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Reconstructing memories: An investigation of the relationship between mental and real space in art and architecture

Claudia S. Behar
University of Texas-Pan American

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RECONSTRUCTING MEMORIES

**An Investigation of the Relationship between Mental and Real Space in
Art and Architecture**

An Exhibition Paper

by

CLAUDIA S. BEHAR

**Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

December 2003

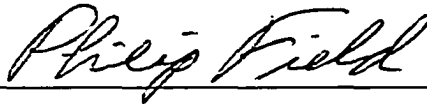
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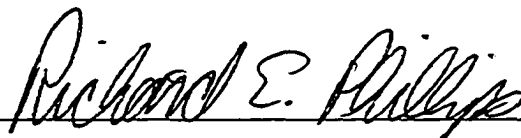
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ABSTRACT

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As an architect and artist I believe that there is a strong relationship between art and architecture. The perceived relationship between both has at times been thought more or less significant; however, history has shown us that a society or an individual can enhance the relationship between the two disciplines. I am working on establishing the strength of that relationship. My work of art is focused on the creation of spaces. It is about experiencing a variety of places through the visual and the emotional senses. The architectural settings that I depict and construct are far from the realm of realism. The intention is rather to place the viewer inside a sequence of spaces in order to make his experience an imaginative, personal, and contemplative one.

My work is about the creation of a visual space in the mind, a “mind – escape:” an opportunity to imagine yourself away from this physical reality into one “created” by you. As with architecture, harmony achieved through the evocation of sensations of space is essential in my art. Without an attachment to architectural and physical function, form and space become flexible and freer, discarding the responsibility of creating “good art” in favor of the creation of an artistic journey.

The concepts of “mental” and “real” space are key in this investigation. Places I have seen, spaces I have lived, are part of the real spaces in my life. They are my source

of inspiration and subject matter for most of the work I have produced for my MFA show. The images from the memories of those real spaces are kept and reinvented in my mind. The exercise of reconstructing those memories results in the creation of mental spaces. These mental and real spaces are expressed through my two-dimensional renderings and three-dimensional constructions.

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Claudia S. Behar

2003

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INTRODUCTION

RECONSTRUCTING MEMORIES

The title of my exhibition “Reconstructing Memories” is based on a series of pieces that are essentially grouped in two themes. The first one is “ Imaginary Cities,” and the second one is “My Life Through Spaces.” The theme of the Imaginary Cities is based on a book called “The Invisible Cities” by Italo Calvino. I found in this book a great source of inspiration for part of the works I have completed. The book is about the descriptions of “fantastic cities” by Marco Polo to the King of the Tartars. Each city described from memory holds a particular characteristic, making each one of them unique. The theme of “My life through Spaces” is also based on personal memory. The Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez once wrote: “Life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to recount it” (Márquez 1). I found these words extremely inspiring for my work. I chose to complete a series of pieces from the memory I have of the houses where I used to live from childhood until today. Both Marco Polo’s memories, and my memories of the houses where I once lived provide the armature that informs the investigation and themes around which I have created two and three-dimensional series.

I have worked with different media toward the development of one idea: the relationship of art to architecture. I believe both the two and three-dimensional approaches contribute to the ideas and the theme but with different results. The two-

dimensional pieces investigate the relationship between art and architecture on a flat surface, and provide the challenge to create the illusion of space with a strong impetus to involve the viewer on a “trip of his own.” Three - dimensional pieces provide the separate advantage of constructing architectural space. The arrangement of the installation pieces delineates and forms actual spaces. Introducing light as a defining component of the pieces, the challenge becomes that of creating space not only with the constructed models, but also with the projection of their shadows.

I also recognize the inherent qualities of painting as containing the means to create something “beautiful on a flat surface.” I believe in the visual arts of painting and installations as “independent vocations entitled to respect for their own sakes, and not merely as vessels of communication” (Greenberg in Harrison 556). The personal references in my work remain important, but ultimately I want the viewer to extrapolate their experience from an independent work of art.

SECTION I

INFLUENCES

“Art like every other cultural phenomenon reflects the social and other circumstances of the age in which its creators live, and that there is nothing inside art disconnected from history, which compels it to go in one direction or another” (Greenberg in Harrison 554). The artist’s personal life and the art to which he has been exposed influence both the formulation of ideas and the choice of media. Although art is largely an intellectual process centered on concepts, emotions shape art as well. The education I have received plays an irreplaceable role in the current direction of my artwork. My personal life and experiences have left me with rich memories of places, spaces, sequences, contrasts, and shadows, which also shape my work and presently compel it to go in its current direction.

Architecture has a permanent place in my mind and heart, and the depictions in my paintings and installations are bound to it. As an architect I always believed I had the opportunity to experience spaces more intensely. In Italy I lived in complex and contrasting spaces; nonetheless, spaces that were constructed to human scale. It is also true that Italy is a country with a long tradition of great works of art and architecture. The extensive experience of studying, living, working and traveling in Italy also taught me to live its architecture and observe its art as if I were reading from an open book.

The years spent in Florence and travel throughout Italy have been a great influence on my personal artistic vision and understanding. Studying in depth the history and architecture of the Renaissance, and having a direct experience of the art that it influenced, taught me that the arts are clearly a reflection of cultural values and social ideals.

Formally speaking, my artwork has constantly changed, searching for a balance between shifting thoughts and feelings. Understanding architecture required me not only to see the functional, but also to appreciate the poetical. On the other hand, without the attachment to function, my art becomes formally freer and flexible although completely engaged to the structural rules that inform it.

My present work is the result of all this and more. In order for us to make any decisions regarding art we must have an idea in mind. The choices we make during the “process” must serve the purpose and vision that we strive to impart. Yet it must also allow the process to have a shaping influence upon the result. The act of material manipulation contains its own mysteries that are revealed through the process of creation. There exists a constant questioning of our manipulations so that every part of the design is involved in realizing the completed concept.

SECTION II

CREATING: COMMUNICATING THROUGH ART

In order to explore the deepest underlying relationship between art and architecture, I seek to create art that communicates at distinctive levels, which are all familiar to my personal experience. As an artist I believe in ideas, I believe that any idea is a good idea, and what truly matters is how a concept is explored and communicated to others. It is clear that artists have continuously worked with ideas that have been previously explored and may not be new as a starting point; however, the real importance rests in the way those ideas are put forward and developed.

The concepts that I have chosen to investigate have been studied before. The architects and artists of the Renaissance were commonly interested in the design of space, a humane space. Architects have always been generally driven to focus on the design of well-resolved spaces. However, it was the Renaissance painters who were the first to be completely involved with spatial definitions, after the development of systematic linear perspective by Filippo Brunelleschi in the early 15th century. The architectural settings depicted in Renaissance painting were in some cases taken from reality, but in others, the design was created with the concept of such idealized perfection that it pertained more to the architectural realm of designing actual spaces. Art and architecture informed each other in an “idealistically real” manner. Linear perspective became the delineating

concept and device that brought them together. An artist would use linear perspective to create the illusion of space, and an architect would use it to create actual space.

A strong and defining linkage between art and architecture was also deeply imbedded at the foundation of the Bauhaus school during the early 20th century. The director of the school, architect Walter Gropius, believed in constructing buildings of the future that fused all of the elements of visual art and architecture together (Chipp 313). The Bauhaus had a different approach with respect to the relationship of art and architecture. In the words of Gropius, “the painters provided a spiritual counterpoint to the materialism of the designers.” However, the Bauhaus under the direction of Johannes Itten proposed that “the sources of creation lay in an intellectual and sensual understanding of the true physical nature of materials such as wood, paint, glass, metals, etc. And that contemporary technology with its host of new possibilities was the guiding inspiration (Itten in Chipp 313). “Art was so much rationalized that it pertained much more to the world of the physical construction and less to the spiritual” (Chipp 313).

Like Walter Gropius I believe that art is more spiritual than rational. Art should leave the viewer with questions and emotions even after the art pieces are gone. Familiarization with the materials an artist uses in his work is fundamental to a work of art. The properties of the media a painter or a sculptor uses in his work are imbedded in the piece as well. The piece is actually delimited by the materials used. I do not negate the importance that materials have in my work, but they are far from being the guiding inspiration. Le Corbusier, an artist and certainly one of the greatest architects of the 20th century once said: “ One uses stone, wood, cement, and turns them into houses or palaces; that is construction. It calls for skill. But suddenly, you touch my heart; you

make me feel good. I am happy. I say: it's beautiful. This is architecture. It is art". (Le Corbusier in Guiton 3).

To me the legacy of the Renaissance and the Bauhaus lies in their emphasis upon creating a very strong relationship between art and architecture. While in the Renaissance the paintings clearly suggested their relationship to architecture by creating the illusion of space using linear perspective, the Bauhaus linked both not in painting, but in the concept of the "future building." I am interested in both depicting and in constructing spaces that are not entirely descriptive, demanding more imagination from the viewer. With particular regard to my paintings, instead of creating an illusion of space like the "Old Masters" into which one could imagine oneself walking, like the Modernists I strive to depict spaces that can only exist in one's imagination, that can be traversed only in the mind.

