SCULPTING WITH AIR: IAN McMAHON AND JONG OH

deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum • Lincoln, MA • decordova.org • Through September 30, 2018

Sculpting with air, as artists Jong Oh and Ian McMahon do with their installations at the deCordova, is a deceptively complex task. Yes, air is abundant, pliable, inexpensive and weightless. But how to capture the essence of a ubiquitous, colorless substance?

The shape of air is determined by its container, so it’s appropriate that the sculptures are site-specific. McMahon’s sculpture, which looks like a cluster of monumental pillows, occupies a space 65 x 25', and captures the expansive, malleable quality of air. Yet, as McMahon says, when it comes to viewing, and perceiving, these giant puffs, sight is the most unreliable sense. The forms look like they could float away if not for the corral of pipes that contain them. In fact, they are made with approximately 5,000 pounds of gypsum plaster. To create the deceptive effect, McMahon inflated thin plastic molds, sprayed in plaster, and then peeled away the plastic shell. The process took several days; he will have to shatter the casts when the show closes.

Oh’s modus operandi is less explosive, yet equally powerful. He uses threadlike chain and invisible wire to create lines and portals in what are otherwise two nondescript rooms—fluorescent overhead light, white walls, industrial carpet. Visitors move slowly, hyperalert to the traces of manipulation: A chain suspended from the ceiling points to a tiny imperfection on the floor; a “window” created with clear gloss paint.

Oh’s interventions are inspired by the shapes and characteristics of the place he’s working in. Four horizontal threads on one wall, for example, might echo the grating of a vent opposite it.

Oh added and moved pieces throughout the installation phase. The sculptures transformed subtly yet perceptibly over time, just as the atmosphere in a room can. Time-lapse video footage on display shows how dramatically Oh and McMahon shaped their spaces, and how the space shaped their pieces. This is the nature of sculpting with air, and it’s a reminder of the power of the invisible media that we move through every day. Catch it before it moves away.

—Emily Avery-Miller
1. At MassArt’s commencement ceremony in Boston, MA on May 25, 2018, world-renowned artist Wangechu Mutu delivered the commencement speech. Photo: Natasha Moustache.


3. At Art New England’s Berkshires party at CYNTHIA-REEVES and Ferrin Contemporary in North Adams, MA on May 10, 2018, l. to r.: artist Doug Trump with gallery owner Cynthia Reeves. Photo: Lisa Green of Rural Intelligence.


5. At the opening for Monotype Guild of New England’s fifth National Monotype/ Monoprint Juried Exhibition at The Art Complex Museum in Duxbury, MA on March 20, 2018, l. to r.: Charles Weyerhaeuser, director of The Art Complex Museum; Craig Bloodgood, contemporary curator; Rebecca Leopoldina Torres, president of the Monotype Guild of New England; Judith Brodsky, juror and board chair, New York Foundation for the Arts, founder, Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper. Photo: R. Leopoldina Torres.


7. At the opening reception for Sculpting with Air: Ian Makin and Jong Oh at deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, MA on April 19, 2018, l. to r.: Marina Tanga, Koch Curatorial Fellow and curator with artist Jong Oh. Photo: Rick Mansfield Jr.

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Deadline for the September/October issue: July 18, 2018