University Art Gallery
San Diego State University
Deborah Aschheim
feeling-of-knowing

with Lisa Mezzacappa

Organized by Tina Yapelli
University Art Gallery
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20 September through 3 December 2011
University Art Gallery, San Diego State University

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Back cover: Tent of Tomorrow
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feeling-of-knowing is a five-year survey of works by Los Angeles-area artist Deborah Aschheim that features sculptures, drawings, a projected video and sculptural installations, many produced in collaboration with musician and composer Lisa Mezzacappa. Although diverse in imagery and media, all of the works address the artist’s exploration of personal and collective memory, including how memories are formed, how they change over time and how they can be forgotten. Moreover, they propose strategies for how memories might be preserved.

Aschheim is interested in both a subjective and scientific understanding of memory, and has titled the exhibition with a poetic phrase that is, in actuality, a clinical term borrowed from memory studies. “Feeling-of-knowing” refers to the sensation that occurs when we feel that we know something about a particular subject, but that knowledge, which we believe exists within our memory, is just beyond our immediate grasp. In other words, we might not know the answer to a question at the moment we are asked, but we believe that the answer is stored within our memory, waiting to be accessed and recalled. Aschheim’s artworks conjure this concept of memory out-of-reach, while at the same time serving as mnemonic devices for individual and cultural remembrance.

Since 2007, memory has been pursued in three major bodies of Aschheim’s work: On Memory, Earworms and Nostalgia for the Future. On Memory focuses on visualizing the memory process and mapping neural networks. Part experimental psychology and part personal narrative, the sculptural installations of On Memory take the form of large, glowing webs that relate to memory’s fragile, intimate connections and create the support structure for small video monitors that display the artist’s childhood home movies. Earworms, in collaboration with Mezzacappa, comprises sculptural and room-sized “instruments” built to play recorded songs that were written to back up the artist’s memory for language, and specifically for a selection of her favorite words. Each elaborate construction continuously plays one song, inspired by one word, over and over again, as it burns an indelible path into one’s memory. Nostalgia for the Future addresses memory and place, and the haunting of the present by the misremembered future. The sculptures and drawings are driven by the unexpected poignancy of endangered modernist buildings and the failed utopia that they evoke. Selections from each of these three series are represented in feeling-of-knowing, and the University Art Gallery is pleased to premiere a new sculpture and several new drawings from the ongoing Nostalgia for the Future project, as well as a new Earworm installation created for the exhibition.
feeling-of-knowing was supported in part by an Artists’ Resources for Completion (ARC) Grant from the Center for Cultural Innovation in Los Angeles and by Aschheim’s Mid-Career Artist Fellowship from the California Community Foundation in Los Angeles. The exhibition and catalogue additionally were sponsored by the School of Art, Design and Art History; the College of Professional Studies and Fine Arts; and the fund for Instructionally Related Activities. Assistance also was provided by the San Diego State University Art Council, a community support group of the School of Art, Design and Art History.

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Like all of the great mysteries of the human psyche—consciousness, sensation, emotion, dreams, death—the enigma of memory haunts the arts and the sciences alike. It would take a dim mind indeed not to be struck, at one time or another, by the strange, elusive character of memory, by its unpredictable dichotomy of richness and paucity, by its power and its fragility. There is no one who is not subject to its vagaries, not bound to grapple periodically with the questions it poses, many of which cut to the heart of the very nature of existence. Such lines of inquiry, however, pursued beyond the level of casual conjecture, are wont to diverge into conflicting...
methodologies: the investigation of how memory feels (by artists) and the investigation of how it works (by scientists).

