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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

JULIANNE SWARTZ JOSEE BIENVENU

PVC is one of those wonder materials, a plastic widely used in the building trade (though outlawed in New York State, perhaps because of its toxicity, its vulnerability to rats, or an union issue that rewards the Steam Pipe Fitters). It has also increasingly begun to appear in sculpture. Anish Kapoor's *Marsyas* installation in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern in 2002 used a giant PVC membrane, but emerging artists tend to employ it raw, with the manufacturer's markings still visible.

One of the most celebrated recent examples of this was *Somewhere Harmony*, 2003-2004, Julianne Swartz's work in the 2004 Whitney Biennial, a rambling epic of clear plastic tubes installed in the six-story-high stairwell and connected to speakers located in a crawl space between the third and fourth floors, which transmitted spoken and sung versions of "somewhere Over the Rainbow." Turning Marcel Breuer's clean Brutalist stairwells into a site with "plumbing" exposed, Swartz transformed the space into something messier and altogether magical.

Swartz continued her use of PVC in this show, concentrating more on optical than sonic effects. Pieces like *In-Fill-Trait*, *In-Fill-Trait*, and *You Are Here* (all works 2004), used PVC pipe, Plexiglas tubes, and mirrors to create periscopes that distorted and extended the viewer's visual field. *Spectrum*, a spectral rainbow of magnets attached to wires issuing from the wall and rising up from the floor, was a delicate study in visual tension. *Deep Storage*, a hole in the gallery wall filled with a lens, shows an inverted projection of the otherwise hidden storage space. The peephole image is transformed by a fan behind the wall blowing on a miniature disco ball, which distorts the view and makes it kaleidoscopic. *Un-Time Structure* was the largest sculpture in the show. An altarlike construction of wood and electrical wiring, it is surrounded by a circle of Plexiglas tubes that project upward like stalagmites and are implanted with lenses that create a flickering kinesis. The amplified sound of clock motors provides an ethereal aural accompaniment, similar to –but more muted than– the eerie Whitney soundtrack.

Swartz's work has been compared to Gordon Matta-Clark's, mostly because of its interventionist strategies. But where Matta-Clark was interested in large-scale meta-architectural projects (or, as he called them, "anarchitecture"), Swartz is more of a miniaturist, entering with small incisions rather than gaping holes. It could be argued that her range was constricted in this show by the size of the gallery, but her works generally address the individual viewer; even her sprawling work at the Whitney was best experienced at close range in a private moment.

In this sense – and particularly given her interest in optics– Swartz's work seems aligned with older ideas and technologies: the imaged single viewer of one-point perspective, the camera obscura, or the stereoscope. Her work's use of rough-and-ready industrial materials counteracts any risk of preciousness (particularly the persistent references to rainbows). Yet there's a delicacy at its core, an enduring sense of wonder at the beauty and strangeness still achievable with optical and sonic tricks.

Plastics facilitate the ruse, but their sturdiness is what allows Swartz, paradoxically, to make such delicate work.

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Julianne Swartz, *You Are Here* (detail), 2004, PVC pipe, Plexiglas, mirror, motor, and hardware, 57 x 46 x 32"