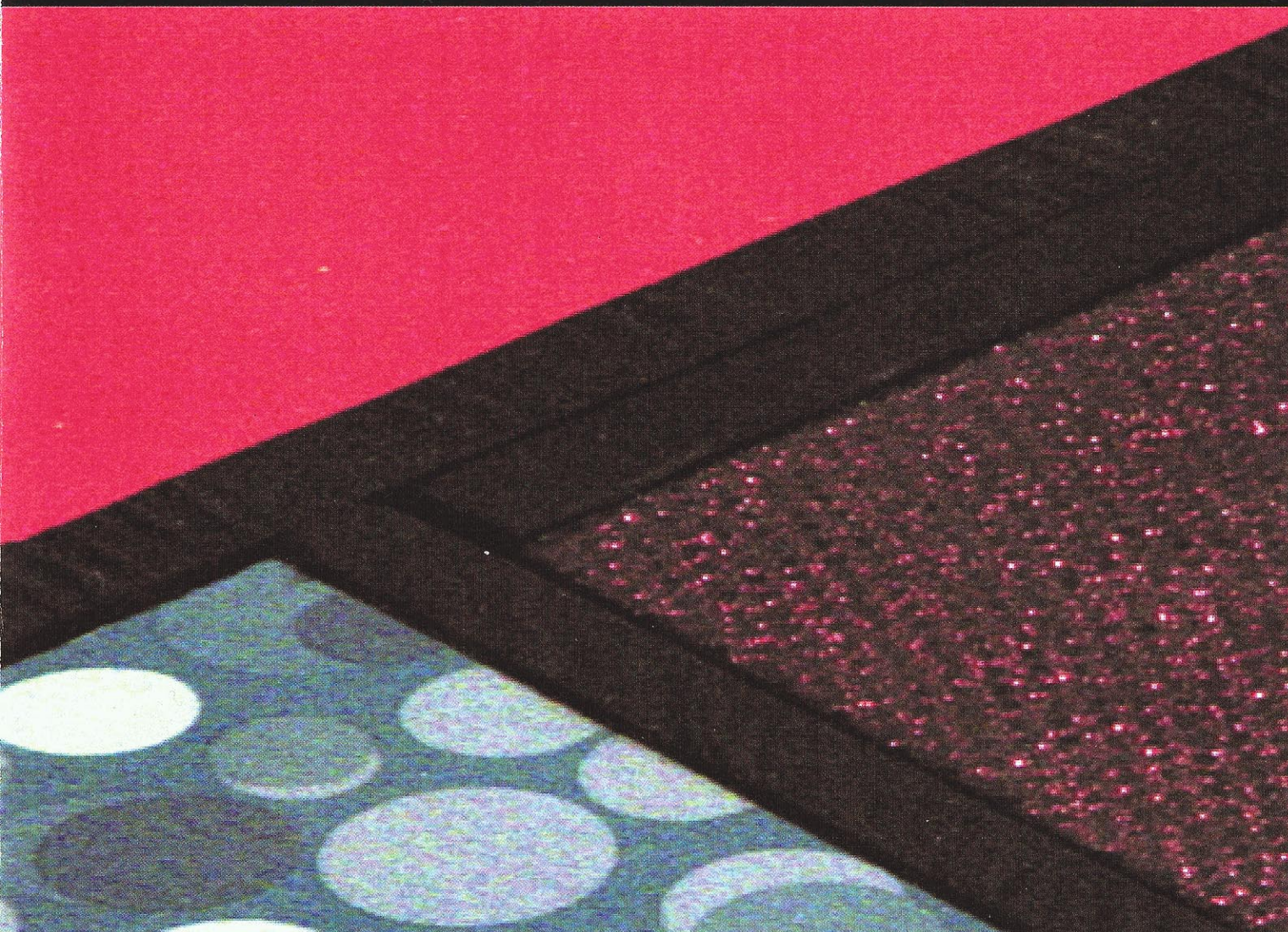
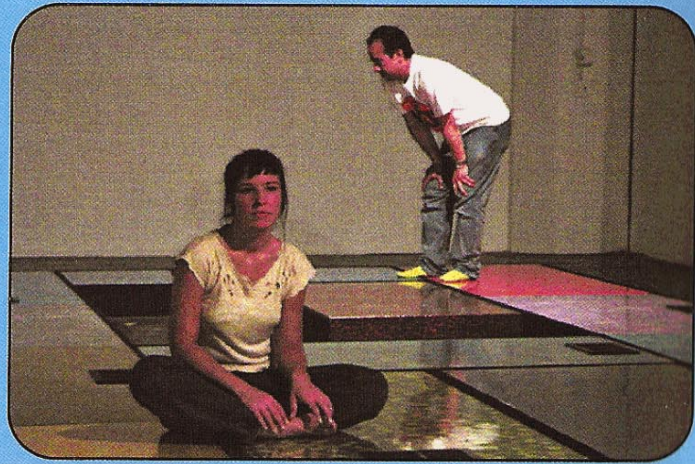


