



## From Ice Storms to Bike Gears

Ten artists engage viewers at the Mattress Factory

### NEW INSTALLATIONS BY ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE

Mattress Factory, North Side

Through June 27

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By Alice Winn

The Mattress Factory's show of new installations by 10 artists in residence involves viewers in an active engagement with site. In turn, the artists' actions integrate their pieces conceptually and physically into the context of their locations, playing with spaces' dramatic qualities and architectural features. Complexes of situations and events create extraordinary atmospheres that allow visitors to have experiences of contemplation or immersion. Some pieces focus attention away from concrete materiality and permanence, instead encouraging a recognition of that which is ephemeral and temporal. While passing through the exhibition, a chain reaction starts from one work to another, causing a sudden clarity between the linkages of very different artists' practices.

Rebecca Holland freezes over the museum's basement floor with a Kryptonite-green synthetic ice storm. She boiled mass quantities of a German sugar substitute and poured the tinted liquid into square molds to harden into translucent sheets.

The work, with its cracked texture and radiant color, plays its expansive verdant shimmer against the stone-gray ground in a rich but diffused melody.

Jim Drain, Ara Peterson and Eamon Brown present a video kaleidoscope that offers delicious spectacles of eye-grabbing immediacy. Completely packed with visual busyness, their composition has a nice sci-fi lyricism to it, further dazzling our media-overloaded consciousness. A triangular window opens to a mirrored tunnel teeming with their DVD's animated abstractions in vibrating hues. Cross-reflections of its crystalline, driven rhythms create an illusion of a large geodesic sphere covered with swiftly shifting patterns. The mirrors seem in a constant state of awareness, inherently seductive as they draw us in to reveal our own fragmented images captured within their planes.

Ann Reichlin's somber, lovely installation has a presence that is riveting in its physical energy and in the visual dialogue between its parts. Skeletal metal armatures for concrete construction — partially skinned with diamond steel lath — form looming enclosures built in bold, straight lines. Daylight filters dimly through windows with an intimate, abstract touch, absorbed into these structures to strengthen their forlorn emptiness. Beside them lies a tilted, broken twin support system, drenched in funereal shadows, expressing a sense of abandonment, solitude and immobility. As in spider webs, a tension exists

between these forms' elegiac beauty and their feeling of lurking evil. They seem to evoke a subdued violence that underlies human relationships. Yet the fragility of their rusted nakedness also becomes a catalyst for our most delicate emotions of love, longing and melancholy.

Selecting materials based on aesthetic and functional characteristics, Liza McConnell strives to dumb down technology by utilizing common objects and labor-intensive assembly processes. Her pieces' effects involve makeshift solutions headed in the opposite direction from high-tech perfection toward a kind of a sublime indeterminacy. There's no attempt to conceal the backstage workings behind the magic here — this is artifice with no shame. The installation contains a flicker of humor, an abject reminder of the body and a tactile beauty that appeals to the senses and thereby reasserts the humanness of the artist's intention.

McConnell addresses our disconnected, distant relationship with reality illustrated by the 19th-century panorama. This antecedent of large-screen moving pictures was a continuous landscape painted to conform to a flat or curved background, which was unrolled before the viewer.

Here, a visitor must set McConnell's piece in motion. Walking a treadmill dims the room lights while powering bicycle gears rigged with traffic cone projection devices. The illusion of moving along a misty night highway under construction, complete with stars and traffic cones, is produced upon a curved wall ahead. The road is just a drawing dotted with tiny orange sculptures on a paper roll, which turns inside one traffic cone, while the twinkling celestial bodies emanate from tin foil tucked within another. When walking the treadmill in real space in front of a big screen, the user of this installation is in real time but is shifted to a virtually represented experience of a world of synthetic space and subtle entities. This ghostly highway you're traveling, silent as a spark down a wire, could be anywhere. Its vista becomes your own private movie passing across the screen of your mind. Through your interaction with McConnell's machinery, traces of your motion and consciousness become invested in the rhythm of the piece.

Curtis Mitchell's pieces taunt the high seriousness of art with a casual, improvisational approach. Working with the leaky bottom of modern life, he processes civilization to reduce it to zero. Building on its ruins, he picks up the pieces and reassembles them with the desperate inventiveness of a man who has been given a last chance to repair a shattered past. His acts of damaging and transforming materials open the way for individual discovery. One installation communicates the feeling that he's put a suburban home into the blender. His remix of the flotsam of contemporary comfort — coffee grounds, boiled ham, Pepto Bismol — becomes a sterile soil that's the sad, smoky purple of old curtains in some cheap burlesque house. A brand-new Oriental rug set on fire, then bleached, stands in a state of arrested decay. Its faded, intricate glory alludes to a broad historical vision of upended human endeavors and dreams. The light-streaked patterns corrupting Mitchell's roll of deliberately exposed film evokes a kind of bright, purifying fire, embodying our dual desire for creation and destruction.