



SHARON LOUDEN **WINDOWS**

INTRODUCTION

Ken Bloom, Director

At its outset in the late 1980s, the Tweed Museum of Art's new Sax Brothers Gallery was intended as a major addition to the Museum. It was designed to provide an open, airy space as a laboratory for innovative art projects and the formal presentation of fine sculpture. With *Windows*, the Sax Gallery realizes its potential as a venue for a pioneering form of contemporary installation art.

Having considered the features and character of the space, including its sky lighting and balcony, artist Sharon Loudon finds advantage in the architecture, creating unique points of view by intermingling highly-reflective twisted aluminum sheets throughout the fly space of the gallery. Not only is the metal shaped into fluid linear forms, but their specular surfaces mirror features of the gallery's surrounding architecture and activity below. This tends to cause one's sense of orientation to slip as the ceiling disappears while all action on the floor is inverted overhead—an effectively improvisational deployment of shifting perspective.

Windows was created on-site, yet the process of its conception and visualization was derived from animation-like sketches, drawings, and paintings, some of which are displayed in the entrance of the gallery as the conceptual underpinning schematics for the sculptural “drawing” that occupies the two-story space. According to the artist, “My visual vocabulary is one of gesture and motion that gives character to form. My characters transform into what I believe are anthropomorphic beings. Meant to be abstract and formal.... Through the specific, awkward placement of these forms, these characters come together to evoke environments of movement and drawing in space.”

The *Windows* installation is accompanied by a 13-minute composition created by composer Andrew Earle Simpson, Professor in the Benjamin T. Rome School of Music at The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC. The composition premiered live in this space on October 22, 2015 by an ensemble of UMD Department of Music students conducted by the composer. His piece, *On Windows*, was conceived as a musical response to inspire audiences to linger in the installation while absorbing an intermixture of sound and reflection. Scored for an ensemble of flute, two clarinets, alto saxophone, bassoon, trumpet, euphonium, trombone, percussion, and electronics, Simpson's work drew inspiration from the various properties of metal — brilliant, bright, strong, flexible — and created aural analogues to these visual qualities. The piece alternates fully-composed sections with segments of controlled improvisation, the latter written by Simpson while in residence, spending time with Loudon's then-finished installation.

This program, as realized after two years of planning, is a delight for its audiences and represents a mission-driven ideal, that the Tweed Museum of Art serve, in part, as a collaborative laboratory for multi-arts projects that engage the Museum's community of visitors and artists—in this case, with the participation of students and faculty of the UMD Department of Music.

DECONSTRUCTION THROUGH REFLECTION

Paul Laster

We shall find the abstract equivalent for all forms and elements in the universe, then we shall combine them in sculptural constructions according to the mood of our inspiration.
– Giacomo Balla, *The Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe*, 1915

Looking intensely into *Windows*, Sharon Louden's shimmering art installation at the Tweed Museum of Art, we see the universe reflected in the abstract forms and elements that compose her magnificent piece. Hundreds of large, twisting sheets of highly-reflective aluminum and subtly-colored strips of the malleable metal dynamically dance through the Sax Gallery's two-story space, while taking all eyes with them.

Embracing the architecture of the gallery, *Windows* is suspended from ceilings with monofilament, attached to the walls, and secured with steel screws to the floor. Spontaneously constructed over a two-week period by the artist, the piece is composed with the viewer in mind. Every twist and turn in the gallery provides another vantage point, another aperture for reflection and discovery.

The staircase with its wooden railing, the gridded skylight, the patterned floor, the decorative lattice mounted on the ceiling, the lights beaming from their white fixtures, the linear metal air ducts, and the framed glass entryways get pulled into the piece. Complex shapes and forms are in dialogue with light and color in the symmetrical architecture of the space.

The mirrored aluminum is the catalyst. Arranged by the artist in a freeform fashion, the dazzling metal creates its own form of chaos through the reflections in its shiny surface and the beckoning shadows it casts before returning to some sole sense of order in the eye of the beholder.

