

L.A. [Ten]: Interviews on Los Angeles Architecture 1970s-1990s

By Stephen Phillips. Lars Müller, dist. by Prestel, November 2013. 256 p. ill. ISBN 9783037784099 (cl.), \$35.00.

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Preparation for the Getty Research Institute's 2013 exhibition on Southern California's postwar architectural history, *Overdrive: L.A. Constructs the Future, 1940-1990*, led to the publication of this book, *L.A. [Ten]*, consisting of nine interviews with ten key Los Angeles architects active between 1970 and 1990. Stephen Phillips, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, Associate Architecture Professor, authored the

essay, "Architecture Industry: The L.A. Ten," in the *Overdrive* catalog, and moderated these interviews with Neil Denari, Thom Mayne, Eric Owen Moss, Michael Rotondi, Craig Hodgetts/Ming Fung, Wes Jones, Frederick Fisher, and Coy Howard. For Franklin Israel, who died in 1996, Phillips interviewed five of his associates, who vividly described his personality and working methods. All but two (Denari and Jones) had participated in a series of ten exhibitions/lectures, "Current L.A.: 10 Viewpoints," held in 1979 at Mayne's Venice Studio/Residence. In each interview, Phillips questioned whether or not the "L.A. Ten" comprised a cohesive movement, with a unified formal/theoretical approach. His interviews identified the social networks that spread and enriched ideas locally and the media and academic connections that fostered each architect's reputation more broadly. All interviewees balanced their careers in private practice with teaching, primarily at SCI-Arc and UCLA, and Phillips investigated the histories of both programs.

The interviews demonstrated that the L.A. Ten developed into a new kind of “movement,” as critic Charles Jencks described in his book, *Heteropolis Los Angeles, the Riots and the Strange Beauty of Hetero-Architecture*, (London: 1993), a “Non-School” composed of “a group of individualized mavericks.” Within this menagerie of nonconformists, interviews revealed common threads. All were professionally driven, pugnaciously independent, and well-read, most having graduated from elite universities. Most indicated that Los Angeles, an architectural tabula rasa, offered them great creative flexibility, opportunities to build, and freedom from East Coast or European trends. Their work aptly reflected Southern California’s heterogeneous, mechanized, limitless and often architecturally banal milieu. An absence of intellectual fora for debate and lack of public interest, forced the Ten to exchange ideas (and quarrel) in academic meetings and impromptu gatherings in Venice’s artistic ghetto. This insular architectural world served as a pressure cooker, sharpening individual viewpoints and giving the creative scene a heterotic vibrancy.

This well-produced, well-illustrated book provides upper-level students fascinating insight into this avant-garde group. Architectural writers have paid considerable attention to Mayne, the 2005 Pritzker Prize winner, and a few others, but L.A. [Ten] also devotes space to other, lesser known, but significant figures, particularly Coy Howard, a pivotal liaison between the city’s vibrant art scene and its architects. Videos of six of the interviews uploaded to YouTube supplement the text and provide added perspective on the speakers.