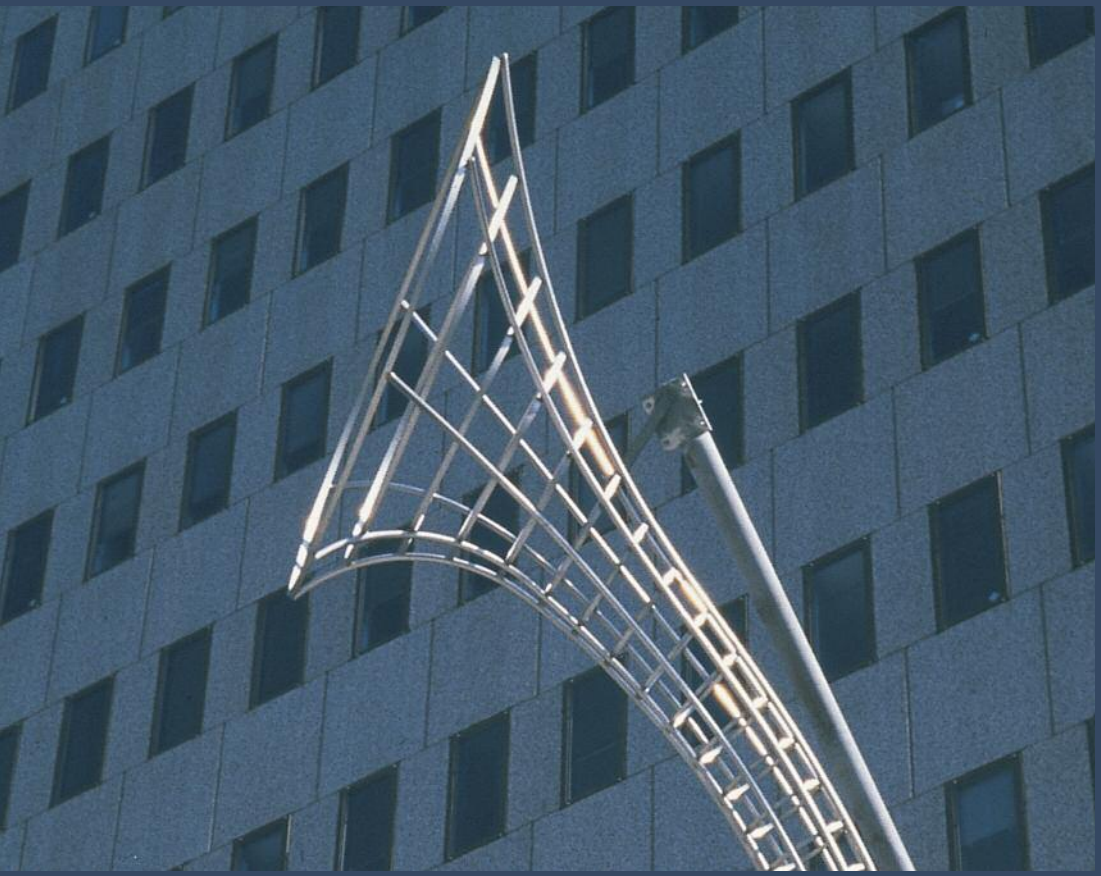
Alice Aycock: Swing Over, 2004
Jean Shin: Dress Code, 2008

GEORGE H. FALLON FEDERAL BUILDING, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND




FEDERAL BUILDING

Alice Aycock: Swing Over, 2004

ESSAY BY ELEANOR HEARTNEY

Traditionally, sculpture is composed of fixed, solid materials that are rooted to the ground. But Alice Aycock designed *Swing Over*, an undulating addition to the George F. Fallon Federal Building, "to deny gravity and escape the earth." Composed of two triangulated trusses and two curved forms, it loops across the façade, weaving in, out, and around the pre-existing openings in the overhang of the building's portico, culminating in a group of crossed, horn-like shapes at the composition's center.

Swing Over incorporates such source materials as an aerial diagram of the flight patterns of hummingbirds and the phenomenon known as the wormhole, which is a conceptual mapping of spacetime. The former can be seen in the way the forms sweep up and then seem to come to a pause before sliding down again, just as hummingbirds, alone of all birds, are able to pause in midair before continuing their progress. The wormholes, meanwhile, are suggested by the central configuration consisting of double horns, each with a mouth at either end. According to theoretical physics, a wormhole offers a shortcut through spacetime, much like a real worm that burrows through an apple rather then inching along its exterior.

