



Jean Maddison: *Gates of Hell*; 1984; mixed media; 102 x 216 in. Photo: courtesy the Geraldine Davis Gallery.

# PROTECTORATES

JEAN MADDISON  
Geraldine Davis Gallery  
Toronto

Hers are massive painted constructions of corrugated/fan-fold handmade paper; of rolled reams of same in cones. These are gates, impenetrable and provocative, resistant and enticing in their surface undulations; they rebound off two supporting walls placed in *vis à vis* across a large, barren square space. Here, themes of entry and rejection, penetration and repellancy, inform architectural components of closures and entrances; which create, alternatively, imaginary courtyards (behind), and forecourts, where the observer becomes charged, inadvertently, with the role of protectorate of that public sector. I, therefore, stand in the center of the articulated space to become, in spite of myself, the Janus deity, controller, keeper of the Gates and realms of the Private and Public: two faces, two visions, two echoed themes, double figurations and di-mediated space.

On one wall, a black painted door and jamb roll in large cylindrical swells — and the jamb, architrave and frivolous “wings” crumple in a multitude of bends, fanning outwards boldly in sanguine reds, blue-blacks and metallic luster to constitute the *Gates of Paradise*. Directly across the room, the *Gates of Hell* repeat folds, creased cylinders and cones, but depart with undulatingly relaxed folds which adorn and compose the side panels as a cornice trim, to find their final demise in the narrow, far lateral panels (cotton sheets strips saturated in acrylic paint and applied to a chicken wire support) which weep and sag as panels — which deconstruct as such, the way Bernini’s folds destroy the articulation inherent, seemingly, to marble.

Unlike the *Gates of Paradise*, the *Gates of Hell* are more brash and expansive, ag-

gressive and seductive. They provide more torment as they detach into larger gaps, punctuations, which in themselves serve to individualize the panels which are linked forcibly by the semantic coherence (here, a symmetrical arrangement), and therefore architectural ideal of “that which might have been” in a more embraced, proximate piece. There is an easier transportation into the perspectival topia (and atopia) beyond, a directionalism as to “how to” see beyond.

Each architectural element: jamb, architrave, gate, wings — newly defined from its classical inheritance — is singularized as an entity yet defined by the wall space on which it is “hung”; unable to “perform” in the traditional theatrical sense. Suddenly, a redefinition of terms is requisite. What I believe to be operational architectural units are rendered inoperable here, and instead are preserved — albeit isolated — from the task of performing as closure or boundary-keeper.

There is a further collapse in my credulity: I feel strength and grandeur in these constructions, yet upon closer scrutiny (for something in the work demands that I inspect, that I remain skeptical of its *strength*), power dwindles and artifice overtakes; becomes identifiable as such. These are paper constructions — not bronze, not iron, not wood (although they beg my eye to believe that they are endowed with strength) — the glitter of copper, shimmering and bouncing off industrial flashing is indeed not metallic but paint: liquid substance dried which strives to duplicate those references. And so my sentiments are confused and I switch to a connotation which brought forth the theatricality of the things, the sets and the impact of visual replays — nothing but sets within forms, articulated blocks and screens that modify perception and rearrange spatial configurations to the unknown “beyond” which these gates succeed in blocking. This collapsing is exaggerated as I remain now linked to a series of

tumblings which consistently strip my faith in the original mission to refute and protect.

The architectural manoeuvres these pieces concern, precisely the *vis à vis*, are ones which lock me, viewer, receiver, arbitrator, keeper, into center stage of a theatre in-the-round. Does this become an installation where my placement establishes the link of vitality (front stage-back stage and vice versa)? At the moment when I believe that I am looking out, surveying, I realize that it is I who await the performance beyond the curtains (gates); I become master of ceremonies to implement a performance of these works in function with each other. It is Jean-Louis Schefer who writes with perspicacity that “seeing turns us on” in a way which forces us to question the contradictions and passions available within a set space: “... it is just that moment when, thinking we are going to the theatre, we are already on the stage where the symbolic undoes itself within is.”

In Jean Maddison’s works, there are issues of uniting knowledgeable technicity in paper constructions with building, building which inhabits her narrative and buttresses her work. I use building as a global term incorporating process and result, the cultural enterprise or unit, following along the theories of Heidegger. In these *Gates*, this essential blend survives; meshing to support the idea of surface as blockade, as barrier, as frontal limitation, forming narrative as continuum, as perforation into artifice, as destruction of the superficial curtain (set, screen, proscenium) working in dialectical tension to it: this sustains their interdependence and the purposefulness of the their mutual existence.

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Note

1. Jean-Louis Schefer, “Thanatography, Skiagraphy,” *Image and Word* 1:2 (April-June 1985), pp. 191-94.