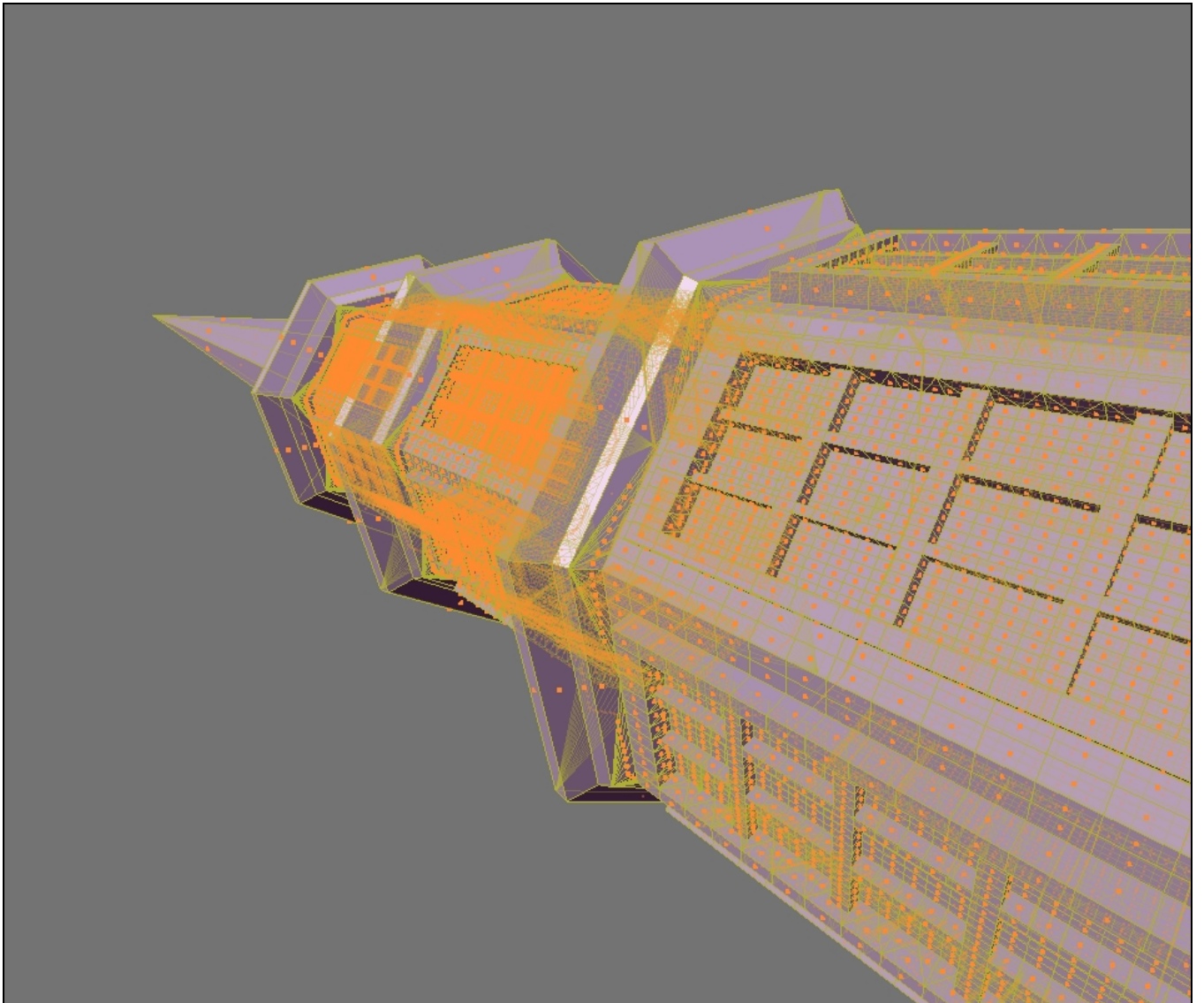


# The Maze: Overview

An Installation by Grant Taylor



# Preface

Dear Reader,

I thank you for this chance to give a general introduction to The Maze, an “installation art”<sup>1</sup> project that will be exhibited here at LVC in August, 2008. To better service give an appropriate introduction, it will be necessary to describe the artwork and some of its meaning, which includes those artistic interests that have coalesced into the current project. Because the ideas I am currently working on have their genesis in previous projects (both in Australia and the United States), I will give a brief background of these two essential art projects. I will then provide a broad introduction to four key ideas and concepts I've been investigating. They include memory, church architecture, seasonal phenomena, and metaphors of the maze. I conclude this overview by outlining how these interwoven ideas form the conceptual basis for the project.

