



Allan Wexler, *Water Storage Unit*,  
1994, plastic, plumbing, hardware, wood.  
50 x 17 x 18".

## ALLAN WEXLER

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ARTS

Allan Wexler's brilliantly inventive oeuvre, which consists of variations on and mutations of something far older than the novel or the easel painting—domestic architecture—should give hope to anyone suffering from the anxiety of influence. Perhaps the key to Wexler's inventiveness lies in his description of himself as an architect trapped in an artist's body. In architecture, the realm of the possible is often fenced in by practical exigencies (everything from the constraints of construction to the demands of clients) that can be swept aside when working on a smaller scale. Thus, in applying his architectural imagination to artistic means, Wexler is often able to produce ingenious variations

on the house and its appurtenances.

In previous exhibitions, Wexler explored the dialectic between domestic space and social functions such as dining or watching TV, but in his recent show, "Buckets, Sinks, Gutters," he investigated how people consume or dispose of water, how a building itself directs the flow of water or is, in turn, transformed by it. A small wooden model called *Building for Water Collection with Bathroom*, 1994, demonstrates how different means of rain collection might alter the structure of a house. The roof of a hypothetical bathroom is punctured by three large funnel-shaped structures that drain directly into a bathtub, sink, and toilet. The model is typical of Wexler's works, in that it responds to a very practical problem—how to utilize natural resources like rainfall—with an imaginative but potentially absurd solution: what happens to your toilet during a dry spell?

Because scale tends to impose more limits in architecture than in art, it is precisely by working at the level of models, maquettes, and prototypes that Wexler is able to try out a number of different solutions, even ridiculous ones, to a given problem. *Parsons Kitchen: Sink Unit*, 1994, stands out as a lifesize exception. Commissioned by the Parsons School of Design, this crate about the size of a coffin or small shower stall houses a washtub, a bucket for waste water, a bottle of Ajax—all on castor wheels. In effect, it's a portable unit containing nothing but the kitchen sink. Seeing one of Wexler's designs realized, however, leads you to wonder whether his works are models and modules or something else altogether. While *Parsons Kitchen* may answer to a specific need at Parsons, how many people could really use a portable kitchen sink? Works like *Parsons Kitchen* don't appear to be intended for mass reproduction, like Bauhaus furniture, any more than *Building for Water Collection with Bathroom*, 1994, is intended for large-scale construction. They may have the appearance of architectural models, environmental proposals, and design objects, but if anything they're really conceptual models—thought experiments pointing in the direction of architectural possibilities, environmental absurdities, and design *rarae aves*. They make it easy to think of Wexler as an architect less trapped than freed in an artist's body.

—Keith Seward