

The Warming Hive: An Architectural Play in Five Acts

WHITNEY MOON

University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

The world-premier of *The Warming Hive*, written and directed by Whitney Moon, opened at the Binder Gallery in Marfa, Texas on Friday, October 13, 2017 at the ACSA Fall Conference “Crossings Between the Proximate and the Remote.” It should be noted that the following cast members, all of whom were presenters at the conference, were either solicited and/or volunteered on the spot to perform the script. No practice or rehearsal took place prior to the debut of this production. This play is based on real life events.



The Warming Hive inflated at ACRE Residency in Steuben, Wisconsin on July 11, 2017, in collaboration with artists Katy Cowan, Nicholas Frank and John Riepenhoff, and critic Filip Teichman. Featuring Bermuda Triangle pop-up bar by artist Sara Caron. Photo by author.

THE CAST

THE PROFESSOR: WHITNEY MOON
played by Antonio Furguele

THE STUDENT: JORDAN NELSON
played by Andrew Santa Lucia

ARTIST 1: KATY COWAN
played by Jasmine Benjamin

ARTIST 2: NICHOLAS FRANK
played by Beth Weinstein

ARTIST 3: JOHN RIEPENHOFF
played by Nick Gelpi

THE CRITIC: FILIP TEICHMAN
played by Filip Teichman

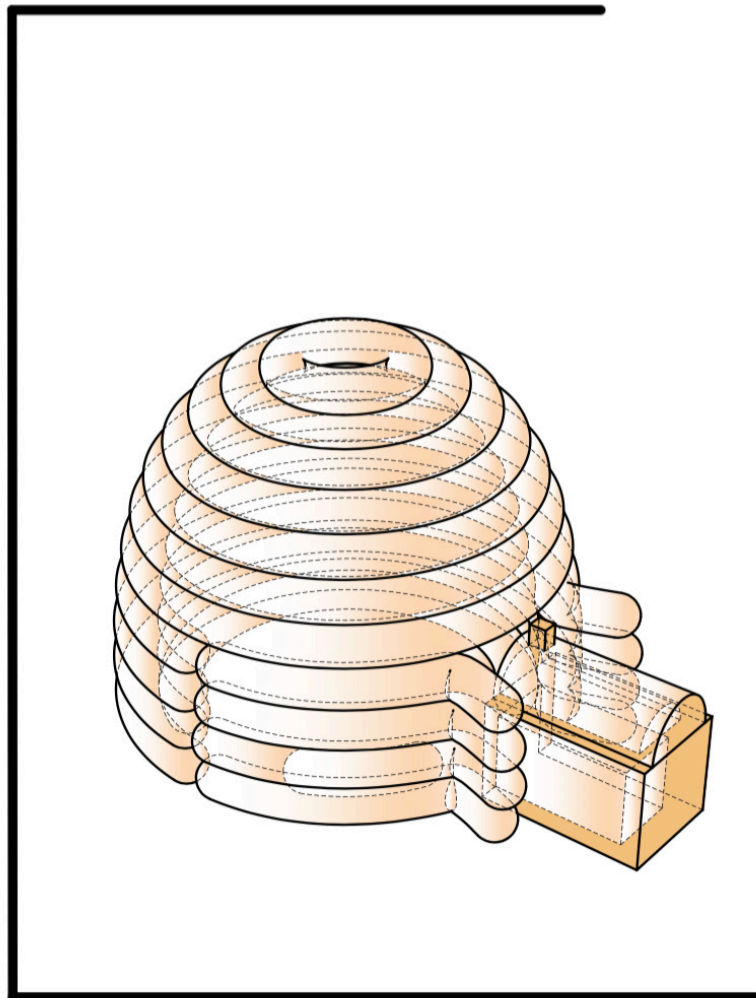
NARRATOR
played by Whitney Moon

ACT ONE

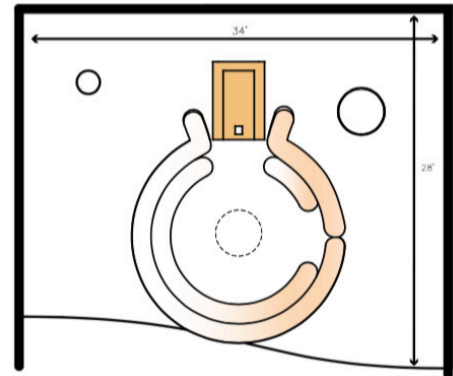
The setting is The Open gallery in Riverwest, Milwaukee in late October. Eleven students from Professor Whitney Moon’s “Pillow Talk: Blow Up!” architectural seminar at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee are presenting three different proposals for a pneumatic installation to be plugged into artist Katy Cowan’s “The Outlet,” an electric outlet located inside The Open gallery. The winning proposal will then be developed and constructed for a December gallery opening. The Professor, The Students, The Artists, and The Critic are all in attendance. One proposal, called “The Warming Hive,” has peaked the interest of The Artists, who are operating as both collaborators and clients. Of the three design proposals, this is the only one that directly responds to the request that it be located outside, to provide additional space for social programming during a winter art opening. In addition, The Warming Hive plans to engage “The Oven,” an outdoor oven in the gallery’s yard, run by artist John Riepenhoff.

[Stakes are high—excitement and tension is building around the potential and feasibility of actually pulling off the project.]

THE STUDENT *[Addressing everyone in the room and pointing to a projected drawing of the proposed project]:* The Warming Hive is a



AXONOMETRIC



PLAN



ELEVATION