"The idea was to change the canvas of the space so completely that you no longer know that the forms are on a canvas," Louden shared with me while speaking metaphorically about her concept for *Windows*. "The image becomes more powerful than the structure that it's painted upon."

The viewer becomes one with this physical drawing in space. It's completely immersive. It reflects the whole gallery, while deconstructing it. The eye moves from open areas to dense ones, depending on our point of view.

From the balcony above it's as dense as the rumbling rainclouds of an approaching storm, yet from the floor below it's as light and airy as the fluffy little clouds that accompany a passing summer breeze.

Taken in its entirety, however, it's like a tornado twirling through the space at a fluctuating pace. Its size is infinite; its visual power intense. Reflecting everything in sight—including itself—the piece multiplies, duplicates, and doubles its size in the wink of an eye.

Trained as a painter, Louden didn't get to this place overnight. It took years of experimentation with such unconventional materials as filament, which she cut and gathered into bunches and hung like Spanish moss throughout gallery spaces, and lighting elements that she suspended in trees to create material drawings of another sort.

While still making paintings and drawings—three abstract canvases are exhibited in the lower gallery of the *Windows* exhibition and three non-objective drawings are displayed on the upper level of the show—the challenge of creating riveting installations is what really gets the artist juiced.

Louden's use of aluminum as a material of choice dates back to her 2004 installation *Merge* at the Munson Williams Proctor Museum of Art in upstate New York. A floor piece, it consisted of hundreds of bent strips of aluminum spread out across the travertine ground of the Philip Johnson-designed gallery, like a herd of ants charging into battle.

Merge was manifested again in 2010 at Washington, D.C.'s Project 4 Gallery, where the bent strips of metal took to the walls, ceiling, and windows, as well as the floor, like locusts invading a cornfield. Even though *Merge* found a permanent home via a commissioned installation at the University of Connecticut in 2013, the icing on the cake for this sprawling work was its 2011 presentation at the Weisman Art Museum in Minneapolis, an opportunity that ultimately led the artist to live and work in the city.

Expanding to 350,000 strips of aluminum in a variety of colors and finishes, the installation at the Weisman ran through a 3,000-square-foot gallery like kudzu in a Georgia forest—both flowing across the floor and climbing the walls. Louden's metal piece was the perfect foil to Frank Gehry's dynamically-designed building, with its shifting exterior planes and stainless steel skin.

While *Merge* may have reached its peak in Minneapolis, *Community*—an installation by the artist that first saw its light of day in Louden's solo show at Morgan Lehman in New York in 2013—hit its climax (at least so far) at North Carolina's Asheville Art Museum in 2014. A precursor to *Windows*, the gestural composition wove through the high-ceilinged space with ribbon-like strips of sparkly aluminum contrasted with broader, reflective sheets and colored bands of the anodized metal, which playfully punctuated the overlapping mass.

Windows encompasses the lessons learned in Louden's previous pieces and kicks the process up a notch. In *Windows*, she makes the intangible tangible. She brings the kinetic imagery of the Futurist artists Giacomo Balla and Umberto Boccioni, the fractured forms of the Cubists George Braque and Pablo Picasso, and the shifting planes of the Modernist masters Fernand Léger and Piet Mondrian of a hundred years past into another realm. It's an entrancing environment, born in the mind and built with the hands of a visionary artist—one who has no limits.

