

An architectural icon visibly disintegrates under the onslaught of heavy rain.

A cable car passes endlessly and fruitlessly in and out of sight across a void.

A protest encampment appears to be vacated and left abandoned.

A zeppelin tracks through the constricted spaces of a library archive.

A viewing device reveals a glimpse of what may always be present but is normally unseen.

And through those moments five artists have made a lasting contribution to a city.



MAGNIFICENT DISTANCE

FIVE SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATIONS
WASHINGTON DC 2012

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MAGNIFICENT DISTANCE

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RICHARD HOLLINSHEAD





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METRO STOPS

RONIT EISENBACH

As an architect and artist with a particular interest in the potential of event-based work and ephemeral interventions to shift understanding of place, and to spark public dialogue about the built environment – and one who is relatively new to DC – the 5x5 festival intrigued me. The opportunity was unique, as the District is inscribed with instantly recognizable symbols of national and international significance. At the same time, the layers of the Federal city are intertwined with the lived city, an urban environment that is rich, diverse and complex, and one whose character and challenges are not unlike those of many other American cities. I was curious to see how effective the works were in situ. This essay offers both an account of my first-hand experience with these installations and an overview of the structure of the 5x5 Festival¹.

Time Stamp 1:03PM March 23rd

I waited to follow a foreigner who knew my own city – Washington DC – in a different way than I did, and in the process to reflect upon art’s potential to reshape experience and reframe understanding of the public realm. Richard Hollinshead arrived. We walked to the National Building Museum where Ben Jeans Houghton’s work Spore (Atom) was installed.

Ben Jeans Houghton Spore (Atom)

Time stamp 1:25PM Judiciary Square, Red Line

The main hall was filled with pink – pink streamers, flowers and tablecloths – in anticipation of an event in honor of the National Cherry Blossom Centennial. We climbed to an upper balcony where Spore (Atom) was located adjacent to the balcony rail, positioned in such a way that I imagined if one looked through it one might see the scene below. Whilst much heavier looking than the viewing devices found usually found at an American tourist spot, one clearly understood the invitation to look through the oculus.

I expected to see the enormous columns, the arches and the roof of the Great Hall magnified. However, the image did not appear to be magnified at all. When I looked through the machine, the cropped vista was obscured by a black sphere hovering in the image’s middle – an object that was clearly not in the space itself. By denying me the center, the sphere forced me to examine the periphery. Annoyed, I wished to push it aside, but at the same time, I became interested in this blind spot obscuring the visual field. Was I being asked to interpolate, to fill in what I couldn’t see? I noticed that while the architecture remained present in

and around the sphere, the pink decorations were absent from the image. Ironically, my view through this temporary viewfinder revealed the constant but hid the happenstance, the ephemeral, and the particular moment in which I found myself in this place.

5x5 is the first citywide festival of contemporary ephemeral art ever undertaken in Washington, DC. Developed by the District of Columbia Commission on the Arts and Humanities (DCCA). 5x5 complements DCCA’s existing public art programs, including the *Public Art Building Communities* grant scheme which offers funds to DC artists and non-profit organizations to create and install new works. The restriction that funding was for “permanent public art projects with a life span of at least five years”² has recently been lifted due to increased recognition that temporary and event-based works can often be catalytic forces in building community, promoting public dialogue and enlivening public space.

The 5x5 festival supports the *DC Creates! Public Art Program* master plan, and specifically two of the strategy’s recommendations: to “support temporary exhibitions of artwork in public spaces on a regular basis” and to “engage the curatorial community”³. The DCCA developed the *5x5 Temporary Public Art Project* with a curatorial-driven approach and a vision of “offering the city an opportunity to use art as a tool to activate and enliven publicly accessible spaces.”⁴

Isabella Streffen Hawk & Dove

Time stamp: 1:43 PM Equidistant between Metro Center and Gallery Place-Chinatown

It is a ten-minute walk from the Building Museum to Mies Van der Rohe’s Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library, the site of Isabella Streffen’s Hawk & Dove. Opened in 1972, the steel, brick and glass structure serves as a daytime respite, a shelter from the outside. The public realm of the street literally extends into and out from the library, symbolically welcoming access to knowledge. Mies’ design reinterprets both the public space of the street and that of the reading room, conflating the two. Steel columns meet and mark the property line, yet at the ground level the enclosure is set back, defining an arcade that creates a spatial overlap between interior and exterior, reading room and sidewalk. The detailing of the reading room enclosure, with glass panels spanning from ground plane to ceiling plane reinforces this continuous spatial flow.

Steffen inserted a pair of black and white translucent photographs to the full-length glazing at the East end of the MLK Memorial library. Two white inflated zeppelins, one marked "Hawk" the other "Dove", hover in the air. On one façade the photo records the flight of the zeppelins in the Library of Congress Main Hall, and on the other façade a second flight that took place in the MLK reading room, directly in front of us. When one views these images of Hawk & Dove affixed to the vertical surface of the reading room – a surface meant to disappear – one occupies this liminal crossing. The space is sandwiched by the horizontal planes of ground and roof, and stands in the spatial overlap of library and street. From within, we experience continuity between readers and city life. From without, continuity with books and library patrons. The phenomenological conditions of the library are intended to symbolically and literally reinforce the ideals of democratic public access to knowledge, but are both enriched and challenged by the presence of Steffen's images which suggest a different – perhaps more sinister – set of associations. Transparency, reflection and porosity are associated with surveillance: the ability to see, but also the ability to be seen. Perhaps Steffen is also asking Do we see? Do we take notice? What do we not see? Information, availability and knowledge become linked with questions of purpose, and of who gains access. Who, in the end, is circling whom?

In the summer of 2011, DCCAH launched an open international call for five curators. Each curator would select five artists to yield a total of twenty-five new works to be sited throughout the city. Of the hundred plus curators who responded, ten were shortlisted during the first week of October, and were given a bus tour to view potential sites and to familiarize them with the wide-ranging character of DC neighborhoods. On December 7th, each presented a proposal outlining their curatorial approach and identifying their artists, and on the 8th Richard Hollinshead, Amy Lipton, Steve Rowell, Laura Roulet, and Justine Topfer were notified that they were selected. On March 20th of 2012, a little more than three months later, the festival opened.

This festival of temporary public art installations is significant due to a very practical problem within the District. As land in the monumental core grows ever more scarce, and more and more groups want their voices and experiences represented, the city and the federal government has begun to consider the potential of temporary works to serve as vehicles for commemoration, celebration and public discourse. Creative solutions offering new forms of cultural expression and commemoration are being sought out to replace permanent markers and symbols, and to activate public space.

Wolfgang Weileder *Res Publica*

Time stamp: 2:26 PM Blue Line from Metro Center to Capitol South

In contrast to the decaying cardboard-model Supreme Court buildings that Weileder situated around the city, the vending machine that he placed at this corner by the court was built of stainless steel – a material that, like the stone of the Court building, appeared to indicate greater value and investment. Reflective and highly polished, the object's mirrored surface captured fragments of its surroundings, and "fitted in" by selectively appropriating traits from the other objects around it. It mimics the scale and function of the newspaper vending machines that lined the sidewalk, and, at the same time, its form appropriated the classical pediment of the Court building. But by that very mix it stood apart and was understood as 'other', and so people stopped, curious... In the space of five minutes, from 2:27 to 2:32, eight people paused, looked and/or took a pamphlet from within – a young couple, a single man, a family of three, and finally two men with button-down shirts. The latter each took a pamphlet, and suspecting that they worked at the Supreme Court I invited them to share their motivations for doing so. Not surprisingly, they 'pleaded the fifth', stating that they would "rather not say" and then walked into the Supreme Court Building. What were they afraid of? As I watched them walk into the building, I envisioned them returning to their desks and spending the afternoon building their very own cardboard models of the structure they inhabited.

Each curator offered a different vision as a contribution to 5x5. In some cases the approach created a loose cohesion among the group of five artists, in others the thematic thread was tighter. Of the five, Hollinshead hails from the UK, Lipton is based in New York, Rowell from Los Angeles, Roulet is locally based and Topfer (originally from Australia) is currently based in San Francisco. The five curators' experiences of DC varied – some had lived in the city, others had visited for longer periods, others only briefly. British curator Hollinshead encouraged his UK-based group to consider the duality of distance and proximity and the sensation of slippage "between the symbolic DC of the worldwide public imagination and the 'domestic' human DC with its complex histories and communities."⁵

Perhaps it is Rowell's curatorial approach that has the strongest affinity with Hollinshead's. Rowell's 'Suspension of Disbelief' projects sought to "investigate the rich legacy of Washington, DC as a place of concentrated, symbolic meaning" which also called "attention to historical inaccuracies, misinterpretations and spatial practices."⁶ Approaching art-making as a form of research, and DC as the ultimate site for research about political power and place, Rowell selected five artists and artist teams who were particularly interested in unearthing and creating opportunities for the public to experience the political – yet often ephemeral – material associated with the city.

Jo Ray Spoken For

Time stamp: 3:42 PM Blue Line from Capitol South to L'Enfant Plaza, then Green Line to Waterfront.

Spoken For is sited on a grassy median dividing northbound and southbound traffic on Water Street, adjacent to the Southwest waterfront. Clearly the view facing north is the privileged one, with two billboard images angled to form an open 'V', and the gap between the two framing the Washington Monument and forming "a Magnificent Entranceway" (though perhaps not exactly what Pierre L'Enfant imagined when he planned this gateway neighborhood). This siting signals the proximity to the monumental core and its constant presence in the city. However, while the monument is within view, an interstate highway and an imposing cluster of Federal office buildings now sever this historically working-class neighborhood from the wider DC. Increasingly marginalized and in decline since the 1920's, a massive urban renewal project was undertaken in the mid-twentieth century that obliterated and remade the Southwest neighborhood. Backed by the belief that even the neighborhoods of the District were symbolically loaded and should therefore be exemplary, a mid-century urban renewal program resulted in the demolition of four thousand eight hundred "sub-par" structures. Only four residential structures, two churches and a handful of commercial structures (only the Fish Market still remains) were spared⁷. Today, Ray's tiny structures appear as protesters, witnesses, reminders of the few buildings and people that survived the last efforts to "redo" the neighborhood, their fragmentary quality and ephemerality resonating with the echoes and anticipation of change and transition in this area.

