

The Pull of Beauty  
The Storefront  
for Art and  
Architecture

Co-curated by: Victoria Milne and Kiki Smith

Pedro Campos Rosado

This exhibition comprises an installation piece made up of several doors in one continuous line, as though a mock up functional situation as in a display of hardware in a store. The doors all open to the same side. Each door has a peephole and distinctive hardware, mainly door knobs and handles, in too great a quantity than what is required for the functionality of a door. Most of the doors, using a periscope-like apparatus, slides of ornaments or decorations are projected very subtly onto one of the walls, where, also in a subtle way, are painted in light gray more decorations/ornaments.

At the narrowest end of this wedged shaped gallery, on the wall, some prints of ornaments and highly decorated keys are displayed, presumably from illustration books (late XIX / early XX century). At the opposite side, one of the walls there is a sequence, placed in a line at about four feet from the floor, of utilitarian objects that were chosen, presumably, for their decorative character. These range from coat hangers, faucet taps, wall soap-dish, mailbox, buzzer, etc. The opposing wall is used to present a quotation from "Ornament and Crime" (1908) by Adolf Loos (see appendix) in four lines, using an italic and somewhat flamboyant lettering. Finally, the gallery offers a handout with information regarding the exhibition and with an essay by Victoria Milne apropos "The Pull of Beauty."

The formal arrangement of each of the four parts that constitute this exhibition seem to be far more directed towards aesthetic considerations rather than "examine the role of decoration and ornament" as the overall impression is of four pieces, each with a specific unity and consistency. Further, it appears that there is not any particular criterium for the choice of objects or their placement, besides some kind of "taste". However, what appears most interesting about this exhibition is that the "door sequence", the hardware on the wall, the quotation, and the prints, by being placed in an art gallery space acquires the statute of art objects.

The “door sequence”, which is the most elaborate of the four pieces, and the hardware on the wall can be perceived as direct references to a display in a hardware store with the excessive profusion of goods for the consumer to choose from, while the placement of the objects is determined by formal aesthetic considerations.

Nevertheless, the reference to a hardware store display brings to question the concept of art, even though this exhibition proposes to examine the role of decoration and ornament. (In other words, is a hardware store display an artifact?) The formal organization of a display in a store is determined, besides serving its functionality, by a pre-reflective aesthetic attitude, and revealing a “taste” - the store’s owner and that of the consumer’s.

The title of this exhibition - “The Pull of Beauty” - and the role of ornament and decoration in contemporary design” that it proposes to examine allows a discussion of Kant’s “Theory of Aesthetic Judgment from The Critique of Judgment” in its relevance to this exhibit.

Kant states: “If we wish to decide whether something is beautiful or not, we do not use understanding to refer the presentation to the object so as to give rise to cognition; rather, we use imagination (perhaps in connection with understanding) to refer the presentation to the subject and his feeling of pleasure or displeasure.

Hence, a judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment and so it is not a logical judgment but an aesthetic one, by which we mean a judgment whose determined basis cannot be other than subjective. But any reference of presentations, even of sensations, can be objective (in which case it signifies what is real [rather than formal] in an empirical presentation); excepted is a reference designates nothing whatsoever in the object, but here the subject feels himself, [namely] how he is affected by the presentation.”<sup>1</sup>

It appears that the “Beauty” referred to in this exhibition is of a subjective nature, and based on feeling. However, this “liking of beauty” seems to involve also some form of interest, even though Victoria Milne states in her essay: “Kiki and I like decorative things,” she also refers to the concept of the objects and to their functionality, and, by implication, to some form of gratification. In fact, in Victoria Milne’s discourse, while not using the word good, nevertheless this concept is subjacent to it.

Kant says: "...the agreeable, the beautiful, and the good designate three different relations that presentations have to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, the feeling by reference to which we distinguish between objects or between ways of presenting them. The terms of approbation which we appropriate to each of these three are also different. We call agreeable what GRATIFIES us, beautiful what we just LIKE, good what we ESTEEM, or endorse [b gen], i.e. That which we attribute [stezen] and objective ... value only the liking involved in taste for the beautiful is disinterested and free."<sup>2</sup>

As such, the four components of this show, on the other hand, in contrast with decoration and ornament, can be qualified as beautiful for there is no gratification or esteem involved - no interest involved. If this is the case, it follows, since a "judgment of taste involves the consciousness that all interest is kept out of it, it must also involve a claim of being valid for everyone, a judgment of taste must involve a claim of subjective universality," writes Kant, "understanding that the universal voice is only an idea."<sup>3</sup>

In relation to this presentation, although this concept of beauty pertains, it is quite questionable whether this installation/s could be said to be beautiful. The concept of "universal" is highly questionable today. Kant reference to "universal" stems from a euro centric cultural framework of his time.

