

*Performance Architecture*  
*Alex Schweder*

# Performance Architecture

Theorizing the interdependence of performance and architecture has been an ongoing discourse since the mid 1970's when Roselee Goldberg and Bernard Tschumi curated the exhibition *A Space, A Thousand Words*. In our contemporary moment, the projects of Alex Schweder are at the forefront of what has come to be known as 'performance architecture', a term Schweder coined in 2007. For over twenty years, his practice has dedicated itself to experimenting with modes of architectural production using performance based thinking. This portfolio represents a selection of works that have been exhibited and performed in two sections.

The first of these, *Architectural Performances*, features made in collaboration with artist Ward Shelley who Schweder met during a 2005-6 fellowship at the American Academy in Rome. During their first project, *Flatland* at the Sculpture Center in New York, Schweder began using the term "performance architecture" as a way to describe how thinking from performance art can be used to make inhabitable spaces. Under this rubric Schweder made buildings that were not focused on objects, but instead the relationships they create. In the September 2013 issue of *Frieze*, Agnieszka Gracza's article "Open House, on the evolution of 'performance architecture'" describes this moment:

*The annals of every discipline are full of unsuspecting twins somehow hitting upon an idea concurrently and yet independently. One such concept is 'performance architecture' – a phrase that started being used at roughly the same time by two different people, both of them practicing architects who happened to have a foot in the art world and a particular interest in performance art. Back in 2007, when Pedro Gadanho and Alex Schweder each Googled the term, their searches yielded meagre pickings: allied with architecture, performance had everything to do with efficiency, sustainability, cost-effectiveness and the like, and nothing to do with performance art. Six years on, owing to their joint proselytizing efforts, performance architecture is a rapidly emerging field.*

Since *Flatland*, Schweder and Shelley have continued their collaboration by building and then continuously living in structures such as *Counterweight Roommate*, *In Orbit*, and *Your Turn*. Through occupying these extreme structures we are able to more vividly notice changes in their subjectivities that are overlooked or too subtle in more habituated environments. In 2015, New York's Museum of Modern Art established the historical significance of this thinking by purchasing *Counterweight Roommate*.

In 2016, Shelley and Schweder completed their first outdoor work at Art Omi in Ghent, New York. Featured in the New York Times and Artforum, *ReActor* is a house balanced on a single point that spins in the wind and tilts with the shifting weight of its occupants moving toward and away from the fulcrum. They continued to incorporate the outdoors into their performances with *The Newcomers* at Performa 17 and *Slow Teleport* for Casino Luxembourg. For both durational architectural events Schweder and Shelley were joined by collaborators Lena Kouvela / Sarah Burns and Matthew Brown / Clemens Klein respectively. Each group built and lived in evolving nomadic structures that changed each day in order to reach the next day's supplies along their route.

Works in the second section of this portfolio, *Inflatables*, consider performance architecture from other perspectives. Among them are spaces that change at a faster pace than most buildings. *A Sac of Rooms All Day Long*, for example, is the skin of a five hundred square foot house with four rooms of an eight hundred square foot house stuffed into it. Rendered at full scale in transparent and black vinyl, the rooms inflate at different times and steal space from one another to make a writhing structure that is itself performing for viewers. Acquired by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection in 2009, this work was the first of many inflatables, which have subsequently used sofas, carpet, and faux fur to entice visitors to increasingly interact with the fluctuating architectural cues.

*Wall to Wall Floor to Ceiling* was commissioned by the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in 2014 to fill their vast 120 meter by 40 meter architecture gallery. Twelve forms, six white on the ceiling and six grey on the floor, alluded to new ways of occupation as they pushed each other out of the way. Visitors were encouraged to lay and sit upon the furry areas as they inflated and disgorged, slowly feeling their own weight as they were lifted and then set down upon the hard concrete floor. *The Sound and the Future*, commissioned by Wasserman Projects in Detroit, animates a dance floor with butoh like speed. In 2019 *SENSEFACTORY*, a 25 x 15 meter twenty channel immersive environment, marked the 100th year anniversary of the Bauhaus in response to Moholy-Nagy's "Mechanical Eccentric". Engaging all senses of its visitors, audiences were not only pushed, lifted, and squeezed by the inflatables; scent, sound, and light similarly moved people through the three courtyards in which architectural space can best be described as gooey. Evolving from this work, *The Breath Before*, marks a new direction that turns inflatable spaces into sonic instruments by collaborating with sound artist Mieko Suzuki. With funding from the Pollock-Krasner foundation, Schweder will feature new works along these lines in a solo exhibition at Berlin's Galerie Barbara Thumm in 2022.

