



Text by Allison Berg / Portrait by Laura Hull

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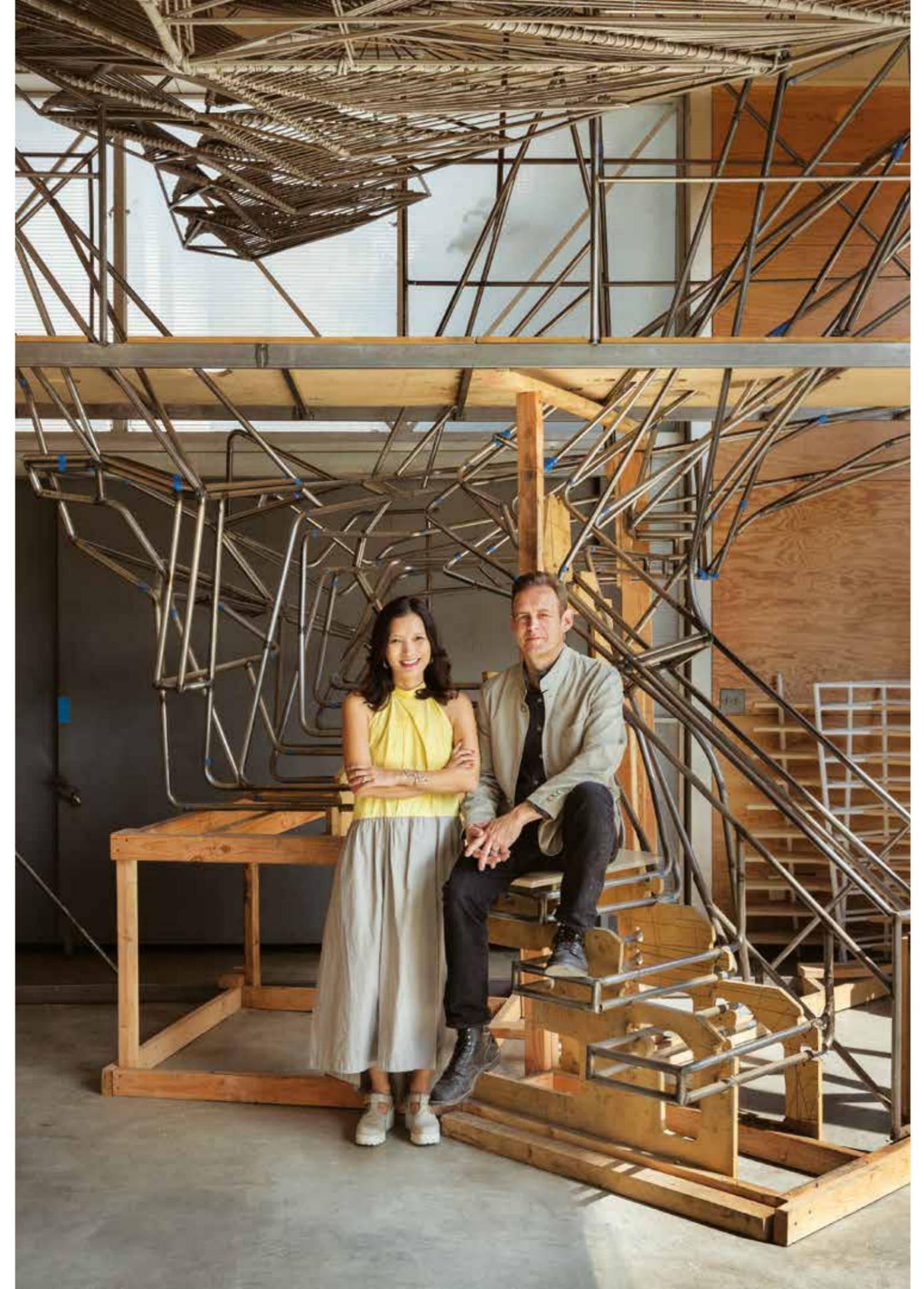
