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Play. Witness. Create.

November 28, 2012



Douglas Weatherby, *808 Gallery Storage Project* 2012

Spatial Anxiety

Vlatka Horvat, in her installation *Also Called: Backbone, Anchor, Lifeline* at Boston University Art Gallery at the Stone Gallery, brings space to awareness. How does a body respond to the built environment? To the detritus of city life? Using material scavenged from around the neighborhood at BU, including stray planks from a local lumberyard, Horvat intervened in the austere gallery space in a way that makes it seem like the gallery's nightmares are seeping through its fissures (there's a detail of the installation above). Tubes loll off the wall. Planks set on their edges make low corrals that seem to forbid entry, although you can step into them. Concrete blocks set upright are like shy people at a cocktail party — close enough to nod, but not to converse. Horvat's work sets off all kinds of perceptual sensors that we usually don't even notice. Where is it safe to sit, to stand, to walk? What's appropriate? How does that phallus-like tube make me feel? Anxious, mostly, but also, curiously, playful.

Over at BU's 808 Gallery, Lynne Cooney and Liz Munsell have organized a rich but somewhat problematic show, "On Sincerity." The problem is that sincerity is, ultimately, difficult to gauge. The curators use four criteria: Art that reaches out to the community; performance art based on the body's vulnerability; art driven by its own materials, and art that critiques mass media and social media. To me, the community-centered art and the art based on material felt the most "sincere."

Douglas Weathersby's "808 Gallery Storage Project," pictured at right, a treehouse of a sculpture, makes an ambitious showcase for decades-old paintings he discovered clearing out storage in the building, which houses the university's art studios. But when it comes to making art, there's almost always artifice, and that's when it's easy to wonder if sincerity has been compromised. When Laurel Nakadate cried every day for a year and photographed herself doing it to combat all the smiling snapshots on Facebook, is that really any more sincere than what she's protesting? Then again, isn't anything that's made with careful thought sincere, even if it has an ironic message? There's some deep work in "On Sincerity," but if the show were a pumpkin patch, I'm not sure the Great Pumpkin would ever appear.