MODEL CITY

For the architect, a model is the portable representation of an idea whose implementation remakes the world. The model allows us to imagine and contextualize the whole, both as an integral structure and as it occupies the space around it. Its material realization, however, inevitably restricts the perception of it to a series of partial views, as the spectator is diminished by the scale and material weight of the real. Kendall Buster's *Model City*, an undulating, twenty by sixty-four foot plane, fabricated out of eighty blue children's tents, places itself at this juncture. Asserting itself both as idea/model and its material realization, it diagrams space while filling it, and denies any unified reading.

Entering the gallery, the viewer/participant is immediately beneath a seven-foot high, glowing blue cloth ceiling, which begins to torque and slope as it passes deep into the exhibition space. From this vantage point, the blue, gridded plane might be read as the surface of an enormous painting. When the ceiling reveals the truth of its materials, however, the references realign themselves. For these are multiple manufactured objects that form a color field structured by a pattern of seams.

As one eventually passes into the space, the ceiling falls to just three feet above the floor, and one must crawl to continue. As the viewer/participant reaches the end and stands in the clearing beyond, s/he can look back at a waist high field of domes, sloping upward into the distance. The sky-like ceiling, no longer in sight, has been replaced by a fully dimensional domed landscape of tents. We realize with irony that the ceiling of the interior from which we have just emerged was created out of the floors of these tents, and the floor now sloping away from us is actually roofing.

In past work, Buster has investigated structure in relation to the human subject, both as the space that contains us (shelter) and the material we contain and out of which we are made (organized matter). These inquiries have taken the form of discrete bioarchitecural objects that occupy a space or are embodied by the space itself, which has been partitioned and structured by membrane-like walls. Activated by viewer/participants, whose relation to her structures is continually changed as they move from point to point, Buster's forms are peered into, out of, or entered. The viewer/participant moves from the outside to the inside of demarcated interior/exterior areas, which at once evoke human habitat and cellular formations. As Buster's walls have become more porous and less material in recent works—made of paper, fabric, screening—they have begun to assert themselves as fluid markers that simultaneously map space and occupy it.

In *Model City*, Buster relocates the marker for interior/exterior from *wall* to *ceiling and floor*. These two vocabulary words of shelter, not only define the space, but also become the metonymical equivalents of perception itself. For as we crawl from beneath the two-dimensional sheet of blue to view the brightly lit landscape we discover, like Plato's cave dwellers, the limits of our former state. One wants to ask if there is another level and dimension beyond the one we have just entered. Indeed the inversion of ceiling and floor by the tents—the material embodiment of this perceptual sleight of hand—seems infinitely repeatable.

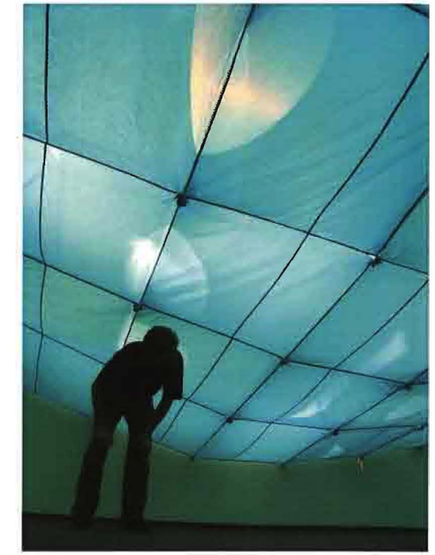
Buster has described her structures as informed by an underlying plan or blueprint, realized through a dynamic of possible readings. In her 2002 project, *Cells (Subterrain)*, a field of columns also formed a hexagonal pattern, which was visible only from a specially constructed viewing platform. This kind of contradiction, central to all of Buster's work, runs particularly deep in *Model City*. For beyond the rising and falling of the modular tent-cloth, is the artist's refusal to allow the viewer/participant a single and complete picture of the work, or even a singular map upon which to chart our course. Perception itself becomes a series of glances that deny us an overarching view. If we see the blue gridded ceiling, we are denied the domed floor. And all names that we try to attach to this experience—ceiling, sky, landscape, ocean, tent city, curved mathematical space—are refused as our movement through the work invariably alters our perception of it.

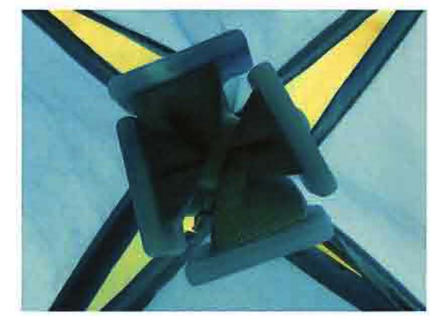
Thus, for Buster, this single spatial gesture is both blueprint and it's realization, offering itself up as material and space, reality and idea, invoking other blueprints in an endless echo chamber of structural possibility.

