

Andrea Dezsö

Sometimes in My Dreams I Fly

**DOME
BRAIN
MAN**

**PUMPKIN
TEETH**

*Pumpkin toothed
double headed
biped*

**QUATRO
DEXTEROUS
LEAF-BRAINED
MAN**

**ASTRONAUTS IN
TRIO
FORMATION**

**NERVE
MAN**

**FEM
ASTRO
WITH
LEAF-
POWER
PROPELLER**

**SOMBER
FLYING
MACHINE**

**CARROT
MAN**

*SHY
Fly
LEAF*

**CARROT
MAN**

**FASTIDIOUS
LITTLE
Fly
WING**

**CORRODED
CLADDER**



Andrea Dezsö

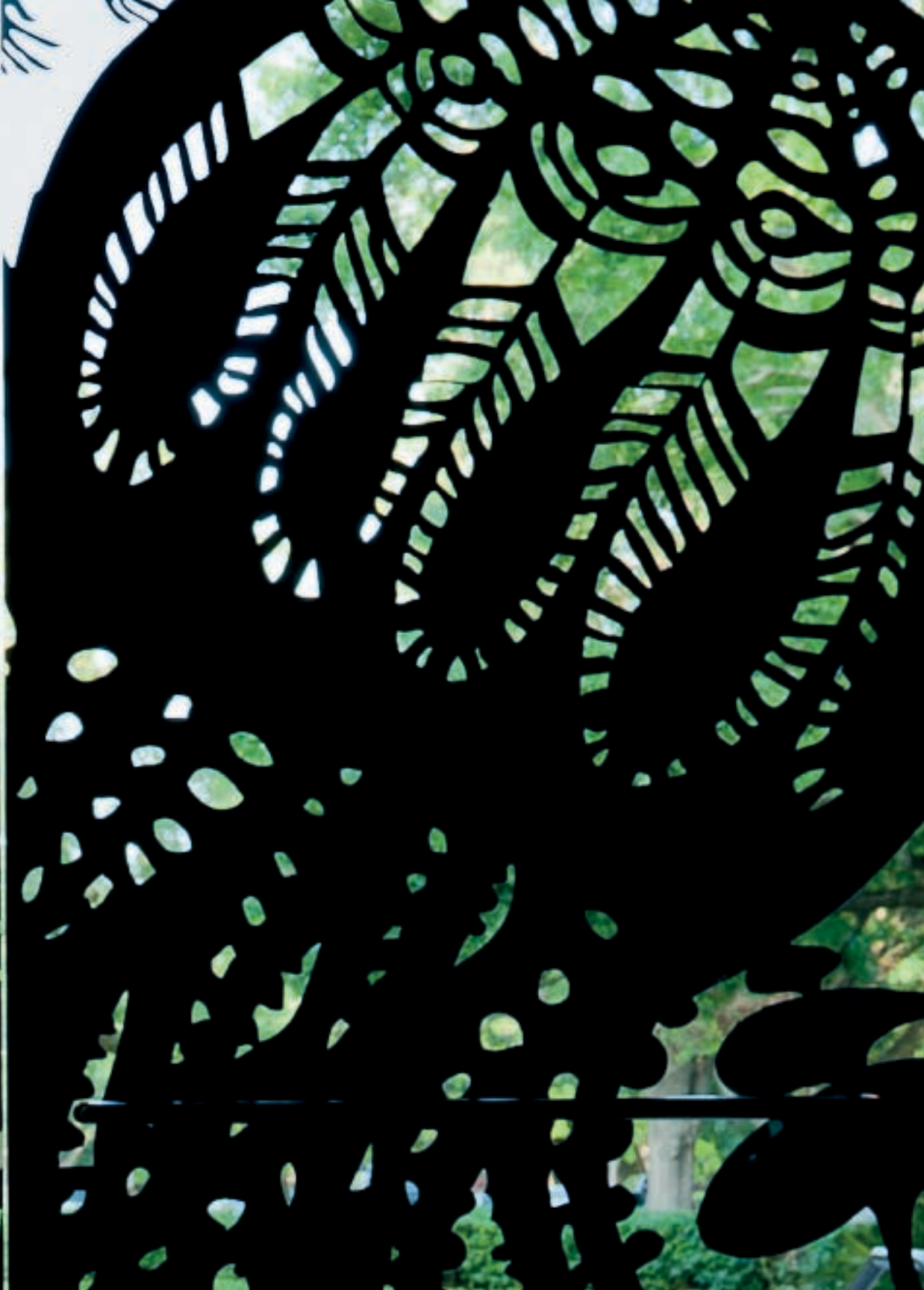


8 APRIL - 8 AUGUST 2010

Sometimes in My Dreams I Fly

Andrea Dezsö

Rice Gallery
HOUSTON, TEXAS





FOREWORD

People often ask how we choose artists for Rice Gallery; how we recognize an artist's potential to create a large-scale installation. To "have an eye" or the ability to judge through a combination of training, experience, and instinct, whether a work of art is "good" or "bad" is helpful. For Rice Gallery, having an eye also means being able to look at even a small work of art, like Andrea Dezsö's tunnel books, to tell whether its character is of great scale, both formally and in terms of the artist's ideas. I commend Joshua Fisher, Rice Gallery's Assistant Curator, on his "eye," his impressive ability after only three years in the curatorial field, to recognize this in Andrea Dezsö's tunnel books. Josh worked closely with Andrea to oversee the details of her installation and to track down a myriad of consultants to help her achieve the effect she wanted. Andrea notes, "Josh played a major part in bringing my vision to life, staying level headed when I felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of what we set out to build."