ACT ONE: *The Warming Hive* was designed by the undergraduate and graduate architecture students of ARCH 533: Pillow Talk "Blow Up!" at UWM-SARUP in Fall 2016, taught by Assistant Professor Whitney Moon, PhD, RA: Jordan Nelson, Indhumathi Venkatachalam, Thomas Sebastian, Trevor Georgeson, Brandon Sather, John Young, Sam Smith, Yangtian Yin, Ryan Neidinger, Jackson Leverenz, & Sean Mroczkowski.

temporary and mobile, yet reusable, pneumatic structure. Because we are planning to install this outside during the winter, we wanted to encourage people to actually hang out in it. So, in addition to providing a shelter for social gatherings, the inflatable is designed to be warmed by John's Oven. It's also designed with an oculus to exhaust excess heat and smoke.

ARTIST 1 [*Looking at Artist 3, and then back at The Student*]: Oh, that's great!

ARTIST 3 [*Smiles and nods in approval*]: Yeah, we think it can work.

THE STUDENT [*Addressing The Artists, The Critic & The Professor*]: We've designed it to address the freezing temperatures outside during a Milwaukee winter, but imagine it could also provide a comfortable year-round shelter for exhibition, cooking, and gathering. The inflatable can also be deployed for a variety of temporary and event-based uses.

ARTIST 2: So, it can be used more than once?

THE STUDENT: Yes, that's what we were hoping for.

THE PROFESSOR [*Addressing The Artists and The Critic*]: We've spoken a lot in this seminar about how to not only advance the DIY technology of pneumatics, but to also address the unwanted waste that these types of temporary installations tend to create.

ARTIST 2 [*Intrigued*]: So, what's it going to be made of?

THE STUDENT: That's what we're trying to figure out. It's going to be a double-wall inflatable membrane so it has insulating properties and is more structurally stable. But, we'll have to do some research on materials.

THE CRITIC [*Disgruntled*]: Okay, okay. I think this points to a bigger problem. None of these proposals have even begun to address what they are going to be made of, let alone how they're going to be put together. And, what... you've got less than two months to pull this off?

THE PROFESSOR [*Addressing The Critic*]: Actually, less than two months.

THE CRITIC [*Disgruntled*]: Precisely! I think we need to be realistic here. Look, this installation isn't happening at an architecture school. This is an art gallery. The stakes are high. You're working with nationally recognized artists. The public will see this. The press will see this. They don't know what you're capable of, and not capable of, but I am. [*Hand gestures to The Professor*] We are. And I say that nobody is taking this seriously enough.

