

of play – that this is the re-creation of culture. In this case, architecture’s culture.

**Joe:** Well, collage seems a habit of people who tend toward temperamental extremes when they look at their field. People who feel strongly about their field but alternate between intensity and a distancing play that allows them to re-approach with a renewed vigor.

**Dora:** But, it’s also a rehearsal of the rule, the constraint. It doesn’t come right to mind, but you can make comparisons, like in Eric’s diptychs or via the series. So, like with Wes’ work, rules tend to be most evident in when the play seems most free, either in their flaunting or in their total subscription. So, all of these marks on paper, and where there aren’t marks, that seems to me to be an exercise in judgment, and really constant on their part. How do you tell a good one from a bad one? That’s a pretty important question for architecture.

**Joe:** Actually, the show is provocative for its restraint. None of the three has tried to amplify painting or collage into architecture (in the way the NY5 did, or perhaps as Zaha does now). Instead, each reexamines a technique or potential of those disciplines for a new method to describe or diagram new interests. In this sense, the scale and serial dimension of all three bodies of work underscores their depth and ambition as new means of discovery, rather than as transitional representation.

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**Wim:** I see a relationship between the sketch and this work. This is another way of thinking, more intensely than the sketch.

**Dora:** The sketch is a seed, though, in a design process, it contains basic information that is supposed to be carried out in the design; whereas these are more like the soil – a fertile ground for design thought but without the same directive. It is deeply disciplinary in that sense but not directly one-to-one,

**Joe:** These look more like maps of the conversations one would have with each of them around architecture, rather than any stage in the work.

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**Wim:** But, can I ask, does size matter? In terms of rigor and its relation to the discipline, these are all smaller works and therefore ones that can be done in a limited amount of time, different from large paintings.

**Dora:** Right, and that’s what I mean when I invoke the sketchbook. They are somewhat wedded to the format, especially in Eric’s case where you can see the open page. Or, in Gary’s case, this is barely scratching the surface of the many works he has, and all of them are in this tight, almost deck-of-cards, format. In Wes’ case, these were cut down from other paintings and drawings, ones that he had done throughout his life, especially while in Rome, but there’s that 11x17 – the size of the standard printer, the size of the standard folio, the tabloid. It’s personal, but not intimate, more like who these guys are in their day jobs. So, yes, size does matter....

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**Joe:** This is not merely the notebook, pinned up, nor is this just architects setting up the easel on Sundays, however informal. This seems like bodies of art taken on in their own right, and for me that is where they gain an autonomy. It’s not clear to me whether that’s a freedom for utopian speculation, or just freedom from disciplinary and professional expectations, but for all three, it’s at least room to move, and maybe to riff or to solo.

## BIOGRAPHIES

### Wes Jones

Wes Jones is a partner in Jones, Partners: Architecture—an international practice based in California. His technologically inspired designs for completed buildings and theoretical projects have been acclaimed for their critical engagement with contemporary cultural issues and their disciplinary sophistication. His architecturally related work has been collected in two monographs, *Instrumental Form* and *El Segundo*, both published by Princeton Architectural Press. But he also makes art. Usually when he’s depressed or there is no architecture to do.

### Eric A. Kahn

Architect Eric A. Kahn is one of three founding members of Central Office of Architecture (COA). Kahn works on both built and theoretical work, as well as maintaining an ongoing commitment to teaching at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc). Kahn’s interests are diverse, and include forays into breeding cross-disciplinary relationships between disciplines as diverse as Art, Scenario Thinking and Music.

Selected works are part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco and his work has been exhibited widely. A monograph of the work of the COA was published in 1998; *The Anatomy of Observation* was published by the SCI-Arc Public Access Press in 1998. Kahn is currently working on a new book of writings and drawings provisionally titled *Proof of Architecture*.

### Gary Paige

Gary Paige is a principal and partner in GPS [Gary Paige Studio], a multi-disciplinary design firm. Long buildings and small chairs—and everything between is the office mantra. Paige was the former undergraduate director at SCI-Arc and teaches design studio and courses in drawing and object making. A monograph of his work is forthcoming.

### Joe Day

Joe Day designs and writes in Los Angeles, where he leads deegan-day design, llc and serves on the faculty and board of the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc). Day was President of the Los Angeles Forum for Architecture and Urban Design in 2000, and recently contributed a forward to the new edition of Reyner Banham’s *Los Angeles: Architecture of the Four Ecologies* (UC Press, 2009).