Paula Crawford
Assistant Professor
George Mason University

Model City, 2004, view from below

Model City, 2004, view from above





Model City, 2004
view from below

Model City, 2004
detail

Model City, 2004
view from above

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The third and final exhibition of work by a visiting artist in our 2004 fall program, the Anderson Gallery is pleased to present Kendall Buster's *Model City*. In this installation, Buster continues her study of the biologic at architectural scales, placing *Model City* somewhere along the disappearing line between disciplines.

In this installation, as in a wide range of Buster's work, sculpture and surface are conflated as the boundary between environment and installation piece necessarily falls away. What is an undulating surface from one angle is eventually revealed to be just one plane of a three-dimensional form. This same seamless three-dimensional form, under scrutiny, is found to be an illusion created of many smaller pieces. Highly crafted, it is only at the seams, joints, horizons, and marginal spaces of Buster's sculpture that these divisions become distinguishable and malleable at once.

Model City would not have been possible without the help of many hands. We are especially grateful to Kendall Buster and her husband, artist Siemon Allen, for their enthusiasm and dedication in the installation of this exhibit and for designing this brochure. Special thanks to Angela White and Miriam Ewers for their invaluable help. We also thank the Department of Art & Design for their ongoing support and warmth in making Kendall Buster and Siemon Allen a true part of the University during their short visit here. Special thanks are due to Professor John Fender for overseeing our publications; to Asya Mikhailenko, curatorial assistant, for her tireless work promoting our visiting artists; to Paula Crawford for the insightful essay included in this guide; to Emily McMahon for editorial assistance; and to Lisa Lacher for media relations support. Additionally, we would like to recognize those who work at the Anderson Gallery, particularly gallery assistants Erick Borg, Emily Lysen, Meridith Tenney, Lindsey Thomas, and Angela Warren.

Finally, our heartfelt thanks to those funding this installation. Without the support of the Jules Kirschenbaum Anderson Gallery Fund, *Model City* would not have been possible.

Nora Wendl, Director

Cells (Subterrain), 2002
view from above

Cells (Subterrain), 2002
view from below

Parabiosis II, 2003
view from below

Parabiosis II, 2003
view from above

BIOGRAPHY

Kendall Buster first studied microbiology and received a BS degree in Medical Technology at the University of Alabama before pursuing an education in art. She earned a BFA degree from the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC and an MFA in Sculpture from Yale University, as well as participating in the Whitney Museum Independent Study Studio Program in New York City.

Her work has been exhibited in numerous venues including the Hirshhorn Museum, the Kreeger Museum and FUSEBOX in Washington DC; the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh; the Kemper Museum in Kansas City; the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia; Artists Space in New York City; the Bahnhoff Westend in Berlin; and the NSA in Durban, South Africa.

Buster was recently interviewed on NPR's *Morning Edition* as part of a series on art and science. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sculpture and Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia.

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GALLERY HOURS
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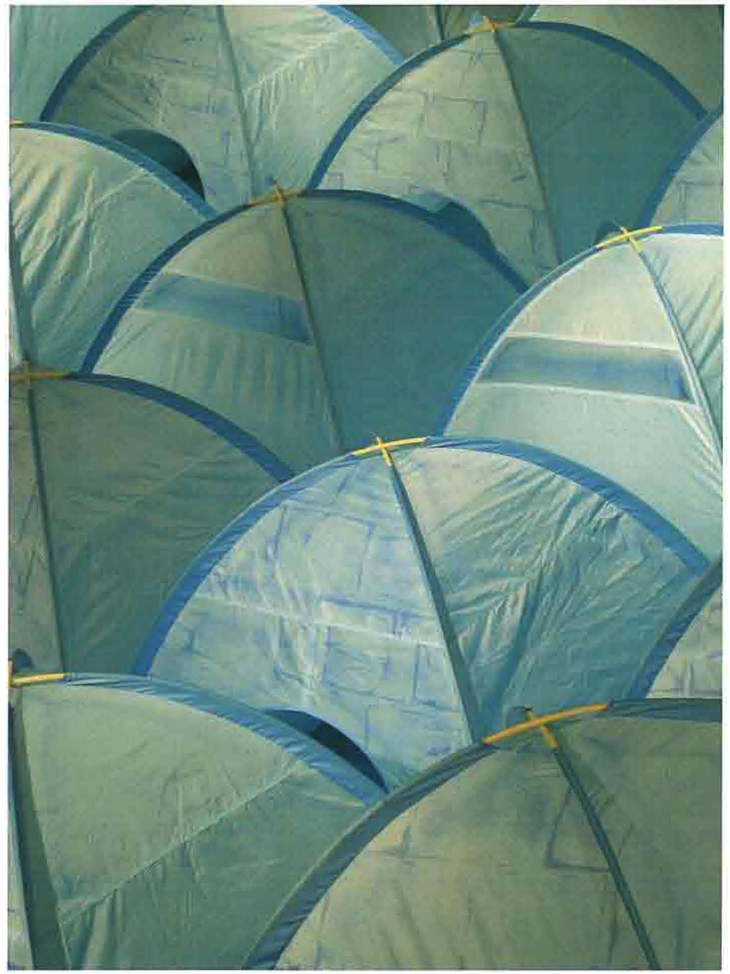
KENDALL BUSTER *MODEL CITY*

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