Cheekwood

temporary contemporary

Kendall Buster

Subterrain (Column Field)

March 31 - May 21, 2006

artist statement

Subterrain (Column Field) is one in a series of works examining how hexagonal units might be used in the design of an architectural space. For this project I constructed what appears to be a field of columns by attaching lightweight ballistic nylon to hexagonal frames configured into a patterned lattice. In each column, six convex curves connect to create an overhead canopy. Considered another way, the columns might be seen as downward extrusions from an irregular hexagonal grid. What appear as supporting elements are in fact empty fluted vessels with joined lips. Experienced from below, in the subterranean region, these hollow forms appear as columns merged into a seamless roof.

This seamlessness is only possible through the kind of tight packing unique to hexagonal cells. The most common association evoked from any structure where a hexagonal pattern is employed is perhaps the honeycomb. Bees construct with cells that are cylindrical but compress in a crowded colony to become hexagonal. It's the most efficient design and allows each chamber entry to connect seamlessly to its neighbors with no wasted space. Isolated soap bubbles also configure in this way when stuck together. The sensitive part of our own retina, the fovea, is made of elongated cones packed in hexagonal formation. The examples go on and on. Evidence of the particular properties of the hexagonal pattern are found in both the seemingly 'self ordering' dynamics of nature and in human design solutions. A molecule of benzene is represented with a hexagonal ring and hexagonal patterns are used in the design of bundled 50 micron superconducting cables and 50 foot geodesic domes. Whether visible in spontaneous ordering in nature or employed in human design, the hexagonal pattern directs very particular design solutions.

Subterrain (Column Field) **gallery view**

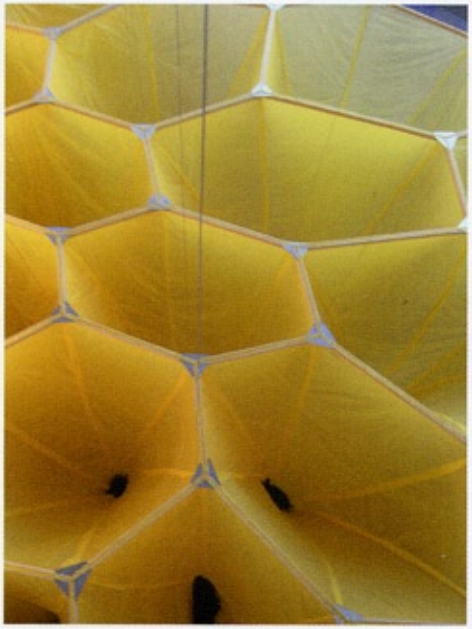
The title *Subterrain (Column Field)* also refers to the sense of being below ground. Though the hexagonal grid informs and indeed is necessary to the shape and configuration of the columns and seamless ceiling, it remains invisible. Moving thorough the yellow columns one is in the subterranean region of an imagined architecture.

Once penetrated, an architectural structure embraces, contains, shelters, frames, and even controls a human body. In this and other projects I am engaged in exploring that notion by constructing sculptures that operate as sites of enclosure, and by investigating how biological forms might be employed in their design and production. I see these sculptures as scale models for theoretical buildings. My aim is to articulate a form where the underlying blueprint is evident in a sharply defined shape, but I am directed also by a necessity to contradict this somewhat with a demonstration of its being a dynamic system. The sculpture should, in other words, also operate with a kind of animation. To this end the complex curves, the transparent or translucent skins, as well as the field of like units allows for multiple viewpoints and a sense of growth in successive stages. This column field is a single stage in a potentially open system, a fragment of a larger whole.

curator statement

In *Subterrain (Column Field),* Kendall Buster is charting a fascinating territory that exists at the margin of fantasy and reality. By allowing viewers to walk inside this sculpture—among its suspended columns and below its complex roof structure—Buster invites us into an imaginative experience akin to scuba or sky diving, or a known/unknown such as exploring the organ systems inside the human body.

Subterrain, as any large-scale work of art, makes observers immediately aware of their own physical scale, causing them to quickly assess their relative comfort level in relation to the piece. The tightly woven opaque yellow nylon fabric is atmospheric: the sunshine seems blocked from view, and the whole piece lit from without, while the gently moving columns floating unanchored suggest weightless suspension. Does the space feel close and comforting or enveloping? Is there a vicarious thrill at leaving gravity or a disturbance of equilibrium?



Subterrain (Column Field) **view from above**

Once physically acclimated, gallery visitors might embark on a more intellectual analysis. The tall fluted columns could be read as an appropriately local reference to classical Greek architecture, since a full-scale replica of The Parthenon is to be found just a few miles away in Nashville's Centennial Park. Those who look up might conclude, although it isn't visible, that the structure from which the fabric is suspended must be a grid made up of curves arranged in six-sided shapes in order to allow the nylon to hang as it does. Recognition of the underlying hexagon, a pattern structure most often associated with beehives, grounds the sculpture contextually, tying it to an unusual, yet familiar, form of nature.

Buster's artist statement points out that human-made forms often mimic the hexagon's economy in such things as the tight stacking of straight-sided forms, such as bundles of metal rods, or the folded compression of a sphere, as in the underpinnings of a geodesic dome. Here, however, by curving the hexagonal lines ever so slightly, the artist is bending the crisp geometry of mathematics, subtly reminding viewers of fractal calculations that show even the straightest line to be a part of a massive curve. By using an ephemeral art medium like nylon to represent the built environment, Buster overturns assumptions about architecture. By showing viewers only the underside of what is clearly a repeating pattern, the artist prompts viewers to try and complete the picture. In all, the experience of *Subterrain* makes possible a leap of the imagination capable of shifting the consciousness for a rare, brief moment. What better function can there be for art, than holding viewers long enough for the mind to stretch?

— Susan Knowles, Independent Curator

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