



Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues

Rip Curl Canyon

Rice Gallery

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Rip Curl Canyon evokes a mythical location in the American West where land and water collide. From the highest point at the rear of the gallery, the steep, canyon-like formations slope down and gain momentum before breaking apart to form ribbons of curling waves. Like rip currents — narrow, fast-moving belts of water — the segments twist and surge toward the front glass wall.

Commissioned by Rice Gallery, the installation is the brainchild of Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues who met as students at Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) in the early 1990s. Although trained as architects, Ball and Nogues do not focus their efforts on the bread and butter of the profession — houses and buildings. Instead, they are part of a new class of young architects who apply architectural concepts to different types of projects, such as events or installations. To achieve their radical results, Ball-Nogues work with unusual materials, develop new digital tools, and apply architectural techniques in unorthodox ways.

Ball-Nogues share an enthusiasm for process as it relates to the built object, letting the properties and the limitations of the chosen material guide the structure's ultimate form. They develop techniques to extend the boundaries of the material's physical potential.

This process-based development guided their first project, *Maximilian's Schell*, a site-specific installation created for the courtyard of Materials and Applications (M&A), a research center for landscape and architecture in Los Angeles. Conceived as

Maximilian's Schell, Los Angeles, 2005 (installation view)
Photo: Oliver Hess

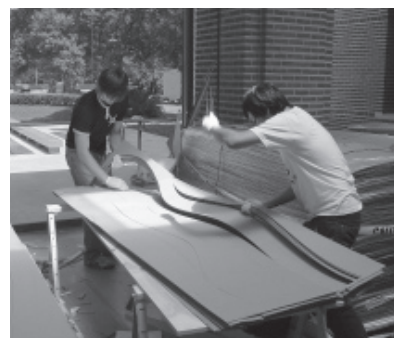


a tribute to German architect and engineer Frei Otto, whose models of the surface of soap film in the 1950s and 1960s pioneered tensile construction techniques, *Maximilian's Schell* was a unique tensile matrix comprised of 504 triangular petals which were cut from reinforced Mylar and labeled with a computer-controlled machine, then hand-fastened together with clear rivets. The resulting tornado-shaped cone was suspended from the two buildings that flank the M&A courtyard, a quiet, semi-enclosed space where visitors could sit and enjoy the sparkling Mylar's beautiful shadows and UV protection. The installation won Ball-Nogues the 2006 *ID Magazine* Annual Design Review award for Best Environment.

Not long after the completion of *Maximilian's Schell*, renowned architect Frank Gehry asked Ball-Nogues to create a fantasy environment for the launch party of the jewelry line he had created for Tiffany & Co. In part, as a reference to Gehry's early experiments with it, and in part as a reference to its low cost, versatility, and structural potential, Ball-Nogues selected corrugated cardboard. After months of work, the architects created a process of cutting and stacking sheets of cardboard to create an elegant party setting that included walls, lounge furniture, and a bar.

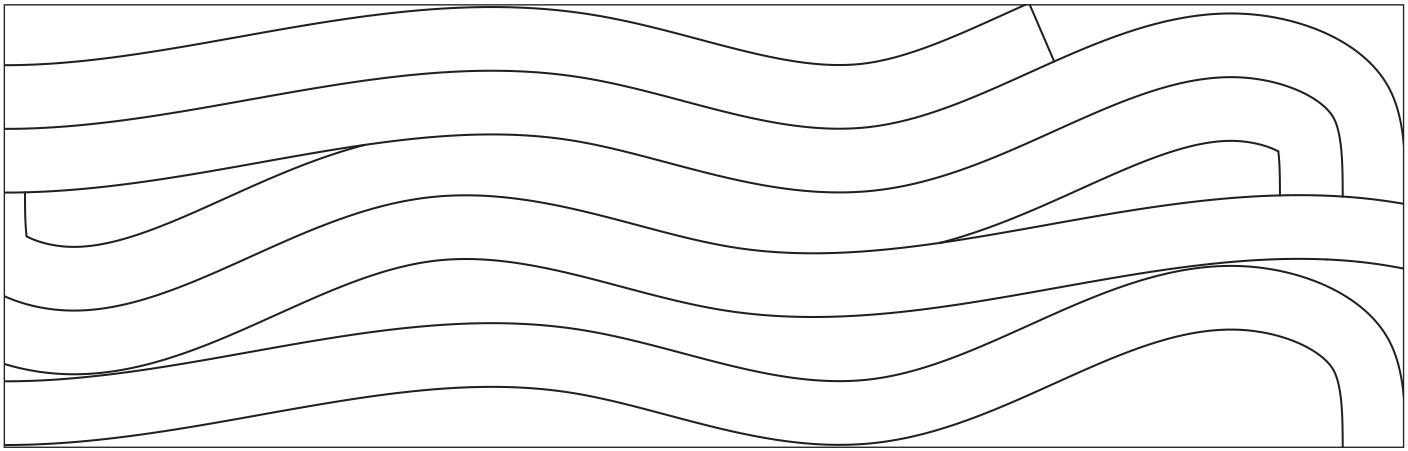
To refine their digital modeling tools, as well as to push the limits of the material even further, Ball-Nogues used cardboard for their site-specific installation at Rice Gallery. Lacking any defined purpose other than to transform the space, Ball-Nogues let the cardboard's inherent properties guide the installation's ultimate form.