We thank Matthew Schlieff, Lecturer and Production Manager in the Rice Theater Program, Department of Visual and Dramatic Arts, who generously shared his expertise in theatrical lighting to help create the work's otherworldly atmosphere. Although Andrea brought hundreds of intricate, laser-cut figures with her, she needed more. Thanks to laser cutting assistance from Carlos Amaro, Engineering Design Technician in Rice's Oshman Design Kitchen, Andrea was able to "increase the population" of her installation here. We are also grateful for the impromptu consultation and advice given by designer Ignatz Gorischek, Vice President for Store Development, Neiman Marcus Group, while visiting his son Alex, Rice '10.

I especially thank Andrea Dezsö for an extraordinarily crafted work of art as original in form as it was mesmerizing in effect. Each day we saw visitors with their faces pressed against the glass, peering in at *Sometimes in My Dreams I Fly* for minutes on end, seemingly lost in thought. We continued to receive inquiries about the work for months after it was deinstalled. Like old fairy tales, Andrea's work reaches deep into the psyche in ways that are magical, strange, scary, and like some of our dreams, unforgettable.

Kimberly Davenport
Director

INTRODUCTION

When I first saw Andrea Dezsö's *Living Inside* (2009) installation of tunnel books in the group exhibition, *Slash: Paper Under the Knife*, at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, I was immediately drawn into what felt like some kind of otherworldly fairy tale ranging in tone from whimsical to grim. Each book was a chapter full of surreal imagery that distilled an internal world of memories and dreams. Two hands reached across a red garden of sprouting, plant-like internal organs. An iconic woman with her stomach cut away to reveal a landscape of internal fecundity peered out of the corners of her eyes. Disembodied limbs passed along a conveyor belt in an austere factory. A gigantic grasshopper lay sleeping (or maybe dead) surrounded by skyscrapers. A gold-helmeted, leotard-clad gymnast defied gravity in an industrial wasteland, and two schoolgirls in bright red dresses played in an eerie forest. These are just a few examples of some of the vignettes depicted in Andrea's installation of 30 books displayed side by side in two horizontal grids. Unlike conventional books that lie flat with illustrations that must be flipped through to be seen, each tunnel book was a 7 x 5 x 6-inch box-like sculpture that sat upright on a shelf and housed a miniature, three-dimensional scene. Andrea created the elements for each small scene by intricately cutting and painting paper figures and forms. She then layered these pieces one behind another in the box-like housing to create the foreground, middle ground, and background. These layers were dramatically spotlighted by miniature LED lights to create something akin to a mini-stage set. The way the painted pieces receded (or "tunneled") back in space meant that looking into each work was like peering into a painting where the parts that give a two-dimensional painting the illusion of space had been teased and pulled apart to create a small-scale, three-dimensional world.

This spatial quality and the idea of looking into a world you could not physically enter made me think that Andrea could do an interesting installation designed to sit just behind Rice Gallery's large front glass wall. Soon enough, I saw Andrea's vision for such an installation firsthand. In early January 2010, almost immediately after stepping off of the plane, Andrea came into the Rice Gallery meeting room carrying a makeshift suitcase ingeniously made out of a bright orange cardboard box with duct tape handles. She unfolded the box's panels to reveal a scale model of Rice Gallery's 15½-foot-high by 44-foot-wide glass wall and her proposed installation, which was all mind bogglingly made in miniature and entirely cut from paper by hand. Employing her tunnel book technique where elements of a scene are layered in space, Andrea proposed making a series of cave-like tunnels that would recede deep into the gallery space. The tunnels would span the entire front wall of the gallery so that visitors would not actually enter the gallery space but would peer into these

Opposite: Self Portrait with Inside View, 2008
From the tunnel book series Living Inside



tunnels through the gallery's glass wall. The installation was Andrea's vision of an imaginary lunar landscape inspired by her childhood in Transylvania, Romania where she was fed news and propaganda about Sputnik as a symbol of Soviet strength and progress. Andrea titled the installation *Sometimes in My Dreams I Fly* alluding to how as a child, space for her was an imaginary place where she often traveled, or as the title alludes, "flew" to in her mind. This escape tactic was a byproduct of life in a communist society where even travel between neighboring cities was heavily restricted.

