

Making of Lines

Taeg Nishimoto



Five Installations

These site-specific installations were done over a period of time in a variety of settings. Each attempts to affect the viewer's perception of the particular site in which it has been temporarily located. Each sets up a play between the elements that have been introduced and the given site, as well as between the viewer and the site. Perhaps they are performances in the sense that there is a very precise set of rules applied to the making of the elements. Within this

set of rules, things happen in a rather spontaneous manner. The sense of spontaneity is important, not only to the end result, but also to the process of making since the actual construction of the installation evolves gradually as the elements start to occupy the space and the resulting reactions take place. One thing happens first, followed by a period of meditation on the next step, and so on. There is a very precise, and yet unpredictable, condition of sequence that takes place

within a temporal framework. The most important aspect in the making, therefore, becomes the focused interactions with the elements that will find their own ways of emerging in space. Thus, the intention of these installations is to communicate with the viewer's experience.

The perception of the architectural spatial condition is inherently tied to the temporal dimension. The axiom that "architecture is frozen music"

refers to architecture as an object and not at all to space or the spatial experience. Light conditions change and the viewpoint to perceive those changes is also in constant movement. All pieces of music unfold over time. Dramatic or subtle, they possess a temporal structure and an inherent quality of spontaneity which they share with spatial experience.

These installations attempt to incorporate the sense of the temporal dimension in their conception and the making of elements. The pieces, white poplar or stainless steel bent into bow shapes by tensioned wires, are introduced and manipulated in order to project a spontaneous and unpredictable quality into space. The composition becomes part of the process, which has as beginning and end a performance within the allocated time of the construction. Naturally, since it is an installation with a site-specific nature, the spaces provided for the work precondition what will happen in a rather pragmatic sense. That is, the spaces are understood as a gallery (or in a most recent case, a passenger lobby at an airport). The anticipated experience of these installations is clearly defined in the temporal dimension. One enters and remains for a certain length of time, which make the intended effect of the installation rather ephemeral and, therefore, also precise. That precision is not due to the nature of the ideas that precede the actual construction, but to the

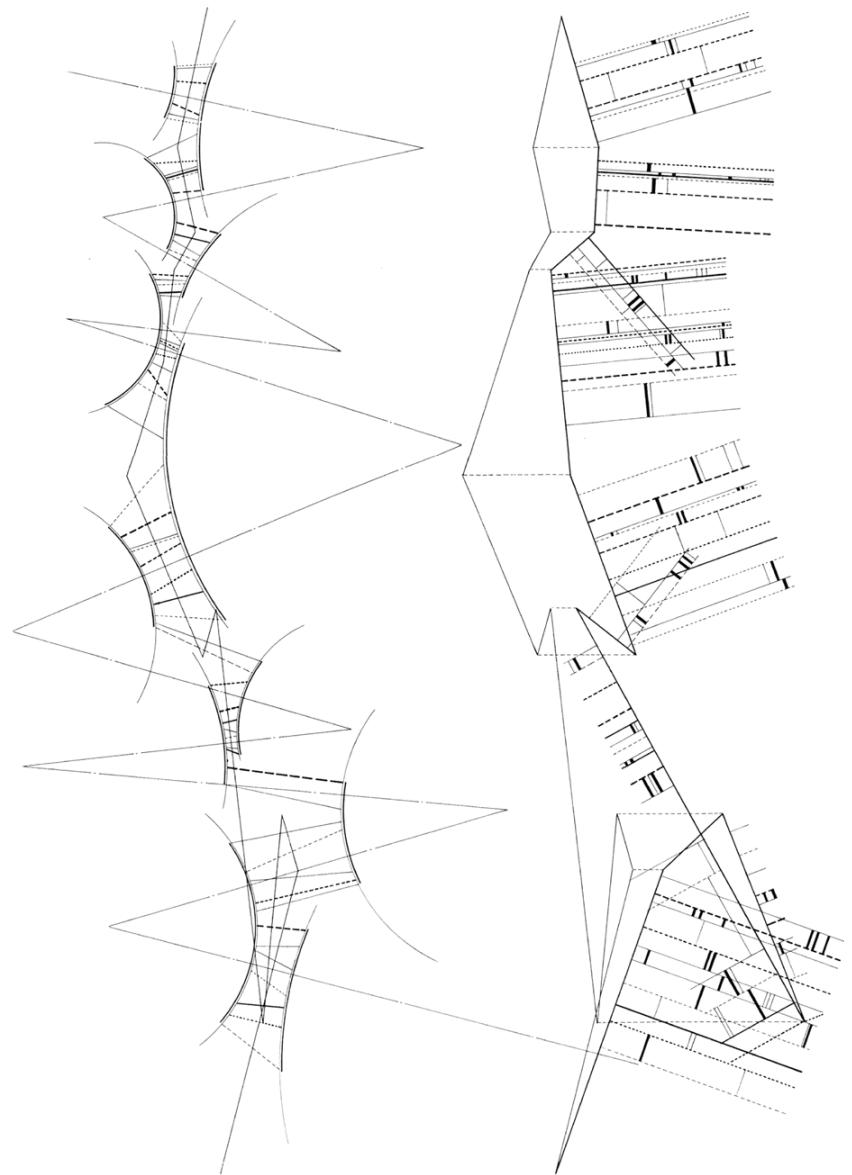
very nature of the elements introduced and to the construction process itself. This, in my intention as well as in my observation, seems to result in a sense of open-endedness capable of evoking images in the viewer's mind. The setting becomes interactive, not in a kinetic sense, but in its engagement with the viewer's perception and association as he or she moves through it. It is a kind of play between the installation and the viewer.