# Biography

Alex Schweder lives and works in New York City, where he was born in 1970. Schweder coined the term 'Performance Architecture' to describe his contributions to architectural discourse that have been developed in spaces of exhibition including, *Sensefactory* at Muffithalle Munich, *Slow Teleport* at Casino Luxembourg, *Your Turn* at the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, *The Newcomers* in Performa17, *Antarctopia* at the 2014 Venice Biennale, *Wall to Wall Floor To Ceiling* at the Tel Aviv Art Museum, *The Endless House* at the Museum of Modern Art, *Performance Architecture* at the 2013 Moscow Biennial, *The Real and Other Fictions* at the 2013 Lisbon Architecture Biennial, *Practise Architecture* at Tate Britain, and *A Sac of Rooms All Day Long* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Financial supporters of his work include, Die Kulturstiftung des Bundes, The Pollack Krasner Foundation, and The Graham Foundation. Schweder has been an artist in residence at the Kohler Company, the Chinati Foundation, The American Academy in Rome as a 2005-6 Rome Prize Fellow in Architecture, and will be a Fellow at Civitella Ranieri in 2020.

The New York Times, Artform, and Architectural Record are among the many periodicals to feature Schweder's work. Historians such as RoseLee Goldberg and Juliet Rufford have theorized Schweder's practice in *Performance Now* and *Theater Architecture* respectively. His writings have contributed to *Performing Architectures* (Andrew Filmer and Juliet Rufford eds.), *Interiors Beyond Architecture* (Amy Campos and Deborah Schneiderman eds.), and *Log* (Cynthia Davidson ed.).

ARCHITECTURAL PERFORMANCES

*ReActor*

*Your Turn*

*Slow Teleport*

*The Newcomers*

*Counterweight Roommate*

*In Orbit*

*Flatland*



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*ReActor*, Art Omi, Ghent, New York, 2016

photo: Richard Barnes



*ReActor*, Art Omi, Ghent, New York, 2016  
photo: Richard Barnes



*ReActor*, Art Omi, Ghent, New York, 2016  
photo: Richard Barnes





*ReActor*, Art Omi, Ghent, New York, 2016  
photo: Richard Barnes



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*In Orbit*, Pierogi's The Boiler, New York, 2014

