

ALEX SCHWEDER AND WARD SHELLEY: YOUR TURN

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum • Ridgefield, CT • aldrichart.org • Through April 22, 2018

In *Your Turn*, Alex Schweder and Ward Shelley's site-specific installation at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, the artists can cook, eat, sleep, work, lounge and use the bathroom. Just not at the same time.

The nuances of cooperative living within provocative architectural structures have continually fueled Schweder and Shelley's decade-long collaboration. *Your Turn*, their newest work, is a 23-by-23-by-6-foot wall that bisects the museum's Project Space gallery. It is also a two-sided habitable environment that Schweder and Ward have occupied for several days-long stints—each confined to his own side, engaging in daily activities, conversing with visitors, climbing around on a grid of steel U-shaped rungs. Complete with electricity and running water, the edifice contains six functional amenities (galley-like kitchen, dining table and chairs, bed, workstation, comfy red chaise and chemical toilet) that slide through the wall from one side to the other depending on who wants to do what. If, for instance, Schweder wants to sleep, he slides the bed to his dwelling, leaving Shelley to rest on the chaise—or not to rest at all.

Negotiation is integral to *Your Turn*. So is the challenge of communicating through a wall—a factor that surprised the artists once

they began living on the structure. "For me, the hardest part of this piece is that I don't know what he is thinking and he doesn't know what I am thinking, and we can't really talk," Shelley said. "We forgot how important that was."

Late last year, he and Schweder were in the midst of a three-day *Your Turn* residency. Shelley, with a trim gray beard and moustache, was poised on the rungs, half-hanging, half-leaning. The view from his side of the installation was a giant window framing the museum's sprawling lawn. Schweder, lanky with spiked brown hair, was sketching on the chaise on the opposite side, facing into the gallery. Both men wore their signature jumpsuits—Shelley's orange, Schweder's red.

"We can't look at each other," Schweder said. "We can't have meaningful conversations about anything. We thought this was going to be a project about sharing, but it became more about mediation."

It is in the nature of the duo's work that they don't fully understand what they've designed and constructed until they've spent time (initially at least 10 days) inhabiting it. Schweder, who was born in 1970 and lives in Brooklyn, NY, is a multi-media installation artist who was trained as an architect; Shelley, 20 years older, is a visual artist based in Easton, CT. The pair share a fascination with how architecture affects human behavior. They call their fabrications "performance architecture."

Each of their undertakings involves some form of co-dependence. *ReActor*, from 2016, is about balance. A long, narrow, glass-walled house perched on a column in a field at Art Omi, in Ghent, NY, spins with the wind. When Schweder and Shelley lived there, it tilted

Above: Alex Schweder and Ward Shelley: *Your Turn* (installation view), October 1, 2017 to April 22, 2018, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT. Photo: Jason Mandella. Below: Alex Schweder & Ward Shelley, *ReActor*, 2016-2017. Courtesy of the artists and Edward Cella Art & Architecture, Los Angeles, and Pierogi Gallery, New York.

like a seesaw as they moved around.

In the 2011 *Counterweight Roommate*, which was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, the men were tethered to either end of a rope that passed over the top of the tall, thin structure, one serving as the other's ballast.

At the Aldrich, *Your Turn* highlights issues of autonomy and teamwork in circumstances of limited resources. It evokes a gamut of associations, from a Japanese capsule hotel, to a vertical stage set, to a wall itself with all its weighty ramifications.

Watching the artists on the installation—checking email, washing a dish, reading a book—museumgoers confront the permeable border between art and life. Richard Klein, the Aldrich's exhibitions director, noted the voyeuristic aspects of *Your Turn* and its parallels to Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rear Window*. Klein likened the structure to a script that dictates Schweder and Shelley's behavior. "They are living according to the script," he said, "and that transforms their actions from life into theater—into art."

After more than a year of designing *Your Turn* and the push of completing its construction, finally occupying it provided the artists a welcome respite. "It takes a couple of days to recover," Schweder said. "Then you start paying attention to how to live there. You start noticing changes in yourself and the way you are relating to each other."

(The artists will occupy the installation again March 23–25, 2018.)

—Susan Hodara

