

ALEX SCHWEDER / ROILING INFILL

13 NOVEMBER 2008–3 JANUARY 2009



In this solo exhibition at The Warehouse Gallery, Seattle-Berlin based Alex Schweder presents two works: A video projection "Jealous Poché" (2004), and an architectural project "Snowballing Doorway" (2007). Both challenge definitions of architecture through their sculptural interpretations of space. An architect by training, Schweder collaborated with a scientist for the first work, which focuses on the relationship of architecture and the human body. His work also crosses over into sculpture and performance art.



Exhibition checklist:

Jealous Poché, 2004
DVD projection
7:30 minutes
Courtesy the artist

above
Snowballing Doorway, 2007
Vinyl and Fan-Blown Air
Courtesy of the artist and APT

THE WAREHOUSE GALLERY
Syracuse University
350 West Fayette Street
Syracuse, NY 13202

The Warehouse Gallery is an international contemporary art venue of the SUArt Galleries at Syracuse University. The gallery's mission is to present exhibitions and programs by artists whose work engages the community in a dialogue regarding the role the arts can play in illuminating critical issues of our life and times.

GALLERY STAFF

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Interview with Alex Schweder

Anja Chávez: Why did you choose to exhibit these two works (Snowballing Doorway and Jealous Poché) at the Warehouse Gallery?

Alex Schweder: Well, the initial idea came when I saw the two columns at The Warehouse Gallery. I knew this would be the perfect location for a piece that I was working on, Snowballing Doorway. The windowless former vault was also ideal for showing a DVD projection, Jealous Poché, which had always been a counterpoint to the inflatable work I make now, but until now they were never seen together. The exhibited works do not look alike, but they are about the same thing, an architectural space that is churning over on itself, rolling. Both pieces have the same kind of urge towards volatility as opposed to permanence.

AC: Could you talk about the importance of Snowballing Doorway within your work?

AS: Snowballing Doorway fits in a trajectory of thinking that I have been pursuing for the last three years called "Performance Architecture". This piece started with a desire for viewers to interact with a set of architectural instructions that change over time. People know how to act with a doorway without any signage because it is part of familiar architectural language. At a certain point you can walk through Snowballing Doorway, and at another point your passage is blocked. Again, the gallery's architecture is perfect for this piece with a threshold of a very similar size just in front of it. You have the stable vault doorway contrasting the volatile Snowballing Doorway, and a viewer can compare the two experiences.

AC: Often our audiences are interested in finding out "how did the artist do it?" What is your work process? How did you start? Did you do any preparatory drawings? Do you use computer models? What can you reveal?

AS: My working process involves failure. For Snowballing Doorway the initial idea was very clear, I wanted to make forms that pushed on each other vertically, thereby enacting a displacement. After I had this idea I made technical drawings that were sent to a fabricator who makes inflatable bouncy houses. I first installed this piece at the Aqua Art Miami art fair (2007) and the piece did not work. The original idea was to locate the fans between the two forms and have the same volume of air pass from one form to the other, but this weight set the piece off balance and modifications were needed. That is how this piece developed, by being open to the fact that, by definition, experiments sometimes fail. Even during this installation I was modifying the piece based on what I thought would work but didn't. I am really satisfied with what is on exhibit, but this is a different piece than the one I originally thought of. I know there will be other opportunities to play out ideas that came up or fell away during the making and installation of this work.

AC: Snowballing Doorway involves major construction that is not immediately evident. Do you do this intentionally?

AS: Absolutely, I mean I have very specific

things that I want viewers to focus on such as the movement between two forms, and I want everything else to kind of fall away. I really want the initial experience to just be sensual and bodily. I want a viewer to get lost in the flux of these two forms passing air back and forth to each other, and finally the viewer's own movement through it.

AC: You may not want the viewer to see this, but when you take a step back and look at Snowballing Doorway and see the construction around it, the way it blends in with the architecture of the Warehouse Gallery is beautiful.

AS: Well I hope that it feels like a part of the architecture. I mean the frame around it is not the piece and is not the architecture, but rather something between the two.

AC: But it's important.

AS: Yes, it constrains the inflatable which wants to pop out, to be somewhere other than that frame. This part of the installation has to be carefully designed both conceptually and pragmatically. I want a viewer to feel like the inflatable is just about to pop out or threaten them. If it is too constrained, there is no threat; in



contrast an inadequate frame will have the piece literally crushing a viewer. This is the difference between a sublime experience and a terrifying one.

AC: How important is it to you that people know that you have a background as an architect?

AS: It is not that important to me. Many people may know of Maya Lin; from what I know she is very insistent on her role as either an architect or an artist. For me this is not a productive distinction. It is all about a study of space, and I hope to add to each category. A lot of what I do uses function, or behavior, as an artistic medium. By making the instructions for that behavior interpretive rather than prescriptive is where I think my work starts to approach something that we normally call art because it requires some questioning on the part of someone who enters that space.

AC: How important are the titles of your works to you?

AS: My titles are important and part of the piece. What I want in a title is not to illustrate what people already see, but open up something else for them. Snowballing is a term from the pornography industry, having to do with passing one fluid back and forth, bodily fluids, and I want people to go there. I want people to think about fluid. I want them to think about air in this case, which is not sexually charged ... until you frame it right. If you provide a context to see it differently, like I'm doing here, it also changes the perception of the context it is in, the architecture.

Anja Chávez with Alex Schweder
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