Edward Mayer: Tracing Change
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WORK FROM 1975 TO 2005

January 25 – April 3, 2005

Essays by Ian Berry and Corinna Ripps Schaming

University Art Museum
University at Albany, State University of New York
Introduction

It is a pleasure to present Edward Mayer: Tracing Change, a dazzling overview of a distinguished career that spans several decades and the reflection of a body of work that has been featured in solo and group exhibitions throughout this country and abroad.

Great thanks go to Ian Berry and Corinna Ripp Schamnig, both of whom have written eloquently about Ed Mayer’s work. They have helped us see it in new ways, connecting it to the work of others and to the many threads of contemporary art practice that weave through Mayer’s process. Zheng Hu’s elegant catalogue design captures the energy of Mayer’s work and mirrors the depth and complexity of his investigations of line and form.

I would like to recognize the rest of the museum staff for their excellence in handling the many details involved in the presentation of an exhibition of this scale. Jeffrey Wright-Sedam was our tireless preparator, and Naomi Lewis adeptly served as registrar for the exhibition. As always, the collections staff—Wren Panzeila, Nicholas Lue, and Ford Bailey—lent their collegial support to the tasks at hand. Joanne Lue and Patty Van Alstyne kept us on track administratively. We were blessed with wonderful student assistants—Darcie Abbatiamo, Sairam Chinnam, Ryan Parr, Matthew Tieman, joined by Cynthia Zellner—who assisted through the entire installation process. I am indebted to all for their good natures and hard work on this (as on every) project.

I want to thank Ed Mayer for sharing the magnitude of his vision, his attention to detail, and his generous spirit of cooperation at all points along the way. As in Portolan, his 1986 installation in the museum, Mayer has thoughtfully responded to the majestic architecture of our exhibition space. His visual dialogue with its lines and volumes—at times harmonic, at other times in playful counterpoint—made the project engaging and exciting for all involved. His unwavering efforts have ensured that both the exhibition and this publication are everything they could and should be.

I am grateful to the University at Albany Alumni Association and the College of Arts and Sciences for their generous support of this exhibition and catalogue, and to University Auxiliary Services for underwriting the opening reception. Our grateful thanks go to the Office of the President and the Office of the Provost, the generous and supportive presences behind all of our programs and exhibitions.

Janet Riker
Director
University Art Museum

1 Studio installation view, 2004
“My art springs from my desire to have things in the world which would otherwise never be there. By nature, I am a materialist, an admirer of Lucretius. It is exactly these impingements upon our sense of touch and so forth that I’m interested in. The sense of one’s being in the world confirmed by the existence of things and others in the world. It has to do with life as opposed to death and a feeling of the true existence of the world in one’s self.”

— Carl Andre

Toward the end of John Kirk’s book *The Shaker World: Art, Life, Belief*, the author suggests that Carl Andre’s 1970s Minimalist sculpture “establishes control of the materials, the space, and the viewers.” He goes on to describe Andre’s floor pieces: “Like a stretch of railroad ties, his units seem both dismissable and inevitable. They are ordinary and shockingly present…a natural part of the environment.” Kirk then wrestles with Andre’s assertion that his work has nothing in common with Shaker design or practice, and although Kirk gets the last word in this version of the argument, the artist is lauded for his tough-mindedness and his ability to produce “mind-changing visual experiences by juxtaposing the known in new ways.”

Ed Mayer, like Andre, is a serial modularist—an artist who has worked for over thirty years with a carefully distilled set of constraints, including materials, process, and time, to build sculpture. From monumental to intimate, his work evolves as new opportunities allow expanding permutations from space to space. Mayer doesn’t fit into any one established artistic category, although he is a peer to many who also emerged in the post-Minimalist 1970s and 80s. One of the reasons his work resists easy categorization is his tough-mindedness—his reliance on a private solitary practice that centers around a continually growing taxonomy of forms and structures. Like Andre’s sculpture and Shaker design, Mayer’s work uses repeating units, elemental materials, absence of decoration, and a strong concentration on work to create elegant objects for use. Use for Mayer is akin to what Kirk describes as “control of the viewers”: a set of objects in a space that we walk around, look through, and measure ourselves against, more like a stage set for curious exploration than something inevitable or shocking.
Mayer's work begins with a site. *Site-specific* is a term often used to describe sculpture of a certain kind, but Mayer's work is slightly and critically different. It can more accurately be described as *site-selected*, meaning that he comes with a cache of components and a corresponding set of actions in place before entering a given space. Site becomes the focus as his established parameters are considered in relation to the space. This is the point where Mayer's project veers away from the more rule-driven projects of Andre or Sol Lewitt, or some works by Robert Morris and Donald Judd. While their work can begin with a written set of descriptors and rarely departs from them regardless of the results, Mayer's pre-determined variants allow for more natural (and, at times, more emotional) responses to certain environments.