Soon after Andrea's site visit, work began. She sent plans for the lunar tunnels, which were made at the gallery by cutting irregularly shaped holes that would decrease in size into large panels of Gatorboard. Rice Gallery preparator, David Krueger used a Dremel hand tool to cut the openings to Andrea's exact specifications, so that once the Gatorboard panels were pieced together and placed one behind another, the openings would appear to be cave-like tunnels that curved and narrowed as they went back in the space. (The Gatorboard layers were painted according to Andrea's instructions with successively lighter washes of green to heighten the illusion of a receding, deep space.) As Andrea created the designs for her tunnels in New York, she also drew and laser-cut from paper the aliens, astronauts, half-plant/half-people, animals, water tower-like structures, and organic forms that would become the inhabitants of her lunar landscape. Andrea FedEx-ed these characters just ahead of her arrival at Rice Gallery for what would be a labor-intensive, six-day installation period.

Installation began by building a series of rectangular plywood frames to hold the Gatorboard layers and space them apart. The frames were a series of rectangular modules that were positioned just behind the glass and spanned nearly the entire 44-foot-wide wall. The largest frame (12 x 8 feet) was at the center of the installation. The deepest frame was at the far right of the gallery wall and included 13 layers that extended 20 feet back into the gallery space. The front glass wall was painted black except for unpainted areas that would become the viewing holes where the openings (or tunnels) in the Gatorboard were placed. While installing, it became evident that daylight coming in from the gallery's exterior, arched windows produced a glare on the unpainted areas of the gallery's front glass wall that obstructed the view and would make achieving the desired artificial lighting effect very difficult. Thinking on her feet, Andrea

(seemingly effortlessly) enlarged some of her lunar characters on a computer to create a composition of silhouette-like figures that tumbled and danced along the gallery's exterior arched windows. This design was then cut from black vinyl and adhered to the windows to block much of the sunlight. Once this solution was in place, Andrea and her assistants strung together special fluorescent lights and placed them along the base of each Gatorboard layer. Borrowing from a technique used in theater lighting, different colored gels, some as small as postage stamps, were laboriously laid over the fluorescent lights to subtly mix green, yellow, red, purple, blue and other colors to illuminate the installation.

Left: *Model of Sometimes in My Dreams I Fly*

Right: *Inside the Heart, 2009*
From the tunnel book series *Living Inside*



When *Sometimes in My Dreams I Fly* was complete, the gallery's front glass wall was completely transformed, atmospherically glowing with intense color and mysterious scenes and worlds that visitors peered into as they moved across the installation from tunnel to tunnel. No two scenes were alike and the experience was something like the first moments of stepping out of a taxi in a bustling foreign city, full of things at once familiar and strange and left to our own interpretation.

There were leering cockroaches, tiny flying creatures seemingly buzzing from one tunnel to another, "space jellyfish" floating in solitude, characters strolling along the cave-like terrain, some calmly standing and observing, while others precariously jumped, fell, or stumbled. All the action was set amidst abstracted industrial structures that looked like something between water towers and silos with intricate ladders and latticework. In one tunnel, a power line snaked far back from electric tower to tower. As the color of light slowly changed from a bright green in the foreground layer to a bright white in the background layer, the wire took on the quality of a frenetic line, drawn into what deceptively felt like an infinite space. Similarly, in another tunnel, concentric circles of outstretched, miniature arms and hands ominously receded in the distance. As one approached the center of the installation, the tunnels gradually increased in size culminating in the largest opening at the center, a roughly 10-foot-high by 6-foot-wide tunnel with large water tower-like structures, a silhouette of the Sputnik satellite in the upper right corner, and abuzz with the activity of space characters walking, tumbling, and flying around. The color in this section shifted from a dark forest green in the foreground to a magenta infused purple, to a cooler grey blue, to a mint green and finally, to a light yellow background that gave the illusion of great depth and atmosphere. This was an incredible feat since the transformed components were nothing more than cut paper, Gatorboard, and fluorescent lighting with colored gels. Visitors filled the gallery's guestbook with comments like "I flew!" and thanked Andrea for transporting them. Others wrote that the surreal blend of imagery that felt dreamlike was like nothing they had ever seen before and that they came back many times to take in all the details and to even invent stories about the characters. As one visitor summed it up, "Thank you! I've been on an amazing adventure today, and it will not end! This is a wonderfully awesome explosion of imagination!"

