

Installation Work

Hold that! (Pozzo holds out the whip, Lucky advances and, both his hands being occupied, takes the whip in his mouth, then goes back to his place, Pozzo begins to put on his coat, stops.) Coat! (Lucky puts down bag, basket and stool, advances, helps Pozzo on with his coat, goes back to his place and takes up bag, basket and stool.) Touch of autumn in the air this evening, (Pozzo finishes buttoning his coat, stoops, inspects himself, straightens up.) Whip! ¹

The MAK Center for Art and Architecture in Los Angeles annually invites an Austrian artist to collaborate with a Los Angeles architect on the design of an installation in the Mackey Gallery. The role of the artist is to place a work of art inside the gallery. The role of the architect is to place a work of architecture inside the gallery. Both actions seem at first similar and straightforward. But they are not. Artists have had a long relationship with galleries and museums as their patrons. These spaces for the display of art seem normalized today, possibly in part because art has had a critical moment toward its means of exhibition and consumption. Examples in the “expanded field” abound that located painting and sculpture outside of the white box of the museum in land, data, performance, pavilions.² Contrary to this long history of art’s display and struggle against its containment, the history of architecture display is a short one. Museums have for over two hundred years located architectural artifacts—models, drawings, and fragments—but locating architecture as such, and commissioning works of architecture within these interiors has emerged as a relatively recent trend.

With many museums and galleries offering such projects to architects today, there is a wave of proposals that shrink architectural problems to the format of the installation. Not too small to be an exhibition of models and not too big to be a fully serviced commission, the installation seems to offer a convenient form for architects to express their ideas on a relatively small budget on the one hand and outside of the constraints of practice on the other. And although this new model of curatorial patronage often offers the only outlet for public display for an office that has not yet established a traditional client base, there are many problems that arise from its format that push the architect into a peripheral field.

Sylvia Lavin offers a similar critique in her recent discussion of a parallel architectural type: the pavilion. She argues that if art’s pavilion was a form of resistance against established norms of the consumption of art, architecture’s pavilion

ANNA NEIMARK
Southern California Institute
of Architecture



1

seems to be its opposite: its form facilitates the consumption of architecture, cheapens its role as a cultural vehicle, and eliminates the need for more committed forms of patronage. Her essay is a call to arms for architects to not engage pavilion competitions, exhibitions, and biennials that have exploded throughout the globe as a result of this easily-packaged architecture “at a steep discount.”³

My partner Andrew Atwood and I of First Office cannot yet afford to decline offers for installations, pavilions, whatever you call these often temporary, low-budget, high-labor projects. Besides, we are so inconsequential, that our resistance, if we pursued it, would go entirely unnoticed. We recognize, however, that if architecture were to remain a critical practice, we necessarily would have to resist occupying such spaces neatly or comfortably. While our participation in installations makes us complicit in promoting its miniaturizing format, we nonetheless hope to express its capacity as a conceptual device through the forms that the work necessarily assembles—representational, professional, and contractual.

So when First Office was approached by the Austrian filmmaker Constanze Ruhm and the Director of the MAK Center for Art and Architecture Kimberli Meier to place a work of architecture inside the Mackey Gallery, we immediately accepted the invitation. We did so under the caveat that it will be a self-conscious and critical piece of architecture, uncomfortable in its own skin, without a beginning or end, barely distinct from its gallery context. Often, when architects are asked to work on such an installation, they end up designing a big sculptural object; neither a piece of architecture, nor a model, it is a confused byproduct. Contrary to this, when architects are asked to provide a professional service—to remodel a bathroom or design a house—the project is usually executed through the conventions of architectural drawing and building practices. These mundane limitations, often left out of the installation, seem to be fundamental to the labor of an architect. After all, if the production of the work defines its medium, then perhaps the instruments of architectural practice are the specific tools that define ours. To reject the established formula of placing an object—architecture—inside of an envelope—gallery—the Mackey project developed its formal language through the professional paperwork and labor practices of the gallery’s normal functions.

Conventionally, gallery walls are painted white. In fact, they seem to be defined by this generic, unquestioned finish. Painting walls does not demand an

Figure 1: Paranormal Panorama, First Office, Mackey Gallery MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles, CA.

architect's involvement. The choice of paint—its hue, sheen, and brand—is often left to chance: something matte, something environmentally safe, something the nearest store never runs out of. If an architect were to get involved in this process, the paint and the painting would have to be specified. Those choices would be documented in the specifications, as a set of instructions to the painter. To design that aspect of the installation, we realized that we would have to write a “spec book.”