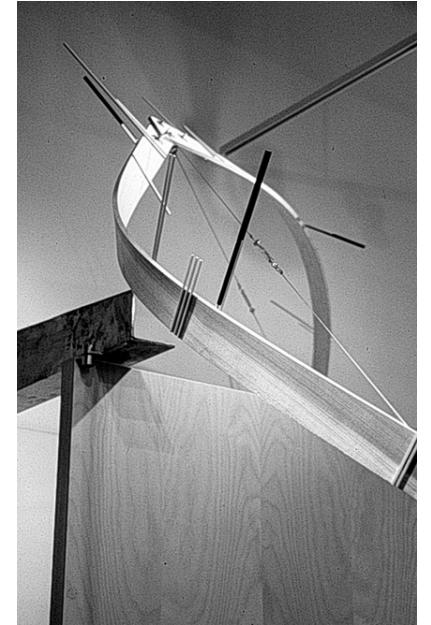
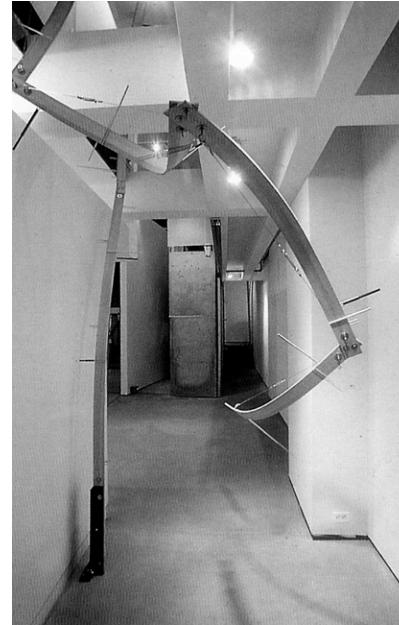
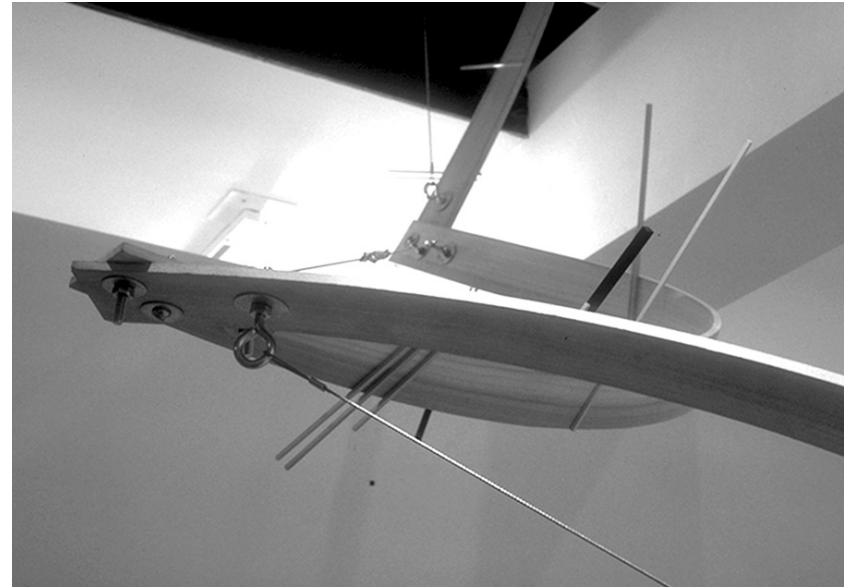
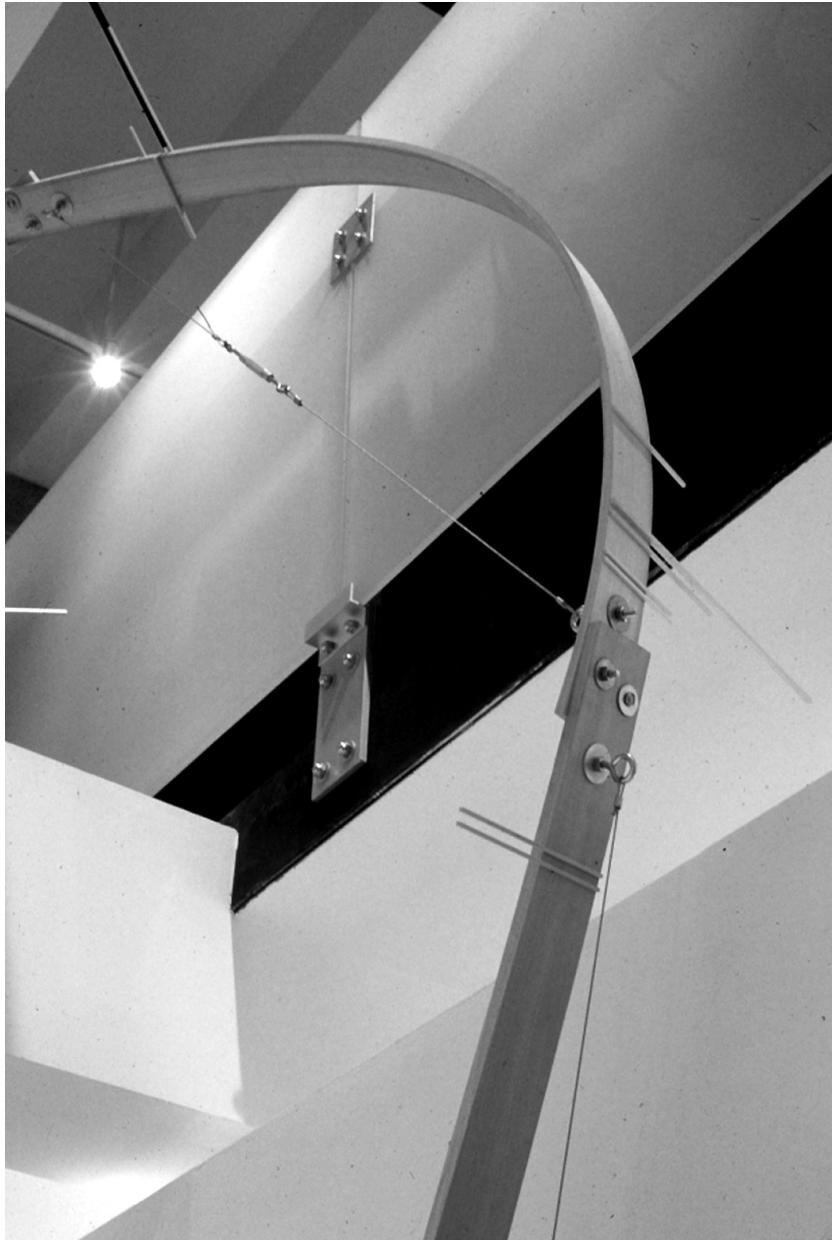
It is also a play in the process of the making of the installation itself. These installations are never completely designed at the drawing board. As the elements are introduced one by one in a given space, they evolve to formulate the entire place, just as a conversation takes its course spontaneously. It is not a representation of ideas, but rather a process whose aim is to visualize that spontaneity.

