

Heather Flood and
Aaron Gensler





Erin Wright,
The Game,
2021

Wright's buildings are mesmerising, composed of materials that are inhumanly flat, compelling the viewer to lean into her work to see its depth. Lighting is anything but warm, and the compositions are so aggressive, shallow that the viewer feels as though the objects depicted may fall right out of the frame.

EXTRA- DISCIPLINARY DREAMS

JOURNEYS INTO THE FOOTHILLS

Erin Wright,
*In Progress for Servants
in the Garden*,
2021

Through a skilled renderer, Wright painstakingly paints her images. Each perfect brick, each identically textured stick of wood and each blade of grass is manifested by hand, not processor, asking the beholder to question its authorship.

Over the years, architects have experimented with cross-disciplinary practices, techniques and concepts to enable them to push the boundaries of their work. At the Woodbury School of Architecture, faculty and students are actively encouraged to take this path. Interim Dean Heather Flood and Chair Aaron Gensler describe some recent successful work and its various individual preoccupations.

California Dreaming is a longing for freedom of action, a craving for community of independent spirits, and a thirst for pleasure in creativity. A place of abundance and beauty, of warmth and wealth. Economic opportunities, ripe for the taking, transformed social status from a fixed condition into an evolving reflection of effort over time. However, on the hardscrabble path to dreamland, other possibilities have emerged. California Dreaming measures quality of life by its style and suggests that the joy of working breeds success.

To dream is to bring the subconscious into light – a hazy comprehension felt as much as understood. A mind at peace with ambiguity, recomposing fragments of the known into the unforeseen. The three practices highlighted here flourish in an unencumbered environment where architecture is defined in the making. One theorist, one designer and one artist - all three are professors at the Woodbury School of Architecture (WSOA). A small, private university, Woodbury is situated on a beautiful campus in the foothills of the Verdugo Mountains on the border of Los Angeles.

The creative pulse of California Dreaming is sustained by a diverse architectural community. California, a state that celebrates progress, recognises the value of inclusivity. To be inclusive is to be open to alternatives to the status quo. To invite foreign ideas and foreign actors into the establishment. Architecture that is curious about craft, fearlessly entangled in other disciplines, and critical of existing power structures is inclusive.

The creative practices of Paulette Singley, Heather Scott Peterson and Erin Wright open up architecture, expanding its material composition and its intellectual matter. Informed but not bound by disciplinary confines, they inhabit the beyond. A creative space at play with disparate branches of knowledge. While their drawings, objects and paintings are not architecture canonically, they are *architectural* – conjuring new futures for the built environment informed by extra-disciplinary undertakings.

Paulette Singley, *Tovaglia* ('Tablecloth') (detail), 'Open Studios', American Academy in Rome, Italy, 2021

Detail showing a map of Rome's Topography (after WB Clarke's *Plan of Ancient Rome*, 1877). The hand-drawn history of Rome conveys an impression of place through the documentation of culinary practices over time. Serving as a table covering, *Tovaglia* transforms prosaic dinner conversation into a historical drama.





Paulette Singley, *Intercenales*, 'Open Studios', American Academy in Rome, Italy, 2022

An assemblage of culinary artefacts, including animal bones, sheets of pasta folded into architectural models, and proper dinnerware are placed on top of a tablecloth that depicts the culinary history of Rome. The installation suggests that guests will soon be arriving to revel in the sensual rediscovery of a city once *fam illiar*.

The Theorist

Paulette Singley is a writer, designer and educator whose voracious cultural critiques reveal truths hidden in plain sight. Her work surfs the perimeter of culture for allied practices that illuminate connections between objects and the constructed environment. Fashion, food and film are all fodder for the construction of histories, theories and artefacts that expand our understanding of architecture. Her appetite for promiscuous intellect, to flirt with strangers, yields intimate encounters where there once were none.

