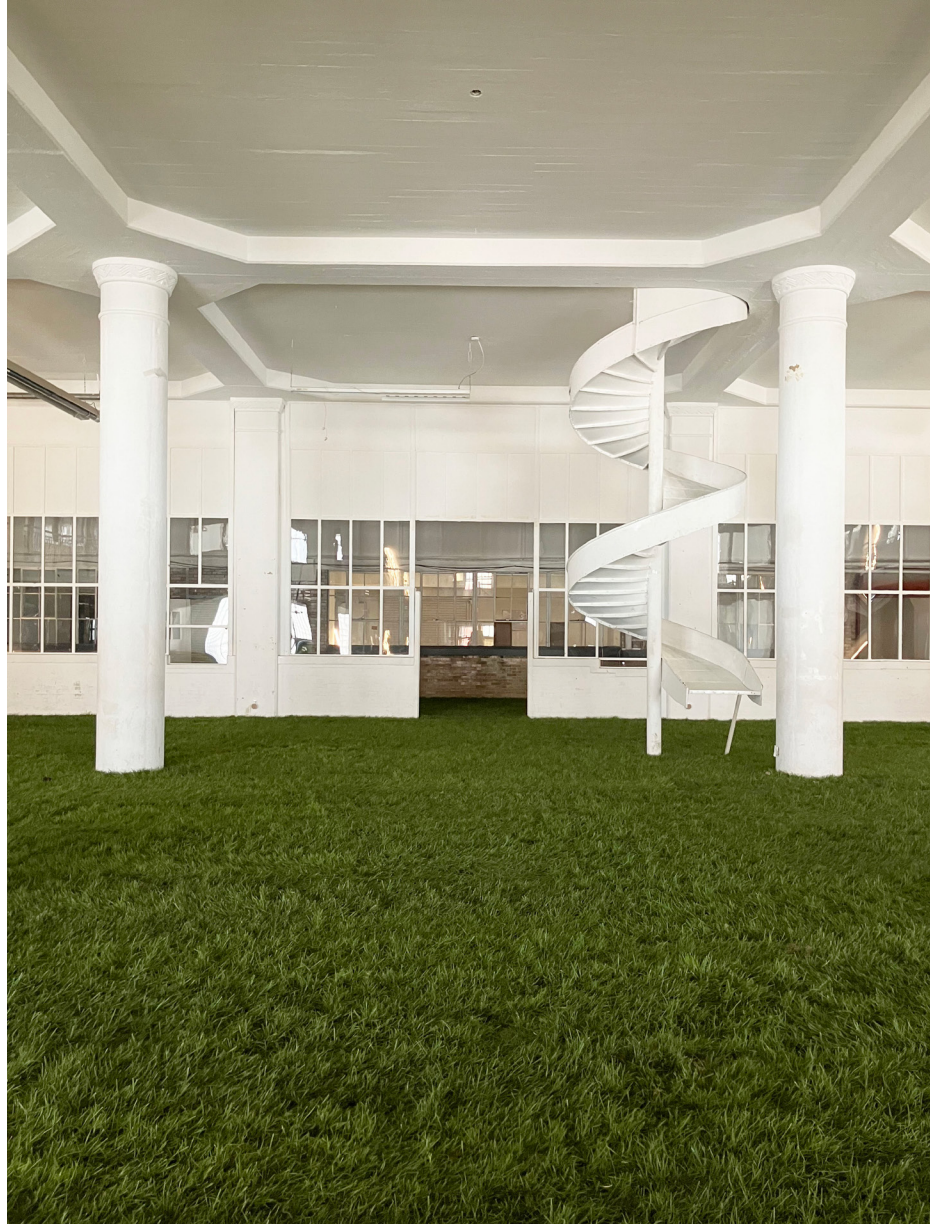


Petrichor

A Conversation with Lisa Waud

June 6, 2024

From Friday, May 31st through Sunday, June 2nd, The Boyer Campbell building in Detroit's Milwaukee Junction neighborhood was the host of a surreal exhibition by botanical artist Lisa Waud. It was an immersive installation that drew visitors in, room by room, to experience moments of sudden enchantment, with the antiquity of the architecture becoming both the convoy and the armature for their temporary journey. The cavernous ground floor was a 1600 square foot space carefully laid with lush, live grass. Its historical features include Albert Kahn style columns, a freight elevator, and old factory windows, which together actively participated in an extraordinary conversation with the hues and smells of the earth inside. Here, the artist discusses the origin of the work, her background as a florist, and the process of realizing *Petrichor*...