Lines

In the understanding of the idea of spontaneity, I rely on the mechanism of "lines" as a conceptual frame. More precisely, the dynamism of how the conceptual and perceptual natures of the lines operate in our mind and experience. When we drive a car, holding the steering wheel completely steady we are actually experiencing the straight line drawn on the land, even if the terrain goes up and down. Or, when we are driving on a deserted beach, moving the steering wheel right and left for fun, that may be the time we are experiencing the continuous curvilinear line in real life. Those moments and the lines drawn by the car are not conceptually predetermined conditions; they are, in fact, the result of a sustained condition in sequence. There is a constant interaction between the conceptual understanding of the nature of the line and the perceived reality based on that condition.

There is another way we operate with lines. The way we understand the letter "A" has everything to do with how the lines are related with one another. The three lines that make an "A" must be related in a precise condition to make the letter readable and understandable. If any one of the three lines were not conforming to the simplest requirement in terms of length and position (for instance, the horizontal line must meet the other two inclined lines at mid-point) then we do not read the marks as a letter "A," it remains an abstract assembly of three lines. The identification of each component and the relationships to each other are to be very precise. This operation extends to how we understand written words as well. Letters must be placed in an exact order to be seen as a word. And the words must be placed in an exact order to be understood as a sentence, and so on. There is a definite sequence to how the first component





is introduced and how the other components follow. In other words, in the case of the letter "A," the first line drawn determines how and where the rest of the lines are placed.

On the other hand, once this mechanism of identification of components and relationships is established, then one can visualize all different variations. These variations are conceptually exact yet perceptually imprecise or spontaneous versions of the same letter "A." And that is how we can read