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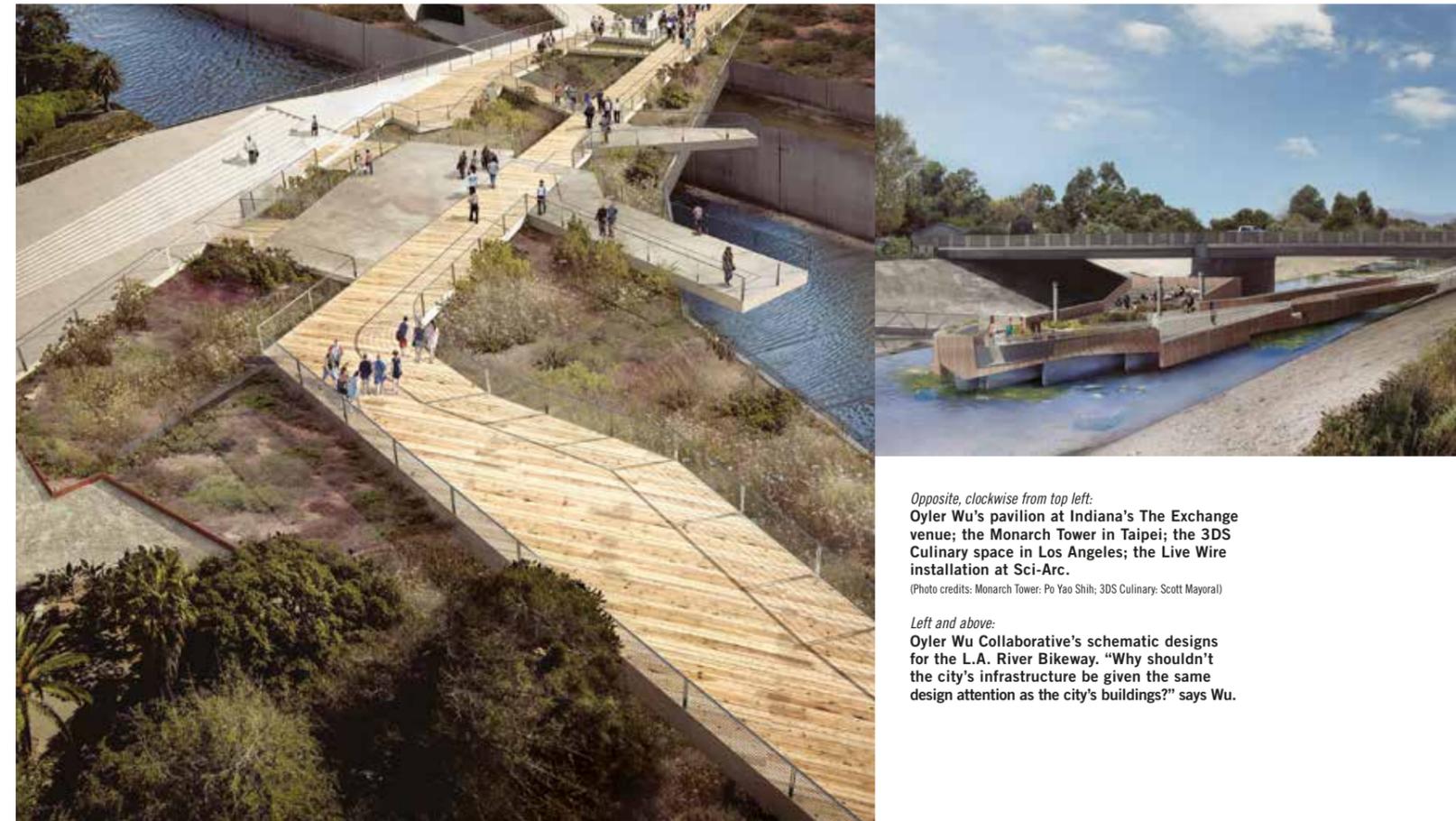
