

'Architect Artists' and 'Artist Architects'



Placemaking happens when there is a dynamic mix of architects and artists says Terry Farrell

The Farrell Review contains some important messages about the role of the arts and artists in placemaking and the built environment. Not just the planning, design, animation, and management of the public realm but also the architectural design of buildings. There has been good progress over the last thirty or forty years, with art becoming much more integrated with architecture, and things have certainly changed for the better. However this needs to be much more mainstream and applied to everyday places in order to 'make the ordinary better' in our towns and cities.

In the 1980's, the American architect and artist James

Wines was a fantastic champion of buildings as the art itself - not separated out (or "zoned out") as high modernism had done with obligatory Calder or Henry Moore sculptures brought in to stand in front of unswervingly functionalist building. What James Wines called "the turd on the plaza"! Today Eric Parry, Herzog and De Meuron, FAT with Grayson Perry and ourselves are among architects who have the confidence to incorporate artistic expression and decoration within their buildings. Architects like Frank Gehry and Zaha Hadid are in my opinion 'architect artists' and even now the role is reversing with 'artist architects' like Thomas Heatherwick becoming ever >>>



RIGHT:
Home Office by Farrells in collaboration with Liam Gillick
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more prevalent as computers and other aids demystify the building element. The extraordinary hotel room by Anthony Gormley would not have been conceived of in any other era than the one we are living in. A sculptural and abstract war memorial by Carmody Groarke merits an RIBA award but one by a sculptor or artist would not, which no longer makes sense.

A pedestrian bridge by Foster is a strictly functional thing, but it is argued that it is art just as a Ferrari or Concorde is art. But the garden bridge is by an artist and is a much broader brief, not just structural and functional but a garden, a park and an ecological haven it is argued, as well as a sculpture. Are other bridges architecture or art? When the blame for its wobble happened it became the responsibility of engineers Arups whilst the garden bridge doesn't have an architect's involvement. These are silos that are breaking down and it is important to recognise that the lines are blurring.

Our design of the Home Office Headquarters in Marsham Street shows what can be achieved when architects and artists work collaboratively at every stage of the design process. In many ways it is an example of the 'decorated shed' approach described by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown in their seminal book 'Learning from Las Vegas'. A simple box which became much more than that following our collaboration with Liam Gillick, both as artist and curator of other artists.

The genius of Liam was to take elements of the building which had already been costed and specified by us and work within that framework to create entirely original interpretations. A concrete canopy became coloured glass, which not only animated the building's elevation but also the street as the light changed colour which led to the local community

renaming it 'Rainbow Street'. A wonderful example of architecture, art and placemaking working in harmony together. The Louvres on the front elevation became a work of art as a brise soleil whilst the frit glass was given a patterned effect. Even the sign for the Home Office became a sculptural component which gave the building its distinctive identity and all these elements working together give it a genuine sense of place. Elements which were needed for the architectural form were reimagined and transformed by an artist in a way that would not have happened if we had worked alone, which is the beauty of genuine collaboration.

These silos didn't used to exist in the same way as they do today, with our ever increasing specialisation within the built environment professions. For the likes of Rennie Macintosh, Voysey and indeed most of the Gothic, Greek and renaissance architects art and architecture were closely knit. Often you couldn't see the join and I believe they were all the better for it. After all, Michelangelo was a sculptor before he became an architect in his 60's and then he became a painter and created the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, not bad for a beginner! Our modern tools make it easier now than ever before to be more versatile and that is a trend that will continue. To survive as architects, I believe we have to work with artists otherwise they will end up doing our work without us!

For me, one of my most rewarding moments was when I went to meet the Planning Minister Brandon Lewis recently only to find out that DCLG have moved into the Home Office and his new office looks out over the front of the building. Let's just say the conversation about the importance of design quality in the built environment was made all the better for it! ■