**Kevin Ei-ichi deForest**

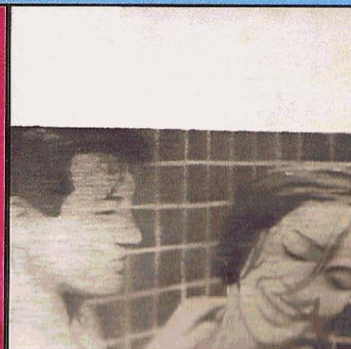
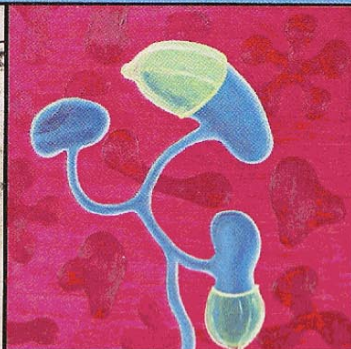
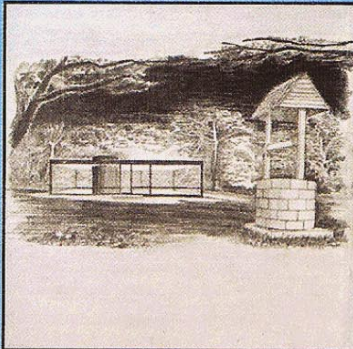
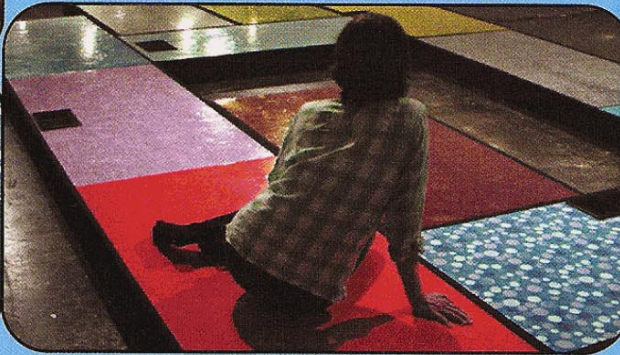
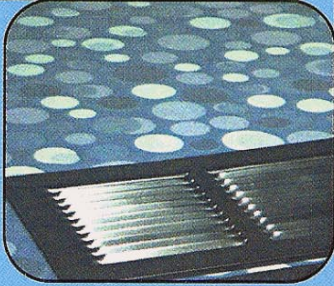
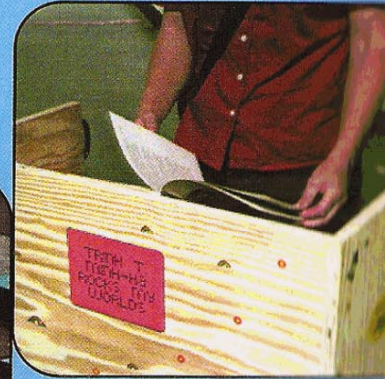
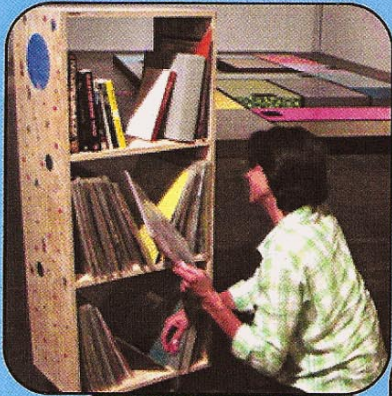
*An Architecture of Hybridity*



