

AWA, Architects With Attitude



by Paige L. Hill

**WHEN RAPPER ICE CUBE
SUDDENLY ANNOUNCES HIS
LOYALTY TO RAY & CHARLES
EAMES WITH A SHORT FILM
DEDICATED TO THEIR
WORK, WE'VE GOT TO ASK
"DOES ARCHITECTURE HAVE
MORE STREET CRED NOW?"**

The architecture world is abuzz following the recent news that rapper Ice Cube is releasing a short film based on the architects Ray and Charles Eames' influence on his life entitled "Ice Cube Celebrates Ray & Charles Eames" in conjunction with Pacific Standard Time's gallery exhibit on the architects' work. [Insert record scratch here]. Excuse me, what? The man who once rapped "A bitch iz a bitch" is a fan of the DAT chair? The man who played "Doughboy" in *Boyz n The Hood* knows what Mathematica is?

Let's rewind.

When Ice Cube was still being called by his given name, O'Shea Jackson, he attended the Phoenix Institute of Technology and studied architectural drafting. Though he was scooped up by Sir Jinx and Dr. Dre in the late 80's before he could finish his degree, he maintained that architecture would be his living of choice should his multi-million dollar music career fail.

"When N.W.A. was first about to pop off I wasn't sure if I was gonna make a living at it... Cussin' on the radio? I didn't know if that was gonna bring me any money," Ice Cube said in a 2007 interview with *World Entertainment News Network*. "If you want me to draw you up a house I can draw you up a house; I don't know if it's gonna be liveable."

It doesn't matter who says it, if it's rapped on an album or announced at a press conference, architecture's place in our society is changing. Becoming an architect is no longer reserved only for the crowd that can afford Yale. The process of how we design, build and fill out the interior was never so accessible to the public at large. Though architecture remains an art form, it is no longer the unattainable art form reserved for a class, a race or an ethnic group. It is both a high art and a part of our culture. Using Matthew Arnold's definition of culture from his groundbreaking text *Culture and Anarchy*, "Culture is a study of perfection... [High art] seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light..."

Despite what some architecture bloggers are claiming -- that Ice Cube's film will kick off a revolution to bring architecture to the masses -- I think that the revolution has already arrived. Ice Cube's film is simply a symptom of it. Never before have there been so many television shows, magazines and blogs dedicated to architecture, interior design and the art of elevating one's environment to a higher level, despite one's income or location. The term "DIY" has become synonymous with home improvement projects and Etsy's home product sales have skyrocketed in the last two years. There is an unspoken acknowledgement that living/working/existing in a built environment that was eloquently designed buoys the soul and excites the mind.

"When you stick someone in a box that was manufactured without a thought, it tends to dumb you down, too," David Eisen said, a principal at Abacus Architects + Planners, when speaking to me on the topic of affordable housing. "I truly believe that your immediate surroundings have a big impact on how you perceive your place in the world and how you act outwardly. Everyone deserves to live in a thoughtfully designed home and we understand that."

He may be "straight outta Compton" (a city not known for its architecture), but Ice Cube recognizes the value architecture has on the human spirit; and that's something we can all get behind.

Visit www.pacificstandardtime.org for more info on the accompanying exhibit.