

Charles gworthmey

BY SAXON HENRY

WHEN CHARLES GWATHMEY VISITED MIAMI TO UNVEIL HIS MODEL FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN NORTH MIAMI, WHICH HE DESIGNED, WE ASKED HIM TO SHARE HIS TAKE ON THE ART OF ARCHITECTURE. THE PRINCIPAL OF THE NEW YORK FIRM GWATHMEY SIEGEL & ASSOCIATES ALSO DESIGNED THE EXPANSION OF THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM IN NEW YORK AND WAS CHOSEN TO RESTORE PAUL RUDOLF'S ART + ARCHITECTURE BUILDING AT YALE UNIVERSITY AND DESIGN THE ADJACENT JEFFREY LORIA CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF ART.

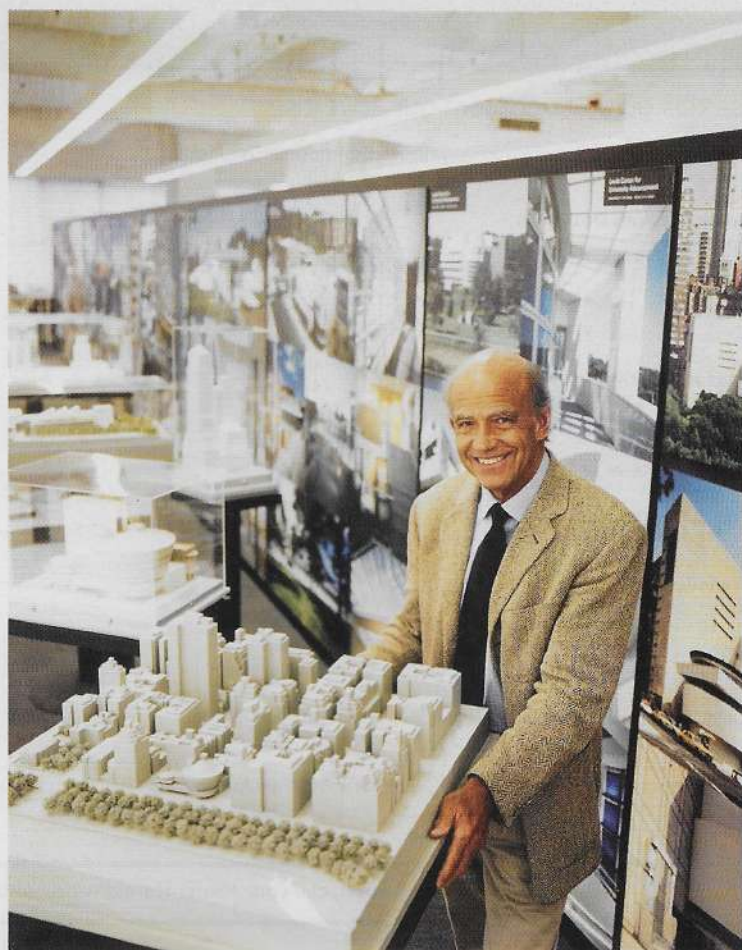
SH: How important do you think mentors are for young architects?

CG: I think having both the experience and the history of great architects to look up to—especially those who happen to be your teachers—gives you a huge bonus. To be able to communicate with them and to experience their buildings uplifts your entire creative motivation as well as your talent.

SH: Classifying architectural styles since Modernism seems to be a slippery slope: postmodernism came and went; deconstructionism was identified, but architects didn't want to claim it. How do you classify your style?

CG: I agree that nomenclature in style is slippery. I think I'm a classic Modernist in the sense that I don't believe in applied decoration. I think form comes from being both a sculptor and a structural proponent. What I try to make is architecture of essence. It's what you are left with that makes architecture compelling.

SH: Early in your career, you were identified as one of the New York Five. How has the designation made an impact on your career?



CG: I think the designation was a way of establishing a talented group of architects that had the European Modernist ethic as their reference, as opposed to the precursor to postmodernism, which was really this sort of traditional vernacular. I think the book [Five Architects] was incredibly provocative, more for architects than for the public at large, because so many architects still tell me that it was their bible in school.

SH: Does designing a building that will house works of art present a greater challenge?

CG: I think what's great about it is it allows the visitor, the architect and the artist to co-exist in a dynamic way. I'm not a believer in background space because I think architecture evokes emotion and spirit, just as art does, and to have them co-exist is doubly enriching. I have to say that buildings have—if they're appropriate—an aspiration and a memory that's tangible. If they are strong buildings, you want to revisit them and see another show by a different artist in the same building—so there is always this continuum of a dynamic and enriched visual relationship.

SH: Has anything about your career surprised you?

CG: You know what's nice? You get frustrated and you get lonely sometimes, but then to have something like MOCA happen where you're called back because the original patrons are still loyal and you're able to reinvestigate your own work and hopefully enrich it like you would another architect's work—as I've had a lot of experience with now. Also, I'm renovating Paul Rudolf's building at Yale University. He was one of my mentors, and I actually worked on the drawings for him, which is pretty great. These situations, which prove that things do come full circle, make me glad that I stood by my convictions.

SH: Do you have a favorite project?

CG: To be fair, the most challenging project right now is renovating Paul Rudolf's building and adding to it, across the street from Lou Kahn on a campus where I went to school. That's both a history of my education and very scary because of the architects who teach at Yale. There's an inspectability that's pretty intense. But then, the most exciting projects are the ones that carry the most risk. ☺