



jennifer danos: hidden in plain sight

3rd floor emerging artist series: atrium gallery

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“For me, the most important function of a work of art is that it manages to alter our perception of things, even minutely, even if the change is insignificant compared to the rest as a whole.¹”

Malcolm Gladwell writes about a fire lieutenant and his unit responding to a routine call within a residential Cleveland neighborhood in his recent bestseller *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. Initially, fire appears to be in the kitchen of the residence. However, after breaking down the door and beginning to battle the blaze, the fire continues to burn without hesitation. The lieutenant quickly fears that something is amiss and orders his team to evacuate. Moments later the floor on which they had just been standing collapses into the basement. The fire had been in the basement not the kitchen as previously suspected. Questioned after the incident, the lieutenant could not identify precisely why he ordered his men out, saving

their lives. In that split second, rather than making a carefully considered decision, the lieutenant reacted intuitively, and in this case, correctly. The lieutenant came to the realization that a combination of factors resulted in his instinctive decision (non-responsive fire, unusual heat, quieter than the heat would suggest). Gladwell uses this example to discuss rapid cognition and how we process subtle cues in our environment to aid in instinctive decision making. Gladwell is particularly interested in the two-second process when we are first exposed to a situation and what initial evaluations are made at that moment, both correct and incorrect. How do we recognize what does and does not belong in an environment? What role does prior experience and expectations play in our perception?

In her work, Jennifer Danos calls attention to subtle cues in the environment that are often ignored. Marks, deviations, or fixtures scattered throughout the interior spaces of galleries, hallways and public spaces, which have the capacity to unconsciously trigger responses and memories. As part of Danos's exhibition *Hidden in Plain Sight*, she reacts to patches, inconsistencies, and errors within the interior space of the Rochester Art Center. Her work is an intervention commenting on patterns of use, social interaction, the accidental vs. the intentional and aesthetic perceptions and assumptions of "art" and "non-art" space.

For her exhibition Danos installed work throughout the interior spaces of the Rochester Art Center. Tucked behind the second floor glass stairwell is an arrangement of objects referencing cement patches and electrical components. A four-foot plaster plateau emerges from the wall forming a rounded triangle. A few feet away, a much smaller structure floats amidst a sea of dark gray concrete. Both objects appear as though the concrete were pried from the surrounding floor. Above the plaster sculptures on the adjacent wall, two small silver boxes are mounted approximately ten feet apart. The installation refers to a group of marks within the floor of the adjacent Accent Gallery. The objects call attention to the unintentional surface inconsistencies and the carefully set fixtures of the space. On the third floor, a false wall inverts the architectural relationship of the wall at the south corner of the passenger elevator entrance. Stripes of gray tape ripple from the base of the wall echoing those left from a prior project near the

elevator, heightening the viewer's awareness of past and recent activity within the space.

Danos begins her work by making multiple visits to the exhibition site, making mental notes, speaking with the daily inhabitants and taking photographic documentation of the space. From the photographs and her interactions a plan for alteration is developed. Pieces are constructed off-site in her studio and then installed in the exhibition space, after which modifications are made to achieve the desired atmosphere, visibility, and viewer response. The choice of material plays an integral role as well. What material will blend with the environment or create discord? What is the natural material of the environment and what is artificial? A prior installation (*MCAD Floor 1, 2005*) use wood contact paper applied to a segment of floor tile indicating an inconsistency where former wall existed. The contact paper strip reads as though a former wood floor was tiled over and around the forgotten segment. The use of faux wood contact paper creates an interesting juxtaposition as to what is "real".

After a trip to Japan, an environment in which every aspect of visual culture is considered (packaging, advertising, clothing, city streets), Danos questioned why decisions are made as to when something will be an aesthetic experience. What expectations does a viewer have entering a gallery and what is the response when those expectations are unfulfilled? In her work, Danos directs the viewer's attention to previously overlooked elements of our environment that are easily dismissed. Upon viewing Danos's work, the viewer may find himself or herself considering at the entire environment anew, examining each space for forgotten elements and blurring the line between "art space" and "non-art space", calling to question what we consider to be art. SS

Scott Stulen is the Curator of the 3rd Floor Emerging Artist Series

1 Rivane Neuenschwander, *Art Now* 2001 Uta Grosenik editor, Taschen

About the Artist

Jennifer Danos was born in Chicago in 1975. She received her BFA in 1997 from the Rhode Island School of Design and her MFA in 2004 from the

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She now lives and works in Minneapolis, teaching Sculpture and Foundation 3D Design at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. Jennifer is a visual artist whose studio practice consists of an in-depth analysis of site, looking at indoor and outdoor environments, and raising questions about what is constructed (decisions, behaviors, physical attributes). She is interested in where there are blurred boundaries between ideas and categories. Her work was included in the first Tri-State Biennial at Depauw University in Greencastle, IN and the first art program at the Siebel Center in Urbana, Illinois.

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