Joshua Fischer
Assistant Curator



EXCERPTS FROM GALLERY TALK
AT OPENING LUNCHEON 9 APRIL 2010

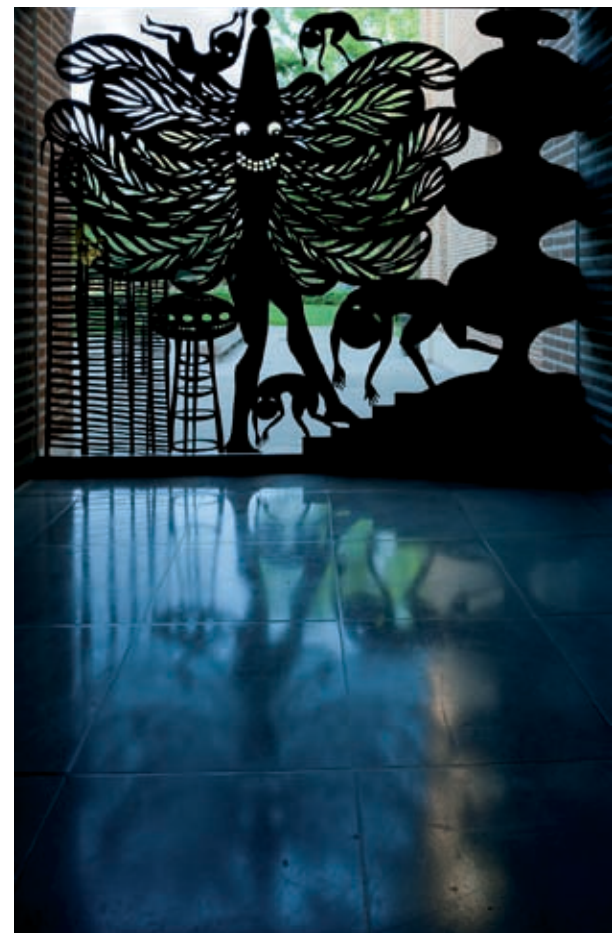
Andrea Dezsö: I want to tell you how this project came into being. I do work on a much smaller scale. In fact, the pieces that Rice Gallery curators Kim Davenport and Joshua Fischer saw in New York at the Museum of Arts and Design were 7 x 5 x 6 inches-deep tunnel books, and that is the scale I usually work at. When Kim, Josh, and I met and they asked me if I would be interested in making something on a much larger scale, I said yes immediately because I thought it would be a unique opportunity, a challenge, and I wanted to give it a try. In January, when I came to Houston, however, and actually stood in front of this wall [gallery's glass wall] and saw how vast this space is, I got a little bit intimidated by it.

Just like in nature or in real life, in this space, things can range from half-inch or smaller to 12-feet or larger. To create that range of elements, we used two techniques: one was [for] the big layers, which are made of Gatorboard, a Formica-foam-Formica sandwich. Those were hand-cut here at Rice Gallery with power tools. It is very difficult to cut. In fact, it is impossible to cut by hand because it chips, so you need a lot of expertise to cut them as intricately as I designed them in the small scale. The little elements that you see in there are all laser-cut. What's interesting about this is that I usually hand-cut my paper cutouts so this is the first time that I used the laser cutter for my work. We had to use the laser cutter because there are hundreds of little objects and elements that go into this installation, and it would have been impossible to do that by hand. I laser-cut these in New York at Parsons, where I work – it's a design school – and shipped them [the laser-cuts] down here where we put together all the different elements that had been fabricated in different parts and different places. It took six people six days to put it together.

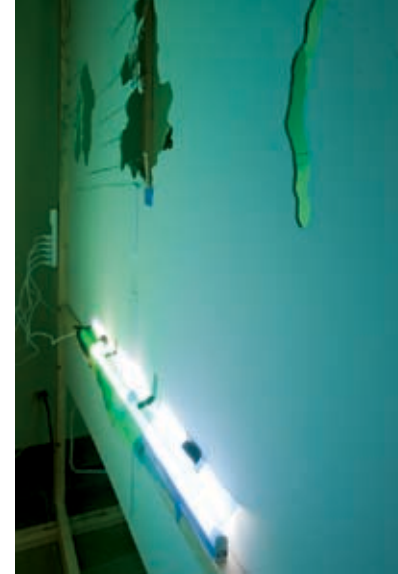
I want to tell you a little bit about the inspiration and the theme for the project. It is titled *Sometimes in My Dreams I Fly*, and it comes from two sources. The first is that I was thinking how site-specificity would work in this space. We are in Houston and this ties in with my own interests and past. I grew up in Romania in the 1970s and 80s during the Cold War when we were not able to travel outside of the country. Sometimes even travel inside of the country was difficult so most travel took place in our imagination or by reading books. Through reading, we traveled to different exotic places; we also traveled in dreams, in our imagination, and in storytelling. My second source of inspiration was the Space Race. As a child, one of the things that fascinated me most was the Space Race. Even though there were no more places to discover on Earth because everything was mapped out and figured out and found, there was this excitement during the 70s of people discovering new galaxies and new universes and walking on the moon. This led me to collect space stamps and other things related to space. I was inspired by the bold and propagandistic imagery that characterized that era of man landing on moon and man doing all kinds of fun things without gravity.

