



Megan Geckler

wexner center for the arts

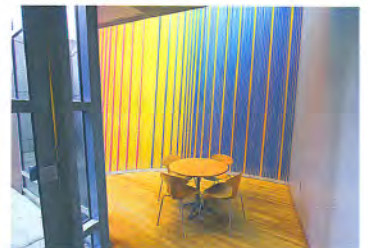
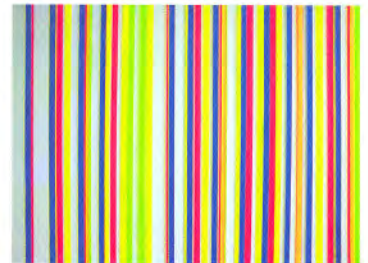
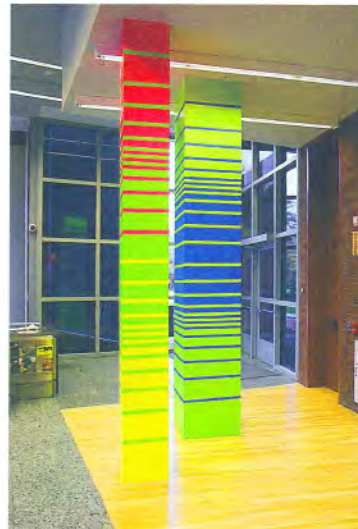
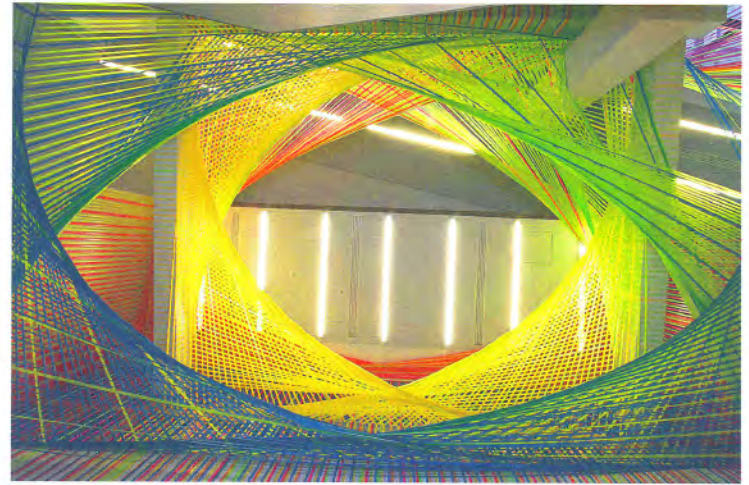


## Introduction

This presentation of Megan Geckler's *Spread the ashes of the colors* is part of *Six Solos*, a suite of six discrete exhibitions each featuring the work of a rising international artist. Since its inception in 1989, the Wexner Center has embraced a strong commitment to the work of younger artists engaged in pushing their practice in new directions. For many of the *Six Solos* artists, this marks their first solo exhibition in a U.S. museum, and for all of them, their presentation at the Wex offers a welcome chance to introduce their work to broad and diverse new audiences. Each artist has taken the center's invitation as an incentive to broaden their scope of address and expand their already ambitious repertoire of forms and ideas. We believe that all six artists are on the cusp of greater achievement and renown, and we are particularly pleased to be able to include them in the programs and festivities marking our 21st anniversary in November 2010. As we now leave adolescence behind, we've undoubtedly gained a modicum of professional and institutional maturity, but *Six Solos* remains true to the energetic, irreverent spirit of artistic exploration and discovery that has marked the Wexner Center throughout its first two decades. That sensibility will certainly remain embedded in our DNA for years to come.

Sherri Geldin, Director  
Christopher Bedford, Chief Curator of Exhibitions  
Wexner Center for the Arts  
The Ohio State University

COVER, OVERLEAF, AND FACING  
**Megan Geckler**  
*Spread the ashes of the colors* (details), 2010  
Site-specific installation for the Wexner Center  
Flagging tape and mixed media  
Courtesy of the artist





Certain numbers and surfaces start to come up again and again and these all get folded into our process. It has been said that the lobby is really Eisenman's space, that it dwarfs and takes over the exhibition space, leaving the artist as a secondary element. Instead of trying to eliminate Eisenman from this space, or camouflage it, we use it in the design of the installation. Two things going on at the same time in the same space, made decades apart, working together.