### Dora Epstein Jones

Dora Epstein Jones is the coordinator of Cultural Studies at SCI-Arc. Her work, as an architectural theorist and cultural critic, concentrates on the discipline of architecture.

### Wim de Wit

Wim de Wit is the Head of the Department of Architecture and Design at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. Trained as an architectural historian, he has been active as an architecture curator in Amsterdam, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, and has organized numerous exhibitions including the recent “Lessons from Bernard Rudofsky.”

# JONES / KAHN / PAIGE OTHER WORKS

A+D

Architecture and Design Museum  
Los Angeles

February 14 – March 14, 2009

# A conversation among three critics about three architects and their “other works,” immediately after a first viewing

JOE DAY / DORA EPSTEIN JONES / WIM DE WIT

A+D MUSEUM

Los Angeles, February 9, 2009

*(Joe Day, Dora Epstein Jones, and Wim de Wit are seated around a table in the A+D Museum gallery. The conversation is edited for clarity.)*

**Wim de Wit:** To know that these are architects doing this work, you can't look at it without knowing, without thinking about, this work as being part of that life. You think about collage, and the urban environment, of billboards and signs ads that are pasted layer over upon layer. There must be architectural ideas that are being played out in the act of painting.

**Joe Day:** I think these are “para-practices.” A lot of contemporary architects are including other practices and saying that it all part of the same work, that whatever they're doing is within the scope of their architectural production, and there isn't any counterpoint to their practice. But, there appears to be a polemic in this show that argues for that counter-point, at a time when a lot of architects and certainly a lot of artists include everything.

*(Joe Day, Dora Epstein Jones, and Wim de Wit are seated around a table in the A+D Museum gallery. The conversation is edited for clarity.)*

**Wim:** There are a lot of architects who are also artists. Many move into architecture because of an interest in art. They have artistic tendencies skills, like to draw, like to paint, but at some point decide that they may need to do something more practical(?). Likewise, there are some quite a few architects who have musical talent, maybe someone like Liebeskind, who was a musician before he became an architect, always says that there is a clear relationship between music and his work.

**Joe:** With both Gary and Eric, every conversation I have with them about their work takes a turn towards music. Even when I'm not sure which band they mean or how they sound, the lessons that Eric and Gary take from music are really clearly articulated – and transferable. I see this show as an attempt to come to terms with the discoveries of artists, whether that feeds into their architectural practices or just expands their personal horizons. Some architects are flip and opportunistic about art - these projects are proof that these architects are not.

*(Joe Day, Dora Epstein Jones, and Wim de Wit are seated around a table in the A+D Museum gallery. The conversation is edited for clarity.)*

**Joe:** It's counterintuitive, but I think architects use collage, as one of many possible works on paper techniques, to better understand “line” and “delineation” in a different and more personal way. In Gary's work the edge condition where color meets color becomes a critical, defining move. In Eric's it's the suture, the fine line that defines and ultimately superimposes another figure on a field. And, for Wes, there's a continuum between graphics and collages that seems to void the edges, which reminds me of the way type is outlined then filled. The delineation for text and for the figures seem to merge.

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**Dora Epstein Jones:** Just because it's “other work” doesn't mean that there is a necessary compatability – it may not be the same practice – “other work” suggests a tension. Perhaps the supplement is necessary – this work is both minor and crucial to their architectural practices. And, perhaps this work has an instrumental nature – as if this were a kind of laboratory for architectural imagining. Both are possible under the term “other.”

**Joe:** The ‘Other’ of the shows title suggests an opposition - of work made in contrast to a main pursuit - but these are multivalent people who juggle teaching, building, writing, etc. These works reveal an interplay or feedback between their interests as much as they mark new areas of exploration.

**Dora:** Yes, there's also a tendency to play this work out in pairs and in series, which suggests that there are a number of other works to which this must be

a small segment, especially in Gary's case. You get the feeling that this is just a little bit of what he has.

**Wim:** Art in a series shows that it's not just amusement, there's thinking, intensity, especially Gary's as if they were light studies. It may have been something totally different than that, but that's the level of study.

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**Joe:** Gary's work shows an interest in the indexical or in charting some kind of experiential passage, which may be as focused as the experiential passage of time in making the series, or as open-ended as a series of environmental conditions. I was struck looking at Gary's by how the modulation of the monochrome looks like it is happening as an exploration of how to see color and light in space, even though his collages are composed of “flat” paint chips.

