HERE

ARTISTS’ INTERVENTIONS AT THE ALDRICH MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
One of the most idiosyncratic qualities of The Aldrich Museum is our building. Originally built in 1783, the structure has been expanded and modified many times during its two hundred years as a home, shop, church, and ultimately, contemporary art museum. This quirky, domestic-scale building, with its hidden windows, vestigial fireplaces, and scarred wooden floors is a defining characteristic of The Aldrich, exerting a subtle and pervasive influence on all the exhibitions we mount. That influence usually extends only as far as the installation of an exhibition, not its content; in the case of Here: Artists’ Interventions at The Aldrich Museum, the invited artists have taken great advantage of our building, exploiting its unique character in their work.

The twelve artists included in Here work in a variety of media, and in a variety of places: California, Connecticut, England, Minnesota, New York, and Wales. All of them have responded to our building and its grounds, creating work which is often domestic in scale or reference, or sited to take advantage of the specifics of this location. One of my greatest joys as director of The Aldrich is our tradition of facilitating the creation of new work: Here celebrates that tradition through the creation of projects that relate closely to our singular building.

I would like to thank those people and organizations who have helped make individual projects possible, including Beth Fisher of Performance Textiles and Marian Griffiths of the Sculpture Center for their help with Lee Boroson’s project; Kimberly-Clark Corporation, The British Council, the University of East London, and the Wimbledon School of Art for their help with Susan Stockwell’s project; and Michael J. Lambrese of Dryvit Systems, Inc. and S. John Campagna of Architectural Wall Systems for their help with Brian Tolle’s project. My special pleasure is to work with a talented staff and a dynamic board, both equally dedicated to the art and artists of our time; my profound thanks to them for realizing this exhibition. Our deepest gratitude goes to the participating artists who have worked with such diligence and skill to create work which delights and provokes.

HARRY PHILBRICK
ROBERLEY BELL

Robeley Bell uses the Museum's sculpture garden as an examination of the human desire to order and control nature. By placing synthetic objects - such as Astroturf, plastic flowers and chain-link fencing - in an organic environment, Bell juxtaposes artificial against natural. From the perspective of the window on the second floor of the Museum, Bell's Nature and Its Other installation adds to the sense of a formally designed outdoor space. Simultaneously, her installation emphasizes the garden as a controlled environment - a way to make sense and order of the space around the home. Bell's choice of objects and their placement reflect her view of the interior home as a female space and the exterior as male territory. Giant vase-like vessels typically perceived as fertile forms are placed in the manicured outdoor garden; one poised invitingly at the entrance, and the other protected but trapped inside a chain-link house.

LEE BOROSON

The architecture of the Museum's lobby space inspired Lee Boroson to create a new environment within the lobby. Boroson's impulse upon viewing his site was to try to create an insulating layer, forming a more intimate surrounding than the complex lobby space. The lobby was added to the original colonial structure of the Museum in 1967. Boroson discovered that in the original building a balcony used to be located directly under what is now the lobby skylight. By recreating this balcony, Boroson has made a bridge from old to new. His inflatable sculpture Cake Walk, made from nylon parachute fabric and a motorized blower, covers the pitched ceiling with an inflated drop ceiling - diffusing the light into a newly created space. From the reconstructed balcony at the second floor level, one can look through an inflated "view tube" - an appendage of the inflated ceiling - and catch a glimpse of the original view of the sky through the skylight. In this way, Boroson focuses our attention on the history of the building and exposes the viewer to previously inaccessible and perhaps unnoticed spaces.
Mary Esch has reacted to the domestic architecture of the Museum by wallpapering a gallery with a recent work entitled The Hyena Repeat. At first glance the piece appears to be a brightly colored rhythmic pattern for decorative purposes. Upon closer examination figures become apparent. Esch’s characters exist in a teal green Dr. Seuss-like world. By following a trail of spilt liquid and scraggly trees a repetitious story begins to appear, involving both idle human behavior and violent encounters. The cartoon style in which it is rendered gives the narrative a fairy-tale feeling similar to Little Red Riding Hood. By drawing a parallel to French eighteenth century toile de Jouy wallpaper, Esch’s tableau provides a parody of the behavior which takes place in a domestic setting.