As I have previously stated, my first series is an interpretation of the narratives told by Marco Polo to the King of the Tartars in Calvino's book "The Invisible Cities." The concept and process began by reading the book and choosing the cities that seemed more compelling to me. I chose "Octavia," "Sofronia," "Esmeraldina," and "Eusapia" for their intricate and fascinating description of imaginary places. I chose to paint one at a time, motivating myself to design an imaginary city that would surpass the emotional effect of reading about it.

I chose to paint three of the four "imaginary cities" on large pieces of cardboard, using their tone as a ground and their material property to produce a less formal quality [Appendix, fig.1, 2, 3, pg.ix,x,xi]. This allowed me to paint with more freedom. I first drew on the cardboard using oil-sticks, markers, and charcoal as if I were sketching on

paper. This gave me the feeling of total control over the media and freedom with the markings placed on the surface. The large size of the boards gave me the chance to extend my sketches as far as I felt was appropriate, with the negative spaces sharing a desired tonal quality due to the grounding color of the cardboard. After designing the main composition with the use of a variety of lines, geometric and organic shapes, I applied color with the intention of reinforcing the elements already designed. I used oil-sticks and spray painting to keep the same “loose sketchy style” as the lines. My approach with color is more intuitive than theoretical, using color to create areas of contrast that ultimately help to create the illusion of space.

I painted the fourth city, “Eusapia,” using oil on canvas [Appendix, fig.4 pg.xii]. I first painted the canvas with yellow ochre ground and used oil-sticks for design. The process of painting on canvas was quite different from that of painting on the cardboards. I used tung oil, a Chinese varnish, as a medium for my oil painting, which made the oils dry faster. Although the spaces, buildings, and figures are more detailed and defined, I tried to maintain a loose feeling similar to the previous three.

The art of the Abstract Expressionists became relevant to me at this point. Not so much for their actual final work, which is definitely about their individual expression, but for their painting process. I was interested in the energy evident in their art and the process of total submersion into their work.

Modern architecture, as with modern painting, is about feelings and the sense of emotions a space creates. My large installation “Imaginary Cities” is a constructed space that incorporates wood-models and their shadows projected on to a series of large vertical panels [Appendix, fig.5 pg.xiii]. I constructed four models, each relating to the cities of

“Octavia,” “Sofronia,” “Esmeraldina,” and “Eusapia.” As I have designed it, the complete installation includes all of the cities’ models and their respective shadows at the same time. All the projected shadows are equal in compositional “weight” with the wood-models they combine to compose an extensive and intricate skyline. All of the parts placed together acquire a new meaning and perspective. The arrangement of the installation also defines an actual space. The success of the piece relies on the effect of creating three-dimensional space with both the actual wood models and the figured shadows projected on the panels, and the emotional and imaginative tableaux it creates for the viewer.

In the process of building this installation I made use of my knowledge about architecture. I realized it was an excellent opportunity to use art and architecture to study their spatial relationship. Using small controlled directional lights in a dark room, I arranged the projecting shadows of model structures. The contrast between the shadows and the use of red light for “coloring” the large panels was very strong. Compositional unity becomes an important element achieved by the result of one main skyline that incorporates the shadows of all four wood structures. The light source is not static but rotates, making the shadows appear and disappear in a horizontally linear direction. This creates the sense of three-dimensionality and the impression of movement.

The actual space described by the relationship between the pieces in the large installation, together with the elements of shadow, light, and movement, attempt to engage the viewer not only emotionally but also physically. As with architectural spaces, and sculpture, the concept of time is present. The viewer is able to “walk” along the perspectives described with the appearing and disappearing shadows. This is the

advantage of an installation piece where the composition constantly changes, challenging the viewer to “complete each city in his mind” [Appendix, fig.6, 7, 8, 9 pg.xiv].

My second group of two and three-dimensional pieces are related to the memories of the four most important houses where I lived from childhood until today. I ordered them chronologically: “House One,” from two to five years old [Appendix, fig. 10 pg.xv]; “House Two,” from five to nineteen [Appendix, fig.11 pg.xvi]; “House Three,” from nineteen to thirty [Appendix, fig.12 pg.xvii]; “House Four,” my current house [Appendix, fig 13 pg.xviii].

My two-dimensional series called “Four Houses” was influenced by the Modernists’ work. In this series my intention is to bring the different images of objects and spaces to the picture plane. Like the work by Hans Hofmann in his painting “*Equipoise*,” 1958, my work is about compressing all the elements of the composition on to one flat plane. It is also about decompressing the inner images and adding space to the compositions. It is about being selective, choosing certain inner images and adding blank open spaces to the compositions. I believe that by adding space the elements of my compositions could be ordered in a hierarchical manner. This approach works together with ways of the mind. Compared to the act of compression, the mind brings all memories to the present, recreating our past in a single moment. On the other hand, the mind can also decompress and add space, which can also be expressed in a work of art.

The outer world becomes my reference. The houses where I lived are the inspiring source for the creation of the “mental” spaces in my work. My intention is to reconstruct those “inner spaces” through the exercise of mentally reconstructing the memories of the places I once lived.

I also chose to paint this series one at a time, allowing myself to get deeply involved with the memories pertaining to each house. During this process I realized how strong my commitment was to each painting when I cried and laughed as I recalled experiences lived in each house. As with the series of the “Imaginary Cities,” the work of the Abstract Expressionists also became relevant during this process. As stated by Jackson Pollock: “I want to express my feelings rather than illustrate them” (Pollock in Chipp 548). It is clearly a more emotional than intellectual process, and that is something I also incorporated in my pieces.

The media I chose for this series was also mixed media on cardboard. I had chosen these media before for the previous series and it had worked for me. The less formal quality of these media allowed me to paint with more freedom, which I consider relevant to these compositions since they are also “free” from any realistic reference. I also believe that by using the same media, my final exhibition will have a strong sense of unity.

The experience of recalling room by room, space by space, even door by door and their location in the overall layout of each house was fascinating. It became a challenge to create work that would surpass the emotional effect of bringing back my own memories. I intended to create art that would evoke strong feelings by looking at the representation of homes brought to life in my work. I believed that my art should further communicate my feelings, and not merely be kept as memories.

My large installation called: “My Life Through Spaces,” is composed of four light fixtures set on a tall central wood-post, four wood models and their shadows projected each on a large white panel [Appendix, fig.14 pg.xix]. The wood models are set three feet

away from the central post in each direction: north, south, east and west. The white panels are set eight to ten feet away from each model in order to cast a large shadow on them. The arrangement of the installation defines a space of approximately twenty- six feet square.

The wood models in this installation are also built upon my interpretation and memories of Houses One through Four (which I had also depicted in my two-dimensional series) [Appendix, fig.15, 16, 17, 18 pg.xx]. The lights are coordinated to light up the models in sequence. They turn on and off in a rotating manner. The shadows of the houses appear and disappear on the white panels, as do the memories of the places where we once lived and loved.

The concept of time is introduced to this piece not only by the timing of the lights, but also by the arrangement of the white panels. Panel number one (where "House One" is projected) is placed at a 22.5 degree angle from the ground, in other words almost parallel to the ground. Panel number two is placed at a 45 degree angle, panel three at 67.5 and panel four at 90, completely vertical. This arrangement allows for the shadows to appear at different distances from the viewer. "House One" is projected further away from the viewer, and the rest of the projections become closer and closer until we see house Four the closest to us.

The arrangement of all parts of this installation defines an actual space, allowing the viewer once again to engage himself physically with the project. Walking through the described spaces and looking at the large scaled shadows of the houses, ultimately motivate the viewer to think about his past, his own memories of places where he lived.

Both installations: “The Imaginary Cities” and “My Life Through Spaces,” are very meaningful as art pieces in their relationship to architecture. Even though in both cases the pieces create physical spaces, they are not permanent. The architecture of the Renaissance for instance was definitely about creating spaces that would last through changing and challenging centuries. Their massive construction clearly states a sense of permanence.

As an architect I understand the importance that architecture has in our lives. It gives people a sense of belonging, and among other things the sequence of spaces that we experience can also enrich our daily lives.

These installations at least for a moment work as architectural spaces, letting us walk through them experiencing different emotions with the play of light, shadows and memories. The projection of their shadows in motion can be seen as the experience of them mentally on the physical plane through time.

My interest as an artist is to leave the viewer with a stronger emotional and mental impression of these spaces that would surpass the physical experience of walking through them.

In my two-dimensional pieces the reference to time is described by the Cubistic manner. As in Cubist painting, I include the element of time: time progression with the transformation of space and structure. “Picasso’s painting of Les Demoiselles certainly represented a break with the canons of traditional portrayals. No longer governed by the laws of a single central perspective, artists were able to depict the subject from various simultaneous viewpoints. Picasso and Braque sought a way of expressing a more complete and multifaceted reality by painting what is known about space and shapes, not

only what is seen” (Rogers 581). I as well describe the passage of time by juxtaposing different viewpoints and perspective planes. With the incorporation of time in my paintings, the connection between art and architecture also becomes stronger, as time is a real element in the experience of an architectural space.

After completing two series of paintings and two installation pieces that strongly connected art to architecture both emotionally and physically, the need to demonstrate a link between the two became less relevant for me. However, using different techniques and media, I completed the following pieces that all work towards enhancing the same main idea.