Cath Campbell Marathon

Time stamp: 4:19 Green Line from Waterfront to Navy Yard

Marathon was sited in the Old Navy Yard, an area adjacent to the Anacostia River boasting a beautiful collection of nineteenth-century industrial buildings that are being converted to commercial offices and loft residences, set within a new urban park. The wholesale destruction of the urban fabric of Southwest catalyzed the historic preservation movement, through which the Navy Yard area was listed on the register of historic places in 1973, and provided with some protection for its built heritage. While we can't actually see the monumental core from here, the federal government's power and its international reach is very present, particularly since the Navy Yard served as both bridge and gatekeeper to the rest of the world.

We walk through the yard toward the water, past a number of brick buildings, some already renovated, others where construction is ongoing. We approach a concrete structure, the bones of a building. All cladding is stripped away. Once a lumber shed – a site of manual labor – it is now an open-air pavilion, dark, quiet, and

cool. A glass façade applied on one corner suggests that it won't remain public for long, and this perfect place that allows the wind to permeate will become private offices.

We entered the two-storey central bay. Someone else is sitting at one of the tables. The structure draws our gaze, framing the light and water beyond. A breeze blows, and it is cool. At the far end of the space, closest to the water, a cable car is suspended. Soundlessly, it travels back and forth across the space. Mesmerized, I watch. The mechanisms are hidden. The car disappears over the floor slab and then returns. It moves slowly. The scale of the space shifts. How big is it? How far away? The cable car travels back and forth, and I am aware of the water beyond. We are on a site burned down in advance of a British invasion in 1814. The cable car goes back and forth. This is also a site that welcomed the first Japanese ambassador in 1860. The cable car goes back and forth. Marking time, the work links a British artist to a Japanese gift of cherry trees on an American site.

Time stamp 4:48 PM

Rather than embracing a direct strategy of community engagement and active public participation (Wolfgang Weileder's *Res Publica* can perhaps be seen as an exception, due to the fundraising component of the project), Hollinshead's artists elected to surgically place objects within the public realm in such a way as to provoke consideration of the invisible and powerful forces that are both active and latent in the District. In their own way, each artist constructed a viewing device that altered one's perspective and gave focus to what was at stake at each particular location and, simultaneously, in the larger site of Washington, DC. They drew attention to the sensations of transition and specificity, to a sense of inequity, and to a failure to live up to institutional ideals. The works either referred to or attached themselves to the icons of DC - the Washington Monument, the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress, Martin Luther King Memorial Library, the decommissioned Navy Yard and the National Building Museum. Yet while the idea of Washington DC as the capital of the world – influencing policy, reflecting values, and shaping news – is ever-present in these works, at the same time each piece also engaged the lived city by assuming characteristics of, and becoming part of, the everyday environment in which they were situated.

¹ I would like to thank Welmoed Laanstra for her willingness to explore and think about 5x5 together and Mary Beth Brown, DCCA Public Art Coordinator; Deirdre Ehlen, DCCA Managing Consultant; Liesel Fenner, Public Art Program Manager, Americans for the Arts; 5x5 curators – Richard Hollinshead, Amy Lipton, Laura Roulet, Steve Rowell and Justine Topfer – for sharing their views of the 5x5 in interviews conducted by Welmoed Laanstra and myself.

² <http://dcarts.dc.gov/DC/DCARTS/DC+Creates+Public+Art/Public+Art+Programs> [accessed June 24, 2012].

³ www.the5x5project.com [accessed June 24, 2012].

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Hollinshead 5x5 curator proposal, December 2011.

⁶ Steve Rowell 5x5 curator proposal, December 2011.

⁷ "The entire redevelopment involved the demolition of approximately 4,800 structures. Approximately 1,500 businesses and 23,000 residents, or almost 6,000 households were displaced from 560 acres of land." History of SW: http://www.swdc.org/neighborhood/about_sw_history.htm.



Front cover of the 1965 'For A More Beautiful Capital' brochure, found in a dumpster in Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Library during the filming of *Hawk & Dove*.

FOR A MORE BEAUTIFUL CAPITAL

MAGNIFICENT DISTANCE

RICHARD HOLLINSHEAD

Initiated by the DC Commission for the Arts & Humanities, from March 20th to April 28th 2012 Washington DC played host to the inaugural 5x5 Public Art Festival, which saw five curators – Richard Hollinshead of Grit & Pearl (Newcastle, UK), Amy Lipton (New York), Laura Roulet (Washington DC), Steve Rowell (Los Angeles) and Justine Topher (San Francisco) – each developing projects with five artists to create the twenty-five artworks which comprised the festival.

Conceived by the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities as “*an environment in which the works of artists merge to reflect the character and identity of the city*”, Grit & Pearl has sought to apply our own approach to the ‘5x5’ festival, immediately moving beyond passive reflections on character and identity, seeking instead to unpick, consider and ultimately to influence. ‘Grit & Pearl’ is not simply an organisational title. In the initial encounter it sets out an analogy in which those embracing risk are rewarded. A second reading using the commercial language of our time reveals a shorthand form of both mission statement and corporate policy. In our preferred terminology, Grit & Pearl is a *manifesto* for change in which the ‘.’ (the grit) signifies the essential role of both artist and curator as agitator or catalyst.

We remain outsiders to the city, neither residents nor tourists and holding an uncertain status in its workings, but we must wryly acknowledge that the *ideal* of Washington DC – the iconic DC – exerts a powerful claim on our imaginations. The individual challenge faced by each artist was to embrace DC without being fully seduced by it and to explore DC without becoming too familiar with it. If at the macro level this examination posits Washington DC as the loci whose gravitational pull exerts influence over the rest of the world, then at the micro level it is evidenced in Ray’s valuing of a fragment of text from an abandoned building.

What, if anything, connects these five projects? Care should be taken not to shoehorn artworks into a pre-existing curatorial conceit – artists must, above all, protect their right (and responsibility) to respond obliquely, personally and idiosyncratically to whatever attracts their attention – but when presented as a curated set, certain commonalities are clear and others can be uncovered. The search for the human (or the humane?) in the midst of the city is one of several concerns common to all five artists. Taking *Magnificent Distance* as our collective title is not simply a recognition of one of Washington DC’s best known epithets, *City of Magnificent Distances*, or of our geographical distance, but is also an open acknowledgment of the

distance and slippage that exists between the symbolic DC of the worldwide public imagination and the ‘domestic’ lived experience of the city.

Weileder’s *Res Publica* is a socially-engaged artwork that aims to stimulate a discussion about the relationship between the wealthy and the homeless, between public and private space, as well as the equitable distribution of both. The project successfully used the 5x5 festival as a platform for raising awareness of the needs of DC’s homeless community, and actively facilitates that work by raising funds through the sale of a limited-edition of artist’s prints. By adopting the Palladian iconography of the Supreme Court of the United States as an architectural motif, Weileder positioned the Supreme Court as the ‘protective canopy’ under which citizens are protected, whilst, equally, being the product of the people.

The National Mall and its attendant structures – the Capitol, Supreme Court, Library of Congress, the White House – are both the heart of the city and the context around which each artist’s work creates a relationship. Ray, Streffen and Weileder all worked directly in the monumental core to create their projects, with Streffen’s *Hawk & Dove* revealing those contested sites with fresh eyes (literally, as she employed miniature spy cameras capable of observing from vantage points inaccessible to the general public). The five *Magnificent Distance* projects all engage knowingly with architecture and the built environment, and all exhibit an awareness not just of the spatial characteristics of their sites, but also the social and political context. The majority of the artworks were sited at the interstices of two competing DC realities: at the meeting point between federal and community environments; in locations undergoing transformation from one use to another; and at points where differing scales meet.

This is demonstrated by Ray’s *Spoken For* installation, which by framing a view of the Washington Monument brings peripheral places and neighbourhoods into direct conversation with the formality of the monumental centre – geographically and ideologically condensing the ‘magnificent distances’ of the city. For Ray, the monumental core finds its counterpoint in the vibrant, informal and idiosyncratic visual language of independent store fascias and hand-made signage, which can be easily read as an equally valid alternative expression of democracy and the representation of the city’s ideals. She refers to *wabi sabi*, the Japanese concept of aesthetics which accepts and celebrates the imperfect and impermanent, as being an influence on her practice – an aesthetic echoed in the rich urban grain and mutability of DC’s

residential districts, and in Weileder's decaying cardboard versions of the Supreme Court.

Campbell's engagement with the monumental core is more oblique, and less immediately apparent. She traced the original source of Washington DC's famous cherry trees to Mt Hiei, Japan – home to the 'Marathon Monks' of the Buddhist Tendai sect, who walk the mountain in a seven-year, 27,000 mile quest for enlightenment. The general public has a somewhat easier ascent via the Eizan Cable Car, and it is a working scale-model of the cable-car gliding smoothly and silently across an empty void of a vacant industrial building that constitutes Campbell's intervention. The building itself became integral to the artwork, drawing pointed attention to its past, present and future. Considered in those terms, the cable car becomes stilled, the loci around which the building is in flux. The phenomena of a specific location becoming the physical embodiment of an ideal, and the attendant pilgrimage and aspiration that accompanies that ideal, is as relevant to Washington DC as it is to a mountain in Japan.

The formal, master-planned whiteness of the monumental core as set out in 1791 by Pierre L'Enfant, was specifically designed – at least in part – to humble visiting dignitaries, and to stand as a celebration of civic order. It retains its place as a national focal point – 'America's front lawn' – and is a place of modern pilgrimage. The National Mall has long been the site for political protest, with its vast scale and open space actually inviting social activism. The crowd completes the space, without which the Mall sits as memorial, awaiting future activation with a sense of expectancy.

If the placement of these five artworks was critical to their success, then equally important was their location in a moment in time. Streffen's *Hawk & Dove* captured the constantly-shifting tides within the corridors of power. Weileder's models rapidly disintegrated against the backdrop of immutable architecture and institutions. In contrast, Campbell's *Marathon* provided a constant form transiting architecture that is itself undergoing transition from industrial, through leisure, and finally to office space. The historic Water Street location for Ray's *Spoken For* installation – a transitional point between the formal architectural language of the federal area of central DC and the informal vernacular of the riverside – will shortly disappear in the current wave of riverside regeneration. With the *Magnificent Distance* projects conceived by the artists in the last quarter of 2011 and presented in the city in the first quarter of 2012, the Occupy DC movement (at its height when curating what became the five proposals) played a central role in our thinking about the city. Just one of many global and national issues – a worldwide recession, on-going conflict in Afghanistan, Supreme Court judgements on Obama's healthcare reforms and the presidential race – that formed a hazy background to the 5x5 festival, where Occupy DC differed

was through its physical presence in those few square miles of Washington DC in which world-changing decisions are made. Whether the political change sought by Occupy DC has been achieved is questionable, but by literally 'taking' a physical hold on the city it certainly achieved a marked spatial change. The relationship between art practice and social activism is a symbiotic one, and comparisons between the Occupy DC camp and seminal artworks such as Joseph Beuys' *7000 Oaks* (1982) or Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981) are justified – particularly in relation to their redistribution or removal – and indeed for those who experienced the camps on a daily basis its very absence continues to make a kind of mark. It is interesting to note that artworks from the beginning of the Thatcher/Reagan decade have a continued relevance three decades later, at a point when the broad debate around capitalism and socialism is raging.

