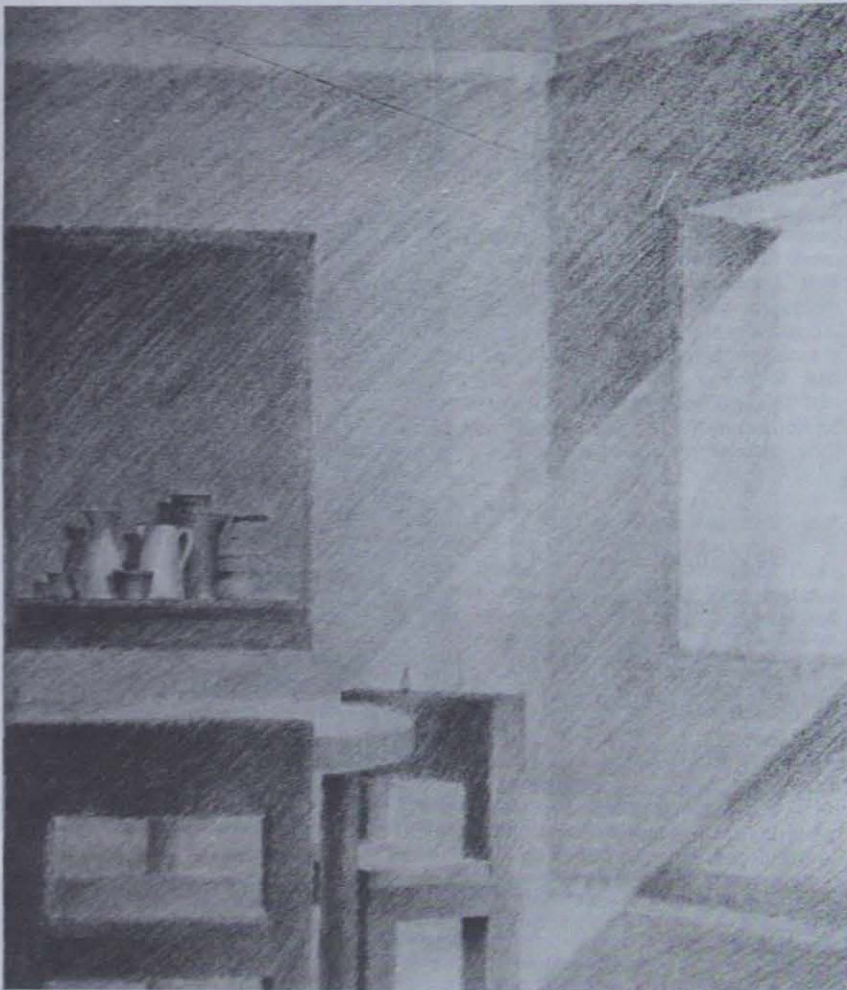# Art and Architecture

by Wendy Eidinger.

The Hexagonal Room, Architectural League of New York Exhibit 1980; *Cesar Pelli and William Bailey.*

Architecture, as Vincent Scully describes it, is: "...not an isolated art. It is part of one large human art, which is the shaping of the physical environment and of living in it. Through the art of architecture human beings create an environment for themselves; they shape a space. Through the art of sculpture human beings populate that space with their own perception of the quality of being alive. Through the art of painting human beings create the illusion of every conceivable kind of environment and kind of action in relation to those environments". [1]

The harmony between the sister arts permitted each to thrive separately while enhancing the other in its reflection - a symbiosis. Sadly, the last half-century has witnessed a fracture in the relationship. "Art and architecture have not been created jointly," critic Paul Goldberger has observed, "... physically made at the same time, spiritually they remain far apart."

The social, economic and political times contributed to this growing rift. Modernist theoreticians, convinced of the superiority of architecture, relegated the visual arts to a supplementary rather than complementary role. The notion of the architect as the prime creative force advanced by the Bauhaus still retains its subscribers. Max Weber's comment that in the 20th-Century, aesthetics would replace ethics as the standard for moral conduct is alive and before us.

True collaboration between art and architecture results when the contiguous presences of a work of art and an architectural design are vital to the meaning of that spatial composition.