Ashley Cook: Lisa, could you tell us about your background?

Lisa Waud: I studied horticulture and landscape design. I was at Michigan State for a few years and then I moved out to Washington State and finished school at Evergreen State College, which is an alternative college; very multidisciplinary. There, I studied writing.

I come from a commercial background working with plants and flowers. After graduating, I pursued landscape and garden design as a career. I had a small business in Ann Arbor that eventually had locations in Detroit. Now, I am functioning primarily in the realm of art, working on installations full-time.

A: I am curious how you gained access to this space, and also how the installation work you are doing is funded.

L: There are two ways that I can do my large projects financially. One is to slowly apply for grants. My dream is that big installations like this would be free to the public, and that becomes possible when it is financially supported by a third party. The other way is to ticket the events in order to cover the cost of the project. Overall, my goal is to make a living as an artist while creating beautiful installations for the public to experience. I believe artist's should be paid for their work and when the work aligns with current public interest and attendance, I can. When something is off, I break even, or lose money. While talking about art, I know it can sound disingenuous to want to make money, but I do believe that artists deserve to make a living with their work, just like any profession.





A: You are doing a couple of other projects in this space as well. Can you talk about those?

L: *Petrichor* is the second of three in this space. A few weeks ago, the first project, *Memory Forest*, was installed in the main room of the building. That came down, and then we installed *Petrichor*. At the end of June, there will be an installation called *Portrait*. For that, there will be twenty-foot tall floral headdresses hanging from the ceiling. These headdresses will be able to be lowered down and worn by the visitors.

A: Are all of the events in this space free to the public?

L: No, all of the events happening in this space are ticketed because the studio residency here came up pretty quickly and I did not have time to apply for grants for the projects.

A: Ah, so this is a residency...

L: Yes, I have this space for six months under an agreement with the building owners, Method Development, who are very supportive of the arts. They have been working in the Milwaukee-Junction neighborhood as Design District Detroit to encourage design and art to take place here.

A: Could you share information about the history of the building?

L: The Boyer-Campbell company designed and built it in the late-1800s. It was an auto-part manufacturing plant. The offices were on the first two floors and then on the two floors above was where the production would take place. There is a strange looking slide in the center that we believe was to send inventory down to the offices from the factory spaces.

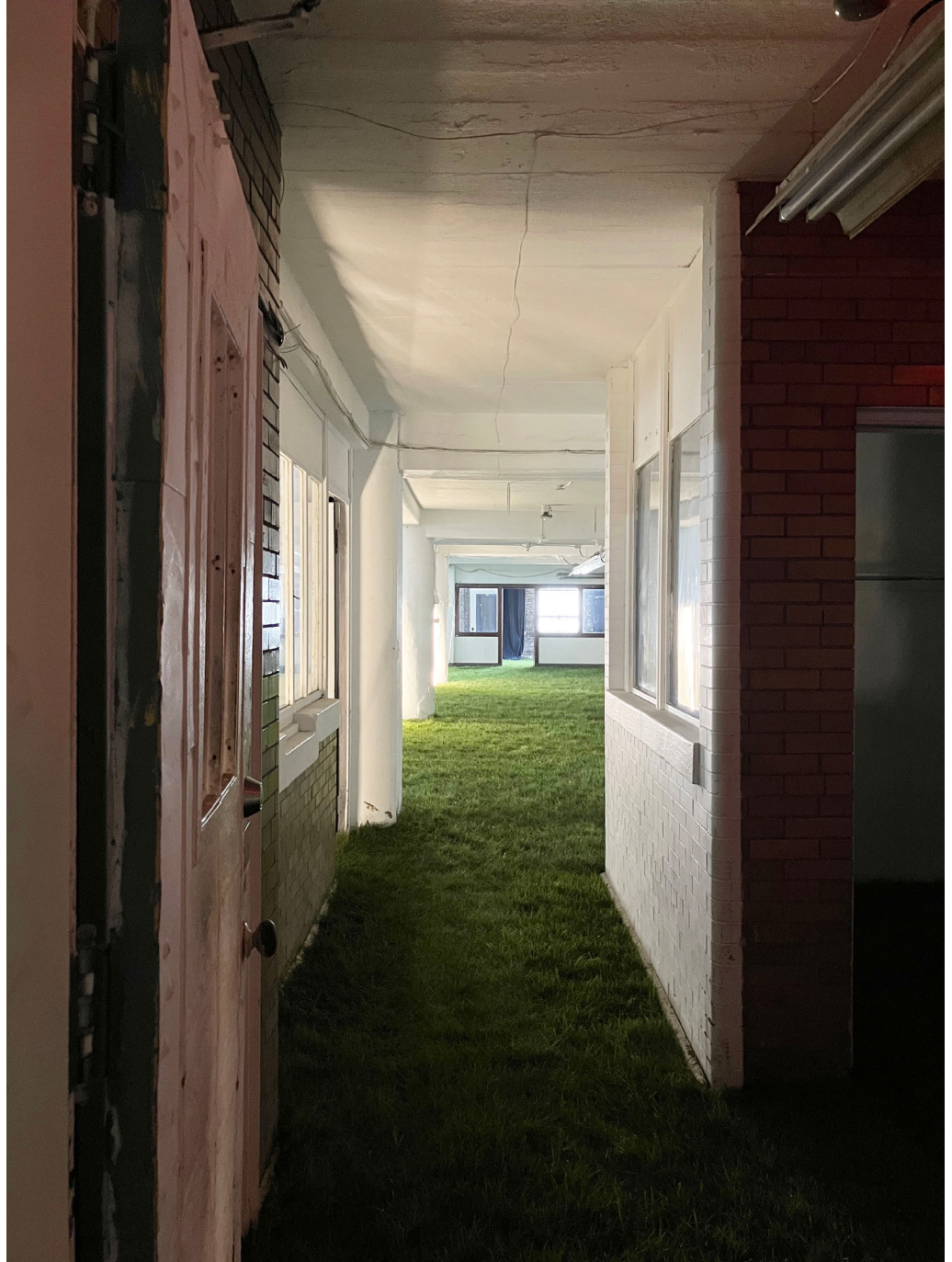
A: And was the building abandoned at all? Or did it sit vacant for a long time?