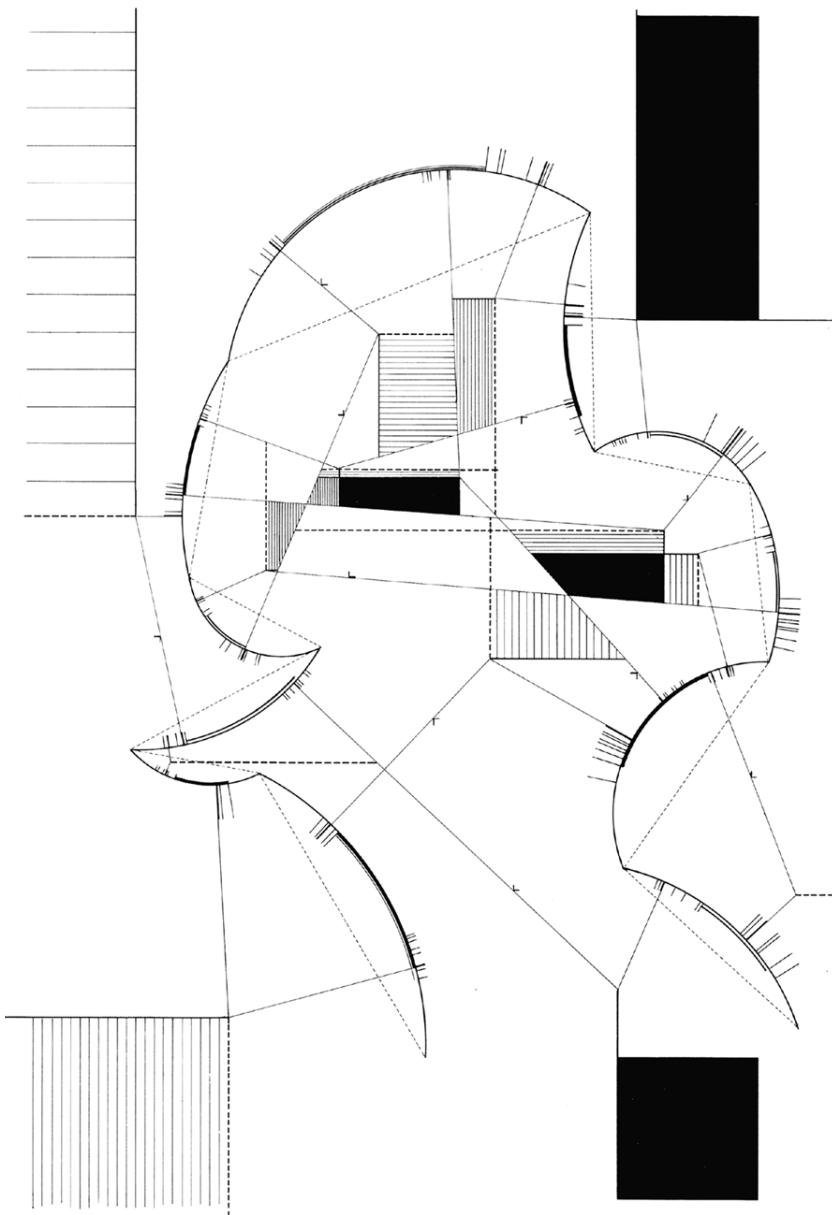
handwriting of all kinds. This constant shift between the conceptual nature of the lines and the perceived reality that emerges out of that condition is what constitutes the operation of these installations.

The line drawings produced for the first installation, Re-f(r)action #01, with wooden bow structure, are examples of visualizing this mechanism. In each drawing there is a precise sequence of lines drawn, from the first to the last, which gradually articulates and

occupies the two-dimensional field. It is not a composition in a spatial sense, since the lines drawn are never modified or erased in the process. Once the operation of the lines is determined, it follows through the premise with constant responses and reactions to the preceding lines. The emphasis is, as one can see in the drawings, the use of curves or arcs that generate from the center of a circle that is not always visible in the drawing. Therefore, the act of drawing also becomes a process of deciphering an un-predetermined

logic that evolves and reveals itself in the process.

The actual construction of the installation was essentially conceived as a parallel of the mechanism of drawing. How each material and device employed in each component finds its own logic and condition (which will evolve in the course of its becoming spatial) is the key to the premise of these installations. The duality of precision and spontaneity in each component seems to be able to generate open-ended associations



in the viewer's mind and experience of the work.

Re-f(r)action #01 — Brooklyn

This project was where the subsequent installation work began. It was generated by a non-profit organization called the Rotunda Gallery in Brooklyn, New York. The gallery space was designed by Smith-Miller and Hawkinson Architects and consists of a set of very sophisticated articulated orthogonal spaces. The project was proposed as an invited competition entry for a site-specific