Streffen's *Hawk & Dove*, Ray's *Spoken For* and Weileder's *Res Publica* are overtly political in nature (an approach shared by fellow 5x5 curator Steve Rowell's five *Suspension of Disbelief* projects, which collectively explore similar territory: in particular Stratman & Badgett's *Polygonal Address (PA) System*, KUNSTrePUBLIK's *Temperance Fountain*, and Lize Mogel's *Sight Lines*). But whilst Streffen's *Hawk & Dove* addresses the machinations inherent in party politics and ideological structures directly, Weileder's *Res Publica* structures and Ray's miniature *Spoken For* models speak for the disenfranchised and share a visual language with an Occupy DC whose aims they are certainly in broad sympathy with. In some respects political acts, both artworks tread lightly on this territory, holding a playful conversation with architecture and public space and evidencing a concern for the delicate ecologies of place.

The engagement with serious subjects is leavened by a lightness of touch, elevating the artworks and retaining the option of multiple readings. Jeans Houghton's *Spore* and Campbell's *Marathon* are more enigmatic, if not actually neutral, hinting at the hidden narratives within their specific sites. The genesis of *Marathon* in the artist's research into DC's cherry blossom trees is a fascinating one, but it is simply that – a back story. No interpretative material was provided alongside the artwork, and none was needed. As it tracked through the space new narratives were established.

Ben Jeans Houghton's viewing device *Spore* actively solicits viewing, and is literally a device for revealing something unseen yet fundamental. In the context of the National Building Museum's Great Hall, the floating object revealed by *Spore* is of uncertain origin or motivation, and its scale remains stubbornly elusive. It might be an elemental atomic form or other universal building block. The exploration of unseen energies and motivations is a recurring theme amongst the five proposals in *Magnificent Distance*, a reflection perhaps of

our collective sense of Washington DC as a place where more is hidden than is revealed. Certainly *Spore* neither attempts to explain away this sensation, nor takes up any position in response to it. The artwork simply creates the circumstances by which we are made to question the reality of what we are seeing, and provides a lens through which our environment can be seen in a wholly new light.

Artists pick up on what, to a resident at least, may be so ubiquitous as to become unnoticed. In the case of Jeans Houghton, his viewing device could conceivably belong to the family of utilitarian municipal infrastructure – the air quality monitoring stations, air vent shrouds and telecoms junction boxes – that manage and regulate unseen aspects of the city, permeating the streetscape but remaining unnoticed. Ray finds value in the interpretive scope and very particular aesthetic of text fragments culled from across the city. In Weileder's *Res Publica* project it is the 'invisible' homeless and the newspaper vending devices.

Whilst the visibility of the source material and reference points may have faded over time, the artists' temporary interventions into the cityscape established a sculptural presence in the city, engaging with and activating space. In electing to use radio-controlled zeppelins fitted with miniature cameras, Streffen's lens-based project *Hawk & Dove* was similarly able to physically investigate the power structures of the city, the pure sculptural form of the zeppelins making a highly-charged intervention within such spaces and creating a new architectural dynamic.

The *Hawk & Dove* zeppelins' explorations are a direct echo, in microcosm, of the Graf Zeppelin's transit over Washington DC in 1928 – undoubtedly the most significant temporary sculptural object central Washington has witnessed – which the Montreal Gazette recorded as "passing close to the Capitol, to which it dipped in salute as hundreds emerged from the House and Senate office buildings to view the spectacle. Continuing straight through the heart of the city... toward the Washington Monument... It circled the Monument, passing almost over it and dipping in salute. She then turned her nose to the northeast and went directly over the White House, where she again dipped in formal salute". *Hawk & Dove* and the other four *Magnificent Distance* artworks similarly circle the city, inquisitive presences alighting for a short period, acknowledging their context, forming relationships, and passing on.



MARATHON CATH CAMPBELL

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HAS THE WORLD GROWN SMALLER BY ANY CHANCE?

MATTHEW HEARN

In the late hours every Sunday, Radio 4 broadcasts a weekly programme, *Something Understood*. Thematically considered, each episode of the programme details a journey in and around ideas, focusing on a particular theme via an expanded repertoire of music, poetry and prose. It is a response both poly-vocal and multi-dimensional, and its aim is less to define an answer than to open up a conversation. Having been asked to offer some thoughts on Cath Campbell's recent installation, *Marathon*, it is my intention to attempt something of a similar order. *Marathon* was installed 3500 miles away, in a place neither I, nor – more importantly – the artist was able to visit. My experience of the work then, is a virtual one.

*

In the opening chapters of Jules Verne's classic novel *Around The World in Eighty Days*, the scene is set for the ensuing tale of travel. The story that unfolds is itself a fiction whose underlying conditions – namely technological innovation and the consequent global possibilities for mechanised travel – mark an important historical shift reflected in the question: "Has the world grown smaller by any chance?". In the novel, Ralph replies "of course it has... because you can go round it ten times more quickly than you could a hundred years ago"¹, but what we can perhaps more objectively state is that our perception of the scale of the world has indeed changed: in relative terms, it has become smaller; distances have grown to be all the less.

In a number of ways, *Around The World in Eighty Days* represented a sea-change in perceptions of travel (and travel writing), offering a blurring in the distinctions between a traveller typified by the former explorer or high adventurer seeking out distant lonely corners of the earth (recalled through prose laced with exotic boastfulness, one-upmanship and exclusivity), and the markers of modern-day global tourism in which these once exceptional destinations and related accounts of experiences offered, have become increasingly accessible and populist. In Verne's novel, the catalyst that facilitates the possibility of this challenge is the announcement of the opening of the Great Indian Peninsular railway. For the present-day adventurer, time and space have been compressed and global interchange and exchange has become ubiquitous. We can be almost anywhere in the world in a matter of hours, or less. Distances that were once deemed expedition-worthy are now covered by a medley of short and long-haul flights, and what were once grand passages have been shrunk to regular commutes.

Whilst tourism suggests a physical relationship with, and experience of, places, via the virtual arena we too can travel the globe. By virtue of cellular networks, fibre-optic cables and satellite communications we can now be in two places at once: from the comfort of our living room we can be looking out to sea and surveying the surf in Cornwall via a webcam; our computers can enable virtual tours of hotels, worldwide; we can share 'FaceTime' and space with a friend using our ever-present mobile phones, and we can collectively convene in the virtual arena of a chat-room or Skype conference. We can document every moment with precision and detail, enabling both ourselves and others to re-live the events after the fact as well. In short, we have the option to live the travelled experience (or at least recreate its intimacy) without travelling the physical distance. Herein lies an important distinction: we are no longer constricted by the necessity, or the inability, to travel.

As noted earlier, Cath Campbell has never been to Washington DC – at least she hasn't physically travelled that *magnificent distance*. Nonetheless the work that she has produced for the former lumber shed in Yards Park harnesses a very particular sense of specificity observed and researched from far-away Newcastle. Conducted from afar, Campbell's research journey has taken detours via various signifiers – even briefly surfacing as far away as Japan – and yet the work that she has created has married her particular aesthetic and interests with elements from its site, making *Marathon* a work conceived of and for the wider-context of Washington DC.

In its most basic sense, *Marathon* is a working scale-model of a cable car running continuously backwards and forwards traversing the geometric shell of an architectural expanse that is, or at least was, a lumber shed. The shed – now only in name – offers an in-between space: neither a place of origin, nor a final destination, but a locus of continuous passage of time and purpose. Within this shell Campbell has in turn chosen to locate – or more accurately dislocate – a similarly de-functionalised object: a sculpture which is at once both a credible interpretation and impotent rendering of a cable car. Within the installation the model moves with purpose and intent, and yet travels nowhere, takes nobody to or from one place or another, only symbolises the movement of travel through its itinerant roaming. Once a site of labour and industry, the Lumbershed and the surrounding parkland is in the process of transition, slowly becoming enlisted in the services of other kinds of industry, enterprise, recreation and tourism. Placed in the context of such, *Marathon's* slow persistent movement becomes a metaphor for the dogged determination of social and physical mobility, and the nomadic status which architectural space both governs, and is given.



In the mid 1980s, artist Robert Irwin sought to add some definition to ideas surrounding sculpture and its relationship to its placement within the public sphere². In this 'roughing-out' of ideas, Irwin proposed a series of four categories by means of which we might interpret particular works and their corresponding relationship to the site of placement. Considering *Marathon* with respect to these distinctions, it is not as simple as to say it sits comfortably within a single category, yet focusing on certain conditions or aspects proves useful in defining the work and its various relationships. For example, under the heading 'Site Adjusted', Irwin notes "*consideration is given to adjustments of scale, appropriateness, placement etc. But the 'work of art' is still either made or conceived in the studio and transported to, or assembled on, the site.*" Whereas under the category 'Site conditioned/determined' Irwin states "*here the sculptural response draws all of its cues (reasons for being) from its surroundings*"³. As a commissioned work, conceived as part of the 5x5 festival, *Marathon* is simultaneously determined by the conditions and parameters of the wider project, yet aspects of the "*understanding of the 'work of art'*" are still "*keyed (referenced) to the oeuvre of the artist*". Put another way, circumstance governs the real context of the works being in the world: "*what was, how it came to be, what it is, and what it may come to be*"⁴.

