Barton Myers

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Nearly 15 years ago the Art, Design & Architecture Museum (or the University Art Museum as it was named then) accepted the first gift of material from Barton Myers’s archives. Now, with this book we can gratefully and proudly acknowledge the near completion of that gift. Of course, with an architect as compulsively creative and energetic as Barton, we should emphasize that “near” is not by any means “done”: we know there will be more fruitful ideas and work yet to come.

Barton Myers’s career for well over 50 years has been marked by his ability to think clearly about specific problems and offer solutions. In his own words, he speaks of having a “design attitude” rather than a trademark style, of accommodation to the particular demands of a project, an urban landscape, a pre-existing building. He works with what is at hand, guided by strong ideas about function, usefulness, appropriateness. His openness has made him an inspiring teacher and mentor for many young architects for decades.

We have been fortunate to have had one of those architects, former Curator of Special Projects and Design, Kris Miller-Fisher curate the Museum’s 2015 Barton Myers exhibition and co-edit this book with Jocelyn Gibbs, Curator of the Architecture and Design Collection, 2010–2018. As the archive arrived on campus, it would have been easy to have been overwhelmed by its scale (hundreds of boxes, thousands of rolls of drawings), and by the questions of what to emphasize and how to organize it, given Barton’s accomplishments on both sides of the border, in Canada and the United States, and his work from urban planning to his recent steel houses in Montecito and Los Angeles. We are pleased that a major living architect represented in our archive should be one of international significance, and such wide-ranging achievement. This publication gives the public for the first time a comprehensible guide to Barton Myers’s oeuvre and joins a sequence of projects drawn from our archives in recent years.

Beginning with Cliff May in 2012, an architect who combined both regional historical and nativist sources with modernist sympathies, we inaugurated our new public identity as an architecture and design museum, as well as an art museum. This excursion into our collections was followed in 2013 by an exhibition and book drawn from the archive of the firm Smith and Williams, major mid-century Los Angeles modernists. With Barton Myers, we move into the present, and into work that has both very particular California interests and wholly international elements.

In the last three years, then, the Architecture and Design Collection has presented a century’s worth of influential architects who have been able to demonstrate that the local, however construed, is worthy of serious attention and celebration.