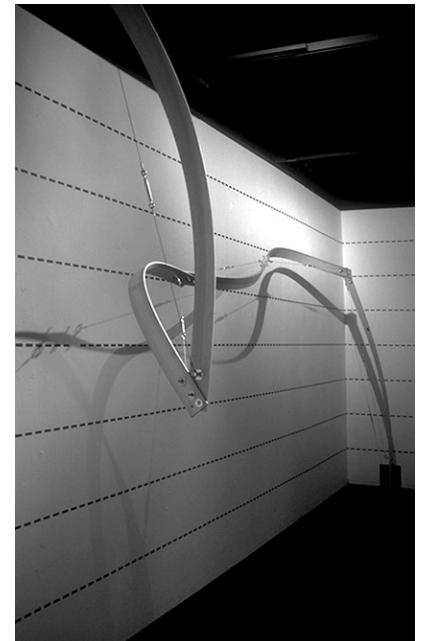
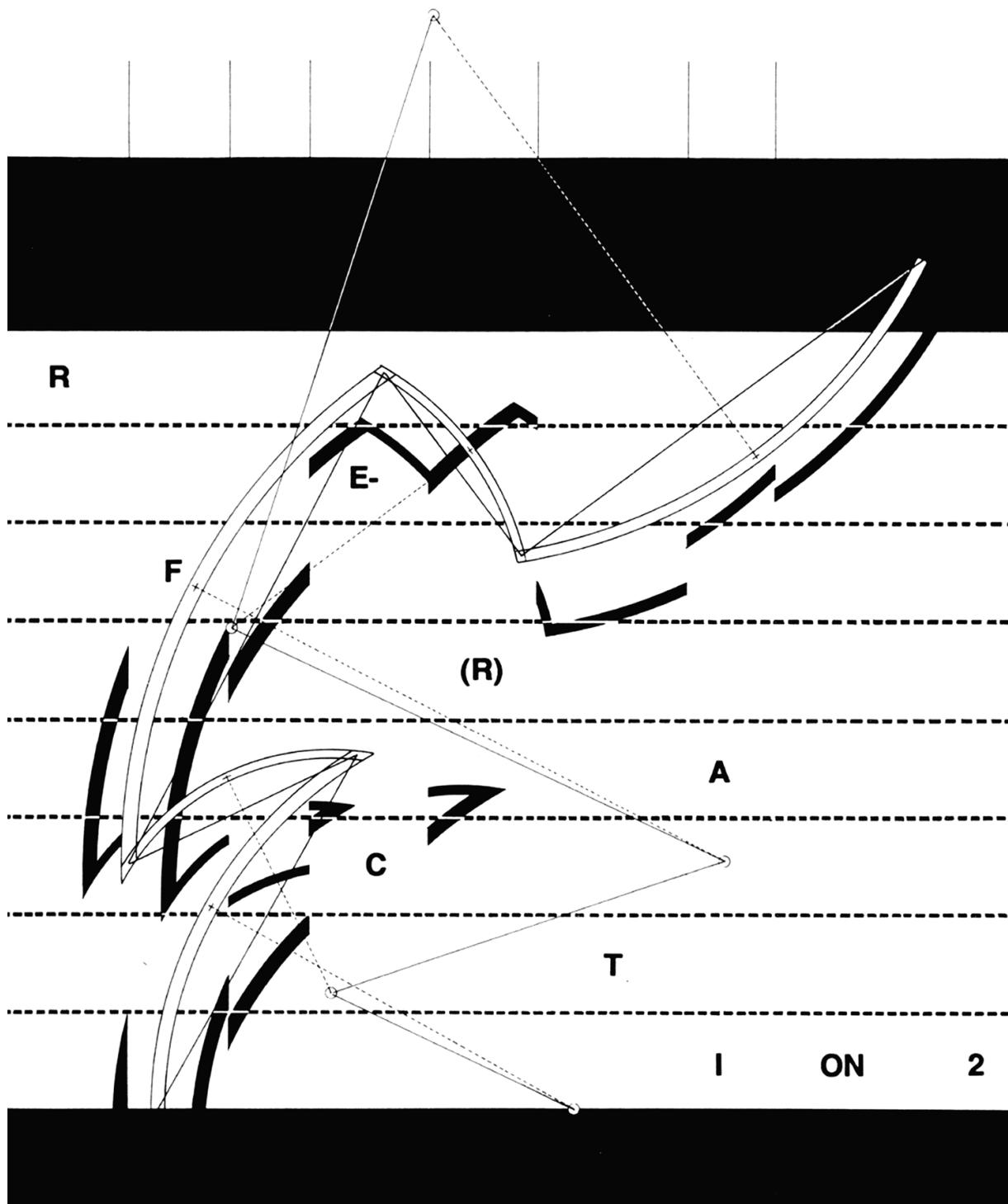
installation in the space. In the process of conceiving the nature of the installation, whatever it was that I was going to do had to deal with curved lines within the space. One might say that the curved lines were to provide an entirely different perception of the space within the stable nature of the given space—i.e., a dialog between the architectural space and the installation components. It was certainly not about a figure in front of a background, but the more fragmented sense of different components meeting with each

other, acknowledging the differences and, even more, the similarities without hierarchical relationship. The squiggly nature of curved lines in the sketch were translated into bent wooden bows of poplar with tensioned wire assemblies. By connecting one bow to another it became an independent structure within the volume of the space, further articulating the overall space and evoking a different perception altogether. The bows were given different lengths and arcs for each assembly. There are three different thicknesses to the poplar members: $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch for the stem and $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch for the cantilevered parts. As the construction and assembly proceeded, we became gradually familiar with the performance of the wood members and the structural behavior of the assembled pieces and we incorporated the torque of a bow as a part of the geometry for the continuation of the pieces. Pictorially speaking, one might say it is Mondrian meets Bryce Marden. However, the excitement of the experience was not so much about the still life nature of the composition, but more about the moving position of the viewer and the rather fragile moment where two sets of abstract lines interacted with one another.