One source for Mayer's art can be found in his memories of an inspirational year in Rome in 1973–74. He had received his M.F.A. six years earlier from the University of Wisconsin, and the trip was part of a teaching appointment for the study-abroad program of Tyler School of Art, Temple University. During visits to ancient sites and cathedrals filled with marble sculpture, tile mosaics, and stone buttresses, questions arose: why do some things remain? Why do we care for some objects over others? The challenge to his artwork was clear: how does one make something that will survive?

Before the trip, Mayer's sculpture was beginning to gravitate toward these ideas—most notably with a series of colored solid shapes that could be displayed in different ways based on different situations. An important work from this time was the outdoor installation *Floating Circles* (1973; see figure 2). The piece consisted of over 100 Formica discs, discarded cutouts from vanity sink tops that were lashed together in a grid with nylon rope. The net of circles was then floated out and anchored down near the southern edge of Lake Michigan. As one looked from the shore, the seemingly weightless blanket swayed and dipped with the waves, never staying fixed in one position. This one-week installation disappeared when a storm took the work away at night. Many details found in Mayer’s later projects can be traced to this early experiment, from the use of pre-existing components to the goal of an artwork that changes over time and reacts to its place.

Upon his return to Ohio from Rome in 1974, Mayer completed the final work in his series *Castel Nuovo* (1974; see figures 26 and 27). This series consisted of laminated geometric forms connected by hinges and blocks made of interlocking sections that allowed the artist to reconfigure them into a variety of positions based on location. The puzzle-like works began to answer his questions from Italy, for the sculpture could change and become newly born depending on the specific exchange with a site. But limits remained. As he experimented with new permutations and new materials for this series, the questions persisted.

In 1976, Mayer created *Broken Mandala* (see figure 28), a large cube constructed of stacked wood lath. One top corner appeared to be cut away, revealing an almond-shaped mandala form. This pivotal work marked a break from the making of permanent discrete objects to a way of working that would propel him through the next two decades. Not only had he found the right material for his project; he had also found his construction process. This allowed him to build and rebuild without fixing any one sculpture in a given space. It also revealed the transparency of each of the structures. Until this point, Mayer had built dense forms, but the new work resulted in open structures where the internal volume became visible. The process also yielded a hold-your-breath fragility that had not existed before: after the artist was finished with his sensitive and precise stacks, it was up to viewers to care for them. Mayer’s solution caused viewers to recognize that transaction in a way in which they weren’t often directly confronted.

The root process of Mayer’s work after 1976 remained constant from piece to piece. He would simply stack pre-cut lengths of raw wood lath to build architectural forms. He used no fasteners of any kind for these works, relying on weight and the ready-made rough surfaces of the lath for their strength. In this process, Mayer found the best answer to his questions. He wrote of the works in 1979. “The object is dematerialized despite its physical presence. This notion is reiterated in the basic construction process, the reliance on gravity, and the vulnerability of the object; the sculpture achieves permanence through an act of renewal, not through resistance.” 11 Although the concept of the “dematerialized” artwork had entered the vocabulary of contemporary art through the writings of Lucy Lippard and the avant-garde activities of such artists as Lawrence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth, and Douglas Huebler, *renewal* was the key word in Mayer’s statement. Although he was keenly aware of those revolutionary provocations—using his own body’s limits, like reach and sight lines, to create sculptural boundaries—he was steadfast in his new way of working, which has more in common with architects and sculptors of the past than the current trends of time-based art. What was important for Mayer during this time was to practice conditioning himself to think in terms of space while insisting on classical aesthetics: beauty in both order and form. He was not satisfied with the often-dry outcomes of conceptual experiments. His work aspired to a conversation between the engineering of ancient structures and the simple economy of nature.

