

JULIE LIBERSAT

PAVED PARADISE



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

MARCH 10 - APRIL 19, 2018

AUSTIN, TEXAS



Above: *Mall Mandala*, 2018, Laser cut laminate sheets, wood, 84" x 84"

Cover Panel: *Mall Mandala: Hover*, 2018, Digitally rendered video, 1 minute, Edition of 3

DOUBLE ENTENDRE

Julie Libersat's *Paved Paradise* is a mixed media and interactive video installation comprised of two- and three-dimensional digital and physical representations of a fictional suburban shopping complex. She uses the dynamics of space and immersive experiences to re-conceptualize and remap how people's bodies move, see, feel, and act in the social spaces of the gallery. Furthermore, Libersat's art disrupts static understandings of public space (the city, the mall) and notions of space (utopian and dystopian). In fact, her work offers an important critique of social spaces, including shopping malls and consumer culture itself, which I consider in relation to French anthropologist Marc Augé's concepts of "non-place" and "supermodernity."

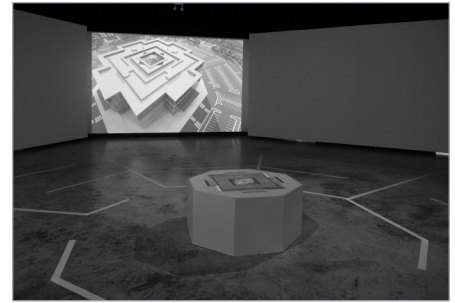
The simulated space in *Paved Paradise* is paradigmatic of what Augé has termed non-places which are spaces designed to be passed through or to be consumed. Ubiquitous in modern life, public areas such as malls, airports, subways, and railway stations exemplify non-places. Augé uses the concept of "super-modernity" to describe the excess of space, time, and individuality. He points out that the isolation experienced in liminal, transitional points of exchange or non-places is inconsistent with social interaction intended to foster community and relationships. In essence, non-places and super-modernity occasion an existential crisis in the construction of individual identities, creating the circumstances that foster fractured and dysfunctional human conditions and dystopian societies.¹

The "Death" of the Mall & The Palimpsest of Non-Places

Projected on the north wall of the gallery, *Mall Mandala: Hover* is a digitally rendered video that slowly circles the top of the mall structure, highlighting the monotony and ordered perfection of the digital landscape. The surfaces, textures, lighting, and visual representations of *Mall Mandala: Hover* are pristine: There are no cars in the parking lot, no people shopping. The aesthetically pleasing digital forms and aerial gaze of the suburban mall allow the viewer to travel effortlessly through the serene and abandoned suburban landscape. Is the *Mall Mandala* a fictitious paradise, as suggested by the exhibition's title *Paved Paradise*, or a utopian space that only points to itself rather than dystopian non-places as theorized by Augé?

The question is worth asking because Augé's liminal spaces are not as static as one might think. For Augé, "place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten."¹ In common with Augé, Libersat's production of space is not defined by the exterior/interior of architectural structures, the presence or absence of people, or even the binary logic of utopian and dystopian spaces. In fact, it is by bringing the traces (palimpsest) of what has been covered, removed, or replaced to the forefront that Libersat's art becomes provocative.

In this exhibition, Libersat presents a monument to the architecture of late-capitalism and its neoliberal ideologies. The mall adopts the symmetry and architectural assemblage of postmodern



Paved Paradise, 2018, (gallery view), laser cut laminate sheets, wood, vinyl tape, video, dimensions variable

architecture, lauded for its ability to hide, flatten, and dissolve the traces of dominant power through consumerism, privatization, and homogeneity. In other words, the vacuous spaces of the suburban mall in Libersat's work amplify rather than hide the conditions of production and mass consumption that perpetuate social and economic inequity and unscrupulous labor practices on a global scale. Related to Augé's concept of super-modernity, today's hyper-consumption is characteristic of excessive accumulation, throw-away culture (short-lived disposable objects), display and spectacle. This excess has created a distinctly negative influence on the potential for meaningful, sustained interactions with place, identity, and belonging in social spaces.