I celebrate the unfinished gridlike columns and beams running through the space, the way that the grid comes back together to create the optical wonderland that is the façade and entrance of the building. The lobby is a hangout space, it is an entrance and an exit, and it holds the doorways to the visual arts, film, and performing arts spaces and elevators to the offices above and the guts below. I want the viewer to slow down, possibly even stop, and forget about where they thought they needed to go. I want everyone to just slow down and maybe take the long scenic road to where they are going.

**LL:** What stage of the process are you currently in? (August 19, 2010)

**MC:** We have a working plan, have drawn the "bones" of where the flagging tape will go. We are working on color and density at this point. There is only so much that can be done on the computer; we have to go into the studio and make a full-scale portion of the work so that we can see how the tape is overlapping itself in the space, and how much interplay there will be between positive and negative space. Too much and it becomes solid, too little and it doesn't have the impact that we want to achieve in the space. The architecture of the lobby area can be overwhelming, but there is a thin line between too much and too little. I work with the architecture, not against it, and we want

the piece to coexist symbiotically, in tandem, in concert, in harmony.

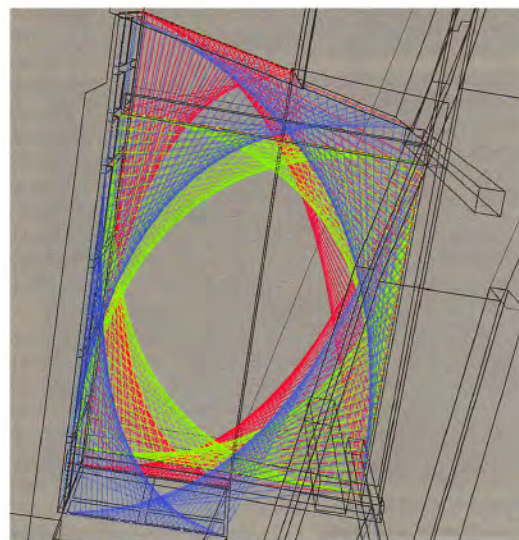
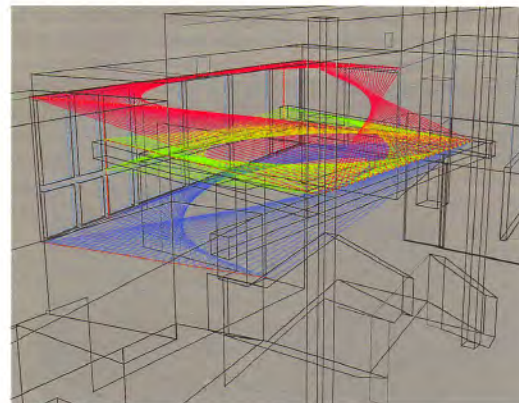
**LL:** How might you elaborate further the notion of working "with" as opposed to "against" architecture?

**MC:** I take all my clues from the architecture. I don't fear how the piece is going to work in the space, because to a certain extent, the architecture makes the piece all by itself. It dictates where I start, where I end, how high or low certain elements have to be. With the Wexner Center, it was so important to fly out and see it—experience the space, walk around it, inspect it, get a feel for how people come in and out and through the space. I was there before the galleries opened and the café was the main attraction; once the galleries opened up, the traffic patterns changed and different areas within the lobby were utilized. This is all information that goes into the making of the piece.

**LL:** Regarding your approach to color in general, how do your rich color choices relate to your comments about taking cues from the architectural spaces you work in? Or, do your color choices come from elsewhere? How have you been thinking about the color for the Wexner Center piece?

**MC:** Actually, we had originally envisioned this piece completely in white, but with how complex it became, we were afraid that it would be too intense as a monochrome and also considering the weather in Columbus from September through February, we thought that it would be great to make this a very colorful piece. A break from the snow white or wintry gray.

