

Open Spaces-The architects greatest playground?

Undefined architecture and space

By Eric Gatzelink



What defines a structure or building as a piece of architecture? Does something need to be purpose-built in order to be defined as architecture, or is architecture now able to be recognized as any public structure?

As a trained and certified architect, you are endowed with a title of high regard and responsibility. With that title, comes an expectation and a set of strict rules. As an architect, you are required to fulfill numerous standards with technical requirements relating to an array of code overviews. These building code restrictions are, in simpler terms, the what "limits" an architect as an architect. Architects are brilliant minds, they're mathematicians, engineers, designers, and they're also artists. Architects in essence it really is a form of public art... So, how can architects explore and seek out the notion of freedom and freedom within space whilst maintaining within their restriction codes? Will the work still be considered architecture or does it then transform into a work of art such as sculpture?



The idea of seeking out freedom within a regulated means of confinement is a recurring quest throughout history. Land artists of the late 1960's and 70's were an amalgam of the concept and spatial artist freedom, which at the time was to explore new platforms for their work but enable the confinement of gallery walls. This during the period, artists began to move away from their studios and into gallery "pop-ups" in public works of art. The intention was to show that land artists and architects to produce a work of art, freedom, work that was portable, and had no need to be in a gallery. The potential found in land is one that is incomparable to any other medium for an artist. The scale doesn't exist in an urban space. Artists such as Michael Heizer and the Double Negative in Nevada and Robert Smithson with the Spiral Jetty in Utah were the pioneers of thinking outside of the confines of their walls.

Architects of today are exploring the same elements of the ways in which they have access to display their work, whilst still being appreciated as architecture. Whether that be a new way of approaching a purpose-built building, or a commercial space. Today, there are plenty of architects who wish to push the boundaries with their work and explore the many ways in which they can produce whilst still being recognized. British architect David Chipperfield for one has already over decades deep diving into concepts, open and form to create what has not been done before.



Many Land artists of this generation proved the way for a new way of thinking and embracing the idea of open and freedom but to break away from restrictions or an imposed idea of where work should be and how it should be defined. Architects, like artists, people with similar notions of producing buildings, and spaces, that are user-focused, and rather built around the concept that the space cannot be defined. There is one architect in particular who is seeking to create with how he places to move forward as an architect but also as an artist, aspiring to produce the way people can use what they believe to be considered as 'architecture'.

A trained architect, Marc Lusscher from France, explains that the topology of the work is far more aligned with traditional architecture. The idea of his work being that it is not to produce a building with a function, but rather to produce a space which cannot be defined. After being completed a residency program for a fellowship at the Villa Mairea in Rome, he returned to France to explore how he could build something where there was no definition from the beginning. Back in France, Lusscher was given access to a piece of land at the Chateau de la Roche-Berny and it was here that he chose to develop on his idea of creating an undefined space. The product of this idea was a pavilion, Prompts, in which one built in the heart of the Chateau, with no real purpose, and the promise being to create a constant rain of light through the forest, and the form providing itself for the curves for Lusscher to create something new and disruptive to the world and rules of architecture. "I would like to expand a certain way of architecture" (Marc Lusscher)

Lusscher's notion of exploring freedom and space within architecture is not a binary one, as it's a resolved concept which is being a critical to the 21st century. This is something which can be known as ephemeral architecture. Architects become excited by the idea of testing the concept of architecture built with no real purpose and can then be viewed as more of an experiential, where they are allowed to take risks, as opposed to creating and building normally within the restrictions of architecture. Ephemeral architecture allows an artist to take on a new way of testing and appreciating what a building is a space represents, and how although it might be temporary, it still has a lasting impact on the individual.



Ephemeral architecture calls on all the senses and emotions of a person, one of the most well-known locations, which every year becomes host to a new form of ephemeral architecture is the landscape district east of Burning Man. An temporary city set up in the middle of the Black Rock Desert in Nevada during the same days, and roughly hosts between 50,000 to more than 80,000 people in the temporary city of Black Rock City. Whether your view is the desert or positive or negative, there's no questioning that the art installations and temporary structures which are developed for the event are a visual and sensory wonder. A place where artists, designers and architects can come together and produce work which aligns with the community of Leave No Trace. The experience of the event is known as "The Temple", which is a temporary garden designed yearly by an architect, which is a work of art in itself, a place to gather people and with the full intention of being burnt down at the close of the event. The desert landscape providing itself for one of the most dramatic and awe-inspiring scenarios for any event or design, allows them complete freedom of space and for the parties to be experienced in whatever way the individual might perceive the structure or their art to exist.

The designer of Burning Man's last temple in 2015, was Gerardo van der Beeck, who created the Temple of Divinity. A structure which drew on inspiration from the grass of the Parkland District in Texas. The temple can be perceived as both purpose and non-purpose-built structure, as its use existence was purpose built for Burning Man users to experience each in their own respective ways, but is also ultimately non-purpose built in that it is a very delicate beginning and an end to the lifespan of this structure. The Temple of Divinity can strongly relate and pull from the work which Land artists of the late 1960's and 70's were trying to achieve through their quest for artistic and creative freedom as artists (and also for architects) by testing the open space as their canvas or platform.



The line between what is defined as art or architecture has begun to blur. Architecture does not need to be defined as a purpose-built structure, architecture can be viewed and experienced in every individual in their own unique way. There is a structure planned or built, but because a building has no initial purpose cannot disappear, it from being recognized as architecture, and can instead be appreciated as both a work of art and architecture.

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