Putting these two things together, the fact that I couldn't travel except in my imagination and Houston's involvement in the Apollo program got me to thinking and I recalled the Apollo 13 mission, the one that never made it to the moon. The mission was called a "successful failure" because even though the astronauts did not land on the moon, they were able to overcome their technical difficulty and return to earth. The famous phrase, "Houston we have a problem," was uttered during this expedition. The Apollo 13 astronauts had to return so only in their imagination were they able to set foot on the moon. This, combined with my own interest in space travel got me to thinking about an imaginary lunar world. If I could go, if I were able to travel to the moon, this is what I think I would find.

And what things would I find? They are landscapes with seemingly natural and seemingly man-made objects in them, machines and space ships and water towers. Creatures inhabit this landscape. What I am trying to do here is not necessarily tell a linear story with one possible course and one possible ending, but instead, I am trying to create a set with characters, with inhabitants of this set, and put it out there for people, for viewers, to be able to make up their own stories. I don't want to tell you what these creatures are doing. Are they coming? Are they visitors, or do they live there? Are they working, or are they having leisurely time? Are they threatened? Are they running away, or they are trying to get into places? Are they building something together, or is there chaos and confusion? It's really up to each one of you based on your dreams, your experiences, and your interests to make up your own stories about these creatures, some of whom have names. If you look at the large cutouts on the windows [Sewall Hall's exterior wall], some of these creatures appear there. Here [pointing to window closest to her] is Carrot Man, the large guy who is running around. On the window on the other side of the gallery is Brain Man. There's Small Leafwing Diver in the middle with a Space Jellyfish, and if you look inside the brochure you will see all the different creatures with all their different names and little short snippets of who these creatures are. The way I worked with them is by combining human anthropomorphic elements with either plant elements or animal elements and populate the space with them.



Pages 12-13: Installation rear view
Above: Vinyl figures on exterior window



Above: Installation rear view, fluorescent lighting, and colored gels

Pages 16-19: Laser-cut paper figures

QUESTIONS FROM AUDIENCE

Q: How difficult was setting up the lighting?

AD: The lighting was quite difficult to set up, but that is because I was working at this large scale for the first time. As Josh Fischer said, a theater lighting expert gave us advice; he actually told us about gels. The lighting is done with fluorescent tubes and a number of different colored gels placed over the tubes. We did not use a single color for each layer; on a single layer you can see several colors that blend into each other because we didn't overlay one or two gels on a light, but instead, we overlaid postage-stamp sized colors in certain areas to provide areas of colors that blend with the other ones. It was a lot of trial and error. We worked on the lighting for two days. You would put on the light in say, layer four, and think you had something so you would come out here [foyer], look and realize you didn't, so you would need to figure out whether you should move that tiny gel on top of another gel two inches to the left or exchange it for another one all together. You do that, you come out again, you take a look and you go back. That's what we did for two entire days. There were six of us, so it took a while.

Q: How did you make the figures?

AD: With a brush pen I drew the little people in my sketchbook as a silhouette, a black and white silhouette. I scanned them, digitized them, vectorized them, and prepared the files for the laser cutter.

The laser cutter cuts sheets of paper 24 x 29 inches, and I arranged the little figures on the paper so that I could cut as many as possible from one sheet. The pieces were so intricate, and there were so many of them that one sheet took about 45 minutes to laser-cut which means it took 16 hours to cut this stuff on the laser cutter when usually everything takes about 10 or 15 minutes. It took a lot of time just to cut it, and then we shipped it here.

Q: What is the actual depth of the installation?

AD: The layers are a little bit less than two feet apart, maybe 18 inches, something like that. Some of the sections have seven layers, and some of them have 15, 18 or 20 layers. Some sections go back 20 feet and others go back less.

Q: Do you have plans for this installation after it closes at Rice Gallery?

Well, if there were a gallery or a museum that wanted to show it, and they would be willing to ship it, install it and take care of it, then I would be very happy, but if that doesn't happen then it's going to be disassembled and it will just live in people's memories.





