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Hyde Park Art Center exhibition transforms building into beach

Jacob Wittich | For the Sun-Times



"Shoretime Spaceline" features a 200-yard quilt of blue fabric that resembles the sky when viewed from below and Lake Michigan when viewed from the gallery's second floor. | Jacob Wittich/Sun-Times

The Hyde Park Art Center will be transported through time this month to the site of the fabled Chicago Beach Hotel during the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.

Artist Karen Reimer's newest exhibition, "Shoretime Spaceline," opens Sunday at the Art Center, 5020 S. Cornell Ave. It transforms the center's main gallery into the shore of the Chicago Beach Hotel. That hotel, built in expectation of the Exposition, stood in roughly the same location as the Art Center until it was demolished in the 1970s.

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"I was caught by that story of the hotel that was actually right on the beach," Reimer said. "The beach has been built out a lot, as has most of the lakefront, so the idea is to take sand and put it back to make the beach come back."

Reimer said the Chicago Beach Hotel's developer supposedly expanded the property's land by dredging sand from Lake Michigan and using piers to hold it on the shore.

She thinks the developer's "gilded" mentality that he could create land was absurd but similar to societal attitudes she encounters today.



Local artist Karen Reimer's show "Shoretime Spaceline" opens May 22 at the Hyde Park Art Center, 5020 S. Cornell Ave., and will run through Aug. 13. | Jacob Wittich/Sun-Times

"We seem to be having a capitalist moment that seems similar to me," Reimer said. "Of course there are regulations now, but there are other ways in which people just take. So the gilded age is relevant to us again — the incredible overconfidence and godliness to just make land."

"Shoretime Spaceline" will feature an interactive exhibit using both floors of the gallery. The first floor will be covered with 40 tons of sand and will feature a wooden boardwalk made from nearby trees that age back to when the hotel stood.

A 200-yard quilt of fabric hangs above, representing the sky. The second floor overlooks the fabric, which obstructs the view of the sand and resembles Lake Michigan.

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Allison Peters Quinn, director of Exhibition and Residency Programs for the Hyde Park Art Center, curated the exhibit. She recruited Reimer to fill the gallery because she was a fan after working with her in 2000 for a previous show.

"This is the first time I've seen the fabric up, and I'm amazed," Peters Quinn said. "It looks so modernist and like stained glass, so I am very impressed with the graphic patterning that's happening."

Sabina Ott, a professor of Art & Art History at Columbia College Chicago whose installation "Who Cares for the Sky?" occupied the gallery before Reimer, said she identifies with Reimer's show because it uses perspective to offer various points of view of the artwork.

"It's absolutely beautiful," Ott said.

"The fact that it's up above and then below so that you are looking down and then you are looking up so it messes around with your point of view is disorienting," she said. "It's very strong."

The Hyde Park Art Center will hold an opening reception for "Shoretime Spaceline" from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. Admission to the center is free, and the show will run through Aug. 13.



The exhibit will feature 40 tons of sand and a wooden boardwalk representing the beach of the fabled Chicago Beach Hotel during the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.

Peter Reese (left), preparator at the Hyde Park Art Center; Will Krauland, exhibitions preparator intern at the Hyde Park Art Center and a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; and artist Karen Reimer wait for more sand to be delivered during the project's installation. | Jacob Wittich/Sun-Times