DeCordova presents *Temporary Structures: Performing Architecture in Contemporary Art* on view this fall

Lincoln, MA, September 12, 2011—*Temporary Structures: Performing Architecture in Contemporary Art* will be on view at deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum from September 18–December 31, 2011. This exhibition features thirteen artists and collaborators who underscore the changeable and active nature of our built environment. In doing so, they take architecture beyond its obvious function as shelter and design and examine its social, psychological, and cultural resonance in our lives. Video, sculpture, installation, and performance converge to address architecture through three broad themes: *intervention, mobility,* and *participation*. Featured artists include Vito Acconci, Ant Farm, Mary Ellen Carroll, Kate Gilmore, Liz Glynn, Gordon Matta-Clark, Mary Mattingly, Sarah Oppenheimer, robbinschilds, Alex Schweder La, Ward Shelley/Douglas Paulson, Mika Tajima, and Erwin Wurm.

Over the past 50 years, architecture’s agency in society has emerged as a growing concern for contemporary artists. Be it the white-cube space of the gallery, the historic walls of a specific site, or the loaded evocations of Modernism embedded in glass and concrete surfaces, artists and theorists agree that there is no such thing as a neutral environment—every space speaks.

*We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.*—Winston Churchill

Churchill delivered this truism in response to the wartime bombing of the House of Commons in London. An unsteady climate asks us to pause and reexamine our surroundings, as ideals and places that we once thought infallible and reliable begin to crumble away—a symbolic building, a free market, housing investments, or political ideals. In the aftermath of recent man-made and natural disasters, and in the decade since the attacks on the World Trade Center towers there has been a media wave bearing collective witness to the unreliable nature of architecture’s capacity to protect and shelter us.

The artists in this exhibition infuse buildings or the idea of buildings, typically considered static and stable, with the element of time through architectural interventions, changeable
environments, and participatory performances. In approach and framework, these artists merge two dominant strains of art practice today—time-based performance and architectural subject matter. They ultimately destabilize our idea of fixed space and present a collective notion of the changing, almost living, nature of architecture, blurring the lines between the organic and built worlds. Accordingly, buildings are viewed as active agents within our social lives, informing and performing human behavior, changing states, and telling stories.

Dina Deitsch, Curator says, “DeCordova is located in one of the most architecturally rich areas in the northeast. We are just around the corner from Walter Gropius’s 1938 home, a key example of Modernism in the United States, and Walden Pond, site of Thoreau’s now legendary cabin—two structures of radical change that make clear the social power of architecture. In planning this exhibition, it was important that the Museum’s own distinctive spaces became an active participant with the works.”

Temporary Structures: Performing Architecture in Contemporary Art uses non-traditional spaces of the Museum’s unique building and outdoor spaces to present an avant-garde exhibition comprised of site-specific, performative, and participatory installations, engaging Museum visitors in a new way throughout the duration of the show.

**Featured Projects**

**Gordon Matta-Clark**’s work from the 1970s is the foundation for this exhibition as one of the first post-modern artists to use buildings as a sculptural material. In his iconic films *Splitting* and *Bingo/Ninths*, 1974, buildings are cut and transformed into objects. Also on view, *Clockshower*, 1973, represents one of Matta-Clark’s most daring performances in which the artist climbed to the top of the Clocktower building in New York and washed, shaved, and brushed his teeth on the face of the clock.

**Vito Acconci**’s *Instant House*, 1980, is one of the artist’s pivotal participatory sculptures. *Instant House* marks Acconci’s interest in making social and political work; when “at rest” the panels appear as four American flags splayed on the floor of the gallery, and when the swing is activated by the weight of a body, the walls rise up into Soviet flags, shifting the national and cultural identity of the participant and the structure. Museum visitors are invited to sit in the swing with the assistance of a Gallery attendant.

For *Temporary Structures*, artistic collaborators **Ward Shelley** and **Douglas Paulson** will be performing a high stakes building game that will result in a complex sculptural installation, *Grow or Die*. Starting days before the opening of the exhibition, Shelley and
Paulson will be building a continuous elevated catwalk that begins in the lobby, travels up the Grand Staircase and ends near the 4th floor café. Like the childhood game of trying to make it across the living room without touching the floor, their performative installation has a clear objective and set rules. The objective is based on the idea that life forms must grow in order to survive, and because the built environment has become our natural environment/habitat, we too must grow, or die. **Museum visitors are invited to witness the “building game” transpire during the first week the exhibition is on view.**

Berlin-based artist **Alex Schweder La presents a new work, Roomograph**, an inflatable room-scaled installation that “photographs” itself and those who occupy it. Sections of Roomograph are constructed out of light sensitive material, which retain imprints of visitors’ contact as they sit, touch, and relax inside the space. “In this way,” explains the artist, “the architecture itself acts as ephemeral performance documentation that allows occupants to visualize their performance in the space. Then, as the work changes, their image and the architecture's image fragment, disperse, and mix together with a loss of visual distinction.”

**Schedule of Performances, Participatory Installations, and Educational Programs**

**Build “Cleopatra’s Needles” with artist Liz Glynn**  
**Sunday, September 18, 10 am–12 pm; 12–2 pm**  
Liz Glynn creates monumental sculptures and participatory performances that explore human ambition and the potential for change through acts of building, destruction, and recycling. For this exhibition, the artist with the help of volunteers will construct two large-scale obelisks based on “Cleopatra’s Needles”, the famed pair of Egyptian Obelisks exported to London and Central Park respectively.

Call for volunteers! DeCordova is currently seeking volunteers to assist in the unearthing and erection of two obelisks to be created on-site on opening weekend. Email programs@decordova.org to sign up to volunteer.

**Public Installation: Ward Shelley and Douglas Paulson’s “Grow or Die”**  
**Sunday, September 18–Friday, September 23, 10 am–5 pm**  
Witness the installation of “Grow or Die” as the work weaves up the grand staircase through the third floor lobby up to the fourth floor and engage with Ward Shelley and Douglas Paulson as they create this amazing spectacle of an installation that serves as the “spine” of the exhibition.
Curator Tour  
Dina Deitsch, Curator  
Saturday, October 22, 3 pm  
Tour Temporary Structures: Performing Architecture in Contemporary Art with the exhibition curator. The public will gain the curatorial perspective behind conceiving such an innovative exhibition, why the artists on view were selected, and a behind-the-scenes understanding of how the site-specific works were created.

Demonstration and Discussion: Performative Process  
Mary Mattingly  
Saturday, October 29, 3 pm  
Learn about Mary Mattingly’s process and creative inspiration as she animates her sculptural “wearable home.” Performance and discussion will be followed by a brief Q & A session.

Interactive Performance  
robbinschilds and students from SMFA  
Saturday, November 5, 1-2:30 pm  
This interactive performance will be led by artist collaborative robbinschilds and students from the School of Museum of Fine Arts. They will have created a site specific performance engaging body movement, architecture, as well as self designed directives to culminate in a multi-sensory experience. The directives provided by the performers will guide their bodily movements to react to specific structures within the Museum. Individual interpretations are welcomed and spontaneous choreographies will result. Museum visitors are welcome to participate as performers or spectators.

Lecture: Architecture as a Medium  
Dina Deitsch, Curator  
Saturday, November 12, 2 pm  
Breaking and manipulating the technical conventions of functional structures have invigorated contemporary artists to create a new visual and philosophical language surrounding the art of architecture. How are we as viewers meant to understand architecture as a medium? Join Associate Curator of Contemporary Art as she discusses the practice of using architectural elements in contemporary art.

Film Screening: Space, Land, and Time: Underground Adventures with Ant Farm  
Saturday, December 3, 2 pm  
Directed by: Elizabeth Federici and Laura Harrison (2010)  
Run Time: 78 minutes  
The renegade 1970s art/architecture collective Ant Farm created Media Van on view as part of Temporary Structures: Performing Architecture in Contemporary Art. Radical -more-
architects, video pioneers, and mordantly funny cultural commentators, the ‘Ant Farmers’ also created a body of other deeply subversive work that questioned the boundaries of architecture and predicted many of the ideas and technologies we take for granted today. From inflatable living spaces and extreme home constructions to their infamous re-staging of the JFK assassination and such stellar events as 1975’s “Media Burn,” in which a customized Cadillac blasts through a mountain of flaming television sets in a San Francisco parking lot—Ant Farm inspired and amused in ways traceable in subsequent generations of artist and activists.

**Cell Phone Audio Tour**

Bring your cell phones with you to deCordova this fall to hear the audio tour for *Temporary Structures: Performing Architecture in Contemporary Art*. Listen as artists explain how they manipulate space through performative and architectural means, as well as their ideas and inspiration behind their work.

Please visit the [website](#) for a current list of programs for *Temporary Structures*.

*Temporary Structures* will be accompanied by a full-color catalogue, featuring guest essayists Neil Leach, architectural historian and theorist and Professor of Architecture at the University of Southern California, and Giuliana Bruno, Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University. The exhibition is organized by Dina Deitsch, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art.

This exhibition has been made possible in part by a major grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and by generous matching support from Anthony and Beth Terrana.

The catalogue publication is made possible through a generous grant from the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation.

**About deCordova**

Established in 1950, deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum is the largest park of its kind in New England and encompasses 35 acres of beautiful rolling woodlands and lawns. In 2009, deCordova changed its name from deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park to deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum to emphasize its renewed focus on sculpture and to support the institution’s goal of becoming a premier Sculpture Park by 2020. Providing a constantly changing landscape of large-scale, outdoor, modern and contemporary sculpture and site-specific installations, the Sculpture Park hosts more than 60 works, the majority of which are on loan to the Museum. Inside, the Museum features a robust slate of rotating exhibitions and innovative interpretive programming.

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In March of 2010, deCordova acquired its first work by an international sculptor and continues to bolster the curatorial program by exhibiting high-quality, accessible art of nationally and internationally recognized artists indoors and out. To maintain its commitment to New England artists and emphasize the quality and vitality of the art created in this region, deCordova launched the deCordova Biennial in 2010 and the PLATFORM series in 2009.

DeCordova attracts more than 100,000 visitors from New England and tourists from around the world to its campus each year. Offering one of the largest non-degree granting studio art programs in New England, deCordova’s School enrolls approximately 2,000 students in various classes and workshops throughout the year. Unique to deCordova, the Corporate Program provides area businesses the opportunity to support the institution and New England-based contemporary artists through membership initiatives and Art Loan options.

**General Information**

DeCordova is open Tuesday through Sunday, from 10 am to 5 pm and on select Monday holidays. General admission during Museum hours is $12 for adults; $8 for senior citizens, students, and youth ages 6–12. Children ages 5 and under, Lincoln residents, and Active Duty Military Personnel and their dependents are admitted free. The Sculpture Park is open year-round during daylight hours. Guided public tours of the Museum’s main galleries take place every Thursday at 1 pm and Sunday at 2 pm. Tours of the Sculpture Park are given on Saturday and Sunday at 1 pm from April to November. All guided tours are free with Campus admission. Visit decordova.org or call 781.259.8355 for further information.

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