The next projects are two small-scale pieces done on canvas and wood board. The use of a hot iron to transfer photo images onto both surfaces became my new media of exploration. I was intrigued by the quality of the transferred images, which I had tested before also on other surfaces. The result in both cases was that of incomplete pictures peeling from their surfaces. As with my previous two-dimensional works where the representation of spaces did not emphasize realism, the faded images also suggested to the viewer the possibility of completing the places in his mind.

Both pieces are compositions based on my present home. The canvas piece is called “Passing Through” [Appendix, fig.19 pg.xxi], and the board one is called “Welcome Home.” In the first one I transferred several pictures of the exterior of my house onto the canvas and I applied colored marks on top. I painted rectangles of different sizes in green, yellow and blue, which were the main colors found on the photographs. The rectangles emphasized the horizontal plane, giving the composition a

sense of movement along the exterior of the house. The intention is to give the viewer the illusion of passing through a street and taking a quick glance at “home.”

The second piece, “Welcome Home” [Appendix, fig.20 pg.xxii], is also composed of transferred images of the exterior of my house with images of my husband, my daughter and myself. Using my architectural skills of building wood models, I constructed the front entrance porch of the house out of balsa wood and placed it on the center of the composition. Our three images were actually transferred onto the wood entry piece. The architecture of my house is simple. The front façade is a straightforward design. With the use of photos and the addition of a three-dimensional model, my intention is to emphasize the entrance porch as the space that stands out to welcome you.

My next piece is called “Future Home” [Appendix, fig.21 pg.xxiii], it is about taking a glance at the future by looking through a partially opened window. The idea of a window is achieved by the construction of a wood shutter attached to the wood window frame, which is actually the picture’s frame. The shutter is composed of a series of long wood pieces that run across the whole width of the painting. I also included the strings and thin wood pole that are used to operate the shutter in order to give it a more realistic appearance. Two sections compose the actual painting. The lower section is composed by photo transferred images of the houses where I once lived, and the upper section is loosely painted with mainly acrylics. The images of the four houses used on the bottom are pictures taken of the four models of my previously discussed Installation piece called “My Life Through Spaces.” Those houses constitute “the ground for my family’s future home.” More particularly, the idea of my future home is built upon the best memories of the places where I had already lived. The window shutter is opened in such a way that it

completely reveals the ground. It unveils my past. The shutter covering the top part, which we can only see partially, reinforces the idea that the future is only an idea yet to be seen. Even though this piece was not done together with the previous series of “Four Houses,” it definitely relates to them. It repeats the same format and it also completes the sequence of houses from the past through the present to the future one.

After a visit to the “*Pop American Icons*” exhibit at the *Guggenheim Hermitage* museum in Las Vegas, Nevada, the work of Pop artists became influential for my next series. Andy Warhol’s fascination with contemporary icons like Jackie Kennedy, Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor was successfully translated into his work by reproducing the same images repeatedly in different colors and sizes. Another example where he uses the idea of repetition is strongly shown in his piece “*Orange Disaster #5*,” 1963. I found those pieces closely related to my idea for my following project called “Ideal Homes.”

“Ideal Homes” is a series composed of three square acrylic canvases measuring each 40 by 40 inches. I printed three different compositions using the photos of the four wood models built for my last installation. The first canvas is composed of one photo of each model. More specifically, four houses are displayed, two on the top and two on the bottom section of the canvas [Appendix, fig.22 pg.xxiv]. The canvas is tinted bright yellow, giving the design a spiritual sense. The second canvas is divided into sixteen squares. Four houses placed at the top create two linear perspectives, which are then repeated three more times to the bottom. The color I chose was orange, giving the composition a calm and warm feeling. The perspectives defined by the architecture of the wood façades remind us of Piero Della Francesca’s paintings of the “Ideal Cities.” The Italian Renaissance painter describes exterior urban spaces in his paintings. The perfect

visual description of the spaces invites the viewer to imagine himself wandering around those streets and squares. Similarly, this piece constructs visual spaces, and invites the viewer to walk along the proposed urban streets [Appendix, fig.23 pg.xxv]. The third canvas has a blue background and four perspectives printed at the top instead of two. The line of four perspectives is repeated seven more times to the bottom. In other words, this is a composition made out of sixty-four houses. The large number of repeated images creates a sense of movement and activity [Appendix, fig.24 pg.xxvi]. It was interesting for me to see how different the outcome could be on each canvas by changing the color and number of repetitions.

I believe that the link of this piece to the work done by Andy Warhol mentioned above is inevitable. By changing the color and number of a selected image, I discovered completely different results. However, it is important to understand that in spite of the obvious similarities, our artistic intentions are opposite. Pop artists embraced consumerism as a fitting subject of their art. Opposite to their philosophy, I turn inward for aesthetic stimuli. I search inside for images that tell my story. I intend my work to reconstruct my own memories.

The title of this previously discussed series also introduces the concept of the ideal, making this an opportunity to discuss Neoplatonic concepts in my work. Artists and architects of the Renaissance were very familiar with the rebirth of Platonism and Neoplatonism through the work of humanists such as Trissino and Ficino among others. The architects of the Renaissance intended to reconcile Plato with Christianity. Their intention was to interpret the great harmony created by God in terms of the platonic numeric order. Artists were convinced that their work must echo this universal harmony,

otherwise they would not be in accordance with the universal principles (Wittkower 217). The use of “divine proportions” was essential to the design of their architecture. These architectural proportions were derived from Plato’s ideas about the correspondence between harmony and the cosmic order in certain numbers and geometrical figures.

The centralized churches of the Renaissance with their geometric design based on circular or squared plans, and proportions derived from the divine macrocosms, were viewed as the “ideal spaces” for God to be revealed. Christ was seen as the essence of perfection and harmony during the Renaissance, replacing the medieval perception of Christ as the one who suffered on the cross for humanity (Wittkower 53).

The architects of the Renaissance reworked the prior medieval approach toward geometry and proportions in order to create first in their minds, and then in reality and in the collective mind, what they believed was the ideal space for the house of God. In other words, their ambitious ideas found their way to be expressed in architecture through their innovative use of geometry and proportions.

My intention agrees with this philosophy. The realization in art of that which is important for me as an artist to communicate to others demands from me a conscious and responsible use of alternatives. The question that often results is if my work is “ideal” in order to communicate a specific idea or feeling. I strongly believe that in order to create art that would remain “permanent” in others, this question should always have an affirmative answer.

The last two pieces that I have completed for my final MFA show recapitulate the four concepts I have continuously investigated throughout my work. The concepts of space, time, memory and mind appear all together in the following pieces. These two

pieces are called “Reconstructing Memories 1 & 2” [Appendix, fig.25, 26 pg.xxvii, xxviii], and this is also the name I have chosen for my MFA show and exhibition paper.

Influenced by the work of Richard Diebenkorn through his piece called “*Ocean Park #140*,” my first step was to translate the sensation of vast spaces into the “flattened idiom of an abstraction” (Le Claire 33). In Diebenkorn’s composition there is a “suggestion of realistic perspective in the dramatic diagonal that sweeps upward as if to a distant vanishing point” (Le Claire 33). In both my compositions, the use of perspective is clearly identified by strong diagonals directed to vanishing points. The illusion of large spaces is definitely dominant. I create large spaces to serve as stage sets for the photo images of my family and myself that are superimposed on the painting. The concepts of time and memories are brought to the paintings by the use of photographs taken of my husband, daughter, and myself at different stages of our lives. For instance, in “Reconstructing Memories 1,” my past is brought to the composition by placing photos taken of myself at the age of one. The arrangement of the photos narrates a chapter of my life. It shows me as a baby looking past my later identity as a pregnant woman toward my husband holding our daughter with my post-partum self on her other side. Like this one, there are more stories brought from inside to the outer world for everyone to relate to and interpret. Disciplined personal exercise of the mind keeps my memories organized chronologically. Artists like myself visualize those memories as images, which in this case are brought to a present moment through shapes, colors and photographs.

In a way my work is like a biography, it tells us about memories of people and places once lived. It is not about imitating, but reinterpreting. It is about the need to bring to the present what it is no longer in my life today. It is definitely about reflection; it is in

contact with the mind. It takes from reality but elevates it to the spiritual. It is Neoplatonic for its spirituality and not for its realism. But most of all my work is about myself, taking and adding where it is needed, for the viewers to see and experience it not only with their eyes, but also with their mind and spirit.

Art and architecture are both incomplete without the presence of the human participant. Art needs the viewer as much as architecture needs inhabitants. Both relate to cultural values and to social matters, and should contribute to the quality of life. Ultimately, I feel this is what the arts are about. We are first of all individuals but do not live in isolation. We are social and interactive. Communitality is constantly longed for among the members of our human "family." Art and architecture throughout our human history have always ameliorated possible feelings of isolation. Our ideas and feelings are a result of our interaction with other people. In the same way, our thoughts and feelings, and the representations of them through art strive to enable a community of individuals that can transcend obstacles, fears and isolation toward the construction of a "better life."

CONCLUSION

LEGACY

During the High Renaissance it was often said that sculpture was more of a material art than painting. In the words of Benvenuto Cellini, “the difference between sculpture and painting is as great as that between the shadow and the object which casts the shadow” (Cellini in Barasch 173). Through this same basis Leonardo da Vinci infers instead the superiority of painting. In a memorable phrase he says that, “the sculptor creates his works so that they appear as they are” (Leonardo in Barasch 173). But the painter’s work is built on illusion: what is in fact flat (the panel on which the picture is painted) appears to be round, to have volume, and to recede in space. Painting is therefore “a matter of greater mental analysis...it compels the mind of the painter to transform itself into the very mind of nature, to become an interpreter between nature and art” (Barasch 173).

