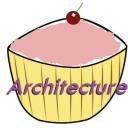




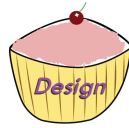
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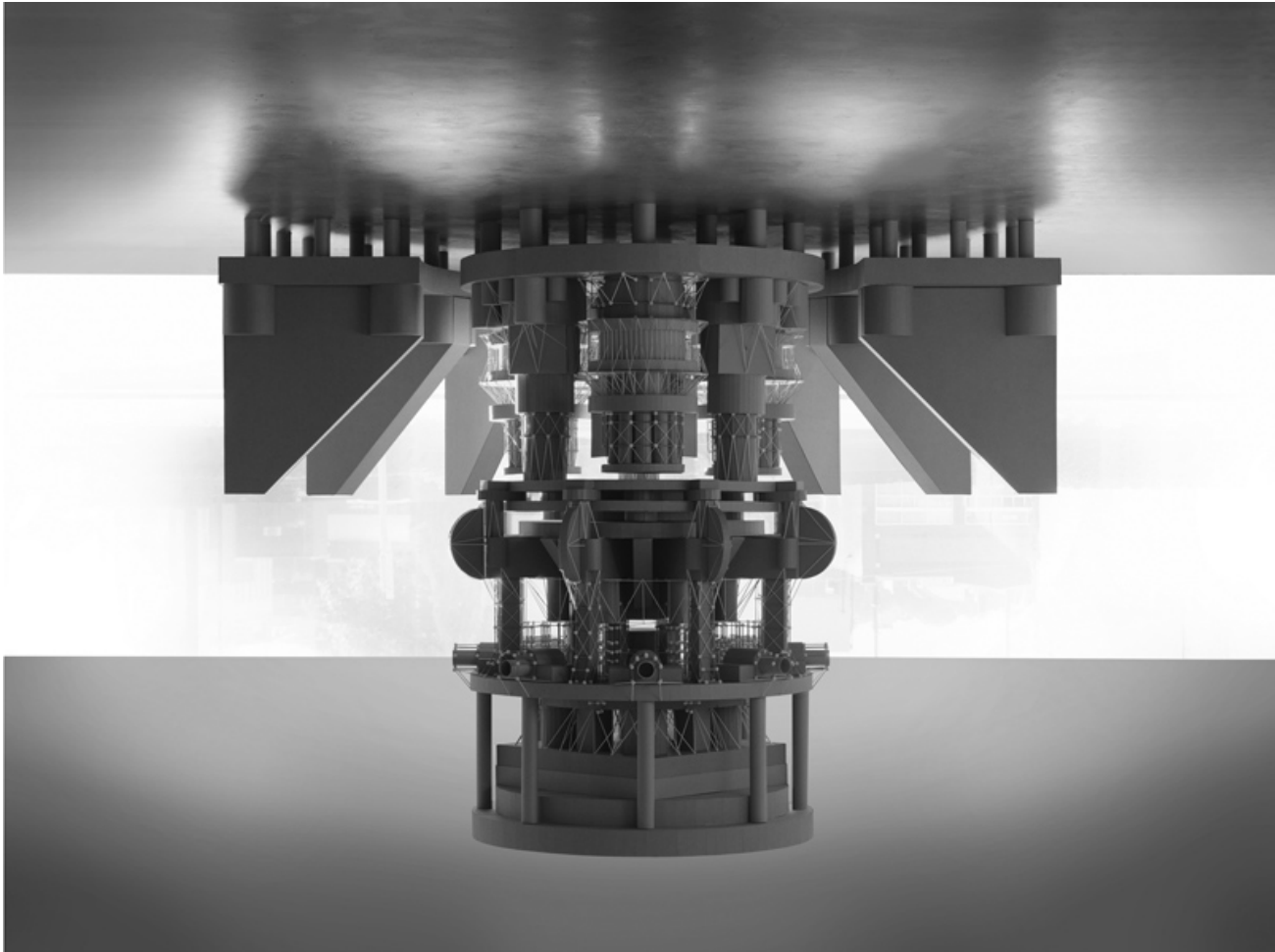