Swing Over escapes the constraints of time in another way as well. As it swells, careens, doubles back and swoops up, it comes as close as static materials can to embodying movement in space. Sweeping the eye along with it, the dynamic lines of the sculpture evoke memories of the giddy exhilaration of the roller coaster car as it climbs a steep incline, rounds a sharp curve, and then plunges down. This experience may be the closest most of us come to feeling free of gravity. Aycock recreates it visually, while also alluding to the ideas of flight, kinesis, dance, elevation, and outer space. In one of those delightful convergences of theory and practice, the company that fabricated this work also produces "sooperdooper-loopers", a particularly hair-raising amusement park ride.

Swing Over, 2004. Aluminum, 40 ft x 400 linear ft x 30 ft. Installed above entrance portico. George H. Fallon Federal Building, Baltimore, MD.

Created from lightweight aluminum, *Swing Over's* open trusswork allowed Aycock to traverse large spaces, creating a sculpture that

glides over the building façade like a three-dimensional line drawing. The dynamic quality of this sculpture is all the more breathtaking because it is affixed to a building that is a model of unremitting symmetry. In keeping with the Modernist aesthetic of the 1960s when it was built, the George H. Fallon Federal Building is all rectangles and straight lines. *Swing Over* breaks through this geometry with a tracery of lyrical silver lines that glitter in the sun light and cast whiplash shadows on the flat façade at night. It energizes its otherwise very inert host, suggesting a visitation by some alien life form or energy field.

Swing Over is not Aycock's first foray into such gravity defying structures. Her *East River Roundabout*, created in 1995, offers an equally dramatic reinvention of roller coaster technology. This work is an 80-foot-long aluminum helix that is attached to the roof supports of a former waterfront garbage transfer station alongside Manhattan's East River. Here, one of Aycock's inspirations was the cinematic depictions of Fred Astaire's gravity defying dance routines. Another was the diagrams physicists have made of the movement of elementary particles. *East River Roundabout* contains encircling loops, a cylindrical coil, and a set of stairs that cannot

be physically used, offering instead an invitation to imaginative travel. Like *Swing Over*, its intellectual underpinnings and visual complexity are overlaid with an air of whimsy.

Aycock has been creating sculptures and evocative three-dimensional installations since the 1970s. Her early works involved temporary constructions in rural sites that recalled ancient tombs, mazes, and underground fortresses. These were often steeped in visual paradox and incorporated ladders to nowhere, sanctuary spaces that morphed into prisons, and passages leading to dead ends. Such devices were designed to evoke strong emotional reactions in the works' viewers, ranging from claustrophobia to uncertainty to elation. In creating these structures, Aycock was a pioneer in what is now referred to as "post-minimalism," an approach to art that focuses as much on an art work's process, relationship to its site, and psychological effects as on its formal qualities as an object.

Over the years, Aycock has moved away from these wood and earth forms toward metal sculptures that draw on associations with industry and the power, as well as poetry, of the machine. As she remarks, "A machine is a tool and the tool is a mental extension of your body...it reflects on the structure of your mind." And indeed, her current works, with their evocations of vortices, whirlpools, fantastic machines, and cosmic motion, reveal Aycock's fascination with the visible and invisible patterns that undergird our world. Her inspirations are mind-bogglingly varied, as she invokes the principles of theoretical physics, the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, the operations of children's toys, the configuration of spiral galaxies,

Below: *East River Roundabout,* 1995. Aluminum, approximately 100 ft x 100 ft x 50 ft. Roof installation, East River Waterfront Park, East 60th Street and York Avenue, New York City. Image courtesy of the artist.