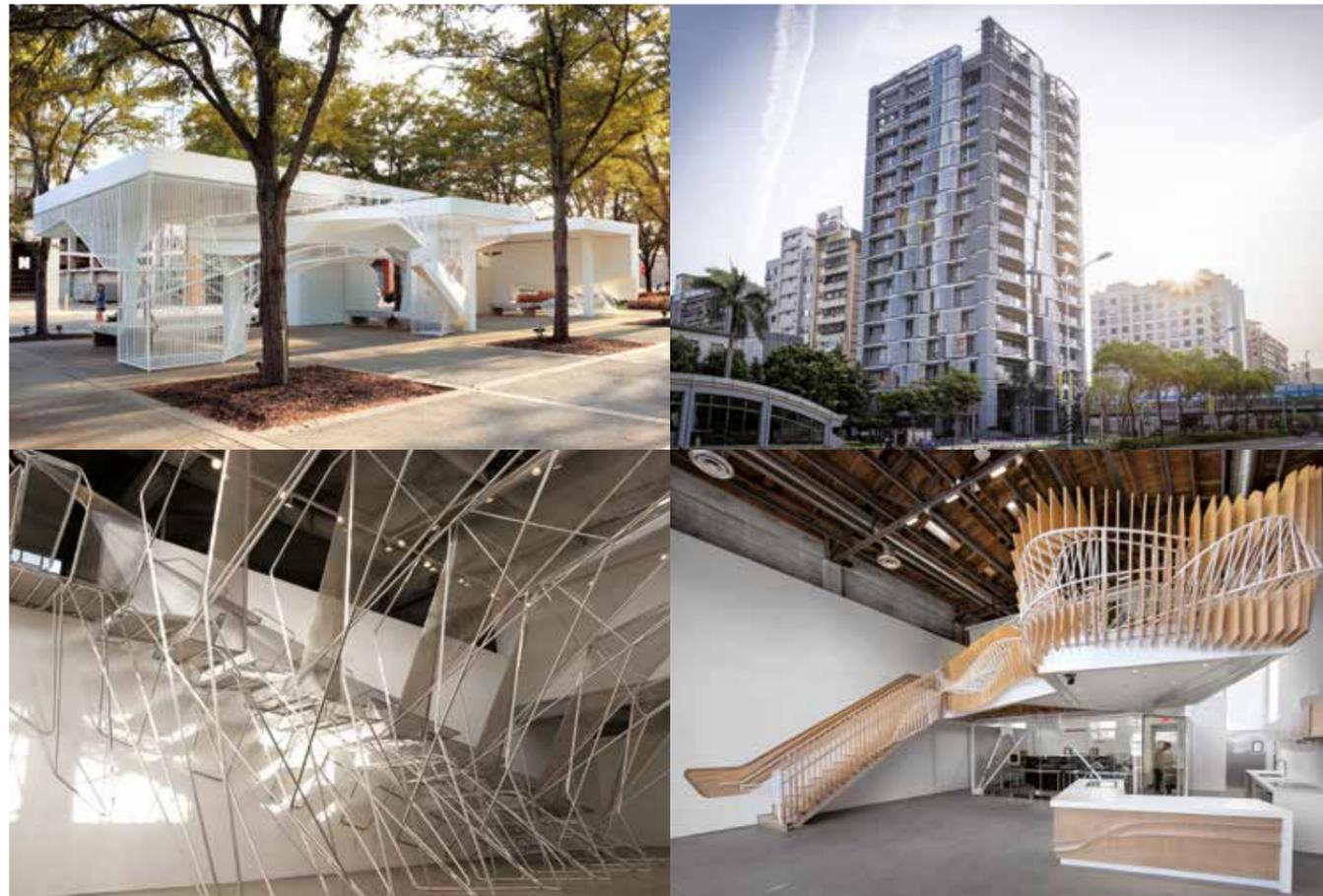
OYLER WU COLLABORATIVE'S LINEAR COMPLEXITY INFORMS EVERYTHING FROM JEWELRY TO THE FABRIC OF THE CITY

