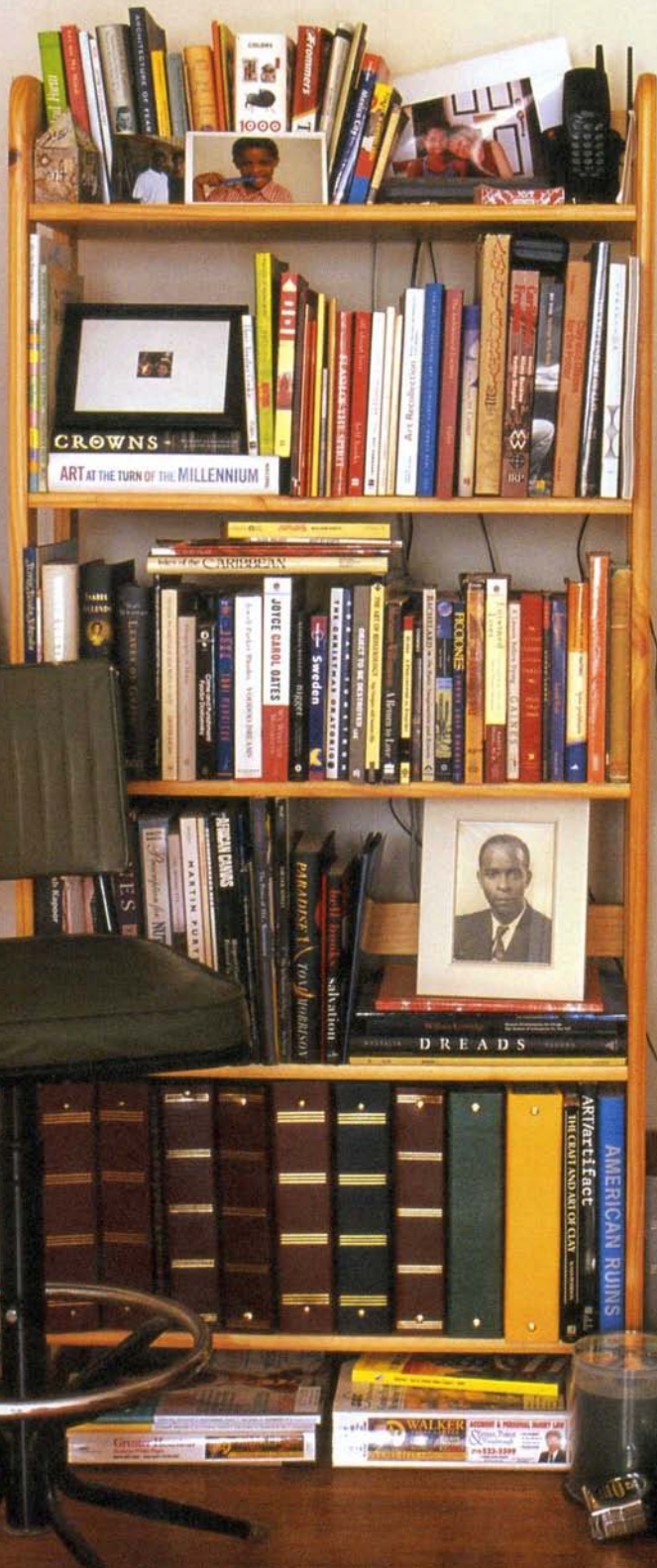


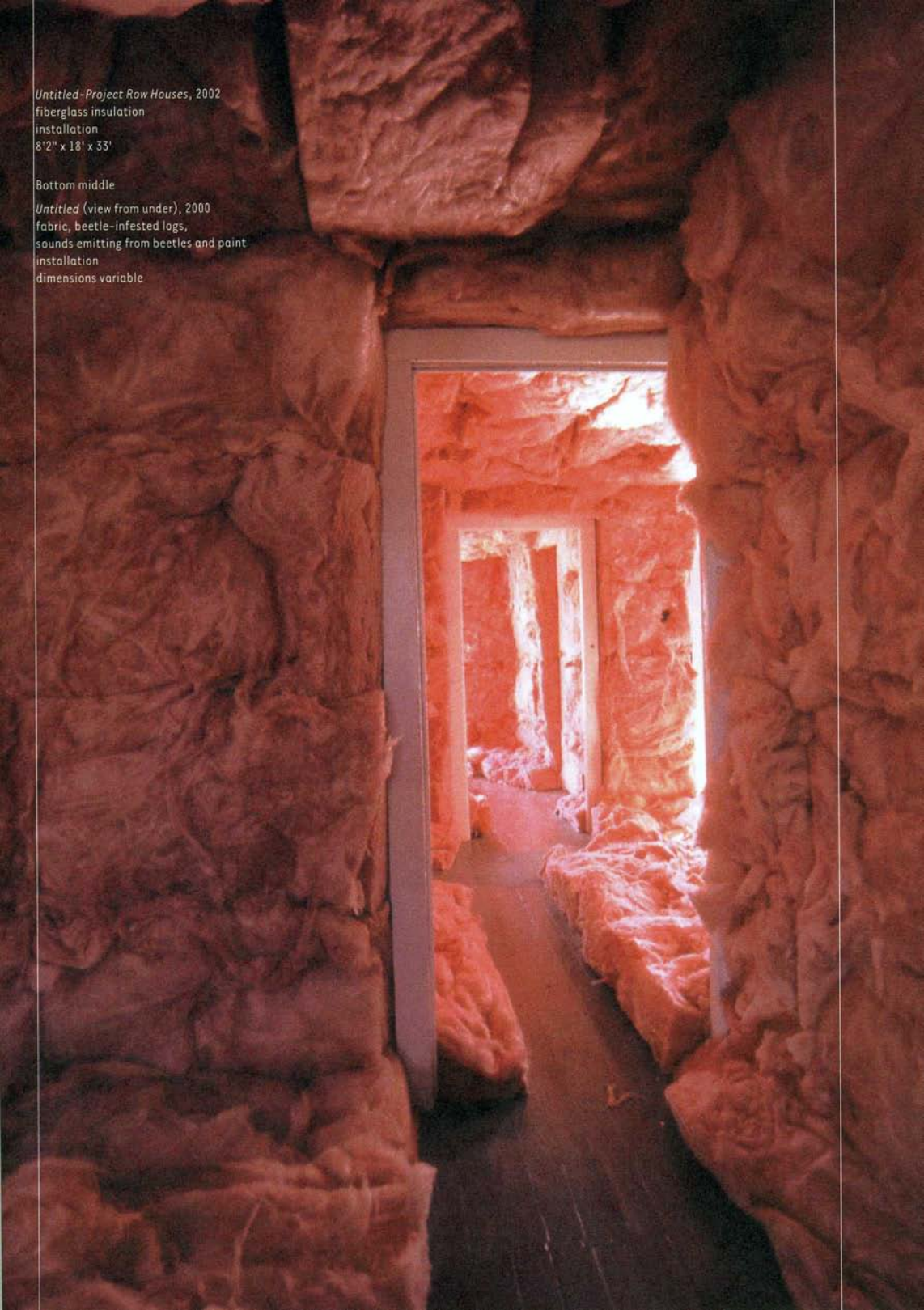
KARYN OLIVIER



Untitled-Project Row Houses, 2002
fiberglass insulation
installation
8'2" x 18' x 33'

Bottom middle

Untitled (view from under), 2000
fabric, beetle-infested logs,
sounds emitting from beetles and paint
installation
dimensions variable



SPACES AND (AND AS) OBJECTS

Karyn Olivier's preoccupation with objects and spaces has dominated her practice for some time now. Foregrounding the spectator's physical and psychological response to a specific space by means of a variety of architectural alterations and interventions, her installations do not simply assume the spectator's participation but entail an implicit invitation to take part in them. Olivier has achieved this by acknowledging, albeit subtly, a threshold between the interior and the exterior of the installation space—often by setting up environments that involve multi-sensory experiences. Her most recent installation, which makes the invitation more explicit and the threshold more literal, departs from this particular approach while complicating the issue of participation.

In *Untitled* (2000) Olivier hung several giant, beetle-infested logs in a sling from the rafters of the gallery, contriving a false ceiling underneath this apparatus using a length of sheer fabric. From the outside, one saw only the massive logs suspended from the ceiling; once inside, the spectator became aware of being positioned below both the sling and the 5'10" ceiling, which, in spite of its translucence, contributed to the oppressiveness of the logs' weight by appearing to restrict the cubic space of the room. In the hushed quiet prompted by this spatial disorientation, one became aware of the distinctive sounds produced by the beetles as they relentlessly consumed the logs, creating sawdust drawings on the scrim below. Since the sounds emitted from the logs and the appearance of the sawdust on the fabric were equal consequences, or indexes, of the beetles' activity, the work did not establish a hierarchy between the visual and the aural. That the focus of this work was the body as both sensing and sentient was attested by the fact that there was a corresponding emphasis on the spectator's awareness of his or her body within this space.