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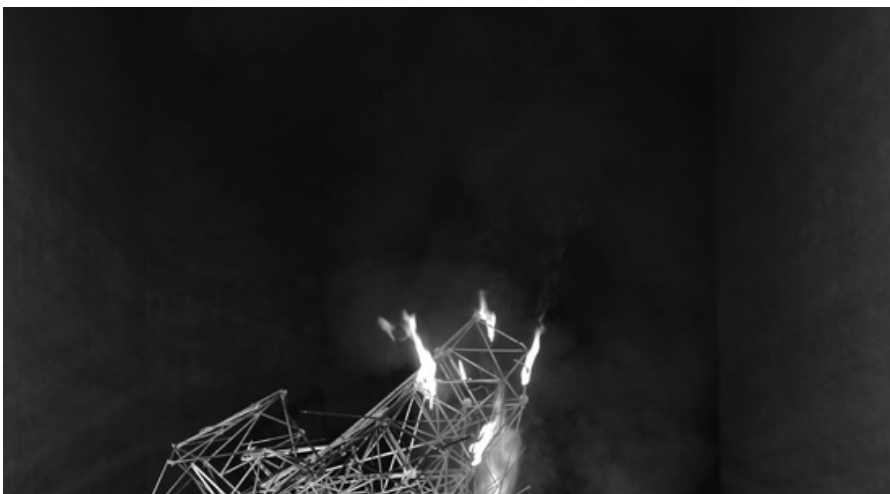


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Anthony Baab, etraphy fore, 2012, inkjet print, photo, E.G. Schempf.

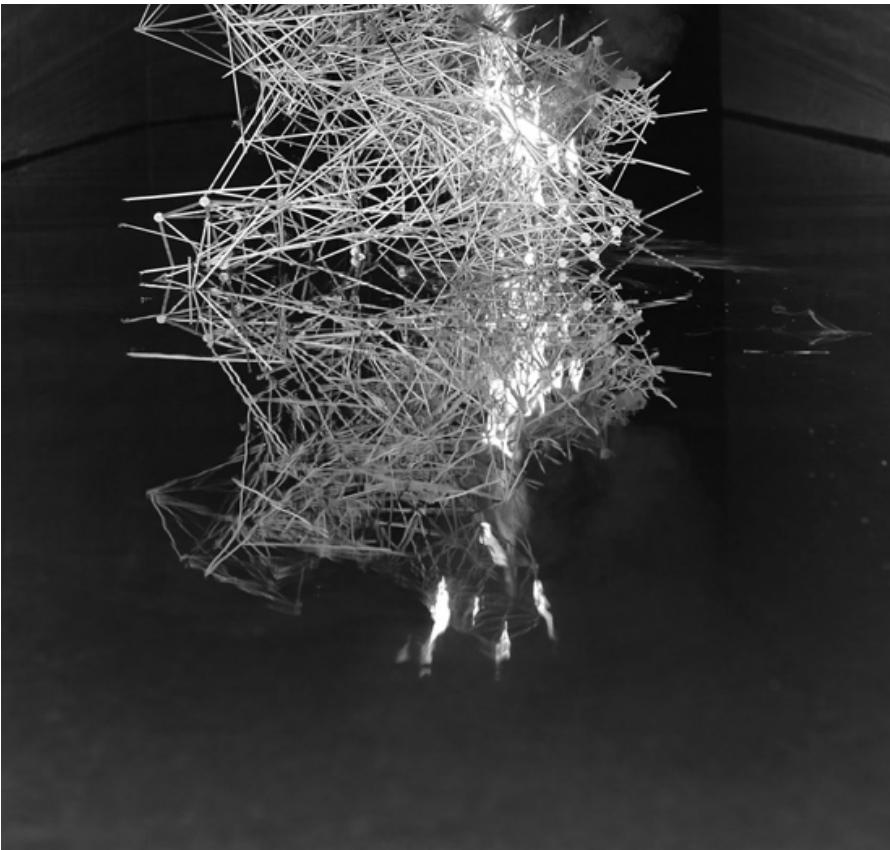
Anthony Baab *Installations* at Grand Arts Exceed All Expectations



Grand Arts
1819 Grand Boulevard
816-421-6887
Kansas City
Anthony Baab
A Strenuous Nonbeing
January 18-March 30, 2013

By BLAIR SCHULMAN

Anthony Baab's long awaited exhibit at Grand Arts is both intriguing and maddening in its precision. He brings us textbook genius that reads precisely the same way. There is great dexterity to be found in the processes and ideology that is a focus of the artists' systemic technique. The exploration Baab offers is taut as a drum, leaving nothing to chance. This work is masterful, intricate and has me confronting my own anxieties about space and time. Buckminster Fuller could go hog wild in the gallery while I sit in a corner and suffer a crisis



Anthony Baab, *patristic isizons*, 2012, inkjet print.



of ignorance.

Utilizing cardboard, bamboo, tape and ZomeTool® kit pieces ("The building toy for kids and Nobel prize winners"!) ideas are constructed, de-constructed and documented in infinitesimal details. On one hand, it is a relief to not be surrounded by the strictures of any specificity of physical appearances. Barring the Fritz Lang (or Kurt Schwitters) referencing that comes to mind, we are presented with a netherworld of noir-like lighting and shadows. Conversely, it is this darkness that forces the audience closer to these images, searching for any signs of life within these staged manifestations that also keeps us at arms' length.

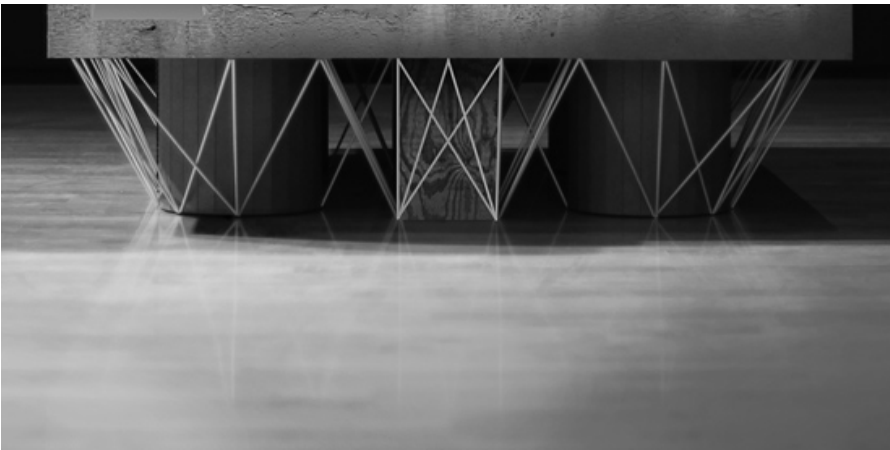
The one piece which I have been able to read past the pure mechanics and therefore a favorite, is *may exesori* (decollage on layered inkjet prints, 2012). Stare at something long enough and you eventually conjure up something, but I may have discovered Roman numerals supporting one of the levels (V, X, IX, V, V). Look closely and you will find them. In the spiritual world of numerology they add up to 34, which splits back to 3+4 and finally 7. Yes, more math. The divine relationship of this number is that of seeker, or searcher of Truth. It is always looking for underlying meanings and hidden truths and a reality that is hidden behind illusions. Persons whose numerological chart is dominated by the number 7 are seen as an "intellectual explorer of the obscure...interested in the metaphysical, not because they are believers, but because it allows access to the ambiguous, abstract world of questions for which there are no clear answers." It is a fitting description of what this exhibition represents.

The craftsmanship comprising *A Strenuous Nonbeing* is removed from scrutiny and presented as a video feed in a darkened gallery and broadcast from an undisclosed cave somewhere in Kansas City. This is the one idea I fully expected to see live in the gallery and didn't. I also believe it is here that Baab holds back. This was a lost opportunity to see in the round what he so completely worked out and documented meticulously throughout the exhibit.

The forced banality of the video feed references Warhol's *Empire* (1964) as Baab himself remarks in an artists' talk he gave following the show opening. The addition of several cats (babysat and protected by a cat wrangler to quell any animal cruelty concerns) wandering in and around the 14-foot piece, are a cross between modern art cat furniture and an ancient Egyptian tomb. This piece is unlike *Empire*, as the occasional live object appearing in the film was happenstance, not contrived. A different Warhol film, *Couch* (also 1964), might be a closer reference. An inanimate object is presented as a catalyst for physical interaction and, much like the cats prodded by the wrangler to feign interest (for both the audience and the cats), we are still conscious of the primary object. It is where the eye always returns.

With *A Strenuous Nonbeing*, one can observe but not oggle. We can admire but not participate. This experience, instead of interacting with a live object, is cold and clinical and not all that compelling. At such a distance, there is no chance of seeing any error, mistake or otherwise accidental permutation. What could be something vulnerable and titanic Baab instead removes it from the space, like a precious object locked inside a glass vault.

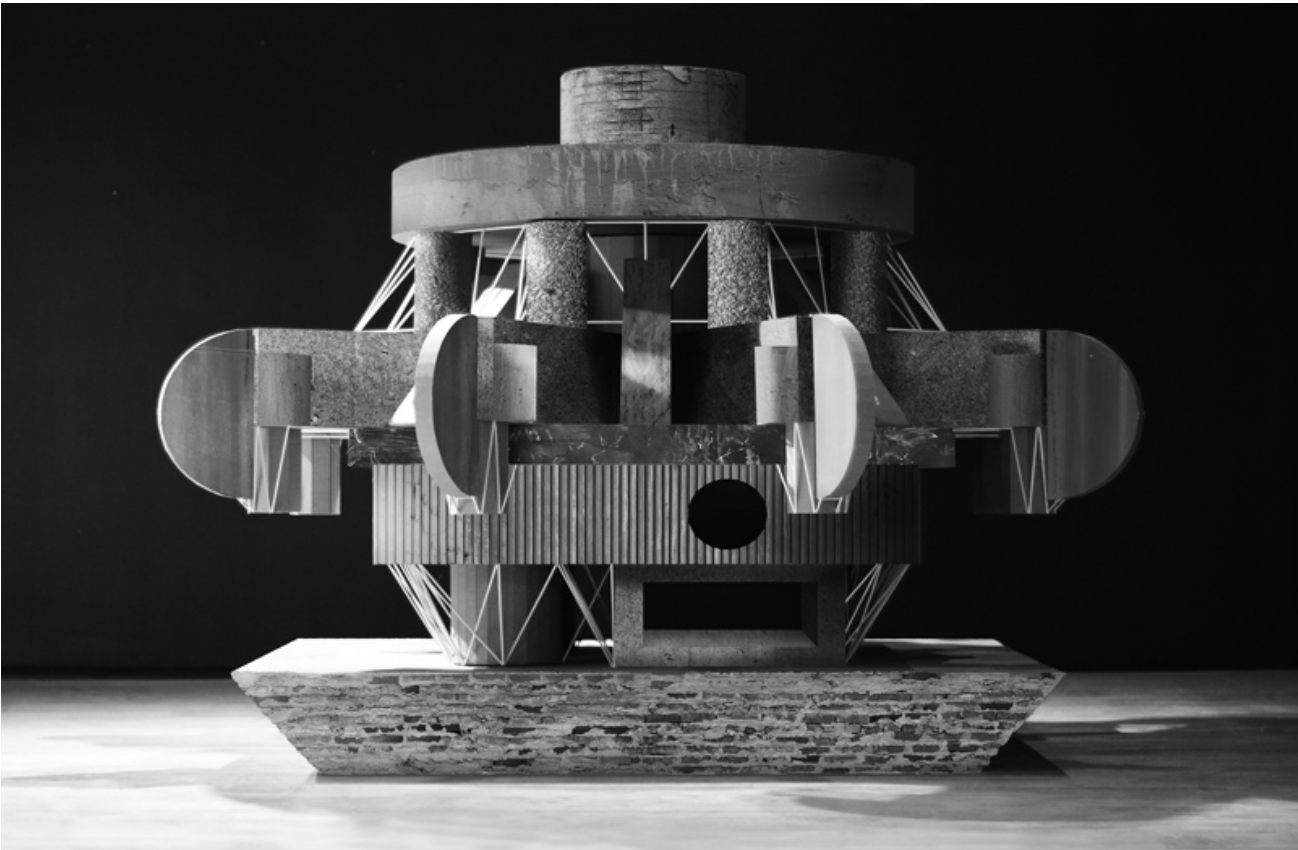
More questions are asked in *sunndo object* (inkjet print, 2012). The inclusion of a brick base brings texture to the fore. It is one of the few works that feels anchored with a definitive point of entry, several in fact. The paddles, or half-circles, that ring the object allude to a possible source of energy or that it might take flight. Whereas, *patristic isizons* (2012, digital print) appears icy cold to the point of near



disintegration. Even with the elements of fire it is not difficult to imagine that touching it would cause an immediate falling to dust. As with this piece, every work on the walls labors a point; math is good, time is structured, space is infinite.

These works are aloof, intricate, and while challenging to examine, worth the effort. They appear as objects of divinity that pay homage to civic and transcendent ideas that are somewhat rigid and academic. Spending time with them entails a long, long journey of process and examination on the part of the observer to get there. But how will you feel once you arrive?

Anthony Baab, *Blackstone ixtenten*, 2012, inkjet print, photo.



Anthony Baab, *sunndo object*, 2012, inkjet print, photo.

Anthony Baab, *poratrix separates*, 2012, Decollage on layered inkjet prints, 2012.