Please understand that the descriptions are brief and thus do not provide the entire matrix of meaning. This document is meant only to give a general introduction to my art practice and what informs this current installation project.

Again, I thank you for your interest.

Grant Taylor

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<sup>1</sup> “Installation art” uses sculptural materials and other media to modify the way we experience a particular space. Installation art is not necessarily confined to gallery spaces and can be any material intervention in everyday public or private spaces. Installation art incorporates almost any media to create an experience in a particular environment. Materials used in contemporary installation art range from everyday and natural materials to new media such as video, sound, performance, computers and the internet. Some installations are site-specific in that they are designed to only exist in the space for which they were created. [Generalized description from *Wikipedia*]

*"Labyrinths are, if nothing else, mirrors"*  
Sig Lonegren

*"All things are double, one against the other"*  
Mary Watts

▼ Strange Phenomena: Two Recent Works

For the past 7 years my practice has been broadly concerned with strange and unexplained phenomena. My first significant project dealing with this theme culminated in a series of exhibitions and an accompany documentary. The series and film, entitled "The Strange Light of Bootenal" (Fig. 1 & 2), centered on a local phenomenon that appeared just outside the historic country town of Greenough, Western Australia. Interestingly, the local myth had pre-European roots as it was discovered that the "light story" was part of the region's Aboriginal storytelling. From the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1970s the "Bootenal Light", as it was called by the early settlers, was a yarn passed from one generation to the next. What made it so unique was that the eerie light would appear in a particular area of no more than 15 square miles around the Bootenal settlement. This ephemeral light was especially evocative for the settlers because it would signal a coming catastrophe, in the form of flood or fire, or even a violent death of one of the area's residents. As a way to preserve this rich mythology, my film documented the last known people (all in their 80s) to have seen the Bootenal light. Because the rural environment is now full of an array of artificial light sources, the myth is slowly disappearing from region's folklore.

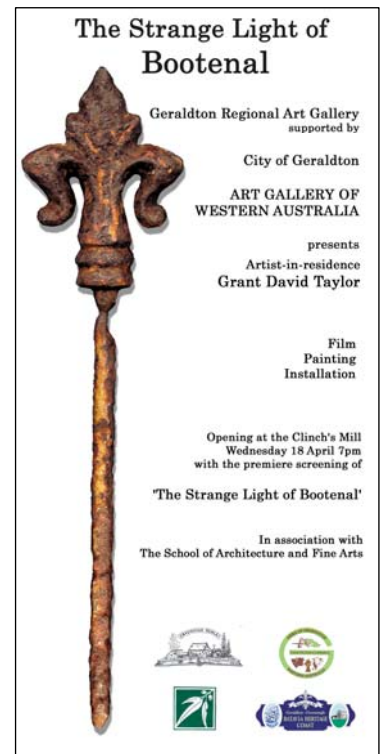


Fig 1. Flyer for the Bootenal Series, 2000



Fig 2. On-site shooting for the Bootenal Light documentary, Greenough, Western Australia