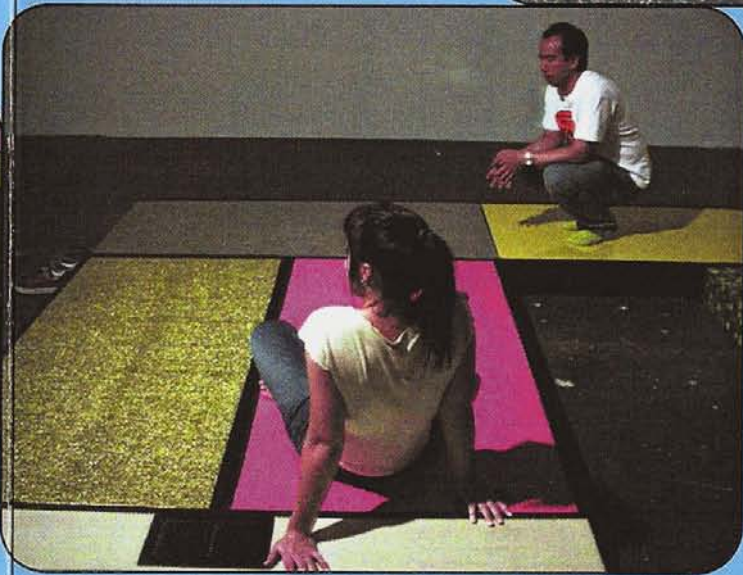
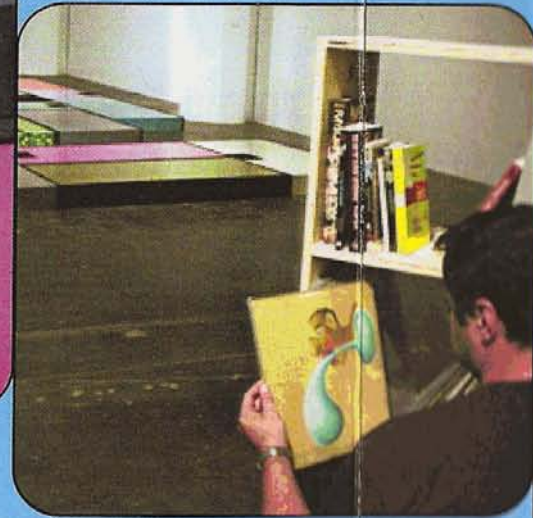
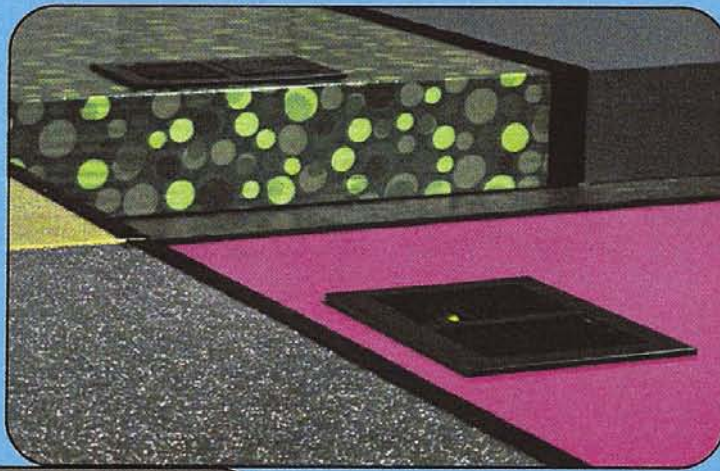
**Doubles**  
~~1/2 the identity~~  
~~Twice the culture~~