Re-f(r)action #02 — Brooklyn

The second installation was conceived as a reconfiguration of the first one,

using the same components created for Rotunda Gallery in a different volume of the space. The small gallery (about 15-by-15 feet square with an 11-foot ceiling) in Pratt Institute's School of Architecture where I used to teach, was a totally enclosed box with one entrance door into it. Since the given space was without any particular characteristics except for its enclosed nature, we had to create our own environment (so to speak) in order to make the bows as a part of a whole: this time from the characteristics of the bow structure itself. The four walls in the gallery were painted white to 8-foot high, with floor and ceiling in dark gray. In this setting, six sheets of 4-by-8-foot plywood panels were introduced to articulate the space around the freestanding bow structures. All vertical surfaces in white were given the black horizontal dashed lines 12-inches apart. I wanted to amplify the sense of continuity and discontinuity of both the vertical surfaces and the curved lines of the bows, and that was the device. The black box nature of the space also prompted the use of lighting as another component in the conditioning of the space. As we played with the light fixtures, it quickly resulted in incorporating the clearly cast shadows of the bows onto the vertical surfaces as part of the installation's components. The voids between the bows and their shadows became an intense moment

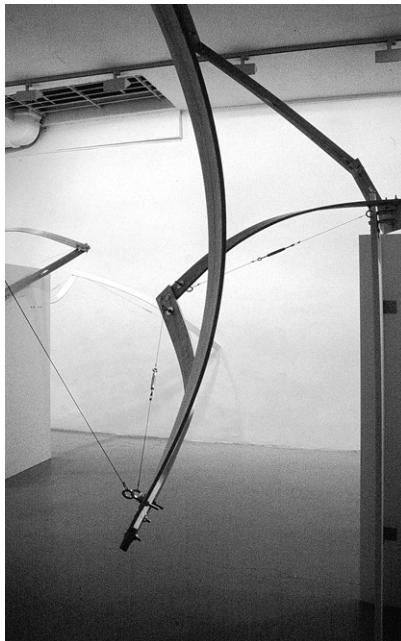


in which the visitor's perception of the space was absorbed.

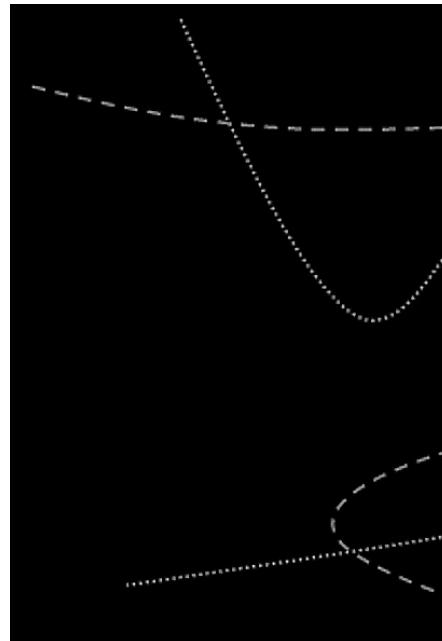
Re-f(r)action #04 — Paris

La Galerie d'Architecture in Paris is located in the Marais district behind the Centre Pompidou. The "L"-shaped gallery occupies the corner of a block with two entrances at either end. The place is not only a gallery, but also a café and bookshop specializing in architectural books. I had met Gian and Olga (who had just started this gallery) in the ArchiLab conference in New Orleans, and it was there that the idea of doing this installation emerged.

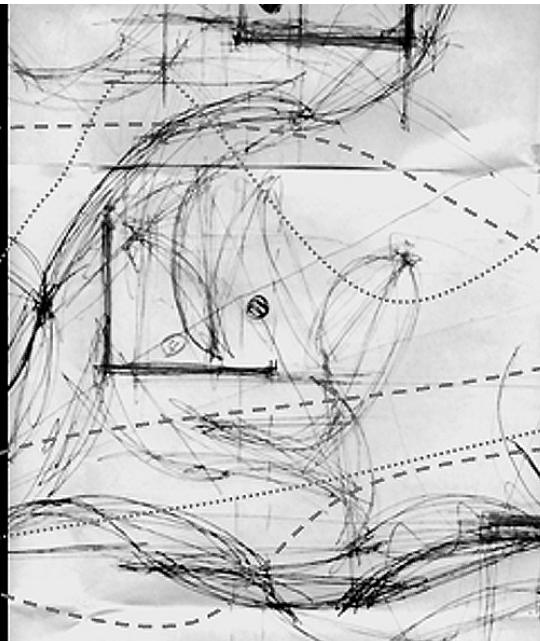
In this setting, the installation was literally conceived as a continuous line



between the two entrances: a pathway for visitors to walk through from one end to the other. The curvilinear lines of the bows were to be drawn in a way that visitors would meander through the space with moments of repose, as a stream of water passes through gentle contours. The configuration of the sequence of the entire space was also a rather complex one: from narrow to wide, low- to high-ceilinged, from points lit with natural light from windows to ones lit only with artificial light from ceiling fixtures, etc. One condition Gian and Olga gave me at the outset was that the structure was not to be bolted to the floor or walls. That resulted in using “L”-shaped panels painted white, which were the points