It is interesting to see how during the Renaissance painting was regarded by many as superior over sculpture because of greater challenge in creating the illusion of something on a flat surface. Alberti in his “Treatise on Painting” also elevates the painter to a highly spiritual status because of his ability to create something that was not there before. I also believe in the importance of the painter as the creator of something that was not there before. I also believe that the responsibility of a painter relies not in the creation

of anything but something that communicates and creates emotional meaning for the viewer.

Michelangelo once wrote, “The idea in the mind of the artist is more beautiful than the final work, which is only a feeble reflection of it” (Michelangelo in Blunt 72). Artists through history have always struggled in order to achieve in their work the realization of what they see in their minds.

As stated by Professor Steven Pinker, art is thought to be not just pleasurable but noble. It is among other fields the mind’s best work, what makes life worth living (Pinker 521).

We can clearly see that the importance given to the visual arts has been present over several centuries. Different art theories have argued about the specific role and importance attributed to the individual art forms. These theories searched for an identity that would pertain to each one of the visual arts individually, and that would restore their importance among all of the arts. Ideas are constantly changing as well as the media that communicates them. From meticulous representations of nature to the purest form of non-objective abstraction with no external references to identifiable objects, art has always been a medium of direct human expression. Artists are part of history, “they have always been reflective, reactive, as well as anticipatory to cultural developments, values, and influences” (Simpson, Graduate Art Seminar).

“Art is, among other things, continuity. Without the art of the past, and without the need and compulsion to maintain past standards of excellence, such a thing as Modernist art would be impossible” (Greenberg in Harrison 761). The art I create today

is also a result of my own “*istoria*.”¹ I am influenced by the knowledge I have about the past and about my own past. There is still much more out there for me to know, and therefore, there is much more there yet for me to do.

¹ Term first used in the fifteenth century to refer to the complex new narrative and allegorical subjects that were then enlarging the repertory of painters (artnet.com: Resource Library : Istorìa). My personal life and artistic past become the narrative and subject for my present and future art.

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APPENDIX

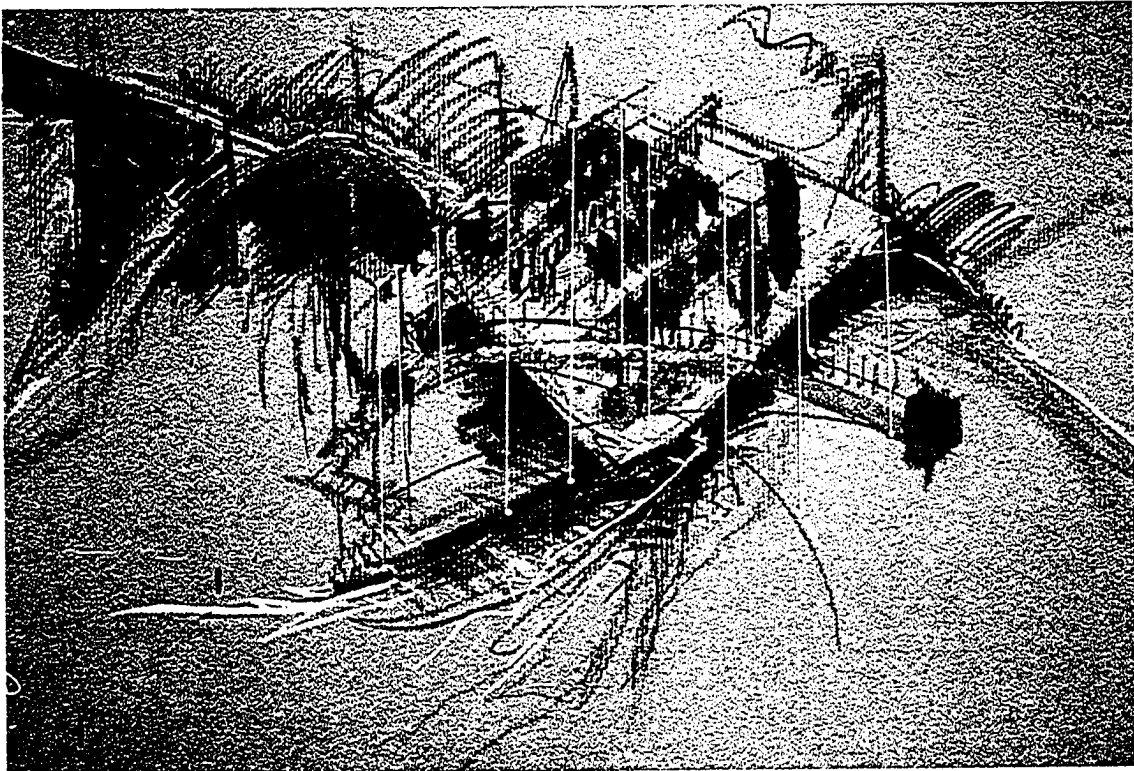


Fig. 1 "Octavia"

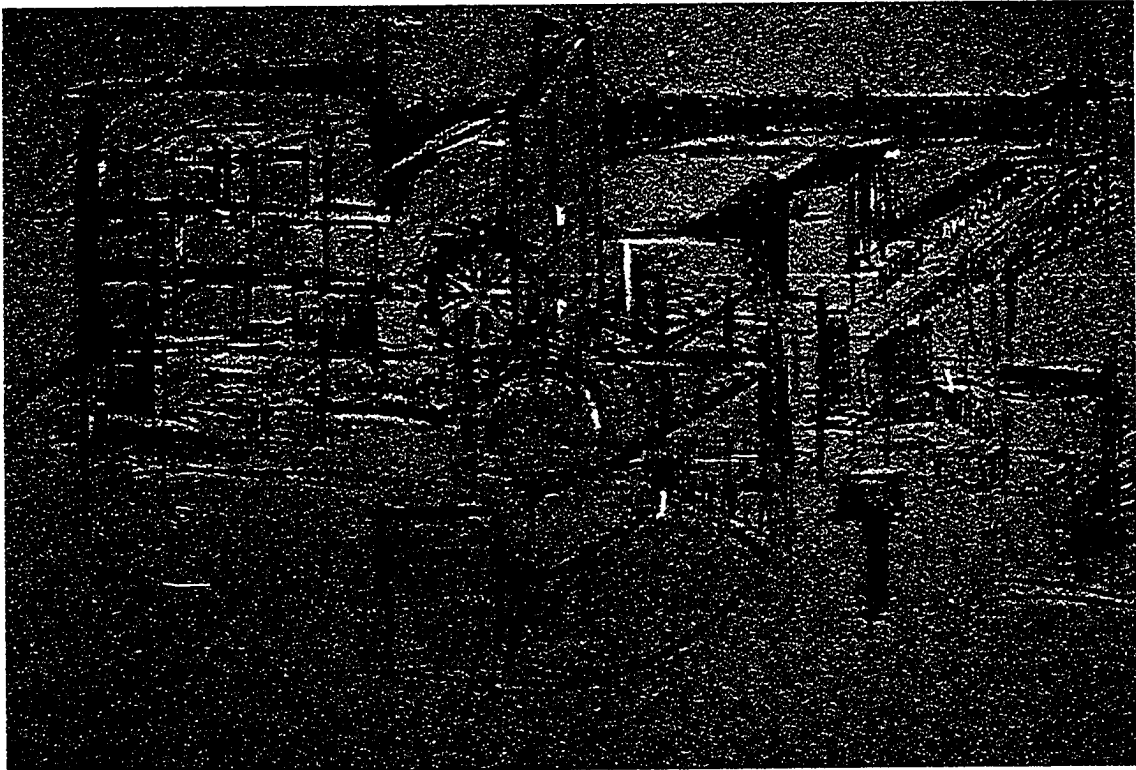


Fig. 2 "Sofronia"

