

## ART PAPERS

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2007

DOUGLAS WEATHERSBY, *Virtual Home Office*, 2007, installation, variable dimensionsInstallation View of *Wandern*, back wall: KATHRYN REFI, *Light Readings* (September 17, 2001), 2001, India ink on paper, 60 x 120 inchesWANDERN  
ATLANTA

*Wandern* transformed Solomon Projects' pristine gallery into an energetic installation-cum-think tank on the vagaries of physical, metaphorical, psychological, and virtual space [May 8—June 15, 2007]. Italian sofas and beanbags were brought in and throw rugs covered the polished concrete gallery floor, setting the scene for sculpture, painting, video and photographic works investigating space. Part lounge, part lab, the show operated on many levels, drawing together narrative and abstract pieces to tackle the special theme from different angles, presided over by the elusive figure of the wanderer. The gallery also programmed an ambitious series of lectures, screenings, and performances by architects, urban planners, and visual and sound artists, many of whom offered passionate treatises on the meaning and values of space in their work. Lectures were simulcast on the Web, thus linking virtual space with the gallery and making time-based performances accessible at home.

This was an ambitious exhibition for Atlanta, a city still struggling to find its urban center and identity, hogtied by choked highways and continued anti-pedestrian development. *Wandern* created a forum, bringing resident experts of many fields together before a diverse and well-informed audience, thereby casting the fine arts as a space for cross-pollination. Curatorially, the show stressed some social and political aspects of nominally abstract work, thus stretching beyond the gallery context. It also highlighted the import of public art and the impact of global nomadic culture. As museums become cultural spectacles, with architecture colluding with entertainment and exhibition spaces to outpace collections, *Wandern's* participants willingly engaged in the expanding conversation.

Artists, architects, and designers overlap in their transformation of space into a cultural realm. In his lecture, James Langford, Georgia Director of Trust for Public Land, presented a digital bird's-eye view of the Atlanta

Beltline, an inner-city public parkland reclamation project. This project both intersects with, and greatly amplifies, the aspirational dimension of artists Gregor Turk and Mike Wsol's individual explorations of public contexts. Likewise, the other lecturers elaborated upon the visual concerns raised in the show, from domestic interiors to the virtual spaces of high-rise structures.

Several works were obvious inclusions, including Turk's *Manifold Manifesto* drawing series, topographic maps that conflate geographies, imposing automobile brand names over grids of city streets. *Manhattan, Kansas*, 2007, Scott Peterman's large-format photograph of lazy tracks in desert sands, conveys the manifest destiny of the American West. Sarah Hobbs' *Untitled [Insomnia]*, 2000, a staged photograph of Post-it messages floating above a slept-in bed, depicts the fraught realm of psychological space, vast in its own right. Some works record process. This is the case for Kathryn Refi's majestic ten-foot long ink drawing, *Light Readings* (September 17, 2001), 2002, a mapping of personal space and light laid out on a rational grid. Others probe the functional arena of architecture and sculpture by altering the space they occupy: Wsol's *Filtration System with Reservoir*, 2004, an elegantly crafted sculpture set on a reflective black table, reads as both architectural model and precision-jeweled abstraction. Seen together with his other works—assemblages in wood and isometric pencil drawings—this piece shows that urban architecture is both form and content in Wsol's work.

The show included stage-like installations by several artists and architects. Some of these works brought the built environment inside. Others bridged the gap between contemporary art's commercial and theoretical realms. A collaboration between Georgia Tech architecture professor Tristan Al-Haddad and architect Tim Frank transformed a short gallery passageway into an acrylic light tunnel reminiscent of Frederick Kiesler's sculptural

designs for Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery in New York. *Thick Neck*, 2007, Al-Haddad's vacuum-formed biomorphic plastic sculptures, stretched upwards as gravity-defying vines, refracting and reflecting street scenes in the gallery space while squeezing visitors into tight psychological quarters. This elegantly engineered piece cast a utopian glow while altering the gallery's functionality.

Douglas Weathersby's *Virtual Home Office*, 2007, was one of the show's most successful, far-reaching works. This full-scale photographic mural rendition of his Boston studio usurped the gallery's front room space. His business, Environmental Services, performed on-site cleaning, organizing, and contracting jobs, offered for sale as art projects in photographs, videos, and infomercials throughout the gallery. The artist's drive from Boston to Atlanta played on a video loop. Stills from carwash videos were presented for sale as elegant painterly abstractions, as polished as the business cards and scope-of-work contracts lining the office shelves. Thus, details of the artist/worker's personal tinkering eroded the normally anonymous, and somewhat forbidding, gallery threshold, casting a biographical net over this theater of commerce. Weathersby's art exists precisely in the orchestral space between the theaters of art and life. Challenging systems of cultural production, it leaves curious objects in the wake of a cleaner, more rational space.

—Lisa Kurzner