The concept of the universal is also present in Hegelian thought in terms of the "absolute mind," placing stress in "geist," which in German means both "spirit" and "mind." "In the former sense it can have a religious connotations; in the second it is the normal word used to describe the mental or intellectual side of our being, as distinct from the physical"<sup>4</sup> It is this importance of "mind" in its mental or intellectual connotation that is appertaining to the objects of this exhibition as "spirit" is absent or, at best, subliminal.

Hegel states that "insofar as works of art are produced by mind, they are in themselves essentially spiritual."<sup>5</sup> If this can be accepted in a very broad sense, it is certainly, nowadays, difficult to accept a religious connotation in art works, however, spirituality might be present in art, differentiated from the intellectual side of being, but it does not seem to be an aspect of this exhibit.

Kant provides some insight of "what is man's need to produce works of art?"

On the one hand, they may appear that such works are products of idle fancy or chance. On the other, they seem sometimes to originate in the highest of human

impulses, supplying what seems to be an absolute need of man and being wedded in this respect to the most universal religious interest and world-perspectives of entire epochs and peoples. It is art in this latter sense, conceived as an absolute rather... than a merely contingent need of man that concerns us here."<sup>6</sup>

Hegel further explains his concept of art by writing: "what distinguishes art from other things made by man is, first of all, that it is made for man's sensuous apprehension in such a way to address itself ultimately in his mind, which is to find a spiritual satisfaction in it.

The sensuous shapes and sounds of art present themselves to us not to arouse or satisfy desire but to excite a response and echo in all the depths of consciousness of the mind."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, according to Hegel, the ornaments and decorations presented in this exhibition are mere man-made objects, however, the installation/s, and in particular the "line of doors," can be considered an art object, because "only in the measure that it has been brought in to being through mind,"<sup>8</sup> - the installations were made for sensuous perception, and are directed to the "intellectual side of being." The "spiritual satisfaction" that Hegel refers to, if at all present, is of minor relevance in this exhibition.

Hegel makes an important reference to form and content and states: "granted that the content of art is the Idea, and that its form in the plastic use of images accessible to the senses, we must first examine how art succeeds in reconciling these two sides - its content and its form - in a full and unite totality. What is first required is that the content which is to be given artistic representation be inherently worthy of such representation."<sup>9</sup> And then Hegel writes: "unlike the merely sensuous concrete thing of external nature, a work of art is not naively self-centered; it is instead essentially a question, an address to the responding human soul, an appeal to affections and to mind."<sup>10</sup>

The unity of form and content is also present in this installation/s, at least as it through form - the formal organization - that the content is brought into consideration, but in a rather diverse way from the concept that form is the content in Modernism. In other words, it requires a conscious intellectual effort to be able to distinguish form from content, and form, by itself, seems to be rather vacuous.

The relation between content and form present in this installation/s does not seem to fit into Hegel's "three basic relations that may be obtained between the Idea and its outward artistic representation."<sup>11</sup> That is, the Symbolic, the Classical, and the Romantic form in their relation to the Idea. However, since Hegel saw these forms as "art's progression," in syntony with his view that "history display a rational process of development,"<sup>12</sup> the art work in question could, eventually, be placed in this "progression" beyond Romantic art. (The concept of development or progression has been highly questioned at the end of the XX century.)

It is through aesthetic contemplation, asserts Schopenhauer that we escape from the horrors of the world. This is achieved "because the whole consciousness is filled and occupied with one single sensuous picture; if thus the object has to such an extent passed out all relation to something outside it, and the subject out of all relation to the will, then that which is so known is no longer the particular thing as such; but it is the idea, the eternal form, the immediate objectivity of the will at this grade; and, therefore, he who sunk in this perception is no longer individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; but he is pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge the pure knowledge knows only Ideas,"<sup>13</sup> where "subject and object are no longer to be distinguished,"<sup>14</sup> liberating us from our "faculty of knowledge ... normally only an instrument to the Will's satisfaction"<sup>15</sup> according to the principle of sufficient reason (sensibility, understanding, principle of sufficient reason (sensibility, understanding, reason, and motive.)