A myriad of steel tubes blankets Dwayne Oyler and Jenny Wu's entire back patio workspace. Components of a hanging stair-like chandelier, the pieces will ultimately form a suspended installation at the entrance to the architects' upcoming solo survey, *Dialogues: Oyler Wu Collaborative*, which opens at Taipei's Jut Art Museum in mid-July. Arguably the quintessential element in the show—a dynamic design in which movement, tactility, shape and space intersect—it seems an apt leaping-off point for understanding Oyler Wu's oeuvre.

Opposite: Architects Jenny Wu and Dwayne Oyler with a sculptural piece that will be in their Taipei museum show this summer.

Above: Oyler Wu Collaborative's live/work space in Silver Lake





Opposite, clockwise from top left: Oyler Wu's pavilion at Indiana's The Exchange venue; the Monarch Tower in Taipei; the 3DS Culinary space in Los Angeles; the Live Wire installation at Sci-Arc.
 (Photo credits: Monarch Tower: Po Yao Shih; 3DS Culinary: Scott Mayoral)

Left and above: Oyler Wu Collaborative's schematic designs for the L.A. River Bikeway. "Why shouldn't the city's infrastructure be given the same design attention as the city's buildings?" says Wu.

The Taipei exhibit signifies a major transition for the Los Angeles-based firm. "We're at the end of our beginning," posits Oyler. Committed to line, surface and volume, the couple are now applying their mastery to prominent high-rise buildings, massive civic pursuits and even a fine jewelry line. All the while the two cerebral-yet-warm creatives weave together professional, academic and family life in a way that is as seamless as their interlaced installations.

"Inspiration is for amateurs," proclaims Oyler, quoting artist Chuck Close. "The rest of us just show up and get to work. We rarely say, Oh, this is a line-based project. We just start working in the way that we know how and look to our devices for organizational strategy." Their intuitive and audacious approach has resulted in a rich problem-solving vocabulary and growing recognition. With a unifying thread of woven, line-based geometry incorporating metal and wood, Oyler Wu's opus represents a singular command of spatial and material issues. Wu's specialty is communicating and combining technology with beauty, while Oyler's is drawing and thinking ten steps ahead. "The drawing is he, the jewelry is me, and the architecture is we," Wu submits.

Oyler hails from Kansas, and Wu is from Arcadia; they met as students when they landed in the same studio at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 2001. "I tried to keep up with her," says Oyler. Soon afterward they entered the Palos Verdes Art Center competition together. "I remember thinking, There is no way I can work with this person," laughs Wu. Among 250 entries, they placed third. "Design and architecture are profoundly creative," explains Oyler. "It takes humility to admit that someone is as good as or better than you. I ultimately realized that things come out better when I can be quiet and listen."

Oyler was determined to relocate to New York after graduation, but Wu convinced him that L.A. would be a better choice. "I fell in love with the energy, culture and can-do attitude the moment I arrived here," says Oyler. They began their L.A. story at the American Cement Building in McArthur Park, where they renovated their loft into a live/work space on a \$2,500 budget. In 2009 they relocated their growing firm to Silver Lake, not far from the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), where both have been faculty members for more than 13 years. "Teaching helps us see the bigger picture," says Wu. "It also forces us to step back and criticize our work."

Hunting for a live/work situation limited them to four appropriately zoned streets. They eventually found their haven on Hyperion Avenue in Silver Lake—a 1920s duplex neighbored by a Smog Test Center and Body Builders Gym. "It was a slow process of getting a really bad building and turning it into our paradise," says Oyler. Retaining the original stucco structure, they re-clad the exterior with fiber-reinforced board and recessed aluminum windows. Aluminum and 100-percent-recycled composite-board fencing with fluctuating horizontal louvers and vertical slats greets visitors and raises the curiosity of passersby. In the rear, a 15-foot-high rope-and-steel ceiling hovers above the outdoor gathering space and work area while an undulating bent-aluminum tube canopy runs from the second floor to the front doorway, creating shade and a striking entrance. The modern architectural jewel box provides a perfect abode for the young family of four upstairs and the efficient collaborative of seven downstairs.

