



Front façade showing pre-engineered structure and vertical siding.

Client  
Franny Koelsch  
Architects  
Dillon Kyle Architecture  
Engineer  
Dan Gay (structural)  
Construction Contractor  
Arrowmont Constructors

citings

ART SPACE

# A HOUSTON CASE STUDY:

## Koelsch Gallery

**FRANNY KOELSCH, OWNER OF THE KOELSCH GALLERY,** worked closely with Dillon Kyle Architecture of Houston on the design of her new exhibition space. Years earlier, Koelsch worked with Kyle on the house she and her family share in the Heights. When she found an empty lot on Yale Street and decided to move her gallery closer to home, she knew just who to call. Koelsch speaks warmly about Dillon Kyle and appreciates his balance of intuition and precision. She knew that Kyle listens closely to his client’s wishes without surrendering his aesthetic vision. Koelsch developed an interest in mid-century modern furniture and Kyle complimented this interest by introducing her to the simplicity of the California Case Study houses. The “workable efficiency” and overlap between public and private realms typical of these houses, was something she sought to emulate in her new gallery.

The Koelsch Gallery is a 3,000 square-foot metal frame building. The straightforward structure of the gallery building is counter-balanced with unexpected materials and unconventional fenestration patterns. The simple volume is clad with corrugated metal on two sides, while the front and back facades are treated differently. Late in the process, Kyle produced a series of elevation studies that both he and Koelsch were finally excited about. The resulting entry facade is built of variegated vertical siding made of

cementitious fiber board (Hardi) trim material of different widths and thicknesses. The east and west faces of the building exterior are painted gallery white.

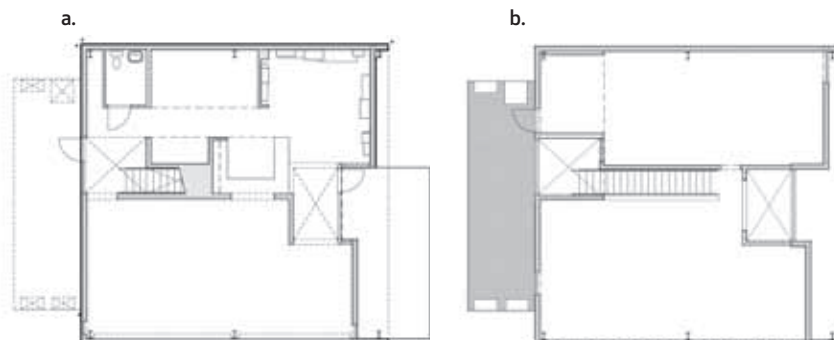
From the start, client and architect decided to use a pre-engineered system because of the system’s assumed economy and ease of erection and maintenance. The selection of the structural and enclosure system also responds to the neighborhood which is dotted with warehouses, such as the bright green karate studio just north of the gallery, that are similarly constructed. In fact, these warehouse buildings are so ubiquitous in the landscape of this part of Houston that they are hardly noticeable. The architect worked closely with the metal building supplier collaborating on details such as the mitered joint of column and beams evident in the front façade. While the roof and wall are framed with steel the building uses a hybrid structural system and the second floor is supported by wood trusses. The second floor is largely uninhabited and provides storage for works of the artists represented by the gallery. The underside of the floor and the wood trusses provide visual warmth to the space below.

Koelsch wanted her artists to be displayed in a true living environment. Her clients live with their art and she is interested in work that mixes visual pleasure with practicality. A plywood desk serves

as the entry’s focal point, anchoring the space. The location of the desk in the center of the space allows for the inner workings of the gallery to be made visible. By extending upwards the desk draws the eye up through the space. Dillon Kyle’s use of a common material like plywood in an uncommon way is in line with the owner’s vision for the gallery. The plywood used in the front desk also balances the austerity of the white walls and concrete floors typical of most contemporary art galleries. The weathering of the surfaces of the plywood contrasts to the perpetually renewed walls, typically repainted at each show. While the walls are continually rejuvenated the desk, built by Pat Kingsbury, will age gracefully over time.

In the main gallery, pieces of the exterior wall are pulled out and treated like partitions in a changing exhibition space. The articulated walls are the architect’s response to hiding the bracing system of the building. A smaller gallery alcove is located to the north of the plywood desk and stair. This allows an artist to have a “solo show,” even if other artists’ works are being shown in the south gallery at the same time. In addition to wall hanging spaces for paintings, there is also a small front room for the display of smaller objects such as pottery and jewelry. These smaller items are displayed in a series of plywood volumes that can be adjusted in response to changing needs. The architect and his team proved their hands-on commitment by sanding and filling nail holes in the plywood until just before the opening of the gallery. The combination of sophistication and flexibility that this building embodies is perfectly suited to the qualities of the “outsider” artists that Koelsch Gallery represents.

-Donna Kacmar



LEFT: a. First floor plan;  
b. second floor plan.  
RIGHT: Gallery reception area.