Schopenhauer writes that "it is possible to consider a real object in two opposite ways, purely objectively, the way of genius (pure knowing subject) grasping its Idea, or in the common way, merely in the relations in which it stands to other objects and to one's own will, in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason."<sup>16</sup> As such, the latter can be related to ornament and decoration, however, even though the installation/s in this exhibition might be susceptible of contemplation, Schopenhauer's concept involves that it is a product of genius which in turn implies the "Idea" as an "universal," and this, as art works are culture bound, it is difficult to be accepted and appertaining today, at the end of the millennium.

The distinction between the sublime and the beautiful, and their concepts, according to Schopenhauer, seems to be in total contradiction with the title of this exhibition - "The Pull of Beauty." As it has been established, ornament and decoration are not objects of "contemplation." Thus, the "beauty" here is

referring to something different from Schopenhauer's concept as he states: "what distinguishes the sense of the sublime from that of the beautiful is this: in the case of the beautiful, pure knowledge has gained the upper hand without struggle, for the beauty of the object, i.e., that property which facilitates the knowledge of the Idea, has removed from consciousness without resistance, and therefore imperceptibly, the will and the knowledge of relations which is subject to it, so that what is left is the pure subject of knowledge without even remembrance of the will. On the other hand, in the case of the sublime that state of pure knowledge is only attained by a conscious and forcible breaking away from the relations of the same object to the will, which are recognized as favorable, by a free and conscious transcending of the will and the knowledge related to it."<sup>17</sup>

This concept of the beautiful might be applicable to the installation/s, but ornament and decoration seem to fit into Schopenhauer's category of charming or attractive, "that which excites the will by presenting to it directly its fulfillment, its satisfaction."<sup>18</sup> It is in this sense that the word "beauty" is used in the title of this exhibition.

This installation might possibly be "a source of aesthetic satisfaction" through "the comprehension of the known Idea." However, the concept of the "Idea" is questionable in its applicability in this context.

Taking from this exhibition ornament and decoration, the installation/s in the gallery and the reference to tattoos in the quoted text by Alfred Loos, brings to mind Nietzsche's concept of the Apollinian and, its opposite, the Dionysian, which he has "artistic energies which burst forth from nature herself, without the mediation of the human artist - energies in which nature's art impulses are satisfied in the most immediate way - first in the image world of dreams, whose completeness is no different upon the intellectual attitude or the aesthetic culture of any single being; and then as intoxicated reality, which likewise does not heed the single unit, but even seeks to destroy the individual and redeem him by a mystic feeling of oneness. With reference to these immediate art-states of nature, every artist is an "imitator," that is to say, either Apollinian artist in dreams, or a Dionysian artist in ecstasies, or finally - as for example in Greek Tragedy - at once artist in both dream and ecstasies."<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the Papuan tattoos (see appendix), and ornament and decoration are the materialization of energies that are intrinsic to all.

The Papuan tattoos appear to emerge “from the innermost depths of man, indeed nature, at this collapse of the principium individuationis, we steal a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysian,”<sup>20</sup> and “the artist power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity.”<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, while the installation with its reference to a hardware store display might also allude to the “energies of creation that are intrinsic to all,” seem more the product of the Apollinian. Ornament and decoration seem also, but in a different way, to relate to the Apollinian: “Apollo, the god of all plastic energies, is at the same time the soothsaying god. He, who (as the etymology of the name indicates) is the “shining one,” the deity of light, is the ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy.

The higher truth, the perception of these states in contrast to the incomplete intelligible everyday world, this deep consciousness of nature, healing and helping in sleep and in dreams, is at the same time the symbolic analogue of the soothsaying faculty and the arts in general, which makes life possible and worth living His (Apollo) eye must be “sun-like,” as befits his origin; even when it is angry and distempered it is still hallowed by beautiful illusion.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *A Theory of Aesthetic Judgment: From the Critique of Judgment*; p.287

<sup>2</sup> I. Kant. p. 290

<sup>3</sup> I. Kant. p. 290

<sup>4</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Edited by Ted Honderich. p. 342

<sup>5</sup> Georg W.F. Hegel. *Hegel: On the Arts*, translated by Henry Paolucci. p. 2

