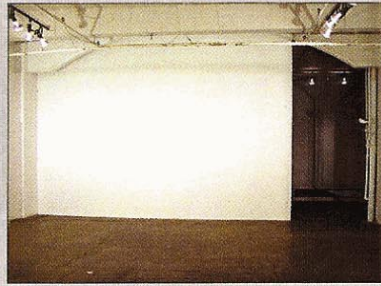
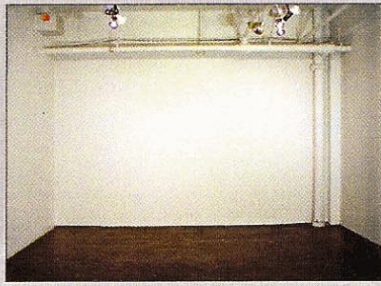


# Karen Henderson

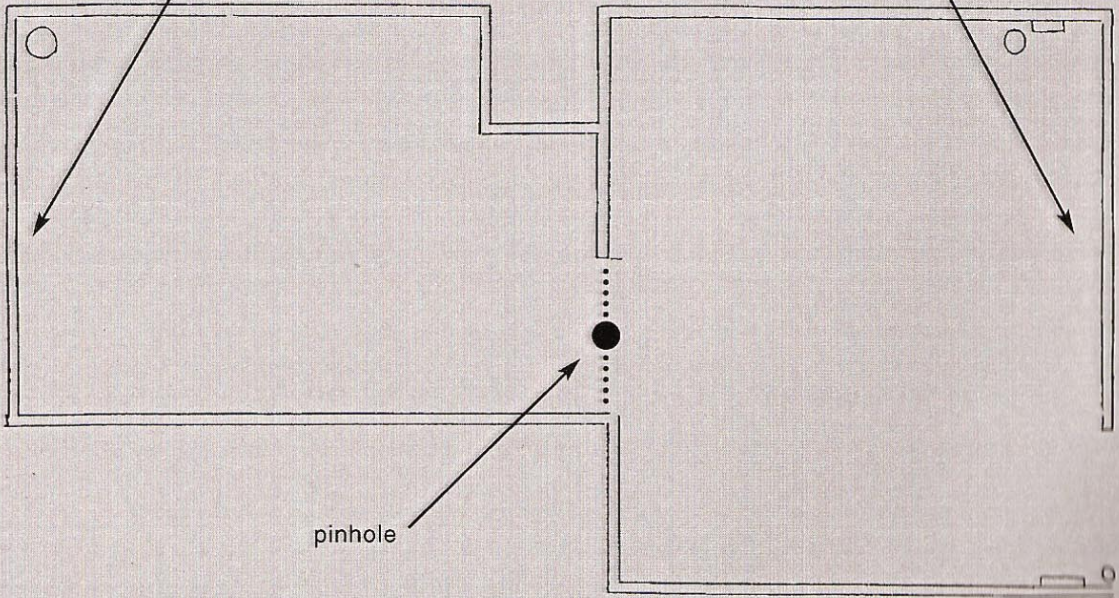
*Gallery cameras: a pinhole between two rooms*