THE PROFESSOR [*Addressing The Critic*]: So what are you suggesting? That they don't actually try to build it?

THE CRITIC [*Less Disgruntled*]: Look, I think this is a great opportunity. Amazing, really. But everyone needs to be more realistic about what can actually be accomplished.

THE STUDENT: I have a lot of experience building things. We can figure out a solu—

THE CRITIC [*Interrupting The Student, and talking with his hands*]: Look, I know you're capable Jordan. But what I'm talking about is focusing on craft. Craft is key here. Craft is everything. Not just how it's going to be made, but how it's going to look. It needs to be fabricated impeccably. There are good ideas here, but none of them are resolved materially. That's why I think each group should build a scaled or partial mockup.

THE PROFESSOR [*Addressing The Critic*]: So, you're suggesting that they don't actually execute the installation, but simply operate in the representational realm? That's an entirely different project, and would be yet another architectural review where the students are making drawings and models. [*Looking to The Artists*] And I don't think that's what The Open had in mind.

THE CRITIC: True. But the focus would be on solving the problem technically and aesthetically. One step closer to actualizing an—

ARTIST 3 [*Politely interrupts*]: I disagree. For me it's not really about craft. Sure, they need to figure out how to build it, but it's the idea that matters most. This is a project about sociability. It brings people together. The Warming Hive does precisely what we were all hoping for.

ARTIST 1: Yeah, this could be a really amazing space to inhabit during an opening. It provides a space for people to gather, and by utilizing both The Outlet and The Oven, it's engaging multiple curatorial platforms simultaneously. I'd really like to see this built, but am also concerned about how that's going to happen...

THE CRITIC: Me too!

[*Everyone laughs*]

ARTIST 2 [*Thoughtfully and contemplatively addresses the group*]: I agree with both Filip and John. It's all about craft, but it's also all about sociability. This has the potential to be a great project, but the students have a responsibility to deliver on both fronts.

ACT TWO

The setting is inside the production warehouse at Landmark Creations, the fabricators of The Warming Hive, on the outskirts of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Professor and The Student have flown out there for the test inflation. Although they visited the fabricator a month earlier, this is the first time The Professor and Student are seeing the completed project in person.

[*The sound of a blower can be heard, and The Professor and The Student are anxious with excitement and anticipation.*]

THE PROFESSOR & THE STUDENT [*Both looking at the inflatable in disbelief, and speaking in unison*]: Wow.

THE STUDENT: Whitney, we did it!

THE PROFESSOR: I can't believe it.

THE STUDENT: We actually pulled it off.

THE PROFESSOR: Actually Jordan, you made it happen.

THE STUDENT: It was nothing.

THE PROFESSOR: And to think that a lot of the students are upset that we went with a fabricator.

THE STUDENT: They were delusional.

THE PROFESSOR [*Speaking very slowly, in near disbelief*]: It inflates in less than three minutes, and is actually fireproof.

THE STUDENT: I can't wait to inflate it around The Oven.

THE PROFESSOR [*Speaking loudly to The Student, over the sound of the air blower*]: This bench doesn't seem inflated enough. We definitely need to figure out a better solution.

THE STUDENT: Yeah, I agree. It's not working well.

THE PROFESSOR [*Speaking loudly to an absent fabricator, over the sound of the air blower*]: We need to fix the bench. It's not working well. Do we need a second blower, or a more powerful one?

THE STUDENT: John and Katy and Nicholas are going to be so stoked.

THE PROFESSOR: I can't believe this cost us less than \$5,000.

THE STUDENT: Seriously! We should make another one.

THE PROFESSOR: And, I can't believe we raised the funds so quickly.

THE STUDENT: Tell me about it. That almost never happens, right?

THE PROFESSOR: The donors will be glad to know that it's almost ready for installation.

THE STUDENT: There's no way we could have made this ourselves. Did you see the impeccably sewn seams? I don't know what some of the students were thinking. I doubt anyone from the seminar even knows how to operate a sewing machine, let alone construct something of this size and complexity.