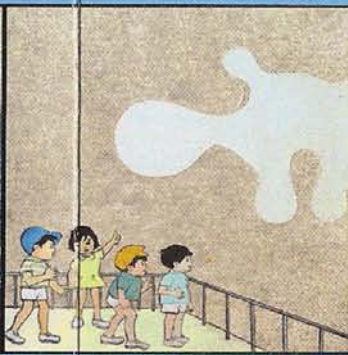
TRINH T.  
MINH-HA  
ROCKS MY  
WORLD'S

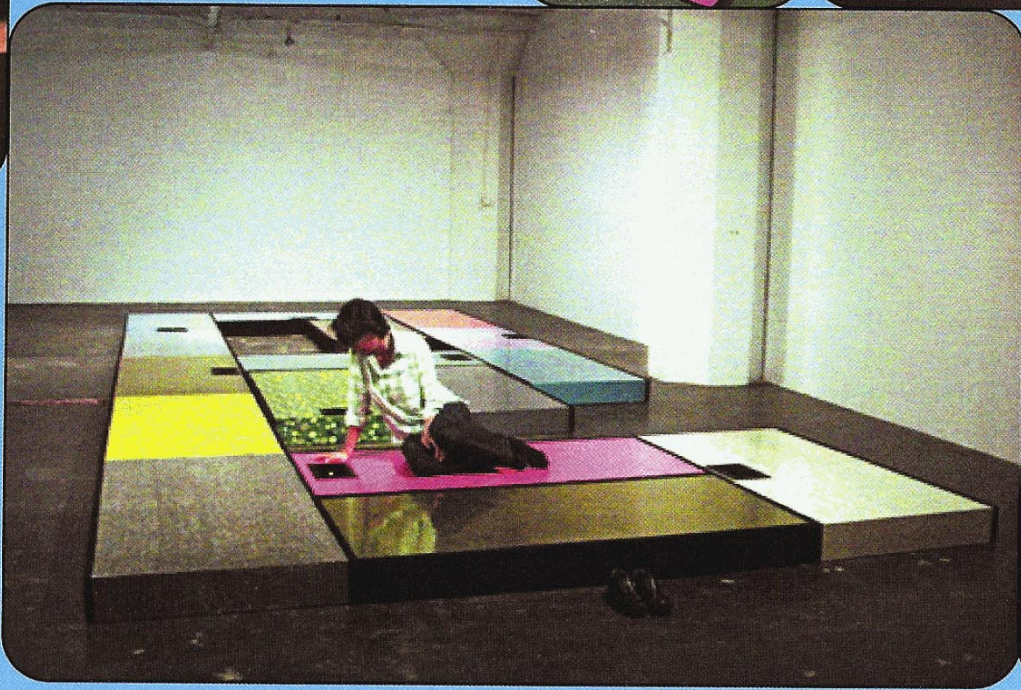
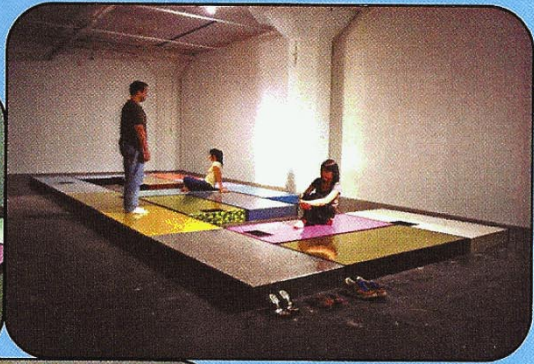


