

Ania Jaworska is currently a lecturer at both SAIC and UIC and has received masters' degrees in architecture from Kraków University of Technology in Poland and the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. Her work has been shown at the Graham Foundation; the Chicago Cultural Center; and as part of *13178 Moran Street: Grounds for Detroit in Common Ground*, the 13th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice (2012).

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BMO Harris Bank
Chicago Works

Ania Jaworska

Aug 25–
Jan 31

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Grace Deveney is the former Marjorie Susman Curatorial Fellow at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

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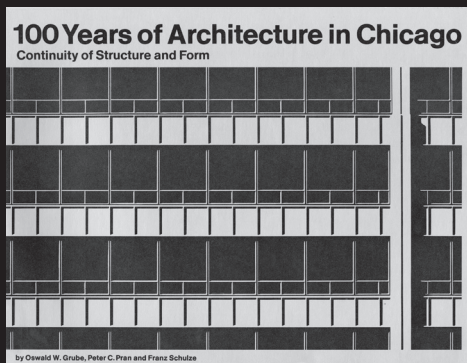
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Signs of Our Place

Architecture, like other art forms, is expressive. We are surrounded by structures that communicate without saying a word. Closed gates keep us out; signage beckons us in; marble floors make us wish we had worn nicer shoes. These cues are often subtle and emerge through the details of the buildings and spaces we enter. Fascinated by the communicative aspects of the built environment, Ania Jaworska explores this phenomenon in her practice. In doing so, Jaworska revisits the architectural traditions established in the first half of the twentieth century, while invoking the subjectivity and playfulness that has characterized postmodern architecture since the 1960s and 1970s.

Although Jaworska is the first architect to be featured in the *Chicago Works* series, the MCA has exhibited architecture on numerous occasions since its founding. In fact, two iconic shows from the 1970s demonstrate the breadth of the discipline and contextualize Jaworska's practice within the fields of art and architecture.



Oswald W. Grube et al., *100 Years of Architecture in Chicago: Continuity of Structure and Form* (1976), J. Philip O'Hara. Cover design: Richard Nickel.

In 1976, MCA director Stephen Prokopoff organized *100 Years of Architecture in Chicago: Continuity of Structure and Form*, which celebrated the city's modernist architecture. This exhibition explored the premise that the Great Fire of 1871 introduced far more visual coherency into the heart of the city in terms of an architectural style and a uniform grid of city blocks. This led to the development of

words boldly announce their presence to the viewer, as many signs and monuments do, while mocking this need for attention. *Monument for Them* especially speaks to the almost human qualities signage can have—the sculpture itself looks like a kneeling supplicant, awkwardly begging for attention. Ultimately, Jaworska never fully defines the relationship between her sculptures and the architecture they reference, but works bearing “here,” “hi,” and “best” draw attention to the relationship between structures and social experience.

Other sculptures in the series explore the ways spaces alternately beckon us in or keep us out, depending on one's point of view. *Untitled (Empty Gesture)* cordons off an area of the gallery with proportionally exaggerated stanchions and a velvet rope, yet this barrier is arbitrary. Nothing distinguishes this part of the room from the other accessible spaces, suggesting that the titular “empty gesture” refers to a prohibition that has no underlying significance beyond restricting movement. Conversely, *Gated Area* invites the viewer to pass through a delicate arch to enter a small enclosure, yet nothing distinguishes this area of the gallery, beyond the invitation the arched gate offers. Together, these sculptures playfully direct and restrict movement through the gallery, demonstrating that forms can structure our experience of space, even spaces with no particular function.

Through the creation of sculptures that alternatively present greetings, restrictions, and access, Jaworska offers an interactive environment. Her work comes to life through the viewer's engagement with it, and in this way takes on the functional quality of the architecture it explores. Together *Cynic Architectures* and the *Subjective Catalog of Columns* transform both celebrated and invisible architectures, ultimately revealing new ways to experience space that take into account the unexpected humor that resides in forms.

