



LYLA RYE is a graduate of York University (BFA) and The San Francisco Art Institute (MFA) whose work has been exhibited at Gallery 76, The Red Head Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario Rental Gallery and Garnet Press. She currently teaches at the University of Guelph and is a founding member of the Toronto sculpture collective Nether Mind.

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THE LOGGIA GALLERY  
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**LYLA RYE**

**PHANTOM  
ARCHITECTURE**

THE KOFFLER LOGGIA GALLERY  
10 NOVEMBER TO 30 DECEMBER 1994



*ewing at once with a  
double thread, A shroud  
as well as a shirt.*

*Thomas Hood  
(1798-1845)*

Toronto sculptor Lyla Rye draws on the psychological symbolism of architecture for her new installation piece, *Phantom Architecture*, which is comprised of 263 blue, yellow and red threads and 36 concrete blocks.

The exhibition articulates a method of sculptural investigation which Rye has been exploring since 1993, focusing on the simultaneous strength and ephemerality of thread. In *Phantom Architecture*, Rye constructs (threads, actually) a low ceiling of thread in the Loggia Gallery space. The threaded ceiling intersects in two broad bands at the gallery's approximate midpoint, through which a third series of threads descends and suspends a grouping of concrete blocks, forming imaginary pillars.

The primary use of thread is to connect or mend and Lyla Rye tests the limits of this function by exaggerating the scale at which the material is intended to operate. We are prone to believe in the inherent fragility of thread and there is a leap of faith required to recognize its inherent, but less expected, strength.

Rye's ceiling consists of individual threads spaced six inches apart. At this distance, each strand works with the next to suggest a form, but the slenderness of

material makes the works simultaneously visible and invisible. Much of the visible form is contingent upon our perspective and the qualities of light surrounding the work. If caught in a ray of light, it can seem to be there, only to apparently vanish for an instant before revealing itself again. This sustains a tentative quality in the work and an uncertainty in the viewer by constantly reminding us of its ephemerality.

Punctuated by pillars of thread that also seem to have a dubious physical presence, there is a heart of tension in the work. The notion that thread will confidently suspend blocks of concrete is a psychological trick of sorts. We may be able to rationally accept the physics of the combined strength of six threads per each concrete block, but there is an element of implausibility that is hard to shake, even when the evidence is before our eyes.

It then becomes more a matter of faith than rational understanding. And faith, which is likewise unseen but can be remarkably strong, seems somehow appropriate, given the spectral quality of the body of thread. Those threads that are visible to the eye at any given time collectively suggest beams of light, a force field to help us believe in the possibility. The existing tension in the piece ultimately serves to reinforce our faith in the exercise, as the phantom architecture remains taut and certain and confident.

Undercutting this is the notion that what we are seeing is indeed just a phantom. The individual blocks which mark the foundation of the work are the only 'real' or 'concrete' evidence of architecture and they do not exist in the same realm of visual chance that the threads inhabit. They remain visible but we cannot be certain if these are building blocks for possible future structures or reminders of something lost and almost

irretrievable. The work does not tell us in which direction the piece is moving. It is as likely that the blocks themselves will soon enough disincorporate and dissolve before our eyes. The work seems to evoke notions of longing and loss as much as it evokes certainty and assurance.

Rye's installation also plays with some basic references of gender identity by combining a material of traditional women's handiwork (thread) with materials of basic construction (concrete, eye hooks, toggle bolts), typically thought to be masculine materials. Rye's phantom architecture, a labour-intensive exercise in handiwork, creates a distinct pattern that mimics a realm where handiwork as we know it does not apply - the geometry of computer technology, which has also been seen thus far as a predominately masculine domain. *Phantom Architecture* blurs the lines between these three apparently divergent activities.

*Phantom Architecture* is almost dreamlike in the way in which it presents several readings at once. The desire for certainty and assurance; the threat that such certainties are ephemeral at best; the fleeting passage of time as it disappears before our eyes; and the possibility of ultimate powerlessness, despite our attempts to hold all the disparate strands together. All these perceived anxieties are, however, ultimately allayed by the fact that the work holds its form and, though it might bend or sway or give, it does not break.

Like thread, we are stronger than we think.

*John Massier  
Associate Curator*