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THE ART ISSUE



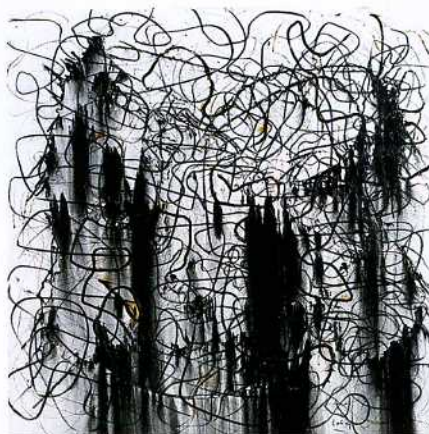
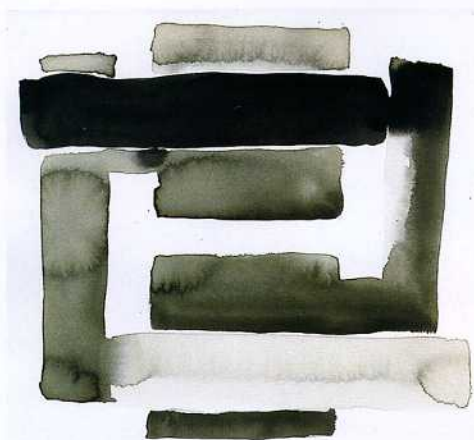
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What Dreams May Come



When architects put down the plans and pick up the brush BY INA DROSU

In language, the words *art* and *architecture* share Greek roots of *ar* and *teks*, both indicating the notion of weaving or fitting elements together. For centuries architects have entwined fine art and architecture into the aesthetics that give life to our constructed environment, and inspiration to those who benefit from it. They continue to do so today.

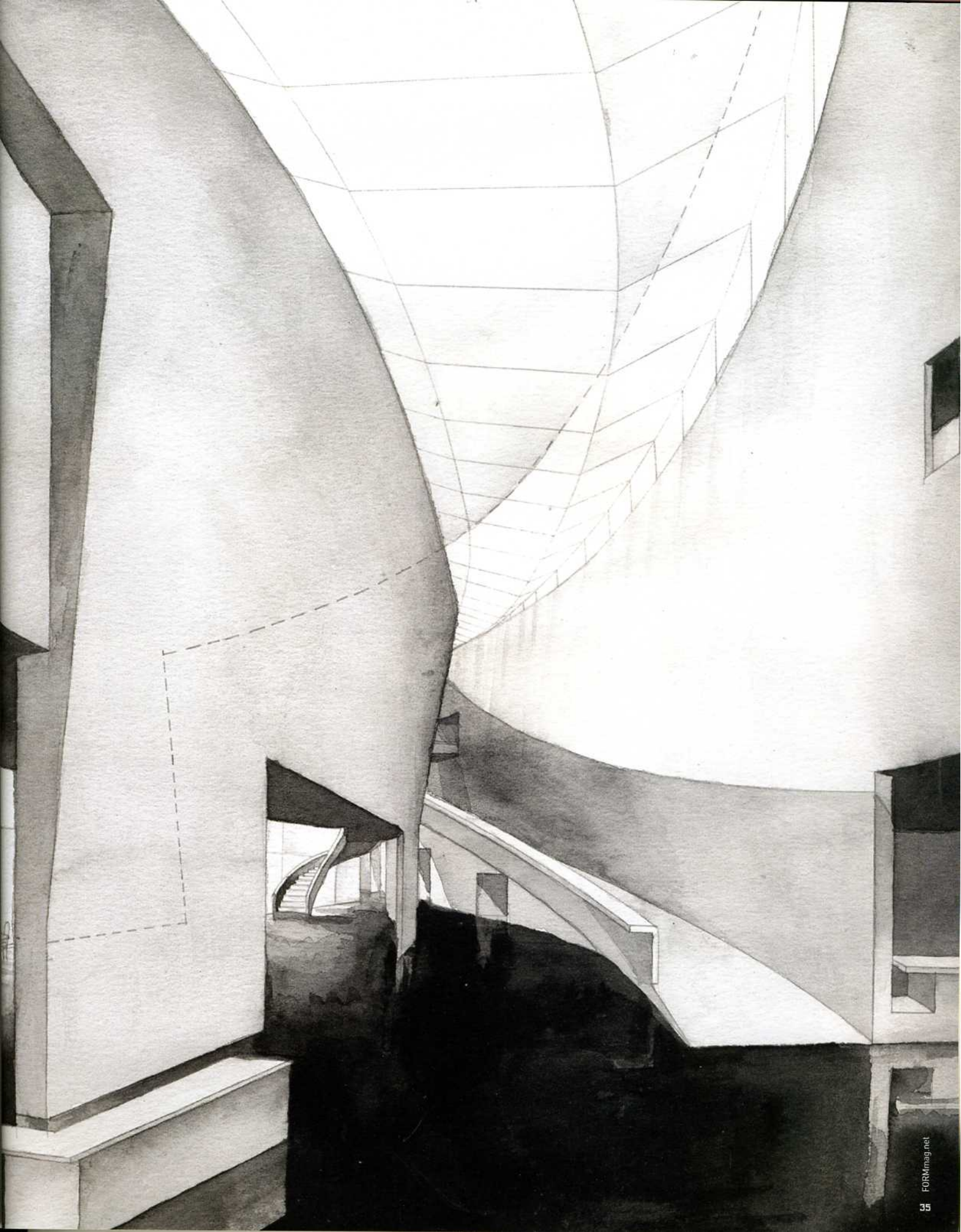
Over his drawing board, **Steven Holl**, AIA, of Steven Holl Architects in New York has a shelf full of 5" x 7" watercolor books:

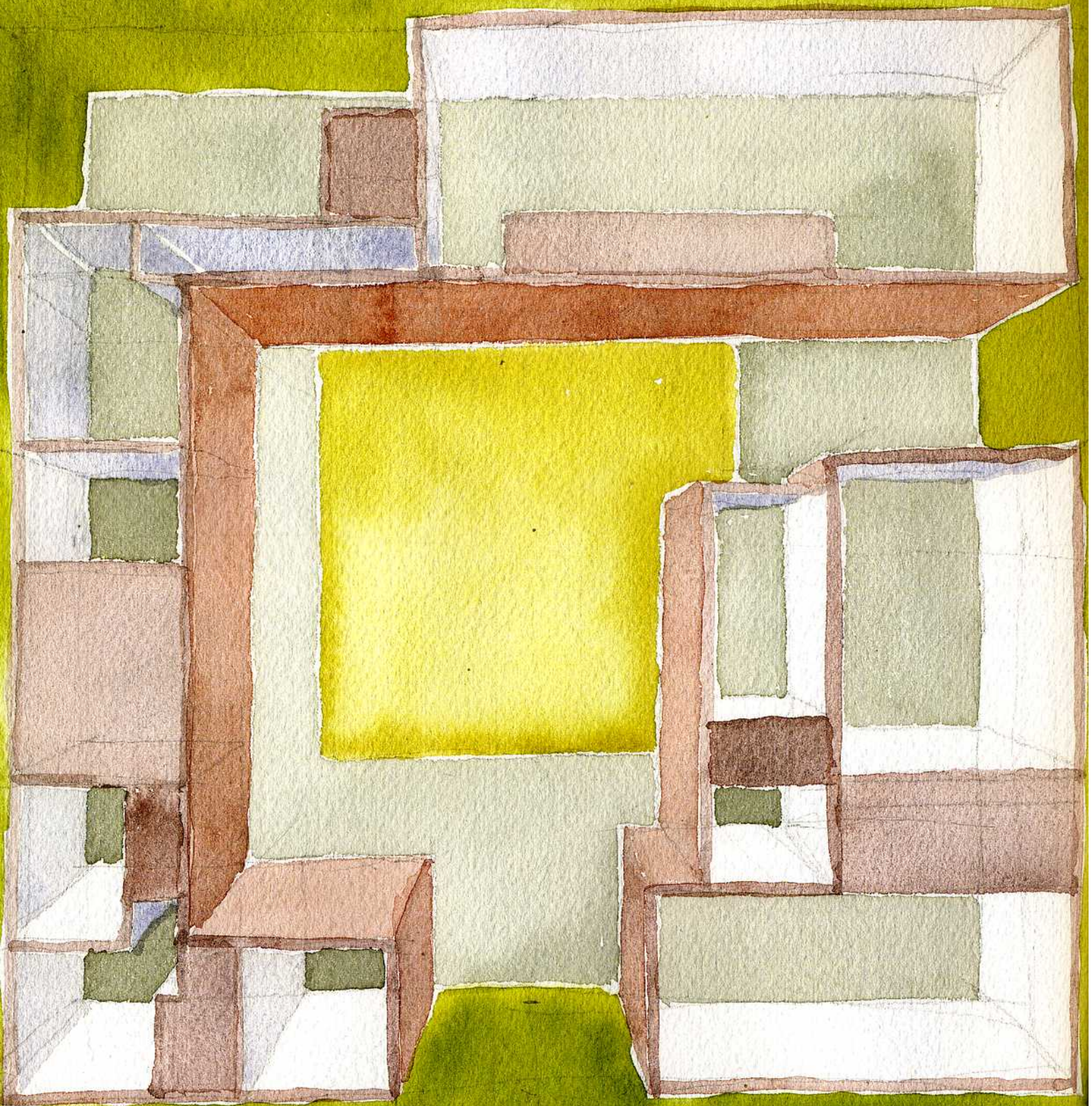
twenty-five years of "architectural fantasies" brought to light daily with the dawn. The visual journals, replete with sketches ranging from formal concepts to studies of light, or just imaginative "drifting," are a cornerstone of his creative process resulting in an architectural end. "As the initial inspiration of a work is a fusion of the analogue process of the brain-mind-hand, I feel these first drawings are crucial in the design process," says Holl. "Sometimes the small paintings are playfully

vague, yet at the same time they capture the idea that will drive the design of an entire project."

The mind's wandering in this creative labyrinth, winding itself around a known project or an imaginary hint to form the suggestive kernel of a new possibility, is a process shared by other seasoned architects including Los Angeles-based **Frederick Fisher**, FAAR, of Frederick Fisher and Partners Architects, **Michael Lehrer**, FAIA, of Lehrer Architects, **Lorcan O'Herlihy**, FAIA, of Lorcan O'Herlihy

ABOVE LEFT: *The Encyclopedic Museum*, watercolor and graphite on paper by Frederick Fisher. ABOVE CENTER: *The Necklace*, oil and charcoal on canvas by Lorcan O'Herlihy. ABOVE RIGHT: *Anemone 3*, oil by Patricia Sonnino. OPPOSITE: Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, watercolor by Steven Holl.







Architects (LOHA), and **Patricia Sonnino**, LEED AP, who spent 20 years at Sasaki before starting her own practice in San Francisco.

The watercolor landscapes, architectural sketches, and still lifes of Fisher are “a way of crystallizing ideas,” he says. “And of letting ideas come to the surface unexpectedly.” His painting style is more about abstract ideas than specific forms, yet his studies in art and art history inform his architecture profoundly both directly through historical perspective, and indirectly through the sustained limberness that mind and hand acquire in what he calls a “much slower and deliberate process than picking up a pencil or working on the computer.” Fisher commends the usefulness of computers in communication and model-making, saying great architecture has been created by people “who probably never pick up a pencil.” He

adds, however, that there’s “a certain loss of sense of space and scale in students when there’s no pushback from physical objects” in three-dimensional space.

Lehrer agrees that life drawing is “training for the eye and the soul.” He considers it his great “bias” that, although architects can be great designers for many reasons, art and art literacy are essential—live figure drawing in particular, which he has practiced since childhood and currently holds monthly sessions at his office. “As an architect one has to know human form, human scale and human dimension—the scale and relationship of a bilaterally symmetrical form that is capable of infinite expression and complexity,” he says. This knowledge must become second nature, inscribed into one’s brain. Lehrer internalized early Vitruvius’s precept that an architect needs to know how