Works such as *Glide* and *Cathedral* (both 1978; see figures 30 and 29) relied on symmetrical stacks that built to a center height. Like the formation of the earth’s terrain, these works appeared as though they might have been formed by geological shift. Both works were made from the same bundle of sticks, an equal number of components that were stacked from the outside in, with the final piece inserted into the center apex. This keystone engineering refers to a principle of architectural form seen in Gothic arches, an architecture that Mayer has long admired.

Mayer continued to build larger and larger sculptures, testing the limits of his newfound method. The works quickly filled the spaces he was given, and the insides of these structures began to emerge as critical to their experience. Works such as *Chicago Circle* and *Quattro Venti* (both 1980, see figures 36 and 40) extended to the limits of their spaces, almost touching ceilings and exterior walls. These awe-inspiring installations allowed viewers to walk through and into them—all the while letting glimpses of other areas remain visible through the perforated slits of space between rows of stacked lath. Light continued to play a role in the experience, heightening the sense of transparency, fragility, and
weight of his built environments. He experimented outdoors as well, with pieces like Sisyphusia (1980; see figure 39) and Zabriskie Pin (1981; see figure 43).

In 1987, Mayer built Quadri (see figures 59 and 60) outdoors at Socrates Sculpture Park in Long Island City, New York. The Egyptian-tomb-like sculpture revealed an open rectangle in its center. As one walked into it, the grit of the waterfront was blocked to allow only the sky above to be observed—a moment of sanctuary in the city. In 1984, Mayer wrote, “[E]arly works are leveled to make way for the new. There is carry-over; elements are preserved, retained and rebuilt from one situation to the next, as if I’m continuously working on the same sculpture. I have an urgent need for things to endure, so I rebuild the pieces over and over again.” Just as the Japanese Shinto temple at Ise has been rebuilt on the same plot of land every twenty years for sixteen centuries, Mayer had found his answer to the Italian questions.

In the ensuing years, Mayer constructed many works with a regular cast of walls, urns, and portals to create labyrinthine installations. 1986’s Portolan (see figures 55–57) was a precursor to his current installations at the University Art Museum. In the expansive Portolan, he created rings, passageways, and doorways through which viewers could move around, suggesting new vistas and pathways as one navigated a familiar space. A small detail found within the interior of one of the large components was a cluster of hoover Styrofoam cups cut from white coffee cups. They were gently suspended by air from a duct in the large gallery. The intimate gesture recalled the outdoor Floating Circles from 1970. Also in 1986, Mayer represented the United States, along with Terry Allen and Paul Thek, at the São Paulo Biennial with his installation Ultima Thule (see figure 58). Sited near a towering wall of glass in the pavilion, the piece shimmered with light during the day. A heightened sense of tension was achieved through the inclusion of a single urn inside the larger of the two expansive enclosures. The urn shape would reappear many times throughout the next fifteen years, most notably in 1988’s Pterokiste (see figure 64), in which an entire gallery space was marked with more than a dozen like forms amidst a tall forest of lath columns. Some were sculptural continuations of ceiling-mounted air vents, while others were sleeves of lath that sheathed the room’s structural columns.

Mayer added “walkers” and large spheres to his vocabulary in the early 1990s. Through the addition of new material and an economy of hardware, these forms seeded installations such as Synedoché (1995; see figures 68 and 69) and Callipgia (1993; see figure 63). A “walker” is an invention of Mayer’s that utilizes a small patch of wire mesh to hold open splayed “legs,” formed by slicing partway through a squared column of pine and leaving a solid end holding all the legs together in one piece. The broom-like figures can be easily moved around a given site by the artist, and like the urns before them function as characters that populate gallery spaces.

Sculptors of Mayer’s generation who emerged in the 1960s and revealed an affinity with his work of this period include Judy Pfaff, Ursula von Rydingsvard, and Tony Cragg. The British-born Cragg is best known for his carefully organized selections of found objects, such as plastic bottles, scraps of building materials, and glass. The process that Cragg employs for finding and sorting objects by color, form, or material is akin to something that Mayer has been doing on one wall of his Albany, New York studio for many years as a warm-up exercise. Felicitously found “pre-made” objects, from discarded plastic baskets to steel tomato cages to magnetic videotape to grilled thick vines, find their way to the wall. His rearrangement of this ever-changing cast of objects is a form of “taking inventory” or sketching. Although none of the arrangements have ever provided a specific plan for a sculpture, the exercise of grouping and categorizing trained his eye toward a new series of works started in the mid-1990s.

