

SINCE THE EARLY 1980S, Jennifer Bolande has been making smart, witty, and fresh work that is as inspiring to younger artists as it is difficult to force into the convenient categories the marketplace prefers. Her idiosyncratic sculptures and photographs (photographic sculptures and sculptural photographs) often make use of overlooked aspects of everyday life. They employ an associative strategy that at first seems effortless, but that on closer examination spirals outward from object to medium to other artworks to the culture at large. In attempting to articulate this chain of associations, I find myself stumped by how clear Bolande's works first appear and by how complex they become when formulated into lanaguage.

Emi Fontana's West of Rome is a nomadic space that has been home to some of the most interesting art exhibited in Los Angeles of late. Typical in its paradoxically simple complexity is what Bolande has done for West of Rome's project "Women in the City," a series of public artworks by female artists. At this point in the Great Recession, the sheets of plywood boarding up defunct businesses are a common sight in Los Angeles County. They are at once notable reminders of the economy's impact on the life of the region and a part of the landscape that slips by unnoticed as one makes one's way from place to place. Bolande's *Plywood Curtains* are just that: photographs of plywood printed on fabric to form curtains. They are installed in the windows of shuttered businesses, a gesture discreet enough

to be easily overlooked, so closely do they resemble actual plywood boards.

The two locations I visited—an Oreck vacuum-cleaner store and a Ford dealership—were in neighborhoods I'm familiar with. Perhaps I had passed by them before without noticing them. After stopping to take a look, however, they served as a frame for a series of associations. At the Oreck store, I peeked behind the curtain and saw a flattened cardboard box lying on a carpeted floor in front of a display of scented candles. I wondered about the businesses on either side. Would they, too, fold? As I drove down Colorado Boulevard searching for 1347 (not yet knowing I was looking for a car dealership, since only the address was given on the West of Rome map), I spotted another business, this one boarded up with actual plywood: a furniture store advertising a 70 percent-off sale. I also noticed a storefront with an overlaborated facade and plastered with FOR RENT signs. When I arrived at the dealership, I encountered a beautiful but decrepit example of midcentury Moderne architecture, the peeling paint on the facade's brickwork reminiscent of the transposition Bolande's curtains perform. The dealership also happened to be where I had purchased my first new car. Here, too, I peered behind the curtain; this time, I saw an American flag, unmoored from its stand, propped up alone in a corner. I found myself looking at the rest of the neighborhood from a different perspective. I wondered how many busy people were no longer busy.

—Sharon Lockhart

## JENNIFER BOLANDE

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN LOCATING where or when one thing ends and another begins. *Plywood Curtains* is sited on such a threshold. It takes place at the interface of interior space and the outside world and makes visible a moment of change in the urban landscape. Detailed, high-resolution photographs of plywood are printed on fabric to scale, pleated, and hung in vacant storefront windows facing the street. I am interested in how the curtains activate and bracket awareness of the urban environment at this particular moment, how they exist as both object and image, indoor and outdoor, invitation and obstruction, art and design, sign and spectacle. The curtains invite a double take. Something solid has become pliable and mobile. At a glance, they register as signs of construction or destruction. On a second look, something else is there.

I'm a big fan of the double take: that moment when something suddenly shifts from being negligible or peripheral to being the center of attention. Often, I am inspired by situations that are initially confusing—I may not be sure what I am looking at or how to orient myself in relation to it. Should I be thinking about what happened here, about what is happening or might happen here, about the thing itself, or about what the object, image, or place symbolizes? Lack of certainty can be generative.

Photography is generally my first line of approach to any subject. For me, photography is not just about pictures but also about positions. It can cause you to miss what is really going on just as easily as it can enable you to capture something. Often, what's most interesting in a photograph is not what you originally set out to photograph, but something off to the side, unnoticed at the time. So I've generally resisted Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment," preferring instead to work with aspects of found, taken,

or staged images. I am very interested in chance and in the momentary, but not so much in "capturing" it. For many years, I rebelled against the frame and the idea of photography as a window into another world, instead seeking other, more physical and sculptural ways of employing photographs.

Plywood is already like a picture of wood. Richard Artschwager mined this terrain extensively. It exists at a remove from the natural world—it's almost hard to imagine its relationship to a tree. One of the most prevalent and least expensive of building materials, it's used for temporary fixes. It conjures various types of disasters that might result in boarded-up windows and doors: floods, fires, closed businesses; damaged, vacant, or foreclosed properties. There can be an aversion to looking at this material and at boarded-up sites in general. It is assumed that we are not supposed to look at something in this state, or that nothing is there.

