**ANNA HEPLER: ARREST, ARRAY**

August 21 – October 4, 2008   
Curated by Beth Sellars

*The broad spectrum of works described as installation art share a common aspect: they are not spatially autonomous art objects. The architectural site or environmental context is as integral to installation art as any object placed within it. Installation artists employ both indoor and outdoor spaces for works that are permanent or temporary -- existing only for the duration of the exhibition. Some installation art is specific to a particular site; other installations change, chameleon-like, according to the particular sites in which they are installed. Artists often co-opt the exhibition space and transform it, and in so doing, challenge the traditional notion of the clean, white cube of the museum gallery.*1

Open Satellite began operation in mid-2007 as a contemporary art exhibition space for the Bellevue and Seattle metropolitan areas. Developed as a residency-based program, Open Satellite provides the opportunity for emerging and mid-career artists from outside the region to create large-scale artwork in any medium. The artist is invited to stay in an apartment in the same building for up to three months, and during the first six weeks of the residency, the artist has 24-hour access to create a site-specific installation.

Open Satellite’s broad, 20-foot high expanse of north facing window wall and its hard surfaces of concrete, glass and drywall define a space that implores the artist to respond directly to the architecture. Because of the gallery’s cavernous volume, the artist must acknowledge the dominant architectural elements to achieve a successful response. The mere introduction of art objects independently placed within the space denies the power of the physical structure and ultimately overpowers whatever is placed there.

*ARREST ARRAY,* the site-specific installation created by Anna Hepler for Open Satellite, complements and intensifies the architectural situation it inhabits. Hepler has suspended a mesmerizing net of aluminum and stainless steel rods that quietly floats overhead, punctuated by round connecting nodes, and invite the visitor to encounter a new constellation at close range. The clustered and fluid components weave around two concrete columns that dominate the space. Is this a molecule magnified? Is it a flock of birds frozen in time, curving high around office towers at dusk? On the west side of the gallery, the swirl of connected rods lightly touches only one side of the column, while the column on the east side is completely surrounded by the piece, incorporating the column into its sphere of charged energy and acknowledging the most salient features of the site.

Hepler says she has introduced the sensation of movement to integrate the sculptural form and architectural space. In response, the visitor moves under and around the piece in order to gather impressions, never quite able to take it all in with a single glance. Implied movement provokes real movement with the introduction of a sculpture with no front or back within a non-hierarchical space. The visitor must establish her own relationship with these elements, never to be quite repeated by another.

In constructing a cohesive array of disks and rods across the length of the room, moving from physically smaller and denser clusters to larger and more open ones, Hepler presents a dramatically diminishing optical perspective. Scale and distance are purposefully exaggerated, and while the whole remains quite still, the entire form is infused with a sense of undulating expansion and contraction. When viewed against the adjacent white walls, the PVC connection disks become black marks dashing and receding in space. Hepler affirms that the primary impression of her work is retinal.

Additional to installation, the artist works in a wide range of media -- sculpture, drawing, photography, digital animation, and printmaking. She consistently works to capture a sense of geometric form, the suspension of floating particles that linger. Though she takes many cues from such natural phenomenon as flocks of starlings or swarms of gnats, Hepler’s work does not illustrate these phenomena or attempt to replicate what she has seen. She uses her impressions from these experiences as a naturalist might: as field notes contributing to a broader understanding of universal organizing principles.

Hepler clarifies ideas for installation work by fashioning rough, three-dimensional wire “drawings” or studies. These sculptural diagrams provide her the flexibility to work out ideas that she will later translate into larger spaces. Once work begins on an actual installation, the space and the construction materials dictate the fabrication and shape of the final form. Hepler likens the process to building a bird nest, repetitively attaching one piece at a time and learning from the observed properties of the structural components.

Hepler states that she is drawn to tensile, skeletal volumes as they occur spontaneously in the natural world. She has created hundreds of variants of such structures in pen and ink, in woodcuts, in etchings, in wire, in miniature dioramas, and on Plexiglas plates similar to the drawing edition she completed for Open Satellite. Her drawings often seem to be slices of imaginary, three-dimensional, wire-frame, spherical objects. "There's almost nothing more restful than the perfect circle,” Hepler has noted, “The sphere is one of those perfect forms that allow you to appreciate the chaos without being overwhelmed because you're constantly held in stillness by the overall shape." 2

I became aware of Anna Hepler’s work in 2006, with encouragement from Christine Wallers, whose installation work appeared at Suyama Space in 2005. I was impressed with Hepler’s acknowledgement of spatial concerns and her use of natural light sources. I felt her documentation exhibited a capacity to recognize and address the challenges inherent in a particular architectural context, while bringing a deliberate, fluid energy to the interpretation. When I was asked to curate a show for Open Satellite, I considered Hepler to be a perfect choice for the space.

Anna Hepler lives in Portland, Maine where she is a faculty member in the Art Department at Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine. Previously she held faculty appointments at the Maine College of Art, the Oregon College of Art and Craft, and Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. After attending Oberlin College, Hepler received her MFA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1994. She has exhibited nationally and internationally, with solo and group shows from Santa Fe, NM to The Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo. Hepler’s work can be found in the collections of the National Gallery of Art, the Tate Gallery, and the DeCordova Museum, as well as many college and university special collections.

Selected as an award recipient of the 1999-2000 Luce Foundation Fellowship, Hepler completed an artist residency in Seoul, South Korea where she produced a solo exhibition and co-founded FACTORY, an ongoing collaboration of international artists. She completed her second visiting artist residency at the Tamarind Institute in Albuquerque, NM in 2004. Here she produced a suite of lithographs in collaboration with resident master printers. Additional residencies included Centrum Center for the Arts, WA, Penland School, NC, Illinois State University, and the Oregon College of Art and Craft. In 2003, Hepler founded THE MAP ROOM, an exhibition space in Portland, ME that featured works on paper and installations.

In Hepler’s words:

*“Several years ago, watching a swarm of gnats hovering against the sky, I was struck by the contradictory but beautiful effect: a delicate grey sphere suspended in the air; an awesome chaos of frenetic movement.*

*“I am interested in such visually cohesive forms that nevertheless contain a chaotic structure – tangles of thread, electronic circuitry, swarms of insects in flight. There is something terrifying about their massive intricacy and something beautiful in the rhythms of their minute and repetitive detail.*

*“My methods are labor-intensive. I work from the conviction that any content gathers depth and density with the accumulation of evident labor.*

*“One theme that I return to is suspension -- the sense of certainty threatened by the possibility of destruction.” 3*

1 Blurring the Boundaries: Installation Art 1969-1996 (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art/ San Diego, 1997), p.31.

2 Interview with April Austin, “An Artist explores complexity and restfulness,” Christian Science Monitor, July 12, 2006, www.csmonitor.com/2006/0712/p18s02-hfes.html.

3 Artist statement, Swarm: Anna Hepler. Nine Gallery (Portland: Beo Press, 2000).