

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

'Interiors' invites viewers to explore beyond the visible

By Mary Thomas

ART REVIEW

You ascend to a quiet space. You hear a sound. You aren't sure whether it's from without or within.

This will be your experience throughout "Interiors," which fills the second floor of the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts until March 30.

Curator Vicky Clark begins her first full year of exhibitions with an auspicious show that is appropriate for a quiescent season that is usually painted in gray and white. But water flows below still surfaces, and there is activity here, much of it delectably cerebral.

Individual rooms of works by six artists relate by theme and compound one another's references. A disconnectedness/disconnectedness component adds a surrealistic sense of walking through someone's night of dreams.

Clark says that she's "been fascinated for quite a while with how art can take a visual form, yet it goes so far beyond the visible." These pieces are concrete objects, but they suggest much more. And they do this in a variety of ways.

Faith Wilding's "Womb Room" is a feminist exploration of domestic forms and symbols. She brings the personal domain into the public so it may be re-examined and entered into the discourse. Crocheting, a seamstress's medium, is used to produce a provocative three-dimensional drawing.

Delanie Jenkins addresses the private side of ideology in "Veil." Angled needle points stick through a rubber curtain to spell out a descending comment from Freud's "Femininity." By displaying thought in a public space, Jenkins removes it from the intimacy of book pages and opens it to scrutiny.

In Jain Machell's "Bed Book 2," a television monitor recessed into a bed is divided in half. Frenzied forms pulsate to pop music make frustrated attempts to connect across a gap. Greasy stains on sullied sheets that cling to the walls suggest past activity.

Jennifer Charron fights back against media bombardment and models like Freud with "'cause I'm a way too introspective, I think." In a dark room, a monitor plays overlapping talking-head images of

the artist while a white stool and headphones beckon. Sitting in the multicolored glare of a flashing video with abrasive sound clamped over each ear is like being interrogated during a blitzkrieg.

Mark Perrott's photographs of the closed Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia are of an actual place and speak of the past as well

as the present. They are extremely sensitive and intoxicatingly beautiful with their large format, strong tactile component and masterful incorporation of light. Stay in the room and the voices come.

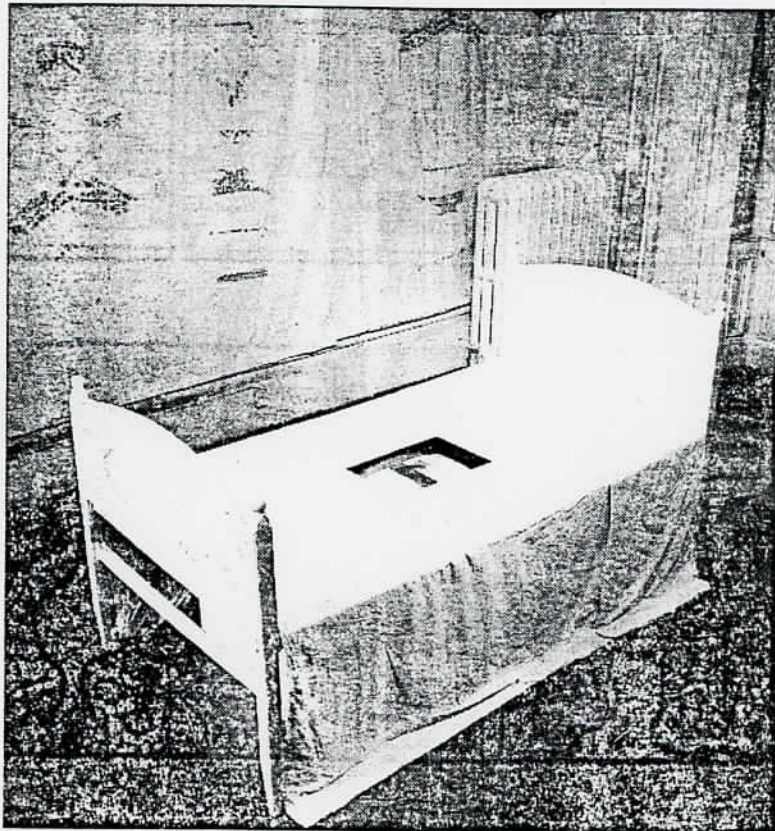
They continue as disembodied whispers in Adrienne Heinrich's "Persistent Voices." Three African-American poets talk about race in a space that's public but sheltered. A curtain covers most of the entry to

the black painted room, the only light source of which is a singular luminescent ship that floats like an ethereal paper nautilus. "We did not come by way of Ellis Island" slides into your consciousness. Indeed,

This show inspires the kind of questioning Clark hoped for with a building that itself, she points out, has a history that has taken it from a private to a public space.

"I mean, what on earth did the artist have in mind when he made this? I mean what is this?" Charron's voice asks.

By the last room I think we know



Jain Machell's "Bed Book 2" is part of the "Interiors" exhibition at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts.

To decompress, go downstairs and enjoy the 67 works in the Pittsburgh Society of Artists exhibition (through Feb. 10).

In the main room, see Katherine Kushner Gardner's "Testimony for the Silenced," sculptural necklaces (or are they yokes?); Barbara Jamma Smith's surprisingly tough "Snowbird"; and Tammy Bauder's "Kildoo Falls," which evokes a moment on the trail.

Aileen Zollweg's rich painting, often access the subliminal. "Angel in the Barn" seems straightforward until one tries to define where the floor of the old structure ends and the sky behind begins; then the presence of the angel takes on new meaning.

In the small room, photographer Suzanne Kemper and Bobett Pflieger redefine the commonplace for noteworthy results.

Mary Thomas is a free-lance art critic for the Post-Gazette.