

WORKING TO SCALE

From objects to buildings Honora Shea and Danielle Rago of This X That help emerging designers and architects think big—and small.

BY COURTNEY COFFMAN PRODUCED BY MALLERY ROBERTS MORGAN

“ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE IS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT making buildings, it’s also about the overlaps between different disciplines, the broader interest in architecture’s cultural and social impact,” says Honora Shea, co-founder of the Los Angeles–based design and architecture consultancy This X That.

Founded by Shea and Danielle Rago in 2016, their roster of emerging architects and designers is a reflection of what’s current in contemporary architecture and design: cross-disciplinary collaboration and multi-faceted practices. Perhaps a sign the omnipotent days of the starchitect are dwindling as smaller innovative creators gain traction.

“This notion applies directly to the choice of architects and designers we work with,” adds Shea, “and how we select our collaborators, whether it’s an institution, a developer, a corporation or a private client or collector.”

Rago and Shea have tapped into a particular niche in an emerging market: a generation of designers who work at a variety of architectural scales. Their roster of clients includes talent such as Jimenez Lai of Bureau Spectacular, whose accolades include the 2016 Coachella installation, *The Tower of Twelve Stories*. Lai was also named a Swarovski Designer of the Future with an original commission for Design Miami/ Basel and a MoMA PS1 Young Architects Program finalist in 2017. This X That also teamed up with duo Claus Benjamin Freyinger and Andrew Holder of The LADG (Los Angeles Design Group), the designers behind the Oyster Gourmet in Downtown’s Grand Central Market and, most recently, a private Silver Lake residence for screenwriter Jason Micallef.

The confluence of Rago and Shea’s professional experience accounts for their bespoke approach, beginning with their shared experience as freelance writers. As an independent curator, Rago has worked on multiple exhibitions including Diane von Furstenberg’s retrospective, “Journey of a Dress,” at LACMA, along with the Come In! series at the Architecture & Design (A+D) Museum and an experimental platform titled On the Road Project LA, both of which celebrate and position the work of the city’s young, contemporary architects. Shea worked internationally as a project manager for artists and galleries, including Cao Fei at Vitamin Creative Space in Beijing, after working on the administrative team at Steven Holl Architects in New York.

Their hybridized business model is part consultancy and part agency, offering support to each architect or designer’s very specific needs with a holistic approach. “This X That has helped us define a clear and concise understanding of ourselves, and what we are trying to achieve as a practice at a larger, global scale,” shares Freyinger of The LADG.

A recent This X That endeavor is a pop-up shop in the MOCA Store at the Geffen Contemporary in Downtown LA, which includes work by several of their locally based clients. A variety of architectural goods are on display in a mini A-Frame structure designed by Besler & Sons, including the *Scribble* neon light by Lai.

“All of the products in the pop-up are extensions of the designers’ broader architectural practices,” Rago says. “Many of them are just starting to build at larger scales, and our goal is to help them find the right opportunities to do so. We aim to grow alongside the designers we work with.”



From top: Paul Davies’s *Forest Screen*; The LADG’s “A Cast of Things” at Bulthaup Chicago; This X That founders Danielle Rago and Honora Shea; The LADG’s *Diagonal Cruciform 1*, 2017.



COURTESY THIS X THAT; PHOTO BY INJINASH UNSHIN; BRIAN GRIFFIN (LADG)