



THRESHOLD INSTALLATION BY DEBORAH ASCHHEIM

SUYAMA SPACE, SEATTLE



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DEBORAH ASCHHEIM THRESHOLD

SUYAMA SPACE, SEATTLE | JANUARY 21 – APRIL 12, 2013



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PREFACE

Beth Sellars, Curator

Deborah Aschheim is a Los Angeles-based artist who received her B.A. in Anthropology from Brown University in 1986 and her M.F.A. in Ceramic Sculpture from the University of Washington in 1990. Recent solo exhibitions include San Diego State University, Laumeier Sculpture Park in St. Louis, the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh, Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles and Laguna Art Museum in Laguna Beach, California. Aschheim has created permanent installations for the Los Angeles Police Department, the Pocket-Greenhaven Library for the City of Sacramento, and most recently an installation for the Seattle Campus of Amazon.com at 207 Boren Avenue North in downtown Seattle. She has received fellowships from the California Community Foundation, the City of Los Angeles, the City of Pasadena, and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. From 2009-2011, Aschheim worked with neuroscientists and physicians to further understand memory and forgetting as she continued to research how memory resides in the environment that we construct in our minds.

Suyama Space has a long history with Deborah Aschheim; she created an earlier installation, *Eventflow*, in the gallery in 2000. My own history with her goes back even farther to 1990 when Deborah was a recent graduate of the University of Washington. As a curator, it is very satisfying to follow an artist's progress in such depth, especially when the artist continues to constantly question, challenge, research and grow in the manner she has these last 20+ years. It has been a pleasure to work with Deborah during her second response to the inherent physical challenges of Suyama Space.

We are grateful for the continued support of 4Culture/King County Lodging Tax Fund, Seattle Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs, and our wonderful Suyama Space Friends. We wish to thank Artech for awarding Deborah "The Artech Grant" for shipping, as well as Peter and Barbara Aschheim for helping to support the printing of this publication. And finally, many thanks to the numerous fabrication volunteers and a special thanks to Ken D. Allan for his insightful essay.



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Evenflow, Installation by Deborah Aschheim, Suyama Space, March 3 – May 7, 2000

In 2000, Deborah Aschheim created for Suyama Space clustered forms with light reactive properties made of epoxy, silk, baby bottle nipples, phosphorescent silicon and gelcaps applied to wooded armatures. Rising from the floor and floating down from the ceiling, the writhing, tentacled and twisted forms related to each other in an environment based on a blown up, imagined microbiology. The artist wanted to unmoor the viewer's sense of scale, so that a visitor could navigate through a space that was simultaneously the soaring wooden beamed gallery and at the same time a vision of a teeming three-dimensional microscopic world.



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DEBORAH ASCHHEIM: THRESHOLD

Ken D. Allan

“‘Modernity’ means contingency. It points to a social order which has turned from the worship of ancestors and past authorities to the pursuit of a projected future—of goods, pleasures, freedoms, forms of control over nature, or infinities of information.”

— T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 1999

Deborah Aschheim’s title for her installation based on architectural ideas of the 1960s—*Threshold*—suggests that her work and the space of the exhibition itself is “in between” one place and another, a liminal space filled with potential and expectation. A threshold is a good metaphor for the effect that modernism in the arts had on those sympathetic to its radicalism. For much of the last century, to be modern and to embrace the notion of the avant-garde was to be in a state of edgy anticipation about the great social and cultural changes that art allowed us to glimpse—just beyond the threshold—in the coming historical moment. The architecture which Aschheim took as her inspiration for this exhibition, the work of mid-twentieth century designers such as Bertrand Goldberg, William Pereira, as well as those who had an impact on the look of Seattle, Minoru Yamasaki and John Graham Jr., embody this vision of the modern as the “pursuit of a projected future,” in the words of art historian T. J. Clark. Those “pleasures [and] . . . infinities of information” certainly seem to animate the soaring forms of Graham’s (and Victor Steinbrueck’s) Space Needle and Yamasaki’s arches for the Pacific Science Center, two structures Aschheim interprets here, which were also originally surrounded by plenty of the future’s “goods” in the displays of the Century 21 World’s Fair in 1962. But beyond these local references, we see a similar spirit reflected in other buildings Aschheim reconstructs: the TV towers of Berlin and Prague, a Communist-era spa in the Ukraine, and the iconic “Theme” building at Los Angeles’s LAX airport. The fact that Aschheim’s childhood was spent in the midst of the optimism of this moment, and her coming of age occurred as the promise of the future that these buildings expressed was fading, has made her particularly interested in exploring how architecture can make meaning and have such a hold over our imaginations.

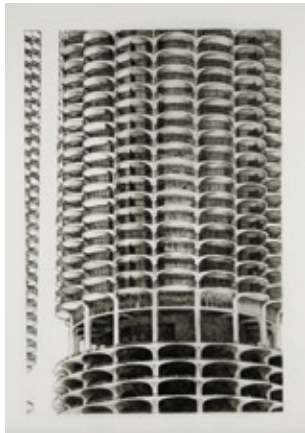
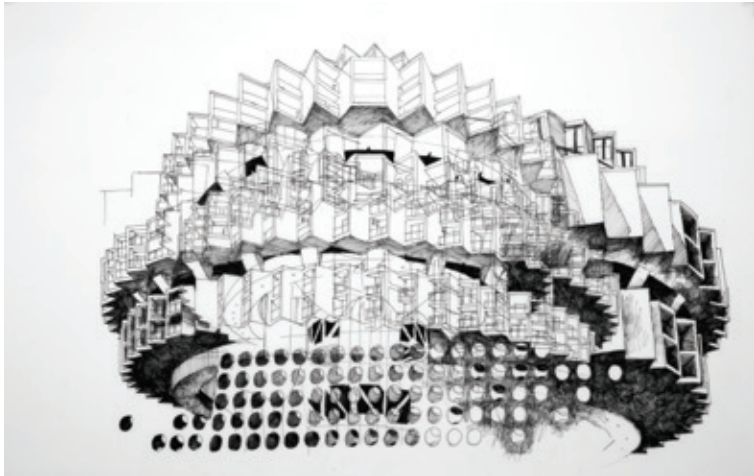
Building on her previous work about the relationship between the brain and identity, Aschheim has made the mechanics of memory, and its imperfections, the focus of her artistic process for this installation. Her sculptures, in all their inaccuracies as architectural models and their blending of ideas between one designer and another, are a product of the decay of the artist’s memory of these buildings, many of which she visited and researched obsessively over the past few years. Aschheim has spoken about her installations as a “haunting” of space and this quality may help us understand the lingering aura that buildings like Goldberg’s corn cob-shaped Marina City apartments in Chicago or his distinctively oval-windowed St. Joseph’s Hospital in Tacoma still possess for us today. History has unfortunately proven just how difficult it is to make the freedoms and pleasures of space-age fantasy that these buildings envision a reality for all within the social sphere. This is perhaps why Aschheim’s use of a mundane material such as corrugated plastic and her decision to leave the marks of her making—drips of glue and penciled lines beside cuts done by hand—brings to mind feelings of struggle and loss.

Yet these white, translucent constructions glow from within, are captivatingly scaled to the body, and some hover, dreamlike, in the middle the exhibition space, as if on clouds. I will put it down to their subtle power to haunt the viewer’s mind that I left Suyama Space only to see the tilted spirals of Aschheim’s homage to Bruegel’s Tower of Babel painting and Tatlin’s Monument to the Third International in a concrete structure occupying the corner of a dog park on 3rd street, or that I looked up and saw the ghost of Goldberg’s “corn cob” towers in the Westin Hotel building—a building that was in fact designed by Space Needle architect John Graham Jr. in 1969. These unanticipated connections are part of the network of memory and association that underlies Aschheim’s fascinating work and are perfect examples of the transformative experience of contingency that art can give us. Perhaps it is also proof that this form of modernity is, luckily, still with us.

Ken D. Allan is an Associate Professor of Art History at Seattle University whose writing has appeared in Art Bulletin, Art Journal, and X-TRA.



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All drawings by Deborah Aschheim

*Top (left to right):
Unrequited, no. 2 (Marina misremembered), 2012, ink on Duralar, 42" x 34", photo by Lee Thompson
Capitol (Only Clear Memory Lonely Year in Hollywood), 2009, ink on vellum, 41 1/2" x 31", photo by Anthony Cunha*

*Middle:
Druzhiba, no. 1, 2012, ink on Duralar, 25" x 38", photo by Ed Gendinning*

*Bottom (left to right):
Prentice deconstructed, no. 1 (The harder I try to remember), 2011, ink on Duralar, 39" x 36", photo by Anthony Cunha
Marina, no. 4 (He wanted every apartment to have at least one balcony), 2011, ink on Duralar, 44" x 31", photo by Anthony Cunha*



ARTIST STATEMENT

Deborah Aschheim

Over the past seven years I have been working to visualize and understand memory. I built networks that projected my memories across the gallery, embedding fragments of home movies in delicate webs of glowing fibers that replicated memory's fragile, cortical lattice. I collaborated with musicians to create sound sculptures based on my memory for language; each sculpture plays a unique musical composition based on a word I don't want to forget. From 2009-2011, I participated as Visiting Artist at the Memory and Aging Center in the Neurology Department at the University of California, San Francisco, working with neuroscientists and physicians to try to understand memory and forgetting.

I make installations to reconcile the spaces of building and bodies with more invisible worlds. I am interested in memory and place and the haunting of the present by the misremembered future. I feel a particular connection with buildings that were new when I was also “new.” Modernist buildings from the postwar era seemed to promise a future of limitless possibility, but this future now seems misplaced and irresponsible. When I move through the city, it is haunted by the unexpected poetry of modernist buildings and their obsolete vision of utopia.

I am interested the way memories of cities, buildings and landscapes we carry in our minds don't quite line up with external reality. Cities in space and cities in memory are mutable, shifting, continually revised and rewritten as different visions of the future and the past are imagined or preserved or erased. In creating *Threshold*, I have tried to conjure up the dynamic city from my mind. I developed a sculptural process that is a kind of collage, but instead of paying attention to what I see or empirical built structures, my goal is to replicate the hybridity, metamorphic fluidity, promiscuous and impressionistic processes of memory itself.

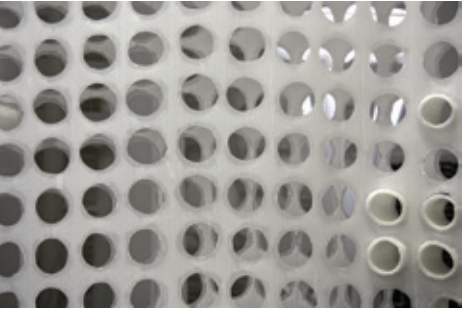
Suyama Space is, itself, haunted for me by the memory of the installation I made here in 2000. I used the memory of that installation as a conceptual blueprint for the current installation. The buildings in *Threshold* were (at least initially) laid out in the (mis)remembered footprint of the previous installation. I have tried to be rigorous in my observation of the distorted and dreamlike representations of buildings and cities in my head and to faithfully document the ongoing cycle of forgetting and misremembering.

I want to thank Syd Brown, Gail Grinnell, Megan Harmon, Matthew Sellars, and Sam Wildman for generously donating their time to help with installation and fabrication; and to Kyle Horn for spending his weekends soldering LED's for the installation. I am honored to be the recipient of “The Artech Grant,” and I want to thank Artech for their professional assistance with the return shipping. I want to thank my parents, Peter and Barbara Aschheim, for their assistance with the catalogue's publication and for their love and support throughout my career. And finally, I am grateful to Beth Sellars, George and Kim Suyama, and Emma Shultz for making this project such a great experience for me personally as well as creatively.

www.deborahaschheim.com

PHOTO CREDITS

Mark Woods: cover, 1, 2, 3, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19
Eduardo Calderon: 6, 7, 8, 9
Deborah Aschheim: 4, 5, 11, 15, 18, back cover



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This exhibit and publication is made possible through funding from 4Culture/King County Lodging Tax Fund, Seattle Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs, the Suyama Space Friends, and Peter and Barbara Aschheim. Artech, offering fine art services for artists and public, private and corporate collectors, provided shipping assistance to Deborah Aschheim through "The Artech Grant."

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Exhibition Dates: January 21 – April 12, 2013

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2324 Second Avenue, Seattle, WA 98121

www.suyamaspace.org

Director: George Suyama
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Graphic Design: Sarah Shapiro Design
Printer: Litho Craft