*

Travel in itself can be both a pleasure and a chore, a necessity or a luxury, a burden when experienced in excess and a restraint when one is unable to even entertain the possibility of it. Its prevalence within Campbell's more recent practice can arguably be read as a reflection of the short-term limitations imposed by the responsibilities of family life. The press release accompanying her recent exhibition described travel guides as 'golden tickets' enabling a personal projection of oneself onto foreign soils. It appears in one sense that the escapism implicit in travel becomes the draw, and the unattainable attraction for Campbell. In another recent







body of photographic works, Campbell has interrogated the structural devices by means of which travel guides are assembled: the cool patina of superficiality; the sense of style which is both part of their appeal and yet symptomatic of their disassociation from reality; the artificiality. In one sense Campbell is critical of the formulaic composition of these guides, of the familiar yet limited colour palettes, the contrived architectural interior and exterior photography in which the clutter of humanity has been ruthlessly obliterated leaving an empty space to insert oneself. The guides nonetheless manufacture a fictionalised and synthesised account of experiences to be consumed in manageable pieces. They make available an aspect of a city that can be afforded a glance, and additionally offer an itinerary by means of which one can partake of the best parts of the city in the (imaginary) time and space of a 24-hour period. More superficial in editorial tone than the classic Baedeker guides of the early to mid-twentieth century – so relied upon for an authoritative voice and ‘qualified’ interpretation⁵ – for the landlocked sailor, the grounded pilot or otherwise immobilised traveler, the precise edited schedule of the travel guide nonetheless offers a virtual escape. This appeal is not lost on Campbell, in spite of her guarded reluctance to let go.

As part of one ongoing series of images⁶, *And We Said Nothing All Day* (2011-) Campbell has produced a series of snapshots of photographs in guidebooks. These low-grade facsimiles of second-hand imagery reflect a doomed attempt to claim these experiences as one’s own. In certain images, the reflection of a flash or even a glimpse of the artist is captured in the image, undermining any attempt to pass these images off as first-hand. Regardless, the images mix and match together cities and seasons into an incongruent medley in which neither the ‘authenticity’ of the original photograph, nor the assembled collection of ‘travel-snaps’ is able to hold up any semblance of legitimacy. Here we might draw a final comparison to Italo Calvino’s fictionalized travelogue, *Invisible Cities*.

In *Invisible Cities* we, like Khan, are offered a series of concise narratives by Marco Polo of places he has purported to visit under the auspices of the Emperor. Unable to survey the vast expanses of his Empire himself, Kublai Khan relies on envoys to report back on the conditions in the distant stretches of his territories. In Calvino's novel we are witness to Khan as a virtual-tourist, seeing only through the eyes of others, consuming Polo's experiences and encounters as if they too – like the lands from which they are alleged to have originated – are his own. Though taken with the telling, Khan becomes disillusioned by all that he hears, and ultimately he becomes disenchanted by the very promise of travel. 'I think you recognize cities better on the atlas than when you visit them in person'⁷ Khan ultimately declares. Here, though Khan's declaration is mis-directed, he reaches a similar conclusion to that played out through Campbell's recent practice: he comes to question the inter-relationship between reality, desire and experience of an idealised world.

¹ Jules Verne, *Around The World In 80 Days*, Ward, Lock & Co. Ltd., London, (1950), p 16.

² Robert Irwin, 'Being and Circumstance – Notes Towards a Confidential Art' in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (eds.) *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, (1985), pp 572 - 574.

³ Ibid p 572.

⁴ Ibid p 573.

⁵ In E M Forster's, *A Room With A View*, Penguin, London (1990). The Baedeker is used as a metaphor for the repressed or received attitudes of Edwardian society and the unwillingness to form ones own opinions or question others. The loss of the book within the story becomes a symbol of liberation whereby Lucy Honeychurch is able to construct her opinions of her experiences.

⁶ These themes also formed the backbone to Campbell's recent exhibition *Ideal Mexico* at WORKPLACE Gallery, 11th February – 17th March 2012.

⁷ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* Trans. William Weaver, Vantage, London, (1997), p 137.





SPORE (ATOM) BEN JEANS HOUGHTON

IMPERCEPTIBLE PRESENCE

ALESSANDRO VINCENTELLI

In [the city of] Olinda if you go out with a magnifying glass and hunt carefully, you may find somewhere a point no bigger than the head of a pin which, if you look at it slightly enlarged, reveals within itself the roofs, the antennae, the skylight, the gardens, the pools, the streamers across the streets, the kiosks in the squares, the horse-racing track. That point does not remain there: a year later you will find it the size of half a lemon, then as large as a mushroom, then a soup plate. And then it becomes a full-size city, enclosed within the earlier city: a new city that forces its way ahead in the earlier city and presses it towards the outside.

- *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino¹

In *Invisible Cities*, the explorer Marco Polo recounts his journey through a number of different cities, each one described as more fantastical and strange than the next in a story that uses imaginative daring in its conjuring of the impossible. Calvino suggests there is a role for going beyond the elemental structures that ground us in a sensate reality, in a known and experienced comprehension of the world around us. We share his visionary landscape of the impossible, as we travel from the head of a pin, to something the size of a mushroom, and then on to the hidden city of Olinda. The morphology of cities is explored through a magical oscillation of scale.

Grappling with the role of literature and art, Calvino's book is beautiful and daring: "*Literature remains alive only if we set ourselves immeasurable goals, far beyond all hope of achievement. Only if poets and writers set themselves tasks that no one else dares imagine will literature continue to have a function*"². Ben Jeans Houghton's *Spore (Atom)* shares something of this same kind of





daring by shifting our perception and by piquing our curiosity as to what an artwork can be and do.

This object asks: how often do we really look? Houghton's object encourages the kind of fundamental curiosity, reflecting his own diverse interests and openness to new ideas and source materials. The history of science is full of just such moments at both ends of an extended spectrum of scale. The author of *Principia Mathematica* (1687), Isaac Newton's research into the movement of the distant planets was contemporaneous with scientist Robert Hooke's discoveries of microscopic organisms and minute life-structures. The exchange of ideas between them enriched the field of science. Jeans Houghton is an artist fascinated by the potential of connecting things, and his investigations bring together interests in all kinds of scientific phenomena. He assembles disparate materials from the fields of science to create new sensory encounters for the viewer, whether through making stand-alone sculptural installations, staging itinerant performances or making films using both found and new material. He has an eye for sculptural objects, and sources redundant equipment from science labs, antiquated display devices, anything that can be re-arranged and re-configured in such a way as to create sparks of energy.

Why did Jeans Houghton want to create an unknown object of uncertain size seemingly floating in space? The intimate act of viewing through a spyhole may initially seem prurient, but in this context it speaks of the inquisitive mind of an artist wanting to reveal – or perhaps allow us to discover for ourselves – a shift in the perception of our everyday environments.

The enigmatic *Spore (Atom)* was installed overlooking the central sweep of the Great Hall of Washington D.C's National Building Museum, and formed part of the 5x5 festival programme of



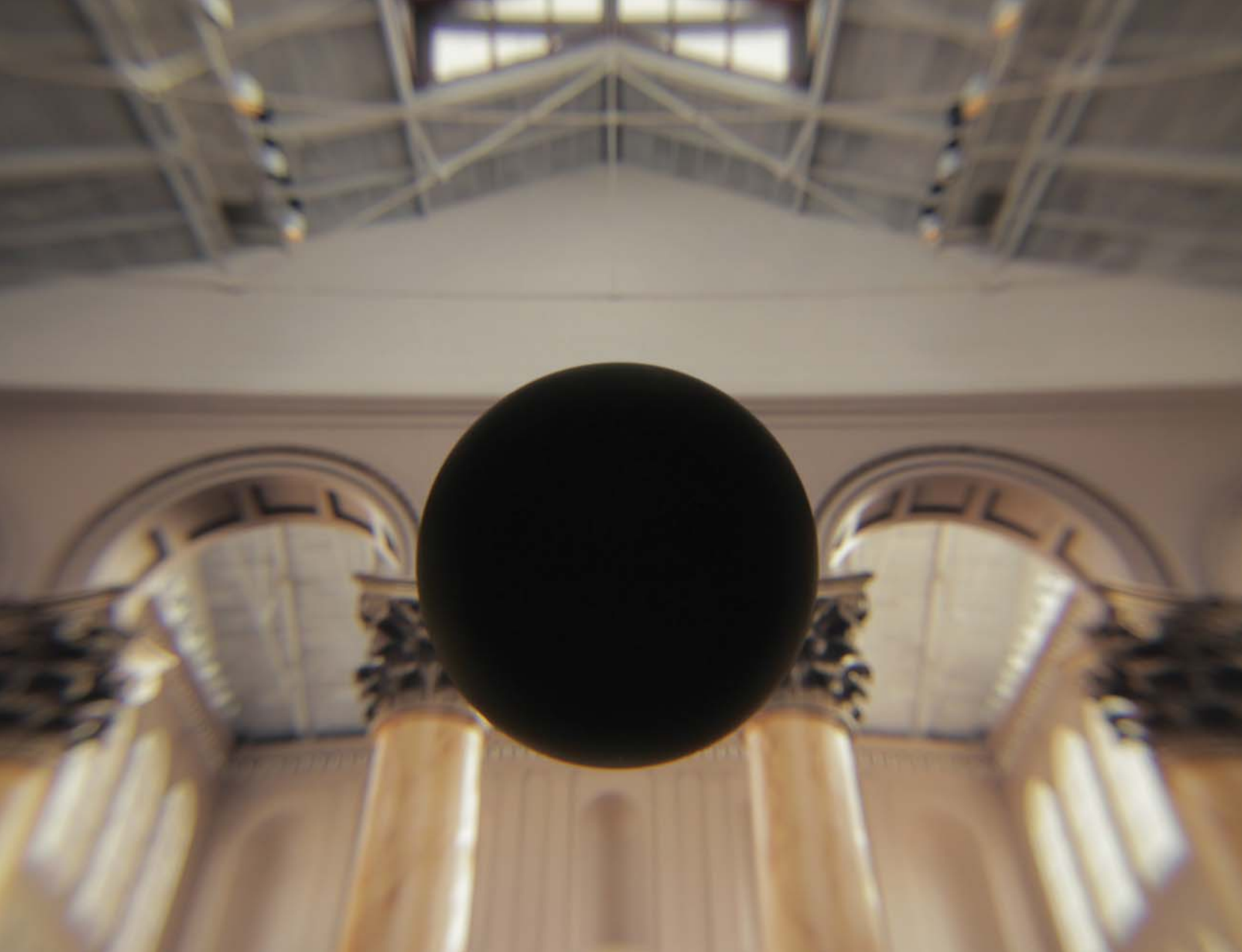
commissions, timed to coincide with the centennial celebrations for Washington's National Cherry Blossom Festival. There is an intimacy to this encounter with *Spore (Atom)*, an intimacy that has spread like the concentric rings of Calvino's *Olinda* into echoing rings of a city-wide celebration of cherry-blossom, as the artwork is laid out as an enigmatic gift to the viewer.