The CMYK color process was definitely in the forefront of my mind when we were addressing the color of this piece. I like to reference basic art techniques or processes with



Digital renderings and color progressions of *Spread the ashes of the colors*, 2010  
Courtesy of the artist



my work. Sometimes it is about color theory, sometimes a basic drawing technique, or in this case, the backbone of all printed color design. I think a lot about the current state of “ink,” “paper,” and information in general. Technology meets art and design and the lines get blurred.

**LL:** To follow up and return to your comments about working “with” or “against” architecture, I’m interested in your acknowledgement of the difficulty of the lobby space. One might understand that difficulty as a purposeful difficulty or even radicality that seems at stake in deconstructive architecture in general. (In order for us to continually rethink architecture, it must work against itself to become itself.) So, on the face of it, to want to work “with” the architecture in a harmonic way seems at odds with the gesture of Eisenman’s lobby space. To work with this architecture might have meant to work against it, if you know what I mean. I wonder if you could say more about your motivation to adopt this (deconstructive) architecture as a kind of host that accepts your work, which in turn honors its structure? Do you envision the lobby space working “against” your work in any way?

**MC:** There are so many connections between the deconstructivist ideas of Jacques Derrida, Peter Eisenman’s approach to deconstructivist architecture, and my working practice.

In this installation I create a focal point with negative space. In the lobby, Eisenman has created spaces within spaces that are indefinable and exist only because of an absence of what we expect. For example, the floating column. Because we expect columns to reach the ground and to hold things up, it is strange to us to see a column that is not structural. It is also strange to see an installation take on the sense of an object, to be comprised of lines, which make form, and a structure of sorts, from an almost weightless

material. An architect is a commander of lines; architects create space through divisions of what is and is not there. My work does the same thing, it creates mass, volume, voids, expectations, and inexplicable situations. It is very physical and experience-oriented, as is architecture. When we look at pictures of a space, it is warped by the lens of the camera, the position of the photographer; needless to say, it’s not the same as being there.

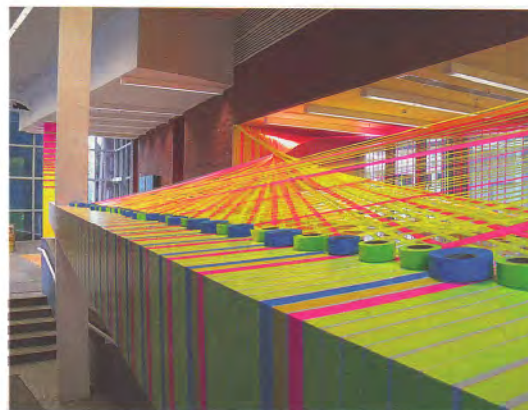
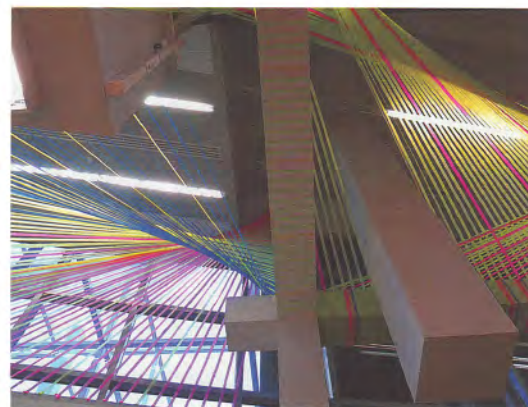
## Revision

**LL:** What was most surprising when you arrived in person to begin your installation process? Could you talk a little bit about the overall gesture of your work, if there is one?

**MC:** The most surprising thing about experiencing the space in person (rather than via photographs, which are so deceiving in terms of scale) was how austere it seemed. So serious. Which is funny because there is so much playfulness in the building itself. This is sort of like working inside of a white cube, but one of Sol LeWitt’s cubes, so things are a little wacky. The floating column is a big part of the lobby as are the beams. Without them, it is largely a blank space. The beams, columns, and angles are what hold the space together and raise it to be a work of art in its own right.

