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Sudarshan Shetty
Piero Gilardi
Winifred Lutz
Vibha Galhotra





LINCOLN, MASSACHUSETTS

Julianne Swartz

deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum

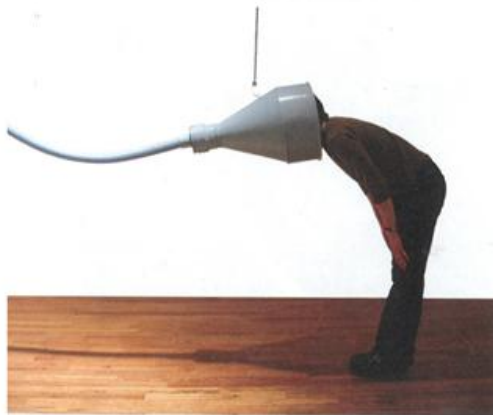
Is it possible for an exhibition that includes blocks of cast cement to be too subtle? In her retrospective "How Deep Is Your," Julianne Swartz worked primarily with gossamer, mirrors, sound, clockworks, and magnets, in addition to cement. It was not an installation for the hurried visitor, nor for the hard of hearing

or for those with difficulty seeing. Some of the works were almost invisible and/or inaudible. Yet close attention revealed an art of audacity, inventiveness, and wit.

Entering the deCordova, one had the option of ascending the stairs or using the elevator, which offered two extremely varied introductions to Swartz's show. A sky-blue pipe placed overhead ran up the stairs—but unless you had a coat to hang up, you might not have discovered that the pipe originated behind a door, opened just enough to allow a glimpse of *Storagescape*, a fun-house mirror reflecting red and blue disco lights and red machinery of unknown purpose.

Swartz's challenges to the senses trumped visual aesthetics at every turn. *Loop* offered a prime example, its 40 speakers and multicolored wires tangled into a wall-high visual

Above: Julianne Swartz, *Surrogate (JS)*, *Surrogate (KRL)*, *Surrogate (ARL)*, 2012. Cement, mica, and clock movements, 40–72 x 17–24 x 8–14 in. Left: Julianne Swartz, *How Deep Is Your*, 2012. Plastic, Plexiglas, and PVC tubing, CD player, funnel, mirror, LED lights, and 2-channel soundtrack, dimensions variable.



mess. For those who sat and listened, however, it emitted a composition worthy of Steve Reich—a 20-minute exercise in identifying a stream of auditory stimuli, from cricket chirps, knocks, thumps, frog song, whispered words, guitar tunings, and whistling to a nasal chant, cowbells, atonal humming, pings, bird chirps, gurgling water, the Early Warning System tone, perhaps a xylophone, and a steel drum. The blue pipe did not lead to this room, nor to the one containing three light and lens pieces. Those were serendipitous discoveries. *Shadow House*, with drawings ever so faintly projected on the white wall, was easiest to overlook.

The blue pipe (passing Swartz's remarkable digital chromogenic prints of landscapes refracted through bubbles and water drops) did lead into the main gallery. Two clear sections contained tiny speakers where the pipe leaked music, one of many details for the ultra-observant. Overhead, a knot in the pipe revealed the artist's whimsical bent.

The show grouped Swartz's work by period. The diaphanous *Air Breath*, from the "Hope" series, consisted of two irregular, white ovals drawn in space. It would be easy to assume that they were made of wire, but not so: silk fiber, feathers, and quills were also incorporated. In the witty *Obstacle*, a cement block holding up a wire filament led a semi-deflated form along in a circle, obliging it on every lap to struggle in Sisyphean fashion over a little rocky barrier. At first glance, *Lean* resembled a curved rod of Ellsworth Kelly-like simplicity propped against a wall; but it didn't touch at all—its suspended placement was maintained by carefully calculated, magnetic repulsion.

Adventurous visitors stuck their heads into the blue bell at the end of the pipe to hear the song "How Deep Is Your Love" (faint and far away, as if from another world) or opened the carefully crafted box titled *Open* to hear murmurs of "I love you." Similar whispered affirmations could theoretically be heard from the lobby couch, but ambient conversations drowned them out. Those who used the elevator stepped into the caress of yellow light and soft multilingual voices, intoning, "You're all right. It's okay."

—Marty Carlock

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