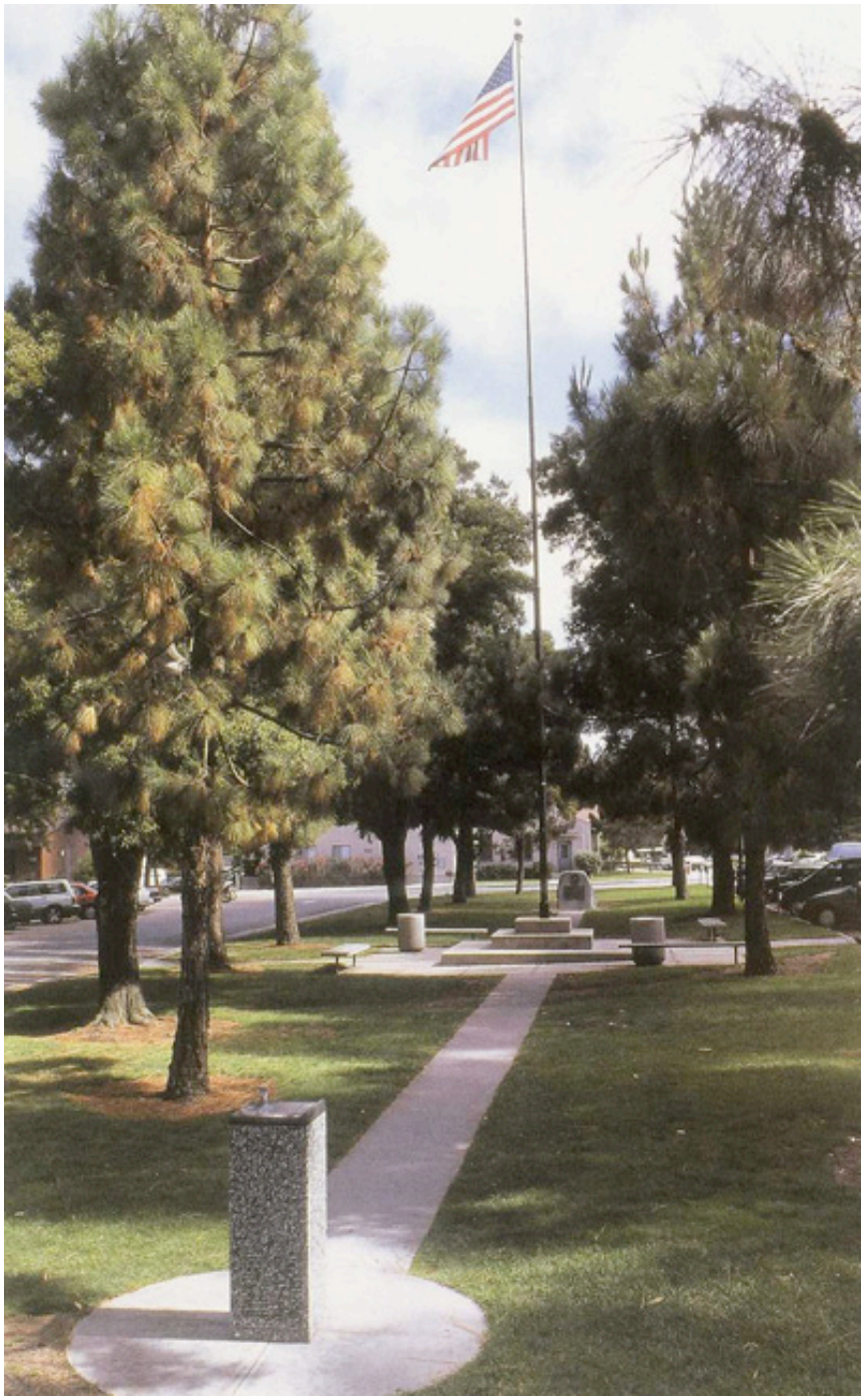


Fig. 2.1. Untitled, 1991, Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California, U.S.A., view showing granite drinking fountain, flagpole, and Camp Calvin B. Matthews landmark. Photograph by Becky Cohen.

Fig. 2.2. Untitled, 1991, Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California, U.S.A., detail of granite drinking fountain. Photograph by Philipp Scholz Rittermann.

Fig. 2.3. Niki de Saint Phalle, *Sun God*, 1983. Photograph by Kavior Moon.