California's Locavore culinary traditions and agricultural infrastructure inspired Singley's research into the topographic trajectory of meals. Her work illustrates how the geography of food production, the choreography of food preparation, and the sensations of food consumption form the contours of spatial ephemera that emerge at the intersection of architecture and eating. In 2004, she co-edited the book *Eating Architecture* with Jamie Horowitz. The foreword states 'we propose that the rituals of dining, the design of meals, and the process of cookery form and inform a distinctly expressive architecture'.¹

Well-versed in the relationship between food and architecture, Singley's 2020 Rome Prize project 'Preserving Perishables: Strategies for Conserving the Cultural History of Cuisine in Contemporary Rome' documents Roman food traditions. Two pieces of work render a historical impression of place, informed by values evident in the sustenance of its people.

Showcased at the American Academy of Rome 'Open Studios' event in 2021, *Tovaglia*, or 'Tablecloth', narrates

the source, distribution and consumption of meals throughout ancient Rome. Using lead and watercolour, Singley illustrates the beauty and flavour of ancient Rome with improvisation. Her work is akin to a chef preparing a meal from specific ingredients and exact measurements calibrated to personal taste. The wiggle of the pencil line, the dark patches of poche where lead strokes overlap, the incongruence of scale where a fennel bulb is larger than a piazza all suggest a mind at work attempting to comprehend a condition. A recording of sensual experience that informs an individual impression of the past, Singley's *Tovaglia* is a delectable pairing of medium and message. By drawing instead of writing history, she has collapsed the figural and intellectual, the formal and conceptual into a single artefact. *Tovaglia* presents history in a non-sequential, polyvalent, sensual manner. Foregoing didactic instruction, it gives a taste of the past that lingers on the tongue, inspiring a hunger for what the future can become.

Also featured in the 2021 'Open Studios' was Singley's *Intercenales* installation, the staging of a dinner party as the means to conjure truth from fiction, and in so doing, highlight folklore as means of fact-checking historical records. Based on Leon Battista Alberti's *Intercenales* (1424–39) compilation of fantastical short stories about the relationship between virtue and luck that is meant to be read between courses of meal,² the elements of Singley's installation, including the servings of bone, the plan drawing of a carcass and pasta folded into architectural shapes, provide intellectual fodder for creative interpretations of ancient Rome.

The Designer

Heather Scott Peterson is more at home in the arid landscape of the Salton Sea than behind a desk. An immediacy with the material world is central to her work, informed by intimate engagement and curiosity with natural processes. Peterson seeks to understand the behaviour of materials in the natural world to harness their limits for artistic production.

Inspired by the savage geographic terrain of Southern California, her recent work translates earth processes into dishware. These strange objects suggest but do not promise use. The porcelain Gastrula vessels (2021) fit in the hand and sit on the table. However, the thick and heavy foundation of the vessel skews balance as it rotates to pour liquid into the mouth. A stoneware disc is neither plate nor bowl. While its shallow trough cradles liquid, the rim elongates into a wafer-thin irregular surface for items such as a slab of butter to rest on. The stretched-dough texture of the surface captures sediment from the food, recording the meal as it is consumed. The rasp of a knife being dragged across the chalky rim of a plate, the aroma captured in divots on the surface of the rim, and the wobbly rate of extraction when pouring from a lopsided cup activate senses otherwise dulled. The experience of dining is intensified, thrilling in its precariousness.

While Peterson's dishware accentuates the choreography of eating, her dining environments set a backdrop for communal connection. She co-hosts the Margaret Mead roaming supper club in Los Angeles where food preparation is the means of crafting environment. This monthly gastronomic event is also a creative salon for faculty and local creatives, providing a backdrop for intimate exchanges that transform colleagues into a community. Blood-stained leather becomes the cloth for the table, the spark and intensity of the grill flame is calibrated for illumination, and the aroma of sediment captured by the tableware sinks into memory.

In 2020, Peterson collaborated with visual artist and set designer Anna Heymowska on the design of Petri, a Stockholm restaurant where they transformed the interior of an existing building into a theatre for dining. Materials are reimagined into exacting elements that stage food and compose atmosphere, designed through full-scale material mock-ups until they were satisfied that the objects and the space embody the precision, subtlety and craft happening in the kitchen. The supper club and the restaurant share a purpose: to produce a universe of interrelated material details that immerse individuals in an environment that imprints a bespoke communal experience into memory.

