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The Exhibitionists

Bringing fresh and original design ideas straight to the public is the central mission of Materials & Applications, the Los Angeles-based nonprofit research center that exhibits projects by adventurous architects and designers. Founder Jenna Didier and technical director Oliver Hess both live and work in the space, so they have a unique experience of the installations, which are open to the public 24/7. "I sometimes come out in the morning and find a few beer cans left over from late-night guests," says Didier.

Allowing architects and designers to experiment with new and unusual materials at little cost in a temporary setting is their primary goal. Didier and Hess curate—and sometimes also help fund and construct—the installations in their 25-by-50-foot front yard. The young couple brings a combined interest and experience in robotics, high-tech interactivity, and special effects to these projects, some of them subsidized by Fountainhead, Didier's fountain design and installation company. Her agenda extends not just to aesthetics but to ethics. "Having worked extensively with water and electricity, I'm very concerned about sustainability," she says, "so I always look through that lens."

Maximilian's Schell, a recent M&A installation inspired by Disney's sci-fi film from 1979, *The Black Hole*, is a dramatic, vortex-shaped canopy crafted from high-tech sail material. Created by architects Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues, it illustrates how materials from one industry—high-performance sailing, in this case—can be used in others, including architecture and design. Adding a sonic component to the piece is Electric Skychurch founder James Lumb, who created the "Resonant Amplified Vortex Emitter," a sound loop that contributes a subsonic drone to the site.

Past M&A participants have created installations with everything from steam-bent wood to plastic-encased foam. What the installations have in common is the repurposing of unusual materials from various industries for use in architecture and design, where their unique properties can be exploited in new and innovative ways, encouraging exploration and experimentation in a temporary setting.

M&A's location on a busy street in the heart of Silver Lake, one of L.A.'s trendiest neighborhoods, no doubt facilitates greater public access to these installations. Though anyone is free to visit at any time, and the designers often bring clients to view their work, it's Hess and Didier who experience the projects most directly—and perhaps enjoy them the most. "It's like having all your interests come to you," Hess says. "It's environmental design," Didier adds, "and we are the occupants." ■

The Materials & Applications team in front of their latest exhibit, *Maximilian's Schell*. At left, a detail of the installation.