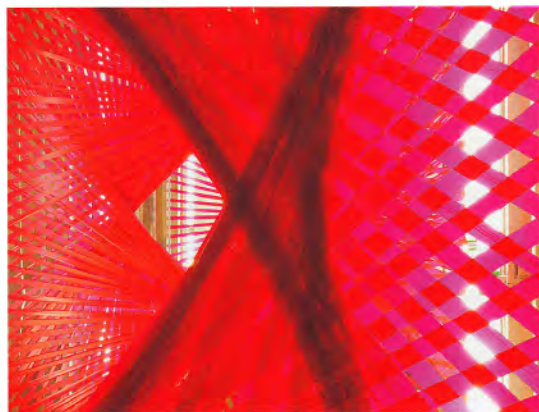
So with that in mind, I knew that whatever I was going to do in the lobby had to work directly with Eisenman’s beams. Whenever possible, I prefer to tie directly into the architecture of the spaces that I am working with, so that the installation blends and becomes part of the space, working in tandem to be greater than the sum of the parts.

I feel like I could come back to the Wexner Center on an annual basis and do a different piece every year until I die. With every other space



*Spread the ashes of the colors*, 2010  
In process  
Photos by Amy Flowers





*I can tell you how this ends*, 2007  
Flagging tape, hardware, wood,  
shipping container  
8 x 8 x 17½ feet  
Courtesy of the artist

that I have worked with, there seemed to be a clear and obvious solution for the treatment of the space. Since the Wexner Center is so complex and also so flexible in its design, it really truly allows for anything. We have discovered several limitations of the space in terms of installation. For example, the “floating column” is not structurally stable; when I touch it (even slightly with a finger), it sways in space. I had wanted to make Eisenman’s unfunctional/dysfunctional column a structural part of the piece, thus giving purpose to an architectural element designed to do nothing structural. However, we can’t use that column because it won’t stay still and will bend to the slightest pressure. No one was aware of this until we got up there and touched it.

**LL:** Will you have to avoid the column altogether now that you know how flimsy it is? Is its flimsiness disappointing conceptually or just practically? (I’m thinking about the difference between knowing that Tony Smith’s *Die* is hollow and not knowing.)

**MG:** I haven’t figured that out yet. We want to bend the tape around it and stripe the entire column, but we can’t be sure how the column will react. We may have to anchor it in space, or maybe we’ll just let it sway in space. This is an ongoing process of trial and error, query and discovery...

**LL:** Have your ideas about color changed as well? One of the stunning things about *I can tell you how this ends* (2007) is its rich monochrome.

**MG:** The inherent translucency of the tape is one of the things that I love most about it. In that piece, which was made in a shipping container, the translucency is highlighted. In retrospect I almost wish that I had chosen a different color as many people have talked about it being a bloody vagina, a bleeding box. But I enjoy the red; it’s not

even “glo red” because I didn’t know that color existed at the time. This piece will be more about a color progression via algorithms, apertures, offsets, registration, the printing process, and a bunch of other things. It’s OK with me if people come in and say, “whoa,” and don’t think about anything else, but that undercurrent of meaning and concept is there. I believe that it can operate on many different levels, from immediate accessibility to a more theory-based critical investigation.

**LL:** You have repeatedly mentioned gradients, cascades, and progressions of color. Each level or plane of your piece incorporates a gradient and moves from one color to another. How did you come to work with color gradients, and what is at stake in employing them for you? I’m thinking a little bit about the columns of Anne Truitt where the color wraps around the corners and in effect pulls one around the work.

**MG:** I certainly want the movement of the piece to stimulate the viewer’s own movement in the space. My hope is that the combination of the swirling strands, which create the occuli, along with the gradients (which function as optical pathways) will help to encourage people to see the progression, and so to understand the piece and accept it. It’s a bit of a trick: using bright colors to draw people into the space and then progressions and diagonals to go around the space. Like a spectacular, never-ending sunset.

**LL:** The development of the occuli is also striking. Your work introduces ovals into the space. How do you think about the occuli? Are they simply the residue of dividing the geometry of a rectangle, or is there something more to it?