Something's  
smelling good  
in the post-colonial  
kitchen

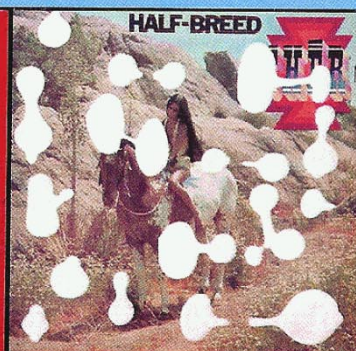
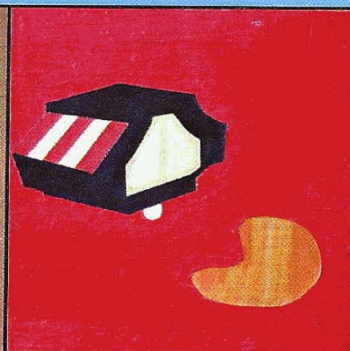
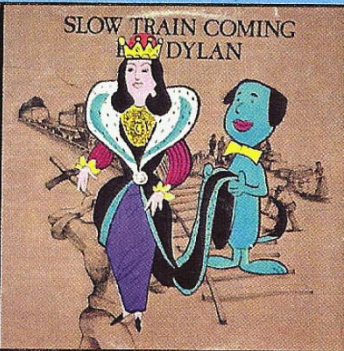


**MAKE ME**  
**JOURNAL FOR**  
**EVERYDAY HYBRID**  
**CULTURE**





*Hybrid Architecture Place:  
Buffalo Murmur Mix 08/2000  
and Disco Library  
(installation views)*



*Selections from  
The Record Shop, 1994-97  
mixed media on record jackets*

## Surrender, Surrender, But Don't Give Yourself Away

The architecture of Kevin deForest's hybridity is a multi-headed psychological hydra and an actual physical space within which source references are reversed and subverted. Japanese interior décor collides with the brashness of popular culture. Album cover art meets painterly concerns. Meditative space doubles as hallucinogenic cosmos. Anxiety coexists with desire.

Kevin deForest's hybridity grows from the artist's own background as a Swiss-Japanese Canadian. His work has always comfortably aligned the schism between mutually-distinct cultures and senses of self. An artist of the generation that came of age in the Seventies and cut its teeth on the do-it-yourself ethos of punk rock, deForest inserts much of rock and roll's ebullient spontaneity into his work. His series of record album covers, produced from 1994-97 and re-inserted into the current residency project, are neither dated nor irrelevant. What record jackets and deForest's painted treatments of them have retained is a boundless panorama of possibility. Some are heavily treated, painted over with thick layers and made into their own solid abstract works. Some riff off Japanese illustration. deForest connects to the youthful identification found on record jackets. They are templates of self-reflection and possibility.

It is not an oblique metaphor. He has inserted himself into many of the record jacket paintings in all manner of portraiture. The record jackets hint at the self-deprecation in deForest's work, hence the inclusion of the cover for Cher's *Half-Breed* album. Straddling a racial and cultural divide is a real issue, something deeply rooted in one's sense of self and place in the world. In earlier times—and even now, in places—such a hybridized reality would prove crippling. deForest's rock and roll heart keeps this possibility at bay, injecting all his work—not just the record jackets—with the persistent pulse of forward momentum. Only one record jacket cover remains untouched, *Raw Power* by Iggy and the Stooges: "Some album covers are just perfect," deForest explains.

For his residency project at Hallwalls, deForest has constructed a new version of a form which he has previously explored: the "tatami mat," the most common design element of Japanese interiors. Ostensibly a method of flooring, the tatami is typically sturdier than carpeting, softer than wood, and can be used for walking, sitting or sleeping. A modular unit that has been an integral part of Japanese architecture for over 1,200 years, its lean, calm form is perfectly suited to the contemplative modernism of Japanese décor. While deForest holds true to the general form and principle of the tatami, his rendition involves specific and intentional disruptions of the traditional form.

