

# Art in America

## Exhibition Reviews

FEBRUARY 2013



Julianne Swartz:  
*Loop*, 2010, wire,  
speakers and mixed  
mediums, 130 by  
140 by 10 inches;  
at the deCordova  
Sculpture Park and  
Museum.

LINCOLN, MASS.

**JULIANNE SWARTZ**

deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum

“Julianne Swartz: How Deep Is Your,” the artist’s first museum survey, presented just over 30 photographs, sculptures and sound pieces that she completed between 1998 and 2012. The earliest, among them *Shadow House* (1996-98), a delicate mobile of almost invisible glass houses that cast dark shadows, were begun while Swartz was still in the MFA program at Bard College. Many of the works that followed were site-specific installations, and it was a highlight of this show to see several re-created, with adaptations. For example, Swartz reconfigured the sound piece *Affirmation* (2006/2012), with its multiple voices issuing encouraging statements, for the museum bathrooms, and tailored *How Deep Is Your* (2003/2012), in which blue PVC pipes broadcast John Lennon’s “Love” and The Bee Gees’ “How Deep Is Your Love,” to transmit throughout the museum. Also present were *Storagescape* (2012, a variation of *Closetspace*, 2002) and *Line Drawing* (2003/2012), both consisting of apertures cut into the gallery walls to reveal, in the first case, a manipulated view of the storage facilities and, in the second, the course of a meandering line of blue plastic tape.

The central galleries featured a number of self-contained, anthropomorphic sculptures, including the series “Hope Studies” (2007), five sets of stacked concrete blocks punctured by slight steel wires, many connected to motors within. Above the largest of these works, *Garden of Infinite Hearts*—a massing of over 30 blocks—wave small paper and foil hearts, while a motor inside *Touch Knowledge* projects a delicate metal arm into an electrically charged wire bramble, generating small sparks. These works set the stage for the recent *Surrogate (JS)*, *Surrogate (KRL)* and *Surrogate (ARL)*, all 2012, three carefully balanced concrete-block towers approximating the size of Swartz, her husband and her

child. Inside, clock motors emit barely audible syncopated ticking.

The figural sculptures and sound pieces were complemented by a variety of works having to do with landscape or forces of nature. In *Spectrum (Double Yellow)*, 2004, Swartz created a rainbow cascade by attaching colored threads to seven points on the wall, 10 feet from the floor. Cutting the threads halfway down, she attached magnets at the gaps so that the threads formed continuous lines that arced through space and landed on the floor one yard from the wall.

*Loop* (2010), an approximately 11-by-12-foot web of brightly colored audio wires and coin-sized speakers, plays a soundscape of bird calls, running water, songs and voices. Such works, along with photographs of land and sky taken through droplets of water dangling from the artist’s fingers, reinforced the connection between art and nature emphasized at the deCordova itself, with its sculpture park set into the New England woodlands. Swartz took this terrain as the subject in *Camera-Less-Video* (2009), a small viewing box that she stationed at one of the museum’s windows.

Swartz appeals to the senses and emotions with a quiet lyricism, using unassuming materials and marshaling grand forces like wind and magnetism. Bending to hear the music in *How Deep Is Your*, we listened; peering at the inverted image of the museum’s back room in *Storagescape*, we looked; and standing close to *Body* (2007), a human-sized suspension of colorful wires and black speakers imploring “don’t be afraid” or “let me hold you,” we felt. With careful attention to the ephemeral and concrete alike, the deCordova exhibition presented Swartz’s career thus far as a thoughtful excursion into sound, sight and psyche.

—Peter R. Kalb