

THE
ARCHITECTSNEWSPAPER

Barbara Bloom dissects architectural drawings at Cleveland's FRONT art festival

by Matthew Messner
September 18, 2018



The exhibition includes a series of 20 images from the Allan Museum's collection, each cropped to reveal only fleeting architectural details. (Field Studio)

Barbara Bloom is not an architect. Yet, her current exhibition, part of FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art, would fit in at any of the innumerable architecture biennials and triennials around the world. Entitled *The Rendering* ($H \times W \times D =$), the solo exhibition explores the relationships between images, objects, and space.

Located in the Robert Venturi-designed Ellen Johnson Gallery, at the Allen Memorial Art Museum on the campus of Oberlin College, Bloom takes full advantage of the museum's collection and the gallery's pedigree. Invoking architectural language and imagery, the installation is at once both thoughtful and funny.

With the Ellen Johnson Gallery, Venturi actively questioned the logic of the typical white box, and Bloom uses this to her advantage. Divided into several discrete pieces, *The Rendering* reverse engineers a number of two-dimensional architectural images into three-dimensional installations. In each case, Bloom uses primary documents from the museum's collection, and in one case engages with the building itself. This happens in a glass corner looking out onto Venturi's "Ironic Ionic" column. Like the other pieces Bloom constructed for the show, the column is matched with a series of column drawings, effectively making Venturi an unaware collaborator in the project.

The other pieces in the show include a bridge, garden, tea house, and screen, which are all constructed based on overly literal readings of historic architectural drawings.

The largest piece, *Garden*, for example, is based on a 19th-century Indian print, which is a mix of perspective, plan, and axonometric drawing techniques. As such, the construction fluctuates from legible to confusing (in a good way) as the viewer moves around the piece. A similar effect takes place with the *Tea House*, which, on first inspection, looks to be a traditional Japanese space for tea ceremonies. This reading falls apart as one works out the relationships of angles and surfaces, which were pulled directly from an 18th-century woodblock print.

These larger pieces are augmented by two series of flat works that flank the entry to the gallery. One set of 20 works from the museum's collection are "framed" in such a way to hide most of the image, revealing only select architectural moments. Another set of photographs curated by the artist from the larger museum collection are hung to temper the palette of viewers entering the space. This attention to procession into the space is just another example of how the artist worked in a distinctly architectural way while conceiving the show.

The FRONT Triennial has many exhibitions and pieces that architects may find interested, but Bloom's *The Rendering* is likely the most directly relatable. The Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Wetzheimer/Johnson House is also hosting works by artist Juan Araujo, and the Richard D. Baron '64 Art Gallery has the striking architectural paintings of Ciu Jie, both just a short distance from the college. Though these works are a bit of a hike from Cleveland, where most of the triennial is taking place, they are well worth the trip.

Considering the popular argument that all these new architecture biennials are, in the end, mostly self-absorbant, it is somehow fitting that the best architectural installations might just be happening at art shows.

The Rendering (H x W x D =) and FRONT will be open through September 30 at at the Allen Memorial Art Museum and across the City of Cleveland.