<sup>6</sup> Hegel. p. 3

<sup>7</sup> Hegel. p. 4

<sup>8</sup> Hegel. p. 4

<sup>9</sup> Hegel. p. 8

<sup>10</sup> Hegel. p. 9

<sup>11</sup> Hegel. p. 10

<sup>12</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. p. 339

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer. *From the World as Will and Idea*. p. 707

<sup>14</sup> A. Schopenhauer. p. 708

<sup>15</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. p. 803

<sup>16</sup> A. Schopenhauer. p. 711

<sup>17</sup> A. Schopenhauer. p. 719

<sup>18</sup> A. Schopenhauer. p. 721

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche. *Apollinian and Dionysian Art: From the Birth of Tragedy*. p. 474

<sup>20</sup> F. Nietzsche. p. 473

<sup>21</sup> F. Nietzsche. p. 473

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## APPENDIX I

Ornament and Crime (1908), By Alfred Loos

### Line 1.

The Papuan tattoos his skin, his boat, his oar, in short, everything that is within his reach. [And although he] slaughters his enemies and devours them, he is not a criminal. The modern man who tattoos himself is a criminal or degenerate. There are prisons where eighty percent of the inmates bear tattoos. Those who are tattooed but are not imprisoned are latent criminals or degenerate aristocrats. If a tattooed person dies at liberty, it is only that he died a few years before he committed a murder - the urge to ornament one's face, and everything within one's reach is the origin of fine art.

### Line 2.

I have made the following observations and have announced to the world: the evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from objects of daily use. - What makes our period so important is that it is incapable of producing new ornament. We have out-grown ornament; we have struggled through to a state without ornament. Behold, the time is at hand, fulfillment awaits us. Soon the streets of the cities will glow like white walls! Like Zion -the holy city, the capital of heaven. It is then that fulfillment will have come.

**Line 3.**

I will not subscribe to the argument that ornament increases the pleasure of the life of the cultivated person, or the argument, which covers itself with the words: "But if the ornament is beautiful..." To me, and to all the cultivated people, ornament does not increase the pleasures of life. Ornament is not merely produced by criminals; it commits a crime itself by damaging the national economy and therefore cultural development. - And if there existed no ornament at all, a condition which might arise in millennia, man would only need to work four instead of eight hours - half of today's working day.

**Line 4.**

Ornament can no longer be borne by someone who exists at our level of culture. It is different for people and notions that have not reached this level - the lack of ornament is a sign of intellectual power. Modern man has the ornament of past and foreign cultures at his discretion. His own inventions are concentrated on other things.

**APPENDIX II**

## EXHIBITION

the Pull of Beauty

February 13 – March 30, 1996

Opening Reception: December 12, 6-8pm

Gallery Hours: Tuesday Saturday, 11-6pm



If you received professional training in architecture or design in the west in the last fifty years, or if you read a respectful publications in these fields, then you certainly have been exposed to the modern doctrine of decoration. Your explosion may have been explicit, like reading Loos *Ornament is Crime*, or it may be implicit, like learning the value in Rietveld's zig-zag chair. Perhaps your professor snidely remarked that considering its floral victorian contents, it was almost worth losing Paxton's crystal palace. Or perhaps you were among the generations of americans architects taught by European modernists like Serge Chermayeff, who told London's Art workers guild in 1929 that "Meaningless decoration as such is desecration."

The aspect of modern philosophy that remains admirable, and for which, especially in Europe, it derived its strength is its political agenda. To quote Chermayeff again in '29: "The furniture of Today and Tomorrow must be strong, cheap and mass-produced, of good, simple, and machine dictated design ... a new furnishing period is opening before our eyes – of good things for all instead of collecting for the few."

The movement was initially associated with the machine, and from that association were to follow a myriad development for the public good: workers were have more time for personal fulfillment, high-quality goods were suddenly to become affordable to them, and a great equalization was to revolutionize society.<sup>22</sup> However machines have become perfect while society was not – a condition that deprives a clean-form-philosophy of its inspiring myth. The modernist's romantic belief in social revolution, or perhaps redemption, has come up bankrupt.

This of course is not news – rational form was downgraded from a universal truth to an optional aesthetic some time ago. But as we leave the romance or modernism's original goals, and its later severity, we are without a constructive, communicative, optimistic philosophy. Postmodernism, because it focuses on the re-use of forms, and often turns into cynical amalgamation without sentiment. These movements have left us impoverished in some ways, hungry for authentic communication.

