

A Mattress Factory exhibit challenges the walls of its own galleries.

by Melissa Kuntz
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Both literally and metaphorically, the theme of Inner and Outer Space is evoked in the work of nine artists currently showing at the Mattress Factory. Organized by independent New York-based curator Dara Meyers-Kinsley, the exhibition presents "inner and outer space" as both the form and content of the works. The title nods to the show's approach to artistic practices, as well as to such relationships as private/public, interior/exterior or earthly/cosmic.

Hailing from six countries, the artists approach the theme from a myriad of angles. Sarah Oppenheimer cut an opening into the floor of a fourth-floor gallery -- the first time in the museum's 30-year history that an artist has so reconfigured its architecture. Like a "wormhole," this cross-section projects through the third floor and out the window. Viewers peer down a chute constructed of aircraft-grade plywood, and into a neighboring yard. As framed by Oppenheimer, the scene instills a sense of vertigo as one looks through the hole far above the ground -- but it also makes us feel, unpleasantly, like voyeurs, spying on the unsuspecting neighbors with a bird's-eye view of their patio.

Meanwhile, two artists bring "outer spaces" inside, creating poignant yet subtle and suggestive works. Mark Garry's "being here" is a "rainbow" constructed from hundreds of strands of colored thread, stretched taut and secured with a miniature pulley system made of pins and beads. The work's color and luminosity shift as the viewer moves around it, or as the light from the windows changes: It is in constant flux, much like an actual rainbow.

Garry also crafted two patches of grass carved from basswood, inspired by the trees outside the museum, and placed them near the thread installation. Finally, he crafted two manual music boxes, whose rotating cylinders can be "played" by viewers. The instruments, displayed on two ceiling-height wooden stands, play music inspired by a drawing of the landscape surrounding the Mattress Factory. Local artist Anne Angyal helped Garry adapt the drawing into a range of 20 notes, each hole-punched into the paper ribbons that feed into the music boxes.

Outer spaces also come indoors in Mary Temple's "Transparent Brick Wall for Kusama," installed just outside one of the museum's permanent exhibits: the seemingly infinite expanse of Yayoi Kusama's mirrored, dotted room. Temple's piece, barely perceptible at first, appears like shadows of leaves and branches upon the walls. Upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that the shadows have been painted on the white walls with the lightest of gray paints.

A second work by Temple was inspired by Internet news sites. Each day, Temple produced a drawing of a world leader, which was scanned and e-mailed to the Mattress Factory staff. The drawings are hung on the walls in a calendar format, accompanied by text illuminating each day's story -- bringing the outside world of news and politics into the space of the museum, day by day.

An artist who has literally conjoined inner and outer spaces is Luca Buvoli, whose sculpture was inspired by Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto of 1909. Buvoli has crafted a car, like Marinetti's iconic crashed Fiat, which inspired the manifesto. In Buvoli's work, six full-sized resin, Plexiglas and metal cars are connected, like a tangible animation, to one another and tilted at varying angles, spanning the length of the gallery and, literally, out the open window.

Other artists exhibited include Daniel Canogar, David Ellis, Yumi Kori, Tavares Strachan and Allison Smith. Contributions like Canogar's fiber-optic photographic projections, and Strachan's robotic rover, are interesting in their own right, but they perhaps complicate the exhibit's theme unnecessarily. The artists whose work resonates most are those who interpreted the inner/outer concept more literally. By taking art beyond the walls of the Mattress Factory, and reflecting upon the world within the gallery's confines, the artists second the curatorial nod to art's ever-expanding role in the globalizing world.

Inner and Outer Space continues through Jan. 11. Mattress Factory, 500 Sampsonia Way, North Side. 412-231-3169 or www.mattress.org