

Teplitzky, Alex “Anna Sew Hoy’s “Psychic Body Grotto “ Offers Respite From The Cartesian World” *Creative Capital Blog*, April 26, 2017

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We don't often think of them as oppressive, yet right angles are everywhere. In her Creative Capital project, the site-specific sculpture Psychic Body Grotto, Anna Sew Hoy offers a momentary rest from right angles and Cartesian space. The sculpture has already been unveiled in Los Angeles's newest green space, the LA State Historic Park. On May 21, Anna and Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND) will use the organic "gazebo" sculpture as a site for ritualistic gatherings. They will be joined by artists who will activate the space through artistic intervention. We spoke to Anna about the Grotto and her upcoming event at the LA State Historic Park.

Alex Teplitzky: Can you tell me a little about the origin of *Psychic Body Grotto*?

Anna Sew Hoy: Several years ago, LA County secured funding to revitalize the Los Angeles River, which was famously cemented over in the 1930s as a way to control its seasonal flooding. People were sold riverfront housing, but it was flooding every year. So the beautiful river was turned into a cement channel. However, the cementing of the river reminds us of the folly of man's attempts to control nature. Since then tall trees have sprouted through the cracks in the cement. Silt has built up so that grasses and underbrush grow. Ducks and herons have returned and people go to the river regularly to fish. The river came back, and it now embodies the contrast of modernist geometry set against weedy and stouthearted natural growth.

Inspired by this turn of events, in my mind I began to create a structure not unlike a cockpit, from which to experience the river and its surroundings—something architectural in scale that was not grandiose public art towering above us. Instead this structure would envelop the viewer, offering a shelter for repose while being outside.



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I called it *Psychic Body Grotto*, and its purpose is to create possibility for new movement, invented ritual, and for a kind of gathering that is yet to occur.

Psychic Body Grotto provides an unpredictable and organic antidote to the cubicles and highways that regulate our movement through space. It’s a figurative gazebo. It is against the Cartesian, so it’s made of gestural arches without walls or 90-degree angles.

Alex: Interesting, can you tell me more about what you mean by “against the Cartesian?” How does that fit into the project location of the LA State Historic Park?

Anna: Contemporary city life dictates that every day we wake up in rooms made of right angles. Space is organized into grids, latitudes and longitudes. I find this oppressive when I remember that there are infinite other ways to imagine and embody space. I think of artist Erika Vogt’s work titled “Geometric Persecution.” For me, geometric persecution is the office cubicle. These square spaces inhibit and control our bodies.

I created *Psychic Body Grotto* in order to show another way. What if rooms were usually round? What if instead of a grid we used a hexagonal field like a beehive? How can we conceive of free space? How many other ways can our bodies move? The ground beneath the Grotto has been carved out to form a shallow bowl. Walk in and you are enclosed in curves both above and below you.

This project was inspired by the Los Angeles River, and it has now been sited adjacent to the River at the Los Angeles State Historic Park. At the park it faces a wash, made of river rocks, that fills with water during the wet season. So the piece now rests in a setting that inspired it in the first place.

Alex: What kind of rituals and gatherings do you envision for the sculptures? Can you tell us about the May 21 performances?

Anna: The answer to the first part of the question is up to the public, the people who use the sculpture and visit the park. *Psychic Body Grotto* is the platform—it holds out possibility—and now let's see how people choose to use it. I'm sure it will be used in ways much more creative and surprising than I could ever guess.

I think of May 21 as an opportunity to demonstrate some ways that the piece could be used by inviting artists and performers whom I admire to have at it. We will see what they do. Corey Fogel, LA Fog, Dylan Mira, Benjamin Boatright, and Cirilo Domine will be responding to the site, environment, sounds and history of the park, as well as to *Psychic Body Grotto* itself.

Alex: You once told us that Creative Capital taught you to be detailed with your idea, no matter how far fetched it might seem. Can you speak more about how this has helped your career as an artist?

Anna: Creative Capital taught me to be ambitious in my thinking, and take every project seriously. I have to believe in it first, before anything more can happen.

Creative Capital taught me to fully realize a project in my imagination. Plan out every step. Know what it is, what it will take to make it, what it needs to exist in reality. Every detail that I decide upon brings the project closer to reality. Being an artist is about having faith in your vision, and understanding that we all can have a say in what becomes reality.

Anna Sew Hoy's Psychic Body Grotto is on view at the LA State Historic Park. On May 21, the site will be activated by artists Benjamin Boatright, Cirilo Domine, Dylan Mira, Corey Fogel and LA Fog. Click here (<http://www.creative-capital.org/events/view/3209>) for more info.

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