For this commission, an engineered camera box creates a viewing device containing both object and image – a spherical object combined with a plano-convex lens. The lens has a subtle magnifying effect and generates a shallow depth of field. The two elements are brought together with a precise large-format transparency photograph of the site. Looking through this lens, the spherical object appears magnified, whilst the background image moves slightly out of focus, heightening the illusion of depth. This ocular sculpture invites our participation. Jeans Houghton's artwork stages a view, beguiling the viewer into looking.

This isn't the first camera/optical sculpture the artist has created. *Spore (Atom)* developed from *Memory One* (2009), an ultra-large-format 'view' camera (with bellows and a convex lens) that contained a photographic image of the room in which it was sited. Deploying an optical illusion, the artist interposed the apparition of a white whale – actually present only as an image hovering before the eyes – invoking a giant object that would have filled the room. The 'walk in' potential of this first ocular sculpture gave the object a performative function and the work consciously engaged with our perception of both the real, and the recall of an early memory.

Both artworks have aesthetic commonalities with the mechanics of early cinema, fairground side-shows and optical experiments. These paradoxical, simultaneously intimate and sensational encounters imaged the world in new and shocking ways through devices such





as the Mutoscope or the 'Becker stereoscopic box viewer'. These contraptions are all associated with forms of knowledge and control, and notions of possession, surveying and desiring. But in the context of the National Building Museum, *Spore (Atom)* resonates quite differently. Retaining its neutral appearance, the work remained anonymous (its optics contained within an engineered casing of metal), unlabelled, without directions or signage relating to its function.

The work's contradictory title *Spore (Atom)* provides an insight into the artist's thought process. 'Spore' derives from the Greek spora, to sow, and describes a method of self-propagation – once a single spore has been released it is ripe with the potential for development into a new organism. The mutable meaning of the word 'spore' is the antithesis of the constancy of 'atom' (*not cuttable*), the elemental particle of life – 'that which cannot be divided'. So where do these linguistic clues lead us in terms of *Spore (Atom)*? Is it just a spot, a lacuna? It certainly celebrates the transitory and the mysterious, inexpressible nature of things. Is it a cipher? Jeans Houghton clearly has a desire to frame and offer up a moment, creating an ambiguous experience that provokes inquiry and instigates investigation. *Spore* illuminates and obfuscates, revealing and concealing in equal measure. When we look through the device something previously unseen is revealed, and when we look again with only our eyes, the seed of an imperceptible presence is suggested.

¹ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver, Vintage Books, (2009), p 129.

² Italo Calvino, *Six Memos For the Next Millennium*, Harvard University Press, 1988, p 112.



De Camp

SPOKEN FOR JO RAY

FUGITIVE SPACES, TRANSIENT TEXTS

IRIS PRIEST

In her recent site-responsive work *A Common Treasury* (2011) Jo Ray playfully dissects the viewer's relationship to space and context through the miniaturisation of reality. These works explore the formulation and communication of a context's specific identity and resonance through its particular language and signage. In *A Common Treasury* Ray took the Latin and common names for local plants, transposing them into miniature signs in the baroque, hand-painted mannerism of amusement parks and seaside fairgrounds. These miniaturized pieces – re-photographed then presented in the transient landscape between ever-shifting sand dunes and the adjacent amusement park at South Shields – embody a moment of suspended ephemerality, hovering uncertainly between the miniature and the gigantic, imagined space and real 'lived' time. Developed simultaneously, the work *Sema-forks* (2011) also explores the shifting identity of the north-east coast of England as epitomised by its idiosyncratic – though endangered and fluctuating – language and dialect. Re-appropriating idiomatic words and phrases, Ray then translated these into visual semaphore signs and printed them onto the disposable wooden forks of the coastline's chip shops. *Sema-forks*, like much of Ray's recent work, presents a transitory vignette of a place (in time, space and culture) embodied in its continuously evolving language.

During the generative stages of her work *Spoken For* Ray literally "hounded" the streets of Washington DC for seven days, hunting down, collecting and appropriating an assortment of fragmented words and phrases from amongst the city's urban typography. From the dilapidated signage above a derelict shop "CARRY OUT" to the proud declaration above a lively fish stall "OUR CRABS HAVE NO SAND", these found-texts accumulate to form an ephemeral snapshot of Washington DC as expressed through the many, various voices and texts of its inhabitants.

In the 18th and 19th Centuries the travelling collector sought to establish definitive narratives of a place through the plundering and taxonomic ordering of its objects and artefacts. Conversely, *Spoken For* explores not one *single* identity but a *plurality* of possibilities. This is epitomised by the collection of phrases Ray gleaned (and subsequently remade in miniature) from across the city, all of them ranging in tone, style and lexis from the declarative "PUSH FOR HELP" to the ambiguous "ERASE MARKERS" and finally the absurd "SAFETY IS JOY". Just as words are ideas (committed to tangible, signifying forms) so these fragments of words and phrases embody the rich variety of ideas, characters and nuances which





multiply to inform Washington DC's multifaceted and ultimately unfixable identity.

Deliberately positioned and re-photographed on the National Mall in view of the iconic Washington Monument, the signs of *Spoken For*, in contrast to that monument, embody an alternative, conversant set of possibilities for local and national identity and history; one which is cumulative and ever-changing. Whilst the Washington Monument stands as an enduring icon of national patriotism and U.S. sovereignty, the ephemeral signs and bill-board structures of *Spoken For* seem reminiscent of the more temporary structures of emergency road signage and building sites. With their hand-drawn and time-worn typefaces, these signs do not convey any single, unified account of local history or character but capture a multifaceted, fragmentary and fleeting moment in the shifting history, identity and vocabulary of a city on the cusp of urban redevelopment, the execution of which may obliterate many of the buildings and sites from whence these texts were originally culled.

In removing the various fragments of text from their original context, Ray divorced the signs from the local and peculiar codes which lent them specific, decipherable meaning. Whereas these signs would usually indicate a recognisable subject e.g. an object such as "RESCUE WORKERS" taken from the cracked and peeling hoarding of a missionary charity shop, or a course of action "PUSH FOR HELP" when read in context beside an elevator buzzer, without an immediate and identifiable connection to their original point of reference they instead became disembodied and their intentions and meanings less certain. The signification of these phrases becomes inferred through the viewer's own interpretation of format, context and cumulative interrelationships. In this new context "RESCUE WORKERS" is no longer the name of an organisation on a decrepit

shop-front hoarding but a call to "RESCUE" the "WORKERS". "PUSH FOR HELP", when no longer conjoined to a lift button, becomes a gentle command.

The language of the sign has been cut loose, disassociated from its connection to the locatable, physical world. Instead these throwaway phrases become metaphorically abstracted, mutable, and open to a diversity of subjective interpretation. One such interpretation is the reading of these signs as a form, or parody, of political protest. Located in sight of the Washington Monument (an historically-loaded site of demonstrations) the hand-drawn, often slightly scrawled, texts echo the aesthetics of political resistance, of the recent Occupy DC encampment and of long-term protestor Concepcion Picciotto's hand painted signs outside the White House which extol messages of peace, social change and democratic representation.

There is a sense that Ray, as both a foreigner and a stranger to the city, brought a new perspective through which to examine this place; one of a wandering and voraciously curious eye, seeking out the "authentic" living voices of Washington DC from beneath the long shadows of its towering monuments, "official" tourist sites and rhetorical, vernacular architecture. The texts that she collected were condensed down into an ephemeral documentation of a passing moment in DC history. Not only were the texts culled from sites due for demolition or renewal, but the fragility of the miniature models and then the impermanence of the temporary billboard structure capture this fleeting quality.

The transitory moment in human history caught by *Spoken For* relates empathically to the constant, but equally fleeting, human presence on the National Mall – a human presence which is consciously dwarfed and subsumed by the monumental and immemorial architecture of the park's monuments and grandiose buildings. The historical paradigms extolled by these monuments i.e. of a unified version of history which favours the aristocracy and the heroism of individuals over the struggles and diversities of the people, are quietly contradicted by *Spoken For's* assertion of human experience. In this context *Spoken For* – by foregrounding the multiplicity and ephemerality of the human presence on the Mall – also invites a gentle critique of those establishments and their implied permanence. The Washington Monument for instance, closed to the public since the Virginia earthquake of 2011, is implicated into the uncertain play of scale that the work poses. The iconic obelisk, enfolded into the world of the miniature, is playfully denuded of its dwarfing gigantism becoming instead a souvenir-like, miniaturised imitation of itself.

At a glance, the slogans and signs pictured on the double billboards of *Spoken For* do not immediately resemble the miniature, and it is only with a longer, closer inspection that the viewers' sense of scale becomes gradually disrupted. The spindly wooden scaffolding reveals itself as suspiciously lightweight (despite the sandbags) and we realise that the grass and pebbles are much larger than they ought to be. The manipulation of scale and perspective in *Spoken For* resonates with the playful family portraits taken in front of iconic monuments: the jokey compositions in which children and adults pose, hands flat and out stretched beneath the distant monolith, seeming to balance it on the palms of their hands. The miniature world also embodies the condensed, internalised world of play and imagination, it is suffused with personal experience and a dream-like quality that, particularly when slyly presented as life-size, has the capacity to "skew time and space relations of the everyday lifeworld"¹.

The miniaturised world is also the idealised, nostalgic world of the souvenir. Step into any tourist shop in Washington DC and you're sure to be inundated with miniaturized replicas of the Washington Memorial (in silver, pewter or plastic), a tiny condensed version of the real thing which serves as a memento of time and space lived. Souvenirs, keepsakes and the miniature act as fallible metonyms to memory and nostalgia, a residue of a holiday or memory suffused with longing for an impossible, idealised past. Ray's miniature signs, on the other hand, only exist as replicated images. The hand-made, slightly dilapidated quality of the signs places them in a remote point in time which is itself fallible and impossibly distant. The temporary and transient nature of the fragile miniatures and texts undermines the photograph's false assertion of 'permanence', of a moment in time arrested, as these sites and moments cannot possibly be revisited.



DeCamp

PUSH FOR HELP

~~ERASE
MARKERS~~

OUT OF ORDER

CARRY
OUT

SAVED BY
JOY

PLEASE!!

