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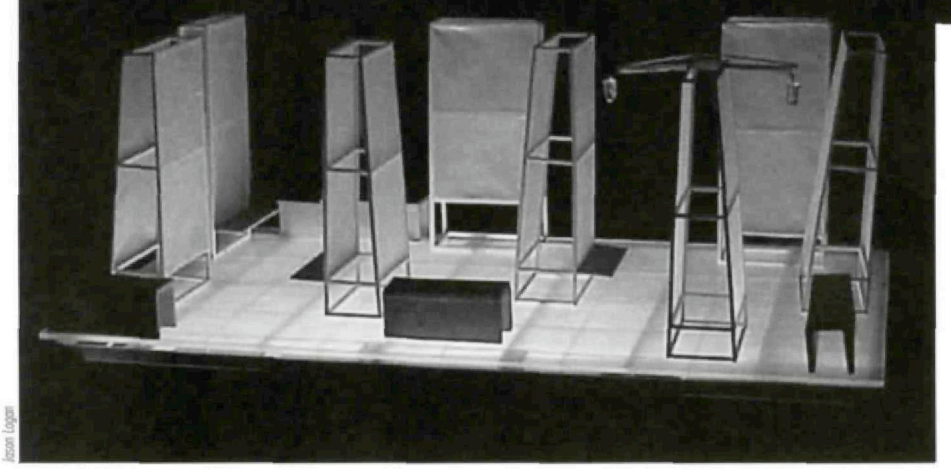
ATRIUM ART

SINCE MID-MARCH, *Organ Grinder*, a large scale, interactive installation, has hung in the atrium of the University of Houston College of Architecture. *Organ Grinder* is the work of Dwayne Bohuslav + parasite, a collaborative of present and former students led by Bohuslav, a visiting architecture professor at UH. The latest and largest of Bohuslav's projects exploring animated, bio-technolgical forms, *Organ Grinder* treats the college's formal atrium space as a body cavity, within which a trio of capsules, constructed of screen wire stretched over a wood and metal frame, are suspended from eight metal, rib-like struts attached to third floor columns. Inside the capsules, electro-mechanical organs respond to ambient light, movement, and sound, acting out metaphorical interpretations of respiration, circulation, and reproduction. *Organ Grinder* will be on display at the College of Architecture through Sunday, June 11. — *Bruce C. Webb*

A MOVING STAGE

GROUND LIGHT WINS UH ARCSTAGE COMPETITION



Jason Logan

A model of the proposed *Ground Light* stage: The panels can be rearranged to hold art or to be a backdrop.

IN THE SPRING of 1998, Filippo Castore, then a third-year student at the University of Houston College of Architecture, became concerned about the limited space the college had to show student work. He and his friends had spent considerable time on the models and designs they created for their classes, and it would be good, Castore thought, if others could see them. But where? "What I wanted was a way to confront people when they walked in the door of the college," Castore says. And that meant creating a display space that could fit into the school's soaring atrium space.

Finding just the right display space took two years of planning and, early this February, a few days of intense work by six design teams that included UH students, UH professors, and local architects. The winning result, from a team led by the Wittenberg Partnership, was *Ground Light*, a raised, glowing platform topped by movable partitions that could be used either to hang work or frame the stage for presentations.

The path toward *Ground Light* began when Castore enlisted the help of another UH architecture student, Andy Nguyen. Together, the pair laid out a plan for what they titled the Arcstage (for architecture stage) Design Competition, then gathered support from UH professors and UH dean Joseph Mashburn. The organizing of the competition continued through late last year, by which time some 20 firms had been invited; six responded quickly, among them the Houston firms MC2, Wittenberg Partnership, Natalye Appel, Carlos Jiménez Studio, and Scott Strasser Design. On Friday, February 4, representatives from the firms showed up at the UH College of Architecture to be paired with their student partners. A discussion Saturday laid out the project requirements, and then the teams began their designs.

The only out-of-town firm to participate was Richter Associates of Corpus Christi, but the design their team presented Sunday afternoon — which featured a canopy supported by wires — was one of the two most praised by the judges. Despite its admirable appearance, however, the judges decided that the Richter stage could be too complicated to build, a major consideration given that the Arcstage was not to be a permanent installation, but rather something that could easily be put together, used, then taken apart for storage. "Ground Light" had the advantage of relative simplicity. But its look, too, drew admiration. Judge Donna Kacmar, a visiting assistant professor of architecture at Texas A&M, noted that the stage's "lifted and glowing plane is an interesting way to bring focus to the area."

With the design in place, the next step is to build the stage, something Castore and Nguyen hope to accomplish in time for this May's graduation, when the stage could be inaugurated. Barring that, they hope to have it done in time for the Blueprint Ball this fall. — *MJS*

More information on the Arcstage project can be found at www.arcstage.org.