Paul Laster is an editor, writer, independent curator, and artist. He is editor of *Artkrush.com*, and a contributing editor at *Flavorpill.com* and *ArtAsiaPacific* magazine. He was the founding editor of *bkyn*, an online journal of the arts, first art editor of *Flavorpill.com*, and last art editor of Russell Simmons' *OneWorld* magazine. He is a frequent contributor to *Time Out New York*, *Art in America*, *TheDailyBeast.com* and *Artnet.com*

REFLECTIONS ON REFLECTION

Diane Mullin

Upon entering a gallery with a Sharon Loudon site-specific work, one would likely identify her as an installation artist. Although the sculptural quality of her work is undeniable, Loudon's formal training was in painting and drawing. When presenting her work—inclusive of drawings, paintings, animations, and installation—the artist insists it is all in fact drawing. This designation, she explains, is based on the fundamental and central importance of “the gesture” in all of her work. In short, she proclaims, her installations are simply “drawings in space.” Loudon's gestures are primarily improvisational. Working with her chosen materials in a specific space (canvas, sheet, video frame, room), Loudon engages the character, unique details, and related phenomena (such as light, shadows, texture, variations in dimension) of each in a personal, physical, and extemporaneous manner. Her relationship to the space is one of give and take, as she brings her reactions forward, continually adjusting physically and conceptually as she works.

Loudon's emphasis on the gesture and her engagement with various spaces is matched in importance by her choice and use of materials. The physical substances of her work are key to its aesthetic and conceptual meanings. She is attracted and committed to common materials transformed by subtle alterations that lead to a kind of magical effect. In her projects, fiber optic cable becomes field grass, polished rocks morph into 1970s shag rugs, and aluminum strips, anodized in jewel-like colors and shaped by hand, become a vast, finely articulated sketch. In the case of large-scale three-dimensional works, Loudon's art achieves almost dizzying experiential heights for both the artist and the viewer. She approaches the spaces in which she works in the same manner she tackles a blank canvas or a sheet of drawing paper: assessing, considering, and planning its takeover. She then works by making gestures with her chosen materials. In some monumental projects (Weisman Art Museum, 2011, and University of Connecticut, Storrs, 2013), Loudon deploys teams of assistants who, following her direction, labor together in workshop-like fashion to help make and put the parts together in the form she intuitively creates through impromptu interaction with the space.

For the Tweed Museum's *Windows*, Loudon returns to what she calls her “love affair with aluminum.” In distinction to the two *Merge* projects (WAM and UConn), *Windows* retreats somewhat from her characteristic use of the whimsical line and dives into the material's reflective qualities on a grand scale. Crafting larger cuts of aluminum into curves that speak to both windows and mirrors, Loudon's *Windows* creates a space that is part spectacular vista and part hall of mirrors. With her characteristic merging of the high and low, the utilitarian and the useless, the beautiful and the garish, and the mundane and the ideal, Loudon's *Windows* uses every aspect of the cavernous Tweed space to create the makings of the sublime. Like a great Romantic landscape painting, viewers are drawn in, faced with the experience of being on the edge of engulfment—at once exhilarating, terrifying, and uplifting. Loudon's *Windows* uses the frame as reference to visual portals, but counters right back with reflective surfaces that both turn inward and, through the multiple layers of reflection that they create, open up to more views and portals than any window could possibly achieve.

In his classic 1978 exhibition, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*, MoMA curator John Szarkowski posited a critical framework for illuminating and assessing the historical and philosophical shift from the public to private impulse in post-1960 American photography. Using the window and the mirror as metaphorical models for the two distinct states, Szarkowski both described and demonstrated the nature of what he saw as the old, public (documentary, illustrative) and the new, private (personal, expressive, single point-of-view

accounts) modes of photography. In his view, the window marked the public work of 1930s photographers as they strove to represent and reveal the realities of the outside world, and the mirror represented the post-1960 work's inward-looking, more private visions. As MoMA's press statement explained: “Unlike the generation of the 1930s and 40s, Szarkowski suggests, the generation that came to artistic maturity and public recognition after 1960 is characterized by a pursuit of highly personal visions of the world rather than by any attempt to offer a comprehensive program for social or aesthetic progress.”