After settling in central Pennsylvania, I began exploring the landscape and phenomena in the local rural environment. I was soon fascinated by the large silos that dotted the landscape and realized that these structures had links to my boyhood memories. As a boy growing up in the later stages of the Cold War, I naively remember thinking that the silos probably hid missiles. I was fascinated that this perfect utilitarian object could be used for subterfuge. After arriving in Annville I soon devised a project, entitled the "Titan Series" (after these famous Cold War ICBMs), in which the artwork itself would become the phenomenon. On different nights through the fall and winter season of 2006 and 2007 I would project an image, using five projectors, onto a storage silo (Fig 3-6). They would only appear briefly (two hours) before disappearing. Because there was no prior warning, only

those who drove past would witness the 75 foot images. I watched with interest as local word-of-mouth communication spread about these strange and transitory images that appeared in different parts of Lebanon County. Baffled and increasingly perplexed, people began contacting the media asking if anyone knew the source of these unaccountable images that appeared in the darkened landscape. Many of those who witnessed the images said that it changed the way they viewed silos. Others were amazed that art could be so powerfully visible in a rural landscape.



Fig 3. Corn Projection, October 2006, Lebanon County



Fig 4. Light House Projection, November, 2006, Dauphin County



Fig 5. Candle Projection, February 2007, Lebanon County

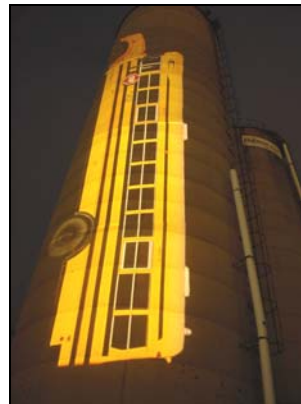


Fig 6. School Bus Projection, February, 2997, Lebanon County

#### ▼ Spire as Spear: Structures in the Landscape

The visually prominent structures that punctuate the landscape have continued to fascinate my artistic imagination. The first was the monolithic concrete stave storage silos, which became crucial as a surface to project images in the Titan Series. The other all pervasive, visually distinct structure is the white church spire (or "steeple", as it's commonly called in this region). This tapered structure with its pyramidal outline is a powerful visual structure in the American landscape. Derived from the Anglo-Saxon word for "spear", the spire has multiple functions in Christian symbolism. The spire extends up toward the heavens, giving a picture of strength and ascendancy. The spire also becomes a geographic point of reference to the local traveler and the homing beacon to the congregation. The prefabricated fiberglass steeple of the contemporary American protestant church is a mixture of simplified Georgian architecture, with its Wren and Gibbs styled classical features, and the high and slender pinnacle of American Gothic Revival (Fig 7.). This simple decorative structure, with its many regional variations, is a unique American icon.



Fig 7. Various local and regional steeples/spires with classical and gothic features. The South Lebanon church spire, second from the left, is the key model and design for the installation.

### ▼ Seasonal Phenomena: Liminality and the Melancholy of the Fall

What struck me soon after arriving in central Pennsylvania was the variety of seasonal events and accompanying decorations. Compared to Australia's often mild seasonal change, the seasons here are far more distinct in both weather variation and the ever changing color within the natural environment. In this region, the principal harvest is celebrated with corn storks, pumpkins and straw men that, when arranged outside the front door, become folk tableaux (Fig 8.). Harking back to various pagan rituals of Europe, these tableaux celebrate the richness and fecundity of the harvest season. Within the fall celebration is the recognition that summer has gone and the cold chill of impending winter will soon arrive. What was ripe will soon decay and the individual will naturally turn inward as the days become shorter and the last leaves fall. The melancholy of fall has found expression in art across most cultures.



Fig 8. Local fall decorations as tableau



Fig 9. Fall color, Lebanon Valley College, 2007

Fall can be viewed as a liminal stage between summer and winter—a transition from active to dormant (Fig 9.). The liminal stage has been characterized as a period during which one is "betwixt and between", "neither here nor there". Twilight, the mysterious period between day and night, has been commonly referred to as liminal time. Liminality (from the Latin word *limen*, meaning "a threshold") has been used by anthropologists, such as Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, to theorize the various stages of ritual. In these theories, a highly ritualized rite of passage, involves some change in the person, especially their social status. A common contemporary example of liminality is the graduation ceremony in which a student is no longer a student, but neither are they yet graduates. The liminal state is characterized by ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy. One's sense of identity dissolves to some extent, often bringing about disorientation. While bewilderment may be unsettling, theorists believe that this period of transition where usual limits to thought, self-understanding, and behavior are

relaxed can lead to new perspectives. However, theorists warn that people may not complete a transition, or a transition between two states may not be fully possible, and those who remain in a state between two states may become permanently liminal.

### ▼ Labyrinths and Mazes: Peculiar Paths

Another fall phenomenon that garnered my attention was the local corn maze. These convoluted matrices cut into the field can be traced back to an archaic tradition. The labyrinthine design is often argued as humanity's oldest artistic creation. As a complex pattern that is not commonly found in nature, the labyrinth is said to emerge wholly from the human imagination. From the coastal plains of the Baltic Sea to native Peruvian craftwork, the pattern appears across different continents in various prehistoric cultures (Fig 10.). Because of the pattern's heavy symbolic value, there has been much speculation on the images meaning. Generally the labyrinth is a metaphor for the journey of life or the description of the journey that takes place in the afterworld following death. As a symbol of rebirth and regeneration, bears a resemblance to the birth canal (or whirls of the brain). It has had associations with the annual rebirth of an entire season, thus it is believed to be a system for understanding the calendar.



Fig 10. Rock Carving, Val Camonica, Italy, 1000-500 BC

In ancient Greece the labyrinth became a symbol for quest and journey. The most famous and enduring Greek myth that centers on the legendary pattern concerns the hero of Theseus. The Hero, Theseus, triumphantly slays the Minotaur who is trapped in a Cretan labyrinth prison. In its classical form, the labyrinthine image becomes closely associated with that most human of creations, the city. As a walled fortification it became a symbol of protection in the Roman world (Fig 11.). In the hands of the Christians, the labyrinth became an icon. Theseus battling the Minotaur was now understood as a parable of Christ defeating the devil. As seen in Chartres Cathedral (Fig 12.), the most famous of Christian labyrinth, the pattern became a wandering path to salvation. Through the middle ages the labyrinth emerges as an increasingly seductive image. For believers, the labyrinth can be a magical and mysterious device that induces pregnancy, revives virility, eases childbirth, cures cancer, restores eyesight, heals the lame or even frees souls from purgatory.



Fig 11. Roman Mosaic, Austria

During the Renaissance and into the Enlightenment, the labyrinth became an increasingly popular design. With the popularity came a significant variation in design. A pattern emerged that was more of a puzzle than a linear path. It was often referred to as a "maze". The semantic difference between the words labyrinth and maze emerged only recently. For most of history the terms were interchangeable. Over the course of the twentieth century a necessary distinction was made. A labyrinth was defined as a single circuitous path that leads uninterrupted to a center, while a maze is a puzzle with many forks in the path that demands choices. For the purists, the labyrinth is unicursal, one course, thus one-way, while the maze is multicursal with many possible ways to go, but only one that will reach the center.

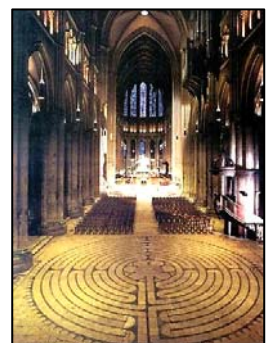


Fig 12. Chartres Cathedral, 13<sup>th</sup> Century

The most popular form of the maze was the garden hedge or bower path (Fig 13.). As an abbreviation of “amaze” in Old English, “maze” meant to “confuse,” “confound” or “astonish”. Garden mazes with their dead ends and wrong turns were meant as a puzzle where hidden solutions were to be enjoyed. While the primary enjoyment of the maze was to delight in conquering the puzzle, the garden maze was also a meeting place for lovers, (or at least) and opportunity for flirtation. The bower was the spot Henry II was said to have hidden his mistress, the fair Rosamond. The labyrinthine allusions in Shakespeare point to both a chance for vice and a metaphor for bewilderment and the impenetrable. The maze was often synonymous with chaos, disorder and confusion. Anyone in the maze who does not learn from one’s mistakes is doomed to be forever trapped.



Fig 13. Hever Castle, England, 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Through the popularity of mazes in parks and in hospital gardens in the twentieth century, the maze has become a path to inner peace or a quiet understanding. Therapists believe that the maze can promote healthy introspection and reflection. As a mnemonic device the angular passages are said to have the ability to spark recollections, generate a calming effect or even become a deeply moving experience. In a famous experiment by British behavioral scientists, mazes (based on the famous Hampton Court Maze) were built for laboratory mice. Testing the muscle and brain activity in sleeping laboratory mice suggest that they dream at night about the mazes they had furiously run that day.

Lebanon Valley College, to my absolute surprise, has an important position in the history of mazes. In fact, the college is mentioned in most books on mazes. Don Frantz, the Disney Broadway Director, and Alum of LVC, built the first “Amazing Maize Maze” in the cornfields adjacent to the Arnold Sports Center, in 1992 (Fig 14.). Adrian Fisher’s dinosaur design was the first commercial corn maze in the United States, and started the Maze/Maize Craze of the 1990s. Since the 1990s, corn mazes have been a regular tradition of the fall season. They are especially prevalent in Lancaster and Lebanon counties (Fig 15.).



Fig 14. First Amazing Maize Maze, Dinosaur Maze, Lebanon Valley College, Annville, Lebanon County, 1992



Fig 15. Amazing Maize Maze, Paradise Valley, Lancaster County, 1999

### ▼ The Maze: Architecture and the Passages Memory

The conception of the work emerges from multiple sources. However, there is one personal experience that could be deemed to be the impulse of the work. Within this experience exist many of the elements that have interested me. These include liminal states, church architecture as focal point, city as maze, and the construction of memory. Here is a small

extract transcribed from my journal (dated the first week of my arrival in Pennsylvania while I stayed in Dan Massad's studio):

"The lightening bugs were terrific sight again last night. Along with the bubbling river, the barns on the far bank, these floating, glowing lights add to the magical quality of my stay .... I had an unusual and disorientating experience today while driving in Lebanon. My first experience of Lebanon was little under a week ago. Scott, Dan and I went to an Italian restaurant on the outskirts of town. We left dinner at dusk and Dan drove through various streets down town. Of course, everything I saw was for the first time and I had no idea where I was positioned within the town. While we passed a number of churches, one was particularly evocative. My memories of the architecture are more dream-like than solid memories. I remember it has both gothic and Romanesque features. In the fading light of late summer, early fall I was struck by the color of the stone and the large trees that seemed to embrace the building. We slowly drove past the building and it made a great impression on me. However, today I returned to Lebanon in my own rental car to search for the church, but was unable to locate it. I intend to look for it again in the coming days."

I never found that church. Every time I travel through Lebanon, even today, I look for that church. I've come to realize that particular night I was deep within a liminal stage. On a literal level, I was in-between worlds—between my life in Western Australia and my new life in Pennsylvania. In that dusk hour, I was exploring a rich and strange new world. This liminal world was highly sensitive to the malleability of human memory. As you would expect, the richness of this experience did not correspond to actuality. I know the church exists, but all the churches I see do not match the one I experienced that night. I resign myself to the fact that it must have been the neo-gothic church on the corner of Chestnut St and 6<sup>th</sup> street, Lebanon.

It was this experience that directed my thinking toward ideas concerning architectural features, memory and the liminal state. As I experienced my first fall in Pennsylvania, I began to incorporate my current thinking with the fall season and its different accompanying phenomena, such as the folk tableaus and corn field maze. I soon began interweaving my key ideas into an idea for an installation.

#### ▼ Installation Content and Production

The Maze installation takes my interest in the design of the prefabricated steeple and integrates it into the concept and schema of the maze (Fig. 16 & 17.). What distinguishes my maze design from others is that a baptistery is placed at its center. Along with the steeple, the baptistery is another church feature that interested me both architecturally and metaphorically. As an object that is incorporated into the architecture of the Anabaptist church, the baptistery is a key aspect in the rites of purification and initiation within the liturgy of the church. For me, the object is a variable liminal arena where the person goes through an initiated transformation from one world to another. The baptistery builds upon the idea of transition and passage that already emerges from the audience traveling through the steeple maze. While the baptistery acts as the visual center of the work, the exact detail of how it will appear is still to be determined. I am still experimenting with various designs and lighting technologies.

Attempting to replicate the mysterious light conditions of dusk, I will be employing a combination of visible fluorescent, ultra violet lights and dimmer technology. The lighting

will be complemented with an audio track of insect sounds, which I have recorded last fall in a corn field at dusk. There will be around sixty seven steeples reaching 7.4 feet tall that will construct the walls of the maze (Fig 18.). Made of prefabricated molded fiberglass, the baptistery is 8.4 feet long and 4.4 feet high. The ideas for this ambitious project have been emerging since early 2006 and the project began development in August 2007.

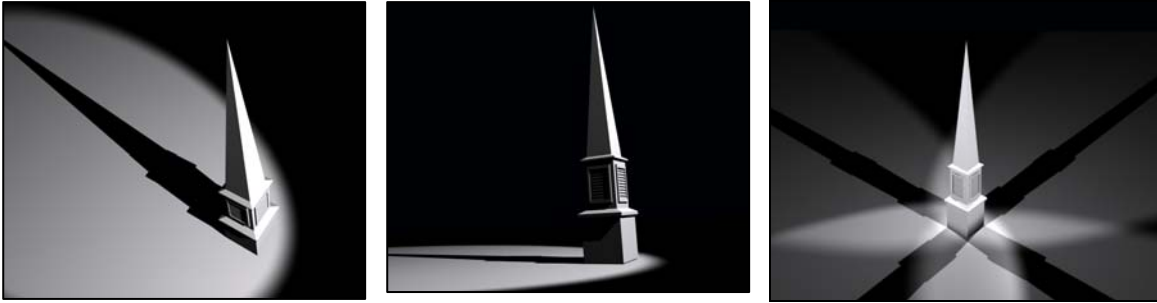


Fig 16. Computer models of steeple/spire

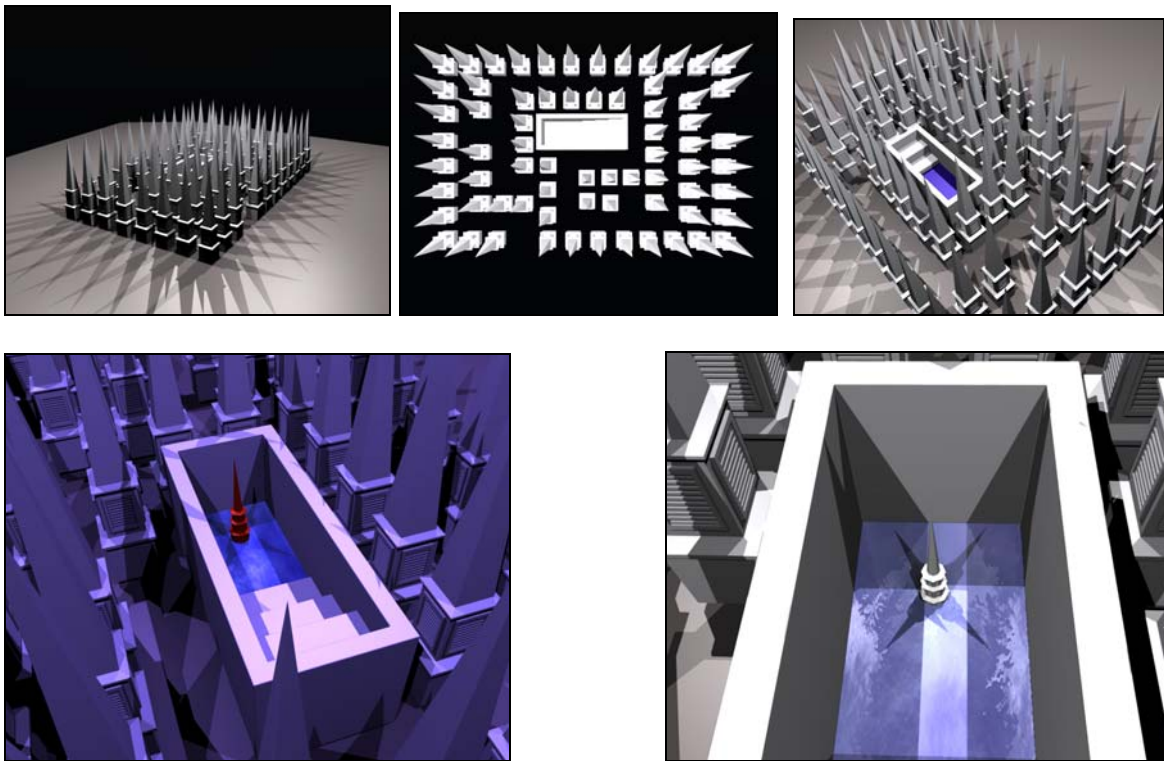


Fig 17. Computer model of maze schema with steeple and baptistery object



Fig 18. Cut and sized MDF wood and steeples in various stages of production. Basement Studio, Fox Run Rd, 2007

## Content of Installation

### Objects

- 66 x MDF spires (glue and screw constructed)
- 1 x Water Resistant Spire
- 1x Fully sealed fiberglass baptistery
- 1x 400W super high output Ultra Violet Light
- 4x 120W spots (with color filters)
- 1x Timer and dimmer light control
- 1x mini CD player with high output speakers

### Dimensions

- H7'-1" x L22"
- H4' x L10"
- H3'-6" x L8'-7" x W3'-4"

# Artist Résumé

## Solo Exhibitions:

2007	"Titan Series" Silo Projection, Lebanon County Pennsylvania
2006	"Titan Series" Silo Projection, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania
2003	"North Dust" Cullity Gallery, Perth, Western Australia
2001	"Artists-in-Residence" at the Greenough Hamlet, Western Australia
2001	"Hidden Spectrum" The Geraldton Regional Art Gallery, Western Australia
2001	"The Copy" The Sydney Fong Gallery, Geraldton, Western Australia
2001	"The Strange Light of Bootenal" Clinch's Mill, Greenough, Western Australia