Judy Fox

Judy Fox has responded to her chosen site by creating a tableau of three adolescent figures—Dying Gaul, Eve, and Attila—in relation to the room. Crafted in terra-cotta or Hydrocal, Judy Fox’s figures hold us to our preconceptions of the innocence of childhood despite their adult poses. Fox is interested in the striving for the ideal, the beautiful, and the divine found in much of art history. Her figures, though, maintain the awkwardness of a child—big ears and out-of-proportion limbs. Their character is completed in the mind of the viewer, a contradiction between the potential adult and the innocent child. In Judy Fox’s grouping the children appear much less heroic than their art historical counterparts. The original Dying Gaul by the Hellenistic period artist Pergamon collapses with the weight of his masculine body, the energy drained from a fatal wound in his chest. A triumph of realism at the time, the sculpture was set on a stage-like platform as heroic human suffering. Fox’s Dying Gaul holds none of this suffering, but instead appears to stare pensively at the ground, his flesh round with baby fat—not taut with muscle. Trapped in frozen action, it is up to the viewer to connect the three characters in their new habitat.
Ridgefield sculptor David Gelfman creates works that are a realization of his boyhood fantasies. Lungfish is a long-delayed riposte to his being told as a child not to climb on the sculpture in the Museum's sculpture garden. Rather than create a piece that responds to the site by conforming to it, Gelfman reacted by creating an object foreign to its setting. His hand-made three-ton fully-equipped submarine sits beached on the front lawn of the Museum as if left behind at low tide. The hull of the ship is made from an old salvaged water tank. Then, using pre-nuclear military submarines from World War I and World War II as a reference, he attached the required nautical accoutrements—a maneuverable rudder, rotating propeller blades, conning tower, escape hatch, and a net cutter—all of which he fabricated by hand from sheets of steel. A computer rigged to control its mechanical features allows the passerby to hear Lungfish's clanging motor as well as the distinct buzz of a diving alarm.

New York artist Justen Ladda has used the towering pines in the Museum’s sculpture garden as the site for his installation. In the midst of these trees we find an elegant evening dress made of welded steel, shimmering with acrylic chandelier beads. Depending on the time of day, the season, or the weather, Ladda’s dress changes its appearance. The chandelier beads reflect the color of the trees as the light changes throughout the day. This new work examines nature as a reflection of change by drawing a parallel to fashion—both being a reflection of constant change in their surroundings. Ladda’s dress is true to the consequences of fashion—we clothe ourselves to create a desirable identity, which changes as does our choice of attire. Fashion conceals one’s true identity behind its outward look, just as nature puts on seasons—changing its appearance, but not its character.
Liza Lou's "three-dimensional alternate realities" are created in response to having grown up in the suburbs. After returning from a trip to Italy when she was 18, Lou became frustrated with the homogeneity of suburban life. She decided to alter typical domestic scenes by mimicking the obsessive processes that create and maintain the American Dream. By covering sculptures of domestic objects entirely with tiny glass beads, Lou "counters the relative pointlessness of her existence with what she considers to be an effective use of her time." For her installation at The Aldrich, Lou has recreated the cramped contents of an actual kitchen closet, complete with all the discarded sporting goods and cleaning supplies of a contemporary household.

Sharon Louden's installation process began with her first trip to the Museum. After studying her chosen gallery, Louden created drawings inspired by the small, low-ceilinged space. Louden maintains the freshness of these gesture drawings in her sculptural installation. The flexibility of the materials she chooses—6,000 braided cotton dental rolls dipped in luminous paint and threaded on steel wire—allows her the freedom to explore the space inside the gallery with the ease of a pencil on a sheet of paper. The parallel between drawing and sculpture is again made apparent when the lights go out and, charged by high intensity bulbs, the sculpture defines space in a new way. With the lights on, shadows accentuate the movement in Louden's gestures as her forms appear to dance up off the floor.
DAVID NASH

British artist David Nash travelled from North Wales to create his installation for The Aldrich. Using naturally-felled maple trees from the New York Catskills, Nash was able to realize a project seeded ten years ago. While working on multiple charred-wood pieces in the mid-eighties, Nash saw a photograph of a demolished village full of roofless, burnt, human dwellings. The sight of the war-torn village left him wanting to create works that contained that “presence of loss.” He made drawings based on the charred works at that time, and was reminded of the forms while visiting The Aldrich last year. As with all of Nash’s work, the wood is transformed first by his own hand—gouging and slicing with a chainsaw and then torching it. The process of change is continued long into the exhibition by the natural drying, cracking, and warping inherent to the material.