For 1993’s White City (see figure 65), Mayer wrapped every surface of his found objects with a layer of white tape. The obsessive action transformed the recognizable objects into ghosts—an absence as much as a presence. Not coloring per se, the white tape performed a renewing function for the artist and in turn unified the new combination of wrapped objects. This repetitive activity allowed Mayer to claim the already-designed objects for his own, creating a repeating module as in his previous work.

Armed with a new vocabulary, Mayer employed large accumulations of these elements within several large-scale environments, such as Linear Accelerator (1994; see figures 70–72) and Line Dancer (1995; see figures 73 and 74). Like loose drawings, these installations centered around line as much as his earlier constructions relied on form. 1997’s Diastoline (see figures 81 and 82) was perhaps the most elegant and reduced of these installations. The work featured a single looping path of wood that snaked through the long gallery space, recalling the traced path of a ribbon at the end of a kite as it looped back and forth between the gallery walls, ceiling, and floor. At one end of the flowing arcs stood a careful stack of steel mesh columns. The tubes were stacked end to end to form the skinnny skeleton of a modern pyramid. This installation, as others before and after, combined several important aspects of Mayer’s continuous project of arranging material on a provisional basis. Mayer occupies lent spaces for a time, building installations that provoke reactions from all our senses. This comes from the accumulat-ed wisdom and understanding of how we feel while negotiating a space. Through order and structure, he reveals a deep awareness and empathy for both architecture and site.

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1 Carl Andre, interviewed by Phyllis Tuchman in Artforum, vol. 4, no. 8 (December 1965): 46–47.
Edward Mayer, Restless Formalist

Corinna Ripps Schaming

Edward Mayer is a restless formalist who is both unable to accept the orthodoxies of the discipline and unwilling to give up its rigors. As a result, his most recent installations (which fall into two distinct categories, the geometrically ordered and the unruly) push him even further away from reconciling these opposing aesthetic impulses. Instead he conflates and liberates his reliance on formalist principles to explore an expanded vocabulary of forms that allows him to redefine how these principles are applied.

Modularity, linearity, transparency, accumulation, and renewability have been the hallmarks of Mayer’s thirty year career as an installation artist, and they remain central to his work. He is always pondering the temporal nature of human endeavor: why persist in ordering the immediate world when chaos surrounds us? His responses to this question have led him to create site-specific work that examines the “in-between spaces” and the margins of a given architectural construction.

Mayer’s most recent installations suggest a sage tolerance of the challenges of imposed boundaries and a willingness to observe and learn from them rather than fight against them. His four new site-specific installations at the University Art Museum create a dialogue between the space and the finished work that suggests a parallel to his own quest to reconcile his formalist principles with a fractious world. He riff on the eccentricities of the museum’s Late Modernist architecture—its arches, columns, doorframes, window bays, ventilation system, and mezzanine level—and, as in his previous installations, everything is considered in relation to everything else. By calling attention to the museum’s more prosaic architectural aspects and by diverting conventional paths through it, in the end what completes the installations is the space itself.

Revealing his artistic process through an increasing transparency is one way Mayer makes his quest visually palatable. At once lucid and measured, the installations are unflinchingly wrought. As he pulls together new combinations from his ongoing lexicon of forms, he simultaneously embraces and rejects their origins. Many found objects and factory-produced materials that were key elements in earlier installations reappear here in new guises, but only after undergoing careful scrutiny and relentless modification.

In three of the four installations, Mayer stakes a firm claim in the formalist camp. Blōculus, the first of these three related works, is an...
ethereal, transparent, rectangular block-form that occupies the museum’s central space on the first floor. Made out of metal tomato-frame hoops, the entire piece measures 12 by 18 by 18 feet. Eight frames are fastened together with zip ties to form a spherical center with megaphone-shaped arms radiating outward from the core. These frames are connected edge-to-edge until a rectangular block is formed out of 144 core elements, each measuring 3 by 3 feet. In all, there are 1,152 tomato frames: Mayer’s precise mathematical calculations have been calibrated to fit the parameters of the space.

Mayer intentionally breaks the museum’s gridded floor plan by his angled placement of Bloccolius, which echoes the angled position of the university’s newly constructed Administration Building in view just outside the museum’s windows. He has also matched the height of Bloccolius with the level of the museum’s mezzanine floor—an implied extension of space that is a visual foil suggesting both closure and shaky ground. Once again Mayer creates a dialogue between pre-existing conditions within an architectural framework and his temporary disruption of those conditions.

In Eight Part Sequence, situated on the museum’s second floor, he again uses tomato frames to form a different configuration, in which six frames are squeezed together to form a dense conical section. When combined, these sections become increasingly triangular. The progression is played out eight times, allowing Mayer’s numerically predetermined series to reach its own logical conclusion. Douzaire, the last of these three pieces, follows a similar serial methodology. Twelve stainless steel circular clothing racks are positioned in front of the twelvelight window bays that run along the north side of the museum’s second floor. The ring of each rack is set at six feet, an intentionally ridiculous extension that obfuscates the rack’s original function as a display unit. Sprung from the center of each rack are four transparent cylindrical towers made out of zip-tied galvanized hardware cloth, each tower measuring 18 feet in height.

The element of transparency is central to all three installations. Bloccolius, an invented title that combines the words “block” and “oculi,” alludes to both the work’s form and intent. The very combination of these words hints at Mayer’s conflicted relationship to formalist principles: a hunkered-down reliance on predetermined mathematical configurations gives way to an eye-opening revelation of new patterns and permutations that are humble to the point of banality. Commonplace tomato frames are merged to form a simultaneously flickering and expanding transparent block that demonstrates Mayer’s uncanny ability to see, in everyday objects, something remarkable that escapes the notice of others. This simple cumulative gesture results in a transformative act that subverts our relationship to his chosen materials and that shifts and expands conventional perceptions of ordinary experience.

Mayer’s approach to materials has remained consistent throughout his career. Rooted in Minimalist and process art practices that center on the artist’s physical identification with his materials, Mayer investigates how, through subtle permutations and intense accumulation, he can amplify the structural possibilities inherent in a given material and develop a homogenous system that will eventually give rise to a struc-
ture. He allows himself time to get to know a material’s limitations and possibilities, either depending on or defying its physical properties until, through finely calculated serial progressions, the material takes on a transcendent quality and a breakthrough occurs. He then builds his structures by the repetition of modular forms and by visual placement until a pattern emerges, creating equations that aren’t closed but infinite.

While earlier constructions exploited the saturated golden-browns of wood lath to give a worked added visual texture, Mayer’s newest work relies on the shimmering silver transparency of metallic hardware cloth. In Bloccolius, Eight Part Sequence, and Douzaire, he demonstrates his interest in creating linear patterns that allow him to play with this transparency. Douzaire’s twelve gridded steel towers stand sentinel in front of the museum’s second-floor windows; like the hexagonal galleries of Jorge Luis Borges’s Library of Babel, these diaphanous towers scale toward the ceiling until they seem to dematerialize from view. Mayer’s expanded forms take on dual readings: they are at once ethereal fortresses and geometric filigrees. Together their insubstantially conveys the weight of infinity.

Mayer’s fourth installation emanates from a different aesthetic construct. General Dynamics (named, in part, after the defense conglomerate) is a chaotic forcefield made from discarded objects tightly bound in white surveyor’s tape. A trellis form activates a relatively dead space on the museum’s first floor and provides the shaky wellspring for lawn chairs, picnic tables, umbrella stands, bed frames, coat racks, and twisted branches that spill forth onto the mezzanine above. In heavy competition with the museum’s rectilinear space, the found objects forms a dizzying expansion on both floors that is precarious, elegant, and encroaching. Foregoing the geometric permutations of his other installations, Mayer throws caution to the wind—sort of.

In General Dynamics, Mayer gives palpability to the guts of his process. The metaphorical “dynamics” of the title conjures up visions of movement, change, growth, activity—indeed, in this work the unruly world of accumulated objects becomes an environment in which disposable artifacts are reconsidered for their potential to become something else. The functionless discards of consumer culture—the attic accumulations passed over at tag sales and left curbside with a “free” sign attached—are what pull Mayer away from pursuing an art practice based strictly on formal terms, because he is determined to claim these found items as his own. He does this by wrapping them in white surveyor’s tape, offsetting their incongruous origins and neutralizing their contours. He allows them to merge with each other in a reconfigured dense mass that can no longer be reduced to identifiable parts. A broken chair leg and twisted tree branch here, an old bedpost there—many of the components are recycled from past installations, taken on a layered history that renews their existence in a hundred different ways. This attempt at preservation is a poignant and admittedly futile attempt to control the ravages of nature and time. But at the core of these bewildering configurations are the deeper recesses of measured thought and action.

Mayer’s insistence on wrapping everything in a shroud of white is an intentional way of distancing the viewer, yet it works as a visually
unifying element akin to Sol LeWitt’s white cube structures from the 1970s. The associations with whiteness are as vast and various as those of any natural or man-made found fragment, but here the overwhelming shower of whiteness takes on spiritual dimensions like those elucidated by Melville in Moby-Dick. Like Ishmael, for whom “the whiteness of the whale” suggests contradictory meanings as well as the possibility of nothing at all, in every Mayer installation this same untenable void looms beneath the surface. Ultimately these purifying efforts undermine, rather than galvanize, his own relationship to formalist principles, and the question begs to be asked: is the site an area of dynamic interaction, or a void waiting to be filled?

On view at the University Art Museum for the first time is a startlingly rich compendium of photographs in which Mayer documents vestiges of human endeavor at its most humble and innocuous. Mayer’s interest in this subject, which has occupied his attention since 1969, provides clues to his ultimate artistic quest. These photographs, taken both close to home and around the globe, include snow-covered tomato frames in his garden; piled stones in Village des Bories, France; stacked terracotta bricks and fish traps in northeastern Brazil and terracotta roofing tiles in Yugoslavia; corn cribs in Canada; tilled fields in Texas; rolled snow fencing in New Jersey; expandable traffic barriers in Paris; apple orchards in Washington; firewood piles in Maine; stacks of wooden pallets in Buffalo and stove wood in Germany’s Black Forest; and so on. This atlas of human endeavor represents Mayer’s efforts to capture and lend enduring resonance to the overlooked mechanisms by which we give meaning to the world. His decision to exhibit a portion of his archive in a grid of fifty-five images is in keeping with his preference for a formalist mode of display. The images are almost always indicative of a measured and ordered approach to controlling the natural environment, but they also hint at the nagging uncertainties that lurk behind the ordering of one’s universe so completely.

For Mayer, inventing ordered systems out of quotidian fragments and discovering their potential for endless renewal remains a palatable aesthetic response to the world and his experience of it. Taken together, his installations and his ancillary photographic project provide a meaningful visual construct by which to consider the plight of the self in a contemporary society where social structures are unstable, boundaries shift in directions that are neither controllable nor escapable, and an ordered universe and a centered self become the illusory domains of reactionary politicians and self-help gurus. Coming to artistic terms with these uncertainties is what makes Edward Mayer, the formalist, so restless.

5. Osuna, 2005
Chrome steel stands, welded wire cylinders, plastic ties
18’ x 3’ x 58’
ABOVE AND UPPER RIGHT:
6-7 Bloculus, 2005
Stainless steel frames, plastic ties
12’ x 18’ x 18’

LOWER RIGHT:
8 Installation view
9-12
General Dynamics, 2006
Coated steel shelving, vinyl tape, found objects, plastic ties
Dimensions variable
TOP:
14 Walkers, 1989–2005
Wood and steel grids
Dimensions variable

MIDDLE AND BOTTOM:
13 Seventyeight, 2004
Steel tomato frames, ring clips
approx. 11’ x 11’ x 5’

15-16 Eight Part Sequence, 2005
Steel tomato frames, plastic ties
Dimensions variable
Exhibition Checklist

Blocula, 2005
Steel tomato frames, plastic ties
12 x 18 x 18 feet

Duos, 2005
Chrome steel stands, welded wire cylinders, plastic ties
18 x 3 x 58 feet

General Dynamics, 2005
Coated steel shelving, vinyl tape, found objects, plastic ties
Dimensions variable

Eight Part Sequence, 2005
Steel tomato frames, plastic ties
Dimensions variable

Ums, 1981–2005
Stacked wood lath
Dimensions variable

Walkers, 1988–2005
Wood and steel grids
Dimensions variable

Seventyweight, 2004
Steel tomato frames, ring clips
Approx. 11 x 11 x 5 feet

Observations, 1973–2004
50 color photographs, 8 x 10 inches

Sympoiste, 1986
Installation at Greene Gallery, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York
4 black and white documentary photographs

Clicking Circles, 1986–2005
Styrofoam circles, 6 x 6 feet

Portolan, 1985
Installation at University Art Museum, University at Albany, Albany, New York
4 working drawings, pencil and pen, 8 1/2 x 11 inches
4 black and white documentary photographs, 8 x 10 inches
Documentary video of Portolan on 4 minotars

Suite of 8 black and white lithographs, 30 x 22 inches

Giza, 1979
Spahi, 1979
M.S. Lu, 1979
Bi-Lateral, 1978
Quasi-Lateral, 1978
Broken Mandala, 1978
Spiral, 1978
Spike Pits, 1978

Castel Nuovo, 1974
Plastic laminas over wood
25 x 25 x 25 inches and dimensions variable

18 Model, 1968–1976
Wood
Dimensions variable

Model of Castel Nuovo, 1975
Wood
5 x 5 x 6 inches and dimensions variable

17 Observations, 1977–2004
8 x 10 inch color photographs
Tracing Change
I have considered giving my stacked lath sculptures the name: Open Enclosures as a means of confirming to others the characteristics of volume and void, external and internal, and transparent mass simultaneously present and most essential to me, in each sculpture. Providing a name or definition to my work, however, reduces the importance I place on the physical process of building each sculpture, using only gravity and the rough-textured wood surface for stability, and makes specific something which should remain more elusive.

The spaces in the sculptures, those between each successive layer of lath, and that larger interior void which grows along with the vertical development of the piece are what give shape to the whole; this space physically lightens the mass and permit the transmission of light into and through. I like the way the transparency dematerializes the object; I like the way a system helps determine each piece; I like the way they have to be dismantled and rebuilt as a way of making them permanent; I like the obsessiveness of it.


Isak Dinesen addresses herself to ideas of structure and support, dimensionality and equilibrium; ambition and effort, success and failure, perfection and pattern and dark and light in her short story, The Wasp. I respond strongly to the poignant sculptural references evoked in the following passage:

"We fish are upheld and supported on all sides. We lean confident and harmoniously upon our element. We move in all dimensions, and whatever course we take, the mighty waters out of reverence for our virtue change shape accordingly.

"We have no hands, so we cannot construct anything at all, and are never tempted by vain ambition to alter anything whatever in the universe of the Lord. We sow not and toil not; therefore no estimates of ours will turn out wrong, and no expectations fail. The greatest amongst us in their spheres have reached perfect darkness. And the pattern of the universe we read with ease, because we see it from below."

—from the catalogue for a traveling exhibition of work by National Endowment for the Arts Regional Fellowship Recipients, 1978
The interaction of matter and void produces a transparency which allows for the simultaneous experience of exterior, interior and opposite space. The object is dematerialized despite its physical presence. This notion is reiterated in the basic construction process, the reliance on gravity, and the vulnerability of the object; the sculpture achieves permanence through an act of renewal, not through resistance. Any value it may have is independent of any material preciousness.

The alusiveness, my own inability to find specificity in spite of a precise and definite presence, is what I address myself to through my sculpture.

—From Merkling exhibition catalogue, Ohio University, Lancaster Gallery, 1979, Lancaster, Ohio

It is more through the process of stacking and layering that I came to see my work as architectural. There is a floor plan made up of lath lines describing simple geometries. The structure evolves vertically and forms walls that make enclosures; there are openings that become entrances.

The lath holds itself together by its own weight. The structure stands on its forms and describes its own visual logic—from without and within. It stands for as long as intended.

Completion is never achieved in spite of all conclusions.

—From The Museum of Art at the University of California, exhibition catalogue, Visual Arts Center, California State University, 1980, Fullerton, California

40 Quotidien, 1980
Stacked wood lath, 6' x 17' x 30'
Zabriskie Gallery, New York

41 GuHa, 1980
Stacked wood lath, 8' x 10' x 9'
City Beautiful Project, Dayton, Ohio

42 GuHan detail

43 Zapatka Co., 1981
Stacked wood
Private collection

44 Savages, 1982
Stacked wood lath
Neville Hall, Chicago, Illinois

45 Eleven, 1982
Stacked wood lath
Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

46 Eleven

47 Architext, 1983
Stacked wood lath
Hartford Art School Joseph P. Gallery, Hartford, Connecticut

48 Styro New, 1984
Stacked wood lath
Madison Art Center, Madison, Wisconsin

49 One Way, 1984
Stacked wood lath
leaning

50 One Winter May, 1984
Stacked wood lath

Cardozo Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
There is no mystery in how I work; everything should be self-evident: the material, the method, the fragility, the space. I want things to be clear and direct. But each construction/reconstruction strengthens and weakens, reveals and conceals, enlightens and confounds and the familiar appears unfamiliar again.

Like reverse entropy.

Something inevitable occurs: Order/Disorder/Order. The work, the piece, the idea, particularizes the general, carves something singular and specific from a repeated line, endorses three dimensions of space as well as three dimensions of time.

Repeated elements, repeated structures in different locations. Something left off the end and added to the beginning. Permanence through renewal.

So I want to be clear, and it must balance, and it has to stand on its own.

—From Nunc Fluens, exhibition catalogue, Mattress Factory, 1995, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

My work is an affirmation of routine
repetition
newness
transformability.

Wood lath is a readily available material.
It is a module which serves me as
a unit of measure: determining height
breadth
length
a measure of weight: affecting stability and balance
a unit of time: gauge of process and duration
a limit.

Paysage, constructed for the Kohler Art Center, is both a situation and a sculpture, the most recent manifestation of an ongoing series of works—all the same, all different—which achieve a degree of permanence through renewal.

All arrangements are fragile; all arrangements are provisional.

—Written for an exhibition in 1996 at the Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
The title Eightlines grows out of previous installation titles: Linear Accelerator, Line Dancer, Grid Line/Contra Nature in which “line” plays a prominent role. In much the same way, this installation grows out of all my previous work, both conceptually and physically. I have conceived of my sculpture not as a single monolith which remains constant no matter where it is shown, but rather as an amalgam of marks and appropriated objects, repetitious modules, things familiar and unfamiliar, installed so as to structure and transform the environment assigned to my use.

My sculpture is an ongoing process of self-discovery and one of revealing the obvious, to myself and to others. Each installation evolves from the previous work; new things are added, others discarded. Walking through and around the work, experiencing it visually and physically, points up its fragility. Neither preciousness nor a desire for a traditional definition of permanence play a role in my thinking, but the spontaneity of decision making does, as does a preoccupation with the ephemeral and transient. The specificity of an idea demands a specificity of order, of materials, of scale, of place. Permanence is arriving at a decision at a specific moment in the development of an idea. Permanence might be achieved through renewal.

Working with linear elements allows me to play with transparency, to have everything visible at once, to imply more than I could say, to work larger than if these lines were the perimeters and edges of planes and volumes, and to layer things, making it difficult to isolate individual components from the whole. Everything is considered in relation to every other thing, everything becomes relative, and maybe a bit uncertain.

Steel wire lines, welded into grids, formed into planes, curved into cylinders, stacked to make towers, grouped into fours, clustered and held in by chromed circles. Three groups of four circles contain the transparent cylindrical columns held together with zip ties, situated in front of the window wall, that reach toward the ceiling, and which reference the rhythms, surfaces and modules of the space they inhabit and modify. The formality of the arrangement is intentional and purposefully straightforward. Line(s) uses found and assembled units in multiple quantities, which repeat and build on each other to form large-scale structures that blur the lines between architecture, design, and sculpture.

The repetition of module reveals the familiar and the obvious and points out a cool sameness in our environments and activities that is both reassuring and unnerving.

All arrangements are provisional.

—From Open(s) Spaces, exhibition brochure, Hudson Valley Community College, 2004, Troy, New York.
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Edward Mayer
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