

**REAL
ART WAYS**

56 ARBOR STREET
HARTFORD CT 06106
860 232 1006
REALARTWAYS.ORG

This exhibition is a result of Real Art Ways' "Don't Trust Anyone Over 30" competition in 2003, which requested proposals from emerging artists age thirty and younger, living in New York or New England. Under 30 was juried by Jennifer Gross, Curator of Contemporary Art, Yale University Art Gallery, Barbara Hunt, Executive Director, Artists Space, New York, and Barbara Krakow, President, Barbara Krakow Gallery.

The exhibition was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.



REAL ART WAYS, founded in 1975, is a nationally recognized, alternative multi-disciplinary arts organization that presents and supports contemporary artists and their work, facilitates the creation of new work, and creatively engages and informs audiences and communities. Real Art Ways is an active presenter of different art forms, including music, performance, spoken word, film, video and visual arts. Real Art Ways has a particular commitment to supporting the work of emerging artists.

On the cover: Authorized Reentrance, 2004, ferromagnetic paint, magnets, initial installation view.

Marci MacGuffie



Authorized Reentrance, 2004, ferromagnetic paint, magnets, viewer altered installation view.

Marci MacGuffie: Sight Specific

By Eileen Doyle

"As a frenetic enthusiast, I examine simultaneous flows of nature. Embracing all energetic forces as more than arbitrary occurrences." – Marci MacGuffie

For her exhibition at Real Art Ways in the spring of 2004, Marci MacGuffie employed her usual materials of ferromagnetic paint, magnets and viewer. Indeed, the viewers in this participatory piece are all-important. In the end, these viewers determined the final appearance of *Authorized Reentrance*. This is not to say that the artist relinquished all compositional decisions to others. Quite the contrary, her careful composition of space and her initial layout for the magnets continued to exert an influence over the installation, particularly over the viewers' responses to it, throughout its exhibition.

MacGuffie's imposition of order at the beginning of all her installations structures the "flows of nature" that she examines. Installations like *Authorized Reentrance* stage classic oppositions,

Marci MacGuffie earned an MFA from Rhode Island School of Design. Her work has been exhibited at ArtSPACE, Smack Mellon, White Columns and Exit Art, among other galleries. She has taught at Fairfield University. In 2004, she received a Puffin Foundation Grant for her installation *Authorized Reentrance* at Real Art Ways.

**REAL
ART WAYS**



Authorized Reentrance, 2004, ferromagnetic paint, magnets, initial installation view.

between nature and culture, and between flux and stasis. Typically in her installations, MacGuffie arranges hand-cut magnets on a wall or walls covered in magnetic paint in a seemingly random and abstract pattern. The walls are also articulated with either three-dimensional elements in the shape of beams criss-crossing the corner of the wall in the case of *Arousing Conviction* (2004–2005) or with painted orthogonals cutting a swathe of illusory space into a corner, as in *Authorized Reentrance* (2003–2004). Such spatial interventions coupled with the participatory nature of the magnetic composition tend to beckon the viewer on different levels. Like the primal scene of human marking in prehistoric caves, MacGuffie's installations create a space which is not only difficult to access, but physically impossible. Nonetheless, it is a knowable space, that is, knowable through an understanding of artistic conventions. Her use of criss-crossing beams or painted planes plants her work firmly in the painterly tradition of illusionistic representations of volume and depth. Her beams realize the cross-hatching technique students of drawing and painting are still taught

to create volume, and her orthogonal planes continue the technique used since antiquity by painters to suggest in two-dimensions the recession of a plane into three-dimensional depth. As such, she uses the marks of painting, including the short brushstrokes of the first modern landscape painters, the Impressionists, this time made moveable by fashioning them from vinyl magnets, not paint, to create a very specific landscape for *Authorized Reentrance*. Her version of nature thus relies heavily upon cultural conventions. But her appeal to

the viewer to participate in the rearranging of her landscape appeals to the roots of aesthetic conventions in “natural” compulsions, returning culture to its more basic origins.

MacGuffie examined a natural flow, or migration more specifically, in *Authorized Reentrance*. She initially placed the vinyl magnets on the magnetic walls very deliberately and in a way that acknowledged their site. Not only did she incorporate such lowly details of the space as the emergency exit, complete with a lit sign, into her space and her title, but she also made reference to a piece of local medical history. These magnets were first arranged in such a way as to resemble the growth pattern of grasses, a pattern that also shows up in animal and human hair. The resemblance between grasses and hair forms the basis for the migration of the common deer tick between long grasses and the hair of animal and human hosts. Making reference to Connecticut's dubious distinction as the first place to identify Lyme disease, the neuro-muscular disorder that is passed to humans from deer through ticks, MacGuffie placed

her viewer in the center of the action, so to speak, in the rather surprising position of the tick. Thus, her viewer became host, not for a disease alas, but rather for a generalized artistic intention. Throughout the installation, viewers rearranged the magnets, sometimes leaving messages, other times simply creating faces, or even fashioning small landscapes of their own. Thus, the natural migration of the tick, which was the inspiration for the installation's original appearance, gave way to the flow introduced through the viewer's hands. Where landscape painters may capture a state of natural flux through static cultural conventions, just as the Impressionists did when they recorded the play of light across a surface with their short, visible brushstrokes, MacGuffie employed materials that allow her to introduce a real and constant flux into her installations. In so doing, she inverted the flux associated with nature and the stasis associated with the cultural representation of nature by allowing a potentially static depiction of a natural phenomenon to be transformed through her viewers' response to and interaction with the installation—both of which, response and interaction, are typically culturally-determined.

And like the cave-painters, whose markings suggest a human compulsion to so many anthropologists, MacGuffie's viewers

Search for Delicious, 2003, ferromagnetic paint, magnets, viewer-altered installation view, video-still.



Arousing Conviction, 2004–2005, ferromagnetic paint, wood, magnets.

are compelled to leave their imprint, in a way that the artist also analogized to the tick who is compelled on an even more primal level to migrate and to latch on. Ticks migrate purposefully, driven by need, but guided by resemblance; similarly, artists, or even early cave painters, mark purposefully, arguably driven by need as well, but more obviously guided by resemblance. So, while the viewer-turned-marker is likened to the tick who moves between the hairs represented, she is more aware of the compulsion to purposefully mark the wall. It is in the space of compulsion that MacGuffie unfolds the nexus of the apparent oppositions between nature and culture, and flux and stasis. How very fitting then that she does so in a corner that is visually altered to appear deeper than it is. The walls that form that corner, like the oppositions, turn out to be far more continuous than they might seem at first glance.

Eileen Doyle is an art historian living in West Hartford, CT. She has published on Robert Smithson, Dan Graham and Robert Rauschenberg, as well as on performance art. She is currently an independent researcher for the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation's catalogue raisonne project.