**MG:** It has a lot to do with figure versus ground, object versus installation, absence versus presence. It is as simple or complex as we want

it to be. We designed the planes and their occuli with a strong nod to the architecture of the space. The beams, columns, mullions, and other elements set the pace for the zips that together create the occuli. So the short answer is “all of the above.”

**LL:** Your development of the occuli prompted me to think about a pedicular spirograph—the child’s drawing tool in which a pen, suspended on a thread like a pendulum above a piece of paper, swings to and fro creating a geometry of overlapping lines within and between the limits of the length of the thread. Can you talk a little bit more about where your interests lie in terms of visual or conceptual references, high and low, art historical and not? I know that you photograph incessantly; everything from staples left on a wall to the froth ring left by a cappuccino, yet your work does not reference any one thing in particular. What is the relationship of the world that you photograph to the world you create digitally, in real space and through documentation?

**MG:** They are the same, overlapping, slightly off register with each other. Everything is happening all at once and I am wide open to ideas, inspiration: I am hyperaware of my surroundings and document incessantly. I post way too many photos to Facebook, everything from a textile pattern to my dinner or the way my cat is curled up and the splotches come together. I see patterns, rhythms, lines, and systems in everything. A cluster of straws seen from above or Tara Donovan’s use of a drinking straw in her installations: they are the same object, just in different places. So objects and images take on secondary or tertiary meanings. I am inspired by that idea most of all. Celebrating the everyday things we may overlook that are powerful images in their own right.

**LL:** Is it fair to say that digital tools are essential to your work? It has been said that was true for the deconstructive architects to be able to visualize and produce the radical fragmentation of their spaces. What do you gain—or lose—with the use of 3D rendering tools?

**MG:** I gain the ability to see a space and really understand the way that the architecture was conceived. By building the space in a 3D modeling program, we essentially rebuild the structure from start to finish, so we get to know a lot of privileged information that might slip by someone who hasn’t worked directly with the blueprints. We are able to show curators what to expect, which is helpful in terms of submitting proposals. Also, with this level of preliminary work and preparation, the installation could essentially become like a Sol LeWitt piece that’s simply a set of instructions. But I like having my hand in the work and climbing all over the lifts and ladders.

The loss involves the inability to render something like flagging tape, a wafer-thin material. We can’t render the translucency of the material, so we can have only a rough idea of how the piece will look. Also, when “viewing” space on the program, it is difficult to get the human experience. Cameras and models are stand-ins for the real thing. Nothing beats walking through a space and experiencing it with your eyeballs.

Laura Lisbon is a professor in Ohio State’s Department of Art.

## About the Artist

Born in Abington, Pennsylvania, in 1975, Megan Geckler earned her BFA from Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia in 1998 and her MFA from Claremont Graduate University in Claremont, California, in 2001. While an undergraduate, she also studied at the Glasgow School of Art in Scotland. She is known particularly for creating lively, site-specific installations from flagging tape, a nonadhesive ribbon used in surveying and construction. Geckler has had solo exhibitions and projects at the Pasadena Museum of California Art (2010), Women & Their Work in Austin, Texas (2009), and the Torrance Art Museum in Torrance, California (2006). She has also created public projects for Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) and for the mobile exhibition program of the Arts Council for Long Beach, California, and participated in the Visual Artists Salon at the National Performance Network (NPN) in Knoxville, Tennessee. Her work has been discussed and reviewed in *Artforum*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *LA Weekly*. Geckler currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

### Six Solos

Erwin Redl  
Megan Geckler  
Tobias Putrih/MOS  
Gustavo Godoy  
Katy Moran  
Joel Morrison

November 9, 2010–February 13, 2011

Six Solos is organized by the Wexner Center, with Chief Curator of Exhibitions Christopher Bedford as the overall curator for the series and project curator for Megan Geckler.

Support for this project has been provided to the artist by IRWIN Tools.

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“Spread the ashes of the colors” will be on view at the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University until January 9, 2011. ([wexarts.org](http://wexarts.org))

For hi-res photos, please contact the artist at:  
[megangeckler@gmail.com](mailto:megangeckler@gmail.com)

More info and a HD time-lapse movie of the piece being installed over the span of 12 days at:  
[megangeckler.com](http://megangeckler.com)