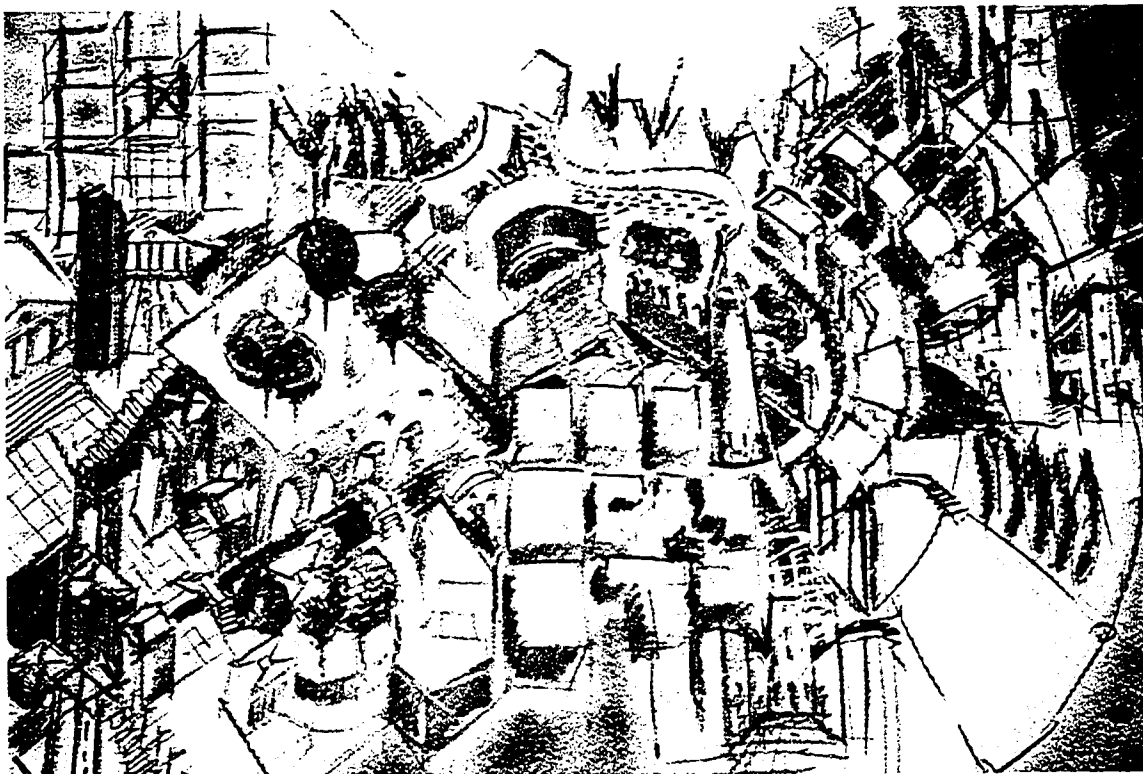


Fig. 3 "Esmeraldina"



Fig. 4 "Eusapia"

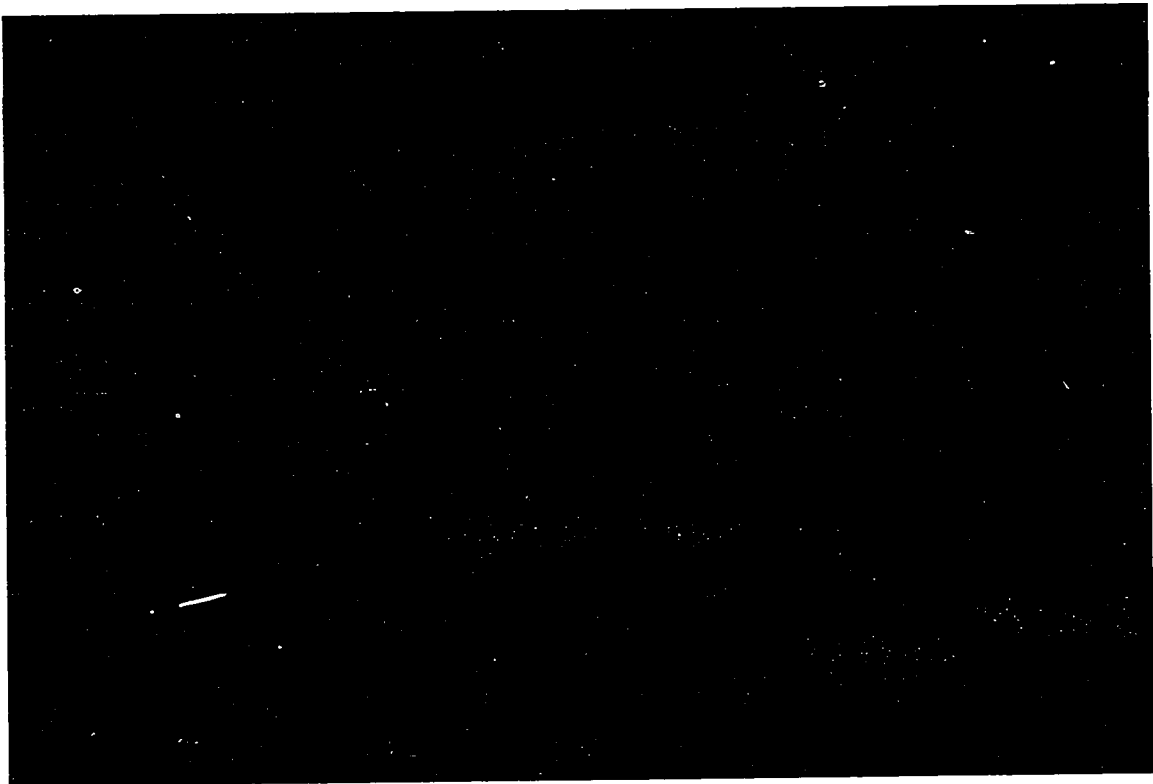


Fig. 5 "Imaginary Cities"



Fig. 6 "Imaginary Cities" (Detail)

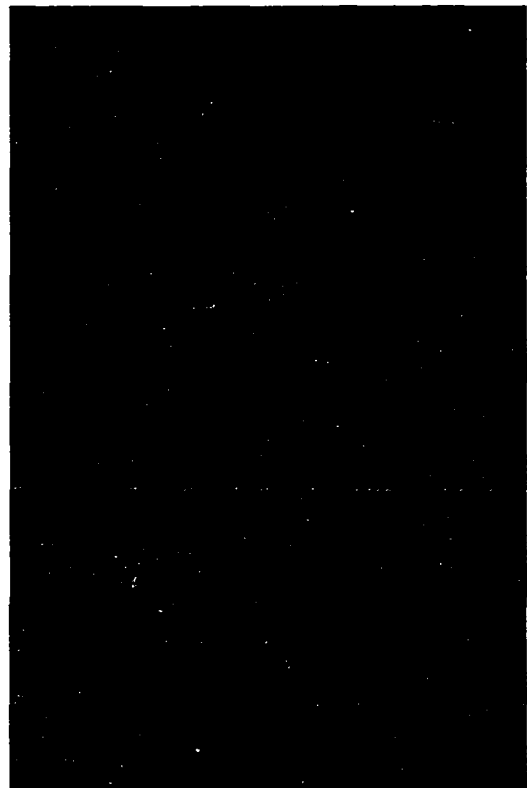


Fig. 7 "Imaginary Cities" (Detail)

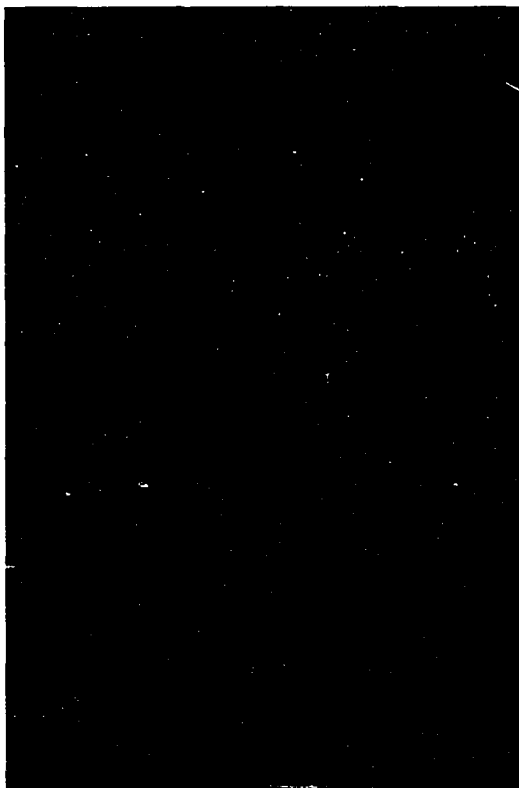


Fig. 8 "Imaginary Cities" (Detail)



Fig. 9 "Imaginary Cities" (Detail)