"It's our effort toward balance," says Wu. "When we can figure out how to work, live and bundle it all together, we're more productive and also enjoy every aspect of it." They involve their three- and five-year-old boys in the practice and integrate architecture into their lives. Indeed,

the boys can often be found building forts in the basement or playing outdoors with their father's handcrafted riding toys.

Oyler Wu has completed various projects and installations, including in public spaces and institutions like Indiana's The Exchange event venue and New York's Guggenheim Museum. They designed and fabricated the 2013 Beijing Biennale winning entry, did 3DS Culinary Lab's interior showroom and collaborated on meditation pods with Headspace. The design strategies they perfect on moderately scaled projects translate to the more sizeable ones. "It's a chicken-and-egg thing," says Wu. "If you've never built a big building, no one will give you one."

About 10 years ago, during an annual family pilgrimage to Taipei, Wu's father suggested they do some work there. With serious apprehension, Wu cold called developers around the cookie-cutter city. One day she stumbled upon one who envisioned making Taipei's urban landscape less generic. He commissioned a ground-floor installation with the collaborative, and when that turned out well, he gave them the big building they had been longing for. In 2017 Monarch Tower, a 16-story residential building, emerged against the Taipei skyline. Composed of aluminum

mesh, fritted glass, solid panel and steel, it reflects the city's diverse materiality and has launched a string of prodigious projects for the firm.

Oyler Wu is now experiencing an exciting shift in their contributions to the local civic landscape. "Los Angeles is a city that's profoundly shaped by its infrastructure, namely its roads, freeways, the L.A. River and the retaining walls that reshape its topography," Wu observes. "So little of those elements have been seen as design assets to the city, but we see them as opportunities to project the incredible design culture of L.A. This infrastructure is a constant presence in our urban lives, so why shouldn't it be given the same design attention as the city's buildings?"

With the goal of widening and beautifying pedestrian sidewalks and bicycle paths, Oyler Wu is currently renovating the Soto Street bridge and retaining wall near USC's Keck Hospital, designing a greenery-adorned woven-metal wall with cantilevered overhangs for shade. Repeating geometric patterns will mimic the area's exposed rock formations when it is completed in three years. They are also serving as design architects on a segment of the L.A. River project, the public biking and walking path that could eventually run from Long Beach



Above: Active inlay models elaborate Oyler Wu's formal concepts.

Below left: The outdoor work space at the rear of the Silver Lake studio and residence. Below: Architectural models in the office space.



Laura Hull



Laura Hull



Left: Wu's jewelry line, LACE by Jenny Wu, employs 3D-printing technology.

Below: The Allegro Cuff.

Bottom: The Tangens Necklace.



to the San Fernando Valley. Oyler Wu has been tasked with giving a 19-mile stretch in the valley (seven miles of which have been completed by others) a more consistent overall complexion.

Launched in 2014, Wu's innovative 3D-printed jewelry line, LACE by Jenny Wu, represents another facet of the firm's practice (The Los Angeles County Museum of Art acquired her Catena necklace in 2017). "I think about placing jewels on the body the same way I place architecture on a site," says Wu. "How are people going to live with it? How do I drape a ring over the hand and still have it work?" Wu does extensive prototyping and testing to find new ways of manipulating traditional materials and foresees eventually dropping the "3D-printed" verbiage. "The point was never the novelty of the 3D printing," Oyler adds. "It's about the uniqueness the technology provides and how it feels."

Making jewelry helps Wu communicate with a broader audience—instead of being caught up in conversation about the perfect line, she is thinking more about why people fall in love with it. "At the end of the day, you can't gloss over a problem with architect language," says Oyler. "People don't want to hear about line, surface and volume. They want their problems solved and they care about the spirit of the work. What does it do for my city? What does it do for my life? As architects, we're obtaining a particular expertise and working on it over and over again. That's the magic." ●

Dialogues: Oyler Wu Collaborative
Jut Art Museum, Taipei, July 20—November 3
jam.jutfoundation.org.tw; oylerwu.com