

A+D

CAPRICIOUS AND MERCURIAL SYSTEMS

JANUARY 17–FEBRUARY 23, 2008





Ellen Driscoll

Phantom Limb (detail of McMansion, detail of improvised housing colony), 2007
 950 recycled #2 plastic milk and water bottles
 84 x 72 x 144



Diana Cooper

The Dispenser (detail), 1999
 Acetate, vinyl, paper, foamcore, pipe cleaners, acrylic, pom-poms, felt, and paper on wall and floor
 111 x 192 x 117

Image copyright Tim Safranek/MOCA Cleveland, Artwork courtesy of Postmasters Gallery

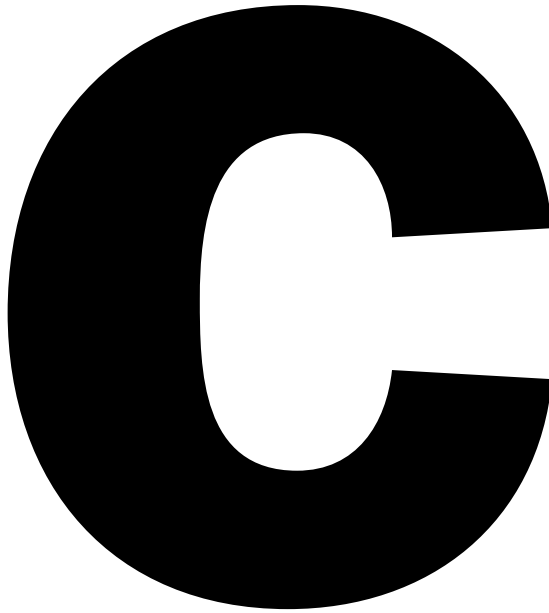


Scott Wolniak

Hoy (video still), 2005
 Hand-made and digital animation on DVD
 Edition of 5, 2:00 duration
 Courtesy of Bodybuilder and Sportsman Gallery



CAPRICIOUS AND MERCURIAL SYSTEMS: SYSTEMS, NETWORKS, AND MATRICES IN CONTEMPORARY SPATIAL ART



Capricious and Mercurial Systems brings together objects and spatial constructs that function as models of systems, structures and geometries in flux and in flow. The works of Isidro Blasco, Diana Cooper, Ellen Driscoll, Kenji Fujita, Julia Klein, Tom Lauerman, Margie Neuhaus, William Niemeier and Scott Wolniak explore and utilize open and dynamic systems,

demonstrating the ability of spatial art forms to make physical such concepts. Systems appear as central images, formal constructs and conceptual frameworks, signifying complexity and cohesion. Yet, the cohesion doesn't hold. Curiosity, exuberance, playfulness, irony and absurdity push the bounds of the system, or sometimes even drive it.

Whether giving image to the interrelatedness of contemporary life, seeing through unexpected organizational lenses or providing a framework for creative exploration that falls outside of usual social networks, these artists organize and disorganize our notions of order. For, if systems, networks and matrices are intended to offer clarity for understanding or setting up complex interrelations, these works analyze and question that clarity of organization, look at it askew, push its limits, find where the matrix slips off-grid, expose the fragility of rigid human constructions, bend the idea of system in service of the imagination.

When these works occupy the same physical space, shared qualities appear. Complex formats and patterning emerge. Exploration of systems as structure or motif reflects creative mindsets

attuned to globalization, industry and networks. Points of connection and disconnection, unifying and disunifying elements, aspects of construction and dissolution, invoke a variety of connotations. Information technology, mapping, communications, institutional structures, architecture, anatomy, scientific models and medical imaging come to mind. *Capricious* and *mercurial* refer to the whimsical and changeable quality of references and evocations in these spatial systems. The content of the work is, at heart, interdisciplinary, drawing on multiple idea sets or contexts. This enriches each work and allows for dynamic relationships between the works. They are visually delightful, stunning, provocative and wonderfully quirky, taking unexpected turns and traversing conceptually expansive terrains.

William Niemeier's *Yellow* (2006) creates a world occupied by individual sculptural entities that, when overlapping in large number, create a network of positive linear form and negative space. The web-like elegant yellow forms seem about to scurry in all directions, across their astroturf continents, but hold together as if making up a social group or colony of organisms. These vacuum-formed skins suggest a Jetsons-era virus or a playful microscopic army. Both the yellow forms and the dark continents are modular and interchangeable systems that produce a symbiotic anthropomorphism.