In one of the prints Jaworska depicts a curving tubular column that spells out "WOW," alluding to the continuous curved steel tubing that serves as a structural and design element for the house. Using prints to narrate the formal history of the column, Jaworska presents an abridged history of architecture. The project culminates in her proposal, *Column Pavilion*, which is a print of a structure that would bring the disparate columns together to support a single structure, thereby uniting different moments in time and space.

Her installation *Cynic Architectures* takes archetypal forms as a starting point to comment on architecture's larger history. *Cynic Architectures* consists of a black room populated by six black sculptures that resemble familiar elements of the built environment. Monochromatic approaches to art making have abounded since the early twentieth century, with artists such as Kasimir Malevich (Russian, 1878–1935) delving into the depths of black. These forays into monochrome often stem from a desire to get to the heart of a matter: for Malevich, the monochrome offered new possibilities for political and spiritual symbolism by stripping away the need for representation or content.

In contrast, Jaworska's work emphasizes the inseparability of cultural and social meanings from familiar forms, and therefore aligns more closely with the Russian constructivists who worked during the same time period as Malevich, yet made art in service of social and political life. The bold, graphic language of these Russian artists informed Jaworska's work during her tenure as a student of architecture.

Jaworska's shapes also recall Jacques Derrida's assertion that cultural attitudes haunt architectural form.⁶ Simple messages, such as "do not enter" or "welcome," are embedded in the structures themselves, and it is this communicative aspect that Jaworska highlights in *Cynic Architectures*. The sculptures all begin with something common, and a cynical quality is evoked in part by the tension between their familiarity and strangeness. That is, their simplicity and lack of color makes them appear like symbols, yet possibly unreliable ones.

6 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (University of Chicago Press, 1978), 5.

For example, in sculptures such as *Sign of Their Place* and *Monument for Them*, single

a Chicago school, or style, of architecture characterized by buildings with facades that resembled the new grid structure of the city streets. This approach to architecture was continually refined throughout the century, reaching its pinnacle with the work of architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (American, b. Germany, 1886–1969).¹ The exhibition also highlighted architects of the 1970s who continued working in the style developed by Mies. The steel and glass from which these Miesian buildings were constructed were also their primary design elements. Lacking further ornamentation, these lean structures have a spare aesthetic that foregrounds the material and technological innovations that made them possible.

1 *100 Years of Architecture in Chicago: Continuity of Structure and Form* (Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 1978). The exhibition originated in Munich, Germany, at Die Neue Sammlung in 1973.

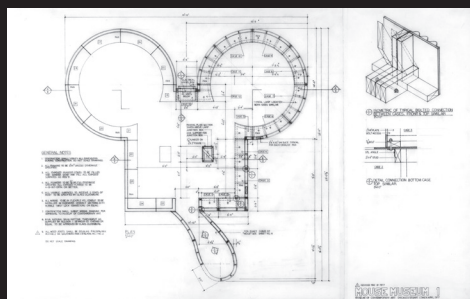
Although this style of architecture is still prevalent, by the 1970s a number of young architects in Chicago and beyond had become disillusioned by the account of history offered in the exhibition *100 Years of Architecture in Chicago*.² A group of architects who eventually became known as the Chicago Seven (a name its members relished because of its connection to the political activists charged with conspiracy to incite riot during the 1968 Democratic Convention) mounted its own exhibition, *Chicago Architects*, in response to the MCA's show. Led by Stuart E. Cohen (American, b. 1942), the exhibition explored what he called "invisible Chicago architecture"—smaller, more private, and vernacular structures that had not been adequately represented elsewhere. Rather than focusing on the skyscrapers that filled the city center, the exhibition explored schools, banks, homes, and motels around the city and its suburbs, as well as the work of architects not following in Mies's footsteps.³

2 The group's objection was not to Mies van der Rohe's architecture. Rather, their objection was to followers and imitators, whose buildings were leading to increasingly homogenous cities the world over, which failed to expand upon discipline.

3 This exhibition was originally presented at Cooper Union in New York, and was shown at the Time-Life Building and IIT in Chicago in 1976, concurrently with 100 Years of Architecture. For more information, see the catalogue, Stuart E. Cohen, *Chicago Architects: Documenting an Exhibition of the Same Name* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1976).