In school, nobody writes spec books. Nobody reads them. Nobody assigns them. They are not deliverables for any final review. They are not considered interesting. And maybe they really aren't. Historically, specifications have been used to translate an abstract design into instructions for the building trades—reading often like Samuel Beckett's stage instructions. They are still used to communicate between these professions and in the process they identify them as separate. The spec book distinguishes the domain of design from the domain of building. In truth, we cross this line all the time, but we wanted to identify that boundary as a contribution to the critique of the architectural installation: to identify the work we do as architects and to differentiate it from other kinds of labor. We used specifications to keep ourselves honest to our goal of doing architectural work instead of doing an architectural installation; it was a kind of rehearsal of an architectural service, not the real thing.

The freedom offered by the gallery has become a burden to make architecture more like an art object, to make it into a form of content. In the process of transforming into content alone, the capacity of architecture to contain things artfully is often traded for the provocation of spectacle. Perhaps nothing is less spectacular than a spec book, but to artfully specify, we hoped, would deliver another aspect to the critique of the curation of architecture as patronage.

ENDNOTES

1. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 17.
2. Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October*, Vol. 8. (Spring, 1979).
3. Sylvia Lavin, “Vanishing Point: The Contemporary Pavilion,” *ArtForum* (October, 2012), 219.

SPECIFICATION MANUAL

This section includes surface preparation, painting, and finishing of one interior surface, measuring, space permitting, eight feet by eight feet.

1. Paint the entire 8'x8' surface in ten layers with colors designated in future articles.
2. Where an item or surface is not specifically mentioned, paint the same as similar adjacent materials or surfaces.

Surfaces Not Requiring Painting:

- a. Metal toilet enclosures, unless otherwise specified
- b. Acoustic materials
- c. Architectural woodwork and casework
- d. Finished mechanical and electrical equipment
- e. Switchgear
- f. Distribution cabinets
- g. Metal roofing
- h. Galvanized components of prefabricated metal buildings
- i. Factory painted mechanical equipment with approved finishes.

Surfaces For Which Painting Is Prohibited:

- a. Sprinkler heads.
- b. Heat and smoke detectors.
- c. Pre-painted Electrical equipment in equipment rooms including Lighting Inverters, VFCs, MCCs, Switchboards, Fire Alarm and Facility Control System(FCS) panels. (Exception – to touch up existing paint damaged during installation or other construction).
- d. Conduit color banding or other identification.
- e. Conduit and equipment in equipment rooms, unless otherwise specified.
- f. Equipment in hazardous (classified) locations.
- g. Labels: Do not paint over Underwriter's Laboratories, Factory Mutual, or other code-required labels or equipment name, identification, performance rating, or nomenclature plates.
- h. Concealed auto-releasing sprinkler head covers (i.e.; escutcheon plates).
09900-4 PAINTING
- i. Glass, brass, or chrome plated portions of fire protection system control valves, hydrants and fire department connections. (Reference NFPA 13 and Section 15310, "Automatic Sprinkler and Water Based Fire Protection Systems.")

3. Deliver materials to the job site in the manufacturer's original, unopened packages and containers bearing manufacturer's name, label, and the following information: a. Product name or title of material; b. Contents by volume, for pigment and vehicle constituents; c. Thinning instructions; d. Application instructions; e. Color name and number.

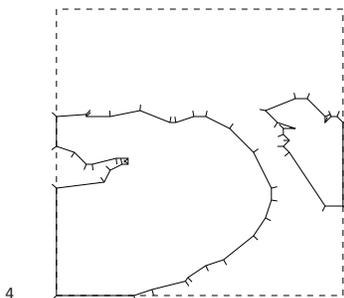
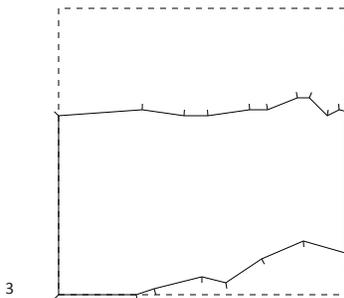
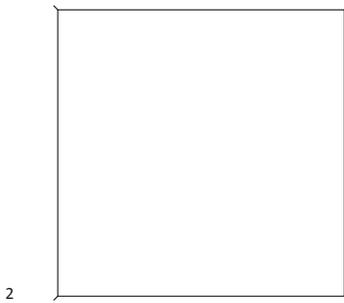


Figure 2: Behr Ultra Pure White Self-Priming Interior Flat.

