

# ArtAsiaPacific

TODAY'S ART FROM TOMORROW'S WORLD

**ARCHITECTS 49**  
**MANISH ARORA**  
**ATELIER BOW-WOW**  
**YUNG HO CHANG**  
**COSMIC WONDER**  
**SEAN GODSELL**  
**BERNARD KHOURY**  
**NOEL LANE**  
**MATHEW AND GHOSH**  
**SCISKEW**  
**SRETSIS**  
**AARON TAN/RAD**  
**UNITED BAMBOO**



# CONSTRUCTIONS AND DECONSTRUCTIONS



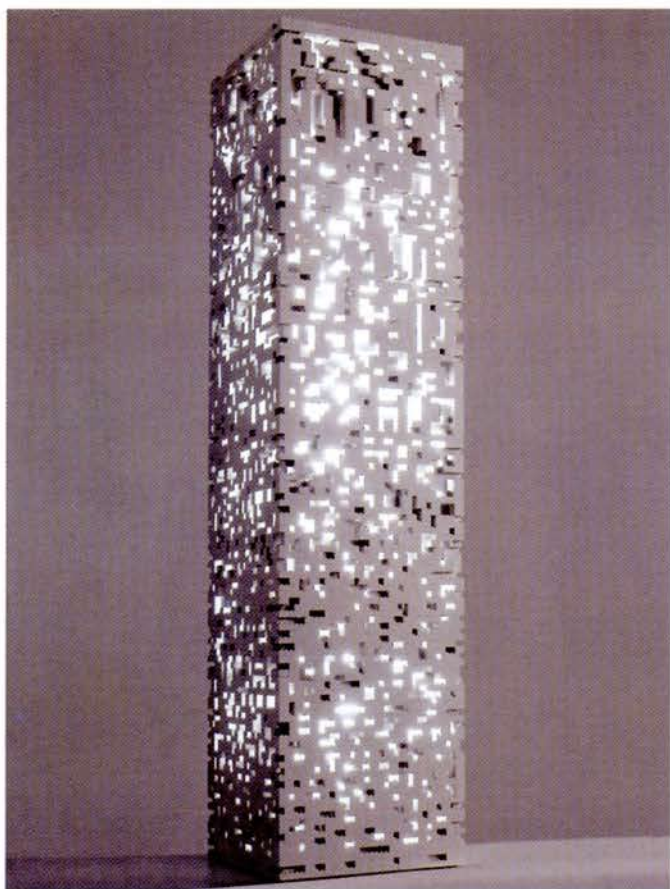
A COLLABORATION BETWEEN ART ASIAPACIFIC, LEGO  
AND NINE LEADING ARCHITECTS

# BUILDING ASIA BLOCK BY BLOCK

Architecture in Asia is booming. As cities and people around the region reinvent the notion of the megalopolis, adapting to unique, local pressures and stimuli, they also express an outward interest in global trends of style and thought. However, much of the writing about this phenomenon takes a socio-critical perspective, addressing urban sprawl, population crowding, the destruction of architectural heritage and the predominance of commercial architectural forms. Few writers have discussed a generation of talented innovators whose work within this context of rapid change and development is leading the way towards exciting, challenging architecture. We at *Art AsiaPacific* believe it is time to take that step and present our readers with a survey of architects who are at the forefront of this field. Rather than commissioning dry profiles on their practices, however, we felt it would be far more valuable to engage them on a more fundamental level, in a way that could transcend the pages of our magazine or the minds of our readers and actually create a manifest response in the physical world, in the best spirit of what they are doing in their formal practices.

Our solution is the architecture project "Building Asia Block by Block," a collaboration between *Art AsiaPacific*, LEGO and nine leading architects: Architects 49, Atelier Bow-Wow, Yung Ho Chang, Sean Godsell, Bernard Khoury, Noel Lane, Mathew & Ghosh, sciSKEW Collaborative and Aaron Tan / RAD. Each of these architects working across the region embody an ethos of open-minded exploration and a commitment to design innovation that looks to both the future and the past. We invited them to create signature models using custom LEGO kits, each containing 7,800 white blocks of varying dimensions. An exhibition and auction of the models later this year will benefit the preservation of architecture in Asia, with a charity to be determined in consultation with the participating architects.

We are thrilled to see these architects respond so enthusiastically to our invitation and the medium of LEGO. They immediately understood its universal appeal and potential for play, and they have created models that reveal unique aspects of their practices and philosophies. What follows are the results of this challenge. — *The Editors*



# BERNARD KHOURY

BEIRUT

## CITY STATE

by Andrew Maerke

Beirut, mired in sectarian civil war from 1975 to 1990, is a contested territory scarred by empires and insurgencies alike. The latest force to enter the fray is what architect Bernard Khoury identifies as hyper-consumerism. As the city reclaims its “Paris of the Middle East” cachet, Khoury has made waves by attending to the ascendant nouveau riche while simultaneously minding Beirut’s war-torn history. His first major commission—Club BO18, a discotheque—is located in the French colonial era Quarantine quarter. Previously, its plot had been a refugee camp and the site of a massacre in 1976, and the architect’s bunker-like design, submerged beneath the ground, mixes foreboding structure with a rakish retractable roof whose mirrored panels open to glitter against the night sky. Another subterranean project, the Japanese restaurant Yabani, resides next to an impoverished tenement and is an ambivalent statement about the disparity of means and experience between disenfranchised populations and “a fraction of society living in marvelous denial.”

Khoury has been an outspoken voice against earlier

developments attempting to whitewash Beirut’s past and its architectural heritage. His model for *Art AsiaPacific*’s LEGO architecture challenge is a tower whose surface is constructed from solids and voids. It has a central void encasing two fluorescent tube-lamps and an outer shell surrounding this. The two structures combine to form a pixelation effect that takes advantage of the interlocking qualities of the LEGO bricks. Khoury writes, “At first, only the perimeter of the base was set. Final height and composition of the object developed during construction as the product of the basic process of haphazard [placement] and buildup of the LEGO pieces. The object’s morphology is gradually affected as it rises: the openings grow larger and the corners disintegrate as the number of pieces diminishes, reflecting our premonition of the object’s growth reaching an end.”

This interest in encasement, void, fill and atrophy is perhaps reflective of an architect who has actively challenged a city and the terrain of memory itself, changing conventional attitudes about remembrance and proving, ultimately, that if you want to enjoy life, it helps to have thick skin.