

ARTIFACTS

Breathing Room



ART

Walking into Kendall Buster's *Parabiosis* is like walking into a city designed for small, ethereal beings. The sculpture, a segmented skeleton of steel supports bolted together, overlaid with translucent

latex-painted white paper, and suspended 4 feet in the air, fills almost the entire Projectspace backroom at the Fusebox gallery on 14th Street NW. To see the piece, you have to enter it—and to enter it is to enter a physical space that controls and impedes your mobility while inviting you to turn and turn again to find new vistas within the multichambered work.

"[Upon] first encounter, it's not necessarily aggressive—yet it is aggressive in a way," Buster, 47, says. "You get a sense of enormous scale with chambers that are not so enormous." Because there is no space that would allow one to step back and take in all of *Parabiosis* at once, gallerygoers are forced to stoop and stand, hide and peek, all the while submitting to "the architectural principles of shelter and control." From above, a view available only in photos, *Parabiosis* looks like an organic creature that has been bleached by time—sluglike shapes improbably supported by prominent backbones. Its multicellular quality suggests that Buster is still drawing on the vocabulary of microbiology she studied as an undergraduate at the University of Alabama.

For more than 20 years, Buster—an associate professor of fine arts at the Corcoran College of Art and Design—has worked with the idea of skeleton and skin, transforming netting, shade cloths, and PVC fabrics to produce works that are "seductive and controlling at the same time." Like *Parabiosis*, most of Buster's installations and sculptures are exhibited only for short periods of time and are not for sale. She has thus tended to show her complex, carefully rendered works mainly at museums and nonprofit alternative spaces.

Her major partners on *Parabiosis* were her husband, Siemon Allen, an artist also represented by Fusebox, and sculptor Ledelle Moe. Six Corcoran students chipped in time to build the work's "inventory of architectural vocabularies." The result—a hybrid evolved from a prototype Buster describes as "a dirigible, a corset, and a piece of architecture"—is a structure that "begins to have a life of its own."

—Garance Franke-Ruta



Ceiling Fan: Buster turns her attention upward.