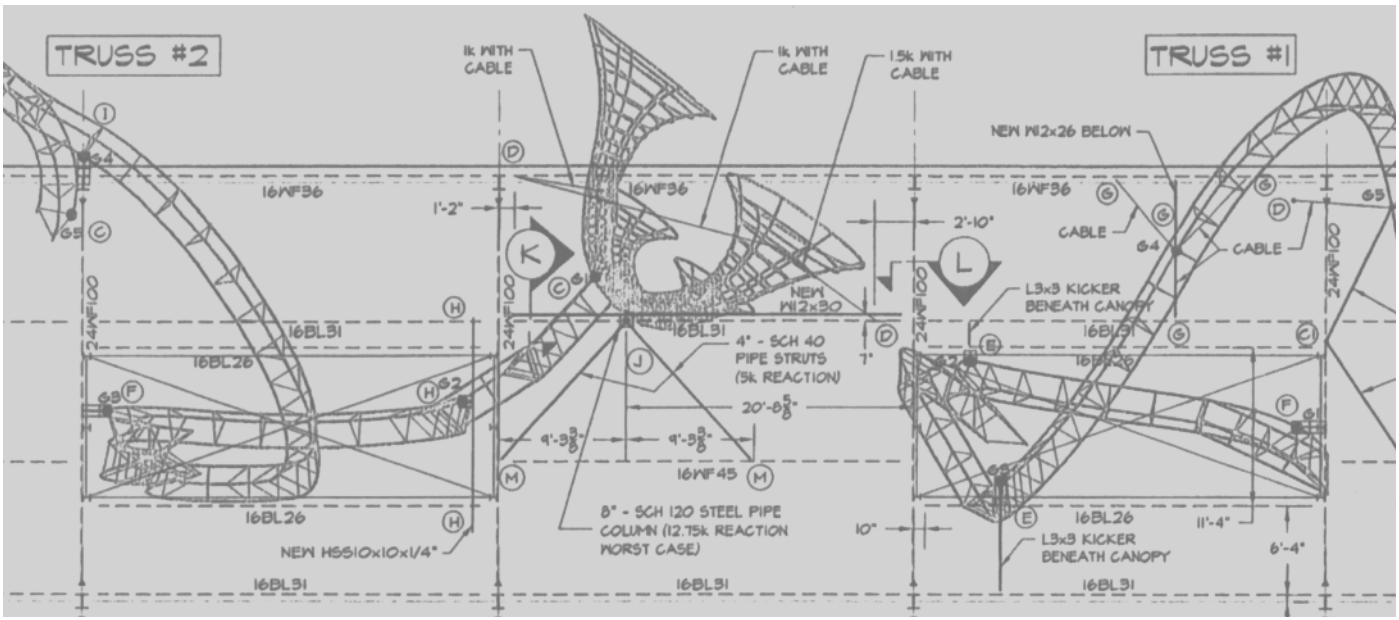
and the petal structure of roses. The forms the works take are equally varied, evoking theatrical amphitheaters, water slides, suspension bridges, satellite dishes, spiral staircases, and medieval astrolabes.

Aycock is the daughter of an engineer, a fact that may have some bearing on her approach to art. She gives fantasies and abstract theories physical form, knitting together apparently antithetical realities to create works that reference history, science, and technology. Her sculptures point simultaneously forward and backward in time, drawing on forms that might be futuristic or primitive, and are as likely to invoke creation myths or ancient philosophies like the Kabala as they are to give visual form to contemporary quantum physics, ornithology, or pop culture. However, her works wear their learning lightly, and one need not know the works' sources to be seduced by their sense of visual play. Operating on many levels at once, her sculptures appeal simultaneously to our desire for order and our embrace of paradox.

Aycock is a premier public artist. Works like *Swing Over* and *East River Roundabout* weave together art, architecture, and the urban landscape, in the process transforming often mundane spaces into portals to the imagination. Along with such public works, and her more self contained free-standing sculptures, Aycock also creates highly detailed drawings of marvelous constructions that could probably never be built. Her works can be found in museums and public sites throughout the world — Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Israel, Italy, The Netherlands, Japan, Switzerland, and numerous locations in the U.S.

With *Swing Over*, Aycock takes on various modes of movement and metamorphosis. While offering a fusion of art and architecture, it imbues the material world of engineering and industrial materials with hints of occult, the spiritual, and the cosmic. Synthesizing the microscopic and the cosmic, the scientific and the mystical, the quotidian and the utterly fantastic, *Swing Over* takes us along for an exuberant ride.

Technical framing plan for *Swing Over*. Image courtesy of the artist.



Biography

Internationally recognized, Alice Aycock was a pioneer in the development of sculpture in the post-minimalist era. Since the 1970s, her large, semi-architectural works and installations have dealt with the interaction of site, structure, materials, and both the physical and psychological responses of the viewer. While the wood and earth forms of her early career draw on childhood memories and allude to ancient history and architecture, the metal sculptures of her recent work evoke associations with industry and the power, as well as the poetry, of the machine.

Born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1946, Aycock was educated at Douglas College of Rutgers University and Hunter College in New York City. She had her first solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1977. She has participated in the Venice Biennale, Dokumenta at Kassel, Germany, and the Whitney Biennial, and has earned four fellowships from National Endowment for the Arts. Aycock is the subject of a recent book by Robert Hobbs, *Alice Aycock: Sculpture and Projects*, in which the author examines the evolution of the artist's work over a twenty-year period.

Left: Alice Aycock working on *Swing Over* in the foundry.

Jean Shin: Dress Code, 2008

ESSAY BY ELEANOR HEARTNEY

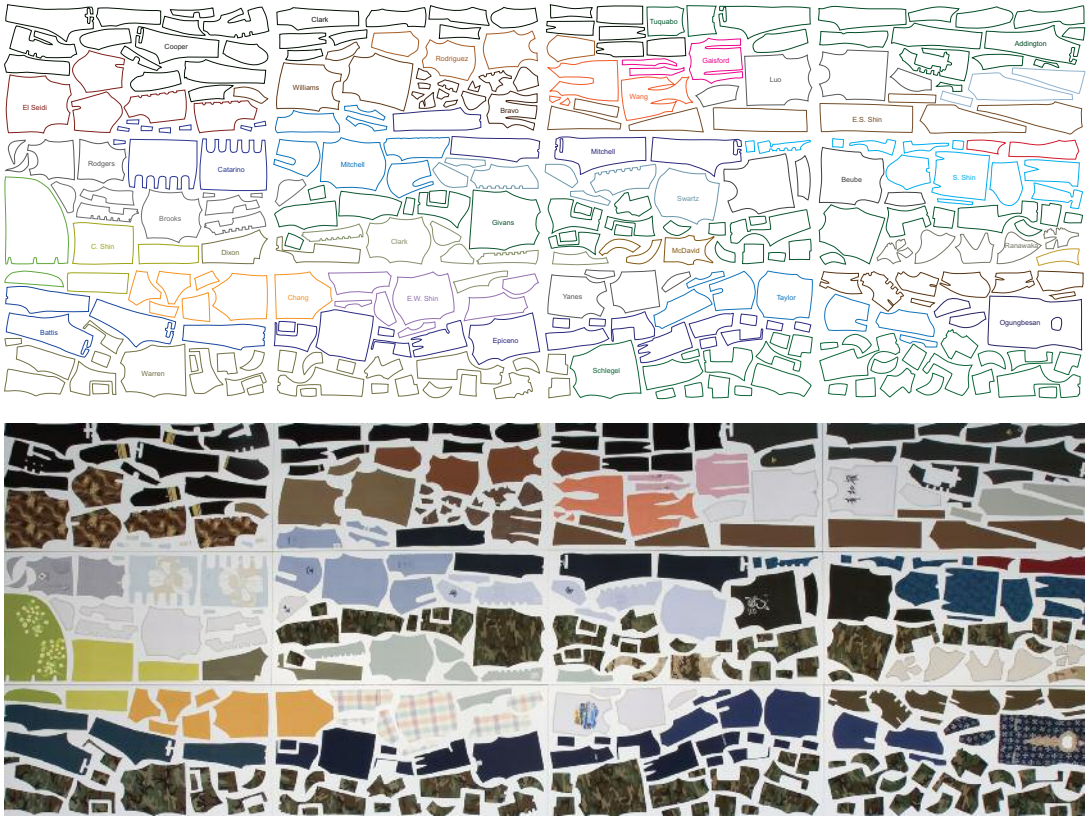
America's throw-away culture encourages a cavalier attitude toward mass produced objects. Consumer products slip quickly from their state of precious newness and are devalued once they become worn, frayed, or broken. At that point, they are thrown away and sent off to landfills, or, less often, recycled and remade into "new" objects for the next cycle of consumption.

Jean Shin interrupts this chain of events, gathering massive accumulations of discarded goods, and reconfiguring them into works of art. She has created art out of used clothing, old shoes, discarded pill bottles, empty wine bottles, scratched off lottery tickets, broken umbrellas, old eyeglasses, and cast off computer keyboards. In her hands, these items become sculptural installations and wall murals whose compositions are determined by the shapes and colors of her found materials. But even as they become abstracted and reborn as art, these humble objects retain traces of their previous lives, and part of the poignancy of Shin's work is our recognition of this lost utility.

Unfurled across the lobby wall of the George F. Fallon Federal Building is Shin's *Dress Code*. This colorful mural is comprised of a fabric mosaic of eighteen panels created from used clothing that has been cut and rearranged in horizontal bands distinguished by color. The clothing comes from two sources — military uniforms donated by various members of the United States Armed Services and clothing donated by recent local immigrants. The former have been gathered with the assistance of the U.S. Veterans Administration, and the latter through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Dress Code, 2008. Cut fabric and beva adhesive on eighteen painted aluminum composite panels, overall: 14.25 ft x 58.5 ft. Installed in main lobby, George H. Fallon Federal Building, Baltimore, MD. Photographed by Seong Kwon.

Shin chose these two groups because they embody important aspects of the American experience. Immigrants personify the principle of inclusion so central to the American dream. Veterans have repaid the gift of citizenship through military service. Shin notes that she initially assumed that these two groups would be quite distinct, but in fact she discovered that some immigrants have found that military service can be a path to citizenship. As a result, both groups represent a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, the articles of clothing in *Dress Code* present graphic evidence of the diversity of the American populace.



Dress Code (Tracing), 2008. Line drawing of garments with participants' names.

In mingling clothing from these two sources, Shin also provides a commentary on the secret meanings of clothing. The military uniforms are standard issue, and represent the gamut of the military hierarchy from the admiral on down to the private. They reflect an institutional culture that demands that the individual subsume his or her personal taste and proclivities to the needs of the group. However, these fragments of military garb have been personalized by the sheer fact of use, with subtle frays and stains that attest to the very particular life that was lived in them. In some cases, they also bear the military badges earned by their original owners. Shin underscores their paradoxical quality, noting, "Military uniforms have a "dehumanizing" quality to them as well. On the one hand, they take away a person's individuality, but on the other, they also function as a blank canvas onto which individuals can project their different, and even contradictory, beliefs and opinions."

In a different but related way, an immigrant's clothing is also a marker of identity. Some of the clothing here can be identified with customs of native dress specific to its former wearer's country of origin. Other articles are more generic, suggesting the homogenizing nature of the global market. And once again, subtler marks of wear point to the very individual history of each item. Here the mosaic-like quality of the mural takes on an additional meaning, suggesting the mosaic of individuals who make up the "melting pot" of America.

For Shin the process of gathering her raw materials is as important as her arrangement of them. In the case of the veterans, she asked the Veterans Administration to invite veterans of all ages to participate. The immigrant participants required more direct contact. Some of them were family and friends who had become citizens years ago. Others came to Shin after she solicited contributions at

an actual swearing-in ceremony, which took place, by happy coincidence, on the same day and month that her own Korean-born parents had become citizens twenty-three years earlier. The veterans and immigrants who responded to her project included Africans, Hispanics, Asians, and Europeans. Among the immigrants' countries of origin were Guyana, Honduras, Peru, Nigeria, the Netherlands, Mexico, China, Poland, South Korea, Sweden, and Sri Lanka. Veterans represented military service from World War II to the present and came from many branches of service, including the Army, Navy, National Guard, Marines, Coast Guard, and Air Force. In all, the project represents the clothing of forty-five people from twenty-five countries.

The real world origins of Shin's mural enhance the personal ties many viewers will have with this work. Shin has carefully catalogued the clothing contributions, and a text panel on the wall recounts the names of the participants, along with the year of their immigration and/or years of military service. As a result, local residents who have donated clothing are able to pick out their contribution. Veterans can recognize bits of the same military uniform that they have worn.

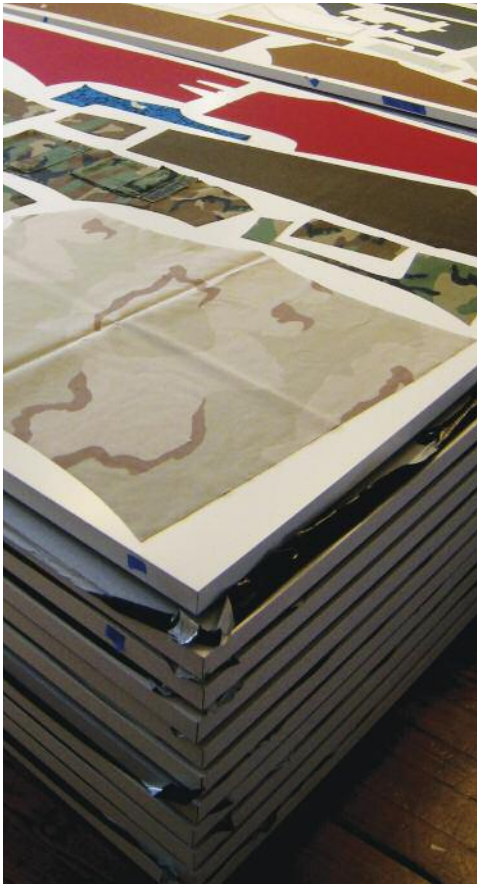
This is not the first time Shin has used clothing as a medium for art. A work from 2004, titled *Cut Outs* and *Suspended Seams*, involved articles of clothing donated from the entire range of employees from janitors to the director. The final work, which also took the form of an extended wall mural, thus formed a collective portrait of the museum staff, while subtly undermining the established hierarchy by giving each item of clothing equal weight. For *Unraveling*, 2006-08, which was included in the Asia Society exhibition "One Way or Another, Asian American Art Now", Shin collected sweaters from Asian American residents of the cities to which the show was to travel, unraveled them, and used the yarn to create a literal web symbolizing the interrelationships between members of the Asian arts community nationally.

Top left: *Cut Outs* and *Suspended Seams,* 2004. Cut fabric (clothes from MoMA museum employees), thread, and starch, 19 ft h x 60 ft w x 15 ft d. Commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art, New York for the exhibition Projects 81: Jean Shin. Photographed by Masahiro Noguchi. Image courtesy of the artist and Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York.

Bottom left: *Unraveling,* 2006/2008. Yarn from sweaters collected from the Asian American art community, dimensions variable. Commissioned by Asia Society and Museum, New York for the exhibition One Way or Another, Asian American Art Now. Photographed by Seong Kwon. Image courtesy of the artist and Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York.

The work that relates most closely to *Dress Code* is Shin's *Armed* from 2005, which appeared at Roebling Hall in New York City and traveled to PKM Gallery in Beijing the following year. This work was a mural composed solely of military uniforms gathered from soldiers with the assistance of the Harbor Defense Museum at Fort Hamilton, New York. For this work, she personally traveled all over the New York area to pick up the uniforms, in the process meeting many of the soldiers and hearing their stories. She remarks, "Overall they were very touched that I took an interest in them and excited that there was a place where their old uniforms would have a second purpose."

In these works, as in *Dress Code*, bits of clothing are meant to serve as catalysts for memories, stories, and exchanges between viewers. By treating everyday objects as magnets for recollections and associations, Shin allows objects to operate as words do, telling stories and generating multiple and even contradictory meanings. *Dress Code* thus becomes a means to explore ideas of community, citizenship, and responsibility that might otherwise be difficult to express.



Biography

Jean Shin (born in Seoul, Korea) is a Brooklyn-based artist who creates elaborate sculptures and site-specific installations using accumulated cast-off materials. Her installations have been widely exhibited in museums and cultural institutions abroad and in the U.S., including the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Asia Society and Museum in New York City; Brooklyn Museum; and Sculpture Center in New York City, among others. She has had solo shows at Museum of Modern Art in New York (2004); Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia (2006); and Socrates Sculpture Park in Long Island City, N.Y. (2003). She has received numerous awards, including the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant (2007), Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Biennial Art Award (2001), and the New York Foundation of the Arts Fellowship in Sculpture (2003). Her works have been featured in several publications, including *Frieze Art*, *Flash Art*, *Tema Celeste, Art in America*, *Artnews*, *The New York Times*, and *Time Out.*

above: Jean Shin installing her work at Pratt Manhattan Gallery, New York for the exhibition, *Four Artists: Work by Recent Pratt Alum.* Photographed by Diana Pau. Image courtesy of the artist.

Art in Architecture Program

Art created for federal buildings has been an important American tradition for more than 150 years, since Congress commissioned artists such as Thomas Crawford, Horatio Greenough, and Constantino Brumidi to create paintings and sculptures for the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. The Public Buildings Service of the General Services Administration (GSA) proudly continues this tradition by commissioning fine art for federal buildings and United States courthouses nationwide.

The incorporation of major artworks into the nation's important civic buildings reflects our country's strongly held belief in the worth of the individual and the value of creative expression. Such public statements of American culture are meaningful contributors to the vibrancy of our democracy.

GSA's review and selection process for commissioning art follows guidelines developed over the past four decades. The agency allocates one-half of one percent of the estimated construction cost of new, or substantially renovated, federal buildings for funding works of art. For each project, GSA relies upon a panel of experts, composed of the design architect, local and national art professionals, client and community representatives, and GSA staff, to assist in the commissioning process. This panel suggests appropriate media, reviews artists' portfolios, and recommends a small pool of finalists. GSA evaluates this group, and awards the commission to the most suitable candidate, who develops a design concept. The panel and GSA review the artist's concept, and — once approved — the final work of art is fabricated and installed.

U.S. General Services Administration
Public Buildings Service
Office of the Chief Architect
Design Excellence and the Arts
Art in Architecture Program