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**Dora:** What's the difference between an artist's series and an architect's iteration?

(all pause...laugh)

**Joe:** Well, I don't have an answer, but I think I'd look somewhere between Sol LeWitt and Peter Eisenman. In LeWitt there's a basic geometric formula and you let it unfurl. With Eisenman, it's more a question of calculation, staging axonometric permutations and then adding and subtracting from them, with some sense that they may or may not be analogous to architectural representations. The iterations of architects seem like they end up instrumental, whereas the artist makes a radical statement in the multiple.

**Wim:** I don't think there is a difference.

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**Joe:** This show has been gestating in three parallel ways. In Eric's case, it's a modest metropolitanism, a desire to intervene into the city, both through the re-imagining of the built environment and an internalized reflection on that process. For Gary, there is a 20- or 30-years notion of practice, and a registration of a development of a set of ideas over a long period of time and his coming to terms with them.

**Dora:** And with Wes, it's a recombination practice – the disciplinary bits and pieces – and the effects of these played out. This show was their idea.

**Wim:** And, well, things come up, that's how a lot of exhibitions are made, new acquisitions or an idea that brews, and the people at A+D, say, yes, we can see the work is great.

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**Dora:** There is a critical comment here on contemporary practice, and especially the exhibition-as-installation scene of contemporary practice. Once upon a time, in the age of the Beaux-Arts, the architectural exhibition would consist of reconstruction drawings and plundered pieces of Classical architecture, and then later, models and drawings of buildings out there. But lately, they have been more experiments in tectonics, reconciling geometries to materials and construction techniques to perform tectonic feats. And, the implicit manifesto is that these feats could be imported back into architecture as skins or as structures, or possibly meant to replace normative senses of architecture.

**Joe:** Yes, there's a real undercurrent of resistance to some contemporary practices. It may be the margin, another of a series of attempts to establish a position and intervene in it.

**Dora:** But, this is not “old school” even if it seems that way because it is not sketches or drawings of buildings. Not architecture but contributing ultimately to a conversation about architecture, and significantly to a theory of architecture, one that reconnects architecture to popular culture as in Eric's work, lighting, texture and modulation in Gary's work, or spatial affect and

iconography in Wes' work.

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**Dora:** This is a different view of what it means to have architecture in the museum. Do you install drawings of buildings? Do you install actual pieces? Or, do you install and exhibit a range of other practices that may not relate to the architecture per se, but stand in as a theory of architecture? If we take that as such, it's not that these practices are also architecture, and fall under the widening disciplinary umbrella, but a stance on what architecture means – light, color, materials, techniques, iconography, language.

**Wim:** I think the ultimate goal is to end up in the Biennale...

**Joe:** But, which Biennale? It's not easy to double, and yet you see a lot of architects who would like to be in the art biennale.

**Wim:** Or a museum like NAI in Rotterdam can play that kind of role, to support theory, but most museums only present something thematic or something monographic, and therefore there's a problem about making it look visually attractive, or as creating a visual experience. So, the installation needs to convey more meaning than one can perceive by just looking at the buildings and the models. This exhibition is incredibly refreshing. The viewer can think about the relationship between art and architecture and at the same time, have a good visual experience. In Wes' work, you can look at the three-dimensionality of the objects, and it's like you can look out through a window, but also you can also imagine that the viewers can consider how they look at objects, how they look at the use of perspective, or space, or any aspect of a building or architecture.

**Joe:** In Wes' work, there's a play of recessional space, playing the flat against the deep. The different graphic registers of his well-known work – type, screens, bold outlines and shadows – all merge in these compositional studies, and both the palette and line quality are far softer than the “look” Wes pioneered. These look like a respite from “finish” for him.

*(Joe Day, Dora Epstein Jones, and Wim de Wit are seated around a table in the A+D Museum gallery. The conversation is edited for clarity.)*

**Dora:** Do you suspect that these aren't the only guys doing this?

**Joe:** One may suspect that, but frankly fewer are than would like you to think they are. Or, fewer are doing it with as much integrity. As Wim said. “It is a pretty good visual experience...” Part of the radicality of this work is the modesty of the project that each of these guys have set for themselves, and how clearly each exceeds those constraints. If the question of architects mounting a show on their own may seems suspect, architects using collage to further their creativity is to me also suspect – a lot of our field is now tied up in trying to sidestep modes of collage or superimposition or recombination in favor of recursion or a different mode of creating work. But, maybe the question is why would you play a guitar in the 1990s – this work sustains an argument that is embattled in our field.