As Libersat notes, parking lots look the same everywhere as do shopping malls and retail chains that sell the same things and capitalize on the same fetishistic desires that neoliberal markets helped to create. The uniformity and ubiquity of retail spaces attest not only to an infinite consumer desire but also to a phenomenon that has become an expression of identity and individuality easily bought and sold at the mall. Yet, as online shopping replaces in-person retail interactions, the

golden age of suburban shopping malls is coming to a close.² Many of these monoliths in our suburban landscape sit empty, reverberating with the sounds of once vibrant commerce like the bells of the cash register in the sound track to *Mall Mandala Drive* that resounds throughout the gallery. In *Paved Paradise*, the shopping mall and its suburban utopian ideal are not dead but have been displaced by a virtual simulation of the shopping experience of the online marketplace.

Spaces of Embodiment and Play

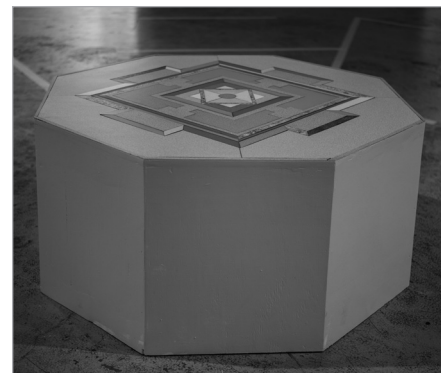
Libersat's body of work pays close attention to the impact of space upon individuals in the locus of everyday interactions—at the mall, on the parking lot, in the exhibition space. *Mall Mandala: Drive* is a driving simulation that winds through the mall's encircling octagonal parking lot. Seemingly trapped in the familiar quest for a space to park up and down parking lot aisles, the

viewer circles the Mall Mandala suspended in a state of anticipation. Viewing the video on a mobile phone while simultaneously walking the floor labyrinth, visitors attempt to align the digital navigation in the driving simulation to their embodied experience while navigating the floor labyrinth outlined in bright yellow vinyl tape. Invariably, viewers become increasingly disoriented in their effort to reconcile the embodied experience of the digital space with their sensory perception of the exhibition space.

As an encounter that is impossible to experience without technological mediation this interaction creates unusual yet playful sensations that disrupt the senses. The same sensation occurs when participants engage in normally incongruous actions—drive a car while walking, move from the vantage point of the driver's seat while standing, and navigate the lines and signs/symbols of the road while steering with a mobile device. In short, Libersat reconstructs the gallery space into a road and viewer-participant play-space.

Most important, by embodying and remapping the fictional territory of *Mall Mandala: Drive*, participants no longer occupy the liminal spaces or non-places of the highway, the space between home and work or between transitional points of exchange. Instead, using the body as a compass and form of play, Libersat asks participants to relearn, relocate, navigate, and negotiate with others their spatial and temporal surroundings within the gallery space.

Thus, Libersat's interactive installation creates opportunities for both play and critical reflection. In addition, she has incorporated the radial symmetry and geometry of certain religious symbols



Shop Till You Drop, 2018,
laser cut laminate sheets, wood,
34"x 34"x16"

associated with Hindu, Buddhist and Christian traditions into the hyperreal, digitally rendered architectural space of a shopping mall. Perhaps the Janus-faced mandala repeated throughout *Paved Paradise*, on the one hand, stands for the symbol of consumption that has become the worship and religion of late capitalism. On the other hand, the vernacular of the mandala is potentially one entry point in which to eschew capitalist society and make way for a different kind of paradise, one that fosters a sense of place and creation of community. In the words of pop singer Joni Mitchell, referenced by the exhibition title, "don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got til its gone, they paved paradise, and put up a parking lot."³

Adetty Pérez de Miles, Ph.D., Associate Professor, University of North Texas

1 Augé, M. (1995). *Non-place: An introduction to supermodernity*. New York, NY: Verso.

2 Schwartz, N. (2015). The Economics (and nostalgia) of Dead Malls. *The New York Times*

3 Mitchell, J. (1970). Big Yellow Taxi. *On Ladies of the Canyon* [Record Album]. U.S.A: Reprise.



Paved with Good Intentions, 2017,
3D prints, Corian®, paint, acrylic,
6"x6"x8"