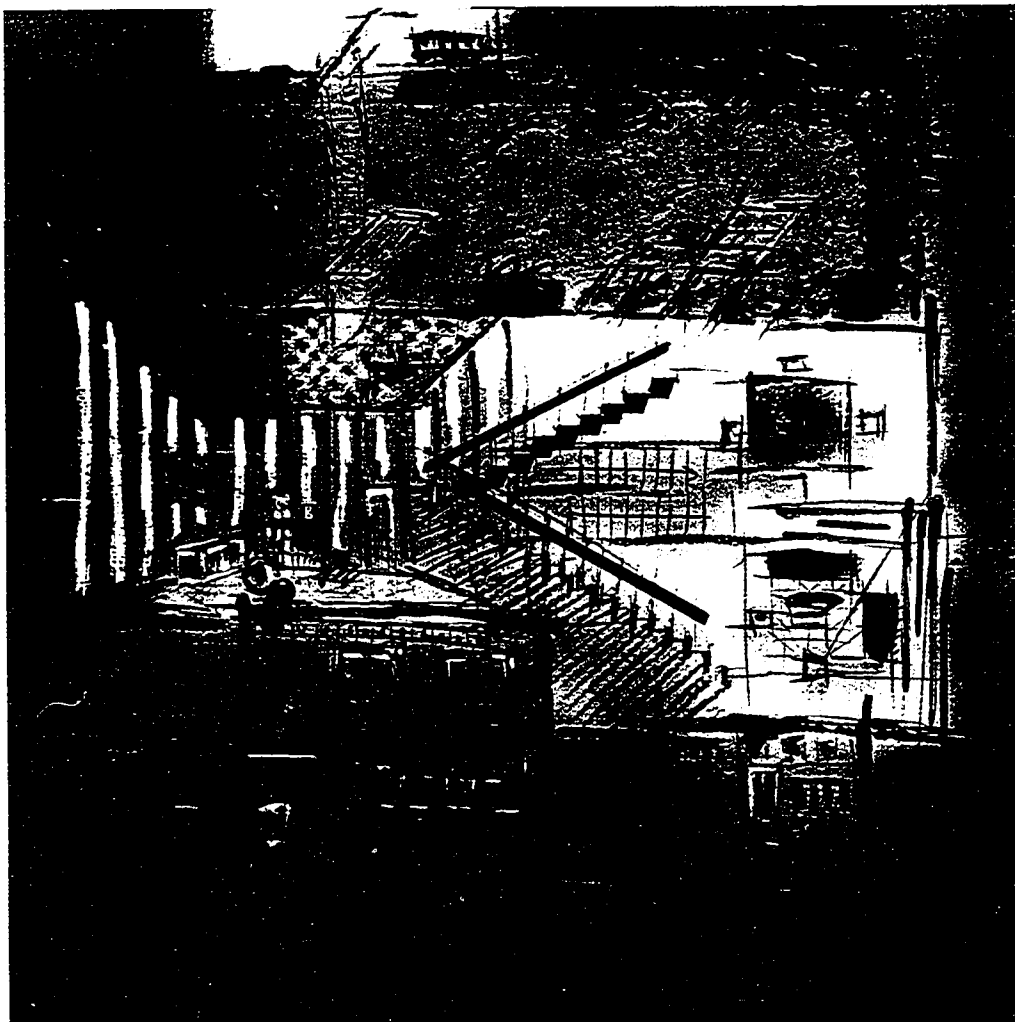


Fig. 10 "House One" ("Four Houses" Series)

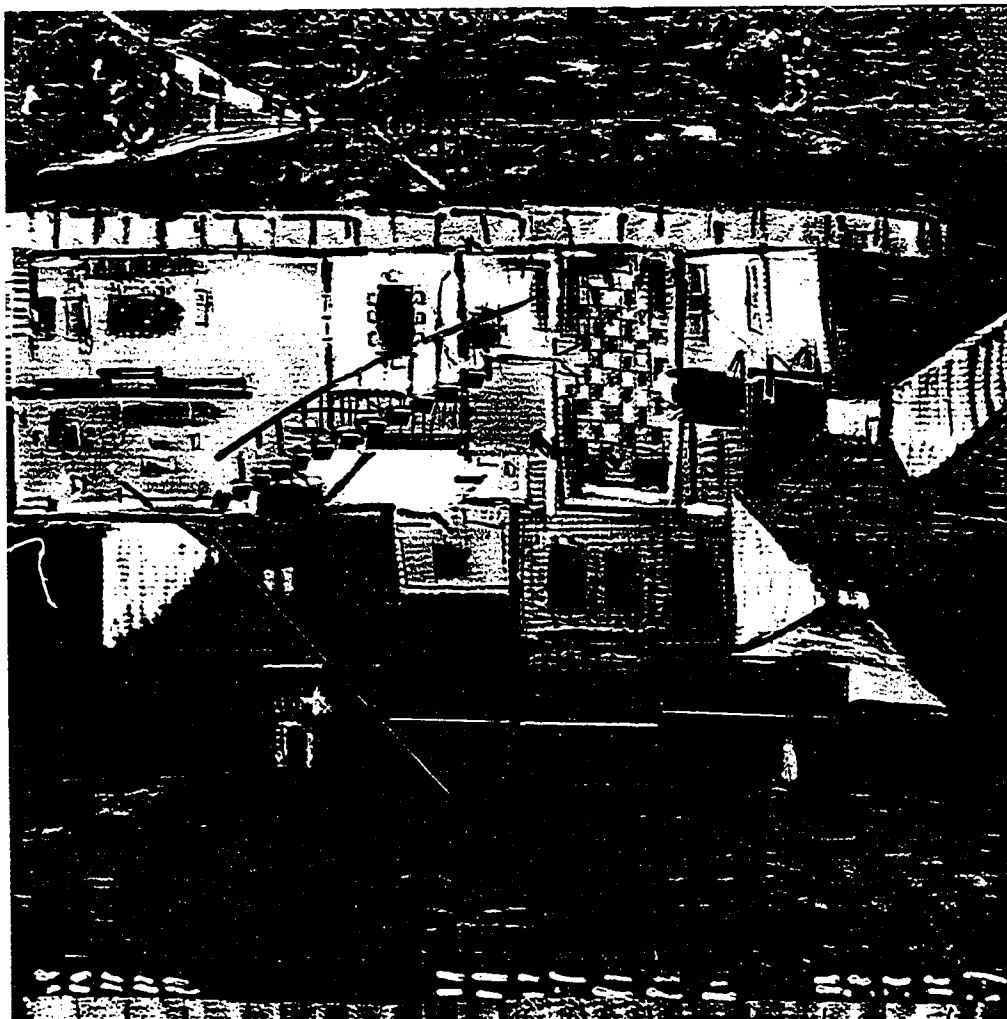


Fig. 11 "House Two" ("Four Houses" Series)



Fig. 12 "House Three" ("Four Houses" Series)

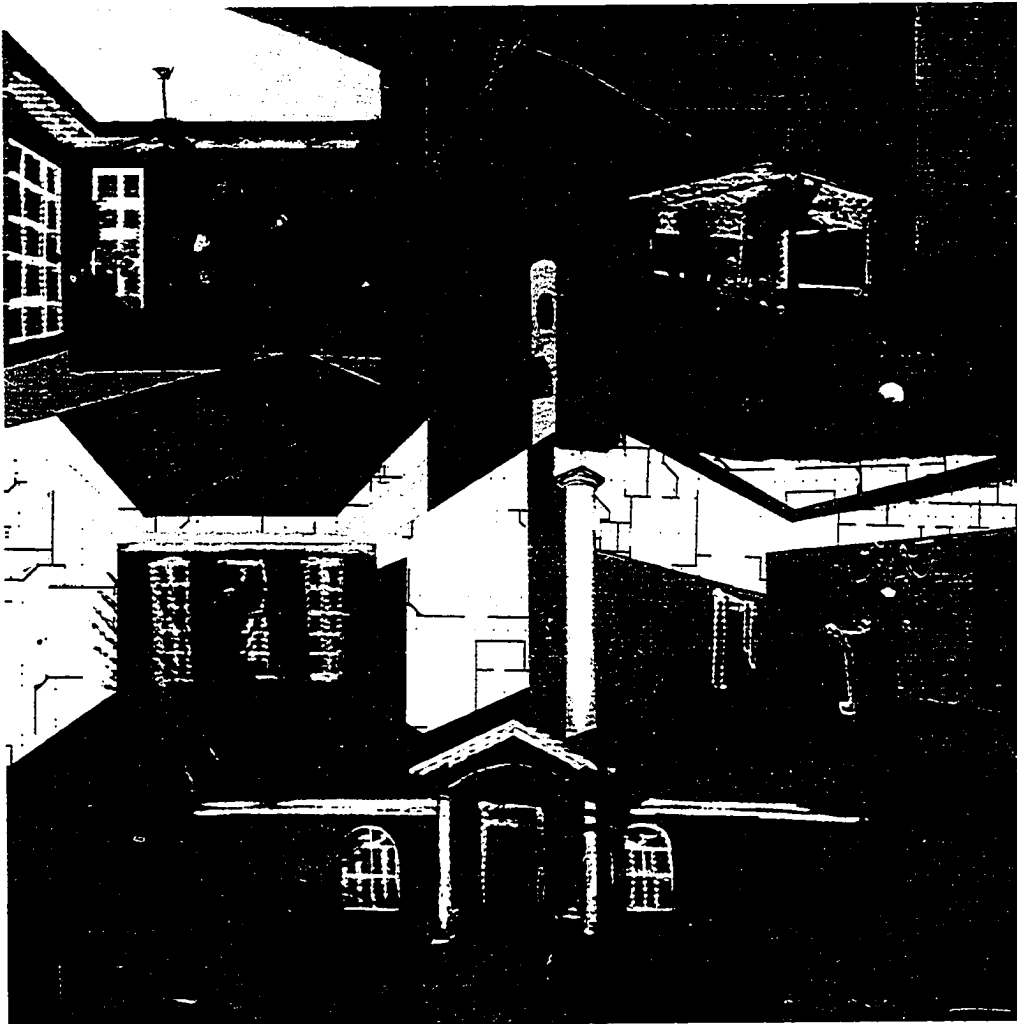


Fig. 13 "House Four" ("Four Houses" Series)

