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"New Growth/Stratum Model," cut and suspended polycarbonate panels by Kendall Buster. (Siemon Allen)

Kendall Buster's suspended plastic sheeting exudes layers of subtle complexity

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By **ADRIANA GRANT**
SPECIAL TO THE P-I

Suyama Space is home to a suspension of white, corrugated-plastic sheeting, layer upon layer hung on thin wires from the soaring ceiling. Organic shapes hang horizontally, a mass of floating curves, like a pale molecule dissected into cross section. This is Virginia sculptor Kendall Buster's "New Growth/Stratum Model," which seems to riff on topographical maps, and reads like a loose conglomeration of clouds. Or, more specifically, a single cloud spliced in half.

Crafted from polycarbonate panels -- a material often used in greenhouse construction -- the suspended sculpture is a study in simplicity. White plastic, connected with wire, hung with metal washers. That's it. The planes' curves swoop and indent, offering a subtle visual complexity. Translucent sections, hung parallel to each other, are supported by wires, which are in turn strung through the polycarbonate at regular vertical intervals. It's all so cleanly designed (in parallels and verticalities), that the hanging mechanism seems to fade: You see the white plastic formation, not the architecture supporting it.

The horizontal layers number up to 14, some with clear connectors between them. These seem to provide a static hinge linking two panels, perhaps reinforcing the more flexible polycarbonate. Or perhaps the artist wanted to interject a few straight lines into her irregularly shaped piece.

ART REVIEW

KENDALL BUSTER: NEW GROWTH / STRATUM MODEL

WHERE: Suyama Space, 2324 Second Ave.

WHEN: Through April 17;

9 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Friday

INFORMATION: 206-256-0810,
suyamanatersondaguchi.com/art

A student of both sculpture and microbiology, Buster sees this installation as a continuing evolution in her study of what she terms "architectural biology." The stacked layers do evoke a certain cellular logic, while the wall text suggests that this site-specific work might be mapping a future city. I am more intrigued by the play of scale possibly at work here: Perhaps the sculpture is a large-scale rendering of some microcosm or alternately, a shrunken version of an imagined landscape.

Buster's work highlights the fact that the gallery is housed in the middle of an office environment. The sculpture is split clean in two, a straight slice dividing dual curvy halves, the work itself creating an aisle for the architects of Suyama Peterson Deguchi to walk through. "New Growth/Stratum Model" offers an architectural nod to the parallel doorways framing the gallery, while acknowledging that the gallery itself is not an empty cube but a highly trafficked room. Further, the polycarbonate panels are a building material the resident architects would be familiar with.

With offices situated on either side of it, the gallery is cut in half by the passing of architects. While other exhibits may have taken over the entire space -- the most recent exhibit, Wade Kavanaugh's Regrade, required a mazelike traverse of the gallery -- this installation leaves travel room for those who live with the art. All day "New Growth/Stratum Model" has bodies moving through it, which seems to make Buster's work more alive: Her sculpture occupies a central role, it's a visual interrupter.

In Suyama Space's more than 10-year history, this is one of two exhibits to so clearly insinuate itself into the line of traffic. In 2004, Lead Pencil Studio -- artist/architects Annie Han and Daniel Mihalyo -- hung the gallery space with "Linear Plenum," filling most of the room with thin strings. As curator Beth Sellars explained, Lead Pencil Studio "played off both openings in a very direct manner by dyeing their strings green to the exact proportion/measurement of the openings." Only that exhibit and Buster's "intentionally incorporated the openings as part of the visual element."

"Kendall was very specific that she wanted the 'walkway' to be formally situated in the center of the two openings," Sellars said. "And this accounts for the straight edges on either side of the passageway from the bottom of the piece to the top tier. ... The vertical "sides" created by the edges of each level create a bit of a straight-sided tunnel."

Imagine, all day you pass through this resident sculpture on the way for coffee or to chat with your boss. The piece becomes familiar. A stratified cloud formation has taken up residence near your office. And maybe this is the ideal way for a sculpture to be seen. Not for one patient minute in a gallery, but over and over for four months, a regular physical presence.

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