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Sculpture Key West 2009 BY CHRISTINA KEE

Exhibition One
West Martello Tower
January 18 – April 18, 2009

Exhibition Two
Fort Zachary Taylor State Park
March 1 – April 18, 2009



Ludwika Ogorzelec *tornado* from "Space Crystallization" cycle, 2009. 4-km cellophane line, coral stones, variable dimensions. Photo by the artist. Other photos by Karley Klopfenstein, courtesy Sculpture Key West. Cover APRIL 2009: Jackson Martin *Rooted* 2009. Burlap, steel evergreen tree, soil, rope, 10 x 6 x 6 feet.

Strong, spirited, and brought to life with industry and intelligence, this year's Sculpture Key West exhibition offered an engaging sampling of contemporary works. Held for the past nine years in its current form, this ambitious outdoor exhibition occurs in two main exhibition sites on the tropical island of Florida's Key West and features the work of local, national and international artists. This year's head curator was Shamim Momin of the Whitney Museum, who worked closely with Exhibitions Director Karley Klopfenstein and a small jury to shape what proved to be a diverse show of 32 works from 37 artists. Sculpture Key West's approach has always been brave: the artists have only a few days - working in the heat, wind and rain - to execute their pieces, which are then expected to remain intact, or at least onsite, until being dismantled two months later. The drama inherent to such a logistically challenging process is palpable in the final result, and lends the show an energy, unity and sheer like-ability foreign to most group exhibitions.

This is not to say that every piece was a success. Some sculptures suffered in the elements, a small few were not able to be on view for the duration of the show, and a couple of the pieces seemed indicative of nothing so much as an artist cracking under pressure and leaving the site in a tantrum. Within an otherwise overwhelmingly successful exhibition, however, these minor setbacks served as material proof of Sculpture Key West's admirable acceptance of risk as a necessary factor in the creation of serious, exciting work.

One of the strongest elements of the show was the considered placement of works within the very different main sites of the Gardens at West Martello Tower and Fort Zachary Taylor State Park. Although both venues center around nineteenth-century military fortifications, the Gardens are a series of cloistered green spaces set amid meandering brickwork, and Fort Taylor Zachary Park is a treeless plain by the water's edge. The contrast in setting was used to exceptional effect, literally doubling the possibilities of an already broadly defined medium.

The visual competition of the Gardens at the West Martello Site, with its profusion of outrageous tropical flora, was so intense as to have necessitated, for most artists, an unconventional sculptural approach - that of camouflage and surprise. Looming in the treetops, Ludwica Ogorzelec's *Space Crystallization* (all works 2009) is the result of impressive technique of woven plastic film. This curious structure extends and falls into space, held in tension with knots and weights that exploit the flex and pull of an unexpected material. Densely translucent, Ogorzelec's piece requires a slow looking-into in order to be properly seen, and defies instinctive attempts to assess properties of mass, material and contour. The oversized crocheted patterns of Liliana Crespi's *Captured*, slung amid the garden foliage, similarly challenge conventional readings, constituted as they are by rope and holes, and having little in the way of weight and form in any regular sense. Bringing to mind the toils of a modern-day Arachne, Crespi's piece elegantly alludes to the tense relationship between the natural and man-made, all the while echoing the concentrically unfurling patterns of the buds and blossoms close-by. Jamey Grimes' carefully crafted, corrugated plastic work *Between Space*, which would almost be too smooth a read in a gallery space, is set here to magical effect under the latticework of a bower where it is forced to do all-out battle with the brilliance and shadow-silhouette of tropical light.

The impact of these works is intentionally subtle, but sufficient for sharpening the senses. *Pay attention* could have been the curatorial mantra for this section of the show, and the directive was acted out in the work of Karen McCoy and Robert Carl, whose "listening trumpets" randomly prompt visitors throughout the site to tune-in to the sensorial possibilities of their fantastical surroundings.



Karlis Rekevics *Bastion, Affectation, Differences?* 2009. Plaster, variable dimensions.

The Fort Zachary venue, bordered by brick and ocean, is infused with that potent blend of the paradisiacal and militaristic encountered throughout the tropics in places of past dispute and defense. Many of the works on this site responded to the sense of threat intrinsic to the presence of the fort, other to the site's identity as a landing place for immigrants arriving by sea. Even the more lighthearted works suggest - like the landscape that is both holiday-like and vaguely ominous - that things are not always as they appear. The sculptures are here set out along what felt like an emotional scale and viewers making their way along the windswept space encounter a progression of play, puzzlement, unease and awe in what amounted to a very moving experience.

Towards the beginning of this trek are a number of pieces that delight and startle with a mischievous sensibility. Diana Shpungin's work *Perfect Disconnect* appears to be two ordinary payphones, except that they are impossibly fused, and emit the clicks and dial tones of a doubly-confounded communication. Jackson Martin's *Rooted* is a northern evergreen dwarfed

within an enormous burlap root-sac, and while looking like a bit of landscaping gone wrong, the piece acts as a succinct expression of the anxieties surrounding issues of upheaval and belonging. Anya Marais' *False Security* is just that: a hot-pink trailer suggestive of a life-size Barbie at play, until a peek inside reveals a surreal alternative. Owen Mundy and Joelle Dietrick's curved mirror placed against the dazzling shoreline takes the form of a light-apparition, a teasing mirage.

Moving out from the populated section of the park, the works become more structured, almost monumental. These pieces are bold enough to stand up to the starker surroundings, and don't shy away either from tackling themes of beauty, message and form. Paige Pedri's *Emancipation*, placed right against the water's edge, is a statement of strength both in the abstract and the actual. A soaring tower of corresponding forms, Pedri's work spoke simultaneously of patterns of flight, a struggle against gravity, and the tangible ambition of an artist truly engaged. Equally expansive, thought oriented along the horizontal plane, was the reflective 250' ramp engineered by Steven Durow and Jessica Capiello that charted a slow and steady ascent towards the blue it mirrored above. Lori Nozick built an irresistible, if somewhat arbitrary, structure from pure salt bricks, and Nathaniel Hein and Jennifer Gonzales fashioned a heart-wrenching piece, in which the plastic-bag panels of a greenhouse allowed tender young shoots just enough air to sprout, only to then suffocate.

The most successful sculptures stood out in their ability to draw complex emotional resonance from simple material statements. Lauren P. McAloon's *Threshold* is a hauntingly beautiful gathering of tall bamboo "flutes" that sing, whistle and sigh almost unceasingly into a relentless sea-wind. Completed with the worn-rudders of Cuban chug boats, the plaintive cry of McAloon's work isn't subtle - but its effectiveness is undeniable. Julia Handshue's piece, *Release/Recovery*, involves the dissemination of exquisite, serial-numbered, porcelain pods throughout both sites for the purposes of discovery and re-documentation. Though coolly-executed, the piece presents in perfect miniature an object-cycle of lost-and-found, stirring unexpected associations of delight and regret.

Karlis Rekevic's work consists of white plaster structures that allude, obliquely, to nearby architectural features. In a sophisticated play of multiple forms, Rekevic's piece simultaneously builds up and subverts an individualized system of construction, in which the forces of assertion, recession, weight and support are in constant play. More than any other artist in the show, this work seemed involved with sculpture as a fully three-dimensional phenomenon, as opposed to a sophisticated form of communication through object means. It is remarkable, however, that nearly all of the works in the show seemed to possess their own internal dignity; expressing within these challenging conditions that the act of sculpture is one that is uncertain, vulnerable, and at its best heroic.

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