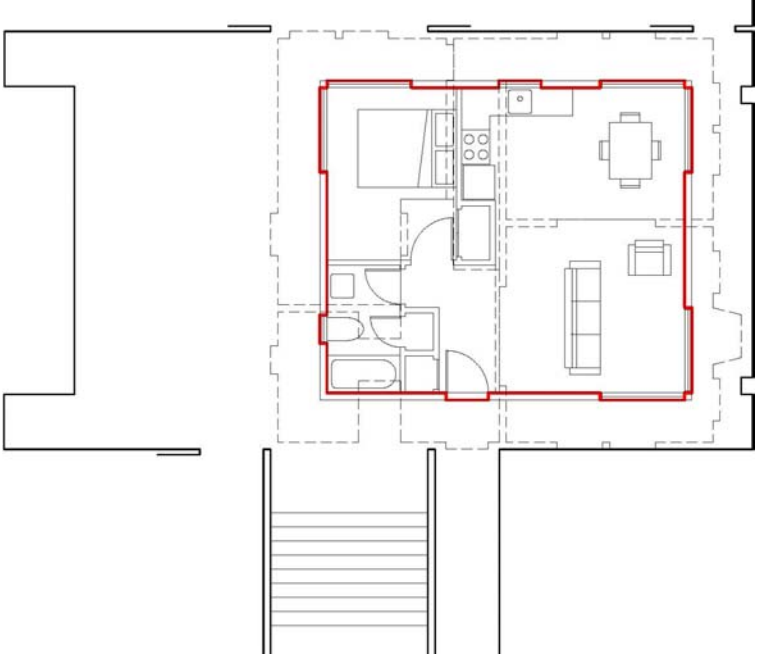
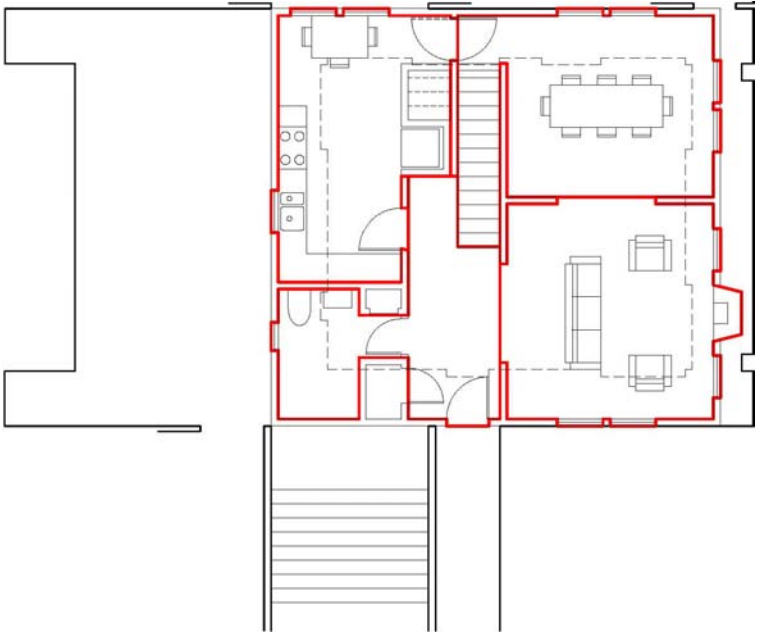




A SAC OF ROOMS THREE TIMES A DAY INSTALLATION BY ALEX SCHWEDER

SUYAMA SPACE, SEATTLE



PREFACE

Beth Sellars, Curator

Alex Schweder's work at the intersection of art and architecture has its roots in practices such as Diller + Scofidio and Frederick Kiesler. He received his Bachelor of Architecture in 1993 from Pratt Institute's School of Architecture in Brooklyn, New York and a Master of Architecture in 1998 from Princeton University's School of Architecture in Princeton, New Jersey. In 2006, Schweder completed a fellowship year in Architecture at the American Academy in Rome, Italy.

Based on Schweder's extensive exhibition record and intuitive investigations within an architectural framework, George Suyama and I were intrigued with his installation proposal: *"Transparent vinyl forms of different sizes will inflate and deflate. The smaller forms will allude to rooms through architectonic elements such as windows doors, walls, and stairs. The larger form will suggest a building envelope through windows and doors. Only the smaller forms will inflate and by doing so, they will make the larger form take shape. The larger envelope, though, will be too small to contain the smaller ones if they all fully inflate. As a result, the smaller forms will distort and be different every time the work is activated. These 'rooms' will inflate at different times so that one that has just inflated will lose volume and distort in response to the form inflating just next to it. This writhing 'performance' will happen three times a day, each lasting about half an hour to forty five minutes."*

Schweder's explorations clearly fell within the required parameters for installation at Suyama Space. As the "rooms" expanded against one another in dramatically evolving shapes, the artist made new discoveries about the physical properties of the clear vinyl compartments and blown air. Consistent with our mission of providing opportunities for experimentation and inspiration, Schweder's project morphed into innovative interpretations that gave new dimension to the concept of interior structure and surrounding environment.

We are pleased to have had the opportunity to present Alex Schweder's continuing investigations in architecture. The project was consistent with our past attempts at inventive connections for viewer discovery, and as always could not have been possible without the significant support of our contributors. Funding for the installation and accompanying publication was provided by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, 4Culture Sustained Support, and Suyama Space Gallery Friends in partnership with Space.City. Major artist funding was provided by the Mayor's Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs and 4 Culture Special Projects.

Cover: "A sac of rooms three times a day," animation series, transparent vinyl, blown air, 21' x 28' x 9'

*Opposite page: "Plan 500, Plan 800."
Diagrams of 800 sf (above) and 500 sf
(below) houses designed to fit inside of
Suyama Space. The red lines indicate
outlines of the vinyl forms.*

*Drawings and photographs by Alex
Schweder*



Left and right:
"Spit Skin, Jan. 19; Spit Skin, July 4."
"Saliva, Biodegradable Packing, 96" x 42"
x 120", December 2006, Rome, Italy;
18" x 48" x 72" at present.
Photograph of Spit Skin, Jan. 19 by Alex
Schweder; Photograph of Spit Skin, July 4
by Richard Barnes



Above, left: "Still Life of Beefsteak and
Cheese," 2004, Howard House, paper,
ink, and scented varnish, 96" x 240" x
72"

Photograph by Alex Schweder

Above, right: Installation of "Love Sick
Room," 2005, Henry Urbach Architecture,
paper, ink, and scented varnish, 126" x
120" x 168"

Photograph by Mauro Restiffe

PERVERSE PERFORMANCE: ALEX SCHWEDER'S A SAC OF ROOMS THREE TIMES A DAY

Henry Urbach

In Tsai Ming-Liang's 1998 film *The Hole*, a plumber leaves a gaping hole in the floor of an apartment block, forging a new opening between two units and joining two lives formerly held apart. This aberrant, leaky slab, a surface that performs effects other than those normally demanded of architectural edges, indelibly alters the inhabitants' lives, compelling them to assume new roles vis-a-vis one another and the architecture that structures their relationship.

An equally intensified sense of architectural agency animates the work of Alex Schweder. In his installation projects, architectural surfaces are attributed with unexpected corporeal qualities, mirroring human flesh in an effort to entangle people within their representational web. Consider *SpitSkin*, for example, Schweder's 2006 bathroom installation composed of biodegradable packing peanuts joined together with spit. Constructed through a process of licking, and located in a subterranean bathroom at the American Academy in Rome, the sticky room served to register the exchange of fluids between the chamber's walls and the bodies that eliminate within them. Walls shriveled and shrunk in response to ambient and human moisture, bringing architectural and corporeal skins into a new degree of interdependence.

Consider likewise *Lovelorn Wall*, Schweder's 2003 installation permanently installed in the bathroom of the Tacoma Trade and Convention Center. Here, toilet partitions fabricated from white porcelain tiles appear standard issue apart from the occasional drippy protrusion, bits of wall that offer themselves to be grabbed like love handles. An equally indeterminate relationship between viewing subject and viewed object also occurs in Schweder's installation *Still Life of Beefsteak and Cheese*, a 2004 work that used scented wallpaper to offer a succulent smell that penetrates viewers' noses and bodies unseen.

With his most recent work, *A sac of rooms three times a day*, Schweder extends his earlier investigations to move towards a more discursive critique of architecture. An inflatable structure that rises and falls three times each day, a gentle giant taking its meals and eliminating its waste, this work is derived by situating the volume of a house with an 800 sf plan inside a house with a 500 sf plan. As the interior inflates the larger house presses against the smaller one, a kind of pregnancy run amok, and both volumes distend and deform in response to their disequilibrium.

Their anamorphosis is captivating and provides the dramatic urgency of the work; viewers watch as the thing rises, contorts, and falls only to relaunch its complex transformation. What begins as a thick pile of plastic becomes a landscape, then a house, then a doubled house, and then something more monstrous before it retreats again. None of the "up! up! and away!" verve of inflatable works from the 1960s and '70s. This is an entropic work, a flaccid construction whose efforts to rise are nothing short of risible. A monster that gropes awkwardly, swallowing its own innards as it distends, but with a certain loveliness.

With *A sac of rooms three times a day*, Schweder has given us a work of radical spatial research, a provocation to architecture and an effort to move forward the terms by which we understand, inhabit, and construct space. In this regard we could describe his work as anti-normative or aberrant or analytical. But to opt for "perverse" is to emphasize that this work performs its critical turn by changing the terms through which architecture can address the human body and vice versa. Perversion has traditionally been defined as the use of people as if they were things; using them for sexual satisfaction without, for example, imagining and cultivating their own pleasure in return. In Schweder's work, this proposition is, quite simply, inverted as he invites us to treat buildings as if they were people, and to let them treat us as objects of their own desire.

Schweder's work puts the desiring body into play, invoking and representing the body that wishes to know the inside of another. This is not the idealized body that stands apart from the objects it encounters, the body that imagines itself to be separate and individual (just as architecture has long imagined for us an inside and an outside, and differentiated one thing from another). It is, instead, a permeable body, a body that engages intimately with other bodies, a body that breathes, shits, leaks, sweats, fucks, and dies. By ascribing base anatomical qualities to the house, Schweder relieves the architectural construct of its stubborn objecthood to reveal another, more intersubjective set of possible encounters. It offers, instead of an object to behold, a kind of mirror that invites us to see ourselves redoubled, and differently than we have before.

Installation, in Schweder's work, serves as a privileged format for exploring how architecture can breed new forms of consciousness and knowledge. Following a trajectory articulated by Diller + Scofidio among others, he aims to build a clear and relevant critical

perspective that can help architecture move beyond the habits that constrain it, and us. This body of work may mark the advent of a truly postmodern architecture. Not the historicist gasp of the last period, the failed and pathetic effort to recapitulate architectural traditions long exhausted, but rather a way of seriously and insightfully absorbing the knowledge and priorities of our times into new forms of spatial practice, and an opportunity to find new and newly meaningful ways to encounter the buildings we make. *A sac of rooms three times a day* entreats our love and our disgust and our recognition and our confusion, all the while inviting us to surrender to its inescapable charms.

Judith Butler and others have written about the ways a performative theory of identity can serve to destabilize more essentialist approaches, calling into question the assumptions that form normative categories and offering, instead, a more supple set of alternatives. Though not a house, *A sac of rooms three times a day* performs house-ness, evoking the familiar coordinates of the house only to render them strange. It reveals not only the contingent aspects of the convention – we know a house to be a house because it has a front door and a toilet – but also the interpretive gesture that we make in order to confer its status. It stages the “no” of architecture – that which cannot be represented – and turns this into a spectacle of what architecture might become were it to loosen up and try something, well, a bit kinky.

Henry Urbach is the Helen Hilton Raiser Curator of Architecture and Design at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art



Left:
“Lovelorn Walls,” 2004, Tacoma Trade
and Convention Center, vitreous china,
84” x 36” x 60”
Photographs by Alex Schweder



















RESUME

Education

- 2006 Fellow of Architecture – American Academy in Rome, Rome, Italy
1998 Master of Architecture – Princeton University, School of Architecture, Princeton, New Jersey
1993 Bachelor of Architecture – Pratt Institute, School of Architecture, Brooklyn, New York

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2008 *A Sac of Rooms All Day Long*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA (upcoming)
2007 *Snowbound*, Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA (upcoming)
A Sac of Rooms Three Times A Day, Suyama Space, Seattle, WA
2006 *Folded Murmur*, Howard House, Seattle, WA
Sick Building Sequence, Howard House, Seattle, WA
Spit Skin, American Academy in Rome, Rome, Italy
2005 *Love Sick Room*, Henry Urbach Architecture, New York, NY
Still Life of Beefsteak and Cheese, Parsons School of Design, New York, NY
Split, Tollbooth Gallery, Tacoma, WA
2004 *Lovesick Buildings*, Howard House, Seattle, WA
2001 *Abjectecture*, Esther Claypool Gallery, Seattle, WA

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2007 *Insubstantial Pageant Faded*, Western Bridge, Seattle, WA
Happiness of Objects, Sculpture Center, New York, NY
Perfect Landscape: Painting Broken Down, Lawrimore Project, Seattle, WA
New Media Series Installation, St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
Dark Matters, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA
Northwest Biennial, Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA
Sparkle and Fade, Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA
Neddy Awards, Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA
2006 *Tryingtoland*, Museo d'Arte Contemporane di Roma, Rome, Italy
Spazia Sette, Romainian Academy in Rome, Italy
2005 *Ergonomicon*, Consolidated Works, Seattle, WA
2003 *Passing Water*, Art Metropole, Toronto, Canada
Young Seattle Artists, Howard House, Seattle, WA
2002 *Latent Space*, Netherlands Architecture Institute, Rotterdam, Holland
Blurred Architectureart, Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA.
Documenta, Northwest Contemporary Art Biennial, A.N. Bush Gallery, Salem Art Association, Salem, OR

Reviews

- DeVuono, Frances, *Schweder at Suyama Space*, Artweek, March 2007, vol. 38, issue 3, p. 23.
Fahey, Anna, *Pee and Sympathy*, Seattle Weekly, October 4, 2001, pp. 70-71.

- Gopnik, Blake, *The Armory Show, With Wit in Store*, The Washington Post, March 3, 2002, p. G6.
_____, *Art and Design, Bringing Fresh Ideas to the Table*, The Washington Post, April 21, 2002, p. G7.
Graves, Jen, *In Art News: Organ Donor*, The Stranger, March 29, 2007, p. 29.
_____, *Gods of Rome, from Howard House to Bird House*, The Stranger, November 2, 2006, p. 31.
_____, *Artist Makes Bold Body of Works Relating to Bodily Functions*, The Tacoma Tribune, March 16, 2003, p. D3.
Gaucys, Peter, *Once More with Feathers*, The Stranger, August 31, 2006, p. 24.
Grant, Adriana, *Inflato-Rooms*, Seattle Weekly Wire, February 14, 2007, www.seattleweekly.com/2007-02-14/arts/monday-2-19.php.
Hackett, Regina, *Schweder's Inflatable House Exposes the Vulnerability of Sanctuary*, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Arts, February 2, 2007, p. 31.
_____, *Lively 'Ergonomicon' plumbs environments awash in fantasy*, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, February 25, 2005, p. 31.
_____, *Architecture and collage fill the senses at Howard House*, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, December 3, 2004, p. 31.
Hall, Emily, *Don't Kill Yourself*, The Stranger, March 20, 2003, p. 25.
_____, *Useful Objects, or are they?* The Stranger, October 21, 2001, p. 53.
Konig, Eppo, *Latent Space*, Rotterdam's Dagblad, 20 July 2002, p. 2A.
Landi, Ann, *Interior Motives*, ARTnews, January 2002, p. 94.
Lippens, Nate, *Body Doubles*, Filip Review, Volume 5, Spring 07, p. 20.
_____, *The Birds Arrive at Howard House in an Amazing Collaboration of Three Artists*, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, November 3, 2006, p. 28.
_____, *Schweder inflates the moving image to a fresh dimension*, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, August 25, 2006, p. 34.
_____, *Conflicted Bodies*, The Stranger, March 24, 2005, p. 25.
_____, *Gut Symmetries, Alex Schweder Builds a Body*, The Stranger, December 2, 2004, p. 25.
Merwood, Joanna, *Relief at Last*, Arcade Journal, Spring 2005, p. 54.
Olson, Sheri, *Architects Become Sleuths of Space*, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, August 23, 2002, p. 15.
Peters, Sue, *Terrific Storms*, Seattle Weekly, October 25, 2006, p. 85.
Vaughan, R.M., *Number one Art, xtra!*, July 10, 2003, p. 29.

Publications

- Brownell, Blaine. *Transmaterial*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006.
Gandelsonas, Mario. *Shanghai Reflections*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002.
Gersheshon, Olga and Penner, Barbara, ed. *Ladies and Gents: Public Toilets and Gender*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, publication pending.
Blurred. Seattle: Center on Contemporary Art, 2002.
Alex Schweder's Peeple. New York: Behavior Press, 2002.

Selected Awards

- Genius Award*, The Stranger, 2007
Artist Pension Trust, Los Angeles, 2006
Artist Trust Fellowship, Seattle, 2006

City Artists Grant, Mayor's Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs, Seattle, 2006, 2004
Arts Special Projects Award, 4Culture, King County, 2006, 2005
Rome Prize, 11 Month Fellowship, American Academy in Rome, 2005 – 2006
Public Arts Network, Year in Review Selection, Austin, TX, 2005
Grant for Artists Projects, Artist Trust, Seattle, 2004, 2001
Arts Project Grant, Seattle Arts Commission, 2002
Residency, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, 2001
Full Tuition and Stipend Fellowship, Princeton University, 1996





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Alex Schweder





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www.suyamapetersondeguchi.com/art

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