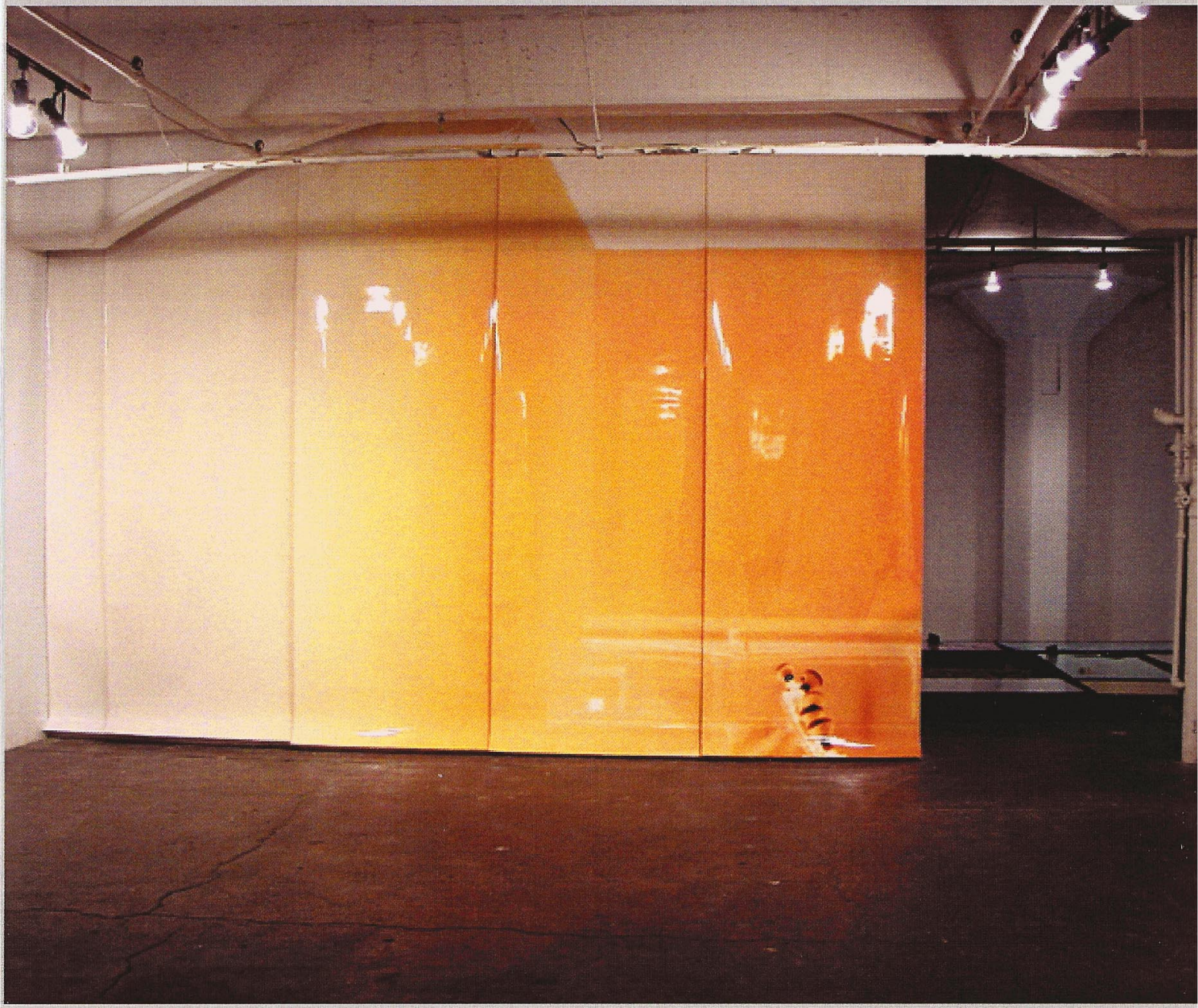






← rear/east project room      front/west project room →





## The Shape of Time

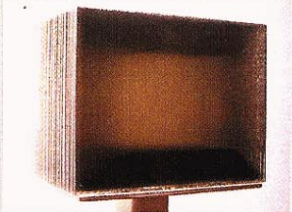
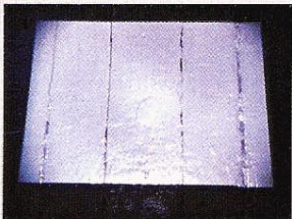
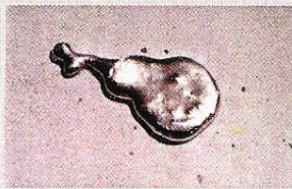
In the past decade of Karen Henderson's work, there have been a succession of images in a succession of guises: ambiguous, ethereal, singular, multiple, large-scale, discreet, emphatically clear, and subtle to the point of dissolution. Her work has always been extremely site-specific—not dependent upon any specific site, but usually dependent upon the fact that it is made in that exact place (whatever the place may be) where the viewer meets the work.

These works have been developed through a variety of processes and maneuvers, often photo-based but also often presented with sculptural considerations in mind. They move through treatments of space and time, of architecture and the time it takes to move through or inhabit space. Almost always implicit is not only the process that created the piece, but the process of the viewer experiencing it, what Henderson once referred to as "the time involved in visibility."

Shotgun reminiscences of Henderson's practice aptly illustrate the diverse directions of her work. 1994: twenty-nine b&w snapshots are culled from the process of re-melting, re-pouring and documenting the same portion of tin. 1995: invited to participate in an outdoor "interventionist" exhibition in Guelph, Ontario, Henderson replaces one clay brick from a side street of the downtown with an exact urethane replica. 2000: Henderson projects a 45-second film on to the exact section of floor where the film was shot, each frame containing a separate and distinct drop of water on the floor. 2002: thirty acrylic sheets, each with exposed b&w photo emulsion image of the gallery space on it, are fitted together and presented as a single object of thirty images of the same thing, the document of a real and imagined space.

When working within a designated and controllable space, Henderson utilizes the immediate surroundings of the viewer as a location for the artwork in order to establish the notion of a ground, a solid and common place from where to begin. Originating the subject of the work in the place where it is ultimately exhibited indisputably reiterates the fact of being in a real place at a specific time. Here it is before us, apparently real and apparently visually verifiable. It is the shaky space between these "indisputable" assumptions that interests Henderson.

