

Gallery Opens Fall Season to a Bang and then Hush

Chicago-based artist Deborah Stratman uses sonic warfare to shock and awe.

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Chicago-based artist and filmmaker Deborah Stratman's exhibition *Tactical Uses of a Belief in the Unseen* opened the fall gallery season at College of DuPage's Galhberg Gallery with an intense bang and then a hush.

Drawing upon the concepts of sound vibration and history of sonic warfare, Stratman's installation incorporates nearly the entire length of the rectangular gallery with uneven carpeted terrain that is better experienced than described. Visitors entering at the far end of the gallery encountered a beige-carpeted surface that immediately juts up around the viewer and encourages them to physically explore the vibrating surface of the piece, which seamlessly staggers and falls at various heights and dimensions.

Sweeping randomly above viewers heads is a sonic beam that, when pointed directly at a viewer, produces a high-frequency squelch that is generally used by military and police forces in crowd control and dispersion situations. Beneath the carpeted-plywood-shell of the structure are several subwoofers that emit a constantly rising and falling vibrating hum. The result is a work of art that successfully transforms the gallery's environment into something more than a mere art hall.

Even before the exhibit opened to the public Aug. 26, director and curator of the Galhberg Gallery, Barabra Wiesen, said Stratman's piece had been receiving a fair amount of attention from students and onlookers who had observed the construction of the piece from the gallery's large glass windows and doors.

"The college-age crowd has been very fascinated by this piece," Wiesen said. "Curiosity and some anticipation were building during the installation because it was obvious that the gallery was going through a major transformation."

Wiesen added that some people even inquired wondering if the large-scale installation was some kind of skateboarding ramp, and given the preparation and process involved in creating the wood frame for the structure, it wasn't a silly question.

Stratman had just two and a half weeks to map out and tape the high and low points along the perimeter of the space, Wiesen said. With the help of Stratman's guidelines, a crew was brought in to help construct a frame for sheets of plywood to be cut and nailed to. While the floor was being placed, Wiesen said Stratman focused on the integral audio elements of the piece, above and below it.

Wiesen said Stratman certainly transformed the space, but according to the exhibition's artist booklet, the change was less about what was there, than what wasn't.

"This idea of an invisible, drifting architecture described by a volume of vibrations rather than a material physicality suggests the uncomfortable feeling of being enclosed with any visual referent to entrapment. The mind compresses just considering it," the exhibition booklet states.

Stratman's piece is the first in a year-long series of exhibitions at the Galhberg Gallery, and runs through Oct. 16. Next up this year for the gallery, Wiesen said is Peter Power's solo exhibition which opens Oct. 21 and the full-time faculty show opening Dec. 9.

Until then viewers are free to make their own sense of Stratman's *Tactical Uses of a Belief in the Unseen*.

"As is often the case, there are many that are puzzled by the piece and will barely give it a chance," Wiesen said.

Located in COD's McAninch Arts Center, 425 Fawell Blvd., the Galhberg Gallery is open Mon-Sat.