A traveling show, organized in 2006

by the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London and devoted to public buildings by the London architect David Adjaye, was brought to San Antonio by Artpace as its final 2008 exhibition. It coincided with Adjaye’s initiation of design for the Linda Pace Foundation in San Antonio. Linda Pace was the founder of Artpace. An artist, art collector, and former co-owner of the Pace Foods Company, she died in 2007 shortly after commissioning Adjaye to design a building to house her personal collection.

David Adjaye is a charismatic personality, as Houston audiences discovered when he spoke in RDA’s “New Directions in Museum and Exhibition Design” lecture series in October 2005. If his articulate diction registers as British, his openness and enthusiasm seem almost American. Adjaye’s father was a Ghanaian diplomat, which meant that Adjaye had an international upbringing in Africa, the Islamic world, and London, where he attended London South Bank University in the late 1980s and the Royal College of Art in the early 1990s. Adjaye has had a studio in London since 1994; he now has offices in Berlin and New York as well. Adjaye Associates have completed three buildings in the United States: Pitch Black (2006), an artists’ space in Brooklyn; the MCA (Museum of Contemporary Art) in Denver (2007); and the LN House (2008), also in Denver. They were recently chosen to design the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African-American History and Culture in Washington D.C.

“David Adjaye: Making Public Buildings” was installed in Artpace’s windowless second-floor gallery. A table-height platform occupied the center of the big gallery. On it were displayed eight of Adjaye’s designs for public buildings. For each project, a large-scale detailed model was accompanied by smaller-scaled study models, a site plan, a visual diagram explaining the architect’s conception, an axonometric drawing, floor plans, samples of finish materials, and an artifact of African origin materially analogous to Adjaye’s architectural conception. On two of the gallery’s four walls, color photographs of the completed buildings were hung in columns above horizontal bands of smaller photos. The other two walls were used for projected and video images. A musical score composed by the architect’s brother, Peter Adjaye, played continuously.

The exhibition followed the didactic model for architectural exhibitions associated with Renzo Piano. The emphasis was on the design process rather than on completed buildings. The design of the platform and the table-mounted display panels occupying a perimeter band subtly conveyed the rational process of analysis and presentation through which Adjaye Associates typically work out the design of their buildings, whose skewed, swelling shapes and provocative exterior surfaces may at first glance seem whimsical and impulsive.

Photographs of African capital cities, which Adjaye showed at a 2007 exhibition at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University and which were displayed at Artpace as continuous projected images
ADJAYE'S RESISTANCE TAKES THE FORM OF WIT RATHER THAN MILITANCY.

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