The materialist obsessions of Peterson are rooted in her ability to transmute the essence of things. There is no tolerance for trickery or sleight of hand in her work. She does not impersonate one material with another. Rather, she stretches the limits of what a given material can form when its natural tendencies are tethered to new functional constraints. And in turn, what experiential qualities emerge when function is elevated to art.



Heather Scott Peterson,
Gastrula vessels,
2021

The porcelain vessels are intended to contain a consommé to be consumed in a communal tea-ceremony setting. The irregularity of the form intensifies engagement with the cup as hands cusp the smooth shell while lips absorb the chalky texture.



Heather Scott Peterson
and Anna Heymowska,
Petrí restaurant,
Stockholm, Sweden,
2020

opposite: The fine-dining restaurant was designed for renowned chef Petter Nilsson. The designers worked like tailors in shaping the space, including custom furniture, casework, lighting fixtures and hardware at full scale.

Heather Scott Peterson,
Moment from Margaret
Mead supper club,
China Town,
Los Angeles, California,
September 2019

right: The blood from raw meat stains leather, producing a decorative table cloth for a supper club dinner.



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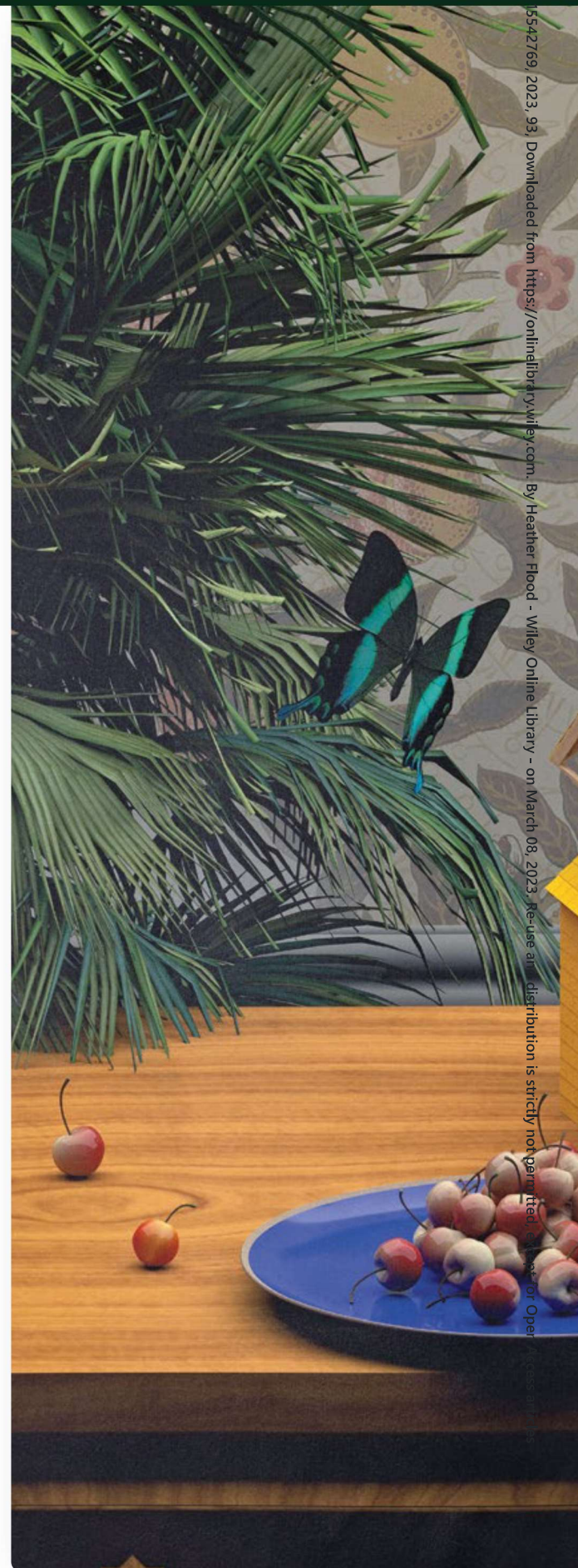


Wright's fanatical devotion to early technical representation trademarks transforms the very inelegance of her subject matter into objects of fetish instead of expressions of technical limitation

The Artist

Erin Wright has a budding architectural practice and a painting studio housed in the back room of her gallery, Winston's, in the Los Angeles neighbourhood of Lincoln Heights. Her paintings, to an audience unfamiliar with architectural representation, may seem like just paintings. As seen in *The Game* or *Four Bitten Fruit* (both 2021), her colour palette and framing echo the tropes of a classic still life. The art connoisseur may note the juxtaposition of naturalistic elements such as dogs, butterflies and an assortment of fruit, flora and fauna, the sensual curves of which are strikingly offset by architectural forms – fanatically orthogonal buildings, structures and architectural materials. Her backgrounds are often minimal to counterbalance her surreally precious, achingly detailed objects. To those who are familiar with the brief history of digital architectural representation, her work, taken as a whole, is both an embodiment of fundamental professional sacrilege and an achievement few, if any, architects could technically achieve.

At the end of the last millennium, architectural representation witnessed a transformation from an analogue pursuit to a predominately digital medium. We saw new methods and techniques marked by crudely realised efforts and stymied by the relative infancy of representational software, hardware limitations, and the fact that those who grappled with the technology were doing something new in our otherwise ancient profession. The epicentre of this innovation was Los Angeles, crossing the boundaries of entertainment and architecture. Like CGI in films of this era, the results were underwhelming by modern standards and current practice. Lighting was harsh and cold, and perspective was isometric or axonometric simply because of software limitations. Gaussian blur and environmental fog were not yet invented, and bloom lighting was just starting to be deployed by the wizards at Pixar. Textures were flat and materials felt more plastic





Erin Wright,
Four Bitten Fruit,
2021

Here, the composition of elements elucidates a story, the relics of a life lived, flirting with architectural representation and ideas of scale. A just-extinguished flame of the candle and freshly cut fruit dwarf the intentionally misaligned framing of the architectural models and the fallen pawn of half-constructed and half-played game tease us with symbolism and surrealism.

than their real-life counterparts. Foliage was unconvincing when such high polygon count forms were even attempted, due to those limitations that deprived images of greenery and removed the human element – the relics of a life lived – from architectural representation and in doing so divorced the work from its scale.

Wright's paintings reclaim the tenor of those early, ambitious, clumsy renderings. These depictions are both shockingly beautiful and enduringly masterful in their technical achievement. The first hallmark, beauty, is achieved by reintroducing scale and humanity through the inclusion of those elements (as we see blades of grass, a dog, a supple peach taking shape in the image of *Servants in the Garden* (2021)), which the renderings she honours could not technically include. In doing so, both scale and humanity are reintroduced without compromising the surreal nature and perspective of alluded representations of the past. Wright's fanatical devotion to early technical representation trademarks transforms the very inelegance of her subject matter into objects of fetish instead of expressions of technical limitation. This affords her paintings a timelessness that their inspiration could never have achieved, thus capturing relative immortality.

The Beyond

Singley, Scott Peterson and Wright have an appetite for self-determination not subjugated by a single discipline. Creative freedom, communal experience and personal pleasure are palpable in their work as they emulsify disciplinary threads, confect conversations, and relish in the labour of their craft. California Dreaming is a wistful notion about an ideal state. The California women described in this article are not dreaming, they are doing. Full-scale and hand-made, their *architectural* practices conceive the unknown and render the unforeseen, bringing that dream ever closer to fruition. ▽

Notes

1. Jamie Horwitz and Paulette Singley (eds), *Eating Architecture*, MIT Press (Cambridge, MA), 2004, p 5.
2. Leon Battista Alberti, *Intercentales: Editio minor*, tr Maria Letizia Bracciali Magnini, Polistampa (Florence), 2022.