

Scavi: Le Volume de Crevasse

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Scavi: le volume de crevasse, a large-scale installation, was recently developed in the Covid-19 quarantine period. It addresses the makeup of the leftover hardwood ground mat salvaged from the Dakota Access Pipeline project, which passes inside a half-mile of the project site. Addressing the environmental crisis and the covert way the petroleum line was installed, the work sought to inversely cope with such infrastructural aggression by producing a silver-gilded reflection chamber within a crevasse of the lumber pile. This was an effort to venerate the diverse geographies, biotic systems and cultures affected by such subterfuge deployed by the United State government. In this way, the work is developed as “a drawing” by constructing and embellishing a set of situational lines and marks intended to reveal the profound material and cultural nature of the spatial operation. The new set of lines envelops the in-between and aims to illuminate the world by

giving it heat, vitality, sense, force, light, and growth, trying to fathom its territories and multiplicities.

Articulated by a mass of heavy timber end cuts (Figure 2) measuring roughly 3 feet wide and 24 feet long the crevasse has an irregular depth that rises 5 feet and falls 7 feet with respect to the entry rampart (Figure 1). Spanning the void overhead is a new series of galvanized steel rod assembly. The axial dimension of the interior is aligned east-west (Figure 6 and 7). The timber end cuts define a broken line on the south edge and maintains a relatively vertical arrangement, while the opposite timber, covered with fil tape, tapers off to the north as it rises to the top (Figure 4).

The relationship between the material makeup and sensuous matter points to the volumetric condition within the



Figure 1. Entry rampart. Photography by Integrated Studio.



Figure 2. Detail of foil gilding. Photography by Integrated Studio.



Figure 3. View atop entry rampart. Photography by Integrated Studio.

configuration. The foil dressing and galvanized steel rod assembly overhead acts as mirror in that it renders the values of the celestial scene above – drawing an image of the sky into the darkened cavern. This set of reflections, broken by the constituent parts, magnifies the perceptual condition of the volumetric entirety. The image of the world beyond is contained by the mirror reflection. However, it can be thought of in a different, yet concurrent, way as something that radiates out to the environment of the assembly and mingles with the smell of moist humus emanating from below. The interior space becomes a void charged with the accumulation of long-gathered energy (Figure 5).

To see and perceive the geometric depth of space in this case is reliant on the mirror as gauge – an instrument for measuring the magnitude, amount and contents of the world of our experience. Correspondingly, the mirror quality of the additive components, serves as harvester to gather the universe and depict an expansive image of the sky. Thus, *Scavi: le volume de crevasse* operates as a sort of dark viewing station from which a momentary recognition of the world beyond is prefigured.

We often think of art and architecture as creative processes whereby things are made. We don't typically think about them as acts of maintenance. The problem, as performance

artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles (author of "Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969") notes, is that our culture values development, while maintenance "takes all the fucking time." The only treatment for degeneration is maintenance – fixing deterioration once it becomes evident.

As preservation architect and artist, I see maintenance as a means to become familiar with the material and immaterial nature of a particular configuration. This is a critical sequence of the design process whereby the creative response is informed. Preparation for *Scavi: le volume de crevasse* dealt, head on, with maintenance as a matter of design draftsmanship rather than as a post-production requirement. The pile of lumber sat dormant in its current location for four years through extreme seasonal shifts and exposure to intense sun and dust. Each timber, in order that the foil tape could be secured, required thorough hand cleaning.

Concurrent with the maintenance aspect of this project is the physical occupation of the constricted crevasse. Occupying of the void in order to perform the work necessary to complete the process of cleaning and gilding, required a series of body contortions. With such physicality, one is afforded new ways to see the constituent spatial makeup of the crevasse. It facilitates a physical, philosophical and spiritual approach to



Figure 4. Detail of foil gilding. Photography by Integrated Studio.



Figure 5. Detail of foil gilding. Photography by Integrated Studio.



Figure 6. Axial view at entrance. Photography by Integrated Studio.



Figure 7. Axial view inside. Photography by Integrated Studio.

what is essentially a practical process of diagnosis and treatment towards a perceptual experience.

The consequent sense of insiderness aroused by such spatial configuration calls for unfocused, peripheral, enveloping, and enfolding perceptions and interactions of various sense experiences. “The atmosphere is a virtual, experiential and multi-sensory place, which usually has shapeless, undefinable and ephemeral boundaries and experiential qualities.” The spatiality of one’s body, for those who enter the Scavi, results in a total awareness of posture in the midst of this alter-sensory state. Our dimensional nature of being conspires with the inherent measure of the compressed space. Through the never-complete design process, author and guests, are immersed in an ontological chamber of being, or more precisely, becoming.

Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. As noted by Andrej Radman, architecture has mastered metric space - lengths, areas and volumes - all too well. The discipline has yet to come to grips with the notion of intensive space. Thus, the drawing assembly lies fallow – a continuously drafted line left uncultivated and incomplete. As



Figure 8. Overhead view. Photography by Integrated Studio.

an embodied practice, it represents a material excavation that, in truth, seeks to reveal the intangible/immaterial contextual realm (Figure 9). Within, we are held in suspense by the celestial world above and its corresponding reflection (Figure 10) amidst derelict populations of folks suffering from the novel coronavirus outbreak.

ENDNOTES

1. Ivana Wingham, *Mobility of the Line* (Birkhauser Verlag GmbH, Basel, 2013), 11.
2. Juhani Pallasmaa, *Atmosphere as Place* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 3.
3. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117.



Figure 9. View atop looking north. Photography by Integrated Studio.



Figure 10. Aerial view. Photograph by Peter P. Goché.