While the urban landscape—how it is experienced,

1000 WORDS

# Jennifer Bolande

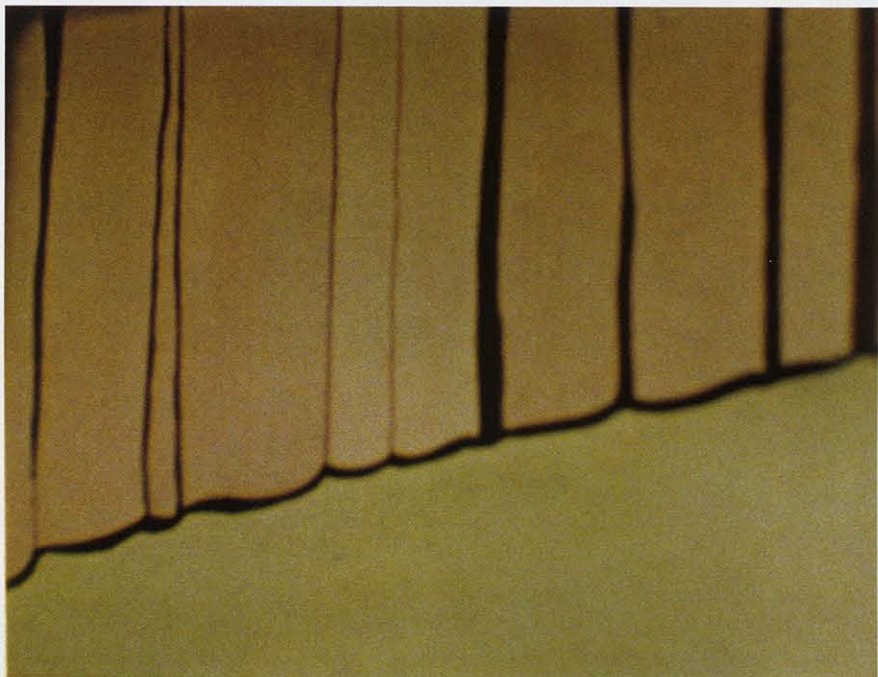
Talks about *Plywood Curtains*, 2010 • Introduction by Sharon Lockhart



Spread: Composite of actual and proposed sites for installations of Jennifer Bolande's *Plywood Curtains*, Los Angeles, 2010. Photos: The artist.



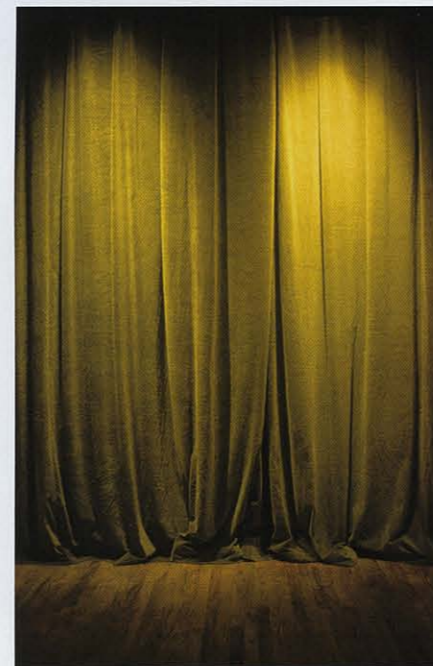
Jennifer Bolande, *Plywood Curtains (detail)*, 2010, printed poplin fabric, each panel 96 x 48".



Jennifer Bolande, *Cartoon Curtain (detail)*, 1982, color photograph, 32 x 30".

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remembered, and imagined—has frequently figured in my work, this is my first piece sited in public space. The project also marks the first time Los Angeles, my recently adopted home, has had a starring role. New York City—its actual and ersatz monuments, distinctions, and divisions—played a part in a lot of the work I made during the twenty-five years I lived there. For example, the sculpture *Hotel* [1983] had something to do with reconciling images of the city from a previous era with what I was actu-



Jennifer Bolande, *Green Curtain (detail)*, 1982, velvet curtains, spotlights. Installation view, The Kitchen, New York.

ally seeing at the time. It was inspired by a scene from the 1933 movie *Dinner at Eight* that featured a hotel sign glimpsed through a curtained window and also by the many instances of abandoned tenements, boarded up with sheet tin, that I was seeing in the East Village. The experience of cities is always a conflation of the temporal and the spatial. We understand and know them through countless repetitive experiences, as well as through the filters of our memories and projections, but they are constantly changing.

New York and Los Angeles are, of course, experienced in distinctly different ways: New York is a walking city and has much to do with faces, facades, and voyeurism. I remember always looking up at windows and imagining myself in different spaces. Los Angeles, on the other hand, has to do with pathways that are traveled and known but not closely examined, the details and particularities glimpsed in passing. That was what was so great about Ed Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* [1966]: He slowed down and made visible what would not otherwise be seen; he made the street visible as a linear strip, but from the perspective of the street itself. I love works that direct attention to ordinarily overlooked aspects of the cultural landscape.

Curtains are thresholds to other realms, theatrical, public, or private. They are a subset of a more general interest in thresholds (physical, psychological, and temporal) and have been a recurrent motif in my work. My beginnings were in dance and performance art—that might explain some of my attraction to curtains, which sit at the boundary between the audience and the performer. Curtains can signify not only the end but also the beginning of something. They fetishize the moment of expectation: Our projections about what is to come are cast onto this surface, which contains the power to conceal or reveal. My first show set an actual theater curtain beside a still of one taken from a cartoon.

I am a kind of bas-relief artist; my work often hovers between image and object. The experience of embodied understanding is central: To this end, I have used a variety of strategies to bring what is primarily visual back into physical space to elicit an embodied response. Not that this is my ultimate goal, but I imagine that if we were able to put *Plywood Curtains* into every empty storefront in the city, it would bring a palpable physicality and a commensurate sense of scale to the recession, which can often seem abstract. I envision a number of iterations of *Plywood Curtains* multiplying throughout Los Angeles, articulating certain corridors of the city and creating a sort of cinematic effect through repetition as you drive by. □



Above: Jennifer Bolande, *Exit Triangle*, 2010, ink-jet print, 70 x 37½".

Below: Jennifer Bolande, *Hotel*, 1983, sheet tin, wood, enamel on tin, 48 x 36 x 3".