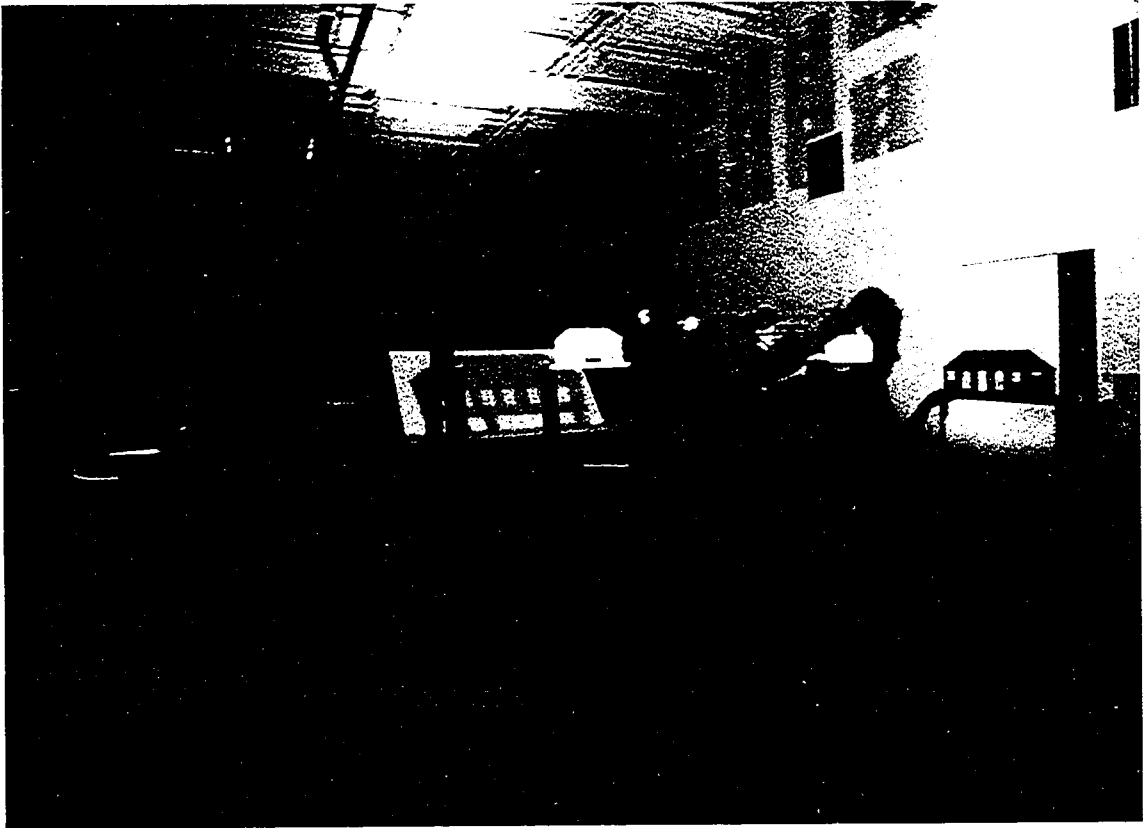


Fig. 14 "My Life Through Spaces"

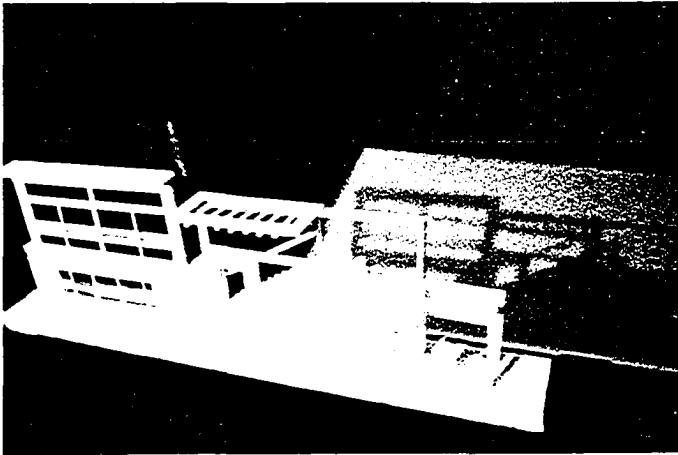


Fig. 15 "My Life Through Spaces" (Detail)

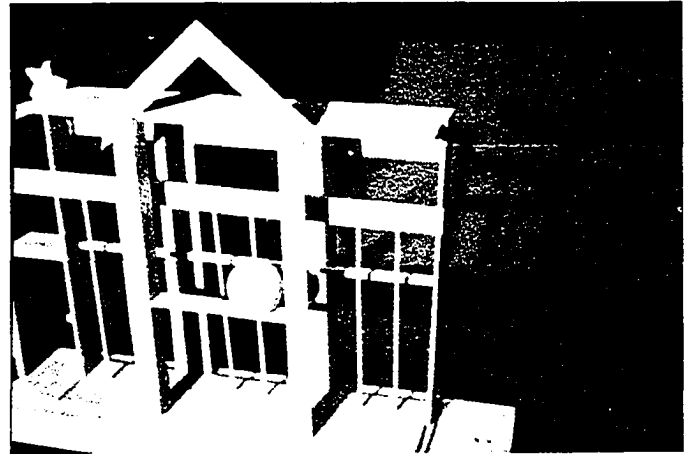


Fig. 16 "My Life Through Spaces" (Detail)

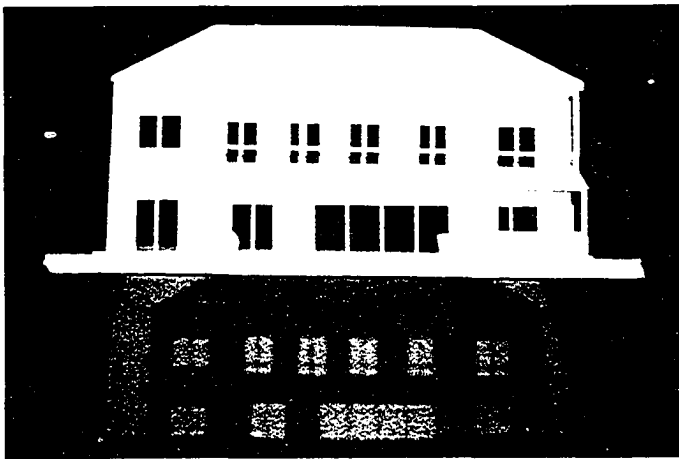


Fig. 17 "My Life Through Spaces" (Detail)

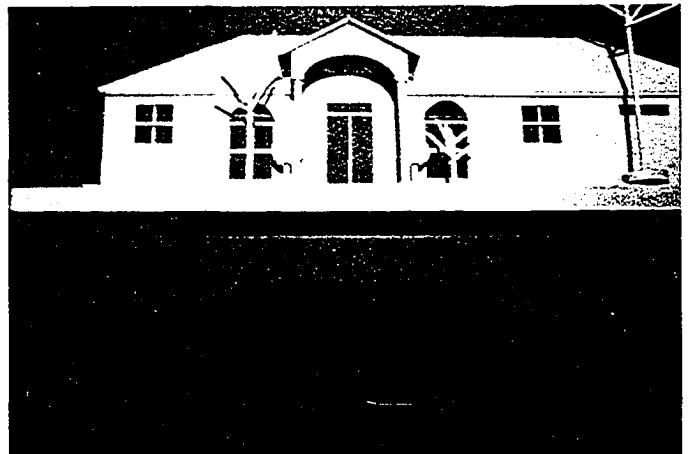


Fig. 18 "My Life Through Spaces" (Detail)



Fig. 19 "Passing Through"



Fig. 20 "Welcome Home"



Fig. 21 "Future Home"



Fig. 22 "Ideal Homes" (Series)



Fig. 23 "Ideal Homes" (Series)

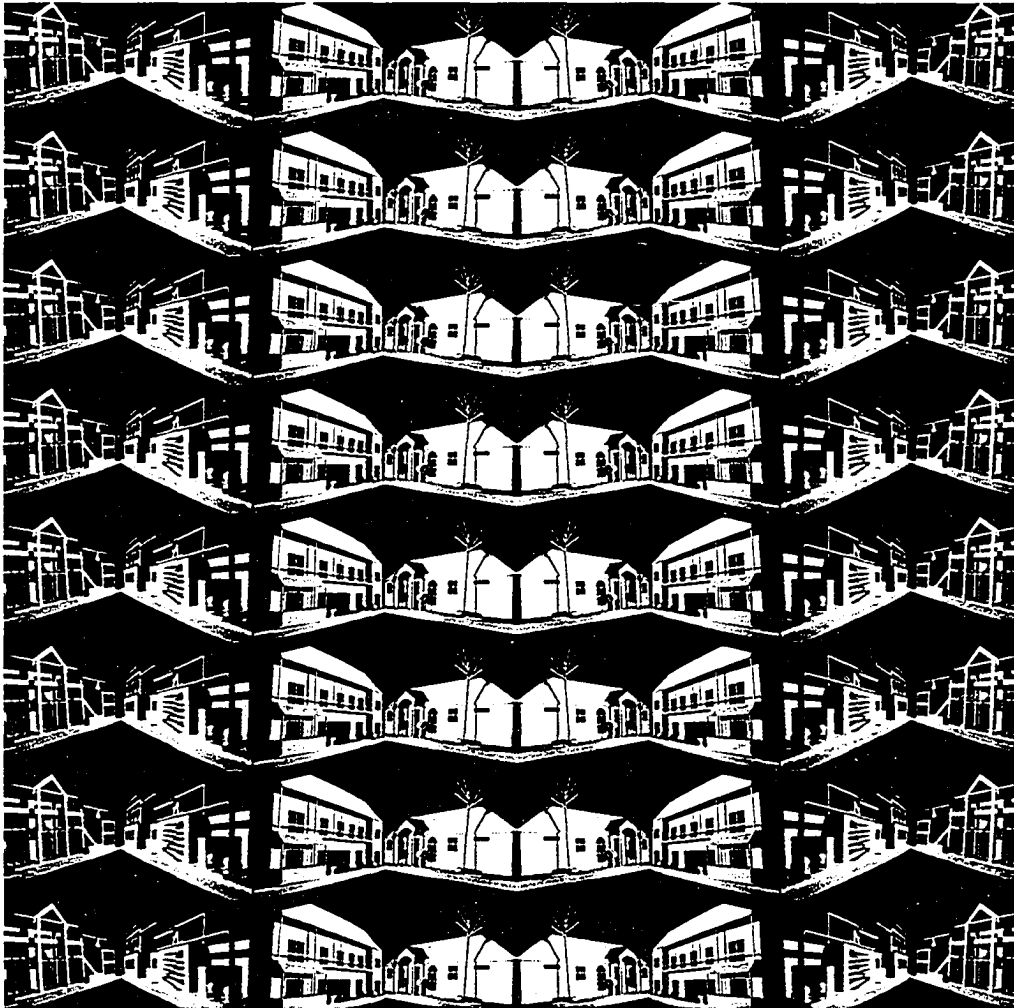


Fig. 24 "Ideal Homes" (Series)

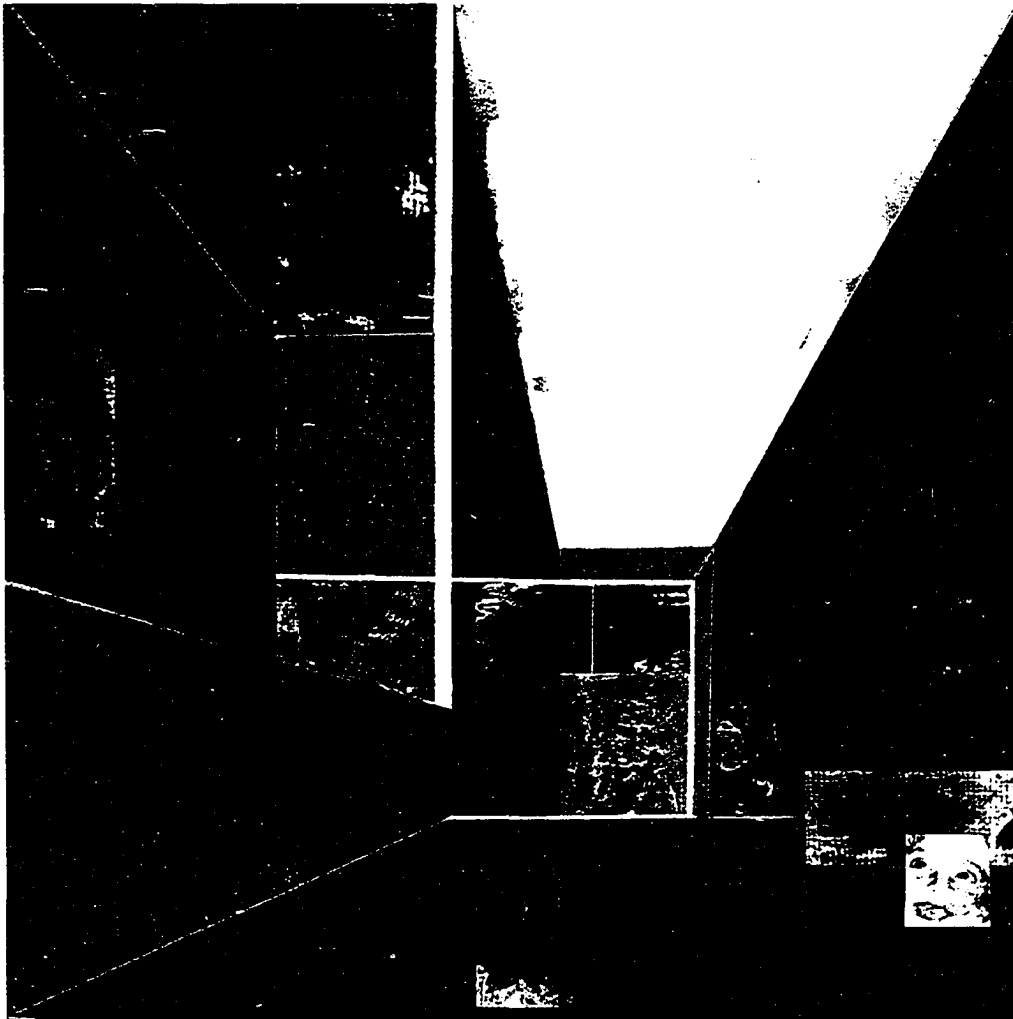


Fig. 25 "Reconstructing Memories 1"

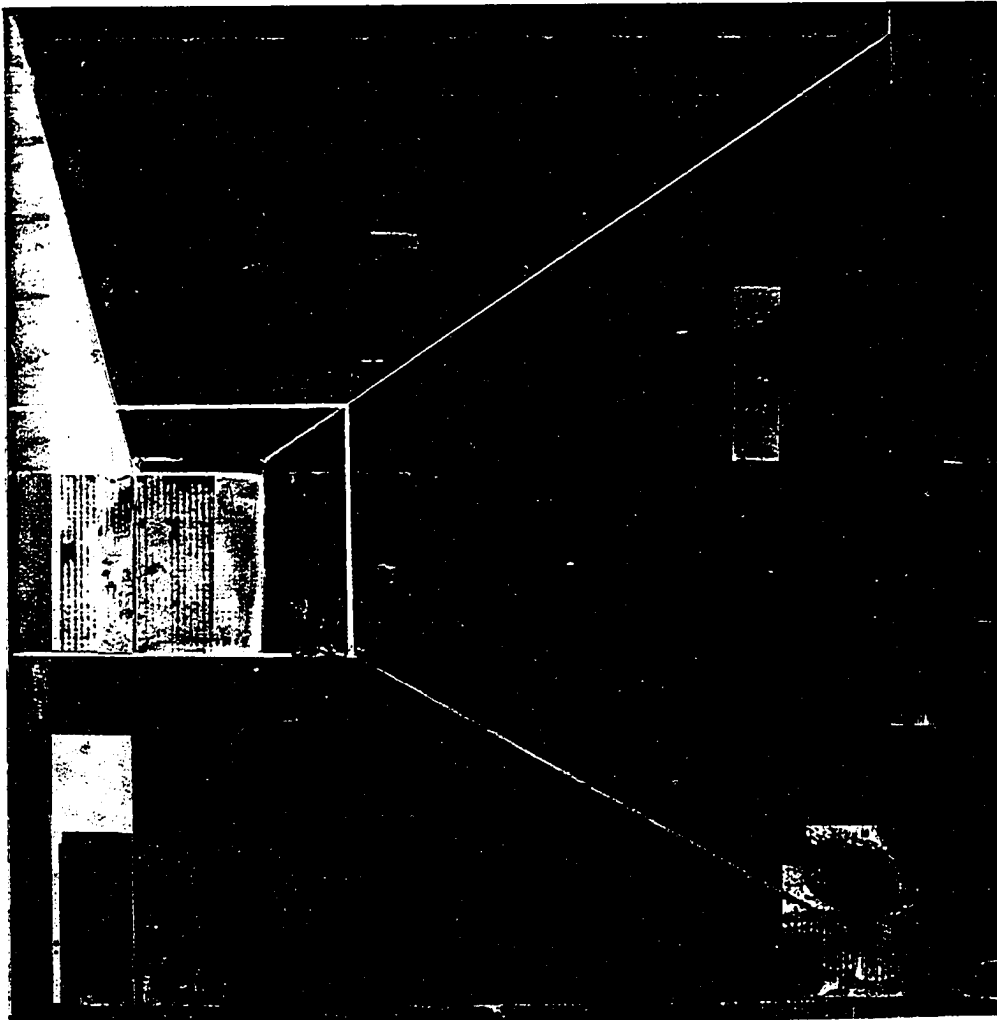


Fig. 26 "Reconstructing Memories 2"

VITA

Claudia S. Behar
609 Tulip Ave.
McAllen, TX 78504
E-mail: HSILB@aol.com

ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

Master of Fine Arts

1998 / 2003 University of Texas – Pan American

Master of Architecture

1995 Syracuse University

Bachelor of Architecture

1992 Syracuse University

1990 / 1991 Florence Program of Syracuse University

PROFESIONAL BACKGROUND

Teaching Experience

1998 / 2000 UTPA - Art Appreciation and Art of the Ancient World

1996 / 1998 Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas (UPC) – Design Studio and History of Renaissance Art and Architecture

1995 SU - Teaching Assistantship – Florence Program

International Programs

Summer 1997 / 1999 UPC - Director of the Art and Architecture Program - Italy

Professional Practice

1992 / 1993 David Palterer Design Studio – Florence

1994 Moriah – Sekely Landscape Architecture – Tel-Aviv

1996 / 1998 Claudia S. Behar – Claudia N. Cancino Architects – Lima

HONORS

2000 United States Achievement Academy (USAA) All – American Scholar

1996 UPC – Best Teacher Award

EXHIBITIONS

1999 MFA Group Exhibition – UTPA

2001 UTPA Faculty Exhibition – Mc Allen International Museum

2003 MFA Group Exhibition – UTPA

Languages: Fluent in Spanish, English, Italian, and Hebrew.