

Big Cité Beat



Project for Commencement Hall, Rice Institute, c. 1910, Bertram Goodhue, architect



Palace of Abraxas, Marne-la-Vallée, 1978-1982, Ricardo Bofill, architect

Ricardo Bofill: Taller De Arquitectura (Rizzoli, 1985)

Bo-philia: Catalán architect **Ricardo Bofill** has been inked to design the new \$16-million **Shepherd School of Music** at Rice. A visit to Bofill's super-columniated housing projects in and about Paris cinched the selection. The school will occupy a site beyond the Rice Memorial Center that was originally intended for Bertram Goodhue's mosque-like auditorium, aligned on axis with the sallyport of Ralph Adams Cram's administration building. Bo-peeks: Schematic designs may be in hand early next year and will be shown at the Farish Gallery. In the meantime, *cinéastes* can gaze at Bofill's brave new villes and looming aeries in *Brazil* (which will be shown at The Museum of Fine Arts, 27 March, 7 PM, as part of the RDA film series) and in Eric Rohmer's just-released *L'Ami de Mon Amie*.

Sic-transit: **O. Jack Mitchell** concludes his second five-year term as dean of the School of Architecture at

Rice in June 1988. A longtime supporter of the Rice Design Alliance and *Cite* magazine, Mitchell will devote increased time to teaching as well as professional and civic activities. A search committee has been formed to seek a new dean.

Eminence domain: The **Texas Society of Architects** conferred an honorary membership on arts patron **Dominique de Menil** at its 48th annual meeting in Houston. De Menil was cited for her vision in renewing the area of Montrose that encompasses the University of St. Thomas, Rothko Chapel, and The Menil Collection, and for the architectural company she has kept, from Philip Johnson to Renzo Piano. Investment-builder **John Hansen**, whose projects include improvements to Poe Elementary and Lanier Middle schools and the development of the Central Church of Christ to house the Montrose Branch of the Houston Public Library, was also made an honorary member. The **Armand Bayou**

Nature Center was awarded a Citation of Honor. Elsewhere, **Leslie Davidson**, a former member of the RDA Board of Directors, received the **Young Architects Award** of the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects for 1987.

Côte d'Bayou: **Robert A.M. Stern** is the current architect for developer **Gerald Hines's** on-again, off-again swankianda planned to overlook Buffalo Bayou in River Oaks. His scheme, reported to share Mediterranean propensities with Ralph Adams Cram's nearby villa for Blanche and Cleveland Sewall of 1925, succeeds an earlier project by **Michael Graves** (see *Cite*, Winter 1984, page 3).

Block-buster: November's tour of houses in Broadacres hosted by the **Rice Design Alliance** netted more than **200 new members** for the RDA. Kudos to Susan B. Keeton, Anne S. Bohnn, and Robert Morris who organized it.

Citelines

Trapping the Unseen Letting It Go

Robert Irwin prefers to find himself in the flux of visual phenomena. Resisting the easy categories of art labels, he is in a constant dialogue with issues that span across painting, architecture, urban planning, psychology, and philosophy. This dialogue flows with great ease from concept to reality, from Plato to Freud, to specific works of his own which often find their place in the environment of civic spaces.

Irwin is this year's Craig Francis Cullinan Visiting Professor of Fine Arts, Architecture, and Urban Planning at Rice University, a chair created by Nina Cullinan to honor her brother. Irwin recently visited the Rice campus to deliver his introductory lecture, "On the Nature of Abstraction," the first in a series of lectures that will continue in March, 1988 (see Winter Architecture Events, page 4). As a part of his involvement with the Rice community, Irwin proposed to devise some "interventions" for the campus grounds. After touring the campus, he settled on a project to "complete" some of the cloisters around the Academic Court using his "trademark" scrim material. Scrim is a translucent fabric used in the theater to create a kind of visual veil which obscures and softens objects by catching and reflecting light on its surface. Irwin has been using scrims for the last seventeen years. One of his most memorable installations was at a project site in Venice, California in 1980; but as early as 1970 he had installed an interior scrim in a retrospective show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The scrims hung by Irwin at Rice in October are the beginning of a work that will expand, move, and change, according to William A. Camfield, chairman of the Rice Art and Art History Department. In the spring the installations are expected to move into the interiors of some buildings. Already there is a hint of things to come in the Dean's Conference Room in Anderson Hall, where Irwin has placed a dark adhesive translucent film simulating an opening in an existing window pane.

Irwin likes to respond to the changing conditions of the sites he chooses - to create what he calls "site specific"



"Marking," cloister between Lovett Hall and Sewall Hall, Rice University, 1987, Robert Irwin

works. The architecture on the Rice campus, with its well-ordered intervals of volumes and voids, and the rhythmic punctuations afforded by doors and windows, inspired him to vary the use of the single panel scrim by incorporating into them windows, doors, and lines. Irwin likes to surprise himself with these new perceptions that are revealed by a new set of circumstances. Irwin chose the name "markings" for his works at Rice, perhaps because it has a less aggressive connotation than "interventions." Ironically, even though each of the installation sites was carefully selected so as to not interfere with the students' circulation, one of the scrims was torn down, as if in protest. According to Camfield, it became apparent upon closer examination that the scrim was

blocking the flow of an obscure path, which was not obvious at first, because one had to duck under a bush to pass through the arch. Always open to suggestions and interventions from real life, Irwin decided to make a door through that scrim when it was reinstalled.

While Irwin was working on campus, the students chatted with him. Some asked, "What is it?" - a question he refuses to answer. He says naming a thing doesn't make it any clearer. "What is it?" is simply not the right question for an art which resists interpretation and calls for direct confrontation and experience.

Irwin is more interested in dialogue than in set concepts and that dialogue involves people, structures, and spaces with

perception, change, time, reality, and conception. Using minimal means he seems to trap a threshold of invisibility. But in trapping the almost invisible aspects of phenomena, he does not fix them, as most traditional artists would. Intensely aware of the changing essence of the phenomenal works, he chooses to reveal its passage through time and circumstance, inviting continual discoveries by the viewer.

Surpik Angelini



"Marking," cloister of Physics Building, Rice University, 1987, Robert Irwin



"Marking," cloister between Fondren Library and Anderson Hall, Rice University, 1987, Robert Irwin

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