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WORKING SPACE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

Working Space

By Timothy DeVoe

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Virginia Commonwealth University, 2005

By altering the outward appearance of the gallery walls, I address the hidden inner temperaments and characteristics of these seemingly benign facades. Architectural rubble impacts with the gallery space in imagined collisions, exposing and distorting its hidden inner workings and structures

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Working Space

The characteristics of place affect us. We learn about where we are and how to get to where we need to be through spatial cues. Large objects like mountains or buildings help us with maintain direction in the landscape, and exit signs and directories help us to get around within buildings. Certain places can awake memories or excite emotions such as fear or passion. Some places evoke spirituality. Sacred places differ for all religions, the cathedral or church house, or even the natural mountains of the Himalayas can all serve as a backdrop to their proceedings. Places can affect the quality and process and of our daily work. Some places can even promote well-being and good health.

I am intrigued by the give and take between ourselves, and the things we build. Sometimes we affect and organize our environments to make ourselves comfortable or more efficient, and sometimes the space reorganizes our movements or even affects us physiologically, often without our knowledge. In her 1996 Article entitled "*The Responsibility of Architecture for the Lack of Responsibility*", Annett Sommer writes. "Architecture as a built environment has an omnipresent and permanently increasing impact on people, structuring the spaces in which the main part of life in industrial societies takes place. People not only passively adjust to their environment, they equally adapt their environment actively to their needs."

It's the passive adjustments and effects of our environment I choose to address, and I do so by actively altering and rearranging the spaces in which I work. It was in 2003 that I began working with architecture as a medium and context for my art. My first works were kinetic sculptures that interacted with pre-existing architectural spaces. For one exhibition a large-scale cam lever was installed into an archway, spanning the 8-foot gap between the columns. A delicate balance of invisible forces was created between the object and the space through applied pressure. The sculpture clung to the architecture with enough force to cancel out its own weight, but not quite enough to knock over the columns.

Architecture can be designed to affect ourselves or others for collective good, or personal gain. If architecture is artistic supplement imposed upon building, then these representations can be used to conceal one reality and purport another. In the context of his large scale public projections on buildings, the artist Krzysztof Wodiczko writes that the medium of building "is not only an institutional "site of the discourse of power," but, more importantly, it it's a metainstitutional, spatial medium for the continuous and simultaneous symbolic reproduction of both the general myth of power and the individual desire for power. For these purposes, the building is "sculptured" to operate as an aesthetic structure, thus assisting in the process of inspiring and symbolically concretizing (reflecting) our mental projections of power."

As I began to research architectural design and discovered the projections of Krzysztof Wodiczko and the "building cuts" of Gordon Matta-Clark, I started to seriously question the white space of the art galleries and museums. Devoid of all adornments that

cannot be reduced to building, the art gallery takes a form that will most support the artwork. Although pretending to be invisible these white walls can inspire both artistic prudence and artistic authority. With our focus almost completely on the artwork in front of us, the architecture recedes into the background, to sanction and validate the work. .

“Why hang things on a wall when the wall itself is so much more challenging of a medium?” Gordon Matta-Clark

With these concerns in mind, I began a series of interactive and architecturally destructive sculptures. The first of these was a small device I installed into the preexisting wall, which through viewer interaction resulted in a 5 inch by 40 inch gash in the drywall, and a big mess on the floor. The viewer had no idea what they were getting themselves into, nor what exactly to do with themselves afterwards. I enjoyed pushing the lines of what viewers were allowed to do, and subsequently watching what their reactions were to their own actions. They know that they are not supposed to touch things in the gallery, but they do, and they also know that its walls are to remain clean and un-blemished, but when they fall apart in their hands they laugh.

Quickly this series of works began to demand more from me. I had to learn to build seamlessly within the gallery walls, or to fabricate new facades for the space because most galleries don't want you destroying their walls, even if they like your work. Walls rolled open when someone pulled a cable, folded in half if when a lever was pulled, and one even sprouted robotic legs and tried to walk off. Rather than the architecture receding into the background in the service of art, the gallery walls broke free of the architecture and became the art.

Georges Bataille claims that “Architecture is the expression of the very soul of societies, just as human physiognomy is the expression of the individuals’ souls.” So when I learned that the built environment, was one of the contributing factors leading to obesity, I created a pair of sculptures entitled “Buildings Make You Fat”. Sculpting with the drywall itself, I anthropomorphized the gallery wall into an enormous belly protrusion that appeared to be so fat that it needed immediate and temporary structural solutions. And in another piece the wall looked as though it had slumped over in a pathetic heap under its own perceived mass. I felt that if my environment was going to make me fat, I was going to do the same thing back to it.

My current works have become much more of an abstract representation of altered and affected spaces. In “Yield and Fracture”, I changed the facade of the gallery to look as though an undefined force has squished it, pushing the surface off toward the corner, while exposing the studs and insulation in the process. The drywall takes on the appearance of a crumpled piece of paper, an action of which is completely impossible, but rendered believably. The work is clearly a farce, and this fact is further supported on closer inspection. All the actions of the work’s construction are left exposed, cut pieces of drywall are held together by small pieces of 2 x 4s and plywood, fiberglass tape and joint compound remain exposed and unpainted.

Throughout my investigation of architecture and my experiments with subverting its normal orientations, I’ve addressed my concern for the influences of our environment, and the agendas of its designers. By exposing the everyday building materials of the pristine gallery space, and destroying the ‘look but don’t touch’ gallery convention, I feel I

have begun to gain back and compete in a battle I'm often losing. I hope to expand upon these ideas in future work, and continue to influence and be influenced by my own environment.

Bibliography

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The MIT Press; 1999

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MA; 1989

Images

“Yield and Fracture” 2x4’s, sheetrock, joint compound, insulation board, 2005



VITA**Group Exhibitions**

(2005)	Anderson Gallery	Richmond, VA
	Space Lab	Columbus, OH
	Steven Blanche Gallery	Valencia, CA
(2004)	The Barrel Factory	Richmond, VA
	1708 Gallery	Richmond, VA
	Keith Talent Gallery	London, England
	Plant Zero Complex	Richmond, VA
	Anderson Gallery	Richmond, VA
(2003)	Artworks Gallery	Richmond, VA
	F.A.B. Gallery	Richmond, VA
	Main Gallery	Baltimore, MD
	Decker Gallery	Baltimore, MD
	The Window Gallery	Baltimore, MD
(2002)	The Hallway Gallery	Baltimore, MD
	Red Room	Richmond, VA
	The M.R.T. Gallery	Baltimore, MD
(2001)	Decker Gallery	Baltimore, MD
	Main Gallery	Baltimore, MD
(1999)	Decker Gallery	Baltimore, MD
(1999)	The Discovery Museum	Bridgeport, CT

Honors

International Sculpture Center, Outstanding student Achievement in contemporary sculpture nominee (2005)

Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Virginia Commonwealth University, Sculpture Department (2004)

Commonwealth Award-Art, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond,
VA (2003-2004)

Evergreen House Foundation Scholarship, Evergreen House Foundation,
Baltimore, MD (2002-2003)

Maryland Institute Grant, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
(1999-2003)

Presidential Scholarship, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
(1999-2003)

Pre-College Scholarship, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
(1999-2003)

Housatonic Art League Scholarship, Housatonic Art League, Washington, CT
(1999)