

a perfect storm

Chris Klapper and Patrick Gallagher bring on thunder and lightning at a Philadelphia gallery

"Would you be interested in trying something really massive?" That was the question posed by Eileen Tognini, curator at Skybox at 2424 Studios in Philadelphia, to installation artist Chris Klapper, whose largest piece to that point was a mere 8 feet high. Tognini challenged her to fill the 7,000-square-foot gallery space with a show that would be "epic in every way." A bit daunted, Klapper turned to her husband, Patrick Gallagher, a fellow installation artist, to collaborate on *Symphony in D Minor*, a multimedia work inspired by the viscera of thunderstorms. "A storm rolling in, building to a crescendo, and gradually receding, in our minds, closely followed symphonic form," Klapper says of the title. "We chose D minor since compositions in that key tend to be more dramatic in tone," adds Gallagher.

The piece comprised a quartet of 22-foot-long translucent cylinders, their shape inspired by long rolling arcus clouds, hung beneath the gallery's 40-foot-high skylit ceiling. Acrylic tubing was heated, bent into arcs, welded into 5-foot-diameter rings, and spaced at 4-foot-intervals to create a circular rib cage for each cylinder. Pliable resin sheets, cast in silicone molds, were wrapped around these armatures, creating a skin upon which storm images—captured on an iPhone by the artists—were back-projected from inside the giant forms. Decorative resin endcaps, molded to evoke storm drains, provided the finishing touch.

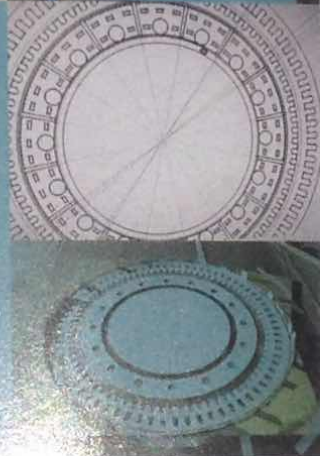
Despite being referred to as clouds, the cylinders, complete with all their technology equipment, weighed 600 pounds apiece. Thus steel pipes were secured by clamps to steel mounts fitted around the gallery's original ceiling trusses; suspended from these pipes, the cylinders were free to swing.

When the installation was up last fall, the gallery proctor would surprise visitors by reaching up to give one of the clouds a gentle shove, which caused the projections of a calm blue sky to darken and rumbling sounds to emerge. Viewers were then encouraged to push the suspended cylinders harder themselves and, gazing upward, observe the thunderous results. "When gallery-goers realized they could touch the art, a taboo boundary was broken," Gallagher says. "That was a beautiful thing to watch." Over the course of approximately 40 minutes, the basso profundo of a full-blown storm diminished to the pitter-patter of receding rain, only to regroup and thunder again. —Craig Kellag

THROUGHOUT: NORTHEAST PLASTIC SUPPLY CO.; ACRYLIC: POLYTEK; RESIN: IRON STUDIO; STEEL: ADAFRUIT INDUSTRIES; SENSORS



Left, from top: Acrylic tubes were heated and formed into arcs, which were welded into rings, to form armatures for *Symphony in D Minor*. Resin sheets were cured in a silicone mold on the floor. A winch raised the resin to cover the acrylic armature. **Right, from top:** The wrapped sheets were secured with zip ties. Motion sensors were placed inside the cylinders to trigger audio and video. Designed using CAD, the relief patterns on



the cylinders' endcaps resembled storm drains. The caps were also molded from resin. Each of the four cylinders was 22 feet long and weighed 600 pounds.

centerfold
UNFOLD



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Draped with back-projected images of storms captured on an iPhone, the cylinders bring 6' 3" feet from the floor—just within reach of most gallery visitors.