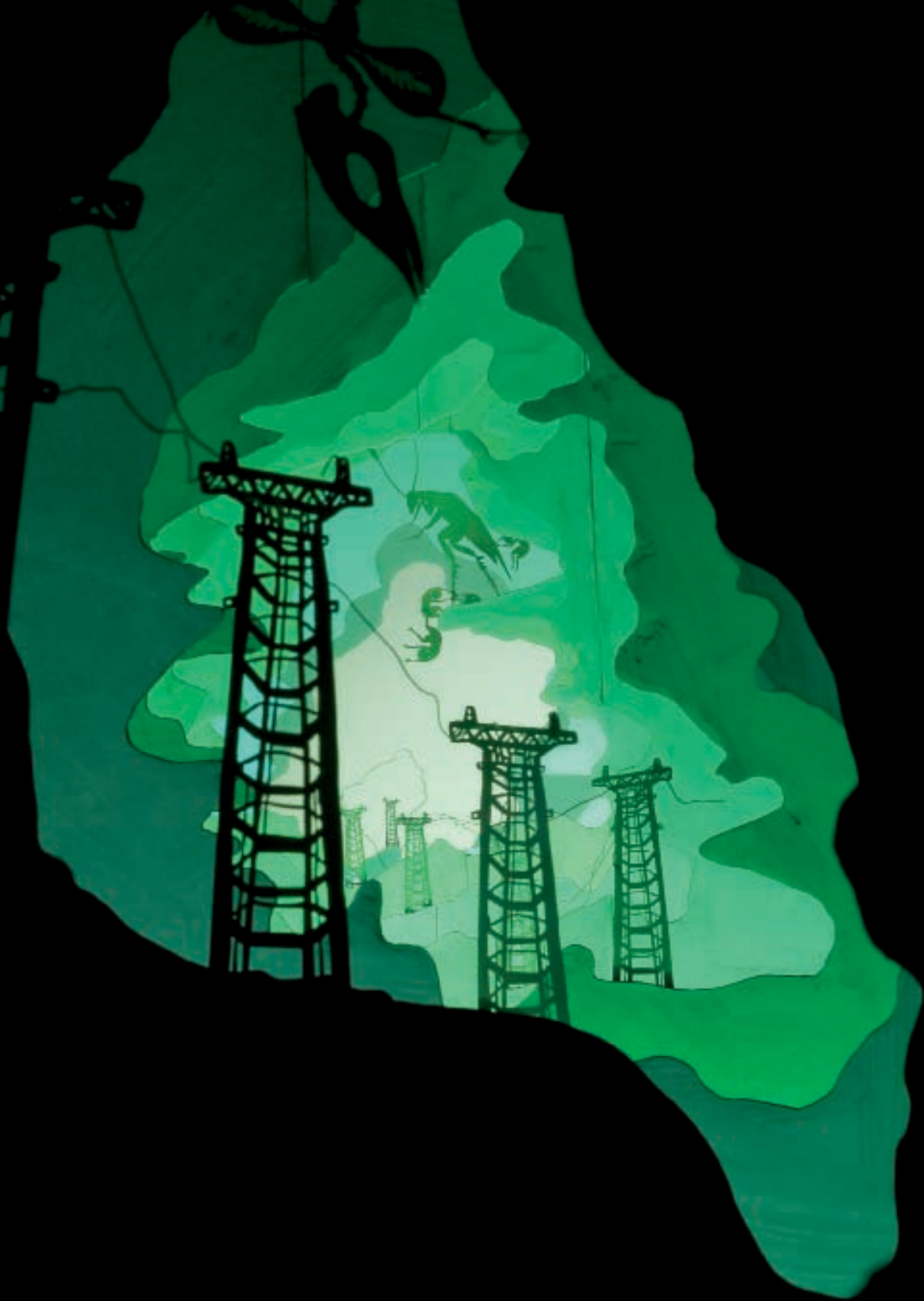






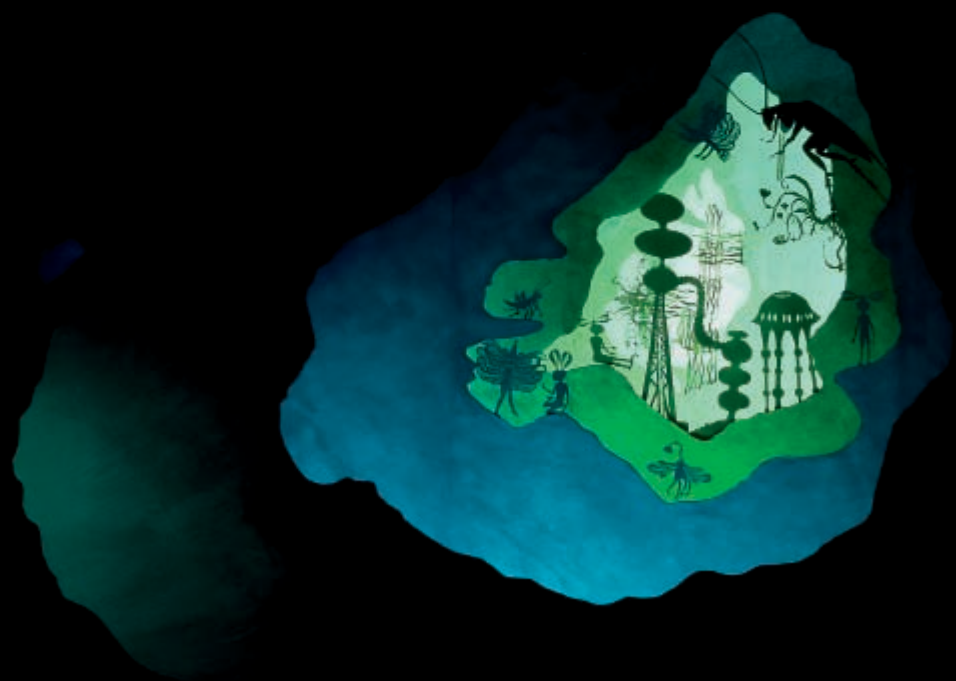
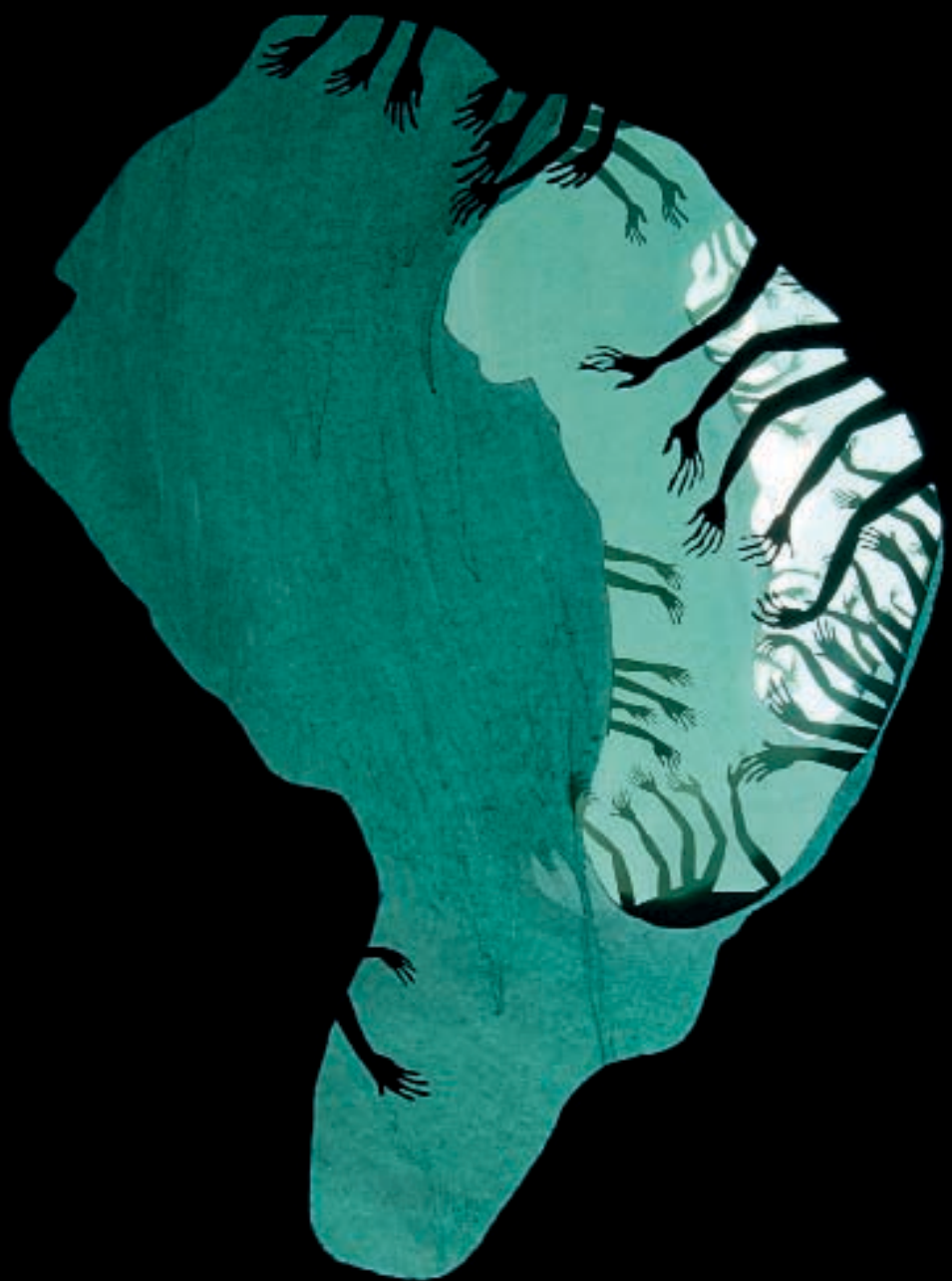
























ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in the Transylvania region of Romania, Andrea Dezsö holds an MFA in Visual Communication (1996) and a BFA in Graphic Design & Typography (1994) from the Hungarian Arts and Design University in Budapest. Her work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions at museums and galleries, including *Slash: Paper Under the Knife* (2009) at the Museum of Arts & Design, New York, the Cheongju International Craft Biennale 2009 in Korea, and a 2010 solo show at Frey Norris Gallery in San Francisco. *Community Garden*, Dezsö's large-scale, public mosaic commissioned and owned by New York's MTA Arts for Transit program, was awarded Best American Public Art 2007 by Americans for the Arts. *Nature Rail*, her second large-scale public art piece for the MTA, will be installed at the 61st Street stop in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. Dezsö lives and works in New York.



Andrea Dezső, *Sometimes in My Dreams I Fly*
Commission, Rice University Art Gallery
8 April – 8 August 2010

Rice University Art Gallery is located in Sewall Hall on the campus of Rice University, 6100 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77005, and on the web at ricegallery.org.

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Endpaper

Photographs by Péter Hapák
Self Portrait with Inside View, 2008 and *Inside the Heart*, 2009
Both works from the tunnel book series *Living Inside*
hand-cut paper, thread, acrylic paint, mixed media, 7 x 5 x 6 inches
Pages 9, 11

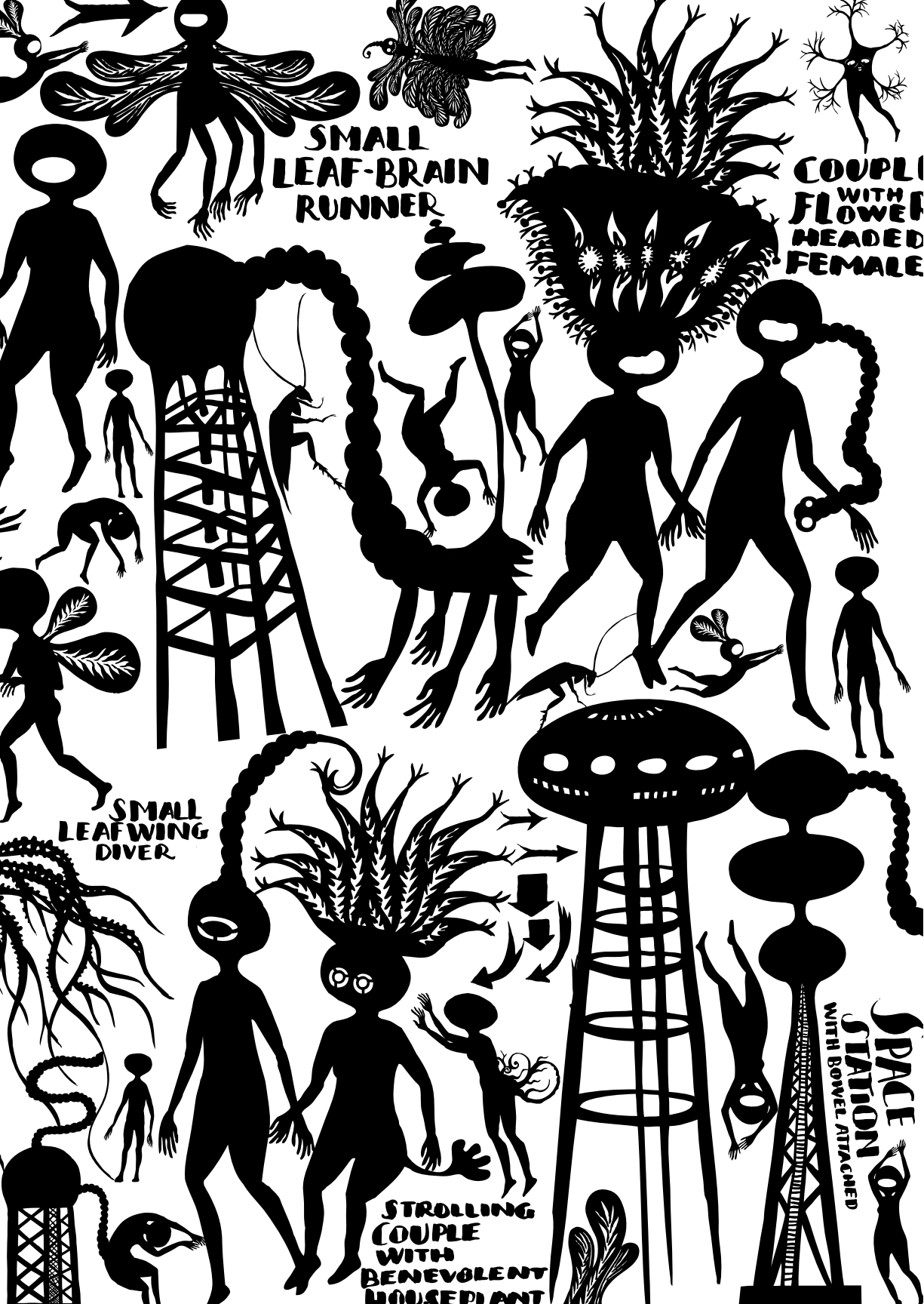
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**SMALL
LEAF-BRAIN
RUNNER**

**COUPLE
WITH
FLOWER
HEADED
FEMALE**

**SMALL
LEAFWING
DIVER.**

**STROLLING
COUPLE
WITH
BENEVOLENT
HOUSEPLANT**

**SPACE
STATION
WITH BOVEL ATTACHED**



Rice Gallery