

**Daniel Congdon
Daniel Laskarin
Vancouver Stock Exchange
Vancouver
April 18 to 28**

After several months of negotiation with city officials, rental agents and the owner, Daniel Congdon and Daniel Laskarin finally obtained permission to exhibit, *Containments: Structures in an Office* at the vacated, former Vancouver Stock Exchange building. The appropriation of this context significantly informs the perception of what might loosely be termed an installation; it consists of three sculptures: *House* and *Pavilion* by Congdon and *Centering Structure* by Laskarin. All are similar in materials and motif but strung out structure by structure by structure in the long office corridor, they interact little with each other; instead, they seem to form their separate relationship with the architectural set.

The dilemma here results from an attempt to continue the modernist tradition of an object to context (viewer reception) relationship while at the same time recalling a conceptual inheritance. One could re-materialize the art-object to signal its end — a contradictory response, yet one which acknowledges the avant-garde's posture in a position of "totalized" cultural edifices. Congdon and Laskarin substitute the Vancouver Stock Exchange for the Art Gallery, not to propose a dialectic, but to mirror the problems of the box. That the significance of the location itself almost overshadows the structures within is, perhaps, not a valid criticism. The containment of ideals in increasing interiority is the subject: the surrounding architecture merely amplifies this in a more literal sense. Thus neither Congdon nor Laskarin propose a way out; however, they successfully posit the dilemma.

Laskarin's *Centering Structure* is somewhere between a collapsed monument and an enlarged model; it clearly reflects the specific architectural setting. It is a cinder block foundation on which half-silvered,

office glass sheets alternate with steel panels in a wind-mill configuration. In a continued metaphor, the glass panels sheathe a smaller monument-model inside. The partially obscured object inside is reminiscent of the Eiffel Tower. On this structure is a gyroscope usually used as a stabilizing navigational device; it is in an obvious state of disuse.

Thus the central centering device — the enshrined object — is only a component of the exteriorized housings. In this case Laskarin relies on the expropriated materials, objects and their functions, to connote meaning. This structuralist sensibility provides some of the rationale for the use of the exterior encasings, but in this way is not directly agitational. Although the structure inhabits an office, rather than a gallery, its conceptual framework nonetheless requires the institutional annex. This appropriation in some ways reminds me of Duchamp's *Boite en Valise*, although the placement of the gyroscope — albeit more enigmatic — as a driving mechanism refers more to *The Large Glass*, (1915-23).

Centering Structure functions well in its manipulation of its viewers. When walking around the sculpture the vision of the object is impeded by either steel panels, competing reflections in the glass, or narrow slits between glass and steel revealing just a partial slice. Only up close to the glass can one see the gyroscope, as icon. Both Congdon's *House* and *Pavilion* employ a more totemic quality. Although there are some correspondences between his structures and their spatial containments, he theorizes less vigorously. They were almost better accentuated when they were shown at Simon Fraser's Downtown Studio. They are more typical of object on pedestal sculpture: both have concrete box bases and platforms on which the model-objects rest. The smaller scale — just under human scale — determines a less aggressive relationship with the viewer. Both elicit contemplation.

House suggests an ambivalence toward the suburban home. This is suggested in the incongruities of scale. Congdon uses the real scale of 2 x 4's to frame a doll-house like model. Although Congdon's structures have affinities with Dan Graham's work on

suburban architecture, (*Homes for America, Alteration to a suburban House*, 1978) Congdon is not as sure about its inauthentic past. He is aware of the falseness of ersatz desires projected onto the suburban home, but he is also part of the post-war generation onto which these desires have been internalized. *House* represents a nostalgia for the inauthentic.

Pavilion usually names the guest house on a wealthy estate, but considering the contradiction in the materials relative to their context, this title seems arbitrary. Congdon glasses in sections of an I-beam (so named because it resembles an I in cross-section) to form what he perceives is like a display case. However, the use of this industrial steel building component has other associations. For me it refers more to a part in office tower constructions, as a mask, head-like the body-politic of corporate hierarchies and development.

In this space the interaction between *House* and *Pavilion* diminishes, and consequently the containment of *Pavilion* as a sign of the architectural setting magnifies the discrepancies between object and title. Although Congdon makes more oblique references to the site than Laskarin does, the endeavor to collaborate in the particular space was, I think, a good one. The common subject of architectural containment was made cogently, and one hopes that this is not their final say regarding the matrix of the conceptual box.

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