



Lyla Rye: All About Eaves

DECEMBER 23,
2015
By [intsculpturectr](#)
in [MATERIALS &
PROCESS](#)
Tags: [GIL
MCELROY](#)
[LEAVE A
COMMENT](#)



Lyla Rye, Sanctuary Interior, 2012.

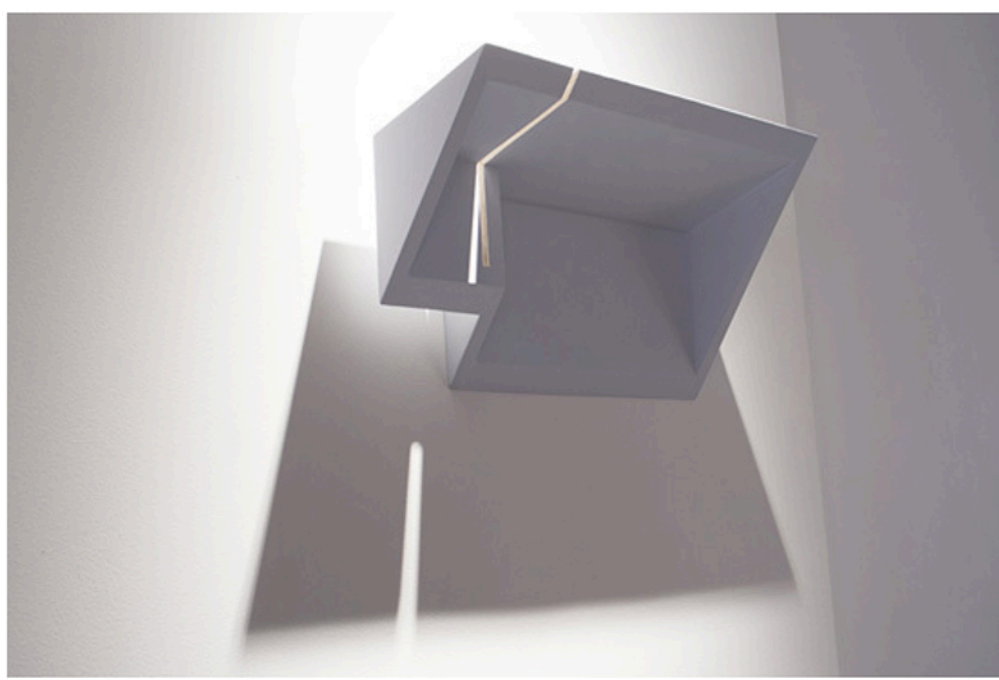
When first encountering the installation work of Canadian artist [Lyla Rye](#), it's perhaps not a huge surprise to then learn that, before she studied Fine Art at York University in Toronto, and before she then ventured on and obtained her MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute, she studied architecture.

I say that because her most recent exhibition of sculptural work at General Hardware Contemporary in Toronto is entitled *Eaves*. And it is exactly that – all about eaves, I mean, sculptural manifestations taken from that architectural/structural roof element common to an awful lot of buildings. Rye's sculptures (seemingly 1:1 scale artefacts, neither miniatures nor exorbitantly out-of-scale distensions) are made of plywood painted white and of course exhibited contextually isolated from function and structural purpose, sitting, unplinthed, directly on the gallery floor – all of course so as to encourage an alternative, purely aesthetic reading. Divorced from a role in the real world (and by the fact that they are, effectively, like extracts or portions of larger elements), these are artefacts that cleave more closely toward a spare, even stringent, geometric abstraction, all clean lines, elegant and minimal, more akin to the work of, say, Donald Judd than they are to a mundane rooftop. And they are exquisite.



Lyla Rye, Eaves Installation, 2015.

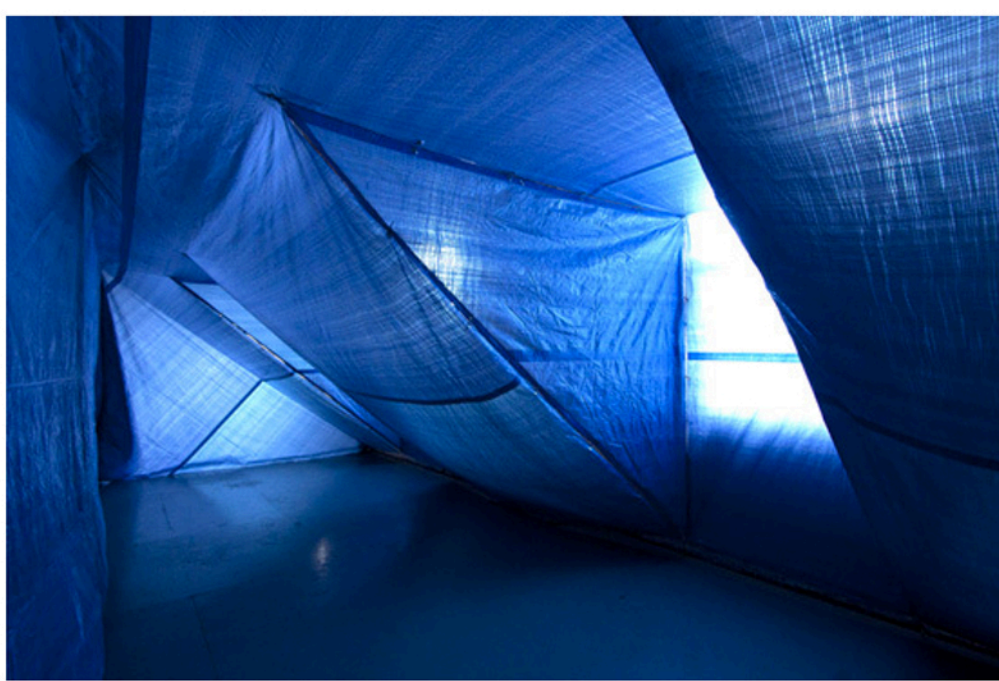
Which is, in significant ways, exactly like much modernist architecture – clean, elegant, and aesthetically pleasing to the eye (though perhaps the human body might be an entire other issue, as much modern architecture was more pleasing to look upon than to live in – think of the glass houses of Philip Johnson or Mies van der Rohe, perhaps, or Frank Lloyd Wright's insistence on designing the furniture to fill his homes). The thing is, though, eaves tend to be more closely associated with the domestic realm, with the house-structure that tends, by and large, not to have a lot to do with modernism in any overtly aesthetic way (and I'm wildly generalizing here, I know). So Rye has engaged in a reimagining of them, recontextualizing a minor, truly uninteresting and ignored architectural element (though one eminently utile and important), investing it with a keen aesthetic edge it has either entirely lacked, or which has been eroded or stripped away over time. I mean, c'mon: eaves aren't exactly visually riveting things, right?



Lyla Rye, Eaves Awning, 2015.

But Rye *makes* them riveting, makes us consider them anew, think of them differently (that's her job, after all, one she does exceedingly well) because we encounter them in an aesthetically centered context which is of course nominally absent in real-world applications. As an element wrenched from its utile, unthought of role, the eave as an artefact is reseen. Or maybe just seen, and actually thought of. It emerges into the aesthetic light of day from its murky, utilitarian world.

This is kinda what Rye does, in a larger way and on an ongoing basis. Several years ago, as part of an exhibition entitled *Cyclorama* at an art gallery in Ontario that was located in a converted grain mill, she installed the work *Memory Palace* in the gallery's airy third-floor loft, a space left untouched by the gallery's conversion into something akin to the standard white cube. Worn and weathered posts and beams traverse the otherwise open space which Rye proceeded to aesthetically shut down, using a bunch of large tarpaulins and bungee cords to create a series of seven separate spaces – rooms, really – within the larger enclosing structure. Rather like indoor tents, if you will, but more spatially elaborate and intricate than most temporary structures of this kind. One, for instance, cleverly fashions interior dormers around the existing loft windows, and another – with the assistance of a pair of electric fans attached to a traversing wooden beam – creates a rather elegantly room of white tarpaulin and high, arched ceiling.



Lyla Rye, Memory Palace Dormer, 2012.

This, of course, is architecture reinvented, refashioned, aesthetically reimagined and recontextualized, a nomadic form of that field installed within the fixed shell of a repurposed industrial building-become-art gallery.

And of course it's not just the secular churches that are art galleries which Rye architecturally re-purposes. The year of *Memory Palace* (2012) was also the year of *Sanctuary*, an installation mounted in a downtown Toronto church in which tarpaulin and bungee cords, and even nomadism again figured. Working in the nave – the central area in which the pews are situated – Rye constructed a long tent (essentially a variant on the classic wedge-shaped pup tent form) and suspended it above several of the pews, high enough to permit someone to sit beneath and slightly within its shelter. It's a canopy, of course. If you absolutely must, you can think of it as an aesthetic variant on the concept of the dropped ceiling – that retrofit often imposed upon older buildings to bring the ceiling height down but which became a ubiquitous staple of bad, utilitarian modernism.



Lyla Rye, Sanctuary Installation, 2012.

But we shouldn't. While Rye may be working within the context of spiritual space with *Sanctuary*, her work much more broadly addresses our need – our craving, even – to make space meaningful, to articulate the realms in which we spend our lives as domains of contextualized aesthetic definition, where we respond to the very shape of the spatial envelopes in which we live and function – and which respond to us. It's what architecture is supposed to do, but in all but rare exceptions doesn't.

Lyla Rye does.

By [Gil McElroy](#)