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ON THE WEB

ART; A Dozen Artists at Work Within a Challenging Space

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RIDGEFIELD - THE curators of the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art here must often wish they had an abandoned factory with no interior walls or columns, a garage door and a huge elevator to bring in the art. Instead, they have a cunning white building, which served in various genteel capacities -- post office, church, home -- before it became a museum.

Affection, but affection with an edge, is being shown toward the building in the current exhibition, titled "Here," (not to be confused with "Where," a recent show at the Stamford, Conn., Whitney).

Just as the world was acclimating itself to installation art, the Aldrich has come up with a variation: "interventions." Twelve artists whose careers had been tracked by the Aldrich director, Harry Philbrick, and the assistant director, Richard Klein, were given a tour of the building and its grounds and asked to choose a site for an artwork that would somehow relate to it. Some chose to connect a piece to the physical aspect of the building or to its history, while others maintained a sometimes intriguing ambiguity.

Brian Tolle chose to refer to the building and town's New England character. He goes back a few centuries when superstition was rife. Out of Styrofoam made to look like red bricks he constructed "Witch Catcher," an X-shaped chimney form. An unsuspecting witch trying to enter a house by means of it would be split in two. The chimney is also visible sprouting from the roof.

Liza Lou took full advantage of a kitchen closet, stocking it with tools, cleaning supplies, sports equipment and board games, which probably have not been played in years. Every inch of closet and its contents is covered with minute glass beads, which make the mundane sparkle. In her celebration of the ordinary, Ms. Lou is a genuine heir to the Pop artists.

A house like this must have been stocked with quilts and had a full larder. Appropriately, Susan Stockwell has made quilts with squares that are teabags, coffee filters and flattened paper cups. But Ms. Stockwell is not the contented domestic; a dense block-like hanging of strands of tissue paper is riddled with bullet holes.

The building is light, white and airy, something played on by Lee Boroson, who used white parachute material gathered into pockets and puffed out by means of motorized blowers to create the sensation of being in a new space. But it is one full of light via the skylight, a feature of the building often overlooked. He rebuilt a second-floor balcony in order to achieve this effect.

Sharon Loudon relies on lights going on and off to make her field of braided cotton dental rolls on wire sticks look, in bright light, like a meadow of wildflowers. Because they are painted with phosphorescence, in the irradiated dark they appear like so many cigarette butts.

The pre-eminent whiteness of the building is countered by David Nash's array of charred blocks of maple wood, which resembles a destroyed village. The work was begun 10 years ago after Mr. Nash was affected by a photograph of a town destroyed by war. Here it injects a note of sobriety.

Waste of a more humorous kind is celebrated by Michelle Segre and her merry roomful of Claes Oldenburg-inspired items from a household garbage can: large orange peelings, giant chicken bones and bread slices.

Children? Judy Fox and Mary Esch invoke them, in a less than greeting card style. In a large, bare room Ms. Fox has placed three diminutive sculptures of naked children assuming postures of art history: a boy sits in a melancholy pose ("Dying Gaul"), a girl is a combination of Botticelli's "Venus" and the Madonna, and another boy is Attila the Hun. It is a disquieting combination of innocence and worldliness.

Ms. Esch made wallpaper in off-putting pink and green, with a repellant narrative too. The misadventures of a young girl reflect both violence and boredom, a very contemporary alternation of mood.

Outdoors, Roberley Bell has made topiary-inspired garden ornaments covered with Astroturf and plastic flowers, and on a hillock David Gelfman has beached an ample submarine.

As far from the building as possible, Justen Ladda found a niche-like space in the vegetation to put a life-size dress of chandelier beads. A garden light keeps the piece sparkling at night.

The Aldrich is also presenting a careerlong survey of prints by Roy Lichtenstein, the Pop pioneer who died last year. Like those of Jasper Johns, Lichtenstein's prints afford the complete experience of his paintings. They highlight, among other things, the resilience of the Benday dot, the small unit of the process used to print color comics.

Lichtenstein's first successes were send-ups of comic book panels, but at the end the dots, spaced rather widely, were pressed into service to make atmospheric Chinese landscapes of great beauty.

Both exhibitions continue through Jan. 3. The number to call for further information is (203) 438-4519.

Photos: Also at the Aldrich: "Detritus Cumulus" by Michelle Segre, above; "Witch Catcher" by Brian Tolle, center, and "Dress" by Justen Ladda, a life-size glass-bead dress in an outdoor niche. David Gelfman's "Lungfish" at the Aldrich Museum in Ridgefield. (Joseph Kugielsky)