

Indianapolis Star
Installations spring to life

by Konrad Marshall
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More than a thousand tiny, hand-held viewers hang from a steel oblong frame, suspended high above the Efroymsen Family Entrance Pavilion at the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

Inside these plastic capsules reside families on Christmas morning, teenage boys with duckbill haircuts, buildings on fire and other Midwestern images captured over more than three decades.

The artist who created "Memory Cloud" is Judith Levy, a 62-year-old former psychotherapist and Indianapolis resident who now calls Lawrence, Kan., home.

Levy collects objects like these photographs from estate and garage sales and thrift stores. She has an interest in history, both public and private, a passion for ephemera and a fascination for the nature of remembrance.

"This is, in some ways, a memorial to the beauty of ordinary, commonly shared moments," Levy said on a recent morning. "Taking a photo is often more than capturing the moment. There's a sense that you want to protect the moment from vanishing, because it's magical, and I'm moved by that. I think it was Faulkner who said, 'The past is never dead. It's not even past.' "

The installation, as opposed to a painting or sculpture or single photograph, is the perfect way for Levy to share those obsessions as an artist.

Installation is as old as art itself. An ancient Aboriginal wall painting could easily be described as an installation, though in modern times artists often install works that are sculptural, with a specific site in mind, and encourage their audience to become part of the work.

The work of 33-year-old Leticia Bajuyo, an associate professor of art at Hanover College, fosters viewer exploration.

"Entropy: A Vortex of Useless Memory" -- which is part of an installation show called "3 X 3" at Herron School of Art and Design -- resembles a shimmering, reflective wall and cave and was constructed using 2-by-4s, fishing wire, cable ties and almost 5,000 compact discs, all of which were donated by "co-contributors" to the project. The piece incorporates everything from old Microsoft

licensing discs to a pirated copy of "Mad Max" to a burned love songs mix CD.

"People can look and say, 'I have that Cake album,' " Bajuyo said. "So there's excitement, participation and a dialogue, which makes interaction less of a hurdle."

Bajuyo studied drawing and painting as an undergrad at Notre Dame and would never have created this kind of work without exposure during her senior year to installation artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

"All of a sudden, it was like the sky opened up," she said. "I started to see how an object has its own voice and how I could borrow that voice. Not change it, but appropriate it and utilize it in a work that was site-sensitive."

Economic influence

Bajuyo's work can be dismantled, stored, then reconfigured and rebuilt in other spaces, but in the midst of a recession, the question of economics must arise.

"Installations are often not particularly portable," said Greg Hull, an associate professor of sculpture at Herron for 10 years and an installation artist himself. "Outside of commissions, it's hard to get funding. It doesn't tend to be a commodity."

But there are pluses to that, he added.

"It becomes driven by the ideas and not the dollars," Hull said. "I think the larger reason a lot of installation artists climb into it is an interest in a different kind of dialogue with their audience."

Hull said prints and paintings are often a means of supplementing income when installation may be an artist's primary medium. He also has seen more students experimenting in video, sound, performance and sculpture.

"Students are really intrigued by the idea of including the audience more actively," he said. "Thinking about how an audience enters the space, moves from work to work. All this is becoming part of their vocabulary."

Installation is also a great way to reach a wider community, Hull said, because it is often exhibited in spaces outside the gallery setting. For example, Hull's latest work, "Breath" -- kinetic sculptures that inflate and deflate -- is on display inside the Indianapolis International Airport parking garage.

"For me, early on it was about creating an environment, an experience, rather than an object," he said. "It was about giving the viewer an active role, either by moving works, or by entering the space."

Settings that work

Jamie Pawlus, 36, creates works that take the notion of interactivity in a different direction. Her 2006 piece "Truth/Lies," which sits on Massachusetts Avenue, looks like two mailboxes.

One obvious reaction to the work has been people putting things into the boxes -- thousands of scraps of paper have ended up inside over the past few years, from confessionals to love letters.

Pawlus has also taken installation into people's homes. At a recent impromptu art show in the home of former Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art curator Christopher West, Pawlus went around labeling everything she saw, from brooms and buckets to a piece of dog hair or a particular patch of wall (which she titled "Zen Landscape").

West recently commissioned an installation at his home by Herron professor and artist Danielle Riede, 33. The work is a single line of paint chips, installed high above a staircase, with an added piece of crown molding above.

"You can have a really loud, bright, crazy installation that slaps the viewer in the face, or something like this," West said. "I imagine eight out of 10 people probably leave and never even notice it's there. One person will see the paint chips and go, 'Oh, that's kind of beautiful.' And then that 10th person will say, 'Wait a minute, that crown molding does not go with this place -- that's got to be part of it', and will really get the installation, and they'll get that satisfaction, that 'aha' moment."

Widening scope

Installation art, however, does not have to be intimate.

The Indy nonprofit art collective Primary Colours ran a June show called "Installation Nation," where nearly a dozen artists were each given half a shipping container to bend to their will.

Hugh Vandiver, Primary Colours' executive director, said the show -- held on a vacant lot Downtown -- was organized in part to recognize the need for a major installation show in the city.

"You'll see installation at some galleries, but almost always they'll pair it with some paintings or sculptures or something because, obviously, they have to sell, and you can't really sell an installation piece per se," he said. "So us being a nonprofit, it seemed like a good approach for us to do that."

One of the artists involved in the show was Brian Priest, who runs Biscuits and Gravy Gallery in the Murphy Building in Fountain Square. Priest's science-based installations have been a mainstay on the Indy art scene for a number of years.

His work at "Installation Nation" featured a plexiglass habitat for fruit flies, with

miniature trees and buildings as part of the environment.

Priest is working on a show, to be held in Japan, in which the installation takes place inside his body.

For "Body Zoo" or "My Own Small Earth," he has been collecting micro-organisms from himself, and plans to store them in a small optical device, which will then be inserted into his arm by a body modificationist.

"My philosophy of art is you should always be uncomfortable," Priest said. "If I'm not sure it could be called art, I know I'm getting somewhere. Art purely for aesthetics is dead, or at least useless."

In a way, he said, the economic downturn might be good for art.

"If no one is buying anything, then that has an upside," he said. "When artists know their stuff isn't going to sell, it frees them to experiment."

"The death of an artist is an artist who finds his niche."

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Jamie Pawlus, 36

Contact: (317) 946-9926 or pawlus3@hotmail.com.

See her work: "Truth/Lies" sits on Massachusetts Avenue near Starbucks, and "Care/Don't Care" will be located on Mass Ave., in the spring, just north of the intersection of St. Clair Street and College Avenue.

Brian Priest, 31

Contact: (317) 513-5763 or www.brianpriest.net or [brian @acquamothers.org](mailto:brian@acquamothers.org).

See his work: His latest project-in-progress can be seen at www.myownsmall-earth.com, or see his upcoming First Friday show, "LAX Shaman," Aug. 7 at Biscuits and Gravy Gallery in the Murphy Building, 1047 Virginia Ave.

Danielle Riede, 33

Contact: (317) 517-9230 or driede@iupui.edu

See her work: Visit www.danielleriede.com to see examples of Riede's work in gallery settings all over the world, or check out a piece during IndyFringe from Aug. 21 through 30.

Greg Hull, 46

Contact: (317) 459-7898 or gghull@sbcglobal.net

See his work: "Breath" is on display at the Indianapolis International Airport parking garage, "Night Orchids" sits on the roof of the Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art, "Vicarious" is on the roof of the Indianapolis Art Center, and "Urban Geometry" is currently in an exhibition at the Indiana State Museum called "Making It in the Midwest: Artists Who Chose To Stay." Other work can be seen at www.greghull.com.

Judith Levy, 62

Contact: (785) 840-7938 or jglevy01@aol.com.

See her work: "Memory Cloud" is on display in the Efroymson Family Entrance Pavilion of the IMA through January. Levy's work can also be seen at www.judithglevy.com.

Leticia Bajuyo, 33

Contact: (812) 866-7338 or [bajuyo @hanover.edu](mailto:bajuyo@hanover.edu).

See her work: "Entropy: A Vortex of Useless Memory" is on display at the Eleanor Prest Reese and Robert B. Berkshire Galleries at Herron School of Art and Design until Aug. 8. Previous works can be seen at www.leticiabajuyo.com.

Arts blog

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