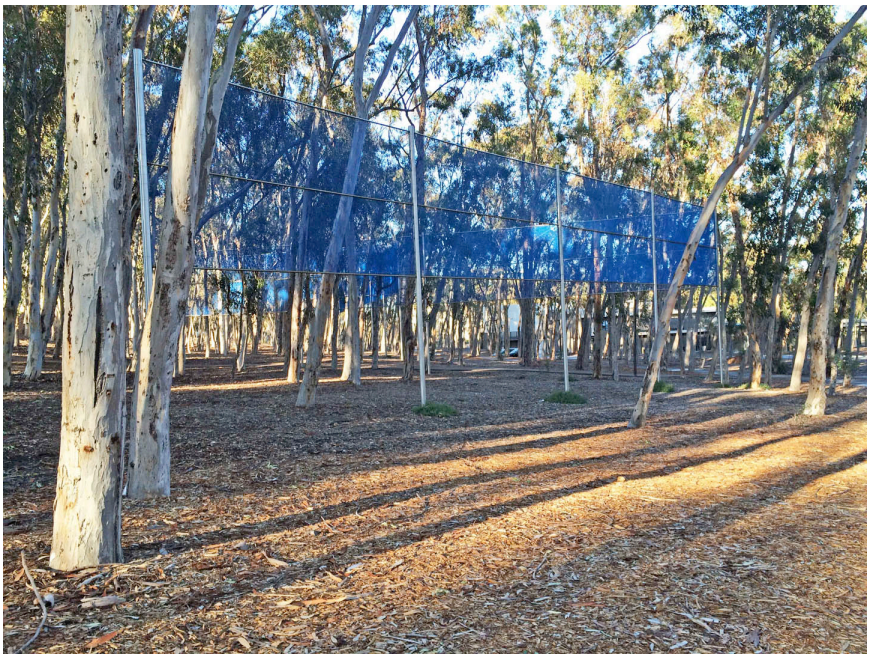


Fig. 2.4. Robert Irwin, *Two Running Violet V Forms*, 1983. Photograph by Kavior Moon.

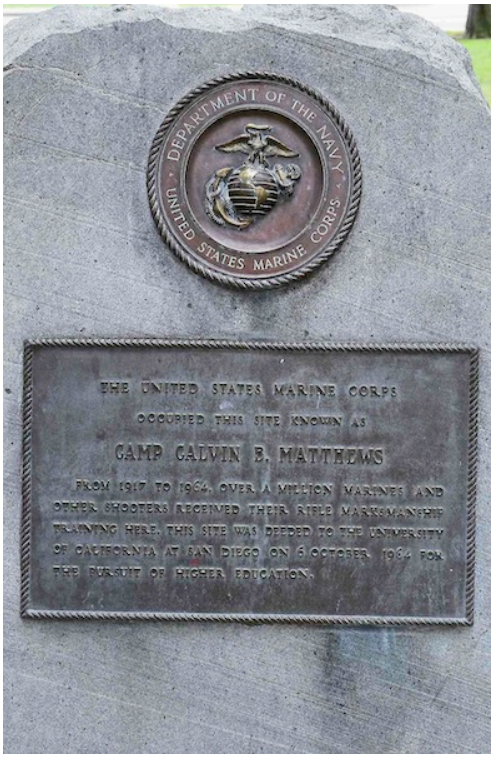


Fig. 2.5. Camp Calvin B. Matthews landmark, University of California, San Diego, 1964. Photograph by Becky Cohen.

Fig. 2.6. View of the Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden at University of California, Los Angeles, established in 1967.

Fig. 2.7. Terry Allen, *Trees*, 1986. Photograph by Philipp Scholz Rittermann.

Fig. 2.8. Jenny Holzer, *Green Table*, 1992. Photograph by Kavior Moon.

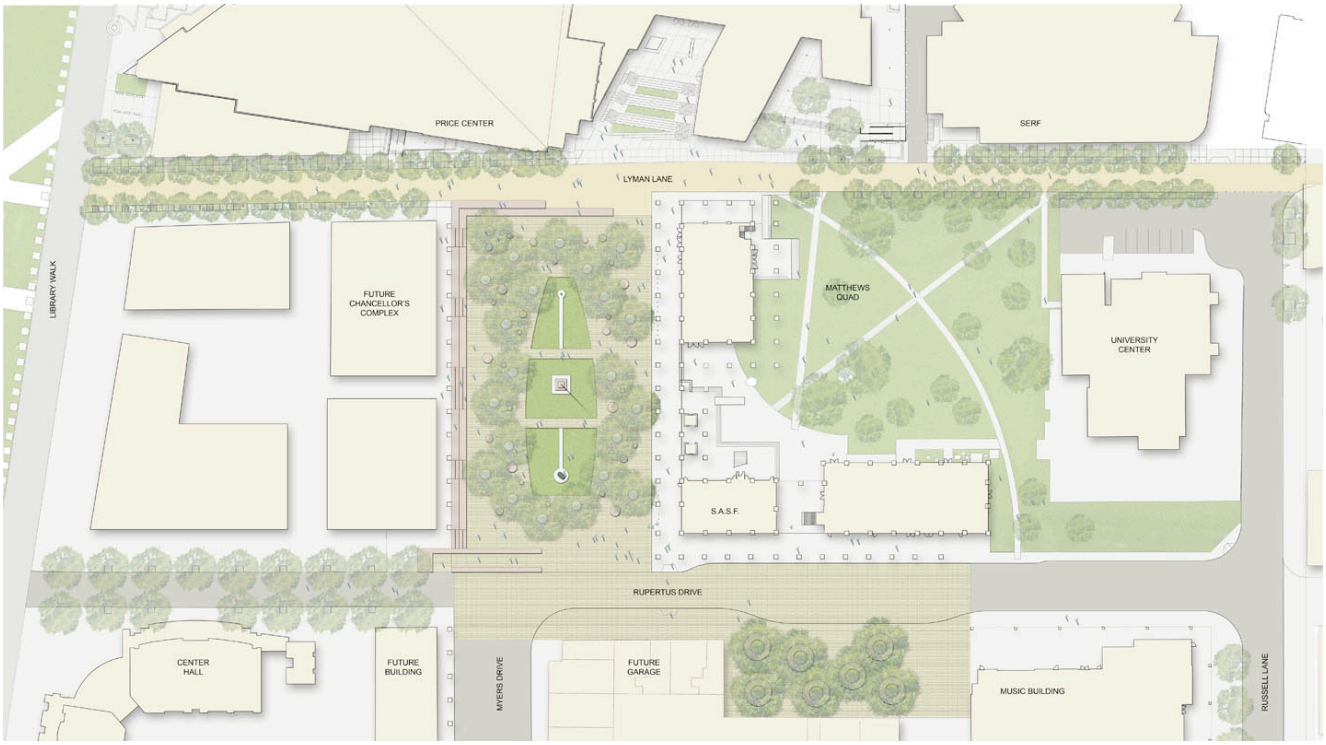


Fig. 2.9. Meyer + Silberberg Land Architects, "Eucalyptus Grove" design scheme for Town Square, University of California, San Diego, 2008

Fig. 2.10. Meyer + Silberberg Land Architects, “Bamboo Wedge” design scheme for Town Square, University of California, San Diego, 2008.

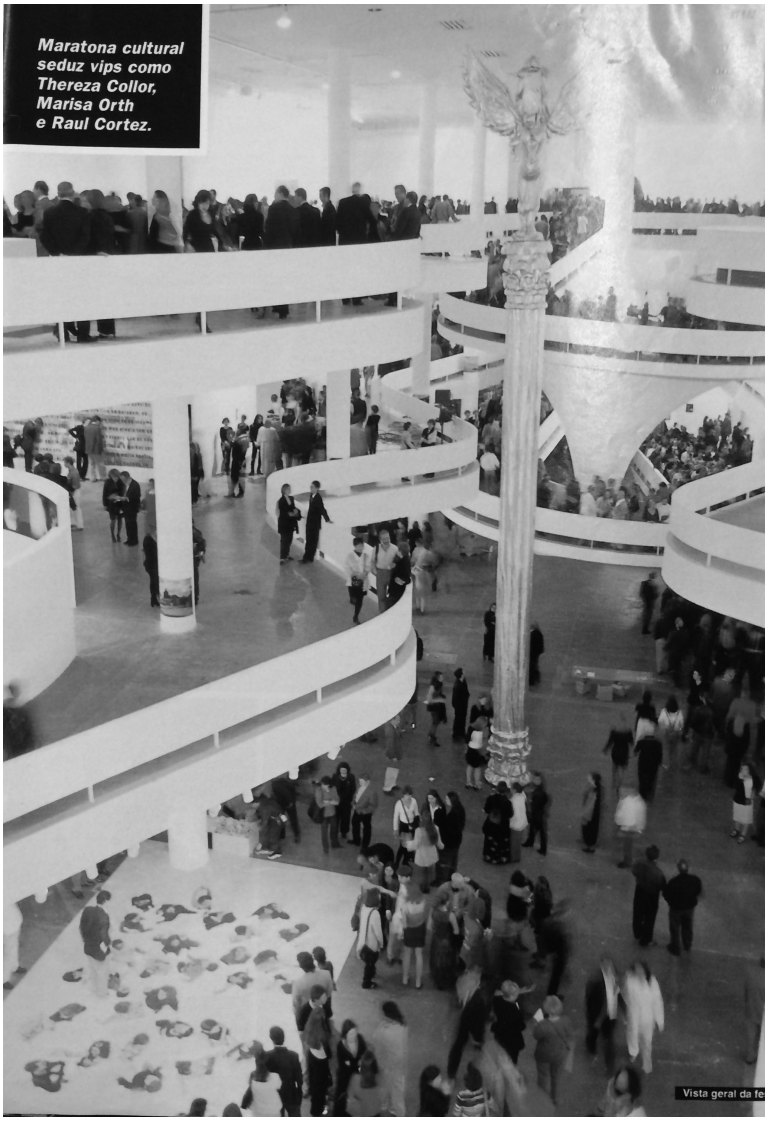


Fig. 3.1. Installation view of the 24th São Paulo Bienal, São Paulo, Brazil, October 3–December 13, 1998. A partial view of Asher's project is visible on the columns of the first floor (second floor according to Brazilian convention).

Fig. 3.2. Aerial view of Ibirapuera Park complex in São Paulo, facing north (São Paulo Bienal held in the Pavilion in the uppermost right hand corner), c.1954.

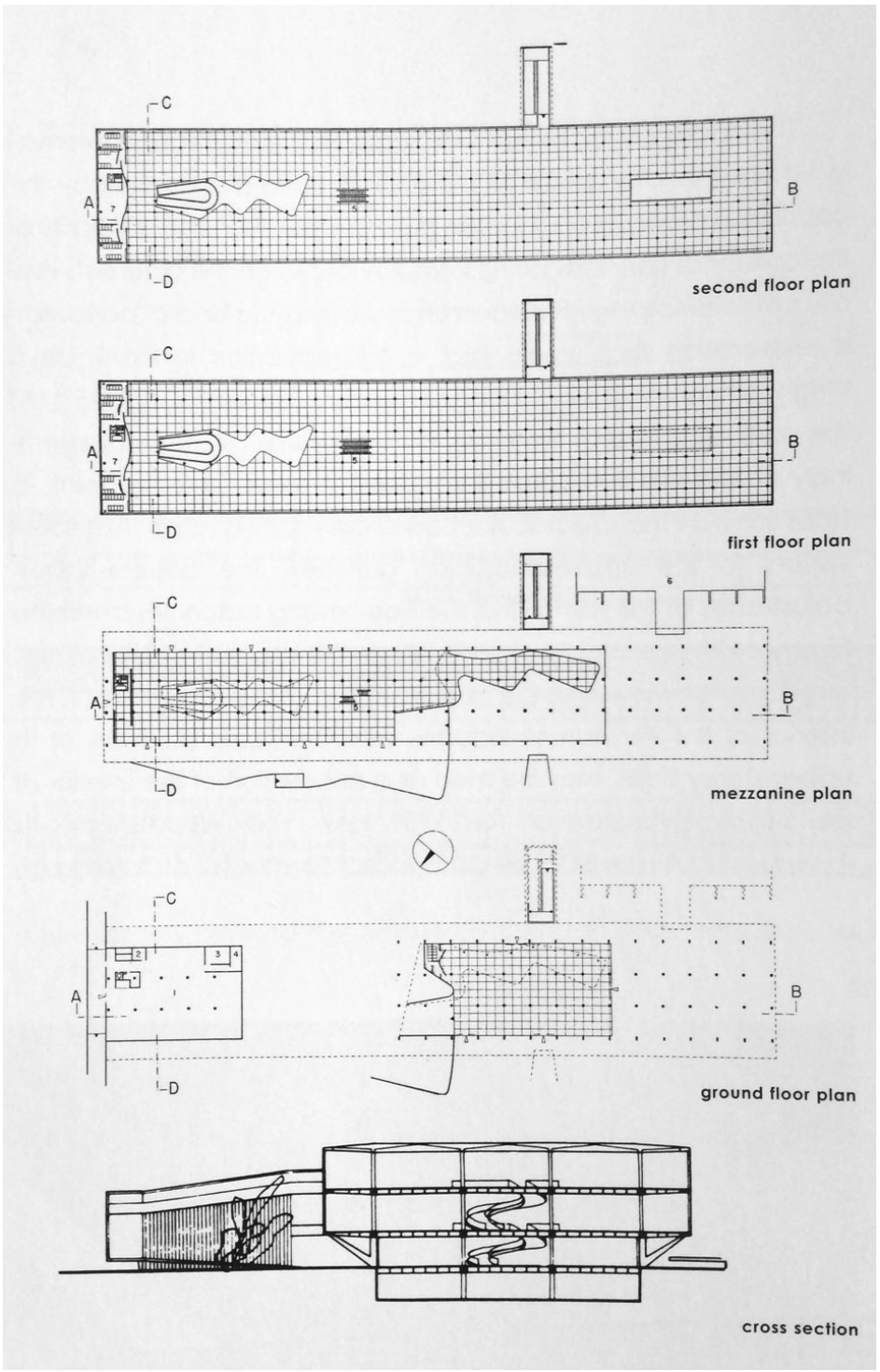


Fig. 3.3. Groundplan and cross-section of the Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion.