**Dora:** Yes, I see that, and I suppose that's part of the “old school” appeal. Maybe they would argue that while it is semiotic – that there is still a disciplinary value to recombination, that there is still a value to a disciplinary rehearsal - it may be more a like a swarm than a direct translation – something in the air of the work.

**Joe:** I do think it is relevant, and I think it is increasingly relevant – as we enter the outer limits of the immediate possibilities of digital, recursive practices, there's also a question about scope, that each of these three are grappling with. One thing that you can see among all three of these practitioners is that collage isn't easy.

*(Joe Day, Dora Epstein Jones, and Wim de Wit are seated around a table in the A+D Museum gallery. The conversation is edited for clarity.)*

**Dora:** When you look at Wes' work, you can see that a lot of it is scrap paper, pieces of re-used paper where he has written phone numbers and notes, and then he layers that into notes that he is writing to himself about the artwork, i.e. “take out line.” It reminds me of Cy Twombly.

**Joe:** Can we bring up comparisons to other artists? Everyone's conversation is so different then. With Eric, it's often related to dada and the surrealists - Duchamp, and (Gary has suggested) Cornell; with Gary, it's often post/Minimalism, and with Wes, well, really more about popular graphic forms and urban polemics. So, maybe push that parallel to include two more painters of (roughly) their generation: Brice Marden and Robert Motherwell. All three try to reconcile post-WWII abstraction with abiding interests in figuration and in other, especially Eastern, visual cultures. Though they clearly emerge from elsewhere, Eric's diptychs remind me of Marden's lyrical, flowing line and tonal range, and Gary's series of the way Motherwell strove to distill, but not oversimplify, the union of medium, armature and action in painting.

**Dora:** And, of course, there's just culture out there – Gary mentioned that Wes' work seems cinematic, of the montage, Eisenstein. And, Eric's work has Fritos, advertising. It's very Southern California.

*(Joe Day, Dora Epstein Jones, and Wim de Wit are seated around a table in the A+D Museum gallery. The conversation is edited for clarity.)*

**Joe:** Every move Wes makes in the discipline has to do with establishing and revisiting the causes and effects of how people practice right now. And this isn't distant for Eric or Gary. It's interesting that this isn't a classic “'60's polemic that says this is a waste of time and here's something else we should be doing. It's more along the lines of “there's a lot going on”, and in order to find some kind of clarity and focus and some sort of personal coherence towards what's going on, we use this mode among others. That's the beauty of the work for me.

**Dora:** The beauty of the work for me is that there's both a delight and rigor – whether that is producing things in series in Gary's work, the labor of love in Eric's work, or the constant cutting and re-hashing of these icons and textures in Wes' work. They're educators in the same way – they delight in their work with their students, and they encourage openness and flexibility, as long as it is also done thoroughly and with intensity.

**Joe:** I would underscore that idea of rigor. They believe in discipline in the sense of disciplining one's day, or in terms of formulating a work or a process, much more intensively. Daily practice, and how rhythm and repetition allow you to build a practice.

**Dora:** Yes, discipline as vocation. A calling.

*(Joe Day, Dora Epstein Jones, and Wim de Wit are seated around a table in the A+D Museum gallery. The conversation is edited for clarity.)*

**Joe:** I feel like this is intensely private work. For Eric, this may or may not be diaristic. We're being led into a whole world of conjecture for him as he's trying to explore and find modes of translation into his many jobs, that of teacher, of architect as builder, architect as critic and the interplay or feedback between all of these modalities, it is a choice to be poly.

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**Dora:** One of the most amazing things I have seen were Aldo Rossi's notebooks in the Getty Special Collections – they were both private and extraordinary. Do you see a connection between those and what you see here?

**Wim:** Yes, Rossi also had collages, word and image and object, and the drawings, and the small things he would place, in his notebooks. That's really a direct relationship.

**Joe:** Even temperamentally, it seems like an interesting connection to draw. I think of Rossi mostly in terms of his writings, his manifestoes. But, certainly Wes and Eric have written, and in an imperative voice, about how architecture could proceed. So, the parallel with Rossi is right, both in an intense but reflective mode. These are part of that para-practice spectrum.

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**Dora:** One thing I do see in this work, that may or may not enter into their architectural work, is a pronounced level of humor, play, irony, fun. Not to say that the work is trivialized because of that. More like D.W. Winnicott's theory