De Camp
OUT

PUSH FOR HELP PLEASE
MARKERS
OF ORDER

CARRY
SAFETY OUT.
JOY

US BEEF



The miniature signs in *Spoken For* are also redolent of the prototype in art and architecture; of the initial rendering of a concept or thought-form into being, a miniaturized model from which the 'final' work or building can be developed. The prototypical model hovers in an uncertain, mutable space between intangible ideas and tangible materials. Essentially an unfinished work, the artists' or architects' prototype is unresolved and subject to the ongoing influences of experimentation, dialogue and exchange. The prototype inherently suggests its status as 'merely' a precursor to something else, to an enlarged (final) version of itself, which in the case of *Spoken For* saw the fragile prototype literally writ large in the final installation.

Spoken For embodies an ever-folding process of ephemeral sign making, re-appropriation and interpretation. What *Spoken For* seems to finally suggest is that the identity of Washington DC is not to be discovered in the rhetoric of the "official" version of history, but rather through an ongoing, organic and interactive process of communication through the production, dissemination and interpretation of signs. The hovering state of changeability invoked by the delicate signs and phrases is directly transcribed onto the billboards of the finished piece, suggesting that the formative and fluctuating qualities of the prototype continue in an endless progression: from the original 'found' texts, to the miniature models, to the billboards, to the viewer. *Spoken For* does not end with a billboard, or even with a photograph of a billboard, but instead seeds itself in the interpretation and imagination of the viewer.

¹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* Duke University Press, Durham, USA, (1984), pp 65.





HAWK & DOVE ISABELLA STREFFEN

ISABELLA STREFFEN: FIELDCRAFT

ALISTAIR ROBINSON

Isabella Streffen's practice is a kind of intellectual fieldwork, engaging with the conditions of a particular culture, place and world view to throw light on their origins and consequences. Although the work here, *Hawk & Dove*, was created through engagement with a very particular context indeed, it enlarges upon three of her existing concerns: the relationship between the civic sphere of democratic societies and the military forces that are permanent yet invisible presences within them; the history of aviation, real and imagined; and the question of what is offered to sight (in contrast to what remains hidden from it, or hidden whilst in plain view).

Streffen often works with highly charged sites, and for '5x5' she created work in and for the heart of the American political establishment in Washington DC, having been resident in the city for part of the preceding year. Streffen's seventeen-minute film '*Hawk & Dove*' contains footage from two of the most highly symbolic institutions in the city of Washington – The Library of Congress, and the Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Library.

The Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Library is a publicly-funded library open to all, whose mission is being a "force in the community for engaging the mind, expanding opportunities and elevating the quality of life". It, however, is Washington DC's principal public library, built in 1972 and designed by Mies van der Rohe. It embodies its own heroic ideal of universal access to knowledge for the general public of the city, and is redolent of both social ideals of the time it was envisaged and built, and of the parallel ideals of late modernism in architecture.

Somewhat distinctly, the Library of Congress is one of the few institutions on the planet with the resources and remit to function as a repository of universal, encyclopaedic knowledge – and where our most senior leaders' conception of the world can be reshaped and re-imagined. It is, bluntly, the intellectual bedrock that underpins political authority: as Streffen describes it, it is "the formal symbol of American knowledge – the single most iconic site of American learning". No greater responsibility could be imagined – though the American statesman Lee H. Hamilton has described the historic mission of Congress as being to 'maintain freedom'. The problem Streffen faced when creating her work was no less than how to represent such an ambition – and how to adopt any kind of genuine critical distance towards it without becoming pointlessly



hostile or bluntly satirical. Her stratagem is to render this clearly in visual terms: if the institution itself functions as a kind of global panopticon from which all can be seen, and all can be known; then we too, in turn, should see the institution as it sees the world, as if from a 'god's eye point of view'.

Accordingly, at first, our attention is likely to be drawn to the overwhelming visual contrasts between the democratic aspirations of the bewilderingly opulent Victorian-era architecture of the Library of Congress, and the (equally) democratic, clean, rational lines of Miesian late twentieth-century modernism. Each ideal is so perfectly realised as architectural form – as the ultimate example of its type, and of its era – that we can feel that the ideals are both the same, and yet utterly different. Both spaces boldly announce that they are places which keep alive the ideals of liberty and democracy, and are civic spaces in the grandest senses.

These sites are, to adapt an anthropological term, 'totemic' in the city. They are intended to provide a public symbol of their community's highest values and ideals, and could scarcely be more loaded with history, or more prestigious. Yet Streffen's artwork *Hawk & Dove* carries serious cargo in what might appear an irreverent container.

Streffen's approach often sees her functioning in an ethnographic manner – viewing the sites she engages with almost as a renegade anthropologist might do, exposing their unspoken codes and assumptions to new light. She addresses the institutions' stories about themselves and their constituencies from both literally as well as metaphorically unprecedented angles, whilst providing a concrete metaphor for their ways of operating. We might say that throughout her practice there is a sense in which each work is a kind of report despatched from the front line of knowledge – and in *Hawk & Dove* this is especially appropriate.

The genesis of the work illustrates Streffen's working process. Streffen's creative and visual ambitions require her to both undertake intense research and preparation, with the filming for *Hawk & Dove* requiring nearly a year's worth of technical preparations and logistical agreements, resulting in seven and a half hours of raw footage. *Hawk & Dove* was initially conceived whilst undertaking a scholarly residency at the Library of Congress, which ordinarily would mean simply undertaking research into one of the archives in the Library – in Streffen's case the Tissandier Brothers archive which charts a key chapter in aeronautical history.

From such beginnings, Streffen's process began to take shape. It became steadily apparent that her time in the Library provided her with the possibility of adopting a scholarly attitude not only towards the archive

she was studying – but towards the institution itself – its operations, its public purpose, and the buildings that it operates from. What became *Hawk & Dove* started as a means to consider the wider context of the institution's history, present functions, and place within the city – which, as the political capital of the nation, meant also its place in the polity as a whole.

The heroic history of flight is, of course, a history in which American engineers, pilots, and pioneers play a major role. The aeronautical industry remains dominated by American corporations today. The 'vehicles' that Streffen created for *Hawk & Dove* are at the opposite end of the technological spectrum to the planes normally commissioned in Washington DC. Of course, the association between Washington and aeronautical technology is strong: if one had to pick a single item that encapsulated the idea of American military (over-)expenditure, it would most likely be the highly iconic Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit – commonly known as the 'stealth bomber'. Washington support of the project, to the tune of an estimated \$2 billion per unit, has become a totemic example of how aeronautical technology can also 'dazzle' even the most seasoned insider.

Drones have been one of the principal focal points of recent years for the US defence industry, and have taken on entirely different forms – bigger, faster, better. In 2011, the former Bush administration Secretary of State for Defence, Robert Gates, remarked "From now on, it's drones, baby, drones". The 'Blue Devil Block 2' is an unmanned airship some 350 feet long planned to hover over Afghanistan, carrying a brand new surveillance system, the 'Gorgon Stare'.

Streffen's two drones – she calls them "dirigibles" – are more akin to simplified versions of 1930s-styled Zeppelin balloons than B-2s, of course. Their technical simplicity, and grace, in complete contrast to the vehicles being commissioned in the vicinity, is precisely their purpose. Their only distinguishing feature is a single, shapely logotype with a single word on. The words 'hawk' and 'dove' are not merely written, but form corporate logos similar to those of thrusting aeronautical giants. The logos, whilst naming political positions, clearly have backers making noises off-stage, who are certainly not to be seen or heard.

These interests should alert us to the fact that, if we imagined that the blunt title 'Hawk & Dove' might be a prompt towards a partisan or even leftist reading – as though the artist were being flippant or ironically belligerent – we had better remain on our mettle. The question that the title of the work might initially seem to pose – 'whose side are we on?' – is clearly not the one at stake.



AMERICAN
CENTRAL

HAWK

Dove

ART IS LONG AND TIME IS FLEETING





Steffen's modus operandi might well be described as combining the 'participant-observer' model shaped by anthropologists with the model of 'institutional critique' developed by Andrea Fraser, Fred Wilson and Hans Haacke. If these figures have developed reputations for tackling debates within the museum as paradigmatic American cultural institution, few have addressed – or been able to address – political institutions directly. Part of Steffen's achievement has been not only to locate one of the most important interfaces between cultural and political institutions – but to 'swim' within that environment successfully. *Hawk & Dove* deepens the long tradition of institutional critique by adding a highly ambiguous, and complex yet politicised take on the institutions that bolster and support the very workings of American democracy.

How Steffen has achieved such a feat requires some unpacking. One term that she returns to repeatedly when describing *Hawk & Dove* is the idea of 'stealth'. The vehicles' movements through space are, most obviously, "stealthy", as though they were military drones conducting reconnaissance missions. But there is also a sense in which her works are themselves created by 'stealth', and she herself is doing the reconnaissance. We might say that her works are created both because and in spite of the institutions she has been part of, and that they engage with them whilst retaining their critical bite.

This is where the play of ironies and contradictions begins in the work. Firstly, though the work is filmed in two libraries, one of which holds twenty-two million catalogued books and is the largest resource in the world, the two words on the logos are almost the only legible written words we encounter. Steffen denies us the pleasure of lingering on the Library's treasures and rarities to focus our attention elsewhere. One of the few written words we see during the footage are ones created by other artists – specifically those commissioned



to decorate the Library of Congress's Great Hall. The words are: 'Art is Long and Time is Fleeting.' If only. Such tiny details punctuate our experience of the work with moments of wit and irony, leavening its serious public purpose. Streffen is adamant that all of her works should – even if they engage with the political landscape of the world's most powerful nation – prompt a sense of "pleasure, or even absurdity".

If our awareness of the institutions and their buildings is one half of the work, then the behaviours of the 'characters' or 'performers' inhabiting them is the other. For Streffen, the types of motion are also full of evocative, metaphorical potential. As the representatives of two competing political rationalities, the vehicles – one might almost call them 'creatures' – undertake a kind of dance, and their motions are almost balletic. These 'animals' encircle one another, never overtly attacking but playfully threatening each other – alternately "playing, hunting and falling; battling, dancing, flirting" as Streffen observes. Of course, Streffen plays on this zoomorphic impulse – endowing the vehicles with kinds of 'behaviours' deflects attention from the fact that we never see the drivers or controllers of the two adversaries – they remain beneath the threshold of visibility. It is as though the vehicles were entirely self-powered. If anyone ultimately controls their trajectories, that much is left unsaid, and left to our imagination.