Figure 3: Valspar Ultra White Matte Interior.

Figure 4: Dunn-Edwards White Interior Flat Paint.

4. Protect from freezing. Keep storage area neat and orderly. Remove oily rags and waste. Take necessary measures to ensure that workers and work areas are protected from fire and health hazards resulting from handling, mixing, and application.

5. Apply water-based paints only when the temperature of surfaces to be painted and surrounding air temperatures are between 50°F and 90°F.

6. Do not apply paint in snow, rain, fog, or mist, when the relative humidity exceeds 85 percent, at temperatures less than 5°F above the dew point, or to damp or wet surfaces. Painting may continue during inclement weather if surfaces and areas to be painted are enclosed and heated within temperature and humidity limits specified by the manufacturer during application and drying periods.

7. Available Manufacturers: Subject to compliance with requirements, manufacturers offering products that may be incorporated in the work include, but are not limited to, the following: Wellborn, A Dunn-Edwards Company (W); Behr Process Corporation (BPC); Sherwin-Williams Company (S-W); Dunn-Edwards Corporation (D-E); Glidden Corporation (G).

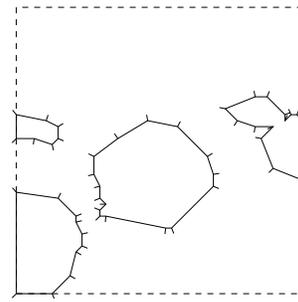
8. Examine conditions under which painting will be performed for compliance with requirements for paint application. Do not begin paint application until unsatisfactory conditions have been corrected. Start of painting will be construed as Applicator's acceptance of surfaces and conditions within a particular area.

9. Remove plates, tables, paintings, wood and similar items in places that are and are not to be painted, or provide surface-applied protection prior to surface preparation and painting. Remove these items if necessary for complete painting of the items and adjacent surfaces. Following completion of painting operations in each space or area, items shall be reinstalled in the same manner that they were removed.

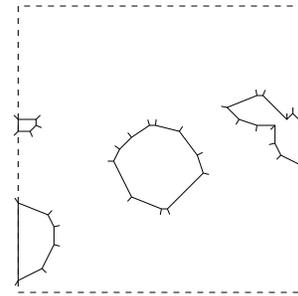
10. Clean and prepare surfaces to be painted in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions for each particular substrate condition and as specified. Do not remove old paint by sanding, scraping, or other means. May generate dust or fumes that contain lead. Exposure to lead, dust or fumes, may cause brain damage or other adverse health effects especially in children and pregnant women.

11. Provide the following paint systems for the various substrates indicated.

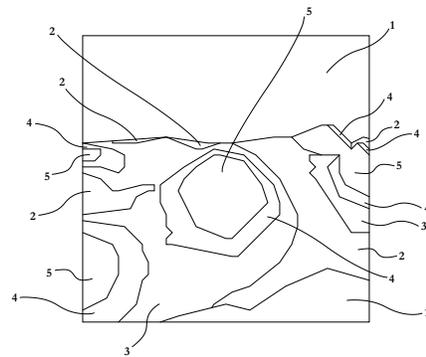
- a. First Coat: Behr Ultra Pure White Self-Priming Interior Flat
- b. Second Coat: Behr Ultra Pure White Self-Priming Interior Flat
- c. First Coat: Valspar Ultra White Matte Interior
- d. Second Coat: Valspar Ultra White Matte Interior
- e. First Coat: Dunn-Edwards White Interior Flat Paint
- f. Second Coat: Dunn-Edwards White Interior Flat Paint
- g. First Coat: Glidden White Interior Premium Paint Flat
- h. Second Coat: Glidden White Interior Premium Paint Flat
- i. First Coat: Sherwin-Williams Extra White Interior Flat
- j. Second Coat: Sherwin-Williams Extra White Interior Flat



5



6



7

- 1 Behr Ultra Pure White Self-Priming Interior Flat
- 2 Valspar Ultra White Matte Interior
- 3 Dunn-Edwards White Interior Flat Paint
- 4 Glidden White Interior Premium Paint Flat
- 5 Sherwin-Williams Extra White HGTV Home Interior Flat

Figure 5: Glidden White Interior Premium Paint Flat.

Figure 6: Sherwin-Williams Extra White HGTV Home Interior Flat

Figure 7: Layers of Paint.