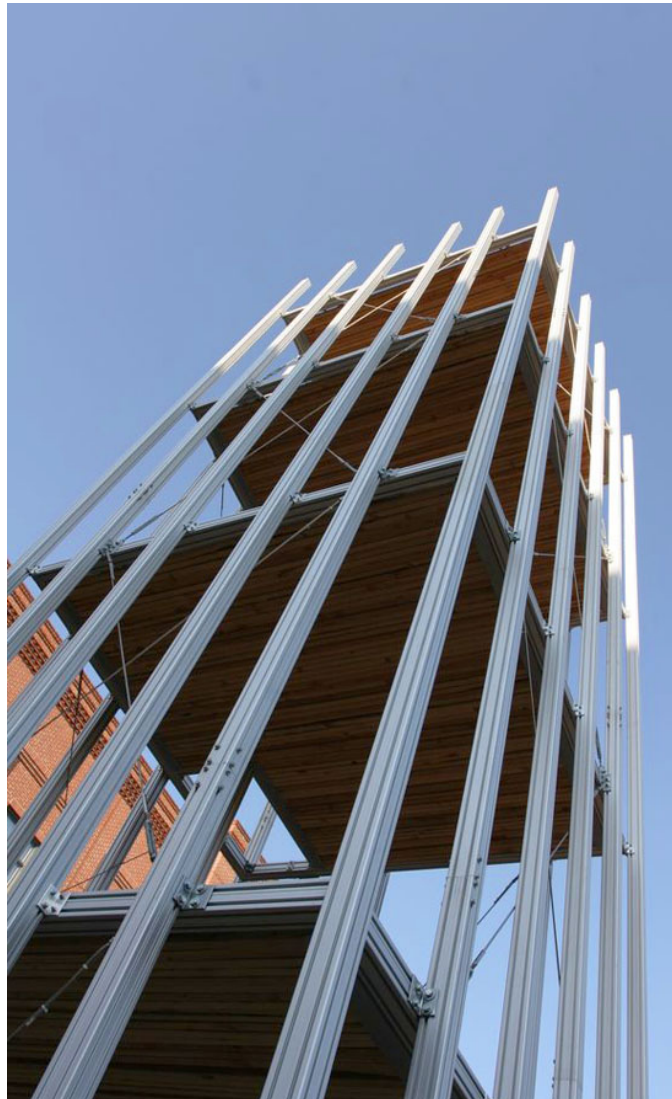


GAGOSIAN GALLERY



**Artist Chris Burden's Quasi-Legal Skyscraper Rises Again**

By Wendy Gilmartin



Chris Burden's Small Skyscraper

In 1991, Los Angeles-based artist Chris Burden decided to add a studio structure on his own property, but he wanted to make it as big as he could without a building permit. After pouring over the building code, he found he could build a detached structure as long as it was under 400 square feet and under 35 feet tall.

The result, Burden's Small Skyscraper (Quasi-Legal Skyscraper), was intended to be "a modern day log cabin" that "two guys with a donkey could put up, and when the neighbor calls the building inspector, the guys can take it down again," he told LA Weekly back in 2003.

Burden's loophole (it's now closed) eventually led to the design of an aluminum-framed structure built in 2003 with the help of Linda Taalman and Alan Koch of Taalman Koch Architecture. On the occasion of the tower officially opening again in Pasadena this past weekend, at One Colorado Courtyard through Nov. 11, LA Weekly spoke with Taalman about her and her partner's collaboration with Burden, and how it has influenced their growing practice over the last decade.

How did you come to collaborate with Chris Burden?

Alan and I were working in New York and we didn't have many projects and instead of navel-gazing, we had the idea to contact people outside of the architecture world who were working in a sort of secret architectural way -- people who had interesting inclinations about space, and who would upend our architectural preconceptions about space.

We knew of Chris' idea for the skyscraper, and he already had the design, and we approached him about the collaboration. By then, they had actually closed that loophole in the code, and the way we got around it was that the building falls under the temporary amusement structure portion of the code -- code-wise, the piece is the same type of structure as a carnival ride that's constructed and taken down after one weekend.

The last time the tower was shown in L.A. it was at LACE gallery. Has the design changed at all since then? Is it the same tower?

When it was installed at LACE it had to fit into the gallery, so it had to be laid down on its side. But when the piece was exhibited in Basel, Switzerland in 2004, that was displayed standing upright, so it had to be re-engineered a bit. The detailing and the columns are a little different. For structural purposes in the current design, the joints of the columns are staggered and mechanically bolted together. The parts are all numbered and categorized to be put together in a certain sequence. The tower that is on view in Pasadena is the same design as the piece that was shown in Basel.

When we built the piece in Basel, we took most of the small pieces with us in our suitcases -- we barely had room for clothes -- and when we got there, we had to put it together in a very short period of time. We had three Swiss guys helping us, but they didn't speak English and we were really worried we wouldn't be able to communicate with them -- it all ended up okay though because we communicated entirely through a series of diagrams showing the incremental steps required in the process.

Right now there is a renewed attention being paid to spaces and places that are temporarily activated, then broken down and moved on to someplace new -- for instance, pop-up shops and pop-up restaurants. The tower in Pasadena is a pop-up skyscraper.

I've been thinking of that lately, and I think it has a lot to do with the economic crisis, and I'd say over the last 25 years or so even, strategies like this -- you can call them modular or pre-fab -- are becoming the solutions for an "I don't really know what's going to happen" type future in terms of the economy or other factors. Architects have to develop these strategies and become

more nimble in light of such economic constraints and unknowns. This kind of thinking makes sense in emerging economies too.

In our office, we've talked with NGOs in other countries about using the same kind of structure implemented in Small Skyscraper to design modular classrooms -- and since these buildings can be re-purposed or up-cycled, it makes them even more flexible.

For us, the skyscraper was a part of a larger building technology research project that can go in many different directions. We've mostly implemented these ideas in the houses we've done like the IT house. It's not like the old kind of pre-fab where you have modules that come on a crane or a truck and get configured on a site. This is an ongoing project about smarter components and organizational systems.

We know of Chris Burden's affinity for towers, cityscapes and erector sets. Can you claim a little influence on that?

I don't think so. We definitely gained a lot by working with Chris, and there's still a lot of feedback and knowledge shared between our office and his studio. Watching him develop these things out of a bazillion pieces is amazing. Just seeing how he and his crew put together the Rockefeller Center tower was astonishing. There were thousands and thousands of tiny bolts in that project and he depleted the entire U.S. supply of Meccano bolts, and when he ran out, he had them manufactured.

Architects don't work that way -- we give drawings to a contractor for them to figure out how to build the thing. But artists have to take risks like that all the time. In that way, I'd say we learned a lot from him. We find it very rewarding to develop speculative products on an architectural scale, much like an artist develops work in the studio, and then find places or clients where the systems can be used. But the erector set mind set is Chris' and it's in the Small Skyscraper.