It is the choreography of these silent characters that provides the heart of the film and the range of its meanings. Most obviously, the manoeuvres that the two ships perform – their stand-offs, circling threats, and soaring, bullish confidence – genuinely do feel to echo their political equivalents' political manoeuvring. More affectingly, though, it acts as an allegory of one community's means of conflict resolution. Given the recent history of party politics in America, to an





outsider the lack of proper contact between the two vehicles might bring to mind Barack Obama's description of America as beset by an "empathy deficit". For Obama, this has become "the essential deficit that exists in this country" - where the "inability to recognize ourselves in one another" is the bulwark preventing progress or even debate.

It is easy to miss the entirely obvious and wholly visible point – to miss that which is immediately in front of our eyes, but which we are distracted from. The two vehicles are, of course, entirely identical other than their (decorative) logos. Streffen's project performs the type of intellectual and affective work that anthropologists like Claude Levi-Strauss have claimed myths do. It establishes binaries for us, only to mediate between them, and complicate things further. This, after all, is what both art and myth are for.

RES PUBLICA WOLFGANG WEILEDER





HOUSING JUSTICE: WOLFGANG WEILEDER'S RES PUBLICA

RACHEL WELLS

In a quiet public space in Washington DC in the Spring of 2012, a squashed and sagging cardboard structure lay humbly on a set of grand marble steps. From a distance, it could have been mistaken for the makeshift shelter of a homeless person, a temporary cover for the night. Up close, however, the plain brown cardboard structure revealed itself to be modelled on the ideals of classical architecture: Palladian pillars, still majestic in style, sat now askance, bent under the weight of six weeks of being open to the elements. The structure was actually a detailed cardboard model of the Supreme Court building in Washington DC, made on a scale of 1:50. As such, the construction presents a solid, imposing public building in the form of a human-scaled, cheaply-made shelter. This contrast between two architectures – between the grandeur and confident solemnity of the Supreme Court and the fragility and transience of a makeshift shelter – is at the crux of Weileder's project. As a complex, layered artwork, *Res Publica* prompts a reassessment of key dichotomies within Western society: of private and public; of temporary and permanent; of justice and injustice.

The crumpled, soggy cardboard 'court', like the histories of many of those sheltering under cardboard roofs, was the result of a series of specific developments. Prior to the dilapidated model, so evocative of supremacy brought low by rain and time, Weileder's project was born as a pristine shiny leaflet-stand, positioned just outside the Supreme Court (and watched carefully by large black Secret Service SUVs). Weileder had noted the array of newspaper stands and vending machines proliferating along Washington's streets, some offering free newspapers, some charging a fee to release their

contents. It is the architecture of these stands that Weileder explores: some plain and functional, others – such as those advertising real estate – mimicking the shape of a house. For his own stand, Weileder created a stainless steel pedestal, supporting a miniature Palladian temple, again modelled on the Supreme Court itself.

Housed within this shiny, witty construction, Weileder placed leaflets detailing architectural plans for the cardboard models of the Supreme Court. These plans were available to all passers-by: a capitalised 'FREE' was etched into the base of the miniaturised court. Such a statement does more than simply reassure people that they can take the contents without payment: Weileder's conflation of the selling of homes and the architecture of the Supreme Court prompts pertinent questions about the relationship between the workings of market capitalism and the outworking of justice. The similarity between Weileder's stand and those of estate agents fleetingly, cheekily, suggests the selling of the Supreme Court of Justice, but here the contents are offered for 'free'. Justice, by definition, cannot be bought or sold. And if justice must be free, so justice is also a precondition for freedom, as the building itself proclaims in a carving over the east entrance '*Justice the Guardian of Liberty*'.¹

These moral values, and their seclusion from financial values, are built into the very structure of the Supreme Court. Designed by the architect Cass Gilbert, and built between 1932 and 1935, the building was intended to resonate with the very highest ideals of Western democratic justice. As Paul Spencer Byard has noted, Gilbert's favouring of Beaux-Arts Classicism was not only useful in practical terms – "it was flexible and it loved size" – it also situated the contemporary American legal system firmly within a specifically Roman lineage, at once both 'muscular' and 'corrective'.² Of course, the majestic structure with its proud columns, temple-like roof and

The image displays a set of architectural plans for a cardboard model of the Supreme Court building. The plans are organized into several sections:

- Front Steps:** Shows a 3D perspective of the steps and a corresponding floor plan with dimensions.
- Entrance Deck and back:** Shows a 3D perspective of the entrance deck and a detailed floor plan with dimensions.
- Main Roof Deck and back:** Shows a 3D perspective of the roof deck and a floor plan with dimensions.
- Main Roof building:** Shows a 3D perspective of the main roof structure and a floor plan with dimensions.
- Main Building Deck and back:** Shows a 3D perspective of the main building deck and a floor plan with dimensions.
- Main Building building:** Shows a 3D perspective of the main building structure and a floor plan with dimensions.

A parts list is provided at the bottom right, detailing the materials and dimensions for each component:

Part Name	Material	Dimensions
Front Steps	Step	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Middle Step	11 x 1 (145mm x 100mm)
	Backstrate	11 x 1 (130mm x 200mm)
Entrance Deck and back	Column Base	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Column Capital	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Column	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Floor	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Back Wall	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
Main Roof Deck and back	Roof	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Roof Side	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Roof Support (Hidden)	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
Main Roof building	Roof	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Roof Side	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Roof Support (Hidden)	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
Main Building Deck and back	Roof	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Roof Side	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Roof Support (Hidden)	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
Main Building building	Roof	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Roof Side	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)
	Roof Support (Hidden)	11 x 13 (130mm x 130mm)

RES PUBLICA
Wolfgang Weileder, 2012

Construction manual for a 1:50 scale cardboard model of the United States Supreme Court Building in Washington DC.

This manual is part of the site-specific artwork for the 2012 Public Art Festival in Washington DC, 2012-2013. www.respublica.com

Res Publica is created by Goldleaf and awarded by the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities, DC Central Public Art Program.

www.respublica.com
www.wolfgangweileder.com

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Corner Building

Corner Building

- Top ① 1 x 4 (800mm x 800mm)
- Side ② 8 x 4 (200mm x 800mm)
- Side ③ 8 x 4 (800mm x 800mm)
- Side ④ 8 x 4 (800mm x 200mm)
- Side ⑤ 8 x 4 (800mm x 800mm)
- Roof ⑥ 8 x 4 (800mm x 800mm)
- Roof ⑦ 8 x 4 (800mm x 800mm)

Side Building

Side Building

- Top ① 1 x 2 (700mm x 540mm)
- Side ② 8 x 2 (400mm x 800mm)
- Side ③ 8 x 2 (800mm x 400mm)
- Side ④ 8 x 2 (200mm x 400mm)
- Side ⑤ 8 x 2 (800mm x 800mm)
- Roof ⑥ 8 x 2 (800mm x 540mm)

Back Entrance Door (Roof)

Back Entrance Door (Roof)

- 1 x 1 (800mm x 300mm)

Front and Side Door

Front and Side Door

- 2 x 2 (400mm x 300mm)

Assembly Instructions

The model should be made from fluted or recycled cardboard. The cutting sheet provides a complete list of individual components required for construction and includes numbers of each component. The individual components are assembled with 2" brown paper garment tape.

Tools required:

- craft knife
- scissors
- cutting board
- straight metal edge
- metric tape measure (all dimensions are in Millimeters)
- water bowl and sponge

Materials required:

- recycled cardboard
- 2" brown paper garment tape
- 1" double sided adhesive tape

Legend:

- > direction of corrugation
- - - - -> band downwards (score half-way through from above)
- - - - -> band upwards (score half-way through from below)
- - - - -> area to apply double sided tape

pristine white symmetry is immediately evocative of the great historic civilisations, bringing with it notions of democracy, wisdom and authority. Its Palladian principles display what Weileder has called ‘power architecture’³, but its construction in the 1930s also signified more specific ideals. In tandem with its name, the Court’s architecture too was a claim of supremacy, not only through the connection with the historic Roman Empire, but also through America’s ‘appreciation of its authority in the world’ following the exposition of 1893, and its move away from focus on its Western frontier to a wider world stage.⁴ The ‘supremacy’ of this court reflected the supremacy of American international power; this building was the new temple of Western democratic ideals, it was set up as the supreme authority of Justice.

This authority was derived not only by the musculature of American might on an international stage, however, but also from a claim to house the highest ethical ideals. According to Spencer Byard, through its emphasis upon historic continuity Beaux-Arts Classicism bore with it the “vital attribute of a claim of authenticity, and through that a claim of right” that was specific to its time.⁵ Committed to beautification, Beaux-Arts classicism was ‘corrective’, willing the world ‘not to be the way it was, but the way its sponsors thought it ought to be’.⁶ This was the architecture of imposed rightness: in the case of Washington’s public building, Gilbert’s choice of Beaux-Arts classicism was his own self-reflexive enactment of the corrective power and will of the court. The building’s symbolic weight was declared from the start. When the cornerstone was laid in 1932, Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes famously stated: “The Republic endures and this is the symbol of its faith”⁷.

The notion of the republic is central to the socially-engaged nature of Weileder’s practice, and to his aims for the project to be participatory. The plans for the cardboard models – offered for free to all from

within the stainless steel sculpture – are detailed, serious and architectural, and the concept behind them – that we can all construct, all in some sense own, the Supreme Court – is as clear a symbol as Gilbert's classicism. The inclusivity of Weileder's project, its democratic emphasis upon the public nature of public places, can be read as being similarly steeped in corrective symbolism. Following Plato, *Res Publica* is suggestive of the common wealth, in direct contradiction to the *res privata* of property that is not collectively owned.⁹ In amongst the wry humour of the 'Supreme' leaflet stand, and the knowing seriousness of the cardboard plans, Weileder's *Res Publica* is a public artwork asking very sharp questions about the nature of public life in this capital of Western civilisation.

While the exact number of built scale-models of the Supreme Court may never be known, Weileder invited students from the Corcoran College of Art in Washington to construct three cardboard versions, which were then left around the city during the length of the 5x5 exhibition. The models were placed in locations where a homeless person might set up shelter, and where there was a resonance between the architecture of the model and that of the surrounding buildings. Permission (secured over months of careful negotiation) was often required to position the models. One, under shelter at Techworld Plaza – by day home to several government agencies and by night a space frequently used by homeless people in Washington – was destroyed on the first night of the exhibition by janitorial staff mistaking the humble cardboard constructions for rubbish that required removing. A second model occupied a valeted parking bay of the influential Cosmos Club, a private social club founded in 1878 whose members have made significant contributions in the fields of science, literature, the arts and public service. The third model was situated next to the Palladian-inspired facade of the DC Jewish Community Center, an organisation which works with local homeless people. This model survived against the odds for the duration of the exhibition, eventually lying weak and weather-beaten by the elements.