Olivier continued this line of inquiry in her 2002 installations *Untitled (Project Row Houses)* and *Eeeeeeeeeee! Graaaack! Grack!* Lining the inside of a small house with a thick layer of fiberglass insulation in the

former, Olivier created an environment that evoked bodily metaphors while simultaneously eliciting a physical response to the deadening of sound within the space. It was the noticeable absence of sound in the latter, however, that signaled a shift in Olivier's focus. The installation of 280 cement grackles under the eaves of a long exhibition space not only manifested a departure from the environmental character of her earlier work, but the presence of the birds in the absence of their raucous cries required the spectator's participation through memory.

In her recent work, particularly her 2003 installation *Fort*, Olivier forgoes her emphasis on the aural and the tactile to focus more exclusively on the visual. In this work Olivier constructed a thick-walled structure with the same square footage as her living room (although the truncated walls are only six feet high) and placed it in the middle of the gallery floor, essentially expanding the Minimalist cube to architectural scale. Turning domestic space inside out—Olivier covered the exterior walls of *Fort* with a photomural of her living room—rendered the public space of the gallery private and vice versa. This is not, however, the intimate domestic space of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's billboards: the living room is arguably the most public of private spaces. The invitation to cross the threshold is perhaps more explicit here, but the virtual space of the image deprives the spectator of the physical experience of this space.

The title *Fort* implies that these walls are intended to serve both a protective and a prohibitive function. Although the artist's domestic space is exposed, space itself becomes mural in the adjectival sense—that is, wall-like—in this work. Because the image is embedded in the drywall, its virtual space is belied by the materiality of the photograph and the wall. Therefore, rather than retaining its status as an illusionistic space to which the spectator has access, the virtual space of the image becomes reified: to paraphrase—and invert—Marx's formula, in this work, "All that is air congeals into a solid." While Hegel envisioned a progression of the arts from architecture to sculpture to painting (and, ultimately, their transcendence altogether), Olivier collapses the distinction between these disciplines and emphasizes their interdependence as well as their materiality. The only "empty" space is that which is occupied by the center of the cube, and it is only accessible to vision. In her latest installation, then, Olivier invites the spectator to explore the relationship between real and virtual space and to consider the way in which images mediate our experience of objects and spaces.

—Mary Leclère





Eeeeeeeeeee! Graaaaack! Grack!
(overview and detail, right), 2002
plaster, cement, and paint
installation of approximately 280
fabricated grackles along the
Glassell School of Art building's
two parapets





Karyn Olivier

- 1968 Born Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
1989 B.A. (Psychology), Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH
1997-99 Post-Baccalaureate Program, University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA
2001 M.F.A., Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI

SOLO EXHIBITION

- 2002 *Artist Installation*, Project Row Houses, Houston, TX

TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *It's not the end of the world*, Nave Museum, Victoria, TX
2000 *Blue*, Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *In Practice*, Sculpture Center, Long Island City, NY
Function: Assimilate, Function Variable Artists' Projects, Tyler Gallery, Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, PA
2002 *2002 Core Artists in Residence*, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
Core Samples, Galveston Arts Center, Galveston, TX
2001 *Function: Drop it*, Function Variable Artists' Projects, Houston, TX
Wall Works (curated by Hiram Butler), Genesis Park, Houston, TX
Summer Show, Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI
Degree Show, Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI
2000 *Erotics of Dislike*, Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI
1999 *Thesis Exhibition*, University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2002 *2002 Core Yearbook* (exhibition catalogue). Houston: The Glassell School of Art of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
Bill Davenport, "Core 2002 Exhibition at the Glassell School of Art," *Glasstire*, <http://www.glasstire.com> (April).
2001 Gavin Morrison, "Wall Space: Wall-works at Genesis Park, Houston," *Glasstire*, <http://www.glasstire.com> (November).

PERMANENT COLLECTION

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX

2003 CORE CORE.MFAH.ORG

On flap

Untitled—Project Row Houses
(rear bedroom view), 2002
fiberglass insulation
82" x 18" x 33"

On cover

Fort (study for installation), 2003