

HILARY PFEIFER

Liminal Space

2006 ITE

This project actually began in late winter of 2005. I came to Philadelphia to visit the Wood Turning Center in anticipation of my residency the following year. Albert took me on the Grand Tour. As we walked past the light well outside the conference room, he mentioned in passing that he'd always wanted someone to create an art piece to go there. It was appropriate for me to work on an installation during this residency, so I kept it in the back of my mind.

When I returned to Philadelphia this summer, I began to look at the space with a closer eye. My first reaction to the lightwell was that it was ugly. It was not preconceived for the current building, but rather, it was created by three waves of architecture coming together. There's the original brick exterior of the Wood Turning Center's space, but the wall of the apartment building across is a hodgepodge of various building materials filling the cavity: brick, concrete, wires and vents, leaves and trash, air conditioners. A more modern red and glass brick addition closes in the space from the west.

The more I looked at the space, however, I started to see that in its ugliness, it was also incredibly intimate. I feel that this light well was a gift to this conference room and the people who use it. The large apartment complex obscures the view you once had from the building. Rather than filling this real estate with utilitarian space, or even bricking up the windows altogether, it was left open so that there would still be natural light in this space created more than a century ago.

The term "center" became very important to me as this project unfolded. This space is in the Wood Turning Center. It is also the center of the mass of buildings that inhabit this city block. "Centering" is also a term used with the lathe--we "find center" when we are making a form round with this machine.

I decided that the pieces in this installation should be stopped at various moments of "finding center." I turned on and off the lathe many times, eager to see what form had emerged between turnings. Certain things would intrigue me when I halted the process in this way, such as the aesthetics of an almost rounded form and the way it would reveal a different silhouette in the flat space that remained. Some of the pieces have multiple centers. I fell in love with the process of discovering forms in a similar way I do in my studio at the sander.

In life, we are constantly finding our centers. Coming to this residency, I was the least experienced with the lathe of all the chosen artists, which, I'll admit, made me feel somewhat insecure before I got here. I came willing, however, to explore this tool and see if it could affect what I already do. To me, I feel centered when I am able to embrace a simultaneous knowing and not knowing in my relations with friends and lovers, and this residency allowed me to be in that liminal space.