

# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

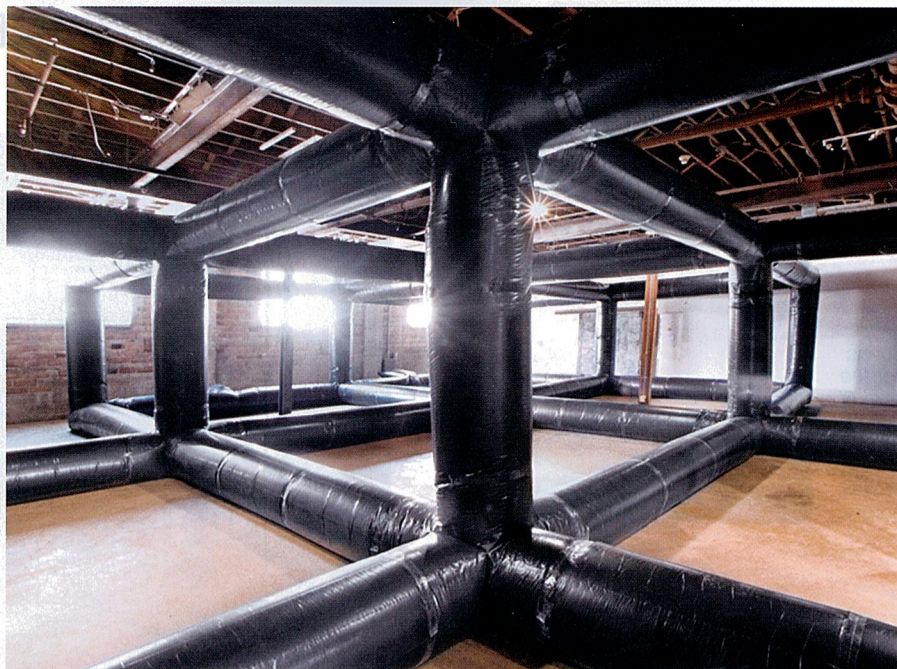
## VENICE '09

plus  
SIGMAR POLKE  
DIKE BLAIR  
HONG KONG



SEPTEMBER '09 \$9.00

View of Clive Murphy's installation "Almost Nothing," 2009, inflated trash bags; at the Soap Factory.



paint—ordinarily a color of cheer—on one side of each diagonal brace and on the inside of one of the fractured boxes looming overhead demonstrated her clearly mixed feelings. No attempt was made to conceal the welding, and the structural elements were a mix of round and square poles, so the whole conveyed a blunt physicality. The intentional charmlessness of it grated against the buoyant yellow but suited the dim lighting and ominous shadows as well as the irregular surfaces of this relatively raw and hardly neutral gallery space.

In the more elegantly installed upstairs room, Feuer presented *Collapse* (2009). It looked like the trusses of an incomplete bridge or roof, compressed into an extended bundle and painted a uniform bright blue. The whole mass, more than 10 feet long and 3 feet thick, was stabbed into the wall about 6 feet up, a soft-margin red circle marking the spot on the wall as if the mass were a gargantuan dart thrown at a target. Gallery information revealed that the material was foam rather than steel or wood, which explains how it could be held aloft without some major brace or cantilever device, and that it was inspired by a storied railroad bridge in the artist's native Winnipeg. *Collapse* is a threatening word in regard to bridges, although the color soars.

Feuer pairs her harsh industrial sensibility with an interest in social implications and a feeling for emotion-generating formal qualities, recalling Mona Hatoum in the former and Nancy Rubins in the latter.

—Janet Koplos

#### MINNEAPOLIS CLIVE MURPHY THE SOAP FACTORY

Housed in a 100-year-old former factory in Minneapolis's riverside warehouse district, the Soap Factory recalls a vanished industrial heyday with its 11-to-13-foot ceilings, wooden floors, and exposed pipes and patches of brick. It is a compelling space, and offers stiff competition for any installation. The Irish artist Clive Murphy, who is now based in New York, is the first in Soap Factory history (the space opened in 1995) to tackle the entire 12,000 square feet of exhibition space on his own. He is also astute enough to take advantage of his surroundings rather than attempt to distract from their character.

For "Almost Nothing," his recent site-specific installation, Murphy used black trash bags to construct three giant inflatable sculptures (he showed similar but smaller works here in 2006). The structures—thick tubes attached both vertically and horizontally to form interlocking three-dimensional rectangular grids that reach almost to the ceiling—stood in three separate rooms on the vast ground floor, redefining their contours and complicating the space. The results conjured a jungle gym designed by Sol LeWitt. Murphy firmly anchored a form usually associated with weightlessness (think of other inflatables like Warhol's Mylar balloons or Tim Hawkinson's sweeping *Überorgan*). High-power electric fans inflated the sculptures while buzzing loudly in the background; the noise and strong air

currents rendered the pieces surprisingly alive. Never uniformly straight or still, each reverberated at a low hum, pulled taut in some places and sagging gently in others. One imagined the whole thing collapsing at night to lie dormant, like a deflated balloon. This was makeshift minimalism, playful and active, accessible and—perhaps most important—able to withstand the unheated galleries during a Minnesota winter.

Rounding out the exhibition were 10 works on paper hung in a small room connecting two of the large galleries. Colorful and precise, they betrayed Murphy's tongue-in-cheek attitude toward art-historical precepts. An ink drawing of two clasped hands, for example, illustrates the written declaration that "Together we can End Relational Aesthetics!" In another, a black bear seems to have stumbled upon an object suspiciously suggestive of one of Murphy's inflatables, which it considers inquisitively. The bear's attitude permeates "Almost Nothing" as a whole: unpretentious and thoughtful.

—Anne Reeve

#### HOUSTON CHRISTOPHER DEETON BARBARA DAVIS

One of the sensations conveyed by Christopher Deeton's richly allusive yet strictly controlled paintings is that of a gradual unfolding. Limiting himself for this show to just two colors—a velvety black and a cayenne-pepper red—the New York-based Deeton created bilater-