

**MAX ABOUT TOWN**

**All this and lemonade: The Weisman reopens; 'Aurora' premieres**

By Max Sparber | Published Tue, Oct 4 2011 9:20 am

I was at the reopening of the [Weisman Art Museum on Saturday](#), and found myself standing in front of a man of strong opinions.

"They have lemonade here," he told me. "That's all right, but they should have food."

"I get dizzy in the the other part of the museum," he told me. "You just walk around in circles."

"There's the guy who built this place," he said, gesturing at a portrait by Andy Warhol. "He wasn't even from here."

"The architect was here last night," he said. "He wouldn't say it, but I think he was inspired by St. Paul's ice castles."

I report these quotes, not to argue with the man (although Frederick R. Weisman was from Minnesota; he later moved to California, which might have been the source of this fellow's confusion.) I'm just glad that the place is open again, and that it's generating opinions. I don't know. Maybe architect Frank Gehry was influence by ice castles. The style of architecture he pioneered at this museum has since been the source of considerable elaboration worldwide, by both Gehry and people inspired by him. It's nice to imagine that he went to the Winter Carnival, perhaps saw the Vulcans chase people around, maybe glanced at a few frozen sculptures, and finally came upon our annual Ice Castle and though, aha, here it is. Here is the future of architecture in America.

At least, one would hope that our ice castles would inspire more than just a 1978 Robby Benson film about a doomed figure skater.

There's really too much in the reopened museum for me to detail. It's been closed for a year to open five new galleries, and it's too much for this one critic, at least for now. I'll head back when I have the chance, which will be often, as I work part-time just a few blocks away. For now, I'll just mention a single piece I particularly found myself drawn to at the opening.

It is an installation by Sharon Louden called "Merge" that I absolutely adore. Louden is a New York-based artist who is particularly well known for a series of animations. I don't like to read intentions into somebody else's work without talking with them first, but it's hard not to see a sense of humor in "Merge." It's made of shiny cuttings of aluminum, and, had she not already produced other iterations of this piece in other galleries, I would guess that she had deliberately chosen the material to reflect the famously reflective exterior of the Weisman.

The pieces alternate between looking like metallic pencil shavings and those shiny scales that people string together to form into a sequined dress, or the wall of a discotheque. It generally symbolizes a sort of chintzy glamour, whether in the costumes worn by party boys and girls or in the backdrops of the parties they attend. But this is a party that has lost control of itself — the scraps of metal lie piled in heaps on the floor, filling much of one gallery, or hang from the wall as though tossed casually over a transom — and, indeed, if you go to the other side of the wall, there are more of these glittering scraps there.

Perhaps this seems funny to me because I like to imagine what sort of party might produce this sort of chaos, or perhaps it is because of the Weisman building itself. It's always been a creation of a sort of swooping, glittery chaos, something parodied in an episode of "The Simpsons" in which Gehry crumpled up a letter, tossed it to a floor, and then designed a building based around the ball of discarded paper. "Gehry," the architect, playing himself, declared, "you've done it again!"

Louden seems to have taken this a step further. It's not just chaos represented by the building, but actual collapse — somehow its exterior seems to have flaked off and fallen into a gallery, where it lies in a pile of near-glamour. Isn't that how we all feel, or should feel, at the end of a party, whether there was food on hand or just lemonade.



"Merge" by Sharon Louden

MinnPost photo by Max Sparber