The result is *Rip Curl Canyon*, a monumental eight-ton landscape made of 4000 sheets of die-cut cardboard mounted on a precision-cut, curved plywood frame. The frame rests on 2 x 4 supports, which hold the entire structure an average of six feet off the ground. Students from the Rice University School of Architecture and the University of Houston Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, as well as



TOP: Ball-Nogues's design for launch gala of Frank Gehry Jewelry Collection for Tiffany & Co., Los Angeles, 2006 (detail)
Photo: Benjamin Ball

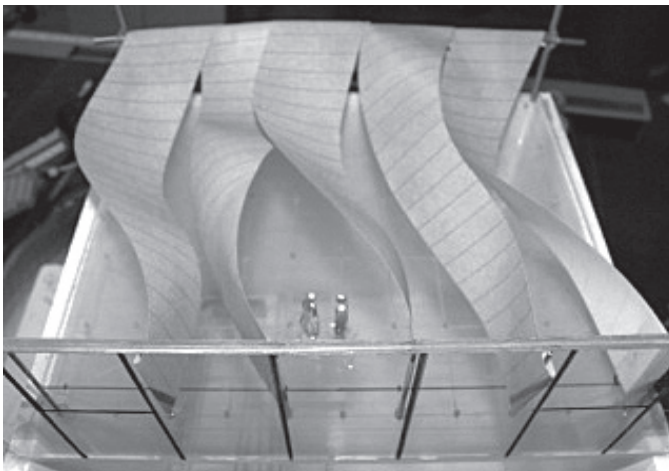
ABOVE: Student volunteers punch out cardboard shapes.



TOP: Template for custom die
Image: Ball-Nogues

RIGHT: *Rip Curl Canyon* armature (detail)

FAR RIGHT: Custom die used to cut cardboard



Conceptual model of *Rip Curl Canyon*
Image: Ball-Nogues

to the armature to form five "ribbons" that run from the back to the front of the gallery. From left to right, the first, second, and fifth ribbons are comprised completely of "hook" shapes; the third ribbon is entirely "double-hooks," and the fourth is "s-curves."

The form of the installation is directed by the idea of landscape and geological phenomenon. The interaction of the ribbons mimics the push and pull of seismic shifts in the earth. In Ball-Nogues's computer models, when two ribbons touch, the curving motion of one ripples through the other. Where the ribbons are torn apart, they curve independently. These points of separation create a spatial effect, exposing the strata of the cardboard construction. Ball reflects, "It was a game to figure out where we wanted them to affect each other and where we didn't."

other volunteers, assisted with every step in the assembly of the installation: they punched out the cardboard; they assembled the wooden armature, and they screwed cardboard pieces along the armature to create its undulating "shell."

A custom die was used to cut 3' x 8' sheets of cardboard into three shapes: the "hook" with one hooked end; the "double-hook" bent at both ends, and the "s-curve." The pieces were punched out of the cardboard, collated by shape, and attached

Rip Curl Canyon is the culmination of seven months of intensive study, modeling, and revision, with much of the work taking place in an un-air-conditioned garage. The process was, Ball admits, "grueling," yet Ball and Nogues enjoy the immediacy of this way of working, and find satisfaction in their open-ended approach. They didn't begin their installation at Rice Gallery with an end result in mind. Guided by imagery of landscape in the American West, they put their trust in the process and the material to guide the form, and the result is compelling.

ABOUT THE DESIGNERS

Gaston Nogues and Benjamin Ball met as students at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), Los Angeles and both worked for renowned architect Frank Gehry at Gehry Partners. Nogues worked for eleven years in product design and production where he was known as “the guy who could build anything.” Ball worked with Gehry Partners as a student, then became a set and production designer in the film industry, working on numerous films, the *Matrix* series among them.

In 2006, Ball-Nogues received Best of Category for Environments in *ID Magazine's* Annual Design Review for their installation *Maximilian's Schell*. Their work has appeared in *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Architectural Record*, *Dwell Magazine*, *Metropolis*, and *Fabric Architecture*, among others.



Gaston Nogues (left) and Benjamin Ball (right)
Photo: Lawrence K. Ho

SUPPORT AND SPONSORSHIP

Rice Gallery's fall 2006 installations are presented in collaboration with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston exhibition, *The Modern West: American Landscapes, 1890 – 1950*, on view at the MFAH, 29 October 2006 – 28 January 2007.

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Rice Gallery thanks grounds superintendent Ron Smith and his remarkable crew: Charles Coleman, Larry Felan, Kelly Frazier, Michael Polk, and Baldwin Swayzer who maneuvered ten tons of cardboard and wood into Sewall Hall. Thanks also to James King and Jason Rowe who removed at least one ton of cardboard scrap from the loading dock.

Rice Gallery

6100 Main Street Houston, Texas 77005
713.348.6069 www.ricegallery.org