

**JILL DOWNEN: (dis)embody**

April 7 - April 29, 2006

---

Imagine a world where inanimate architecture and human beings can interact in unreal ways. In this imagined place, each has the potential for morphing with the other in impossible combinations to meld and become, in varying degrees, one with each other. This is the transformation that Jill Downen asks us to empathetically consider.

Architecture derives from us, it shelters us and it requires us to substantiate its meaning and purpose. Alternately, we require it. In many ways, we define ourselves through it and, depend on it to sustain and protect us. In recent years, Jill Downen has brought to the art world a virtually seamless topography in which she blends, morphs and compares the built environment to a kind of body. Using common construction materials Downen has created this recombinant world of sinew and sags - of bulges and bumps. Some beg a caress. Others suggest a step back.

In *(dis)embody* we are shown more than a broad epidermis; so critical to Downen's previous projects. This exhibition moves toward internal forms of anatomy. Discreet objects resonate within the artist's continuum of an installation environment; yet gain the ability to amplify individual and specific nuances. Some closely resemble (human?) organs; others are rooted deeply in the realm of geometric architecture. White as the walls on which they hang, an initial suggestion of stasis emerges from the subtle forms. The monochromatic aesthetic allows the conceptual energy of the work to surface quickly

with no blood, secretions, debris or color to distract.

An aspect of time, embodied in the ideas of stasis and temporality, underlies the work. In *Overflow*, a length of 2 x 4 lumber props a sagging blob of fleshy wall in a seemingly desperate attempt to contain the effects of gravity. This stud, (the only nonwhite object in the exhibition) is like the 'ribs' that make up the structure in the very walls of the gallery. In this work, the futile act of resisting time and change is made clear. The metamorphosis occurring in *Flexure* and *Stratum* also possesses a temporal dimension. Neither the previous state nor the outcome is prescribed, but rather a process of change is manifest in the fluid contours and morphing nodules.

The exhibit *(dis)embody* is presented as a pliable axiom. While Downen's art embodies significant conversation and relevance to the human condition - our symbiotic relationship to architecture and eventual mortality - little is prescribed. In the exhibition, Downen presents a void between the imaginary and the physical, between the corporeal and the disembodied. In this subtle space, questions arise along with a suspended moment that invites quietness for contemplation.

Written by Kim Humphries

Kim Humphries is an artist. His work was recently on view at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis and the Bruno David Gallery.

This essay is a series of introductions to the gallery's exhibitions written by fellow gallery artists.