Julie Libersat

EDUCATION

- 2017 MA in Art Education and Visual Studies, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas
- 2016 MFA in Studio Art (New Media), University of North Texas, Denton, Texas
- 2003 BFA in Painting (cum laude), Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, Maryland

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *Paved Paradise, Women & Their Work*, Austin, Texas
- 2017 *Public Domain*, The Box Company, Dallas, Texas
Escapes, 500X Gallery, Dallas, Texas
- 2016 *No Exit*, MFA Thesis Exhibition, Cora Stafford Gallery, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas
Infinite Loop, Ro2 Art, Dallas, Texas
- 2005 *Burning Down the House*, Public Art Installation, Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts, Baltimore, Maryland

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *Bring Your Own Beamer*, Anchor Artist, The MacKinney Contemporary, Dallas, Texas
CHAOS! Small Works, Ro2 Art, Dallas, Texas
Currents: Santa Fe International New Media Festival, Santa Fe, New Mexico
Dallas Art Fair, participating artists represented by Ro2 Art Gallery, Dallas, Texas
Members Show, 500X Gallery, Dallas, Texas
Corporeality, Merrill Ellis Intermedia Theater, Denton, Texas
- 2016 *56th Annual Voertman's Exhibition (first prize)*, Lightwell Gallery, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas
Sonar Scan (honorable mention), Brick Haus Collective, Denton, Texas
Changarrito en Acción, Museo de la Ciudad de México, Mexico City, Mexico
PASEO Taos Outdoor Art Festival, Taos, New Mexico
Currents: Santa Fe International New Media Festival, Santa Fe, New Mexico
object / subject, Kit and Ace, Dallas, Texas
Lost & Found: Mappathon, Brick Haus Collective, Denton, Texas
- 2015 *2014 Contemporary Art Dealers of Dallas (CADD)*
FUNd Finalist Exhibition, University of North Texas at Dallas ArtSpace, Dallas, Texas
Six @ Six: Motel Portal, Motel 6, Baltimore, Maryland, and Denton, Texas

- 2015 *CHAOS! Small Works*, Ro2 Art, Dallas, Texas
You Are Here, Ann Street Gallery, Newburgh, New York
Nanogalactic, Merrill Ellis Intermedia Theater, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas
STEM City Arts, Coconino Center for the Arts, Flagstaff, Arizona
- 2014 *Metropolis Familiaris*, Backspace Artist Collective, Prairie Center for the Arts, Peoria, Illinois
Student New Media Exhibition, Dallas Contemporary Museum, Dallas, Texas
Home Inventions, 9th Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brazil
- 2004 *Inside Out and Half*, School 33 Art Center Installation Gallery, Baltimore, Maryland
- 2003 *Model Home*, M&T Bank Pavilion, Artscape 2003, Baltimore, Maryland
Door and Window Project, Station North Arts District, Baltimore, Maryland
Ten Page Book, The Contemporary Museum, Baltimore, Maryland
4 Corners, BFA Thesis Exhibition, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, Maryland
- 2002 *L'Arte*, Centre Pour L'Art et Culture, Aix-en-Provence, France

WORKSHOPS

- 2017 *Digital Couture*, Curriculum Consultant, Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas
Vectors & Patterns, Professional Development session for Dallas ISD teachers, North Texas Digital Fabrication Symposium, Denton, Texas
Fine Arts Application in Digital Fabrication, STEAM Makerspace Session, National Art Education Association Conference (NAEA), New York, New York
ROAM Workshop, Paseo Taos, Taos Cyber Magnet High School, PASEO Taos, Taos, New Mexico
Wayfinding with Oil & Cotton, ARTsite, Latino Cultural Center, Dallas, Texas
- 2014 *3D Recycled Constructions*, Lead Teacher, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas

RESIDENCIES

- 2017 *Gaming the Museum*, Visiting Artist with Teen Artist Project, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, Texas



Mall Mandala Drive, 2018, Digitally rendered video, 10 minutes, Edition of 3

Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 40th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,900 artists in 313 visual art exhibitions, 128 music, dance and theater events, 16 film festivals, 30 literary readings and spoken word performances, and 632 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, The New York Times, ArtForum, and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Women & Their Work reaches over 650 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



women and
their work

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