



LEE BOROSON'S FABRICATED GARDEN

Imagine the navigational patterns of Midtown Manhattan's urban grid as a variation on formal garden planning. Such utopian fantasy is at the center of the artistic vision of sculptor Lee Boroson, whose giant installation of air-pumped fabric, "Underpass," is now on view at the Whitney Museum's sculpture garden at Phillip Morris.

This most recent of Boroson's large-scale installations is an extension of a theme explored in "Pleasure Grounds," his project on view last April at the Genovese/Sullivan Gallery in Boston's South End. Both works derive from our experience of gardens, particularly their navigational patterns, at once wandering and deliberate, where a viewer goes without a foreknown purpose.

Whereas the Genovese/Sullivan installation made use of a grid-based layout to create a modular space, the arching design of "Underpass" describes the intersection of two pathways — where vertical meets horizontal.

Boroson's current piece was inspired by the shape of the highway cloverleaf, a botanical form whose only appearance in an actual garden is as a mutant weed. Suspended mid-level in the tall vertical atrium of the sculpture court, this monumental work is ironically contiguous to an elevated roadway passing just outside the windows of the building.

When viewed from the ground-level public area, its quilted curves of brightly colored fabric feel less like the uninhabitable realms of a highway's expanse and more like an undulating theme-park water slide. When asked about "Underpass"'s reference to such a form, the artist did allude to the proliferation of Disney just down the road in Times Square.

"Underpass" was fabricated from blue cloth, a metaphor for sky or currents of air and water. Although the sculpture court of the Phillip Morris Building has many windows, open sky is only visible in two parts of the atrium. Within this hard-edged environment of glass and stone, the artwork becomes a quasi-natural aesthetic cloud, far more comforting in its soft, quilted tucks than the sparse flora planted within the space.

In conceptualizing the piece, Boroson began looking for examples of cloverleaf patterns in nature. He focused on the idea of flowing rivers or air currents as a means to bridge the streamlined efficiency of interconnecting roadways (or business connections in the corporate environment) with symbols from the natural world. The rigor of his design for the piece initially included plans to power the sculpture through the building's HVAC system.

Preliminary drawings are an essential element to Boroson's installation work. The artist makes drawings to explore a range of possibilities for a structure, to be viewed as variations on an evolving theme. Rather

than being products derived from the project, Boroson's drawings are used to identify and resolve problems and as such they are crucial to the successful completion of a project. For the piece exhibited at Genovese/Sullivan, twenty drawings were produced in planning for the installation, some of which are still on view.

Although "Underpass" is primarily accessible through the public sculpture court, two other viewing points provide strikingly different angles on the piece. Windows inside the Phillip Morris Building provide an overview of the sculpture, a view reserved primarily for office workers.

Through windows at the other side of the atrium, one can catch a glimpse of the installation from the outside by way of the overpass leading around Grand Central Station. This particular stretch of road is a fascinating navigational pattern in its own right — all the more reason to make a purposeful visit and admire the work from all sides. **am**

Lee Boroson's site specific installation "Underpass" is on view at the Phillip Morris Branch of the Whitney Museum of American Art through March 17, 2000. The Museum is located directly across from Grand Central Station at 120 Park Avenue.

The Sculpture Court is open to the public from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., Monday to Saturday and from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Sundays and holidays.

Boroson is represented in Boston by the Genovese/Sullivan Gallery, where a selection of his preparatory drawings are available for viewing. The gallery is located at 47 Thayer Street and is open to the public from 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Further information can be obtained from the gallery at (617) 426-9738.



Lee Boroson's installation "Pleasure Grounds" recently at the Genovese/Sullivan Gallery.