

ALBERTA: Marcia Huyer, *Spaced Out*, Apr 20 — May 20, 2006

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Marcia Huyer: *Spaced Out*, installation view, Harcourt House Arts Centre, Edmonton.

Marcia Huyer successfully deconstructs both the idea of gallery space and the ideal viewer stance in *Spaced Out* at Harcourt House Arts Centre. Her installation features inflatable sculptures constructed of white Tyvek fabric that sprawl out over the gallery's floor and occupy two corners, floor to ceiling. Jointly inspired by architectural and organic, bodily shapes, some sections of the inflated pieces look like duct work, others appear as surreal internal organs. The overall effect is an inside-out sensation, as if you've magically stepped behind (or maybe through) a room, or crawled inside an alien being. There is no "line" between gallery and artifact. Huyer has custom-built her sculpture into the gallery space, making it seem as if the soft forms could be exiting (or possibly entering) the room's ventilation system.

Not only is the white-on-white installation wonderfully claustrophobic and all-encompassing as an experience, it also poses a significant and subtle challenge for the viewer. The configuration of the snaking arms that switchback over the gallery's floor — requiring viewers to continually watch where they step and hemming them in at every possible turn — deny a natural or ideal vantage point to see the piece. Unlike the traditional gallery configuration where viewers can be centred three feet in front of a work of art, here there is no opportunity to stand back and get an objective look at the piece as a whole. No matter where you place yourself, you are missing parts of the sculpture. A towering section shrinks

as you try to step away from it or another looms up behind or beside you in an endless game of shifting scale and perspective. Once you've stepped inside the room, you share the physicality of the piece and participate in the installation. There is absolutely no possibility of any objective stance as the piece deconstructs itself organically from inside out.

All of this fits seamlessly into Huyer's larger artistic plan. The BC-based artist has stated her dual desire is to prolong the gallery experience away from the usual 30-second gawk at every discrete work of art and make the gallery visitor definitively position themselves in the full reality of the piece.

In conversation Huyer is also quick to cite her love of juxtaposing opposites in her work, playing dualities off of each other: hard vs soft, inside vs outside, and domestic vs industrial. Tyvek is a soft but tough cloth used for multiple products, ranging from the deeply domestic (disposable painter's overalls are made from Tyvek) to the industrial (chemical protection suits). Architects use the cloth as a house-wrap because it keeps out cold air and vents moisture — a use that Huyer especially likes since it imbues the fabric with an organic, membrane-like quality.

The use of Tyvek also allows her to literally build her work from air and light, two ethereal but vital elements of the construction process that allow her to move from the metaphorical to the overtly sculptural.



Marcia Huyer: *Spaced Out*, installation view, Harcourt House Arts Centre, Edmonton.

At the same time the soft, malleable material can be compressed to such a degree that Huyer carried all the installation components to Edmonton in a single suitcase, including sections purposefully made to look like they are solid. By adding and subtracting components, she is able to shape the sculpture to match the architectural realities of each and every installation site, giving her work the power to artistically define any space. Further customizing her installation for Harcourt House, Huyer has worked several solid white plinths into the body of piece, leaving the construction open and oppositional. Viewers are left wondering if these "supports" are holding up or being smothered by the morphing sculptural mass.

— **BY Gilbert A. Bouchard**