ACT TWO: Test inflation of *The Warming Hive* at Landmark Creations near Minneapolis, Minnesota on January 5, 2017. Photo by author.

THE PROFESSOR: We'd still be watching YouTube Sewing 101 videos—

THE STUDENT *[Interrupts]*: —and trying to figure out who even sells fire-retardant nylon.

THE PROFESSOR *[With enthusiasm]*: Yes! And check out these interchangeable doors that go around The Oven. They zip in and out! That was such a brilliant solution that the fabricators came up with.

THE STUDENT: I know! It's even better than I imagined.

THE PROFESSOR: We really need to figure out this bench inflation. It's so central to the project. But the blower is already pretty loud. I can't imagine what it will be like with two blowers.

THE STUDENT: We have time to figure it out.

THE PROFESSOR *[Expressing concern]*: I wonder how much it's going to cost to fix it? At this point it's coming out of my own pocket, so we need to find a good, yet affordable solution. *[Speaking loudly to an absent fabricator, over the sound of the air blower, and pointing to the bench again.]* How much will it cost for a second blower?

ACT THREE

The setting is the premier of The Warming Hive at The Open gallery in Riverwest, Milwaukee in early April. Around 150 people are in attendance on a sunny Saturday afternoon, including most of the students from Professor Moon's seminar, taught the previous semester. Local Chef Peter Mandroni is cooking inside The Warming Hive, which is designed specifically to be installed around The Oven in the garden/courtyard of The Open gallery. The Warming Hive is powered by two blowers, one of which is plugged into The Outlet.

[Spirits are high, and The Warming Hive is swarming with people, inside and out.]

ARTIST 1 *[Places arm around The Professor in a friendly and jovial way]*: Well done Whitney! It's absolutely perfect.

THE PROFESSOR: Thanks Katy. It's great to see it come to life.

ARTIST 1 *[Gestures to ARTIST 2 to come over, and shouts]*: Nicholas!

[ARTIST 2 enters scene]



ACT THREE: Installation of *The Warming Hive* at The Open gallery in Riverwest, Milwaukee on April 1, 2017. Photo courtesy of Davis Dolson.

ARTIST 2 [*Gives a double-thumbs up to ARTIST 1 & The Professor*]: Congratulations! I love it.

THE PROFESSOR: Nicholas, I'm so glad we decided to postpone this event until you returned from your artist residency.

ARTIST 2: Yes, thank you. [*Gestures with both hands*] And, thank you for this!

THE PROFESSOR: It seems like only yesterday that the three of us were discussing the possibilities of a pneumatic collaboration.

ARTIST 1: I'm so glad we were able to work together. Your students must be thrilled.

[*All three looking up at a drone flying overhead*]

THE PROFESSOR: Jordan is taking drone footage of the event.

ARTIST 2 [*Looking up at the drone*]: Jordan thinks of everything.

[*THE CRITIC enters scene*]

THE PROFESSOR [*Addressing The Critic*]: So, what do you think Filip?

THE CRITIC [*Looking up at the drone*]: Well done.

THE PROFESSOR: The only thing we are missing is—

THE CRITIC [*Interrupts*]: —the snow?

[*ARTIST 3 enters scene*]

THE PROFESSOR [*Addressing Artist 3*]: John, Is everything going okay with The Oven?

ARTIST 3: Yeah. Peter is having a great time cooking in there!

ARTIST 1: It's amazing to see so many people packed into The Hive and enjoying themselves.

THE CRITIC: I'm going to go get some food before they run out.

[*Brief pause as The Critic leaves the scene*]

ARTIST 3: You know Whitney, the project really came together. I've been meaning to thank you. Somehow, you and your students were able to give temporary form to what has been happening socially in the Milwaukee art scene.



ACT FOUR: Installation of *The Warming Hive* around an outdoor oven at ACRE Residency in Steuben, Wisconsin on July 11, 2017. Photo by author.

ARTIST 1: Yeah, but if you asked one of us to ascribe a form to it, we wouldn't possibly know where to begin.

