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Tony Smith, *Smoke*, 1967, fabricated 2005, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, made possible by The Belldegrun Family's gift to LACMA in honor of Rebecka Belldegrun's birthday, © Tony Smith Estate/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Architecture Students Take on Tony Smith's Smoke

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Nandi Dill Jordan, *Digital Content Specialist*

Modern art

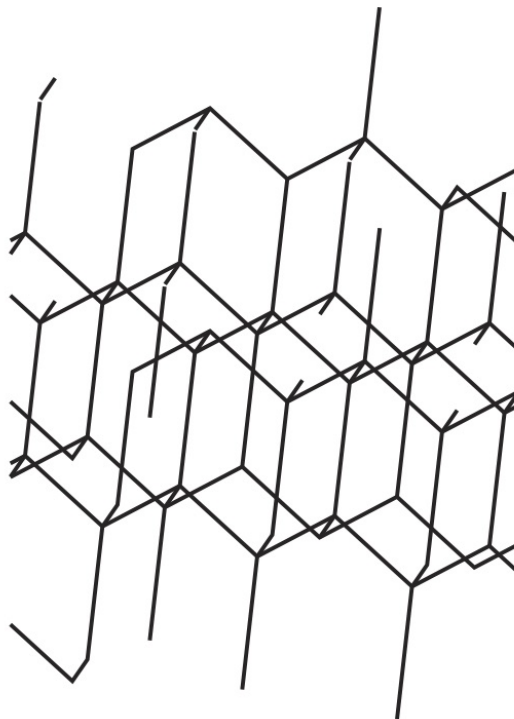
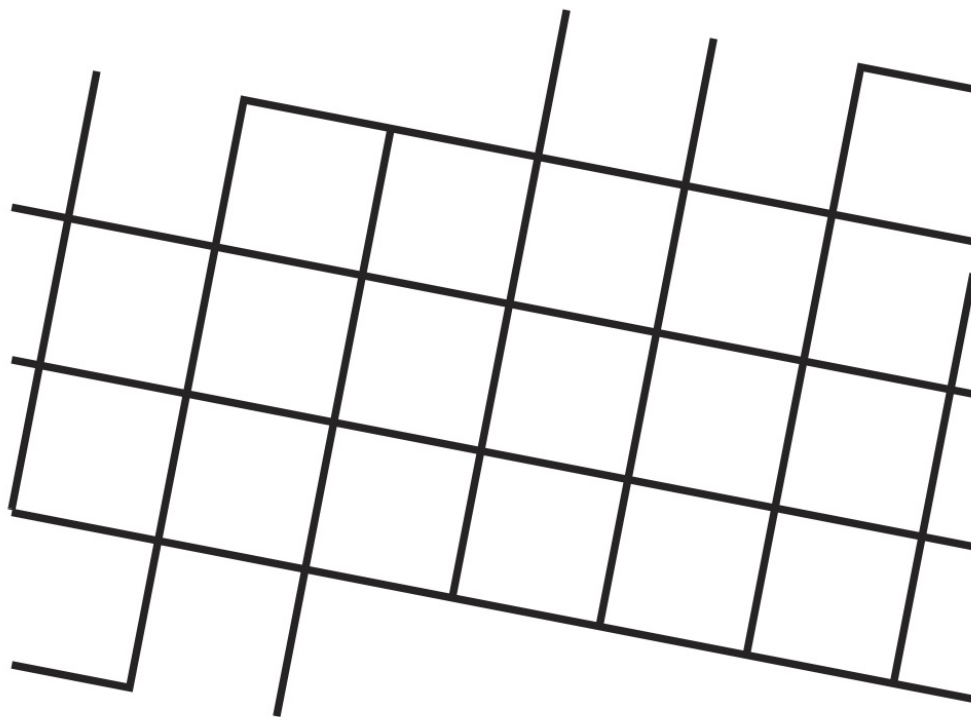
A visit to LACMA often involves walking through *Smoke*, Tony Smith's sprawling sculpture located in the atrium of the Ahmanson Building. Recently, graduate students at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) were asked not to just admire the sculpture but to study, deconstruct, and use it to propose a design for the Hyde Park Branch Library in Los Angeles.

Tony Smith (1912–1980) started his career as an architect. He worked as a bricklayer and clerk for Frank Lloyd Wright; Wright's influence on Smith's artistic career is evident when viewing *Smoke*. Both men viewed the hexagon as a "universal modular," a functional shape with reusable potential, and used it throughout their careers. Wright famously used the hexagon in *The Hanna House* while Smith incorporated close-packed hexagons into *Smoke*. Smith's use of these shapes in *Smoke* and other sculptures reflects his broad interest in finding patterns in organic life and using orderly forms to create new structures.



Installation view, *Tony Smith: Smoke*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, February 26–July 2, 2017, art © Tony Smith Estate/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

SCI-Arc students began the assignment with a visit to LACMA. They were instructed to stand under *Smoke* and try to draw the sculpture's architectural plans. Once students understood the basic forms of the sculpture, they created sketches and models that eventually evolved into a design for the library.



The *Smoke* assignment, which is the first major studio project in the Masters of Architecture 1 program (M.Arch 1), familiarizes students with the foundations of geometric drawing and modeling. It is part of a curriculum written by architect Andrew Zago and coordinated by Anna Neimark as a way to introduce students to working with non-traditional and complex architectural forms. Students learn about geometry, form making, and how geometries are materialized into architectural structures. The instructors hope the *Smoke* assignment challenges students' preconceived ideas about what shapes can be used as basic architectural forms.



In March, LACMA hosted about 50 M.Arch 1 students and their instructors for a tour of the exhibition *Tony Smith: Smoke* with curator Leslie Jones. After the tour, students expressed surprise at learning about Smith's early career as an architect. Sabrina Yeun, a first-year student, said it was helpful viewing Smith's early sketches of *Smoke* in the exhibition. "[Smoke] is very different and unique every time you look at it," Sabrina remarked, sharing that she was pleased that Smith's sketches were pretty similar to her own.



SCI-Arc students tour *Tony Smith: Smoke* with curator Leslie Jones, photo by Nandi Dill Jordan

Viewing the exhibition also helped students understand Smith's vision for *Smoke*, which seemed to puzzle them when they first began the assignment. Andrew Chittenden, a first-year student, explained, "Based on how it's oriented in the atrium, it doesn't reveal itself very quickly...One of the photos in the exhibition was pretty eye-opening in that there was a clear axis that lined up with the building and you immediately saw the grid."

Check out the drawings and models by a few SCI-Arc students who completed this assignment. With Tony Smith's influence visible throughout the students' final models, we can't help but wonder what the artist would have thought of his work reimaged in such unique ways.



ANDREW CHITTENDEN
INSTRUCTOR: AU
1GA 2016



SABRINA YUEN
INSTRUCTOR: NEIMARK
1GA 2016



TAE SANGRUCHI
INSTRUCTOR: NEIMARK
1GA 2016



MAXIMILLIAN TAVDI
INSTRUCTOR: AU
1GA 2016

Fundamentals Architectural Principles 1 project by Maximilian Tavdi, SCI-Arc 2016

Tony Smith: *Smoke is on view in the Ahmanson Building through July 2, 2017.*