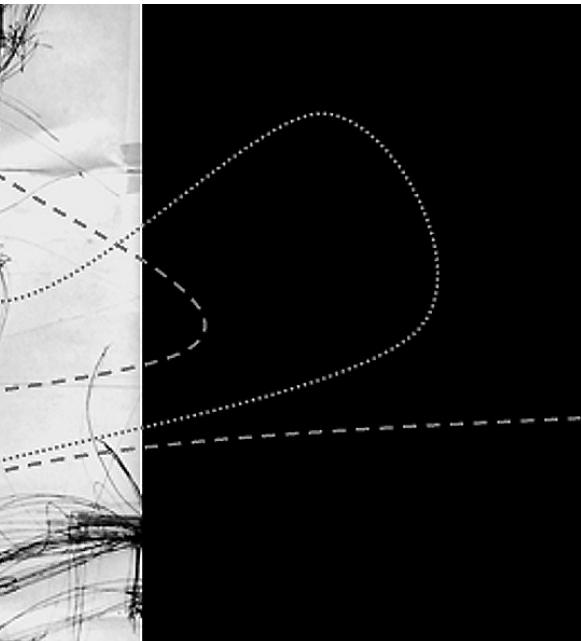
of support from the floor. The other idea was that the gallery would be open for visitors while the installation was going up. People walking through or sitting down for an espresso would be able to see the spatial effect of different pieces while we were putting up and taking down the bows. Since the work had to be completed in five days, it was an exercise in itself to maximize the spontaneous nature of the way the lines of bows and lines of visitors’ movement through the gallery interacted as the work progressed. The installation also tried to integrate the different parts of the place (café, bookshop, entrances, etc.) into one continuous experience of walking through the place, sometimes passing through, sometimes stopping for



a while. The bows appeared and disappeared from view at different parts of the sequence due to the positioning of the supporting “L”-shaped panels. This was really an effort in the articulation of not only the spatial conditioning, but also in the temporal conditioning of the entire experience.

Re-f(r)action #05 — Bordeaux

The bows and panels used in Paris were transported to Bordeaux for the next installation. The galleries allocated for our installation were two adjacent spaces at “arc en rêve,” an architectural exhibition space inside the Museum of Contemporary Art in Bordeaux, which is a old wine warehouse with a large open space in the center. Our space was



on the third floor, which was divided into smaller bays originally used for wine storage. This was the first time the work would be done in a space where I had never been before the actual installation. I had four days to complete the work. I looked at the plan and section of the spaces along with images the curators had sent me and tried to reconfigure the bows from Paris for this completely different spatial setting. Rather than recreating the same situation for this space, the only thing I had planned before flying to Bordeaux was to incorporate another component into the sequence of curvilinear bow structures—i.e., a continuous, series of straight lines, which would set up another layer to

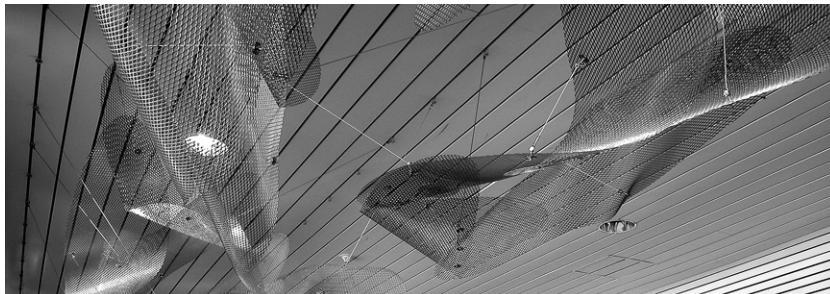
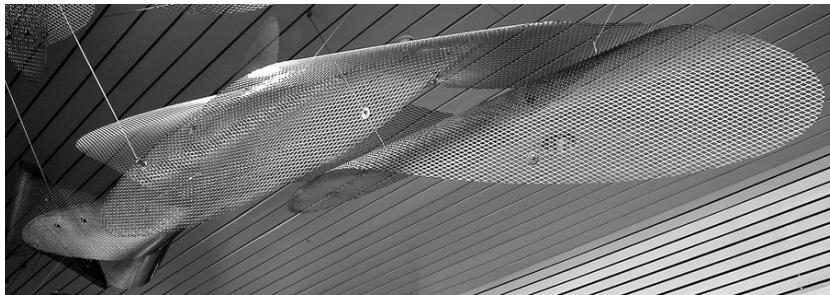
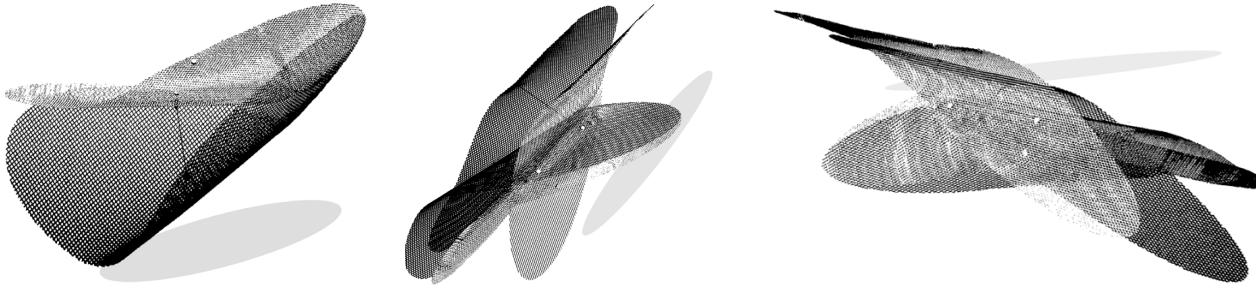