ARTIST 2 [*Mildly sarcastic*]: Leave it to the architects to figure it out!

ARTIST 3: It also renders Katy's "outlet" as a conduit to provide physical support for The Hive.

ARTIST 1: It's certainly the largest thing we've plugged into The Outlet.

THE PROFESSOR: It was such a great process working with the three of you. Since we first began talking about a pneumatic collaboration last summer, I've been fascinated by the multiple curatorial platforms happening here at The Open (The Oven, The Outlet, The Nicholas Frank Public Library...) There's an ambiguity of authorship, and a celebration of simultaneous and overlapping programs. I really wanted our project to participate in that culture in an architectural way. I only wish that more of the students were committed to actually seeing the project through.

ARTIST 2: You mean, more than just Jordan?

THE PROFESSOR [*Laughs*]: Exactly. It's like the minute we decided to work with a fabricator the bulk of the students lost interest. Unfortunately, that's where the real learning began.

ARTIST 1: Out of sight, out of mind.

ARTIST 2: But most of them are here enjoying themselves, no?

[*Brief Pause*]

ARTIST 3 [*Speaking to The Professor*]: I've already been speaking to some people about some art residencies where we can inflate The Warming Hive this summer. You interested?

ACT FOUR

The setting is ACRE Residency in Steuben, Wisconsin. The Open gallery has invited The Warming Hive to participate as a visiting artist for a few days, and to inflate the project for both a lunchtime and evening event. This scene takes place in the evening, with Artist Sara Caron mixing up craft cocktails as part of her Bermuda Triangle pop-up bar project. Earlier in the day a few visiting artists from Japan,



ACT FOUR: "But, did you get 'the' shot?" Sunset view from *The Warming Hive* at ACRE Residency on July 11, 2017. Photo courtesy of Filip Tejchman.

collaborated with John to cook mochi in an outdoor oven, similar to the one at The Open. The conversation takes place inside the inflatable between The Professor, Artist 3 and The Critic.

[Spirits are generally high. Although a number of people are enjoying themselves, the Professor is starting to feel the burden of managing The Hive, in terms of maintenance and labor, and starts to question how it could be improved.]

ARTIST 3: I'm so glad you guys could make it.

THE PROFESSOR: Here we are...

THE CRITIC: Again!

THE PROFESSOR: Thanks for inviting us here John. It's really great to see the project inflated in such a rural setting.

ARTIST 3: Yeah, I agree. It takes on a very different identity depending on where it's installed.

THE PROFESSOR: It's too bad Jordan had to work.

[ARTIST 3 waves to someone, and leaves the scene]

THE PROFESSOR *[Speaking to The Critic]*: Did you see how much tree trimming I did? It took hours.

THE CRITIC: Yeah, I was surprised. I thought you'd just inflate it in the clearing over there.

THE PROFESSOR: But there's an outdoor oven here! John and I wanted to test it out—

THE CRITIC *[Interrupting, with sarcasm]* Again.

THE PROFESSOR: I was pretty determined to set it up here. It's definitely a site-specific installation. Did you notice how I left some of the weeds and wildflowers inside The Hive? And how the tree branches just kiss the top of the dome? I think you can even see part of the tree through the oculus...

THE CRITIC: It's all in the details, I suppose.

THE PROFESSOR: The Hive is particularly photogenic here. I've taken hundreds of photos already.

THE CRITIC: But, did you get “the” shot?

[The Critic pulls out his camera, and they both admire the photo]

THE PROFESSOR: Oh... that’s really good. Very Sunset magazine.

[Long pause...]

THE CRITIC *[Pointing and gazing out to the horizon]*: Wow, that’s quite a light show.

THE PROFESSOR: I hope it doesn’t rain. *[Puts out open palms to see if it’s raining]* The Hive is going to get filthy!

THE CRITIC *[Speaking with certainty]*: Oh, it will.