In *Phantom Limb* (2007), Ellen Driscoll inventively mines discarded plastic bottles to create ghostly edifices suggesting bleak futuristic outcomes of mindless consumerism. The artist describes this as a reflection on "the complexity of relationships engendered by simple acts of consumption and waste—the clean milk or water, that comes in a plastic bottle, that ends up as waste on a street, then on a garbage barge, plying the waters for a developing world site ready for a cash exchange." *Phantom Limb* combines architectural forms from vastly different contexts—a McMansion, North Sea oil rigs, shotgun houses—embodying class disparity in one eerily confounding structure.

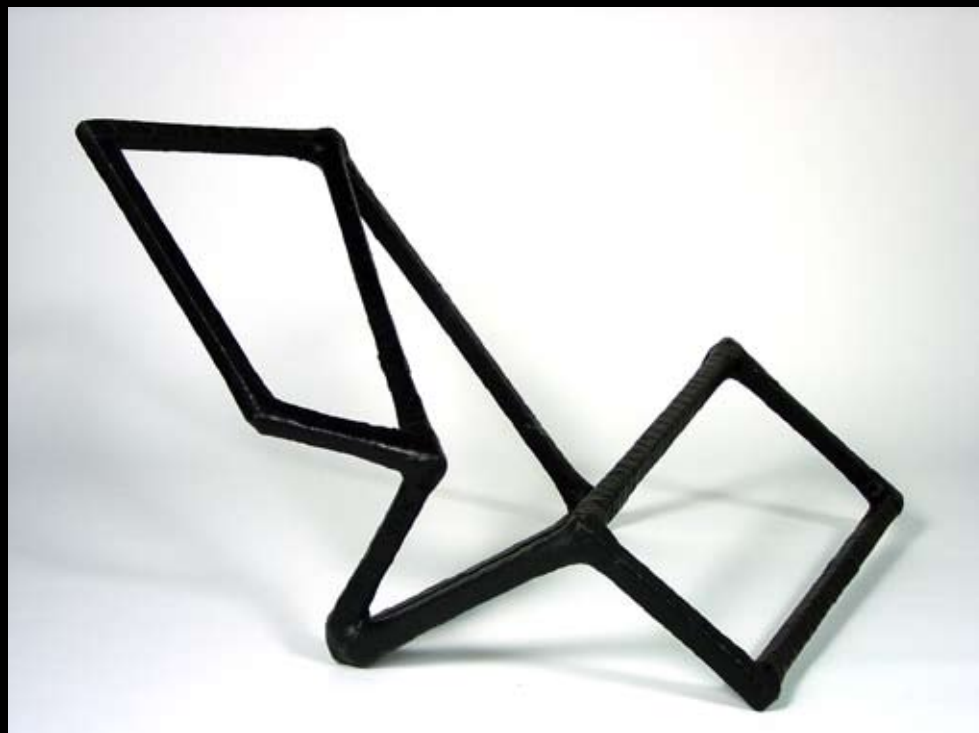
Scaffold (2004–2008) by Tom Lauerma reconstructs, at smaller scale, the scaffolding that enveloped The Church of The Holy Innocents, in Chicago, during a recent renovation. With the church itself absent, the structure of the scaffolding takes on a delicate yet persistent life of its own. An open framework formed unceremoniously, it contrasts the empty space that would have held the traditional and recognizable architectural mass of the church. In Lauerma's work, we consider the beauty of the scaffold itself as a temporary modular system, while tiny planks of wood left at random recall the cumulative labor of the restorers.

Isidro Blasco's architectural photo constructions reinterpret urban sites, interior and exterior residential spaces, reordering the solid understructure of walls, windows, frames, stairways, doors and corners, as if architectural structure could freely bend and sway under the weight of perception and experience. In his maquettes he freely splits space, tilts planes and re-seams edges. This process is further refined in the large-scale constructions such as *Side Building with Hydrant* (2006). Here, architectural structure undergoes similar disorientation and poetic manipulation.