It is among the more remarkable aspects of Deborah Aschheim’s own investigations—pursued over the course of the last five years and culminating in three bodies of work sampled here—that she insists upon bridging these disparate camps: confronting the problem of memory on a scientific as well as a personal basis, as a biological phenomenon with poetic dimensions. Aschheim is an artist, of course, but one driven by the research instincts of an anthropologist (a subject she pursued in college alongside art). She is also, as a glance at any of her exhaustively intricate installations would suggest, an unusually avid and energetic individual. Not one to abide in idle speculation, she turns herself into something of an expert on any subject her work comes to encompass: the human nervous system and home surveillance technology for her series Neural Architecture in the early 2000s, for instance; neuroscience, memory research, and modernist architecture more recently. She’s read difficult books, collaborated with neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists, conducted informal experiments of her own. She’s led memory-based workshops with seniors. In 2009, she all but created an artist-in-residence position at a clinic for memory and aging in the UC San Francisco Department of Neurology, where she worked on and off for two years with both scientists and patients. She knows, in other words, whereof she speaks.

Yet never does the work feel clinical, dry, or information-laden. Never does Aschheim make a show of her knowledge, or hold it over the heads of her audience. The work is human in scale and, despite elements of technology—lights, cords, speakers, video screens—resolutely handmade. The forms are drooping, drippingly organic, often mimicking biological imagery: neurons, blood vessels, tangled pathways of synaptic activity. They’re playful as well, betraying no small trace of imaginative license, and laced with poignant emotional intonations—notes of wonderment, anxiety, nostalgia, longing. It would be impossible to mistake the presence of a human being behind this work—a scientifically informed subjectivity that comes at the problem of memory from multiple angles, drawing it piece by piece into a clearer light.

At the root of all fascination with memory, for Aschheim and probably anyone else, is an element of anxiety. Memory is a resource upon which we rely completely, but over which we have little control. It keeps us pinned into the stage set of our reality; cut loose from memory, we are cut loose from our world. Yet it is fickle and faulty, it betrays us continually, and could very well desert us at any moment. Aschheim and San Francisco musician/composer Lisa Mezzacappa’s Earworms series is a hedge of sorts against this threat. Triggered by Aschheim’s uncomfortable awareness of the prevalence of dementia in her family history, the series is a method devised to protect her claim on a vital aspect of her linguistic identity—namely, her twenty-five favorite words. Verisimilitude, palimpsest, cortex, incandescent, hybrid, dude, tarmac, loop, snarky, fuck, swoon, node—the list is a strangely intimate document, touching in its randomness and its sincerity. Aware of scientific evidence suggesting that the memory of music is stored in a different region of the brain than linguistic information, she gave the words to Mezzacappa, who worked with other composers, lyricists, musicians, and vocalists to create a series of recorded songs for each word. Aschheim and Mezzacappa then created a sculptural installation to play each song on a repetitive loop, creating, in effect, a backup copy for Aschheim and anyone else who happens to be listening: preserving the words in melody.

It is a poignant vulnerability. There is no doubt that Aschheim recognizes the limitations of her ingenuity: twenty-five words are only twenty-five words, scarcely a fraction of a drop in the bucket of all that’s linguistically encoded in her mind. And what is language, furthermore, but one of multiple facets of cognitive experience, all

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Memory is the scribe of the soul.
—Aristotle

The memory represents to us not what we choose but what it pleases.
—Montaigne

When I was younger, I could remember anything, whether it had happened or not.
—Mark Twain

Earworm (node) (detail)
It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.

—Lewis Carroll

necessary in some way to a cogent and coherent possession of identity? What’s moving is the earnest quality of the effort in the face of likely futility, the determination to pry open the biological facts, take stock, and understand.

In June 10, an installation taken from her series On Memory, Aschheim draws upon another tender thread of biographical memory in the form of home movies of three different birthday parties from early childhood. (The title refers to Aschheim’s birthday.) Silent footage of festive children drenched in the warm hues of late 1960s film stock appears on jewel-like screens nestled in spherical webs of glowing green plastic strands that suggest the networks of synaptic activity that can be mapped across the brain with the application of mental or sensory stimuli. As a nearby trio of diagrammatic drawings indicates, they are maps of Aschheim’s associated recollections. In the drawings, which float on the page with a buoyant, three-dimensional quality, like whirling clouds of gnats, words denoting individual memories—horses, cookies, French horn, bugle, camera, Bermuda shorts—are joined to one another by slender strands, one leading feverishly on to another. It is an enchanting interpretation of the glowing, buzzing activity of the brain that’s triggered by images as rich as those of childhood, whether they be reflections of real memories (belonging to Aschheim) or surrogates that trigger a viewer’s own recollections.