In the past, these disruptions have included the extraction of ambiguous shapes from the surface of the tatami or its hybridization with deForest's musical compulsions through the addition of working turntables, as in the *Disco Tatami* piece. In the current tatami, he disrupts its normally placid appearance by covering the surface with an array of overwrought fabric patterns. Its physical form is the same, but its demeanor is distinctly more

glam than the traditional monochromatic tatami. The cut-out forms found in earlier tatami works are modified here to holes fitted with grills, behind which five separate audio tracks play a selection of sampled and recorded sounds, which aspire to bring the ambience of Buffalo—the space of the city, its emotional architecture—into the installation.

Despite the quantity of sounds emanating from the floor, its overall volume is kept low and muted, a cacophony that still aspires to the contemplative quality of the form in which it is encased. deForest's selected soundtracks include improvised piano lines by the artist, a partial homage to avant garde composer Morton Feldman, who spent much of his later life in Buffalo; ambient sounds recorded throughout Buffalo during August 2002, including a walk-through at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery; the audio track to the 1974 disaster epic *The Towering Inferno*; and the artist's verbal monologues describing his impressions of a month spent in Buffalo as a friendly outsider.

The audio segments of deForest's installation offer a particular example of "hybridized architecture," the construction of a new thing from an array of component parts. deForest's plural architecture, while blended together, emits an amalgam of sounds woven into a single emotional tapestry. Ambient wanderings, spontaneous and languid lines of melody, ambiguous snatches of spoken word and—in the artist's oblique reference to 9/11—the fearful and anxious audio of a film that now seems a little less kitsch and a little more present.

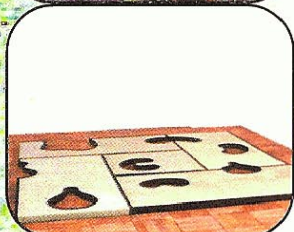
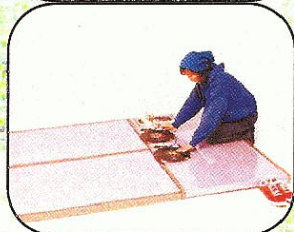
The slow vocal tempo of the artist's monologues alludes to the excruciatingly slow pace of the centuries-old noh theater in Japan. It is part of deForest's residency experience that the pace of life in Buffalo feels toned down when compared to the frantic urban core of Montreal, where the artist spends most of his time. It is by no means an allusion to dullness; in noh theater, the measured pace of the performance evokes elegance, serenity and depth of thought, an ultimately calming influence.

But not too calm. In the space preceding the tatami mats, deForest offers a few items of rolling, anxious furniture—the *Disco Library*—with suggested reading and viewing materials: his record jacket paintings, sundry books collected around Buffalo, and a heavy, coffee table book with extracted holes, peering eyeballs and sketches of infinite circular loops. He is spinning you right round, baby, right round.

These multifarious works are the poetic landscape that Kevin deForest uses to demarcate his place in time and space. He concedes to his inescapable hybridized identity, collapsing visual and aural reference points into a style that nudges the viewer between hybridized psychological spaces. Sensory overload here. Contemplation and quietude there. Near boredom

lurking just beneath the surface.

John Massier  
Visual Arts Curator



from top: *The Record Shop* (Installation view), 1997; *Disco Tatami*, 1998; *Disco Tatami* (detail); *Island of Change—Onnanohito(Girl)*, 1998/99



Kevin Ei-ichi deForest was born in Winnipeg in 1962. He studied in Winnipeg (BFA, University of Manitoba, 1986), Montreal (MFA, Concordia University, 1994) with residencies in Banff (The Banff Centre for the Arts, 1987), Amsterdam (Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, 1993) and Kyoto (Kyoto Seika Daigaku, 1999). He has shown individually in Canada and Holland, with group exhibitions in the United States, Mexico, Germany and Japan. In addition, he has received numerous international grants and awards. He currently lives and works in Montreal.

Kevin Ei-ichi deForest / *An Architecture of Hybridity* / September 14 to October 31, 2002

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