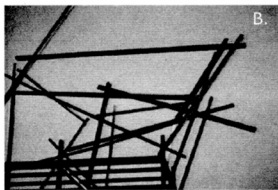


A MODEL EXPERIENCE

BY MARY-KAY LOMBINO

Architectural models, like many forms of representation, act as stand-ins for other objects. However, models differ from most simulacra in that they are often preliminary objects that represent items that have not yet been built. Therefore, they serve as tools for communicating abstract ideas and plans from which finished works will be produced. A three-dimensional diagram that describes the basic form of a structure, often at a reduced scale, a model serves to stimulate one's imagination to fathom a potential building. In order to imagine the details and attributes of something that is not in front of us, we rely on the complex cerebral process of perception that we perform everyday as we analyze the world around us. The complexity of this process is unique to mankind—from achieving the required functions of existence to meeting multifaceted cultural demands.

The Minimalist artists of the late 1960s and early 1970s were a generation of groundbreaking sculptors concerned with the intensity and forming power of human perception. These artists had an anti-illusionistic desire to break down the barrier between sculptural and real space. Since the emergence of Minimalism, artists have been wrestling with the issue of architectural space and the ways in which three-dimensional art objects can shape the area around them. Expanding on this tradition, the works included in *ReModeling* investigate the role of models in the process of assessment and explore the bodily experience of space and how it differs from perceiving two-dimensional representations of space. Leo Saul Berk, Barbara Bestor, Taft Green, and David Schafer, whose work is gathered together in this exhibition, help to reveal the workings of the process of perception as they test the stamina of our suspension of disbelief.



On a broader social level, David Schafer grapples with similar ideas in many of his works, including his series entitled *How High is Up?*, 2003-04. The title is borrowed from a 1940 episode of the classic television program *The Three Stooges*, which inspired Schafer to perform an in-depth analysis of one particular image. The Stooges, when hired as builders, are visited by the foreman who discovers that they have botched the job. The blunder, a structure made of I-beams pointing in various directions rather than at rational right angles, is shown full-screen as the punch line of a pure slapstick moment. However, Schafer notes that in a different context, the same image could be seen as an expression of Deconstructivist architecture, which introduced a spirit of ad-hocism to the field in the 1980s. In fact, the Stooges' object resembles elements of the Santa Monica house Frank Gehry designed for himself in 1978, known for its deliberately slanted lines and randomly angled protrusions, and now considered a forerunner of a movement that favored anti-refinement. Schafer proposes that while, in 1940—a time when elegant, Meislian perfection was becoming mainstream—the Stooges were considered imbeciles; forty years later they might have been considered visionaries. In order to make this point visually, Schafer translates the flat image from his TV screen into a fifteen-foot gleaming abstract sculpture and presents it in the context of the art museum. Schafer's speculative sculpture, built at one-quarter scale, is two generations away from the original object that was no-doubt created for *The Three Stooges* set, purely for the purpose of comedic entertainment.



Further removing the structure from its humorous origins, Schafer presents three handsome computer renderings of his sculpture in detail, showing it again on a flat surface. These close-ups highlight the similarities of the piece to Modernist abstract work by artists such as Mark di Suvero and Anthony Caro, who are accomplished in combining industrial materials to create elegant monumental sculptures with raw energy. In this context, the image is elevated from the status of a comic eyesore into an object that has no utilitarian function other than as an aesthetic achievement. Schafer also presents a poster that reveals the original source image along with a computer-generated, rear-elevation drawing at full scale, which he commissioned from TK Architecture, an experimental firm based in Los Angeles. Such drawings are used by architects to communicate specifications to the builders who handle the construction of a project. The detailed, computer-assisted drawing, complete with the architect's customary annotations and labels, lends a practical application and a more authoritative expertise to the irrational tangle of beams. By utilizing the logic and methods of architecture in his work, Schafer adds a layer of rationality to an object that was first created to illustrate human error and chaos. This juxtaposition allows us to rethink our habits of seeing and reconsider the way we perceive our surroundings in order to gain new insight from what we think of as the familiar.