Who can observe Henry Moore's receptive plastic forms and Alexander Calder's kinetic sculpture without admiring the simultaneous effects of counterpoint on the strict modernis geometry of their 'host' edifices? Yet Moore's reclining figures would function equally well in the pastoral landscape of the English countryside; and, if truth be known, the Calder mobiles which breathe an infusion of colour into their sombre architectural surroundings were never part of the original blueprint. The notion of 'art as an antidote to architecture' prevails. Apparently disinclined to the integrating principle, the mentality of our age continues to ponder architecture with art as the *arriere-pensée*.

The importance of mutual respect is apparent in 16th-Century Rome's Piazza del Campidoglio where Michelangelo "pushed his buildings back at a diagonal to show that architecture is supremely space and then placed the Roman equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius in it to act out, through its gesture, the creation of that space by human action. There could be no clearer demonstration of architecture as environment and sculpture as act".[2] In the Romanesque church designs of the 6th-Century and later in the Gothic cathedrals of the 1200's the balance of art and edifice is resolved. Early figural sculpture on the Romanesque capitals are "primarily an outgrowth of the environment and conform to its architectural shape ... they bring the mass to life. They do not challenge it".[3] The Gothic cathedral embraced the light ot stained glass: "... the narrative function (of the figures) subordinate to the overall environmental colour screen".[4]
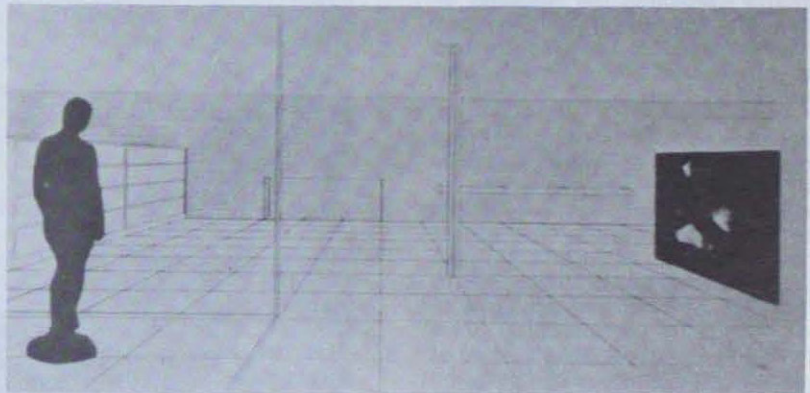
Courthouse project; *Mies Van der Rohe.*

Piazza del Campidoglio; *Michelangelo.*
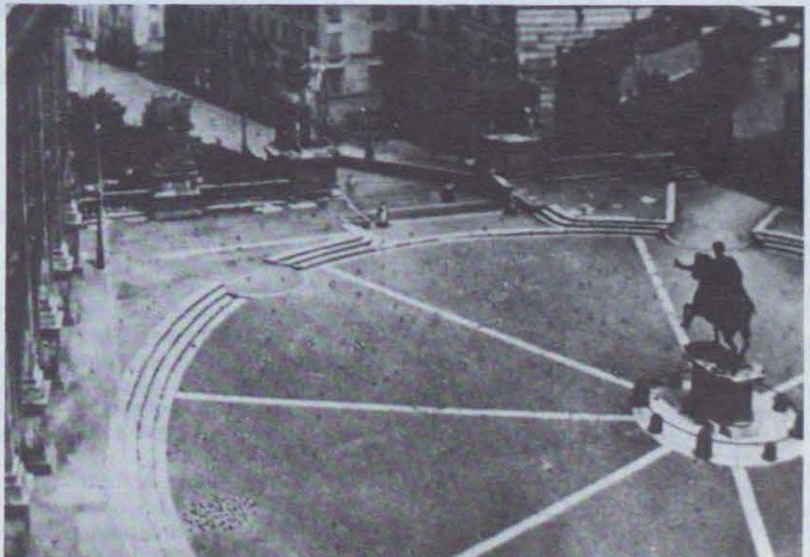
The Ecole des Beaux Arts addressed itself to the question of how architecture, sculpture and painting should relate to each other. In this era a spirit of cooperation prevailed whereby the participants saw themselves enhancing and deepening the meaning of each other's work. In their schemes prominent consideration was given to the integration of painting and sculpture.

