

TIME-BASED ARCHITECTURE

KAREN BRUMMUND

In 2005, while living in London as a graduate student, Karen Brummund drew, from an oblique angle, a freehand sketch of the façade of a community center on the East side of London. She proceeded to enlarge the original drawing to the actual size of the façade and overlaid a grid on the surface from which she printed hundreds of single sheets of paper that, when accurately affixed to the building, produced a captivating, curiously misaligned picture of the elevation. Serving as a symbolic representation of its community-based mission, the Brady Arts and Community Centre project graphically—if ephemerally—animated the building and surrounding neighborhood. Since this project, Brummund has developed a series of temporary installations that examine and expose our perception and experience of actual space through puzzling and phantom-like interventions.

Her dynamically evolving body of work embraces elemental, generally accepted forms of drawing and visualization. Her experimental domain is buildings and their insistent presence in the world, as well as less substantial, but oddly authentic, traditions of representation. There is a history of artists who have worked with architecture. For instance, Gordon Matta-Clark subversively deployed didactic conventions of architectural drawing (the dimensional axonometric diagram, for example) to cut and carve marginal and condemned buildings. Brummund brings a subtly distinctive sensibility to this legacy. Generally, she focuses on the “flatness” of an elevation rather than a robust “fullness” of structure, but she has no staunchly predetermined preoccupations or historical proclivities. She does, however, gravitate toward ambivalently iconic, programmatically unambiguous, and modestly evocative places. Working in both rural and urban environments, Brummund’s sites are both those designed/constructed by anonymous or collective builders, as well as buildings that have a more significant presence or pedigree.

Observation, drawing, and documentation are central to her work, but these visual conventions are invariably disarmed— and ultimately dismembered— through a critical inclination. Her frequently full-frontal depictions of façades evoke silhouettes and proportions, features and details, as well as material conditions. Her inscriptive work illuminates and interprets the character of a building but, typically and ironically, the evidentiary drawing or image is manipulated and installed to momentarily eclipse the site of interest. Descriptive representation both articulates and obfuscates. As the scale of the original drawings or images is expanded and explored in small elements, time becomes an errant agent of unpredictable outcomes.

Vernacular and more self-consciously designed buildings generally use a generic and repeatable palette of materials. With wit, Brummund pursues a quietly restive but mimetic process of benign modularity and repetition. An old barn in central New York was the site of a recent project in this vein. Storm Road (2008) was identified and rendered, seemed to vanish, and then reappeared in a sequential orchestration of thorough, if futile, planning with incalculable human and meteorological vagaries. The project began with an

“accurate” drawing of the façade of the barn, digitally enlarged to its precise dimensions, to which the artist applied a grid to create rows of same-sized elements—each one the size of ubiquitous 8.5” x 11” office paper. Each increment of the original drawing was applied, by a crew of friends and other participants, to its corresponding location on the side of the barn. The adhesion of hundreds of sheets of generic letter paper on the elevation of a rugged, agricultural building was remarkably memorable, if evocatively unstable. Within days, most pieces of the drawing randomly fell off and drifted away. The slowly depreciating effects created an unsettling convergence of the representational and the real through random and ephemeral events.

Like most of Brummund's work, Storm Road has an after-life of alternative (and ulterior) representation. Brummund videotaped the gradual but persistent unfurling of the pixilated drawing as wind, rain, and the heat of the sun indiscriminately emancipated the pieces of paper from their tenuous claim on the building's façade. Deadpan documentation endlessly reenacts the project's wondrous denouement.

Working in more constrained, urban conditions, Brummund began Main Street (2008) with a digital photograph of an unexceptional, empty window of a storefront in Beacon, New York. Brummund expanded pieces of prints to the actual size of the window, sectioned them into 8.5” x 11” elements, and affixed them to the surface of the glass. As images fell off the glass, they were replaced by simple contour drawings of the missing section. In time, some of these rendered replacements sporadically fell away, producing a perceptual conundrum of mediated images, “blind” drawings, and actual window glass. A random pattern of opacity and transparency enhanced a puzzling mosaic of serial visual conventions and anomalous effects.

In 2009, Brummund spent a month at Casa Poli on the Coliumo Peninsula in Chile. The austere, concrete modernist building projects a vivid silhouette from its elevated site on the Pacific coast. The residency provided opportunities for prolonged occupation and observation in which the artist witnessed extreme transformations of interior and exterior conditions that inspired mutating forms of drawing, digital photography, projections, and video in a dynamic score of representational conventions, temporal displacements, and ineffable effects.

Brummund's ephemeral interventions excavate, expose, and etherealize both quotidian and more striking sites. Within a single site, her most confounding, multiple, and dynamic series of representational initiatives invoke the constitutively unsettled— and vividly engaging— processes of visualization and perception.

—Patricia C. Phillips, July 2010