

Invitation and Press Release

You are cordially invited to

Opening: **Thu 1 May**
6 - 9 pm

Performance: **Sun 1 Jun**
4 pm

of “Collapse”
the 1st project in our series exploring space-reality

Aeneas Wilder, artist

exhibition continues to 1 Jun

exhibition hours: W - Su, 12 - 6 pm



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“Collapse” -- installation & performance -- Aeneas Wilder

Aeneas Wilder’s installation consists of 4000+ units of wood stacked to build a large curved wall that fills the Gallery. Its mass fills even the corners of our vision and subsumes our proprioception. It will bisect the Gallery, blocking our movements, though we’ll be able to see the areas we cannot go.

The wall is free-standing and self-balancing, so despite its scale there is the tension of its possible collapse. Indeed, the artist, in a performance, will kick its base and destroy the installation. What was once a monument becomes a random distribution of sticks.

The work sets out to ask, will we remember the wall as it once was, or as its final manifestation? Do we mourn or venerate? Is it the Hoover dam we think of, or Percy Bysshe Shelley’s ruined Ozymandias?

Over 2008, AUGUST art will be hosting 3 projects exploring space and how it affects our interpretation of what is real. For more information of the series, please go to our website or contact the Gallery.

Introduction to the projects

The Doris Salcedo installation “Shibboleth” at the Tate Modern consists of a large crack in the floor that runs most of the length of the large turbine hall. Despite the artist’s intended reference of the relationship between the West and developing countries in the post-colonial era, and despite her protestation of irrelevance, most viewers seem drawn to the physical crack itself. They talk about feeling uncomfortable, wonder frequently how the crack was made, and many gingerly dip their toes into it. We’ve all walked past cracks in pavements with noticing, yet here was an art work, fabricated by skill, that is causing unease. Could it be worry that a fault could happen to a vast monolith like the turbine hall, that it could be irreparable, or perhaps thrill by the perceived power that could achieve that? Regardless, it seems viewers are identifying with the fault at a physical level, feeling the crack as if on their bodies.

One might not be surprised, because, as physical beings, space is integral to what is real. Yet we can now meet and keep friends virtually through Facebook, and have different identities/lives on Secondlife, and play tennis from our sitting rooms with Wii playstation. These are interactions without the physical, and yet are still real.

Thus this is an interesting time to think about what space-reality means to us. Suppose Salcedo had created a “crack” in a prestigious building on Secondlife, would it have had the same impact? Or what if she caused us just to imagine a crack in the Houses of Parliament? Thus, is space just a physical dimension or does it hold something more meaningful, a manifestation of ourselves somehow? To what degree does something need to be physical for it to be real?

Curatorial Response to “Collapse”

Aeneas Wilder’s work calls to mind ruins. Through the ages, we have been fascinated by them though the motivations have not been constant. And today, why do we visit the Great Wall of China and how do we feel about the Battersea power station?

During the Renaissance, monuments, reliquaries were links to Ancient Greece and Rome. As the art and architectural theorist Antoine Chrysotome Quatremere de Quincy asked “What is the antique in Rome if not a great book whose pages have been destroyed or ripped by time, it being left to modern research to fill in the blanks, to bridge the gaps?” Ruins were for piecing together and learning from our classical past. Although as things, they were just another source of building materials and old columns, statuary were re-used.

The objects themselves weren’t venerated until the Romantic era, when they became seen as the climax of the law of nature. For despite man’s scientific rationalism and industry, all things fell back into ruin, and decay was a symbol of the aesthetic sublime. Hubert Robert’s exhibition at the Salon included works like “Imaginary view of the Gallery of the Louvre as a Ruin”, and caused Denis Diderot to say “The ideas which ruins awake in me are grand”. John Soane on completing the Bank of England buildings, commissioned paintings of them viewed as ruins.

One hundred odd years later, ruins came not be seen as a return to nature, but nature itself was being ruined. John Ruskin writing about a storm cloud over London: “This plague-cloud looks partly as if it were made of poisonous smoke; very possibly it may be: there are at least two hundred furnace chimneys in a square of two miles on either side of me...”

Though as we stepped further into modernity, Ruskin’s fear that nature was being destroyed by man was replaced by the view that the man-made was a culmination of progress, and future ruins were imagined to be a legacy of those achievements.

Today, where do we stand? Our contemporary ruins, those created in our life times, span from small derelict storefronts on high streets, to large abandoned manufacturing plants and excavated mines in less traffic-ed areas, to grand ruins like the Battersea power station... they are our Greek temples.

The myriad of photos and websites attest to their enthusiasts. Christopher Woodward, Director of Holburne Museum of Art in Bath suggests that ruins are a “dialogue between an incomplete reality and the human imagination”. Art writer Brian Dillon says that “ruins show us again... a world in which beauty (or sublimity) is sealed off, its derangement safely framed...”, that the fascination of ruins is a mourning for the loss of aesthetic itself.

For all the enthusiasts, there are also many others who ignore them. We have so many most are generic. However, this indifference is a learned response, we wish them away, because ruins haunt us. The past, however, does not confront as books of knowledge nor as romantic return to nature. It is, as a legacy of modernism, about what we have been able to build, and it is also about what we have failed. Perhaps for the devotees, that dilapidated store front is a reminder of what we were able to build, the structure and the contents therein. And for the uninterested, perhaps it is best to ignore that the store is now a failed business.