

Some Thoughts on Architectural Models in Art and Architecture

Everyone understands a model. With a model you “get it” instantly, in one.

Our models are different from conventional architectural models because despite re-presenting a particular building, they are independent of it. They are there for a purpose that in practical terms is completely independent of the building. They are non-fiction but they are not there to illustrate the building. They are only there to say that the building exists, or has previously existed.

In architectural terms our models are purposeless. They are not there to display, promote or sell a building for a developer. They are not there to illustrate or investigate a tectonic programme. They are not generative tools for future design development. They exist to re-present the building as part of an artwork. Their purpose is contemplative and conceptual.

This distinction or difference is achieved largely by the way our models are presented and displayed. They may be framed like a picture or a relief and hung on a wall, exposed under glass in the seat of a chair, form part of sculpture, or be projected like a film. They are often collated together in series or groups where the only possible motive or criteria for their selection and juxtaposition is conceptual or artistic.

In architecture the normal process of creative development involves a translation from **idea** to **model** to **building**, however in our case as artists it is the reverse. We start with the building and use the model to get to the idea.

Why use a model?

Models are a universal language because miniaturisation is a universal strategy. Models don't need, or they appear not to need specialised information to understand them. A model instantly gives the viewer a taste or suggestion of reality. Models are a kind of intermediate reality because with their physicality they have crossed the threshold between representation and reality. They place you the viewer in the three dimensional world.

Models are codes and decodes for structures and systems because they enact, exemplify, or reveal the relationships between the system's components. They display the structure's order, with the routes and interactions that penetrate and connect the different parts.

A model allows the viewer an instant overview. The sense of access and even power is pleasurable. Because they are or appear to be preliminary or informal models are more accessible. Because they can be provisional they may represent an aspiration towards an ideal and offer a glimpse of utopia. You can inhabit a model in your imagination whereas something full scale might be much more demanding intimidating or even overwhelming. Like toys, small things are emotionally attractive. However we all know that if they are nurtured and tended small things may realise their potential, they may become big.

One of the key reasons for making an architectural model, one of it's key advantages, is that it is a more portable, and materially economic example of a given structure than the structure itself. Whereas a 3D architectural model, unlike a drawing or painting, begins to establish a building in the physical world, virtual models maintain the building in the metaphysical world, and virtual models are even more portable. They can be transported thousands of miles in an instant, they have the potential to be replicated at any size, and they can be in more than one place at a time. Virtual models can be anywhere and everywhere at once.

When virtual models achieve the tactile dimension we will have come full circle. The model of the structure will have become an infinitely adaptable reality and we will have arrived at a certain utopia.

Langlands & Bell April 2014