THE PROFESSOR: And, unfortunately, it will take forever to dry it out. *[Long pause...]* You know, it’s funny how we pitch The Warming Hive as being super mobile and lightweight. It may be, relative to other structures, but it’s still pretty heavy. Not to mention, it gets quite dirty. *[Pause]* I suppose as a prototype, there’s certainly some room for improvement.

[Long pause...]

THE CRITIC: I take it you need help packing it up?

ACT FIVE

The Warming Hive has recently returned from ACRE residency (a high note, in terms of publicity), and is continuing to attract more attention and interest. As a result, it was invited to participate in the Makeshift Festival, a food and art event in late August, located in Madison, Wisconsin. The Student, who has now graduated, but is managing The Warming Hive, informed The Professor a few days before the event that he is slammed with deadlines at work and cannot go. Although disappointed, The Professor—who does not own a car and who cannot manage the 250+ pound inflatable by herself—understands the predicament, and asked The Student to call the festival organizers to cancel. Much to her surprise, on the day of The Makeshift Festival, The Professor sees on Instagram that The Warming Hive has been inflated. This following scene takes place between The Professor and Student, via text message.

[Tension is very high, as The Professor is learning to contend with issues of maintenance, management, publicity, etc.]

THE PROFESSOR *[Staring at Instagram on iPhone in disbelief, types a text message to The Student]*: Jordan! Why am I seeing The Warming Hive in Madison??? *[Still texting...]* I thought you canceled. *[Still texting...]* Are you there?

THE STUDENT *[Texting]*: Oh, hi. Yes.

THE PROFESSOR *[Texting]*: I’m confused.

THE STUDENT *[Texting]*: It’s in Madison.

THE PROFESSOR *[Texting]*: But I thought we canceled? Are you there?

THE STUDENT *[Texting]*: I drove it out there early this morning.

THE PROFESSOR *[Texting]*: So, you are in Madison?

THE STUDENT *[Texting]*: No. I’m in Milwaukee now. I dropped it off before going to work.

THE PROFESSOR *[Texting, while looking at more images of The Warming Hive at the Makeshift Festival]*: Why didn’t you inform me?

THE STUDENT *[Texting]*: Sorry. *[Long pause...]* I was planning to. *[Even longer pause...]* Things are super stressful at work.

THE PROFESSOR *[Texting]*: Ok. *[Pause]* I’m really glad you were able to take it, but we need to communicate better. It seems strange to find out this way. *[Long pause...]* But, who’s watching it? *[Long pause...]* Are you going to pick it up?

[Long pause...]

THE STUDENT *[Texting]*: The organizer said they’d ship it back to Milwaukee, and provide documentation.

THE PROFESSOR *[Sighs, while looking at more images of The Warming Hive at the Makeshift Festival, and says to herself]*: What a mess!

[Long pause...]

THE PROFESSOR *[Texting]*: I really wish you would have let me know. *[Pause]* It’s a huge liability. *[Long pause...]* And I assume you didn’t have time to clean it?

THE STUDENT *[Texting]*: I apologize. Next time I’ll keep you in the loop.

THE PROFESSOR *[Sighs, while looking at more images of The Warming Hive at the Makeshift Festival, and says to the audience]*: The bench isn’t inflated. And he didn’t tie anything down. What a nightmare!

[The Professor’s phone rings...]

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ENDNOTES

1. Brian Grazer and Charles Fishman, *A Curious Mind: The Secret to a Bigger Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 12.
2. Henry David Thoreau, “Walking,” in *The Making of the American Essay*, ed. John D’Agata (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2016), 177–78.
3. Grazer and Fishman, *Curious Mind*, 37.
4. Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, eds., *The Founders’ Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), chap. 10, doc. 19, <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/>.
5. Susan Satterfield, “Livy and the Pax Deum,” *Classical Philology* 111, no. 2 (April 2016): 170.
6. Kurland and Lerner, *Founders’ Constitution*, chap. 4, doc. 29.
7. Thoreau, “Walking,” 182.
8. “Privacy Policy,” *Privacy & Terms*, Google, last modified April 17, 2017, <https://www.google.com/policies/privacy/>.