Perhaps we can consider the expressiveness of a decorative design aesthetic to be read for renewal. This by no means is to say that the subtext of design should become less critical – this is no wish for escapists curlicues folderol – but it seems clear that expressiveness, and the humanism that its presence can indicate, may be appropriate now. It is possible to imagine a decorative vocabulary that

is neither sentimental nor sarcastic; one that is expressive in a way that is creative, optimistic, unsentimental, an appropriate to our time.

This is swimming upstream, however, because whether one wants to call the period in which we now are, we still accept this modern view towards decoration not as a philosophy of a certain period, but as a received doctrine. That is to say that intellectually, in the culture of design and architecture, we are still essentially within the modern period, and so have not genuinely reassessed the principle tenet that decoration is the desecration and ornament is crime. To return to the texts from which this principle came, however, is to show an emperor without a fig leaf; the argument against decoration reads as romantic and now irrelevant prejudice; understandable as a political position in its day, but as applicable today as animism.

At the moment, however, gender, virtual reality, globalization and other concepts are used to discuss decisions that are often aesthetic. Once this romance of the machine was the operative rationale, and now social theories are used to underlie designs; but the argument that any aspect of a design has an aesthetic basis, all underlying philosophy is disconnected from the project. Remaining within the modernist mind set, we have unquestionably inherited this myth that it is possible to create a design vocabulary that is not based on aesthetics, and that is rational in some way. Philosophically speaking, though, as soon as one thinks "It would be better a little shorter," "It" might as well be covered in floral chintz. There is no defensible line to draw that would distinguish "good" design from any other subjective taste.



So, what explains the persistence of this prejudice against ornament? Convenience, certainly. Right angles are cheap, and craftspeople are both scarce and expensive. In fact, the flow of theories regarding the success of modernism and its place in society is unending, and I will not survey them here. One theory especially regarding ornament that may be new, however, is this: it is risky. "Risky? To be a sentimental fop? Risky for my dignity perhaps, but not risky in the way, for instance, showing my selection in a completion would be."

It is, though – risky more along the lines of proposing marriage. Genuine, good decoration is an expression, and in personal expression one is revealed and made vulnerable. As with many things in society we have an arrogant, vaguely disgusted response to something we fear, in this case the challenge of this kind of expressiveness. But an arrogant, vaguely disgusted response is what we would rather not be aware of, what we would be much more comfortable retaining as a needed buffer against that fearsome vulnerability.



This defensive response is a common device in society with obvious and ugly application. And in fact, the connection between this fear-turned-to-disgust response to ornament and society's response to the emotional and feminine (whether in men or women), is obvious.

You surely can follow the course of that argument yourself. Let us return to the creative core of devising other's environment. It must, for every designer and architect, include some sense of satisfaction in influencing the experience of the user; Dieter Rams designed a green switch on a travel alarm clock, the intelligent function of which me joy; Raphael Moneo recently designed a path, from the illuminated interiority of pop art to the celestial radiance of ancient Rome, that communicates profoundly to a museum visitor. We may think of this "influencing another's experience" as a kind of communication. Rams and Moneo have given an elegant encounter that is unavailable in any other medium; they have communicated with design.

One might consider communication to be the essential element of a cultural endeavor, whether in a form of a book, car, building, plaza, speech, gown, frame, newscast, vessel, meal or graffiti. These all succeed the more clearly they convey their overt or implicit meaning to their audience. We are not talking necessarily about easy communication, nor necessarily positive. Often, as in the case of graffiti or even Comme des Garçons, for instances, the message is partly

about group identity, or exclusion. If we take the cultural essential aspect of communication to the issue or ornament, however, one is moved, again, toward the curiousness of decoration's rejection.

Is it too simple to say this: every aspect of a design communicates, so developing a building or an industrial design that does not communicate is not possible; and, since what is made is communicative, is it not an affection to suppress its expressive potential?



It is not a stretch to say that communication, in design, is deeply connected to the decorative; one can see it in glass doorknob or in a brass drawer pull. It is through these details that every work of architecture reaches for the resident's hand; in fact, hardware marks the only spot one is really intended to touch a building. Therefore, hardware marks the location in which the most intimate, in the physical sense, communication takes place.

