



Artist Karen Brummund stands in front of a home at 126 Sears St. in Ithaca, where she'll stage a public installation Friday night. (Photo by Rachel Philipson)

Building Art

Karen Brummund's installation will transform a Fall Creek home

BY LUKE Z. FENCHEL

A home in Ithaca's Fall Creek neighborhood will be a site for an hour-long art installation Friday, April 1.

Nestled on a quiet street overlooking Cascadilla Creek, 126 Sears Street is like many area buildings: modest, unassuming and almost invisible. But from 8:15 - 9:15 p.m., the artist Karen Brummund will transform the site with projections of drawings of the house made by the artist as well as other community members and collaborators.

In the last four months Brummund has done five new public installations: in a 1950s warehouse in Atlanta, a modern museum in Buffalo and an old yacht club in Ireland. Last year she was awarded a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship, joining a community that includes Spike Lee and Donald Margulies.

Her "time-based drawings," transform architectural structures: by projecting images onto buildings, or by attaching drawings onto the façade itself. Her work calls attention to our environment, but in a more ephemeral way than attaching a bronze plaque would.

For this project, Brummund solicited drawings from the general public, and the installation will include work from 32 people: a group that includes artists from as far away as Idaho and Rhode Island; draws from graphic designers, neighbors and friends, and spans a vast age range. Artist and programmer Jason Bernagozzi designed an algorithm to prevent the sequence of the drawings from repeating. (Note: there is no on-site parking. Please park on neighboring streets.)

This interview was conducted by email, and then by phone.

Q: 126 Sears Street isn't the only example of Greek Revival Architecture in town by a long shot - even the street has a slightly more grand example at 112. How did you decide on the site?

Brummund: I was looking for a Greek Revival house downtown. I needed it to have specific technical requirements for setting up the projection. This house is an early home in Ithaca that Historic Ithaca helped me identify.

The couple that owns this house recently bought it, are renovating it and are interested in the history of the house. There are other practical reasons, like

trees don't block the view.

This is the second part of a longer project I am doing on Greek Revival architecture. The first was the site in Trumansburg. Working with a different form of the style is part of how this project will develop. I wouldn't normally do another installation so close to the one last fall. But it got such a great response that I was asked to do another one downtown.

Q: Would you talk a bit more about the Greek Revival architectural movement and your interest in it?

Brummund: It was an early architectural style in independent America, and its peak of popularity was between 1825-55. Its rise occurred within the same time as Ithaca's boom, and so much of our city is related to the movement. Every type of building incorporated it: you see it in prisons, churches, monuments, but also with your neighbor's house. It's popular to the vernacular, not just to official or important buildings.

Greek Revival is a political statement

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Greek Revival is a political statement on a number of levels. It was at a time when we were trying to define ourselves as a nation, but it was also coincided with western expansion. I find it has an uncomfortable relationship with itself and America's cultural identity. It was copied across the nation, almost thoughtlessly.

Q: This installation follows one last September at the Waterburg Chapel. Would you talk about how the two are related?

Brummund: The Waterburg Chapel was built by a man for use by his family and neighbors. It's in the same style as the grand Greek Revival buildings like Latrobe's Baltimore Basilica. Both installations involve the subject of Greek Revival architecture. They both use digital projection to collage images related to the style with the building itself. At 126 Sears Street, I am incorporating drawings of the house itself and collaborating with Jason Bernagozzi to use interactive software to process the video signal.

Q: Please tell us a little bit about Jason Bernagozzi.

Brummund: Jason Bernagozzi is a video and new media artist from Rochester, N.Y. I am collaborating with Jason to design the interactivity for this installation. On Friday, the projection will be a real-time manipulation of the video. Jason wrote the processing algorithms that will control the video signal.

While at Waterburg, the images were ordered by me; at 126 Sears Street, the algorithm will move forward and backward based on the images themselves. So every time you watch it, it will be different.

Q: The artist Paul Chambers has done a lot of work restoring the Waterburg site.

Brummund: In a sense I thought of that as almost a two-person show. Working at Waterburg Chapel was a privilege because of Paul's work and how he thinks about his property. It was a great experience being able to work and see one of my installations in that setting. I think people who come to both will notice a difference on the streets in Ithaca. This one feels like you're in your everyday. This is just Ithaca.

Q: How does this work relate to your time-based drawings and other earlier installations?

Brummund: I am interested in drawing as a form of translation that continues to explore how we see our environment. Both the paper and video installations give me context for asking similar questions.

Q: Contemplation, community and sustainability are all current buzzwords. What reaction are you hoping for with this piece?

Brummund: By doing something temporary in your neighborhood, it becomes part of your memory and the stories we tell in Ithaca. Next time when we're walking by, we'll notice something new. This is an example of how art enriches the city. By working in public space, I

am exploring new ways to see our place and time in our everyday environment.

Participants who submitted drawings are engaging the community in a creative way. In the installation, one person's drawing of the window is both different and the same as another. So you have an opportunity to see multiple images at the same time. And, hopefully, people might see it as something completely new.

To learn more about the artist, visit www.karenbrummund.com.