

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL ● REVIEW



View of Sharon Louden's installation *Merge*, 2011, aluminum, steel and glue; at the Weisman Art Museum.

MINNEAPOLIS

SHARON LOUDEN WEISMAN ART MUSEUM

ON VIEW THROUGH MAY 20

In creating a new installation for the reopening last fall of the enlarged Weisman Art Museum (WAM), artist Sharon Louden was commissioned to take inspiration from the WAM building itself, Frank Gehry's 1993 warm-up for Bilbao, with its curvilinear stainless-steel-plated facade, as well as his new addition and his remarkably fluid preparatory drawings. Last summer, she and a group of helpers spent weeks mounting a quarter of a million pieces of cut aluminum flashing, fastened together with 14,000 screws, in a 1,900-square-foot rectangular gallery and an adjacent passage.

Merge is sited just off the museum's entry, where masses of the small silvery elements in various shapes climb up and over a 16-foot-tall wall. Walk around the unattached end of that wall and your jaw drops as you encounter a vastly greater array, draping the other side, spreading onto another wall, then meandering and piling into drifts on the floor.

The number of parts surely enhances the impact of Louden's installation, yet this is not a work that makes you ponder its assembly. Your eyes don't follow a specific linkage or trace the system of connections. *Merge* is as abstract as some of Maya Lin's public installations

but with a greater sense of mutability. It's possible to see the whole as an expanse in motion, pouring down like a flood and throwing a few random splats on the wall. But it's by no means a determined picture.

Louden—a 1991 Yale MFA graduate, based in New York—is a widely exhibited artist known for installations, many of which have involved numerous flexible vinyl tubes in bright colors. Here the smaller and less distinct elements yield a greater unity—one that is visually alive, like the surface of the sea. The metal glints under spotlights, becoming increasingly active as you move. And as the days and seasons pass, the Weisman's huge skylights offer a changing panoply of light effects. Louden has also used white surfacing in some places (suggesting foam or eddies) and introduced minuscule but decisive touches of blue here and there to hold your eyes in searching the restless surface.

With all these formal affinities between art and architecture, the interior vista subtly draws you outside to look again at Gehry's vertical landscape. Yet the energetic *Merge*, perhaps Louden's best work to date, clearly succeeds on its own merits and would be satisfying anywhere.

—Janet Koplos