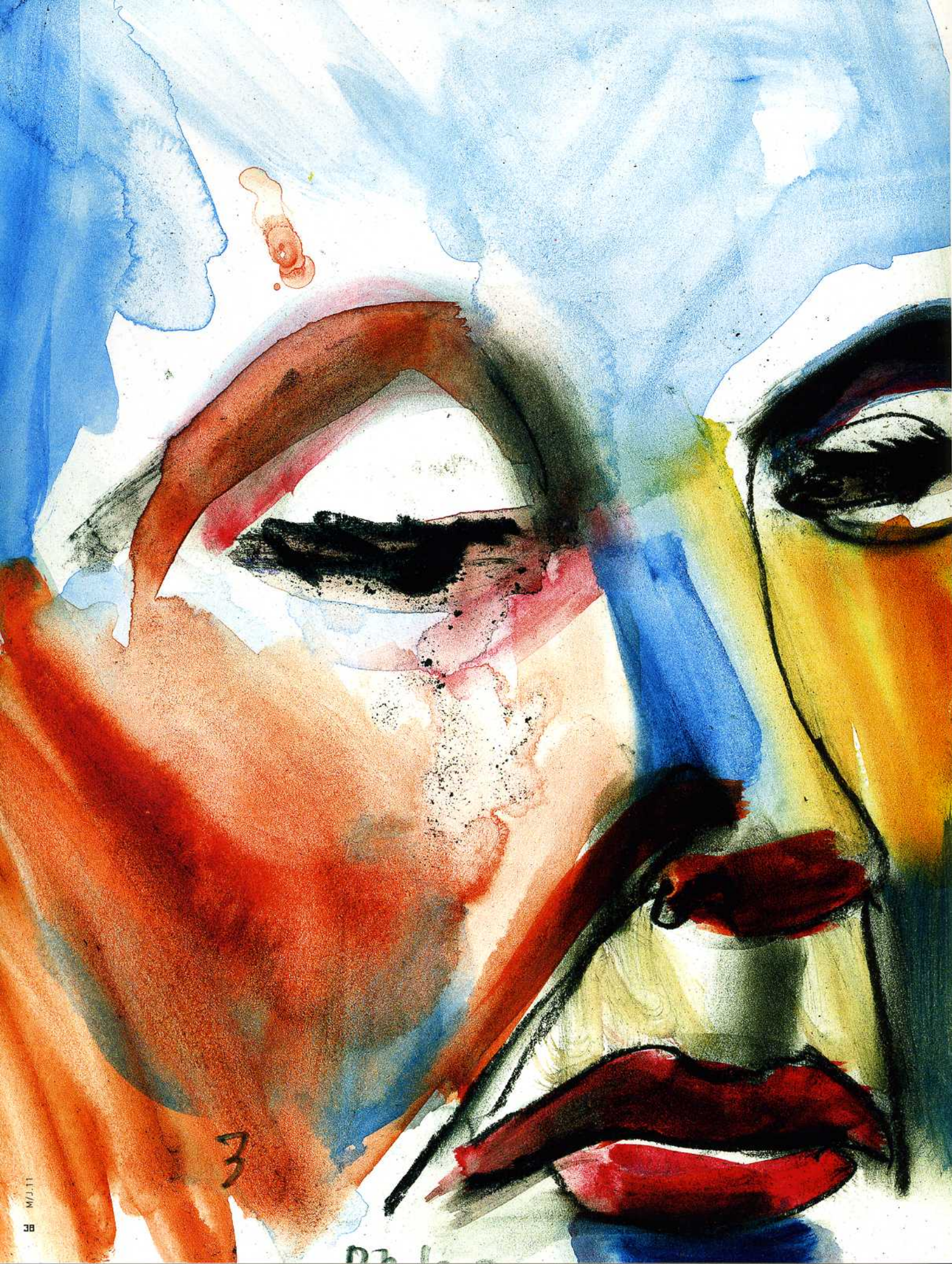
“As an architect one has to know human form, human scale and human dimension...”

— MICHAEL LEHRER

OPPOSITE: Santa Ynez residence, watercolor and graphite on paper by Frederick Fisher.

