

## RIDGEFIELD, CONNECTICUT

### Norm Magnusson

Aldrich Contemporary Art  
Museum

Norm Magnusson's outdoor installation *On This Site Stood* featured seven historical markers whose texts conveyed subtle, yet unambiguous social messages. Installed along Main Street in front of the Aldrich and winding down through the sculpture garden, these artist-made markers interrupted the museum's serene surroundings both physically and mentally. Their prominent placement and pointedly poignant messages guaranteed that visitors took note.

Historical markers are traditionally used by the federal government, states, counties, and local organizations to commemorate a person or event at a particular location. Inherently accessible, markers are usually placed at public sites, for instance, along roadways or park paths. A marker bestows a sense of significance and embodies responsibility and credibility; its content is perceived as educational, derived from and sanctioned by an official source.

Magnusson's aluminum markers are identical to traditional historical markers, but they record events and commemorate people epitomizing the concerns and outlooks of Americans today. The texts that he devised resonate far beyond the specific place they inhabit and act as painful reminders of our reality. For example: "On this site stood: Karen Dewitt, who could not afford the prescription drugs that would have saved her life"; "On this site stood: Ian Wikno, joined the Army Reserve to pay for college, sent to Iraq, March 2005, has not yet returned"; and "On this site stood: Beth Whise, who believes that evolution is a form of intelligent design."

Over the past few years, Magnusson has been using the historical marker as a platform to support his

Norm Magnusson, *On This Site Stood*, 2006–07. Two views of installation at the Aldrich.

long-time agenda of relaying socially relevant messages through art. He has placed markers in various cities around the country, each encapsulating a pressing concern of everyday life. By employing this familiar and widespread method of communication, Magnusson hopes to reach a broad audience that extends beyond already socially aware art aficionados. Despite their critical tone, the markers are neither confrontational nor alienating; instead, they prompt thoughtful reflection.

In his exhibition statement, Magnusson mentioned that he wants to eliminate the practice common to political artists of "preach[ing] to the choir." At the Aldrich, however, he carried out precisely what he has set out to overturn: the markers were installed at the limited location of a museum, rather than dispersed around the town. Average museum visitors would not be shocked by the information on the markers; most would simply walk away, nodding their heads solemnly. That said, the markers conveyed their messages effectively, and those messages are worth noting. They offer new perspectives on issues of which we are already aware, not unlike the information found on the side of the road, on traditional historical markers.

—Yaelle Amir

## CHICAGO

### Amanda Browder and Stuart Keeler

Gallery 400

In "Urban Warp/Weft," collaborative partners Amanda Browder and Stuart Keeler investigate and expose the interrelated, overlapping, and frequently obscure systems that sustain modern urban life. The artists assert that their



projects do not attempt to solve environmental challenges; instead, they use a series of sculptural gestures to respond to "green" trends with the language of fine art.

Browder and Keeler approached the exhibition as a two-part process, treating brainstorming/research and construction as equally vital phases. Urban environmentalism is a hot

topic in the Windy City: the mayor is committed to making Chicago the "greenest city in America," and a host of innovative sustainability programs are underway. The artists conferred with local arts administrators, architects, and even market researchers to generate ideas about how the public understands the concept of "green."