

113 | MUSEUMS AND NOT-MUSEUMS

Similarly to Fujiwara, Ellen Harvey creates a museum as a rubric that enables her to explore subjects that may not cohere under a single artistic identity. Her *Museum of Failure* (2007–present) encompasses

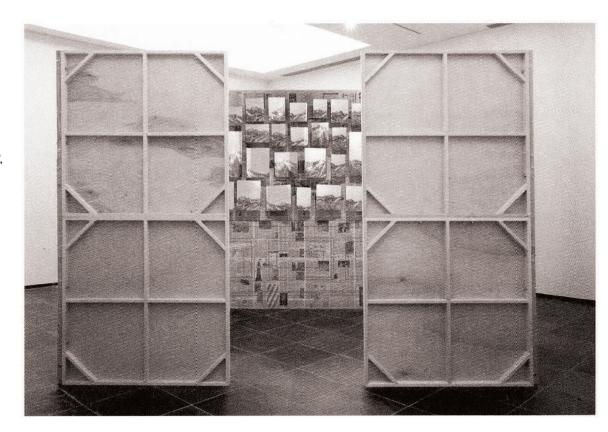


a number of projects that engage how one regularly sees fine art in traditional museums, and each project makes viewing problematic in some way. In *The Room of Sublime Wallpaper 1* (2008) Harvey created an illusion of a salon-style hanging of landscape paintings (illus. 51 and 52). When you enter the room, however, the rectangles that suggested they were paintings turn out to be mirrors, reflecting a mural-sized painting of a landscape, previously hidden to viewers on the walls they couldn't see. Instead of many paintings there is one. The illusion is made complete when one moves fully into the room and the mirrors then multiply the reflection of one's own image. This is a museum that cannot deliver a unified message. From far away it seems to, but close examination makes it fall apart. The structure creates a metaphor for what Harvey reads as museums' destruction of subject-matter. Her works are monumental attempts to bring it back into the frame, albeit in ways

51 Ellen Harvey,
The Room of
Sublime Wallpaper I,
2008, oil on twelve
wood panels, 33
Plexiglass mirrors
mounted on swivels,
newspaper and
tape, each panel
121.9 x 121.9 cm.
Installation view,
Galerie Gebr,
Lehmann booth,
Art Basel, 2008.

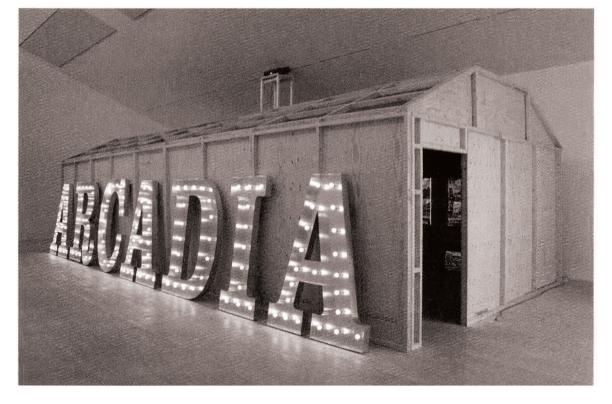
that signal this process.<sup>38</sup> Harvey nonetheless calls her *Museum* of *Failure* an 'anarchist museum',<sup>39</sup> a homage to the idea that art is the last professional arena for the amateur. In calling her projects 'museums' rather than 'work' or 'installations', she opens a wed of difference between her self-interest as an individual and the institutionalized museum that only has use for subjectivity that can be universalized.

In some regards Harvey's *Museum of Failure* recalls the strategy of Claes Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum*. <sup>40</sup> Oldenburg's reversal of museum protocols is clear enough: his installations follow a logic of display but contain objects of little value. Oldenburg's objects acquire value through their accumulation and side-by-side relationships (pieces of wood *do* take on the quality of a ray gun, after all, when there are enough of them). When it was included in Documenta 5, the *Mouse Museum* prompted Harald Szeemann to begin an open-ended research project he called the 'Museum of Obsessions'. Notably, he claimed it was 'only in my head', but he wanted to account for the creative spaces that people design for themselves through collection and display (the next show Szeemann organized



52 Ellen Harvey, The Room of Sublime Wallpaper I, 2008, oil on twelve wood panels, 33 Plexiglass mirrors mounted on swivels, newspaper and tape, each pane! 121.9 X 121.9 C**m**. Installation view, Beyond the Picturesque, SMAK, Citadelpark, Ghent, 23 April-4 August 2009.





53 and 54 Ellen Harvey, Arcade/∧rcadia, 2011-12, 34 hand-engraved Plexiglass mirrors over LumiSheets. aluminium letters, light bulbs, plywood shed, wallpaper paste. paper and video, shed: 2.74 × 4.57 x 10.06 m; looped high-resolution video (colour, sound, 5:14 min.), projection: 3.66 x 10.06 m. Commissioned by Turner Contemporary, Margate. Exterior installation view. 'Revealed', Turner Contemporary, Margate, 16 April-4 September 2011.

was an exhibition in his apartment of the collections and tools belonging to his grandfather, a hairdresser).<sup>41</sup>

What these projects recall, under the sign of the museum, are sarly museums based on personal collections designed to entertain audiences, or sometimes built by an artist to house his or her own work. These are not regulated by disciplines or science, but based

on interest and, often, self-promotion. Harvey drew on this for her work Arcade/Arcadia (2011–12), which was commissioned for the inaugural exhibition of the Turner Contemporary in Margate, Kent Harvey designed a three-quarter scale model of the gallery belonging to painter J.M.W. Turner, which he had built at the age of 28, an act that far pre-dated his eventual fame. It was a nineteenth-century museum inside a contemporary art museum, then. For the interior Harvey made a series of landscape paintings depicting present-day Margate, not in paint but etched into mirrored Plexiglas. They were installed inside the gallery in the same number and locations as the paintings that were in the gallery at Turner's death (illus. 53 and 54). If these were differences Harvey drew forward, she also wanted to indicate similarities between the two spaces. She lined the outside of Turner's gallery-model with theme park lettering modelled on the signage found in Coney Island. This neighbourhood in south Brooklyn is a vibrant, multicultural one that is still home to a beachfront boardwalk and a cluster of amusements and rides. A video of the sea at Coney Island was shown, linking the beachfront to that of Margate, itself a former seaside resort that has seen better days but that is now caught up in a cycle of urban renewal.<sup>42</sup> Even when reinstalled in years that followed, the work is a series of gestures within gestures,

55 Ellen Harvey, Arcade/Arcadia, 2011-12, 34 hand-engraved Plexiglass mirrors over LumiSheets, wood frame, aluminium letters, light bulbs, overall: 2.74 × 4.57 × 10.06 m. Exterior installation view, 'Arcade/Arcadia', Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences, Charleston. wv. 15 August-16 November 2014.