Loudon's reference to windows—in her title and forms—calls to mind Szarkowski's thoughts and the oft-cited pairing of window and mirror. The highlighted reflective, mirror-like surfaces of aluminum cement this association in *Windows*. Mirrors and windows were key conceptual tools in the construction of pictorial space in Western Renaissance painting and drawing. Thinking of the surface of the painting as a plane to look through like a window onto another visually accurate world, Renaissance painters used the “space” in a mirror to construct and test a more human-centered visually-accurate view of nature in two-dimensional painting.

The mirror itself was also invented in Renaissance Italy. The technological developments that allowed for this particular use of glass permitted the Renaissance subject to gaze upon a clear and more truthful image of her visage for the first time in human history. In keeping with that historical period's pre-Enlightenment emergence of the modern scientific method, this invention was at first widely understood as charmed. Although the supernatural aspect of the mirror's nature faded, the quality of enchantment lurked in thoughts on and evocations of the mirror in the modern era. Think here of the fairy tale incantation “mirror, mirror on the wall” and Versailles's famous and stunning Hall of Mirrors, where the king's grandeur, marked by his property and belongings, is multiplied many times over by the strategic placement of mirrored surfaces in the space of the royal manor.

Loudon's *Windows* implies the magic of both the window and the mirror. The windows and mirrors of Szarkowski's 1978 MOMA exhibition were defined in opposition to one another—each model representing the distinct impulses of the public and the personal. Loudon's windows and mirrors are both and more. Through accumulation and layering of materials and experiential elements, the artist, assuming the participation of her audience, challenges viewers in the space to stake their own presence and make their own moves. Such an experiment—improvisational in its indeterminate outcome—is fraught with potential, both grand and precarious. The work in effect is in a constant state of becoming, created again and again as conditions in the space shift and as people interact with it. Every individual interaction with the piece will create and complete *Windows* over the course of its temporary existence in the gallery, multiplying and amplifying its effects in a hall-of-mirrors-like manner that is big, generous, and magical.

This magic in Loudon's *Windows* manifests itself in the same manner that drawing relates to the actual world outside it. More than a slavish, visual copy, the drawing is always a fantastic re-presentation of that world, as William Carlos Williams once put it, awash in the individual human imagination. *Windows* is certainly such a representation, but is further complicated and enriched by its alluring pull on the viewer that transforms him into a productive participant in the making of the work's ultimate meaning(s). Like our most enduring fairy tales, the charm of *Windows* lies in its miraculous effects on our physical and emotional selves.

Diane Mullin is Senior Curator at the Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota. Her curatorial work focuses on modern and contemporary art. She has curated numerous exhibitions including *SAD: Illuminating a Northern View of Darkness* (2007), *Paul Shambroom: Picturing Power* (2008), *Common Sense: Art and the Quotidian* (2010), and *Local Time* (2015). Mullin was assistant professor of liberal and critical studies and director of MCAD Gallery at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design from 1995-2004.





BIOGRAPHY

Sharon M. Louden is an artist, educator, advocate for artists, and editor of the Living and Sustaining a Creative Life series of books.

She graduated with a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and an MFA from Yale University School of Art. Her work has been exhibited in numerous venues including the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, the Drawing Center, Carnegie Mellon University, Weisman Art Museum, National Gallery of Art, Birmingham Museum of Art, Weatherspoon Art Museum and the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art.

Louden's work is held in major public and private collections including the Whitney Museum of American Art, National Gallery of Art, Neuberger Museum of Art, Arkansas Arts Center, Yale University Art Gallery, Weatherspoon Art Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, among others.

Her work has also been written about in the New York Times, Art in America, Washington Post, Sculpture Magazine, ARTnews and the Philadelphia Inquirer, as well as other publications. She has participated in residencies at Tamarind Institute, Urban Glass, Franconia Sculpture Park, Society of the Four Arts and Art Omi. Louden has also received a grant from the Ford Foundation.

Sharon Louden has taught for more than 25 years since graduating from Yale University School of Art in 1991. Her teaching experience includes studio and professional practice classes to students of all levels in many institutions throughout the United States. Colleges and universities at which she has lectured and taught include: Kansas City Art Institute, College of Saint Rose, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Vanderbilt University and Maryland Institute College of Art.