DAVID NASH WORKING ON BLACK THRONE, 1997

MICHELLE SEGRE

A domestic scenario is played out in the Museum’s gallery seven by New York artist Michelle Segre. By following a trail of scattered bread crumbs, chicken bones, and aging orange peels, one arrives at an enormous slice of bread. The scale is such that the visitor is like a mouse who happens upon the treasures behind the kitchen garbage can. These hyper-real constructions are made of plaster, acrylic paint, foam, beeswax, and papier mâché. The trail of deteriorating food is as captivatingly abstract as it is realistic. Our eyes are slowed down by the pockmarked surfaces and the subtle variants of color. This combination of size, material, realism, and subject matter present a dichotomy at once huggable, banal, frightening, and playful.
SUSAN STOCKWELL

Travelling from London, England, Susan Stockwell has prepared an installation of quilts that responds to the domestic nature of her site. Suspended in front of the exposed bay windows on the second floor of the Museum, each quilt is sewn from recycled domestic containers such as coffee filters, tea bags, and flattened paper cups. Following the tradition of a community of women making quilts together, Stockwell invited friends to help hand-sew her pieces. On the opposite side of her gallery, hanging from the ceiling, are several industrial-size rolls of tissue paper supplied by the Kimberly-Clark Corporation, New Milford, CT. Daylight filters through holes in the paper and is absorbed—causing the space between sheets to glow in a meditative state. The tranquility of the piece is upset by the fact that the tunnels of light were created by bullets ripping through the sheets of tissue.

TEA QUILT (DETAIL), 1998

BRIAN TOLLE

Brian Tolle's WitchCatcher plays off the colonial architecture of the Museum. In his installation for The Aldrich, Tolle created a chimney stack that is inspired by one that he saw on a colonial revival house featured in a magazine. Starting on the roof of the Museum, WitchCatcher consists of four flues joined by arches which seemingly pass through the building and into the gallery below, where they twist into a knot which separates before coming to a halt at floor level. The title WitchCatcher implies a creative expression of a superstition. Here lies one of the paradoxes of the WitchCatcher—the comforting notion of a fireplace is taken over by fear. Tolle's piece blends into its environment so well that we forget it is an illusion—a foam construction based on an historical image. Artifice and artifact, comfort and fear, history and fantasy, all manifest themselves in this daunting installation.

WITCHCATCHER, 1998. DIGITALLY RENDERED IMAGES OF ALDRICH INSTALLATION.
Works in the Exhibition

Roberley Bell
Nature and Its Other, 1998
Astorfall, steel, chain-link fencing, artificial flowers
Installation in the Museum's sculpture garden, dimensions variable
Courtesty of the artist

Lee Boroson
Cake Walk, 1998
Nylon parachute fabric, blower, steel, wood, rope, hardware
Installation in the Museum's atrium, dimensions variable
Courtesty of the artist

Mary Esch
The Hive of Bees, 1997
Vinyl wallpaper
Dimensions variable
Courtesty Brownwyn Keenan Gallery, New York

Judy Fox
Dying Gaul, 1995
Hydrostone, casein
Edition of 2
18 1/2" x 24 1/2" x 16 1/2"
Collection of Morton Swinsky

Aftila, 1996
Original terre-cotta, casein
31 1/2" x 21" x 11"
Collection of Stephen and Pamela Hockkin

Sharon Louden
Tips, 1998
Braided cotton dental rolls, cotton roll holders, steel wire, glue, pins, luminous paint
Dimensions variable
Courtesty of the artist and Thomas Healy Gallery, New York

David Nash
Village Husk, 1998
Maple Dimensions variable
Courtesty of the artist and Haines Gallery, San Francisco

Justen Ladda
Dress, 1998
Painted steel, acrylic chandelier beads, spotlights
Installation in the Museum's sculpture garden, 60" x 15" x 12"
Courtesty of the artist

Liza Lou
Closet, 1998
Glass beads, mixed media 22 1/2" x 33" x 96" Private collection

Michelle Segre
Dettritos Cumulus, 1998
Foam, beeswax, paint, papier mâché, hydrocal Dimensions variable
Courtesty of the artist

Susan Stockwell
Tea Quilt, 1998
Tea bags, cotton thread 72" x 72" x 2"
Filter Drawing, 1998
Paper coffee filters, coffee, pins, cotton thread
Dimensions variable

Chairman's Circle
Mr. and Mrs. Larry Aldrich
Alexander Julian Foundation for Aesthetic Understanding & Appreciation

Mr. and Mrs. Lester Morse, Jr.
Morse Family Foundation

Nash Family Foundation, Inc.

E. H. Johnson
Tate Museum of Art

Boerner Botanical Gardens

Terra Foundation for American Art

Carnegie Museum of Art

The Frick Collection

The Henry Ford Wheeling Trust

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Museum of Modern Art

The Barnes Foundation

The Art Institute of Chicago

The Cleveland Museum of Art

The Detroit Institute of Arts

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art

The Philadelphia Museum of Art

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

The Seattle Art Museum

The Smithsoniain National Gallery of Art

The Art Institute of Chicago

The Art Institute of Chicago
A portion of The Aldrich Museum’s general operating funds has been provided through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a Federal agency serving the public by strengthening museums and libraries.

Exhibition and education funding also provided, in part, by the Connecticut Commission on the Arts.


Kimberly-Clark Corporation
Performance Textiles, Inc.