In Nostalgia for the Future, the most recent series in this five-year survey, Aschheim takes a step back to examine a thread of historical memory, as embedded in the architectural relics of a futuristic vision that never came about. The Capitol Records building in Los Angeles, the Prentice Women’s Hospital in Chicago, the Tent of Tomorrow from the 1965 World’s Fair in Flushing, Queens — they are monuments to the confidence and optimism of a particular historical moment, one that also happens to encompass Aschheim’s own childhood. “When I was growing up,” she’s written about the series, “the future was limitless possibility, a jet age, space-age, techno-paradise. ‘Modern’ meant ‘new.’ Now ‘modern’ means ‘old’ and the future I grew up with is obsolete, somehow defunct and irresponsible—still, I miss the old future.”

In drawings as well as in model-like sculptures of dripping, off-white plastic, Aschheim recreates these decaying structures with the adoration that only nostalgia can instill — an act of preservation not unlike that of her childhood movies or her twenty-five words. It is a compassionate, if effectively fruitless, act. Aschheim understands the how-it-works aspect of memory enough to keep the how-it-feels in some perspective. She is too scientific to be entirely sentimental. But she is too human not to recognize the sweetness of memory, the preciousness instilled by its delicate nature, and the need to cherish some aspect of that, so long as it remains within one’s power to do so.

Holly Myers is a writer, critic, and independent curator based in Los Angeles. Her writing appears regularly in the Los Angeles Times, Art Review, and other publications.

above: June 10 at Weatherspoon Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro; below: Unisphere
Earworm (node) at University Art Gallery, San Diego State University
Prentice Deconstructed No. 2

Drawings

Both Kinds of Kinship, 2005
Ink on Dura-Lar, 29.25 x 58.75
June 10, 1965, 2007
Ink and acrylic on Dura-Lar, 24.75 x 20
June 10, 1967, 2007
Ink and acrylic on Dura-Lar, 24.75 x 20
Ink and acrylic on Dura-Lar, 24.75 x 20
Tarmac, 2007
Ink and acrylic on Dura-Lar, 20 x 24
Earworm (resonant), 2008
Ink on Dura-Lar, 30 x 42

Tent of Tomorrow (we rode the subway all the way to
Flushing Corona Meadows), 2009
Ink and acrylic on Dura-Lar, 25 x 40
Universe (I see in my mind Mum in front of it looking
like Jackie Kennedy), 2009
Ink and acrylic on Dura-Lar, 25 x 34
Capital (I see again in memory like a dream), 2010
Ink and acrylic paint on acrylic, 72 x 48
Prentice Deconstructed No. 1 (the harder I try to remember), 2011
Ink on Dura-Lar, 38.75 x 36
Prentice Deconstructed No. 2 (like trying to remember
a person), 2011
Ink on Dura-Lar, 25 x 30
Prentice No. 1 (preservationists said they would throw
themselves in front of bulldozers to save it), 2011
Ink on Dura-Lar, 34 x 49

Installations

Earworm (redundant), 2007
Plastic, copper, LEDs, speakers, sound; dimensions variable
Music by Michelle Amador with Lisa Mezzacappa
Lyrics by Michelle Amador
Michelle Amador—vocals, piano
Lisa Mezzacappa—acoustic bass, whistling
June 10, 2007
Plastic, steel, LEDs, video edited from 8mm home movies
by Peter Aschheim; dimensions variable
Earworm (node), 2008
Plastic, copper, LEDs, speakers, sound; dimensions variable
Music by Michelle Amador and Lisa Mezzacappa
Michelle Amador—vocals
Tim Bulkey—vocals
Jason Lewis—percussion
Lisa Mezzacappa—acoustic bass
Earworm (resonant), 2008–2011
Plastic, LEDs, speakers, sound; dimensions variable
Music by Lisa Mezzacappa with Aurora Josephson,
Heather Frasch and Jason Lewis
Aurora Josephson—vocals
Heather Frasch—flute
Lisa Mezzacappa—contrabass
Jason Lewis—percussion

Dimensions are noted in inches; height precedes
width precedes depth. Works are lent courtesy
of the artist and Edward Cella Art + Architecture, Los Angeles.
Sculptures

Earworm (crazy), 2007
Plastic, LEDs, speakers, video edited from 8mm home movies by Peter Aschheim, sound; 28 x 22.75 x 25.25
Music and Lyrics by Michelle Amador
Michelle Amador–vocals, synthesizer
Deborah Aschheim–voice
Lisa Mezzacappa–electric bass

Earworm (tarmac), 2007
Plastic, copper, LEDs, speakers, sound; 31.25 x 36 x 22.25
Music by Lisa Mezzacappa and Katy Stephan
Lyrics by Katy Stephan
Katy Stephan–vocals
Henry Hung–trumpet
John Finkbeiner–acoustic guitar
Lisa Mezzacappa–electric bass, vocals
Jason Levis–drums

Nostalgia, 2009
Plastic, copper, light bulbs (compact fluorescent, halogen, incandescent, LED, reproduction Edison, xenon), propellers, motors, motion sensor, video edited from 8mm home movies by Irving Stone, N-scale railroad accessories; 22.75 x 90 x 69
Prentice Deconstructed, 2011
Plastic, 68 x 35.5 x 31

Video

Apollo, 2009
Video and sound; 5:00
NASA video courtesy of nasaimages.org
Music by Lisa Mezzacappa
Cory Wright–clarinet
John Finkbeiner–guitar
Tim Perkis–electronics
Lisa Mezzacappa–contrebass
Kjell Nordeson–percussion
Recorded by Michael Zehner at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, California
© 2008–2011 MezzTone Music (ASCAP)

Additional Audio Credits

Earworm (redundant), Earworm (node), Earworm (resonant), Earworm (crazy), Earworm (tarmac)
Audio recorded and produced by Lisa Mezzacappa
Mixed by John Finkbeiner at New, Improved Recording, Oakland, California
Mastered by Myles Boisen at Headless Buddha Mastering Labs, Oakland, California
Supported in part by a Subito grant from the American Composers Forum
© 2008–2011 planBmusic (ASCAP)
Deborah Aschheim
Born 1964 in Boston, Massachusetts
Lives and works in Pasadena, California
Represented by Edward Cella Art + Architecture, Los Angeles, California

Education
1990 Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington
1986 Bachelor of Arts in Honors Anthropology and Studio Art, Magna Cum Laude; Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island

Solo Exhibitions
2012 Deborah Aschheim: My Life in Airports, Terminal 1, Los Angeles International Airport, Los Angeles, California
2011 Deborah Aschheim: feeling-of-knowing, with Lisa Mezzacappa, University Art Gallery, San Diego State University, San Diego, California; catalogue
2010 Nostalgia for the Future, Edward Cella + Architecture, Los Angeles, California
2009 Deborah Aschheim: School of Architecture, Art and Historic Preservation Exhibition Gallery; Roger Williams University; Bristol, Rhode Island
2008 Deborah Aschheim, Gallery 2.5, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois
Deborah Aschheim + Lisa Mezzacappa: Earworms, Pasadena Museum of California Art, Pasadena, California
Deborah Aschheim: Reconsider, Museum Galleries Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis, Missouri; catalogue; with Lisa Mezzacappa
2007 The Forgetting Curve, University of Southern Maine Art Gallery, Gorham, Maine

Biography of the Artist
Deborah Aschheim was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1964. She is a sculptor and installation artist who lives and works in Pasadena, California. She is represented by Edward Cella Art + Architecture in Los Angeles, California.

Aschheim received her Bachelor of Arts in Honors Anthropology and Studio Art from Brown University in 1986, where she graduated Magna Cum Laude. She subsequently earned her Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture from the University of Washington in 1990.

Aschheim has had a prolific career exhibiting her work in various solo exhibitions and group shows across the United States. Notable solo exhibitions include "My Life in Airports" at the Los Angeles International Airport in 2012, "feeling-of-knowing" with Lisa Mezzacappa at the University Art Gallery in 2010, and "Nostalgia for the Future" at Edward Cella Art + Architecture in 2009.

Aschheim’s work often explores themes of memory, identity, and the effects of technology on human experience. Her installations are known for their intricate and immersive qualities, frequently incorporating sound and movement to engage the viewer in a sensorial journey.

Selected Exhibitions:
- 2012: "My Life in Airports," Los Angeles International Airport, Los Angeles, California
- 2010: "feeling-of-knowing," University Art Gallery, San Diego State University, San Diego, California
- 2008: "Gallery 2.5," Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois

Aschheim’s work is held in public collections and has been included in numerous curated exhibitions. Her dedication to her craft and her unique approach to art making continue to inspire and challenge viewers to consider the layers of memory and personal experience in contemporary life.
2003–2004
Arborization, Two10 Gallery, Wellcome Trust, London, England; Euston Road installation

2001
Osmosis, Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Buffalo, New York

2000
Intergel, City Gallery at Chastian, Atlanta, Georgia
Evenflow, Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barbara, California
Evenflow, Suyama Space, Seattle, Washington

Selected Group Exhibitions

2011
Some City Angels, Edward Cella Art + Architecture, Los Angeles, California

2010
Dialog 21, Galerie Califa, Horadzice, Czech Republic
ADHD, JAUS Gallery, Los Angeles, California

I Spy: Surveillance and Security, Sun Valley Center for the Arts, Sun Valley, Idaho; installation: Neural Architecture

2009
Home and Garden, Vinairnet.net, Center for Integrated Media, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, California; Nostalgia for the Future with Lisa Mezzacappa; http://www.integratedmedia.net/vinairnet/homeandgarden/projects/aschheim_description.html

Installations Inside/Out, Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, California; catalogue; installation: Nostalgia for the Future with Lisa Mezzacappa

The Future Imaginary, Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, California

2008–2009
The Lining of Forgetting: Internal & External Memory in Art, Weatherspoon Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina; traveled to Austin Museum of Art, Austin, Texas; catalogue

2008
Vital Signs, Newcomb Art Gallery, Woldenberg Art Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana

2007
Orion’s Belt: Sheppard Fine Arts Gallery; University of Nevada, Reno; Reno, Nevada; with Lisa Mezzacappa

Animus/Wilderness, Glass Eye, Brooklyn, New York

2006
Alternate Routes: Mapping in the Studio, Sam Francis Gallery, Crossroads School, Santa Monica, California

Draw, Paper, Scissors, Domestic Setting, Los Angeles, California

2005
The One, NGC 224, Brooklyn, New York

2004
Certain Traces: Dialogue Los Angeles/Prague 2004, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles, California, and Museum Kampa, Prague, Czech Republic

Suspension: Sonic Absorption, Consolidated Works, Seattle, Washington; installation: Neural Architecture no. 2 (eavesdropping network)

2003
C.O.L.A. 2003, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles, California; installation: Neural Architecture no. 1

2002
Synthetically Bred, University Art Gallery, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan
Out of True, University Art Museum; University of California, Santa Barbara; Santa Barbara, California; installation: Audition

Beelden Buiten 2002: Fractals, Tuin de Brabandere, Tielt, Belgium; installation: Arborization

Beelden Buiten 2002, Galerie CD, Tielt, Belgium

2001
New Works, New Spaces, Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, California; installation: Retina

Irrational Propositions, Post Gallery, Los Angeles, California

2000
Artificial Structures, Rad Projects, Los Angeles, California; installation: Synapse

Sensate; W. Keith and Janet Kellogg University Art Gallery; California State Polytechnic University, Pomona; Pomona, California; installation: Spore/Virus

Quilty, Adam Baumgold Fine Art, New York, New York
As If Alive: Animate Sculpture, Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, Summit, New Jersey

2007
Taxonomy, Robbie Waters Pocket-Greenhaven Library, Sacramento, California

2005
New Center, LAPD Valley Communications Dispatch Center, City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs, Public Art Division, Los Angeles, California

Building as Body, University of Southern Maine, Bioscience Research Institute, Portland, Maine, and Robbie Hall, Gorham, Maine

2003
Arborization, Two10 Gallery, Welcom Trust, London, England; Euston Road installation

2001
Osmosis, Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Buffalo, New York

2000
Intergel, City Gallery at Chastian, Atlanta, Georgia
Evenflow, Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barbara, California
Evenflow, Suyama Space, Seattle, Washington
Grants
2011
Artists’ Resources for Completion Grant, Center for Cultural Innovation, Los Angeles, California
Mid-Career Artist Fellowship, California Community Foundation, Los Angeles, California
2011, 2009
City of Los Angeles Artist-in-Residence Grant, Los Angeles, California
Hixson-Lied Visiting Lecturer, Department of Art and Art History, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska
2009–2011
Helman Visiting Artist; Memory and Aging Center; Department of Neurology, University of California, San Francisco; San Francisco, California
2010
Visiting Artist, Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia
2008, 2004
Individual Artist Grant, Pasadena Arts and Culture Commission, Pasadena, California
2007
Artist-in-Residence, Fundación Valparaíso, Mojacar, Spain
Artist-in-Residence, McColl Center for Visual Art, Charlotte, North Carolina
2007, 2004
Individual Resources for Completion Grant, The Durfee Foundation, Los Angeles, California
2008
Artist-in-Residence, Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, California
2002–2003
City of Los Angeles (C.O.L.A.) Individual Artist Fellowship, Los Angeles, California
2001
HARP Residency, Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Buffalo, New York
Individual Artist Fellowship, New Jersey State Council on the Arts, New Jersey
1994
Residency Fellowship, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, Nebraska
1993–1994
Artist-in-Residence Grant, Roswell Museum and Art Center, Roswell, New Mexico

Selected Bibliography
2012
2011
Deborah Aschheim: feeling-of-knowing, with Lisa Mezzacappa. (San Diego: University Art Gallery, San Diego State University); introduction by Tina Yapatki and essay by Holly Myers.
Hiding Places: Memory in the Arts. (Shelbyan, WI: John Michael Kohler Arts Center); essays by Anne Davis Bast- ing, Amy Chaloupeika, Erika Doss, Ethan W. Lasser, Darold A. Treffelt and Leslie Umerberger.
“Profile: Deborah Aschheim.” Juxtapoz, page 122, illustrated.
2010
Earle, David P., ed. The Open Daybook. (Brooklyn: Mark Batty Publisher).
2009
Installations Inside/Out (Pasadena: Armory Center for the Arts); foreword by Jay Belloli and artists’ statements.
2008
Bonetti, David. “Deborah Aschheim: Reconsider.” St. Louis Post Dispatch, 12 April, illustrated.
Deborah Aschheim: (St. Louis: Laumeier Sculpture Park); essay by Meg Linton.
The Lining of Forgetting: Internal and External Memory in Art (Greensboro: Weatherspoon Art Museum, The University of North Carolina); essays by Sarah Cook, Xandra Eden and John Roberts.
2006
2005
Deborah Aschheim: Neural Architecture no. 6. (Nashville: Frist Center for the Visual Arts); essay by Nancy Cason.
2004
Earworm (rasonant) (detail)
Deborah Aschheim: Neural Architecture (a smart building is a nervous building). (Laguna Beach: Laguna Art Museum); essay by Tyler Stallings.


2001


2000