For her Hallwalls residency project, Henderson proposed a situation at once simple and epic: to use the two adjoining project room spaces as cameras



from top:

**Melted Tin** (1994)

**Clear Brick** (1995)

**1089 pictures of this floor with a different pool of water in each one** (2000)

**30 photographs of here** (2002)

obscure to photograph one another. As direct as the proposition appeared, the process itself involved a multitude of stages. Each space needed to be light-proof. An ad hoc lens mount was created. Various sizes of metal washers were tested for the one best sized as a workable aperture. A series of tests followed to determine the optimum exposure time. When all the preparatory processes were complete, all that was required was the ability to work on a ladder in total darkness to mount the photographic paper and expose each room to the other.

Like much of Henderson's previous work, final outcomes are almost impossible to predict. Certain parameters are established and reasonably strict methodologies employed. Beyond this, the final work as we see it displayed can be said to have found itself. The artist has steered it toward this point, but with a minimum of manipulation. While the change from a larger washer to a smaller one helped enhance the image resolution, for example, the portion of wall ultimately photographed was beyond Henderson's control. The sections of wall captured on the photo paper are entirely a result of the position of the doorway between the project rooms to each far wall.

Henderson's final images are, on the one hand, accurate documents. They really are these things, photographed in this place. This is true and undeniable. On the other hand, they are somehow simultaneously fictional. They appear to allude to the space as much as document it. The use of a pinhole naturally reverses and mirrors the image. The need to utilize color photo paper (more versatile and practical than b&w) creates images in burnished peach. They are almost like abstracted wall paintings, suggesting the spaces as much as representing them.

At this point, in 2002, these particular physical spaces have been used for fully a decade to install all manner of contemporary visual art. To devise a manner in which the galleries could effectively document and exhibit themselves is to create a subtle homage to the idea of space itself. This is where it all goes up. And this is where it all goes down.

With nothing other than the actual spaces to consider, Henderson's project also emphatically directs itself to the viewer. These are not just documents of spaces within which things are placed for you to see; they are spaces within which you activate that internal process, spaces *within which you see*. The time and process used to create these images corresponds to the time and process involved in looking at them, or anything else installed here. And once we recognize that these images are accurate within certain specifications, other questions rise to the surface—namely, if there is a difference between what is and what the camera sees, what is the difference between what is and what we think we see? Not just here, but everywhere.

The visual aspects of Henderson's art have always eschewed the merely pictorial and instead have usually alluded to something physical. Her work has always reiterated that the visual is not merely a snapshot frozen in linear time but something that moves through an actual—and for most purposes, verifiable—space. It is a thing not only of duration, but also of volume.

This thing before you is not merely an image. It happened. Right here. And it took time. And this is what the shape of that time looks like.

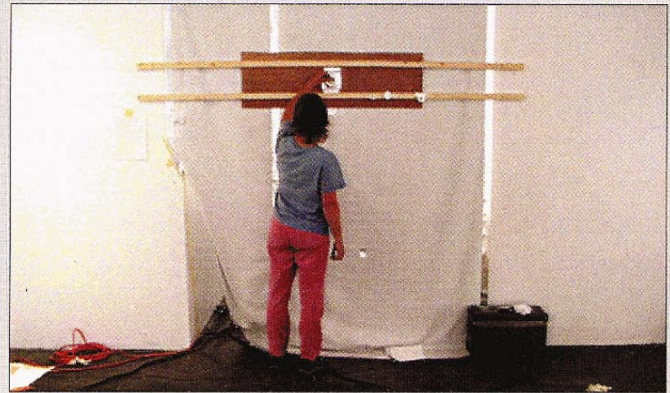
*John Massier*  
*Visual Arts Curator*



above: pinhole (actual size)

right: pinhole in situ

Karen Henderson was born in Scotland, studied art at the Central School of Art and at Camberwell School of Art in London, England and came to Canada in 1986. She received an MFA from the University of Victoria, BC, in 1988. since that time, she has exhibited her work in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including Mercer Union (Toronto, 1992); *Naked State* (Power Plant, Toronto, 1994); *30 Seconds + Title* (Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 1995); Peregrine Artists' Collective (solo project, 401 Richmond Street, Toronto, 1997); *Time Indefinite* (Koffler Gallery, Toronto, 1998); *Version City* (University at Buffalo, Art Gallery, Buffalo, 1998); Present Tense Gallery (Art Gallery of Ontario, 1999); *Four Days at the White House* (White House Gallery, Toronto, 1999); Flywheel Artists' Collective (The Nunnery Gallery, London, England, 1999); *Images Festival of Film and Video* (installation at Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Toronto, 2000); and Gallery 101 (Ottawa, Ontario, 2002). She has lived and worked in Toronto since 1988.



Karen Henderson / *Gallery cameras: a pinhole between two rooms* / September 14 to October 31, 2002

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