Kenji Fujita
Clay Feet #2, 1983
Painted plywood
13 x 13 x 9

Julia Klein
Rail, 2007
Wood, fiberglass cast tape, plastic
48 x 42 x 30, variable



The accretive forms of Kenji Fujita's constructions suggest imploding and exploding geometries and matrices. The skin of vacuum-formed containers in *Wallflower #3* (1992), the membrane of a discarded cardboard box in *Fractured Fairytale #13* (2006), and the unhinged plywood structure anchoring red and yellow discs in *Untitled #5* (2001) all suggest an order gone awry, the impulse to contain and harness coupled with a need to extend and stretch. These works play with Cartesian space as a sculptural material that can bend, twist, fold, unfold and crush.

Julia Klein's sculptural work *Rail* (2007) changes positions daily, creating a dialogue between object space and the space of a room, while exploring perspective in the continual repositioning of object contours. In the accompanying video and photo-grid, Klein maneuvers her sculptures for the viewer's benefit, in a systematic yet spontaneous process. Her works show us the quality of unlimited vantage points provided by spatial objects, whether experienced in space or when repositioned for the eye of a camera.

Diana Cooper's construction, *The Dispenser* (1999), physically layers line, mark, shape, pattern and edge, pushing the interrelationships of drawing and spatial forms to extremes. In meticulous yet open-ended complexes of color and material, Cooper orchestrates dense, multi-leveled visual and spatial information that can be read in various ways. The interplay of forms suggests teeming circuits or overflowing communication networks. Formal elements seem to respond to each other with energy like that of improvisational jazz musicians, and the work has an excessive exuberance that defies the order of many organizational structures of our current wired age.

In her work, described by the artist as drawing in space, Margie Neuhaus translates neurological imaging, flat depictions of living networks in the body, into poetic spatial experiences. Neuhaus transforms the microscopic and miniature into compositions seeable by the naked eye. The artist suggests parallels between the nervous system and systems of absorption and circulation in nature. *Sensory Jetty* (2007) draws on imagery related to (dys)functions of neural pathways. In its details, the work juxtaposes the grand with the petite, suggesting disconnects and lapsed moments in neural systems gone haywire. The viewer travels in and out of these layered spaces in an almost filmic experience of the objects.



Isidro Blasco
Side Building with Hydrant, 2006
 C-print on museum board, wood, hardware
 60 x 57 x 18

Scott Wolniak's video work, *Hoy* (2005), employs system as a conceptual framework for the work's making. In *Hoy*, singular collaged and hand-cut images in sequence overlap to create a pulsing compound of light, color and silhouetted forms. At first glance, these read as abstracted shapes, colors, and forms, yet closer examination reveals them to be composed of mundane images culled from the pages of a newspaper. The title of the piece is based on the name of a Chicago west side daily from which most of the work's images were derived. It is also the Spanish word for *today*, referring in this piece to a sense of constant presence. After repeated unsuccessful attempts to stop delivery of the free newspaper to his home, the artist began imposing his own daily system of use on the printed pages. They now serve as raw material for his animated image of a bursting and beating sun. The use of the sun as central figure is based on a sense that printed ephemera is omnipresent and immersive, every bit as complex as natural phenomena.

ABOUT THE CURATORS:

JOAN GIROUX is an interdisciplinary artist, educator, compassionate activist, and a faculty member in the Art + Design Department at Columbia College Chicago. Giroux has shown her work in the United States and abroad. Together with Lisa Kaftori, she is the cofounder of Compassionate Action Enterprises.

WHITNEY HUBER LAZAR is a spatial and performance artist with a background in art history and film theory and criticism. She teaches at Columbia College in the Art + Design Department. Her work has recently been shown at Rosewood Gallery, Dayton, The Sculpture Center, Cleveland, and the Columbus Museum of Art.



William Niemeier
Mumbo Jumbo, 2006
 Cast urethane on black astroturf
 Each piece approximately 4 x 5 x 6

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Gallery Hours:
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 Thursday 11am – 8pm



Margie Neuhaus
Transmitter I (detail), 2007
 Ink on vellum, vinyl, wire, thread, rubber
 21 x 15 x 15

create...
 change

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This exhibition is sponsored by the Art + Design Department at Columbia College Chicago and is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and the Efroymsen Fund, a CICF Fund.

FRONT:
Tom Lauerma
Scaffold (detail), 2004–2008
 Metal, wood, paint
 72 x 60 x 120