Just two years after this controversial exhibition of modernist architecture, the

MCA organized *Claes Oldenburg: Mouse Museum/Ray Gun*. In contrast to the spare constructions of glass and metal celebrated in *100 Years, Claes Oldenburg: Mouse Museum/Ray Gun* referenced popular culture through a deeply personal logic that linked the cheery image of an animated mouse with architecture and the act of collecting.



Stuart Cohen, *Construction Drawing for the Oldenburg Mouse Museum and Ray Gun Wing*, 1977. Graphite on vellum; 19-1/4 x 30 in. (48.9 x 76.2 cm) Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift of the architect, 1978.36.1-5. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago

The MCA exhibition, curated by Judith Russi Kirshner, focused on Oldenburg's (American, b. Sweden, 1929) longstanding interest in playfully transforming the notion of the museum and the collection. In 1965, Oldenburg began collecting small commonplace objects that he organized on shelves in his studio and then named the "museum of popular art n.y.c." Oldenburg associated this collection with the "Geometric Mouse," a simple mouse head constructed from a rectangle and two circles, a more mechanical version of the iconic Mickey Mouse silhouette. He further explored this concept of a "Mouse Museum" through drawings and constructions, including a proposal of a façade for the recently established MCA in 1967 that would incorporate mouse ears. Although the façade was never realized, Oldenburg did construct a Geometric Mouse-shaped exhibition space in a Chicago warehouse. Cohen, of the Chicago Seven, created the blueprints for this project.⁴ This project combined high and low culture, challenging any distinction between the two. In doing so, it enriched the alternative history of Chicago architecture, bridging the gap between architecture's counterculture and the museum.

⁴ *Claes Oldenburg: Mouse Museum/Ray Gun Wing* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1978).

Now, nearly forty years later, Jaworska draws on the legacy of both exhibitions in her work by reflecting on architectural modernism and humorously synthesizing popular and elevated culture with a particular interest in Chicago's eclectic built environment. Jaworska culls the history of architecture with an eye for iconic details that reveal social and cultural meanings embedded in form.

For *Chicago Works*, the architect has realized two distinct but related projects that isolate common architectural and design elements. The first project, a series of screen-printed posters titled *A Subjective Catalog of Columns*, explores the shift this architectural element has undergone over its long history. This element, at once structural and decorative, has persisted in Western architecture, eventually taking on an association with the classical era. Time and again builders have used columns to lend an air of legitimacy or prestige to their buildings, even as these forms have been reduced to the steel beams of modernism.

As Jaworska has noted, "the column has become a complex symbol that embodies issues of status, taste tradition, and advancement. It has been celebrated and misused, reinvented and ridiculed."⁵ To this end, the latter half of the twentieth century has seen the emergence of a new order of ironic columns that alternatively don't function or function differently than a classical column might. Jaworska responds to this phenomenon through her *Subjective Catalog* by investigating the larger relationship between architecture and culture.

