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Cheselyn Amato: A Temple in Honor of Life Lived Every Day An Unfinished Song of Love

Chicago artist Cheselyn Amato has created a site-specific, mixed-media installation of 18 large classical columns with an inner chamber surrounded by suspended fabric that functions as a monument to memory and everyday existence. The artist's personal accumulations of notes, memos, journals, junk mail, maps and diagrams are embedded onto these columns, enshrining and fetishizing the artist's intimate ephemera. The artist's personal space and individual history thereby become entwined with public space and references to ancient history.

Transformation and the interplay of the sacred and the profane are the thematic core of this installation. Transformation comes into play in the artist's alteration of a space from its ordinary state as well as through the personal sense of transformation and cleansing that occurs when recycling one's past. In the repetitive task of crumpling paper balls, representing twelve years of her life's concerns, obsessions and cast-offs, Amato has sanctified and ritualized this recycling into a humbling act of piety.

The formalism of these columnar elements is contrasted with the mundane nature of their origins and means of creation. In this installation, a classicized structure is everywhere contrasted with the chaos of everyday life. A sacred, tent-like structure is surrounded by a giddy array of "profane" fabrics. Also "embedded" in the structure of this piece is the artist's involvement with Jewish mysticism as reflected in numerical choices and intervals. A large metal hoop suspended from six points (alluding to the Star of David) helps establish an inner sanctum. The numeral eighteen in Jewish mysticism is an equivalent for "chai" or life, which, coincidentally, also is the translation of Cheselyn's Hebrew name.

Sound is also used as an element to sanctify this space. The artist made a recording layering her voice singing a song of the spirit. Amato has subtitled this installation "an unfinished song of love," stressing the process of life and art which continues beyond our earthly existence and endeavors.

Cheselyn Amato received her B.A. from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island and her M.F.A. from Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. She has been an adjunct associate professor at The School of The Art Institute of Chicago since 1985. Her work has been exhibited in numerous galleries throughout the Chicago area.

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The artist wishes to dedicate this piece to her grandmother, Mary Arbitman and to acknowledge the generous assistance and support of Susan Abelson, Lynda Barckert, Julie Fleps, Dana Garner, Nancy Gildart, Alice George, Tracy Jones, Colette Martin, Raphael and Matthew Sonstein, William Talsma, and Bret Williams.