

Art in America

February 2006

Yung Ho Chang at Chambers

This show consisted of a suite of photos and six packing crates that doubled as display cases and tripled as stage sets—they opened up to form backgrounds for building models, surrounding them like scenery. Such devices certainly suit Yung Ho Chang, who operates on at least three continents in at least three disciplines. A Beijing architect, artist

and planner educated in the U.S., he recently became chairman of the MIT School of Architecture and often lectures and shows his work in Europe. The photos on view documented sequential stages of construction of the Chinese pavilion he designed for the Venice Biennale of 2005.

It was hard to see, at first, what the bold, arched pavilion had to do with the crisp wire-mesh cubes in the open, hinged crates. You really had to read the hand-sewn accordion-fold catalogue, inspired by traditional Chinese book-making, to understand that the model structures represent the building blocks of an innovative architecture informed by prototypes from China's past.

Chang and his colleagues at Atelier Feichang Jianzhu (FCJZ),

Shanghai—exemplify Chang's ideas for adapting tradition to contemporary situations. The villa is a variation on the venerable courtyard house, integrated into a dramatic natural setting in the mountains just north of the city. The blocky museum is stepped up to evoke the hilly site that was flattened for redevelopment before the architects arrived.

As explained in the catalogue, Chang and his colleagues (who include his architect wife Lijia Lu) see the city as "a set of relationships—spatial, physical, social, political, economic, and cultural—and attempt to establish such relationships within individual buildings." They also try to place buildings subtly in landscapes and cityscapes, which are depicted in colored stencils



View of Yung Ho Chang's exhibition "Boxes," 2005; at Chambers.

inventively modern and authentically Chinese at the same time.

—Jayne Merkel