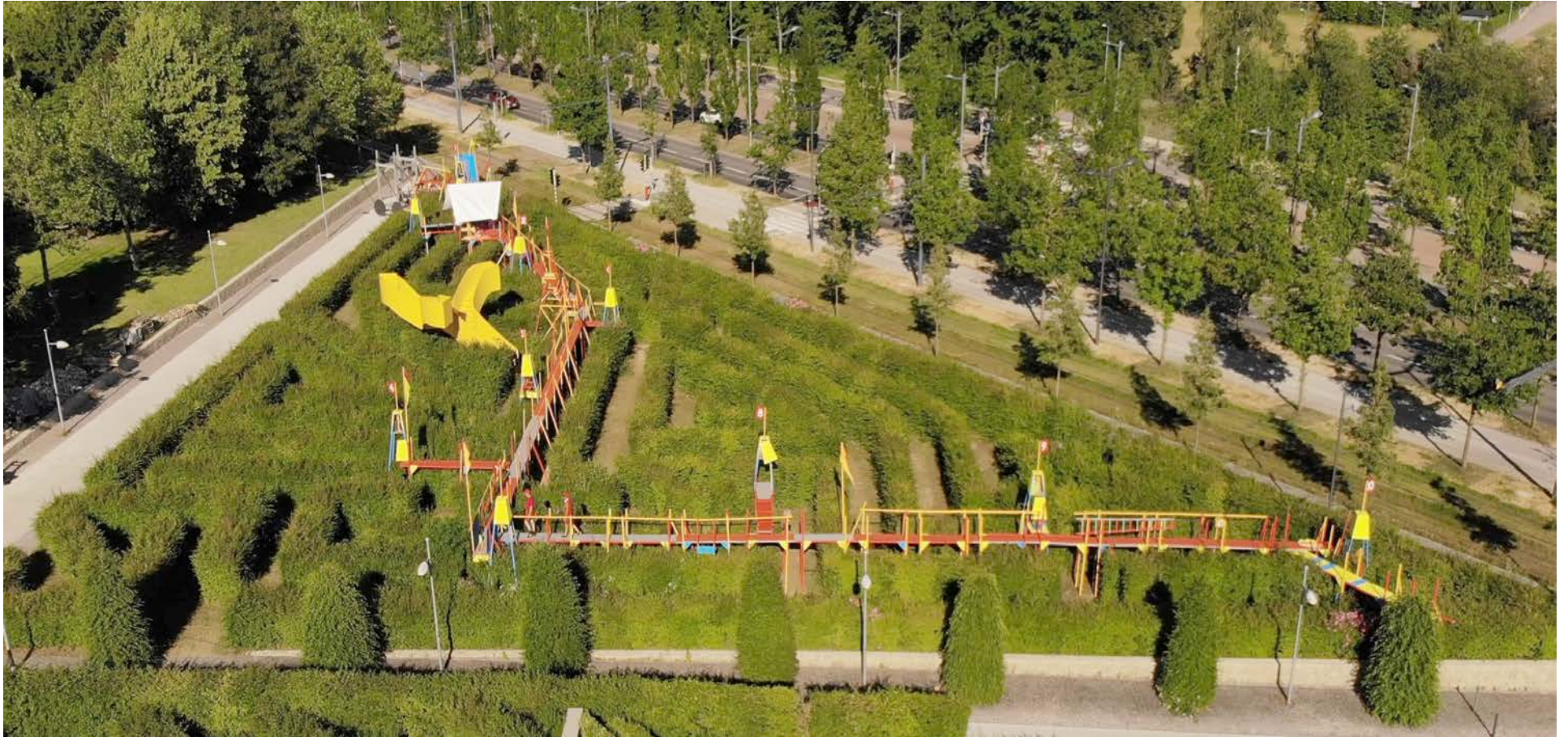
photo: Scott Lynch



*Your Turn*, The Aldrich Museum,  
Connecticut, 2017  
photo: Jason Mandela



*Slow Teleport*, Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg, 2019  
photo: Clemens Klein



*Slow Teleport*, Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg, 2019  
photo: Clemens Klein



*Slow Teleport*, Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg, 2019  
photo: Clemens Klein

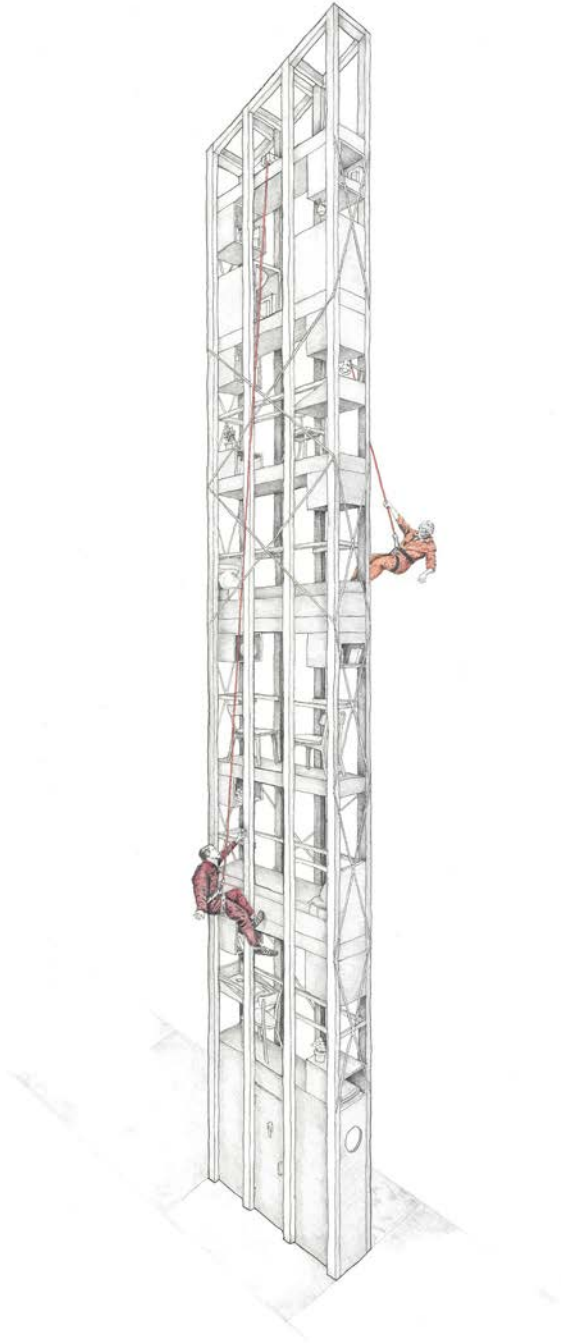


*The Newcomers*, Performa 17, 28 Liberty, New York City, 2017  
photo: Paula Court



*The Newcomers*, Performa 17, 28 Liberty, New York City, 2017  
photo: Paula Court





*Counterweight Roommate*, Museum of Modern Art Collection, 2015



*Counterweight Roommate,*  
Museum of Modern Art Collection, 2015



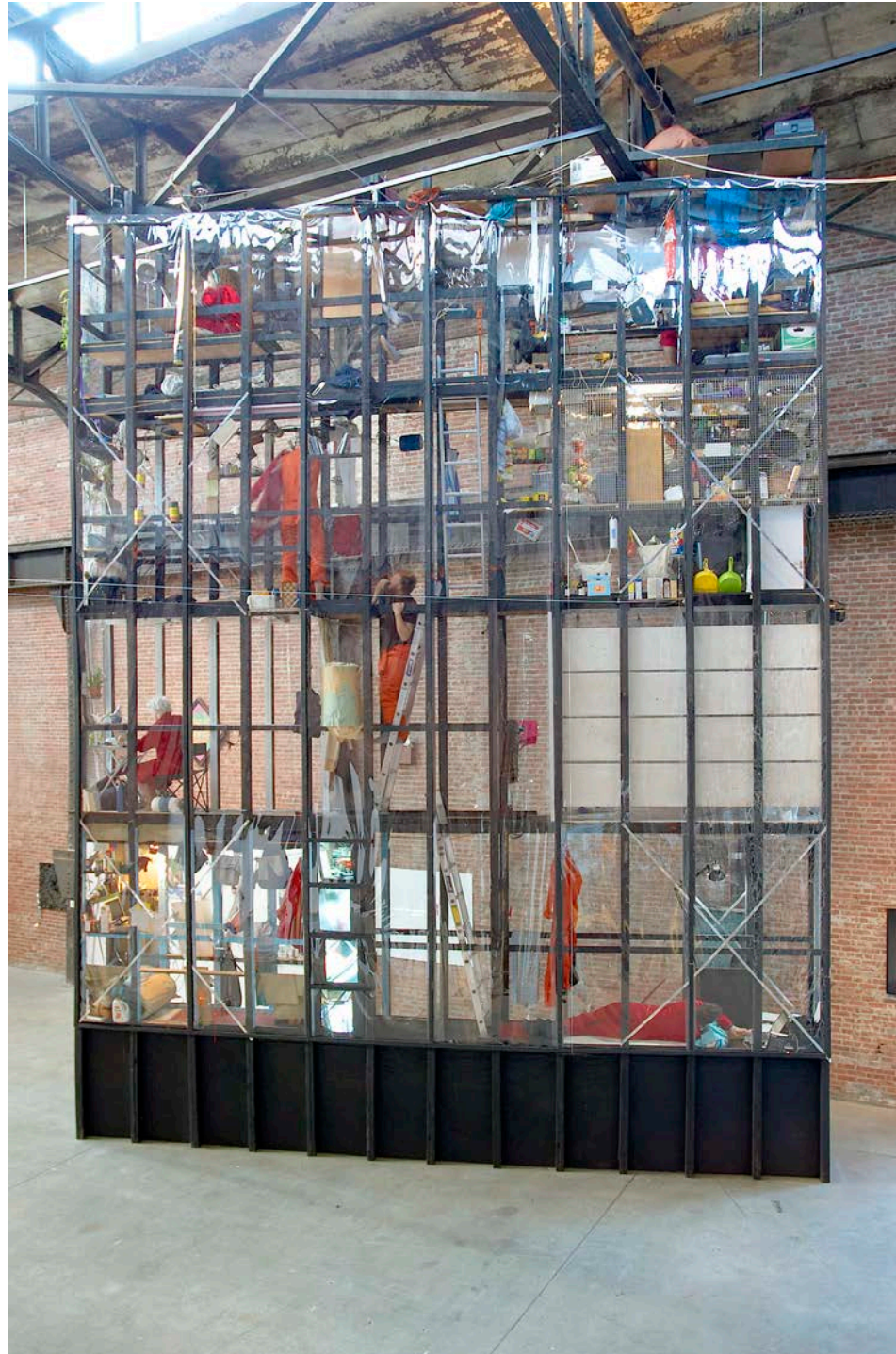
[Click here for video link](#)  
*In Orbit*, Pierogi's The Boiler, New York, 2014  
photo: Scott Lynch



*In Orbit*, Pierogi's The Boiler,  
New York, 2014  
photo: Scott Lynch



*Flatland*, Sculpture Center,  
New York, 2007  
photo: Mark Lins



*Flatland*, Sculpture Center,  
New York, 2007  
photo: Mark Lins



*Flatland*, Sculpture Center,  
New York, 2007  
photo: Mark Lins

## INFLATABLES

*How Does Your Inside Become My Inside?*

*The Breath Before*

*SENSEFACTORY*

*Davenport's Yawn*

*Wall to Wall Floor to Ceiling*

*Roomograph*

*A Sac of Rooms All Day Long*

*The Hotel Rehearsal*





*How Does Your Inside Become My Inside?*, 2020  
photo: Oscar Maguire



*How Does Your Inside Become My Inside?*, 2020  
photo: Oscar Maguire



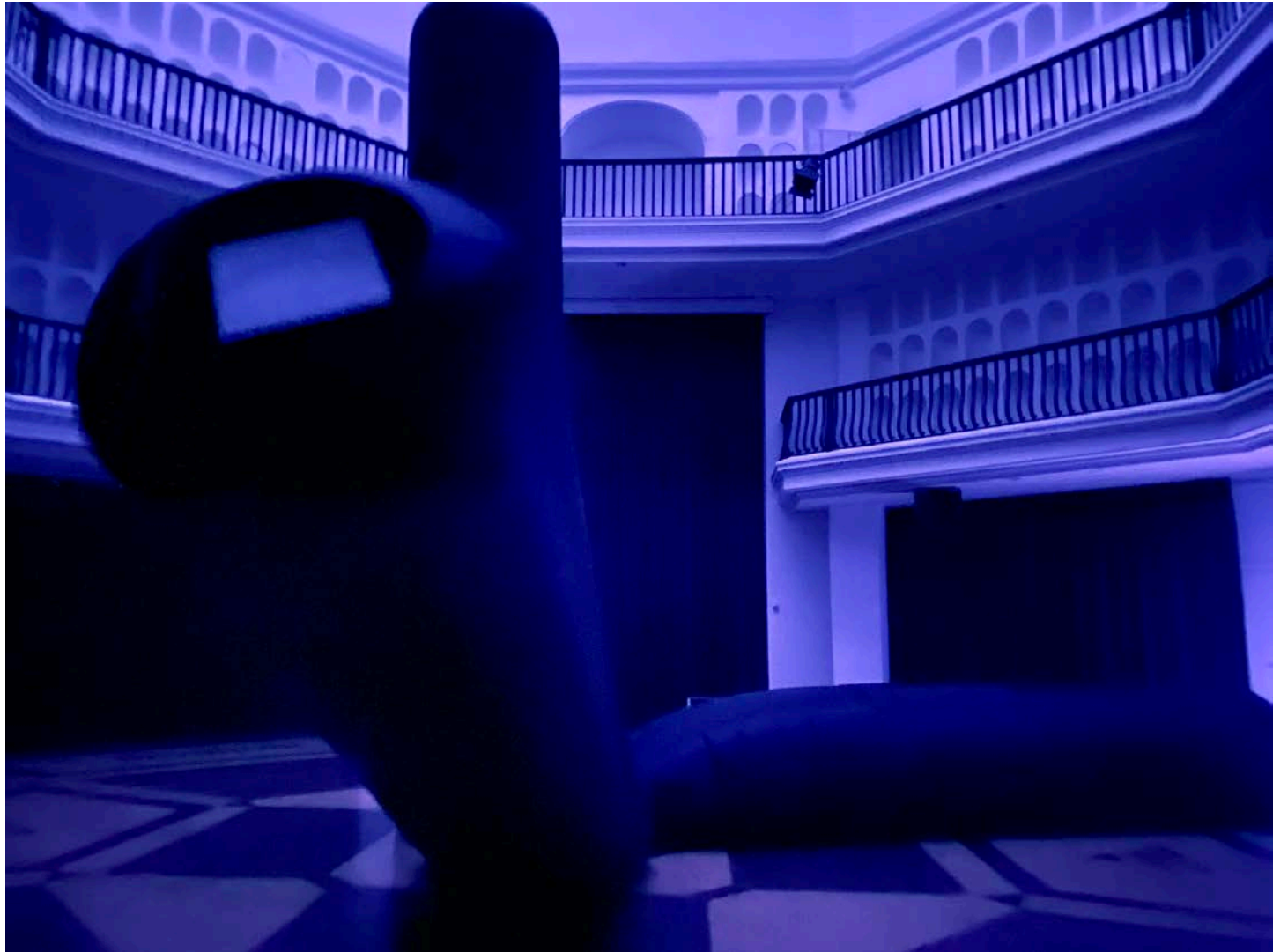
*How Does Your Inside Become My Inside?*, 2020  
photo: Oscar Maguire



*The Breath Before*, A' LARME! Festival, Berlin, 2020  
photo: Karina Mertin



*The Breath Before*, A' LARME! Festival, Berlin, 2020  
photo: Karina Mertin



*The Breath Before*, A' LARME! Festival, Berlin, 2020  
photo: Karina Mertin



*SENSEFACTORY*, Muffathalle, Munich, Germany, 2019  
photo: Clemens Klein

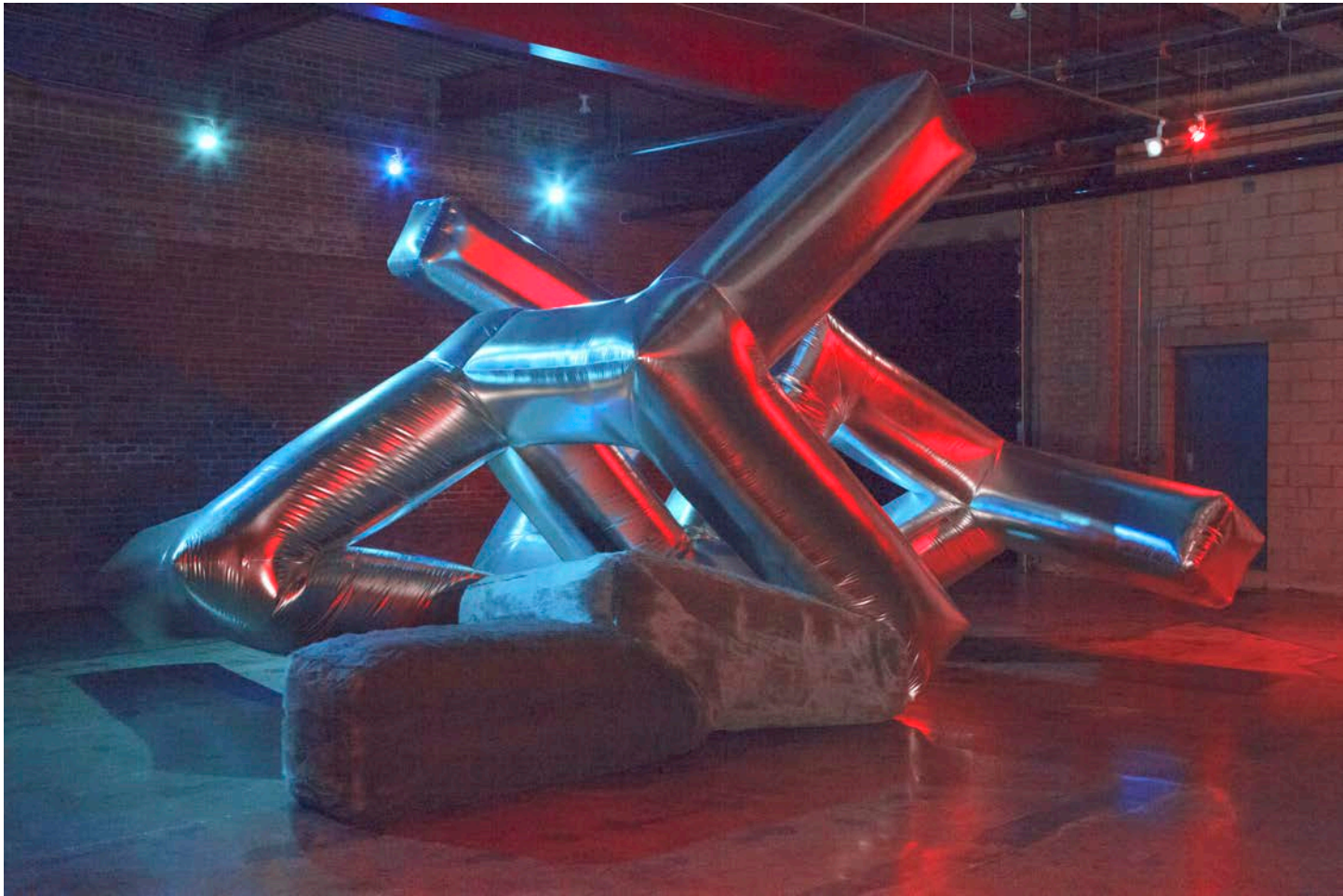


*SENSEFACTORY*, Muffathalle, Munich, Germany, 2019  
photo: Clemens Klein





*Davenport's Yawn*, Collective Design, New York, 2018  
photo: Dora Samosi



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*The Sound and the Future*, Wasserman Projects, Detroit, 2016  
photo: Alison Wong



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*Wall to Wall Floor to Ceiling*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2014  
photo: Elad Sarig



*Wall to Wall Floor to Ceiling*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2014  
photo: Elad Sarig



*Wall to Wall Floor to Ceiling*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2014  
photo: Elad Sarig



*Wall to Wall Floor to Ceiling*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2014  
photo: Elad Sarig



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*Roomograph*, de Cordova Museum, 2010  
photo: Clements/Howcroft Fine Art Photography

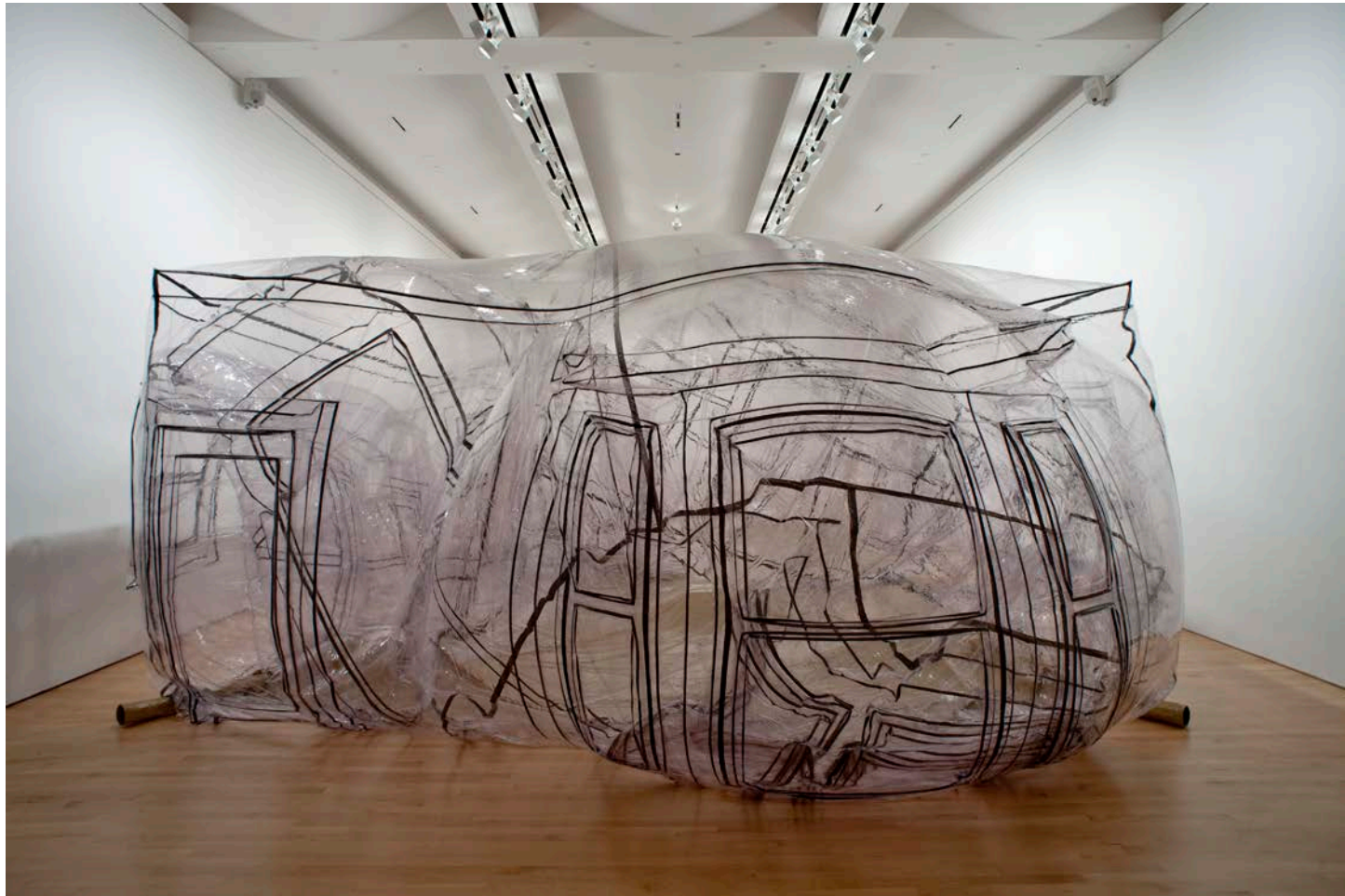


*Roomograph*, de Cordova Museum, 2010  
photo: Clements/Howcroft Fine Art Photography





*Roomograph*, de Cordova Museum, 2010  
photo: Clements/Howcroft Fine Art Photography



[Click here for video link](#)

*A Sac of Rooms All Day Long*, SFMOMA Collection, 2009  
photo: Ian Reeves



*A Sac of Rooms All Day Long*, SFMOMA Collection, 2009  
photo: Ian Reeves



[Click here for video link](#)

*The Hotel Rehearsal*, The Glass House,  
Connecticut, 2013  
photo: Amanda Kirkpatrick



*The Hotel Rehearsal*, The Glass House, Connecticut, 2013  
photo: Amanda Kirkpatrick