

Architecture as Performing Art: Puddin' and the Grumble

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Architecture as a performing art was the focus of a second-year architecture studio project that enabled students to design, construct 1:1 prototypes, and fabricate inflatable elements for a play: Puddin' and the Grumble. The project was an interdisciplinary collaboration that situated beginning design students in a creatively risky setting at the junction of introductory architectural knowledge, knowledge creation (research), and multiple communities beyond the traditional design studio.

Puddin' and the Grumble is a play that examines issues surrounding childhood hunger and food insecurity (approximately 19% of children in our university's county experience these issues and 15.8 million nationally). The play tells the story of a 10-year-old girl whose mother works a day and night job. Needing to live with her grandma, Puddin' misses her mother, struggles with 5th grade math, and feels as empty as her stomach. Added to this she's being followed by the Grumble, an obnoxious creature symbolizing her hunger. Written by Becky Boesen and David Von Kampen. Inspired by the kids of the Clinton Elementary Creative Club. Commissioned and produced by the Lied Center for Performing Arts, it was created by Becky Boesen and Petra Wahlqvist as part of the GROW A SHOW program in collaboration with ASCAP in Los Angeles, the Lincoln Food Bank, the College of Fine and Performing Arts, and the second-year architecture students in the College of Architecture.

The project was truly collaborative. The script, music, and actions informed the conception, development, and realization of the architectural elements and vice-versa. For the studio's deliverables, the students were required to generate a research pamphlet (summarizing their findings), drawings (from process to scalar documents), models, 1:1 prototypes for proof of concept, and the final working elements at 1:1 scale that were used on stage. Not only did the students have to consider all of the structural, material and logistical issues of their work but also they had to responsibly engage with larger communities (kids, audience, etc.) that demanded ethical and social consideration.

ARCHITECTURE AS PERFORMING ART

PUDDIN' AND THE GRUMBLE

PHASE 01

Design intent, inflatable strategies, inflatable mechanics



Prototype 01



Prototype 02



Proof of Concept Critique

Architecture as a performing art was the focus of a second-year architecture studio project which enabled students to design, construct, test 1:1 prototypes, and fabricate working inflatable elements for a new play. The project was an interdisciplinary collaboration that situated beginning design students in a creatively risky setting at the conjunction of introductory architectural knowledge, knowledge creation (research), and multiple communities beyond the traditional beginning design studio environment. Not only did the students have to consider all of the structural, material and logistical issues of their work, but larger they had to responsibly engage with large audiences. This demanded considerations that were enriched and validated through performance.

In the first phase of the project, students were asked to interpret the fragments of the script and grasp the myriad of factors to making places and architectural possibilities within the limited frame of the stage. From this, the studio generated clear design intentions, design strategies for inflatables, mechanics for the inflatables, and material tests. Finally, working prototypes were fabricated, offering the theater team "proof" of the student's ideas and strategies.

In the second phase, three architectural elements were developed for specific scenes of the play. The students had various design reviews in consultation with the playwright, director and educational coordinator of the play and received input from one of the primary actors. The script, music and actions informed the conception, development and realization of the architectural elements. The studio produced drawings, including process to scalar documents, models, material tests and 1:1 prototypes.

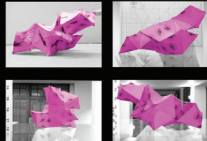
To conclude the term, three final architectural elements were fabricated at 1:1 scale, one of which was used in the actual performance. The students generated two nylon inflatables, as suggestive manifestations of hunger, that were remote controlled operated by battery-powered fans and deployed from backpacks during two scenes. The third inflatable, evoking the trope of the dark forest, was constructed of vinyl and would be inflated off-stage. To be sure each of these elements were appropriate and performed as claimed, the students were required to act out the scenes as a means to validate their intentions and strategies as proof of concepts.



Architectural Element - Stage Performance

PHASE 2

Model evolution, fabrication process, & prototypes



Beginning iterative form models



Clay model & penner strategy



Prototype inflation testing

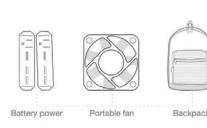
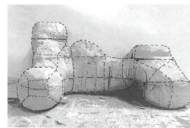
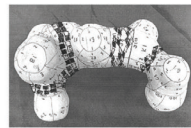


Material capacity testing

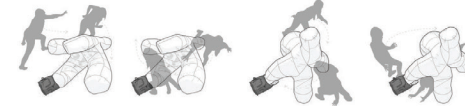


Alternate material prototype

Beginning design students rely too frequently on formal or instrumental means to orient their work. To redress the limits of these approaches, this project focused on architecture as performing art. Why performance? "To treat any object, work or product 'as' performance," the scholar Richard Schickel explains, "means to investigate what the object does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or beings." This offers a rich "tradition of thought," Gray Read explains, "that casts architecture as both set and player in the ongoing theater of social life." To say this differently, this promotes design that is critically considered in time and for people in a setting.



Battery power Portable fan Backpack



BLOCKING DIAGRAMS FOR STAGING



CONCEPT TO PROTOTYPE

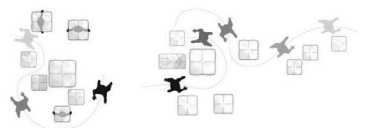


INFLATE SERIES - 8 SECONDS FROM BACKPACK DEPLOYMENT

ACT 02 - SCENE 03



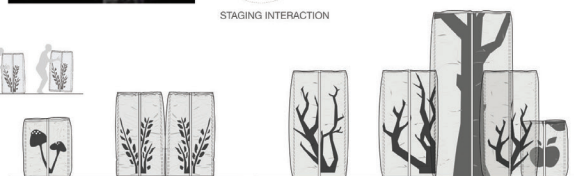
MATERIALITY & FABRICATION TESTING



STAGING INTERACTION



HUMAN SCALE INTERACTION



ACT 02 - SCENE 04