



LONDON EIGHT

SIR PETER COOK LIBERATES THE WORLD FROM THE CONVENTIONS OF DIGITAL ARCHITECTURE.

Written by **A. Moret**

LONG BEFORE RECEIVING KNIGHTHOOD FOR HIS services in architecture, Peter Cook was known as a founding member of Archigram, an avant-garde architectural group formed in the 1960s. The group's sense of invention was influential to British counterculture while Cook's "irrepressible" (as he calls it) architectural desire continues to challenge the elasticity of boundaries.

Currently, Cook serves as a consultant for HOK Sport, the design firm responsible for the 2012 London Olympic Stadium. His curatorial contributions with *London Eight*, an architectural design exhibition at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), however, may prove to have a cultural impact just as significant. During his tenure as visiting professor at SCI-Arc in Downtown Los Angeles, one of the few independent architecture schools in the country, Cook shared a drawing catalogue of London students at The Bartlett School of Architecture with Director Eric Owen Moss.

The *London Eight* exhibit catalogue begins with a letter from Moss written in lucid prose, in a format akin to an email complete with a time stamp and title. Moss reveals his reaction to the drawing catalogue, "I found

in it, astonishingly, a plausible key to [un] lock the all-to-predictable [sic] 'MIDI' drawing pro forma which has [practically] devoured the architectural representation discourse." Here, "MIDI" alludes to the technology of the standardized music in software, a metaphor for the design programs many architects use today.

While technologies can liberate a medium, they can also rob it of its humanity and thus its ability to surprise. Accordingly, the aim of *London Eight* is to break free of digital conventions. The architects and protégés of The Bartlett operate outside of the margins, and this "new cast [sic] of artisans," as Moss calls them, are "unlocking one outside[r] at a time," just as Cook did in the days of Archigram.

In keeping with this desire to "unlock" those on the outside, *London Eight* offers a rich and textured lens to Socratic dialogue between teacher and student, which continues into the exhibition space where they show side by side. The exhibition is composed of five architects and three protégés: CJ Lim with protégé Pascal Bronner; Marcos Cruz and Marjan Colletti with Yousef Al-Mehdari; and Laura Allen and Mark Smout with Johan Hybschmann. There are only two London-born

in the group, and their international perspectives create an assemblage of distinct worldviews, which Cook calls "a window to the world."

The uniqueness of the exhibition lies in the dynamism presented through the use of two and three-dimensional architectural forms, digital and handmade drawings, collages, projections, and models. The materials are a vehicle through which to contemplate the current state of architecture and its future. Protégé Pascal Bronner reflects that his time with CJ Lim is like "working under the personification of a spatial Thesaurus. One cannot help but be inspired by working so closely with someone who tailormakes every design to suit context and culture."

London Eight marks a departure from drawings and models rendered into anonymity by software. In many ways protégé Yousef Al-Mehdari's "The New Polyhydric Body" brings the exhibition full circle. By repeating complex digital computations, Al-Mehdari creates an embryonic form in utero with an exposed skeletal framework, gently curled forward and waiting patiently. This form perhaps is the "star child," signaling The Bartlett pedagogy, as well as SCI-Arc's rejection of all that is inside the box.