

The Function of Form
-Wendy Welch

It's always surprising how the LAB gallery in the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria can be transformed into a completely different space with each new exhibition. This time it's Marcia Huyer's installation, inFORM, deFORM, reFORM, that almost fills the room with its voluminous air-filled fabric construction. The structure is a scaled down (1:12 ratio) model of the AGGV building with one section representing the Victorian mansion built in 1889 and the other the modernist institutional additions built in 1959 and 1978.

Having no original blueprints to work from, Huyer took photos and the odd measurement to create a cardboard model for the pieces of fabric used to construct her installation. Despite all the meticulous measuring and sewing, fabric has a natural tendency to stretch and transform, especially when combined with air, resulting in a somewhat unpredictable finished form. This organic and slightly distorted architectural structure relates directly to one of the proclamations Charles Jencks made in his seminal book, *The New Paradigm in Architecture*: "One of the characteristics of postmodern architecture is its use of curves, blobs, fold, crinkles, twists or scattered patterns" Huyer's work plays on the evolution of architecture from the Victorian to the modernist and the more contemporary postmodernist in terms of design and spatial considerations.

The work is curious in nature as it is both immense-almost filling the floor space-as well as miniature, since it rises only a few feet off the ground. Huyer's installation is all about space: viewers are simultaneously engaged with the space inside the room surrounding the sculpture as well as the 'empty' air-filled space within the piece itself. As the revelation unfolds that the work refers to the architecture of the AGGV, the viewer becomes transported to an imagined space outside the perimeters of the LAB-in order to completely see both sides of the installation it is necessary to leave the main entrance to the LAB and enter through the gallery entrance way. We are forced to engage with the architecture of the space as a whole both inside and outside the room, as well as inside and outside the building.

Although Huyer's work has the look of manufactured inflatable furniture or even of a giant beach toy, the handmade quality is quickly evident in this precise yet wonky structure. The irregular squares and rectangles that have been used to repair areas during construction and installation remind me of my mother's reassuring words as I was learning to sew: "There are no mistakes in sewing, only new designs." Elements such as these and the wilting tower create an overall sense of vulnerability to the structure and they also present a case for flaws being transformative features that reinvent the original design. In any case, the irregularities embedded in the structure are reminders of the unpredictable quality of something so pervasive as air.

Jon Jakle writes in his book *The Visual Elements of Landscape*, that "buildings are remembered more for what they do than for how they look." This is evident here because once we enter the threshold of the gallery space, our attention immediately goes to the art within and not the architectural

structure of the building per se. Most gallery-goers would probably have a difficult time describing the exterior appearance of the AGGV. Part of the fascination with Huyer's work is that it draws our attention to both what the AGGV does as well as how it looks.

Space is all around us-it is something we walk through, walk around, stand outside from looking in, or stand inside of looking out. Huyer's work successfully draws attention to our interaction with and connection to the physical yet sometimes intangible presence of space-exterior and interior, empty and full as well as perceived and imagined.

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