Architectural hardware is the ideal voice for this discussion because the most humble fitting still plays a role as a visual ornament. In fact as any handle design, perhaps aspiring to modernist discretion, approaches invisibility, it also approaches uselessness; hardware must reveal itself. So not only is hardware the place of physical interaction, but it must also draw attention to itself visually, and it fails if it does not. Is this not a prescription for decoration? To meet this program of visual self-proclamation is nothing other than to be decorative. But rather than holding one hostage to a doorknob's "narcissism", fulfilling this requirement of hardware opens a rich opportunity: a light plate can be a personal missive from the designer to the one whose hand turns the switch. That aspect of missive, of communication from the designer, is the central theme in this exhibition.

Hardware's role, as what we touch in order to control and manipulate interior environment, is that of a tool. Through it we change the flow of traffic or air, the illumination, the temperature, the space one has access to, the water. Hardware forms the knobs on the machine for living. In each instance it offers environmental

control but often so intimately that architectural hardware becomes almost invisible to the user as an extension of herself.

In the question of the tool's imperceptibility arises the question of perceptible decoration. Can something be decorative to be touched? Is it possible for a handle to be expressive in the dark? In use? Is "the decorative" only a superficial experience cheaply available to the eye – not to the hand, not to the body, not to the ear?<sup>23</sup>

Heidegger has a discussion that is relevant to this exhibition in which he analyzes our perception of tools as "ready-to hand":

*"In dealing such as ... [using a hammer], where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the 'in-order-to' which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time; the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is – as equipment. The hammering itself uncovers the specific 'manipulation' of the hammer. The kind of Being which equipment possesses – in which it manifests itself in its own right – we call 'readiness-to-hand.' Only because equipment has this 'Being-in-itself' and does not merely occur, is it manipulated in the broadest sense and at our disposal. No matter how sharply we just look at the 'outward appearance' of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. If we look at Things just 'theoretically,' we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character....."*

*'Practical' behavior is nor 'atheoretical' in the sense of 'sightless.' The way it differs from theoretical behavior does not lie simply in the fact that in theoretical behavior one observes, while in practical behavior one acts, and that action must employ theoretical cognition if it is not to remain blind; for the fact that observation is a kind of concern is just as primordial as the fact that action has its own kind of sight .....*

*The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must withdraw in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically. That with which our everyday dealings proximally dwell is not the tools themselves. On the contrary, that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work – that which is to be produced at the time; and this is accordingly the ready-to-hand too."<sup>24</sup>*

Clearly, in using architectural hardware, our experience of the tool is subordinated to the purpose to which we put it; usually, we do not really see the window latch when we use it, we might not recognize a daily doorknob. This exhibition is therefore an uncovering of this arena of actions in a building.



For the Storefront For Art and Architecture, this exhibition will take up an issue forming a direct opposite to that of the Acconci/Holl façade. The Acconci/Holl manipulation of the sense of interior/exterior is an abstract and macro-scale reconsideration of space. Hardware, on the other hand, is the finest and most palpable aspect of the building environment. They represent, perhaps, caricatures of the extremes in the divergent interests of architecture and design. Design always involves the issues of “ready-to-hand”, of being imperceptible in the service of function.

This essay is written in promotion of a conviction, and it, with the exhibition, exists because Kiki and I like decorative things.

Victoria Milne

New York

1/21/96

## NOTES

<sup>22</sup> A parallel worth mentioning here is that a rather non-mechanical machine, the computer, is in many ways achieving, among the employed, that revolution expected by the intellectuals of 1920, in which everyone is elevated to the position of skilled manager, even if it is only of a sophisticated machine. And computer empowers people differently (for example, enabling the impaired, merging professions – editor/designer, industrial designer/modelbuilder), it moves one sector of society towards the egalitarian, creative fantasies of the industrial era.

Another related digression concerns an elegant symmetry between the subject of this exhibition and the “hardware” of the computer world: both are the location of our insignificant, or unmemorable, physical interaction with a greater architecture – one of space and other of information.

<sup>23</sup> I enjoy the thought of the role hardware plays in one's self image: how victorious were you when you could reach the faucets for the first time? When you got to open the door? To push the button on the elevator?

<sup>24</sup> *Being and Time, (Sein und Zeit)* Martin Heidegger, trans. John Macquire & Edward Robinson, Harper & Row, New York, 1962, p. 98-99.