

The Wily Ploy

The jovial décor comprising the multiple surfaces of Kirsten Reynolds' installation *The Other Last Moment* is a wily ploy to seduce the viewer. Confronting the senses like some hallucinogenic wet dream, its hues are intense in every direction and splayed out across a structure that is itself splayed out in space. Framed by a field of alluring blue, it is a somewhat welcoming setting. There are no closed walls that contain or constrict space, no cul de sacs, no fixed enclosures. The work is punctuated with cryptic gaps—both multiple points of entry and multiple avenues of escape. Despite its chuckycheesesque demeanor, it is serving up equal portions of joie de vivre and inchoate anxiety.

Reynolds' structure does not appear unstable but is fixed in an unexpected position. Presuming this is not its natural structural state, we are confronted with the question of whether the scene before us is exploding or imploding. Given the inclination of several of the walls, the evidence suggests a scene in which some air has been partially sucked out, triggering a slight collapse, but there's no way to be certain. Reynolds' installation is architecturally and figuratively enigmatic and this is an intentional detail within the wily ploy. In title and in appearance, it begs the question: if this is the "other" last moment, what's the last moment? Are we in the presence of an alternate possibility or a second chance? Is this the version where it all went wrong or is this the arena of redemption?

There are no obvious answers. The overall tone of the installation is a ruse, a decorative flourish that masks a darker underbelly. Reynolds' carved biomorphic creature—a yellow blob topped with a curling tongue—is elegant as a swan but remains strange and unknowable. It is a creature full of erotic verve—smooth, sexy, undulating like

a cobra—but like every other element in the piece, this eroticism is both obvious and ambiguous. Its presence in the overall scene provides no clues as to the meaning of the "moment," but its salacious aura presents itself as a perpetual beckoning. Or perpetual reckoning...

Enfolding the viewer into a total environment of the moment is an essential ingredient to the piece because its staggered and haphazard configuration introduces a palpable sense of motion to something otherwise hard and static. Everything in *The Other Last Moment* is utterly still, as though we have entered a suspended moment in time, yet the structure itself—which delineates this arena of stillness—is also the agent of implied, and aggressive, movement.

Like a being whose elbows and knees are all askew, frozen in some undefined action, the overall form is strangely reminiscent of a Transformer, a mis en scene caught in the midst of a convoluted make-over. From what and to what is not revealed and, as such, may not be relevant to anything. All we have is what is before us and what is before us reiterates a transformative quality, a sense of perpetual becoming, of possibility as an active ongoing agent in and of itself.

The gestures contained within Reynolds' constructed space are similarly mysterious, but numerous elements within the work drop clues like breadcrumbs and imply a narrative, quite apart from our ability to discern or identify a particular storyline. Creature, rags, black puddles, and the abrupt smear on an otherwise precise pattern are all material evidence of some past "event." The rags are left behind from an unfinished action, the puddles are perhaps residue related to that action.

Shiny and comical, the puddles share a clownish and absurd aspect with the rest of the elements of



the scene. The patterns and color schemes are intense and severe, the physical aspect is almost grotesque, and none of these elements seem quite natural. There is a self-conscious aspect to the installation, as though it were aware of its own absurdity. And how could it not? Oversized tacks, faux finishing, phony wood grain—imaginary elements blending in with the real—all seem self-consciously fake.

So even if the work remains in a zone beyond rational understanding, beyond our ability to pin a specific narrative to these elements, it effectively appeals to the inarticulate and emotional within us. If it offers us a certain quotient of visual glee—and it does—it likewise brings to the surface darker, more ominous sensations. These darker undercurrents are the transgressive elements actively operating within the work.

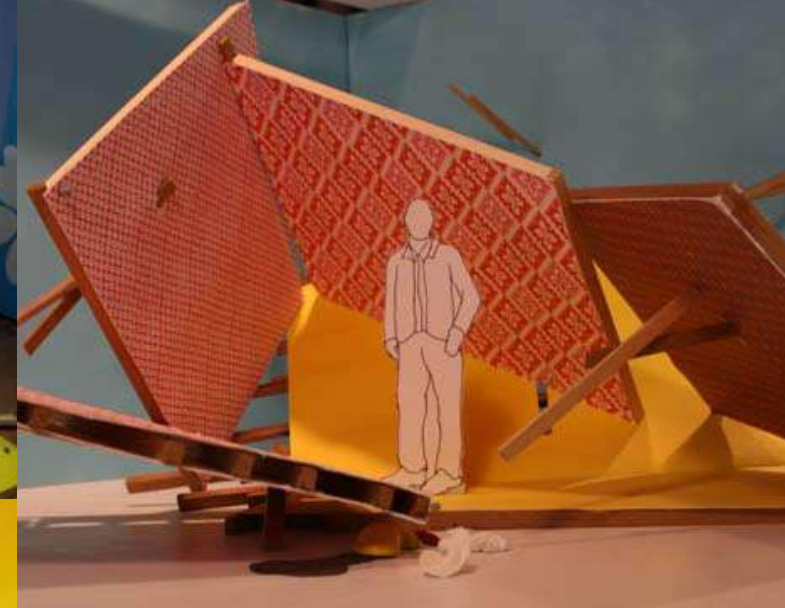
In some sense, everything about the piece is transgressive. It upsets expectations about form, balance, and color. It emphatically suggests a narrative while undercutting its own potential for narrative resolution. It presents an exploded view of a moment yet fails to reveal any information about the moment. Cumulatively, it may be reiterating a broader truth about transgression, about its essential participation in any mode of transformation.

Change and rupture are essential to transformation, vital ingredients within the schemata of possibility.

There is no other last moment...there is only *this* moment.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator





Reynolds received her MFA from Maine College of Art with a concentration in Studio Arts and Critical Theory, and her BFA from Syracuse University in Art Video. She has taught at the Maine College of Art, New Hampshire Institute of Art, Chester College of New England, and the University of New England and has been a guest lecturer at the Museum School of Fine Arts, Boston, The Massachusetts College of Art and the Maine College of Art.

Reynolds has exhibited her work most recently in the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, MA (2008); the Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA; Vox Populi, Philadelphia, PA; ArtSpace, New Haven, CT and the Firehouse Gallery, Burlington, VT. She is the recipient of numerous awards, such as the NH Charitable Foundation, Greater Piscataqua Region, Artist Advancement Fellowship, the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation Artist Resource Fellowship and the NH State Council for the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship.

Reynolds lives and works in Newmarket, New Hampshire with her husband Pete Lankford and their son, Soren.

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