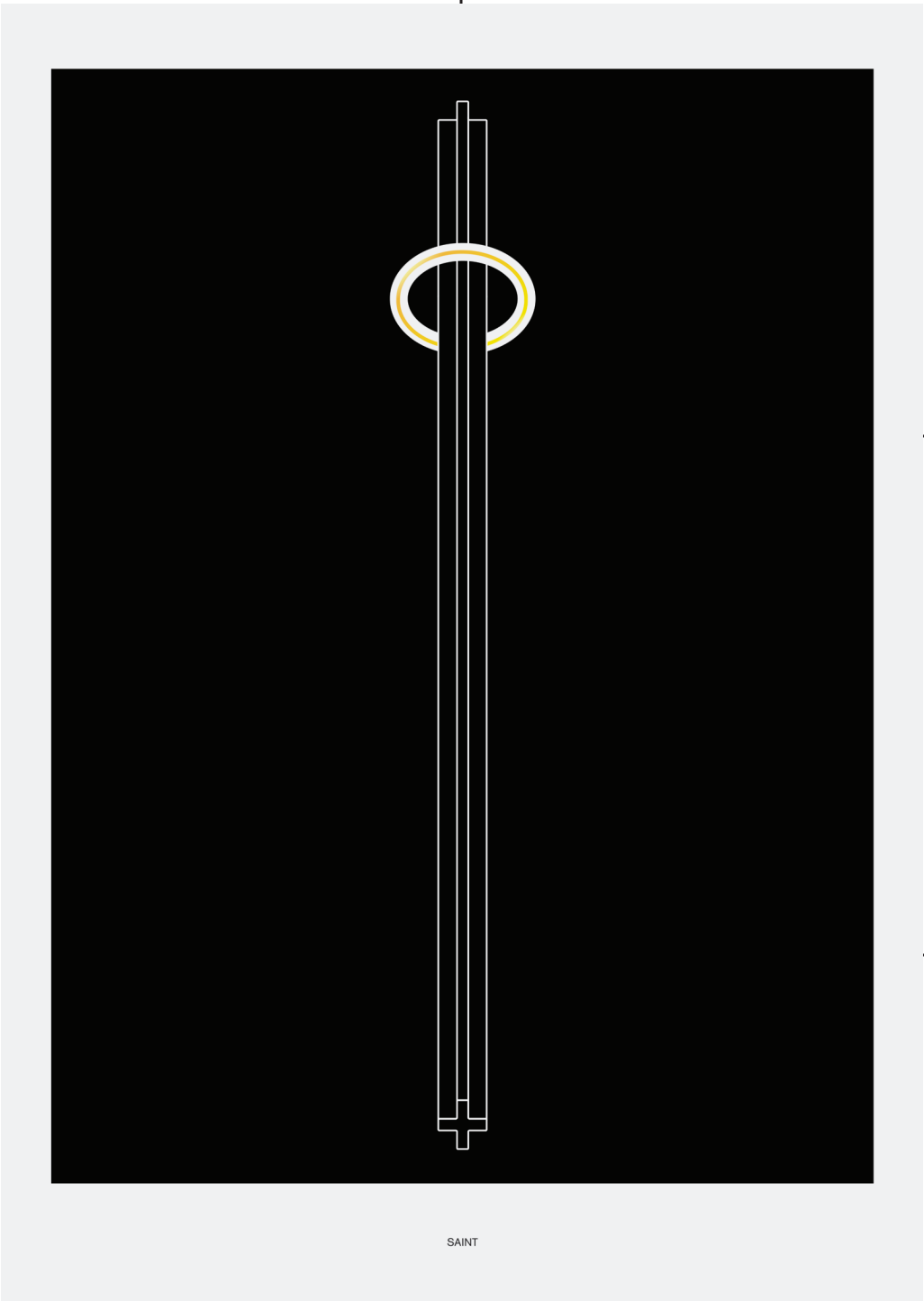
⁵ Ania Jaworska, "A Subjective Catalog of Columns," unpublished statement, 2015.

Subjective Catalog of Columns includes a print titled *Saint*, which depicts a Mies van der Rohe-style column with a golden halo around it. *Saint* playfully portrays the reverence for Mies within architectural history. Similarly, another print in this series references the work of Stanley Tigerman (American, b. 1930), another revered architect and member of the Chicago Seven, who created satirical drawings known as "Architoons," a number of which depict classic columns in states of disorder and decay.

Some of the prints also reference contemporary architects' works, such as Greg Lynn's Slavin House in Venice, California.



Ania Jaworska, *Monument For Them*, 2012.
MDF; 96 × 36 × 48 in. (423.8 × 91.4 × 121.9 cm).
Photo: Zack Ostrowski. Courtesy of the artist.



SAINT

Ania Jaworska, *Saint*, 2015. Screen print on folio paper;
30 × 22 in. (76.2 × 55.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist.



ANIA JAWORSKA

Fancy Pants IS NEVER LATE

Beverly Feath 4/08

Ania Jaworska, *Landmark of the Area AKA: Fancy Pants Is Always Late*, 2012. Screen print on folio paper with hand drawing and pattern by Zack Ostrowski; 30 x 22 in. (76.2 x 55.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist.



AFTER SLAVIN HOUSE

Ania Jaworska, *Wow, After Slavin House*, 2015. Screen print on folio paper; 30 x 22 in. (76.2 x 55.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist.