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April 07, 2010

Artist expands her 'tunnel books' to life size at Rice Gallery

As she surveys her installation-in-progress at Rice University Art Gallery, Andrea Dezsó realizes she has visibility issues to address before [Sometime in My Dreams I Fly](#) opens Thursday with a reception.

Glare is a problem. Because Dezsó's show will be up through the summer, when the museum is closed, it must be visible through the gallery's front glass wall, which means the window on the other side of the lobby will need to be masked from the Texas sunlight.



Douglas Britt / Chronicle

The Rice University campus can be seen in the reflection of the Rice Gallery window where artist Andrea Dezsó is installing her work.

But because viewers will peer through portals of different shapes and sizes to see Dezsó's cutout figures suspended in spaces of varying depth, the daylight creates another problem. Dezsó wants the figures, which are currently monochromatic, to stand out against the background.

"We have to have some kind of color so they don't blend in," she says. "At night, they come out, but during the day, they should be able to come out too. So we'll do that. We have some time left."

Born and raised in Communist Romania, educated in Hungary and now living in New York,

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Dezső is known for her one-of-a-kind books, paper-cuttings, and embroideries featuring strange creatures and fantastical, sci-fi-infused imagery.

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Douglas Britt / Chronicle

Dezső typically works with paper and scissors, but she used a laser cutter and Gatorboard to create the larger forms in her Rice Gallery installation.

Although she's worked with techniques as varied as stop-motion animation, mosaics, ceramics, and even the ancient Japanese art of fusuma-e screen painting, she's never done a site-specific installation until now.

But Rice Gallery curators and preparators have become experts at helping all kinds of artists, even those new to installations, transform the gallery's space with their visions. So when assistant curator Josh Fischer and director Kim Davenport came across Dezső's work in a recent group exhibition at New York's Museum of Arts and Design, they didn't hesitate to contact her about a commission.

"We saw her 'tunnel books' in the *Slash: Paper Under The Knife* show, and we were completely blown away by them," says Fischer, curator of *Sometimes in My Dreams I Fly*. "They were these small, 6-by-9-inch boxes made from cut paper. ... The basic idea was to ask Andrea if she'd be interested in taking the same technique she used to create the tunnel books to this kind of scale."

Dezső says she's enjoying the shift in size, even with the challenges it brings.



Douglas Britt / Chronicle

Detail, *Sometimes in My Dreams I Fly* (in progress)

"I (normally) work in a small scale, and everything is more or less on that scale," she says. "You can't do really tiny micro things, because they won't be visible. Here ... there's a much bigger range of what you can put into one composition, so it can become much richer."

A Houston commission also appealed to Dezsó, whose childhood imagination was captured by reports of space travel. Such stories resonated with the artist, whose ability to travel was severely curtailed under a repressive regime.

"The Apollo 13 mission that never actually landed on the moon -- they had to return -- was one of the primary sources of inspiration," she says. "This kind of wanting to go, but being thwarted from actually reaching your destination in a physical way, and how that forces you to ... go in your imagination ... reminded me of how I used to travel as a child in Romania. We couldn't travel from there, so most of the traveling took place in books or in the imagination."

ANDREA DESZÓ: SOMETIMES IN MY DREAMS I FLY

When: Reception 5-7 p.m. Thursday, through Aug. 8

Where: Rice University Art Gallery, 6100 Main, entrance 1, Sewall Hall ground floor; 713-348-6069

Gallery talks: 6 p.m. Thursday and noon Friday

Posted by Douglas Britt at April 7, 2010 01:36 PM

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