Place is the Space

The opening of this building at 3750 Washington Boulevard in 2003 signaled a new identity for the institution. Founded as the First Street Forum in 1980 and later known as the Forum for Contemporary Art, the Museum became the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM), receiving a permanent home along with the new name. Inspired by the tenth anniversary of the event, Place is the Space presents work by Carla Arocha and Stéphane Schraenen, Jill Downen, Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, Virginia Overton, and Dominique Petitgand, each commissioned to address specific details and dynamics of the museum’s architectural spaces. Jointly selected by the museum’s architect, Brad Cloepfil, founding principal of Allied Works Architecture, and Dominic Molon, CAM’s chief curator, the artists were chosen based on their consistent production of site-specific work as well as their ability to address what Cloepfil identifies as key aspects of the building: boundary, intersection, public accessibility, scale, surface, and transparency. The building’s floor plan has been returned to its original design to allow the art works to better highlight the most distinctive aspects of CAM’s structure. With its intensive focus on how museum architecture functions, Place is the Space also reflects artists’ awareness of—and responsiveness to—the way that museums and other cultural venues shape viewers’ experience of their work.

Place is the Space is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Brad Cloepfil, Principal, Allied Works Architecture, and Dominic Molon, Chief Curator.

This exhibition is generously supported by the William Weiss Foundation; the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation; and the Flanders Ministry for Culture, Sports, Youth and Media, Kingdom of Belgium. Support for CAM’s exhibition program is provided by Jeannie and Rex Sinquefield and Emerson.

Opening Night
Friday, September 6, 7:00–9:00 pm

Artist Roundtable
Saturday, September 7, 11:00 am
Co-curators of Place is the Space, Brad Cloepfil and Dominic Molon, will talk with participating artists Carla Arocha and Stéphane Schraenen, Jill Downen, and Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle about their respective projects and general concerns of presenting work in contemporary art museums.

Sound Performance: Dominique Petitgand
Saturday, September 7, 8:00 pm
Sound artist Dominique Petitgand will present a live performance to complement his installation in Place is the Space.

Friday Evening Tours
Fridays, September 6–December 29, 6:00 pm
Take advantage of CAM’s late hours on Friday evenings and stop by for a special 30-minute tour of the exhibitions.

Panel Discussion: Architecture for Art
Monday, September 23, 7:00 pm
Cash bar. Food trucks on site.
Architecture for Art—the opening event for STL Design Week—presents a panel of distinguished architects who have designed museums of contemporary art. Moderated by practitioner and professor Eric Hoffman, the panel will examine the relationship between architecture and the display of contemporary art, featuring Brad Cloepfil, CAM, 2003; Farshid Moussavi, Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, 2012; and Kyo Sung Wu, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, Kansas, 2007.

Presented in partnership with the Graduate School of Architecture & Urban Design in the Sam Fox School at Washington University in St. Louis.

For a complete list of programs, please visit camstl.org.

Free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.
Yellow and White (St. Louis), 2013
Vinyl decal on glass
Courtesy the artists and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago

Collaborating since 2005, Carla Arocha and Stéphane Schraenen create work that prompts greater awareness of the act of seeing. Yellow and White (St. Louis) is a moiré pattern (transparent, geometric patterns overlaid to create the illusion of movement) placed on the L-shaped bank of windows that enclose the east side of the building and open onto CAM’s courtyard. The effect of the work is an engaging yet disorienting sensation of movement and volume. The intertwining shapes of the pattern also recall the distinctive stainless steel mesh found throughout the museum. As in Arocha and Schraenen’s previous window-based works, elements of light and silhouette emerge, simultaneously frustrating and maintaining the transparent boundary integral to the experience of this area of the building.

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle (American, b. 1961, Spain)
die Hütte / the hut, 2013
Charred cedar
Courtesy the artist and Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle’s work explores CAM as not only a temporary dwelling for artworks but as a social space for art to be presented, discussed, and celebrated. His presentation comprises two interventions into CAM’s main galleries, Die Hütte / the hut (2013), a sixteen-foot square, charred cedar cube produced specifically for this exhibition, was inspired by German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s consideration of the relationship between the ideas of “building” and “dwellling”, the piece exists as a building within a building, yet is not intended as a place where one would dwell. Beehive Grid 5 x 6, 2012
Stained maple
Courtesy the artist and Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica

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Virginia Overton (b. 1971, United States)
Untitled (45°6’), 2013
Steel pipes, rope
Courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York

Virginia Overton transforms industrial materials and objects into sculptures of spare, elegant, and precise beauty that respond directly to the dynamics of the space in which they are presented. Her work often evokes the way that many structures are built by simply making do with the resources that are available. Overton does not alter the physical appearance or substance of her materials, presenting them as art on their own terms. Here, she suspends long metal pipes underneath and over two intersecting walls between CAM’s main galleries and performance space. The presentation in this transitional space fills a void, yet allows the area to remain visually and functionally open between the two rooms, emphasizing the building’s key principles of transparency and public accessibility. Overton’s installation continues on the perpendicular wall separating the front lobby and performance space. Here, she underscores another key facet of the building’s design: the use of intersecting walls to create unique spatial volumes and contribute to various kinds of “openness” that define the institution. Overton heightens our awareness of this detail by using sandbags suspended on the opposite side of the wall to provide the ballast for the hanging pipe.

Dominique Petitgand (b. 1965, France)
Les liens invisibles (The Invisible Links), 2013
Sound installation with five speakers and subtitles
Courtesy gb agency, Paris

Dominique Petitgand’s work frequently features recorded voices, abstract noises, and other sounds. Developed for specific spaces, the works encourage visitors to play an active and engaged role in the process of listening. Petitgand’s sound-based installation, Les liens invisibles (The Invisible Links), consists of speakers placed in the performance space and upstairs mezzanine space. Ambiguous noises, such as objects moving in glass containers, play intermittently on the speakers on the first floor and are synchronized with a French spoken-word presentation on the second floor. The vocal portion of the work is translated into English on a monitor and features a woman’s voice uttering brief phrases and what seem to be excerpts of a monologue. Petitgand prompts visitors to hear connections between the noises and the voice as they walk through the space, suggesting personal links that atmospherically transform the museum space and the public experience of place.