L: It has been empty, but not really ever neglected. It is actually in pretty exceptional shape for its age.



A: What was your inspiration for *Petrichor*?

L: This idea was actually about five years in the making; it came about when I had a flower shop in the Fisher Building. I actually initially pitched it for the entire first floor of the Fisher Building, but right as I was finalizing the plan for that, they received a large endowment from Michigan State and with it came a renovation plan. They requested that I push back the installation to 2025 or 2026 after the renovations were complete. After having got the residency here, I realized that the project could work in this building quite well and decided to go for it. I think that this space provides a maze-like quality, drawing people further and further into the different rooms like an exploration. Reflecting on the space and its conversation with the installation, there is so much here to take in, more so than if it was a white-cube gallery or something. The history of the building as a car-parts manufacturer also brings in the history of the city in a really meaningful way.





A: Have you ever done anything like this before?

L: I have done other large-scale works, but not with grass. Ironically, I am pretty anti-lawn. At my house, I have taken up all the grass and replaced it with a large flower garden. I dislike how resource-hungry grass is, so yeah, this project is sort of funny in that way. I usually work with flowers and other living plants. I did *Flower House* in

2015, which involved filling a 17 room house in Hamtramck with flowers. That was highly collaborative. There were 30 flower designers and 100 volunteers to make that happen.

A: What was the process of creating *Petrichor*?

L: The sod farm partner was absolutely critical in the process of planning it. Initially, I was pretty nervous to begin

seeking out a farmer who would be willing to do this project, but the people who I ended up working with were very open minded and supportive. We brought the sod in on the Wednesday before the opening. There were eight people from the sod farm. Plastic film was laid out before the sod was put down to protect the floors. They started at 9am and finished around 3pm. Their approach to laying the sod was with such great attention to detail. That really made it a very positive experience for me as the artist, and I think they also enjoyed it.

Something that is really important to me is the after-life of the material that I use for the installations, so the sod and the plastic film will go out into the community for different purposes. To keep the sod alive, we planned to water the sod to keep it alive throughout the installation, but surprisingly, the grass seems to have made its own ecosystem, so it turned out to be quite humid inside, so we haven't needed to water it at all.

A: Do you have anything you want to say about the installation conceptually?

L: My work explores using plants in unexpected places, and taps into the universality of our relationship to plants. Almost everyone has a relationship with plants. Almost any visitor can resonate with the work for that reason, but even in its universality, there are such personal memories that come from interacting with plant-life. I think by putting them in unexpected places, I am able to hold someone long enough to process what they are experiencing. I don't know what the gentle version of jarring is, but the surreality of it causes people to slow down for a minute, losing track of time like being in a dream.

Lisa's final installation, *Portrait*, will open on Friday, June 28th and June 29th in Boyer Campbell Building. To learn more about the project, you can visit: <https://www.lisawaud.com/portrait>

Photos by Ashley Cook

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