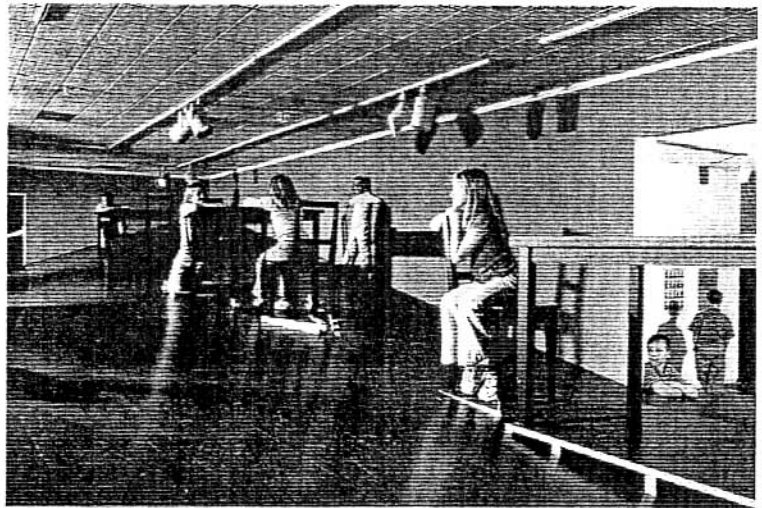


CINCINNATI

ALLAN WEXLER
 CONTEMPORARY
 ARTS CENTER

There is a deceptive modesty about Allan Wexler's work, seen here in a survey covering twenty-five years of the artist's career. He has long laid claim to the diminutive with his Lilliputian-like objects, and he has confined himself to some of the most fundamental elements of our material culture—the two-by-four, the chair, the hut—coaxing from them a formal vocabulary of seemingly infinite variety. Compulsively breaking down and recombining their planar surfaces, he appears bent on releasing undiscovered dimensions of mass and volume. Wexler, one critic wrote, has sexual intercourse with the subjects of his art: Such is the intensity of his involvement that in a piece like *Twelve Chairs*, 1979, a grid of creamy yellow canvases bearing the pale shadows of splayed and sectioned chair parts, the reimagined chair could be the body's supple mate.

In pairing *127 x 2"*, 1997, and *Drawing 2 x 4*, 1997, Wexler makes the two-by-four into an icon, raising it above its rudimentary role, by placing, respectively, a two-by-four made of folded architectural tracing paper beside a ghostlike drawing of this prevalent construction item on the same kind of translucent paper—it is as if Wexler were exploring the essence of “two-by-fourness.” In *Series #4: Houses Using Uncut 2 x 4s*, 1979, he rejects the same object's historical use in braced-frame construction (the common architecture since the mid-nineteenth century, when nails were first mass-produced); instead, he stacks miniature studs like logs into deliberately clumsy walls. Ruminating on furniture in *Scaffold Paper Chair*, 1997, and in *Thirty Proposals for a Hill*, 1989, he props two-by-twos and scaffolding together in knock-kneed formations that seem fragile at best, and yet



Allan Wexler, *Above and Below: The Hypar Room*, 1999. Installation view.

the reinvented objects alert us to the ideals of stability and durability and to the possibility that their kinky, antic postures represent what chairs might say if they were able to speak.

Taking the mode of fantasy a step further, Wexler has created a series of small sculptural tableaux depicting everyday scenes gone slightly haywire—four oxford shirts trail off the hem of a tablecloth; ink seems to pool slowly from the hollow legs of a tiny table; and miniature people bulge the walls of an even tinier building. Wexler is often humorous, as in *Braum "Aromaster" to Cup Coffee Maker*, 1991, where the appliance is completely dismantled, its numerous parts all neatly displayed in a custom-made portable case—but how to make a cup of coffee?

An architect by training, Wexler knows that almost any built form can topple over, slide downhill, wear out, or give up the ghost—that the craft of construction is, after all, provisional. He plays this idea out in full-scale participatory projects such as the installation *Above and Below: The Hypar Room*, 1999, named for the main design principle at work, a hyperbolic paraboloid (or “hypar” for short) in which a horizontal warped plane is formed by straight vertical lines beneath it. In this room, to be installed permanently in the center's projected new home, visitors lose their sure-footedness: Contradicting our expectations, the platform that is the “floor” (in the “Above” portion) torques and twists like the slow swells of a sea under our feet. People may sit, or rather perch, on chairs at various tables, some of which seriously test one's equilibrium. Underneath the platform, in “Below,” visitors can thread their way among the raw studs of varied heights that heft the rolling floorboards above—a warren of supports that reassuringly dramatizes their load-bearing role.

—Joan Seeman Robinson