

Sarah Traedwell

### Architectural abstractions: free space of unregulation

Catalogue portion on Chiara Corbelletto

#### *geometry*

Lopdell House is described in architectural histories in terms of the Spanish Mission style. Defined by the use of adobe-look plaster or stucco and Cordova terracotta tile cappings, it includes the use of arches, plaster ornamentation, metal grilles and 'barley twist' columns. Lopdell House has been considered as an architecturally significant building in part because of small, geometrically detailed pieces. Decorative elements in the building, seen to have significance in conservation terms, include window surrounds, leadlight windows, tessellated floors and handrails brackets.

The status of decoration is complex in architecture which depends upon ornament to distinguish itself from building. But ornament also unsettles prevalent notions of functionality and efficiency valued in New Zealand. Corbelletto's austere and elegant work in Lopdell House, hanging screens of translucent geometry, refuses simple minded allocations. The pared back screens, precise, lacking tolerance, industrially constructed, introduce doubt about oppositional categories into the building.

Rather than voyaging outside the orthogonal, which computers now allow, Corbelletto's work precisely employs the orthogonal as the primary organisation system. The accurately shaped plates of heavy translucent film look like they should fit together to make an impervious surface but rounded corners curve away from the universal grid leaving small gaps which become spiralling stars. New figures reshape the ground as a site for constellations. Overlapped, the pieces produce small crescent moons of doubled material causing visual effects that disturb the perfection of exact geometry.

As Rajchman suggests the release from the strictly orthogonal allows "unanticipated encounter and connection, letting people see and be seen from odd angles, creating momentary little worlds ..."<sup>1</sup> Behind the screens of translucent, overlapping geometry that Corbelletto inserts into the gallery moving figures become blurred and recoloured. Rendered partial, unexpectedly vivid details appear through the gaps in the system.

The modules of the construction, stamped out exactly, are shaped like rectangular blocks under pressure; subject to a prevalent force the pieces bulge and the possibility of a responsive, rather than a rigid, grid is raised. Rectilinear geometry subjected to compressive force takes on a certain roundness which in turn releases figures from within the geometry of Lopdell House; the curved edges of the pieces repeat the curvature of the stairs. To move vertically within the building is to curve away from and return to orthogonal structure.

Deleuze and Guattari writing of a protogeometry discuss the circle as "an organic, ideal, fixed essence, but roundness [a]s a vague and fluent essence ..."<sup>2</sup> and it seems that Corbelletto works from the precise geometric shape to articulate tendencies, inexact but rigorous, within the shapes.

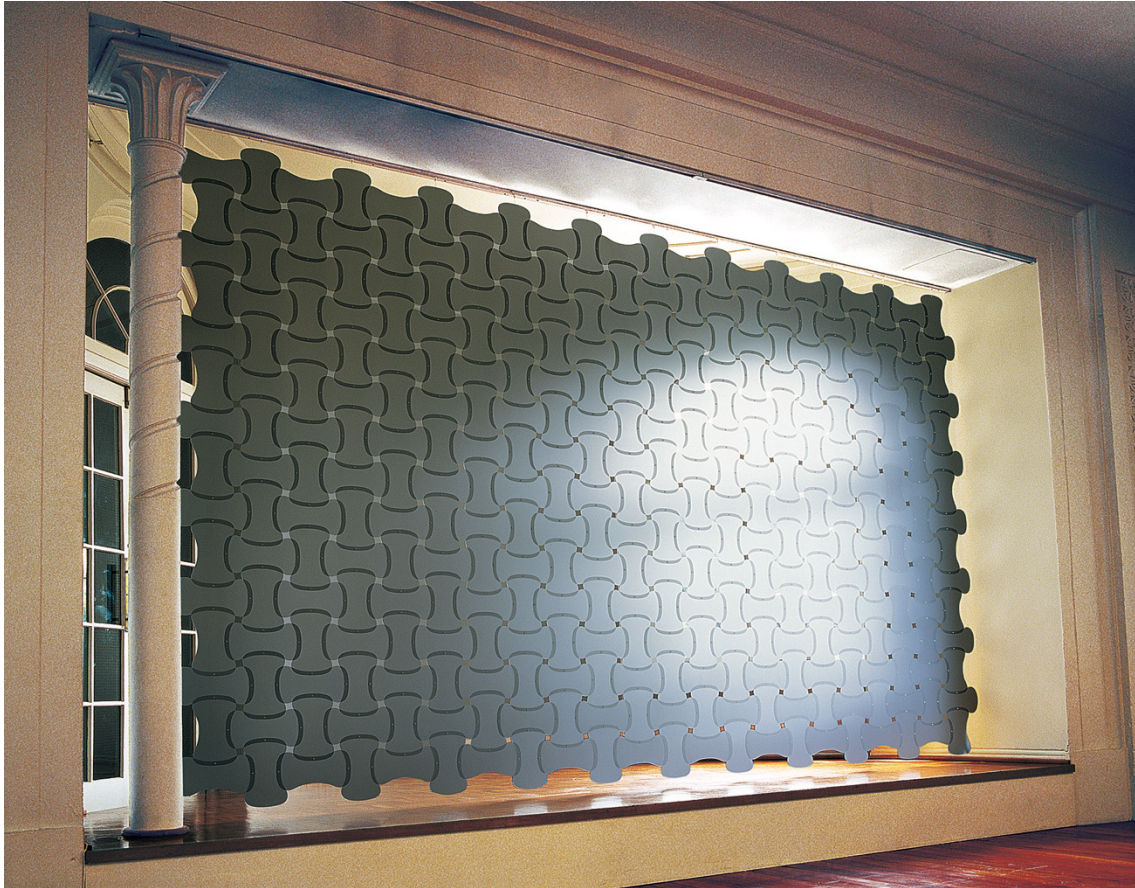
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<sup>1</sup> John Rajchman, *Constructions*, Camb. Mass.: The MIT Press, 1998, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987, p. 367.

The hanging translucent screens are concerned with blur, with impressions, with misreading and veiling.

Corbelletto places her screens across selected openings in the building. Openings in architecture usually allow passage; the movement of bodies, air or light. The screens are employed in Lopdell House to veil openings and permit only partial passage, incomplete access. New technology that cuts the shapes so precisely is employed to restrict modernist dreams of clarity, availability and transparent circulation; modern light that was to lay bare is reshaped in terms of fluctuation.



*Pavesini* screen part of the *Archimedes' Garden* series. 2003 330 semitranslucent polypropylene components.

### In house: on the fringe of heaven > Installations at Lopdell House

The five separate artists, Christopher Braddock, Chiara Corbelletto, Paul Cullen, Andrea Low and Marcus Williams work between the allied disciplines of architecture and installation art with forces that are operational in site and siting, plan and grounds and in matters of orientation. Diagrams of occupation and ornament are projected onto Lopdell House opening new territories and surfaces for practice and consideration.