This prompting towards personification is encouraged by Weileder's aesthetic choices for the models. By rendering the Supreme Court in lowly, vulnerable materials, and crucially, on a miniaturised scale, Weileder here again references longstanding beliefs dating from ancient Greece and Rome which suggest that the city itself, and buildings within it, are in some way macrocosms of the body. According to Vitruvius, in line with the dictum that man is the measure of all things, the body should be the inspirational source for the proportions of the building and the city.⁹ As Joseph Rykwert has suggested, buildings are like bodies in that they 'need to be nourished and maintained throughout their life, they may be wounded, and have to die'.¹⁰ So it is that the temporality of Weileder's project gains so much poignancy: the human scale of the models

emphasises the individual within the public realm, and starkly contrasts the overwhelming vastness of the Supreme Court with the life-size frame of those who live under the power – and ideally the protection – of the state. There is a rich history of the use of the life-size in sculpture to present values that are essentially qualitative: from Duane Hanson's early work to recent projects such as Mark Wallinger's *Ecce Homo* (1999) and Michael Landy's *Semi-Detached* (2004), the life-size has been used to emphasise individuality and uniqueness rather than that which can be quantitatively measured.¹¹ Weileder's human-scale models join this important lineage of artwork, here posing a pointed question about the nature of justice in a capitalist system that allows homelessness on this scale.

The economic emphasis within Weileder's project is presented most provocatively in its final element: the selling of limited-edition prints of the model in order to raise monies that will benefit homeless people living in Washington. While rendering the artwork far from 'art for art's sake', this sale also demonstrates the artist's keen awareness of recent debate in which 'socially engaged' artwork can be seen as exploitative or patronising. Some recent artwork concerned with homelessness has played upon the financial value of 'high art' in comparison to the worthlessness with which human life can be treated. Gavin Turk's *Nomad* – a sculpture of a figure contorted beneath a dirty sleeping bag – was made of bronze to emphasise this contrast, while Michael Rakowitz's recent *ParaSITE* project created made-to-order inflatable shelters which harnessed the heat of nearby local buildings. While *Res Publica* shares a similar concern with contrasts in terms of value, and, like Rakowitz, actively offers practical help to those who find themselves homeless, the project does not depend upon the cooperation of specific people, but rather invites participation from all of Washington's citizens. In doing so, it prompts all who encounter it to consider how the





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strength of justice, represented so confidently in Gilbert's Supreme Court, has itself sagged and buckled wherever so many are forced to live without a building to call home.

¹ www.nps.gov/nr/travel/wash/dc78.htm. Accessed 21/5/2012.

² Paul Spencer Byard, 'Representing American Justice: The United States' Supreme Court', *Cass Gilbert Life and Work: Architect of the Public Domain*, ed. Barbara S. Christen and Steven Flanders, W.W. Norton and Company, New York and London, 2001, pp. 272-287, p 274.

³ Wolfgang Weileder, in conversation with the author, May 2012.

⁴ Paul Spencer Byard, p 274.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ www.nps.gov/nr/travel/wash/dc78.htm, accessed 21/5/2012.

⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee, Penguin Classics, London, 2007.

⁹ Joseph Rykwert, *The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1996, p 63.

¹⁰ Joseph Rykwert, p 65.

¹¹ For a more detailed account, see Rachel Wells, *Scale in Contemporary Sculpture: Enlargement, Miniaturisation and the Life-Size*, Ashgate Publishing, London, 2013.

Strive to make the world a little better and more beautiful because you have lived in it.—EDWARD BOK

Introduction by The Trustees of the Society for a More Beautiful National Capital, Inc to the 1965 'For A More Beautiful Capital' brochure, found in a dumpster in Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Library during the filming of Hawk & Dove.

Washington is many things to many people. It is a special kind of city, earning a special kind of love from people around the world to whom it is a beacon light of freedom.

Rich in tradition, Washington is a solid landmark in a world of disordered change, one of America's glories—an heirloom of beauty. Yet it is a city whose pulse marks the impatient rhythms of a youthful nation, eager to right the world's wrongs, to help the sick and feed the hungry and settle the little problems along with the big ones—and confident it can be done.

Washington is a place of pilgrimage, a promise that peace and serenity and beauty are attainable. It stands as a symbol of civilization that wrests much from the land it loves, but strives to give back much more than it takes.

... Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson to establish the First Lady's Committee for a More Beautiful National Capital for the Nation's cities and towns. She asks you to share in this effort. This brochure will serve as your...

BIOGRAPHIES

Cath Campbell is an artist whose practice has a consistent interest in architectural space, with works on paper, scale models of architecture and architectural forms recurrent within her gallery work, and a substantial portfolio of public art in the form of structural or spatial interventions into existing or planned architecture. Recent gallery exhibitions include 'Ideal Mexico' (2012) solo show at Workplace Gallery, Gateshead, UK, 'Enter Slowly,' The Lab, San Francisco, USA (2011) and a solo project for Openspace, Art Cologne, Germany (2009).

Ronit Eisenbach is an artist, architect, curator and University of Maryland faculty member who engages others in dialogue about the world we make for ourselves. Her recent publications include Installations by Architects and Ruth Adler Schnee: A Passion for Color. Venues for her installations and exhibitions have included: The Detroit Institute of Arts, The Cranbrook Art Museum, Oslo's Galleri Rom, and Venice's Palazzo Mocenigo. She is a Fellow of the Center for Creative Research, the Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and the MacDowell Colony.

Matthew Hearn is a part-time lecturer at Newcastle University and writes and curates as part of a collaborative artistic practice. He recently curated Re-Make/Re-Model (2010/11), National Glass Centre, Sunderland and SPECTRUM: WHITTLEHOGARTHPRATTTREND (2011), NewBridge Space, Newcastle upon Tyne. He has written for various magazines and publications and is currently Commissioning Editor for IOTA, a programme of public art practice in Inverness, Scotland.

Richard Hollinshead is an artist, curator and project manager specialising in public realm projects, and was curator of Magnificent Distance for the 5x5 project. A former lecturer, his PhD explored potential roles for contemporary artworks within historic landscapes, leading to the role of Public Art Manager for the INSPIRE Project in Northumberland before founding creative agency Grit & Pearl with Martin Hulse in 2007. Grit & Pearl specialises in the curation and delivery of public art, small-scale bespoke architecture and urban design projects.

Ben Jeans Houghton is an artist whose diverse practice includes sculpture, installation, film, photography, drawing, and performance. He has exhibited internationally in Germany, Greece, Japan, North Africa and South Asia, whilst regularly exhibiting in the UK with organisations such as BALTIC, CrASH, SpacelnBetween, CIRCA Contemporary Arts, Globe Gallery, CORNERHOUSE, ACA and Waygood. With Matthew Giraudeau he is a founder member of the ARKA Group, a fluid collection of creative collaborators who aim to make scientific and philosophical concepts tangible to a wider audience through poetic visual art.

Iris Priest is an artist and writer based at The NewBridge Project in Newcastle upon Tyne where she is also Editor of the arts magazine CANNED. Iris has written extensively for artists and arts organisations throughout the region including Chance Finds U - a Turning Point North East supported project exploring the various intellectual, philosophical and art historical connections developing between a group of eight artists. She is also a contributor to a number of national magazines and journals including Corridor8, Artists Newsletter and this is tomorrow.

Jo Ray is an artist and lecturer at Hull School of Art & Design. She has exhibited nationally in both gallery and public sites. She has undertaken site-specific commissions for Inspire Northumberland, Rednile Projects and Northcabin, and is an associate of Art Gene. She is increasingly drawn to an exploration of the political and poetic qualities of architecture and landscape and the complex interplay between the popular perception of a place and the lived experience of it. Plays on scale, adapted views and public intervention are recurrent strategies within her diverse practice.

Alistair Robinson is curator at Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, having held posts at the Victoria & Albert Museum and National Museum of Photography. He has organised the first public exhibitions of artists from Spartacus Chetwynd to Mark Titchner amongst many others. His publications include 'Rank: Picturing the Social Order' and a monograph on David Harrison for Victoria Miro gallery. He has also published articles in journals from the New Statesman to Turps Banana.

Isabella Streffen is an artist with research interests in military visioning technologies and early photographic devices and processes. She uses residencies to develop ambitious projects for contested public sites, including Lead Artist for Hadrian's Wall UNESCO World Heritage Site (2010); AHRC Fellow in the John W. Kluge Center, Library of Congress, Washington DC (2010-11) – a six-month research period which has led directly to her 5x5 proposal Hawk & Dove; and artist-in-residence at the Terra Foundation for American Art in Giverny, France (2011).

Alessandro Vincentelli is Curator of Exhibitions & Research at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art Gateshead. He has curated and produced exhibitions and edited publications for numerous projects internationally, most recently presenting Elizabeth Price's exhibition at BALTIC. He has devised and curated exhibitions for many artists including Steve McQueen, Yoko Ono, Lindsay Seers, the Raqs Media Collective and Bob & Roberta Smith. In 2009 he exhibited and commissioned Ben Jeans Houghton in the BALTIC group show A Duck for Mr. Darwin, an exhibition examining the legacy of Charles Darwin.

Wolfgang Weileder is an artist and currently Professor of Contemporary Sculpture at Newcastle University. Focusing on large-scale temporary site-specific architectural installation and sculpture in the urban environment his work also branches into photography, film, phonic installation and performance practice. This work is primarily concerned with the investigation and critical deconstruction of architecture, public spaces and the interactions we have with the ubiquitous urban environment. He has exhibited extensively throughout Europe and the UK, in both gallery and public contexts, as well as in Singapore, Australia, the United States and Venezuela.

Rachel Wells is Lecturer in the History of Art at Newcastle University. Her research interests encompass modern and contemporary art, with particular emphasis upon the relationship between sculpture and photography, the address of responsibility within contemporary art, and the impact of globalisation on recent art production and reception. She received her PhD from the Courtauld Institute in 2008. Her book on Scale in Contemporary Sculpture is forthcoming with Ashgate Publishing.





MAGNIFICENT DISTANCE

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