Sharon is currently the Senior Critic at the New York Academy of Art in New York City where she organizes a popular Lecture Series, interviewing luminaries and exceptional individuals in the art world and from afar. In addition to teaching in colleges and universities, she continues to conduct Glowtown workshops in schools and not-for-profit organizations across the country.

Louden is also active on boards and committees of various not-for-profit art organizations and volunteers her time to artists to further their careers. Sharon is a consultant for the Joan Mitchell Foundation, advising their grantees, and conducts webinars and consultations for Creative Capital. She also contributes to various organizations including the National Endowment for the Arts.

She is also the editor of Living and Sustaining a Creative Life: Essays by 40 Working Artists and The Artist as Culture Producer: Living and Sustaining a Creative Life, both published by Intellect Books and distributed by the University of Chicago Press.

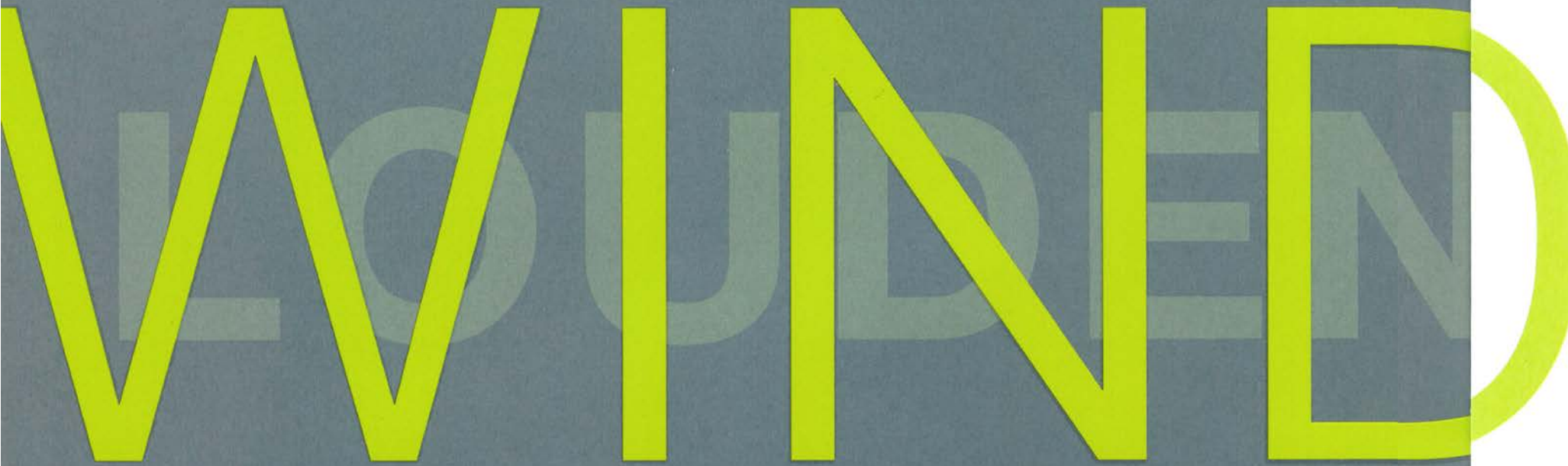
From September, 2013, until late May, 2015, Louden went on a 62-stop book tour, where she met thousands of artists from all over the US. Louden has continued this momentum bringing her second book, The Artist as Culture Producer, on an extensive conversation/book tour which launched at the Strand Book Store in New York in March, 2017. The last book in the trilogy of Living and Sustaining a Creative Life books, Last Artist Standing, will be published in 2020.

For more information on Sharon's work, visit her websites at www.sharonlouden.com and www.livesustain.org.

SHARON LOUDEN



SHARON LOUDEN WINDOWS



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