



Top: Carsten Höller, *Giant Psycho Tank*, 1999. Polypropylene, rubber, steel, PVC tubes, filter, pump, water, water heater, magnesium sulfate, bathing gowns, towels, and flip-flops, 600 x 400 x 370 cm. Above: Carsten Höller, *Love Drug (PEA)*, 1993/2011. Glass vial and phenylethylamine (PEA), 4.9 x 2 x 2 in. Below: Lindsay Rowinski, *Median (detail)*, 2011. Archival inkjet print, 44 x 63 in. From "E8."

shift my perception of a familiar everyday environment. Still, using the goggles temporarily in the safe white galleries of the museum showed how altered vision affects our physical well-being.

Two other works successfully pushed the boundaries of the user's comfort zone. On the fourth floor, a stainless steel tube stuck out of the floor. This marked the entry to *Untitled (Slide)* (2011), a steep 102-foot-long slide that in seconds transported the brave to the bottom, two floors down. The ride was bumpy and winding and ended in a dizzying stroboscopic light installation, *Double Light Corner* (2011).

The third floor hosted *Giant Psycho Tank* (1999), a large, elevated tank filled with water so salty that people floated weightlessly. In addition to neutralizing gravity, the tank—with its enclosed, white interior—muffled visual and aural impressions. The strangest feeling, however, came from undressing in a half-open stall in the middle of the gallery.

"Experience" also presented a number of more benign experiments such as an aquarium into which viewers could insert their heads, an electric vibrator that gave the impression of the nose growing, and a scent meant to make the smell

fall in love. These works would have been at home in a science museum or a fun park, but, unlike some of Höller's stronger works, they did not put our doubts and fears to the test.

A recurring and unforeseen challenge concerned patience. On busy days, experiencing all of the works required hours of standing in line—waiting to sign the waivers, waiting to borrow the goggles, waiting to use the slide, waiting to enter the tank. As a result, many people chose to simply stroll around and watch others participating, a perspective from which the show had little to offer.

—Elna Svenle

#### WASHINGTON, DC

#### "E8: Sculpture"

##### Transformer

In 2004, Transformer launched its "Exercise" program—a peer critique and mentorship program culminating in short exhibitions for participating artists. As last year's roster attested, the program continues to thrive as a dynamic incubator. In successive offerings, Oreen Cohen, Lindsay Rowinski, and Sean Lundgren mounted distinct and thought-provoking interpretations of the space. All three engineered big and bold interventions that, true to the gallery's name, transformed limited cubic footage into a mind-expanding venue.

On first impression, Cohen's *Running Drill* resembled a giant cruciform hoisted onto the gallery's central beam. Ending in a baptismal font-like basin, the sculpture gave way to clay soil on the floor below. Cohen's statement explains that the installation drew on her personal ties to the contested territories of what are now Israel and Bull Run, Virginia, the site of the first major land battle of the American Civil War: "*Running Drill* tries to exhume layers that have been denied their history and essence, having been constantly reclaimed and rebuilt." The dirt turned out to be from a hole that she dug at Bull Run, the basin a cast of the hole. Playing humankind off nature, the dense assembly was manically woven together as though there were vines and roots, rusted farm and construction implements, hoses, and cables. Yet no part was moving, and there was no sound—only a suggestion of some obscure ritual involving mechanical labor and the land. While addressing the theme of upheaval, the work produced nothing. In this context, the word "running" assumed metaphorical meaning: it spoke of the ongoing and repeated struggle between building and destroying that courses through history, leaving behind future relics that await spiritual excavation.

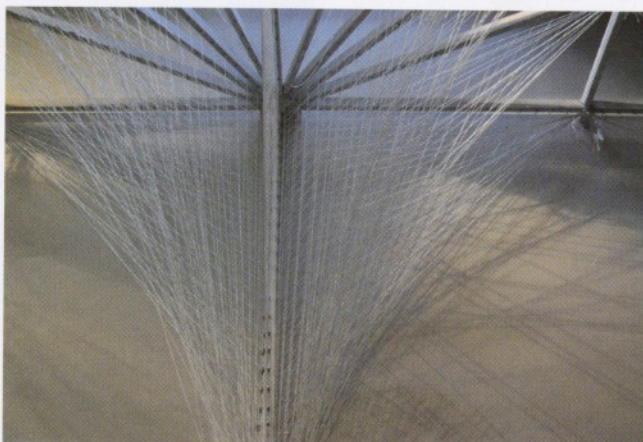




A different kind of exposure occurred in Rowinski's "Trying to be There." Using everyday objects, the show called attention to embedded codes and functions of our built environment hidden in plain sight. Two photographs on facing walls offered clues. *Median* presented an image of an actual median abutting one that the artist created out of poured concrete, while *Slop Stair* depicted a set of entry stairs encased in congealed yellow concrete. Both architectural features deviated from norms, distant echoes of Platonic ideals that revealed our fear of chaos and need to control behavior. Slowly, the other works in the show came to light: a faux back wall, dormer, and window chair, all

Above: Oreen Cohen, *Running Drill*, 2011. Scrap metal, drainage pipe, electrical insulators, rope, gas cans, hand-forged machinery, car parts, I-beam, and mixed media, 13 x 9 x 6 ft. Right: Sean Lundgren, *Nave* (detail), 2011. Mason line, wood, found objects, and hardware, 9.5 x 12 x 10 ft. Both from "E8."

Painted a camouflaging white. More puzzling was a wooden construction—part of a ceiling beam, perhaps—and its artistic doppelgänger, whose original function remained uncertain. Rowinski's mise-en-scène subtly engaged the entire space. The architectural surrogates slyly enacted the age-old tension between truth and fiction, while drawing attention to accepted rules and standards and their (absurd) devolution when our attempts to "be there" are taken to extremes.



In contrast to Rowinski's disguised disruptions, Lundgren's clearly visible *Nave* magically coaxed the feeling of a Gothic cathedral out of the diminutive gallery: "My first reaction to the Transformer space was how vertical it is. I found my gaze constantly drifting upward and was reminded of how cathedrals are designed to direct the viewer's gaze to the heavens." After building a ceiling frame, Lundgren threaded and knotted hundreds of feet of mason line to create the arches of three vaulted bays. The resulting study of white-on-white was arresting. Employing an actual building material, he crafted a lightweight version of a cathedral that substituted air and line for stone, yet preserved an ethereal quality. Salvaged sinks, trophies, and chandeliers took the place of sculpted capitals lending stability and symbolic content. With nods to other artists, including Marcel Duchamp and Jean Shin, these domestic objects cleverly referenced their sacral counterparts—a holy water sconce, a reliquary, and the lighting fixtures seen in Golden Age paintings of Dutch churches.

All three shows triggered the kind of free-thinking that fed the series in the first place, letting viewers connect the dots and draw their own conclusions. Each installation became an act of discovery, a staging area for found and manufac-

tured objects. As the interventions engaged the gallery space, they blurred distinctions between life and art. Offering broad metaphorical interpretation, these exercises proved there is much more to knowledge than rote learning.

—Sarah Tanguy

## BOSTON Ellsworth Kelly

### Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Unlike most Ellsworth Kelly shows, "Ellsworth Kelly: Wood Sculpture" was all brown. This first exhibition devoted exclusively to the artist's works in wood bypassed the early painted pieces to focus on sculptures that celebrate the color, texture, and grain of the unadorned material. Though this is hardly a neglected part of Kelly's oeuvre—*Curve XXI* (1978–80) was included in Kelly's 1996 Guggenheim retrospective in New York—the fact that everything in the show was made of bare wood allowed viewers to form a cohesive ensemble from pieces spanning nearly four decades.

As a sculptor, Kelly is better known for his metal works. While the wood pieces have some of the same shapes, their character is entirely different. The viewer bounces off the metal sculptures, which are cold and anonymous. The wood pieces, on the other hand, are warm and redolent with personality, though it derives as much from nature as from the artist. They're nature in its friendliest form.

The material's siren song beckoned to Kelly in the 1950s when he happened on a carpenter's shop near his New York City studio and saw the array of woods there. "I knew right away that I didn't want to do anything to that wood," he recalls. "I wanted wood to reveal all its different shades and patterns. It was clear that wood was a natural material for me to use for sculpture."