Fig. 3.4. 24th São Paulo Bienal, São Paulo, Brazil, October 3–December 13, 1998, a series of fourteen photographs of South Texas colonias, glued to pillars of the building, with labels describing where each picture was taken, detail view. Photographic documentation by Andrew Freeman.

Fig. 3.5. Interior view of the Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion, facing north (ramp in background).

Fig. 3.6. Interior view of Brazilian Pavilion designed by Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa for 1939 World's Fair in New York.

Fig. 3.7. Interior view of the Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion, facing south (escalator in background).

APPENDIX

PROJECT PROPOSAL FOR STUART COLLECTION

by Michael Asher

The outdoor sculpture I propose for the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego consists of a granite drinking fountain in the form of a commercial indoor water cooler, and similar to those found on numerous school campuses, city buildings, and businesses. It is approximately forty-four inches tall, fifteen inches wide, fifteen inches deep, and constructed of a light and dark colored granite. The base of the sculpture will contain a refrigeration unit for the water.

This project is to be situated on the island which forms a parkway in the center of Myers Drive. This median strip is located between the Political Science Building #412 and Academic Affairs Building #105 within the Matthews Complex. The Sculpture [*sic*] will be placed on the path through the parkway at a point equidistant north of the central flagpole, as the Camp Calvin B. Matthews landmark is placed south of the flagpole. A circular pad of cement will be poured for the sculpture which is the same size diameter as that of the landmark's foundation.

The size of the sculpture makes it a similar scale as the Camp Matthews landmark. Its position on the parkway will visually balance the arrangement of all the elements placed there and inherently give the site a certain visual continuity. Yet, the introduction of the sculpture is meant to reveal some clues produced by the landmark which might otherwise be read as representing a closed chapter in ucsd [*sic*] history. In this juxtaposition, the sculpture functions as a model containing numerous cultural references.

For example, the artwork I propose can be read as a fountain, if only due to its object status outdoors, yet it distributes water rather than circulating it, plus its appearance refers to the industrial designs of objects for institutional use. On another level, it carries the baggage which allows it to be an artwork on modernist terms with its aesthetic dimension having the characteristics of sculptural representation and its integration of appropriation within its production as a formal strategy. But the reference to the modernist paradigm begins to disintegrate as soon as the operation of the sculpture has been realized as having the potential to bring together the viewing subject and the object for something other than transcendent renewal. The sculpture also bears a relationship to a monument in its similarities of material construction and its iconic status, but as a monument, the sculpture lacks the same reference to a specific event.

Further, operating as a model to open up this important landmark to a contemporary reading, this project subtly disturbs the relationships that exist between requirements of natural resources and requirements of state policy. Within the terrain of use value, the sculpture represents a distribution point for one of the most essential material requirements (water) for our body without which we could not live. The water cooler describes an area where we can take a break in our daily routine for refreshment and regeneration, as well as social discourse. On the other hand, the landmark chronicles a short history regarding the use and transfer of government land from the military to education in order to meet future requirements in the construction and maintenance of state policy. In communicating this message, we are given a sense that this fundamental shift in land use possibly represents a shift in the state's concerns for growth of the individual, through education, to prepare for the demands of civilian life. Therefore, within this juxtaposition, the sculpture meets the needs of our bodies' requirements of state policy to meet

our future political and economic needs. But neither object on the Myers Drive parkway directly reflects upon portions of its current status which define their existence. The sculpture does not reflect upon the complex networks of pumps and pipes which make it possible to distribute water as a drinking fountain just as the landmark does not reflect upon the degree to which education is at the service of the military, and so on. Within the disturbance which is created by this juxtaposition is hopefully enough cause for the public to become adequately stimulated to develop these problematic issues and continually ask thoughtful questions about these two very different objects.

[as reprinted in Mary Beebe, ed., *Landmarks: Sculpture Commissions for the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego* (New York: Rizzoli, 2001), 174–75]

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