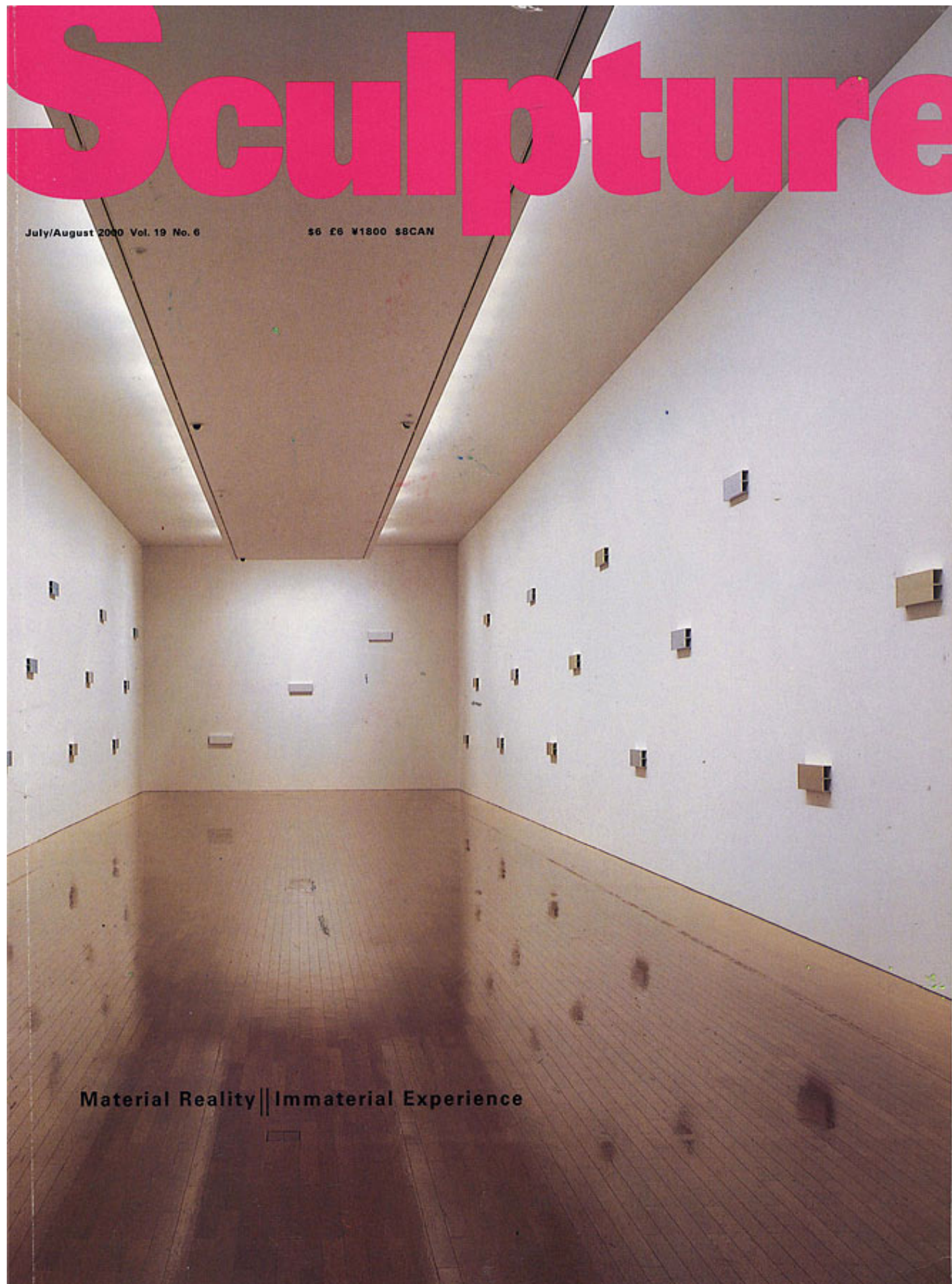


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Material Reality || Immaterial Experience

Margery Amdur: Noir and Roses

by Kathleen Whitney

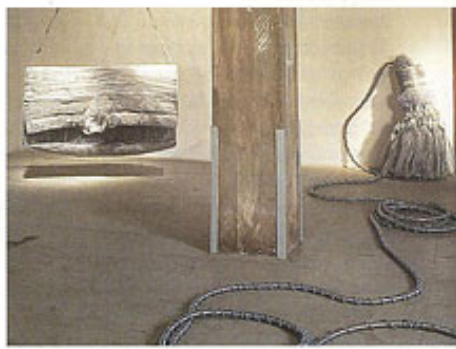


Over the course of the past three years Margery Amdur has produced three major interrelated installations: *Seams to be Constructed*, *Threads Of Continuity*, and *High Ly Strung*. These projects address the multiple dimensions of biology, psychology, the metaphysics of memory, and the influence of culture on experience. The organization of her work suggests fractal geometry, in which similar patterns iterate at different scales to produce irregular structures. The complex structures are also reminiscent of the current “biological” model of the mind as something that serves human needs and desires by maintaining circulations and reproductions of constantly mutating information.

Amdur’s structures also suggest Deleuze’s theories of the rhizome: the notion of culture as a lived pattern which functions in accordance with the language of physicality. The plurality her work exhibits is no static domain of facts; it emphasizes reality’s active overflow, the excessive productions that subvert or are repressed by the reigning pretenses of order.

These installations, both chaotic and poetic, bear multiple-nuances. It is very “noir” stuff: overblown, dramatic, shadowy, and captivating in a way that implies both charisma and control. Generally divided into a series of rooms or chambers, the works recall the lushness of nature yet are entirely artificial in terms of their florid exaggeration, lack of control, and celebration of the mechanics of anxiety, obsession, fetishism. Amdur’s environments always employ artificial lighting; they are meaningless and opaque in daylight. Their lack of light, a certain shadowed quality, is crucial—not as a way of obscuring but as a way of emphasizing a lack of control. As Merleau-Ponty said: “We see as far as our hold on things extends.” Her work marks out a dark, somber naturalism, nature without natural illumination.

This work is deepened and expanded through subtle, paradoxical contrasts; the darkness contains balancing images of light, growth, escape, love, and reception. Using symbols drawn from popular culture, Amdur renders her recognizable images—roses, curtains, veils—in unheroic, clear language.



Left: *Threads of Continuity*, 1998. Wire mesh screen, plastic tubing, and aluminum wire, installation view. Above: *Seams to be Constructed*, 1997. Wire mesh screen, plastic tubing, and aluminum wire, installation view.

While these images can nearly disappear within the abstractions of Amdur’s Wagnerian universe, they serve as a balance, keeping the work open and welcoming.

The singularity of Amdur’s work is derived as much from its formal and material variety as from any particular innovation or image. The spaces she creates and the objects within them are consequences of repetitive actions: wrapping, winding, and twisting. Her materials are monochromatic and consistent: window screening, plastic tubing, lightweight wire. These are wrapped, folded, and sewn together—thousands of feet of plastic tubing are bent into shape by wire wrappings. Various weights and kinds of wires are twisted together repeatedly until they take on enough mass to hold themselves up or simply become visible. Screening covers walls and floor, supporting smaller panels of amorphous shapes and creating huge evocative gray forms. All scales are represented, from the gigantic to the tiny. This is the labor of a fetishist: all spaces are deeply inflected by Amdur’s labor and its obsessive repetition. Her room-sized



Clockwise from left: *Seams to be Constructed* (detail), 1997. *High Ly Strung*, 1999–2000. Macro lights, video projection, wire mesh screen, plastic tubing, and aluminum wire, installation view. *Threads of Continuity* (detail), 1998. *High Ly Strung* (detail), 1999–2000.



tableaux rely on quantity and repetition; the mass of objects impinges on the viewer through accumulation, aggressively sharing the space. You have to watch your every move or you may step on something or catch your sleeve. The restlessness of these accretions keeps all the objects in flux.

High Ly Strung incorporates low-voltage adapters and electrical wiring attached to small constellations of tiny low-wattage bulbs and twinkle lights. Hidden within all the wire and partitioning, these agglomerations of lights deny the dense materiality that surrounds them. Because of the shadows cast by the lights, the work appears uninhibited by gravity, its great mass weightless and levitating somewhere between floor and ceiling. Amdur's selective use of video projection perfectly complements this weightlessness, adding yet another evanescent element.

Over the past three years, Amdur's installations have become increasingly abstract. Rather than relying on symbolism and specificity of form, the entire project is based upon the "thingness" of abstraction. Like Jackson Pollock's paintings, Amdur's work functions through a structure of oppositions: linearity is opposed to color, contour is opposed to field, matter is opposed to formlessness. Her newest work is resolutely anti-illustrational, yet it takes memory as its subject. The consequence of an abstract logic that contains the psychological, her imagery is absorbed into its own structure, which replicates the experience of dream space; they are charged with feeling but stripped of imagery. These installations could be seen as three-dimensional projections of Pollock's "memories arrested in space," to borrow Rosalind Krauss's phrase.

In Amdur's work, the urge to displace or otherwise disorient responds to a deeper purpose, to re-place and re-orient. This makes stringent demands on the viewer's imagination as nothing present is ever fully described. The work is never public or didactic; instead, it is deeply private and evocative. Amdur's work speaks of a world of social contact where seduction and wonderment carry serious consequences; the world of separation may melt away. This vision of endless connection is deeply utopian: in Amdur's world everything is promised and everything is possible. She encourages play with meaning but also engages indeterminacy, meaning's other side. Ultimately, the work has less to do with itself as a physical entity than it has to do with these extra-aesthetic associations. More than the idiosyncrasies of response, what the viewer



takes away from these fragile inscriptions and cursory drawings is an affirmation of the relationship between object and beholder.

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