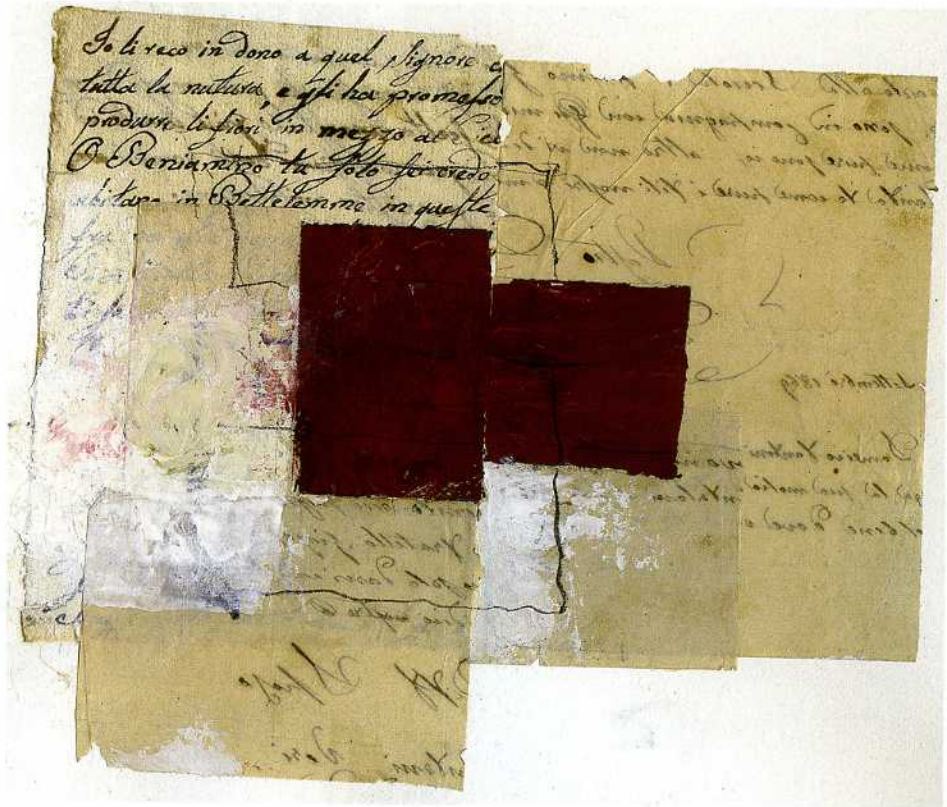
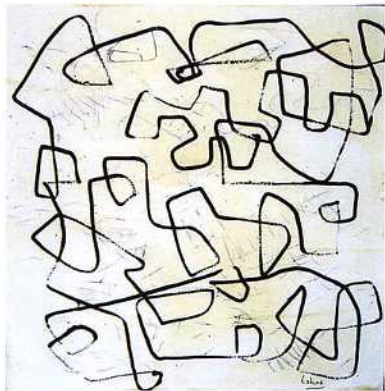
ABOVE LEFT: Morandi Museum, watercolor and graphite on paper by Frederick Fisher.

ABOVE RIGHT: Pencil and eraser on paper by Michael Lehrer.



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to draw, to paint and to sculpt. The live figure drawing and art(ist)-in-residence programs of the firm focus the “visual agility” he sees as crucial in the absorption and application of the visual palette. Free creative process and engagement outside of one’s own discipline also serve to pry one out of one’s comfort zone, engendering greater imaginative power. “If you don’t have that in your brain and soul,” says Lehrer, “if you are not passionate about the beauty of that form and creating places to honor human form, movement and emotion, to me that’s a deficiency.”

The positive reinforcement of art and architecture is clear as well for O’Herlihy, who considers them to be necessities on both the personal level, as refiners of his vision and aesthetic, and the creative level as partners in the reciprocation of ideas. Though he considers himself an architect first, “breaking ranks from architecture and moving

meaningfully between various artistic fields is both possible and essential,” he says, as his abstract line and circle paintings would suggest. “When I paint it’s because I want to paint, not to escape the field of architecture. Ideas come from painting, and I like to take that voice created through my paintings into the world of architecture and allow that vision to influence me.”

Having painted since the age of five, Sonnino considers it her visceral grounding base, diffusing her colorist’s flair into twenty-plus years of architectural practice. “I think about buildings the same way I think about painting, but I don’t think about painting the same way I think about buildings,” she says. The former evokes an emotional, personal and subconscious impact on the latter, which she sees as far more cerebral, collective and outward. She also underscores the physical immediacy of painting that architecture does

not share. “If I were a builder and had my hands on it, maybe it would be the same thing,” she states, but architecture is a “much different beast” that one creates in the abstract.

Many architects understand architecture as a field defined by problem solving but, according to Holl, “you cannot find out anything about things that you don’t know if you just think in a pragmatic, objective way. You have to let the dream occur—you have to have a dream intersecting.” *Firmitas. Utilitas. Venustas.* ■

OPPOSITE: Watercolor and charcoal on paper by Michael Lehrer. ABOVE LEFT, TOP: *Jigsaw*, oil and pencil on canvas by Lorcan O’Herlihy. ABOVE LEFT, BOTTOM: *The Dancing Thread*, oil and charcoal on canvas by Lorcan O’Herlihy. ABOVE: *Red and White 1*, collage painted with gouache on old letters purchased at an Italian flea market by Patricia Sonnino.