## Selected Exhibition History:

2001	"Do It" Perth International Arts Festival, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, Perth, Western Australia
2001	"Wide Open" Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, Perth, Western Australia
2000	"Medium Rare" Honors Exhibition, Cullity Gallery, Perth Western Australia
2000	"Hatched" National Graduate Show, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth, Western Australia, Melbourne, Victoria
2000	"Becoming", Cullity Gallery, Perth, Western Australia

## Educational Background

2001-2004	PhD with Distinction, University of Western Australia
1996-2000	Bachelor of Fine Arts with First Class Honors, University of Western Australia
1994-1995	Tuart College, Concentration in Art and Art History

## Art Awards

2001	Awarded Australian Postgraduate Award Scholarship
2001	Bachelor of Fine Arts with First Class Honors
2001	Letter of Achievement from The City of Geraldton for Cultural Development
1999	Chosen to represent University of Western Australia in the "Hatched" national graduate exhibition
1999	The Hewitt Prize for Art, for graduating with highest mark amongst students completing their Bachelor of Fine Arts
1995	The Tuart Achievement Award for the highest mark in Art and Art History, Tuart College

## Public Lectures

2004	"Art and Science the Uneasy Kinship" Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery
2002	"Evolutionism's Mutant Monsters" ARTtalk, University of Western Australia "Public Lecture Series"

- 2002 "Panoramic Space and Simulation" Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery Public Lecture Series
- 2001 "Surveying the Symbolic Realm" ARTtalk, University of Western Australia Public Lecture Series
- 2001 "Architecture and Memory" The Geraldton Regional Gallery
- 2001 "Spatial Dynamics and Installation" Geraldton Technical College (TAFE)
- 2001 "John Baldessari and the Splat" Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery