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Susan Giles: Exhibiting at The Mission and Hyde Park Art Center this Summer



June 17, 2015

BY FRANCK MERCURIO

- *Susan Giles: Points in Space at The Mission* (through June 27)
- *Susan Giles: Scenic Overlook at the Hyde Park Art Center* (through July 26)

We tend to think of monumental architecture as solid, stable, and static—massive structures built to withstand weather and war and embody power and permanence. But in *Scenic Overlook* at the Hyde Park Art Center, artist Susan Giles takes that notion and turns it on its head—or more correctly, on its side.

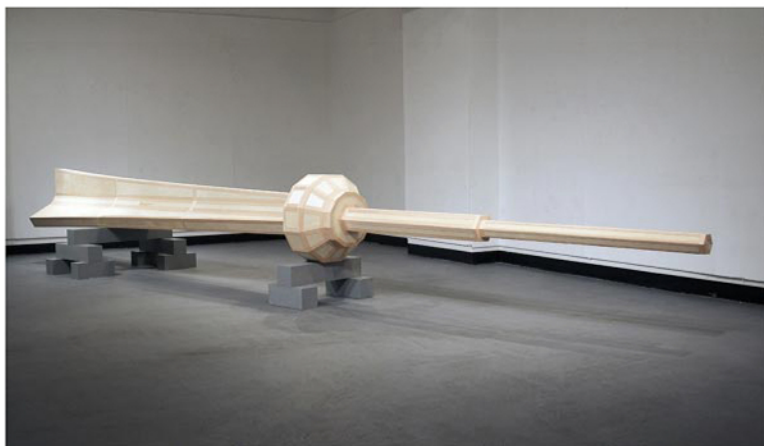


Susan Giles, *Minarets* 2015, concrete and paper, Courtesy The Mission

Entering HPAC's two-story gallery space, visitors are confronted by four large-scale sculptures. At first glance, they appear to be giant wooden telescopes mounted to steel tripods, all four pointed towards the same, distant star. In actuality they represent observation towers—Tokyo Skytree, Canton Tower (Guangzhou), CN Tower (Toronto), and Ostankino Tower (Moscow)—super tall structures that serve as architectural icons in their respective cities.

In a subversive move, Giles tilts each tower on its tripod; these vertical structures become horizontal; stable forms become mobile. Do these sculptures still represent buildings? Or have they been transformed into Saturn V rockets, or ballistic missiles?

The artist's intention seems to change depending on the viewer's vantage point. From the gallery's main level, the sculptures appear to be on a planned trajectory, aimed toward a specific point on the gallery's second-level balcony. Standing at this point (perhaps the "scenic overlook" referenced in the installation's title), visitors get a bird's-eye view of all four towers. But it's a somewhat menacing perspective akin to looking down the barrels of four guns, perhaps a reflection of our post-911 world where tall buildings take on new and somewhat threatening meanings.



Susan Giles, *Horizontal CN Tower*, 2013, wood and wood veneer, 20 ft 9 in x 25 in x 25 in, Courtesy The Mission

In a smaller space, just off the balcony, three of Giles' table sculptures are displayed. Here, the artist continues to manipulate architectural forms and explore ideas of permanence and instability, construction and destruction, by juxtaposing concrete with paper. Giles' concrete forms are powerful in their minimalist simplicity and contrast with the detail and delicacy of the paper forms, each of which represents a different iconic structure, including the Arc de Triomphe and Tower Bridge.

More of the Giles' small-scale sculptures are displayed at The Mission Projects in West Town. The well-curated companion show is titled *Points in Space*. Of these, *Minarets* (2015) showcases the artist's skill at balancing abstract concrete elements with more recognizable architectural forms. Giles places the decontextualized minarets onto two diagonally positioned bases, giving the piece a sense of movement and suggesting new interpretations of traditional Islamic structures.

All of Giles' sculptures are meticulously constructed. The artist fabricates each with equal finesse, whether the material is wood veneer, cast concrete, or folder paper. But it's Giles manipulation of those materials and forms that give her works a conceptual richness, enabling viewers to extract different meanings from each piece.

Image pictured at top of page: Installation view from Hyde Park Art Center

The Mission, 1431 W Chicago Ave, Chicago, IL 60642

Hyde Park Art Center, 5020 S Cornell Ave, Chicago, IL 60615

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