the way the spaces would be experienced. These continuous straight lines were to be painted black against the white walls, panels, and the natural color of the wooden bows. This black line was made of 2-inch by 2-inch wood members either supported by themselves or by the “L”-shaped panels. The black lines in space had this material dimension, though when they were drawn on the surface of the walls or panels, they became merely a painted width of surface without material dimension. Between two spaces separated yet connected by openings, the curvilinear lines of the bows and the black straight lines were to have their own interactions to make this installation a bit more pictorial in nature. The dimensioning of the resulting spaces also became slightly denser in places with the intention of making the experience of walking through the installation more personal at times. Even if visitors walked into the installation with other people, they had to be by themselves at times because of the tight dimension of certain places, and when the space opened up they gathered again. It was as if a visitor had been joined by the two different lines, and immersed in their conversations. The straight black lines also gave the curvilinear lines of the bows an immediate sense of the anti-gravitational sensation, which, in my mind, is really the next step for the development of the bow structures.

Easterwood Airport

While lines are the generator of the bow installations, this installation takes on the surface as the initiator of the spatial conditioning. It is a direct development from the bow structures in terms of the fabrication of the pieces involved, although the way they interact with the given space is entirely different in two notable ways. One is that this installation is a permanent one in the space, and the other is that the space is a passenger lobby and waiting area at a small airport, not in a gallery or museum. The project was conceived as public art for Easterwood Airport at Texas A&M University and was funded by the Arts Council of Brazos Valley, a non-profit organization of the city of College Station, Texas. The initial program of making the airport public space more psychologically user-friendly was clearly desired in the process of developing the project.

The installations are in two locations within the airport, one is a ticketing counter space (about 30-by 120-feet) with a glass surface along one side of the space opposite the ticket counters. The other is a passenger waiting lobby (about 30-by 70-feet) also with glass overlooking the runway. During the course of the day, the sun rotates around the building and brings the direct light rather dramatically from one end to the other. This characteristic was the key to determining the nature of the installation, essentially a series of pieces hung



from the ceiling all along the length of the two spaces.

The pieces are made of stainless steel expanded metal. The identical surfboard shapes were cut from 4-by-8-foot sheets (two panels per sheet) that were then bent spontaneously in different degrees. These were held by tension wires at two points in much the same way as the bent bows. They resemble the shape of a set of wings of a flying bird. Depending on the points of the tension and the length of the wire, each “wing” its own individual shape. The wings are then combined together in groups of three, four, or five to make one set piece. This set of wings has three cables connected to eyehooks that are then spaced evenly

across the ceiling. The balancing of the direction and the position of the sets depends entirely on the connecting points in the ceiling and the length of the cables. The evolving combination of the set of wings, again, was determined spontaneously from point to point as the work progressed.

The stainless steel expanded metal surface reflects and refracts light, both natural and artificial, in a rather unpredictable and mysterious manner. It captures the slight change of colors hitting the metal, and, at the same time, remains transparent, creating the effect of lightness in much the same way clouds appear in the sky. It was not at all my intention to forge this formal association in the making of the pieces,

however, in the process of working at the airport, with the daily operation of the flights taking place, passengers were responding to the image of the hung pieces as “butterfly,” “clouds,” “birds,” etc., appropriately associating them with the image of flight and its airiness. In the entire length of the two locations of the installation, exactly one hundred wings were used, commemorating the year 2003 as the one hundredth anniversary of the Wright Brothers’ first flight.

One does not stay in the public space of the airport longer than necessary. It is a uniquely transitional space in its program and experience. At the same time, especially in this airport, one does spend time in the same space at different

times of day, different conditions of light, and so on. This installation hopes to capture those pragmatic moments with an image that becomes both constant and in flux at the same time.

Project Credits

Project Assistants
 Re-f(r)action 01: Leonard Camposano
 Re-f(r)action 02: Jun Aizaki
 Re-f(r)action 04: Leonard Camposano
 Re-f(r)action 05: Dan Gonzalez
 Easterwood Airport: Dave Sellers

Photography
 Easterwood Airport: Marcel Erminy