

ART PAPERS

STRIKING IDEAS + MOVING IMAGES + SMART TEXTS
NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2011 US \$7 CAN \$9 UK £6 EU €8



INTERRUPTION
THE ARTIST'S INSTITUTE:
A THINKING SPACE

NEGOTIATION
+ MATERIAL PLAY
CARLOS SANDOVAL DE LEON

INSTABILITY
JOSÉ LERMA
ON CLARITY

REVIEWS
WILLIAM CORDOVA
ANTHONY GOICOLEA +





TEMPORARY STRUCTURES LINCOLN, MA

How does the built environment embody cultural concerns and shape our lived experience? Associate Curator of Contemporary Art Dina Deitsch addresses these questions by transforming deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum into a vibrant cityscape in *Temporary Structures: Performing Architecture in Contemporary Art* [September 18—December 31, 2011]. Visitors to this museological metropolis encounter an assortment of installations, videos, and multimedia sculptures that problematize our seemingly straightforward relationships with the architecture we inhabit.

The exhibition opens with a triad of video works by Gordon Matta-Clark: *Clockshower*, 1973, *Splitting*, 1974, and *Bingo/Ninths*, 1974. This sequence of films is strategically situated on the ground floor, serving as both a literal and symbolic foundation for the rest of the show. Visitors who invest the time to view these films will be rewarded with an eloquent introduction to the exhibition's central themes. Foremost is the interface between the built environment and its inhabitants, which Matta-Clark thematizes through physical interventions into architectural structures. Footage of the artist hacking precise lines through condemned homes alternates with meandering views of his newly created "Anarchitecture," reframing once-familiar domestic environments as abstract and alien.

The works in *Temporary Structures* adopt this practice of architectural interactivity, and the eponymous phrase "performing architecture" implies different participatory relationships between artist, artwork, and viewer. In some pieces, as in Kate Gilmore's video *Standing Here*, 2010, the artist is the performer. The camera looks down on Gilmore as she violently pounds her way through a claustrophobic drywall cube. The piece is projected onto the wall as if offering a window into illusionistic space, yet the aerial perspective and increased scale confuses our experience of the space she inhabits.

A second strain of work casts the architectural struc-

ture itself as the performing protagonist. For example, Erwin Wurm's video *Am I a House?*, 2005, features a bloated cartoon house whose monologue considers the relationship between high art and vernacular architecture—an issue that characterizes the show as a whole—by posing questions such as "Am I an artwork more than a house?" Wurm's work neighbors Mary Ellen Carroll's *prototype 180*, 2010, a meticulous installation of videos, photographs, and text documenting a dwelling's continuous physical rotations, which the artist has engineered. One of the show's many sensitive curatorial decisions, the juxtaposition of these pieces highlights the artists' shared interest in the performative capabilities of architectural structures.

The third and largest category of works encourages viewer participation. In *Ant Farm Media Van v.08 (Time Capsule)*, 2008, Ant Farm invites visitors to climb inside their van to view scenes from their archives, or to upload photographs for use in future iterations of the installation. The abundance of interactive works on view engenders an energetic atmosphere, but the potential Disneyland effect is mitigated by the inclusion of works that tackle serious gender and political issues. Vito Acconci's *Instant House*, 1980, consists of four American flags mounted on boards lying flat on the floor, radiating outwards from a swing. As visitors sit on the swing, they trigger a mechanism that instantly raises the flags to create a crude dwelling. While the participant now occupies a confined space wallpapered with stars and stripes, he or she may be unaware that the other side of each wall is emblazoned with a Soviet flag. Acconci reminds us that our experience of architectural space is far from neutral or passive, but politicized and active.

Additionally, Acconci's piece invokes the tension between construction and deconstruction introduced by Matta-Clark's architectural interventions. Other artists also represent architecture as inherently unstable: Alex Schweder La presents an ice blue *Roomograph*, 2010,

that somersaults by alternately inflating and deflating its various chambers, Ward Shelley and Douglas Paulson construct an elevated timber tunnel titled *Grow or Die*, 2003/2011, and Mary Mattingly designs a nomadic shelter called *Wearable Portable Architecture (Wearable City)*, 2011. The mutable nature of these pieces foregrounds the temporal dimension of architecture, unsettling the notion that buildings are permanent, protective structures.

Originally a country estate, the deCordova Museum is a hybrid building that has undergone several renovations to suit the institution's changing needs. This history of symbiosis between structure and user extends the thesis of the exhibition, and works have been situated creatively throughout the museum—from the sculpture park to the rooftop terrace—to create dialogue between the works and the site that would not be possible in a white-cube gallery. The show is punctuated by videos by robbinschields, portraying the pair's site-specific choreographic responses to various spaces within the building, repeatedly reminding us of the power of the museum's architecture to shape our experiences within it. By developing an innovative approach that pushes beyond the drawings and models typically used to explore architectural issues, *Temporary Structures: Performing Architecture in Contemporary Art* inspires viewers to critically contemplate the interplay between performance and place.

—Sarah Parrish

INSIDE FRONT COVER + ABOVE, LEFT: **Mary Ellen Carroll**, *prototype 180*, 2010, structural rotation (courtesy of the artist; photo: Kenny Trice); ABOVE, RIGHT: **Ward Shelley and Douglas Paulson**, *Grow or Die*, 2003/2011, mixed building materials and performers (installation at deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum; courtesy of the artists and Pierogi Gallery, Brooklyn; photo: Clements/Howcroft Fine Art Photography, Boston)