The philosophy of total design of Frank Lloyd Wright had as its premise the incorporation of all arts into a total architectural system. But precedence was always given to the environment which dominates; all the arts playing a supportive role. Le Corbusier tried to synthesize painting and sculpture in the making of architectural form whereas Mies van der Rohe's sense of the total environment was conceived with the essential presence of sculpture and painting. These modern architects, Mies, Le Corbusier and Wright, concerned with creating their own imagined environments, set up total orders which tolerated few associations outside their system and tended to eradicate all acts other than their own.

The prejudice of the modern movement with its abhorence of all which was not 'of the spirit of the age' is to be re-examined. The Modernist doctrine itself, with its inflexible canons and inherent sterility, has proved itself the Neitzchean prisoner of its own convictions. Recent movements, however, have embarked towards a broadening and overlapping of roles played by artists and architects. Artists are exploring architectural dimensions - in one of the popular exhibits on the gallery market aptly named 'Architecture by Artists', while architects are no longer shy to impinge on the 'art scene' - in recent successful shows: 'Houses for Sale' and 'Art by Architects'. Additionally teams of architects and artists were commissioned by the Architec-
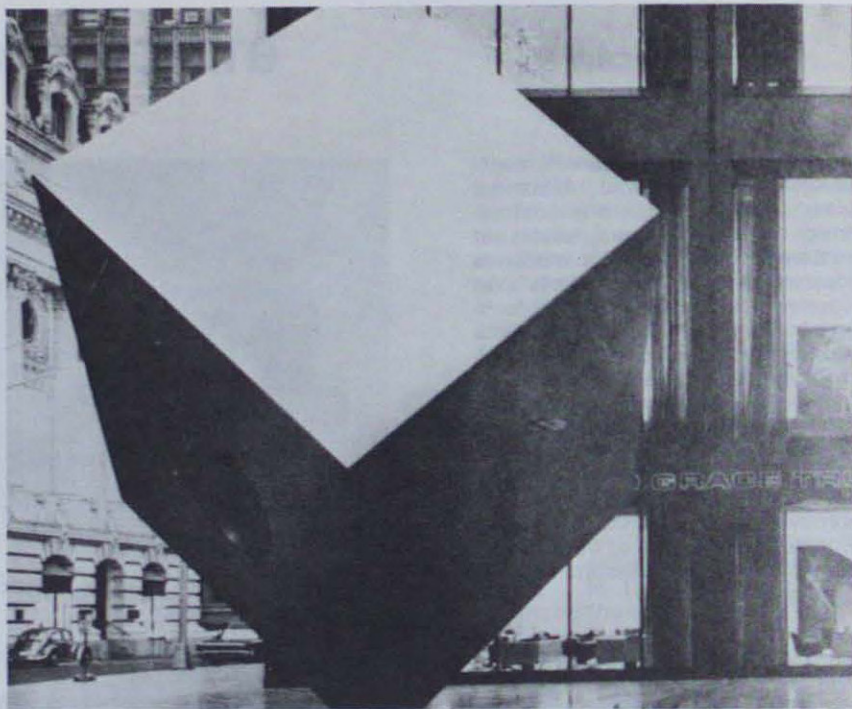
Red Cube Marine Midland Building, New York; *Isamu Noguchi.*

tural League of New York to try their hands at a joint project.

In this sympathetic climate, artists who design whole environments rather than objects and architects who create purely aesthetic experiences have liberated the spirits and the imaginations of all who believe that creation and cooperation need not be mutually exclusive processes.

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Notes

1. Scully, Vincent. "The Past Architecture, Sculpture and Painting: Environment, Act and Illusion", essay in *Collaboration: Artists & Architects*, Barbaralee Diamonstein, ed., Whitney Library of Design, Watson-Guptill Publications, New York 1981. p17.

2. ibid., p18.

3. ibid., p26.

4. ibid., p27.