

# ART IN REVIEW

**Ted Larsen: *The Party Is Over***, Axle Contemporary, 670-7612, [www.axleart.com](http://www.axleart.com), through Jan. 29

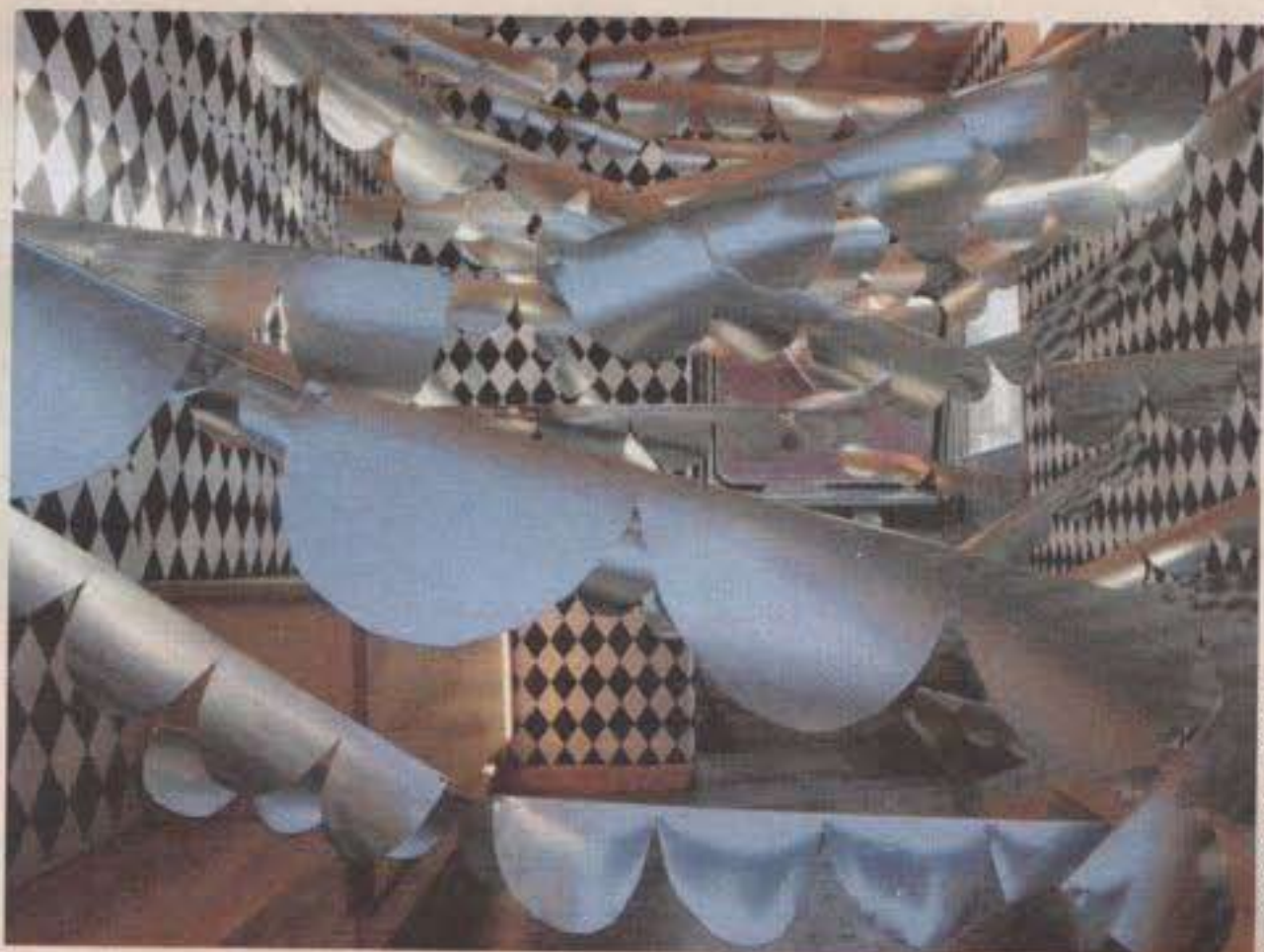
Is anybody buying art these days? It's a serious question. Sept. 15, 2008, the day Lehman Brothers filed for what would turn out to be the largest bankruptcy in U.S. history, spelled dark times ahead for the art market. For many collectors, art is an investment. But if only the wealthiest patrons can afford to buy it, that leaves the rest of us to merely window shop. Ted Larsen's installation at Axle Contemporary, *The Party Is Over*, suggests a cold, hard truth about the market and the global economy overall: we have bled a fat pig dry. Being on the outside of the installation looking in is a confounding and frustrating experience. All that separates the viewer from the art is a pane of glass. Stamped on the glass, partially obstructing our view of the interior, are the words "The Party Is Over" — as emphatic as a closed-for-business sign.

Inside, there is a dull sameness to the crisscrossing streamers that fill the gallery's small space. Like party streamers the day after the party, they hang slightly limp in a dead, empty silence. Larsen is an artist who works with salvaged metal, sometimes juxtaposing small, colored pieces in painterly abstractions and constructing sculptures out of salvaged materials. His works are marvels of minimalist craftsmanship. For this installation, Larsen draped his streamers with pieces of what appear to be hand-cut sheet metal draped loosely over wire. The hand-cut metal has a sharpness despite its rounded edges; it looks like it could cut you. The gleaming light off the aluminum surfaces seems to promise more than it can deliver, probably an intentional effect. Black and white harlequin patterns on the gallery walls add to the dissonance. It is not aesthetically pleasing, but *The Party Is Over* gets its message across.

An installation at Axle last spring by Nina Mastrangelo similarly filled the space, allowing no room for visitors. Interestingly, one didn't feel shut out from Mastrangelo's exhibit, as one does with Larsen's. It doesn't take long to surmise that there is a kind of safety in standing apart, being on the outside. If you don't like it, you can simply walk away. Of course, that is true of any exhibit, but here, walking away feels like part of the experience. There really isn't much to see beyond the statement on the glass, so final and certain. It's an exhibit that elicits a perfunctory response.

Note: The harlequin figure, a clown associated with the *Commedia dell'arte* that developed in 16th-century Italy, may have had its origin in the figure of Hellequin, an emissary of the devil in French drama. Maybe Larsen just liked the diamond pattern. Maybe he was suggesting something a little more playful — or a little more sinister.

— Michael Abatemarco



Matthew Chase-Daniel

Ted Larsen: *The Party Is Over*, 2011, installation view, galvanized sheet metal, steel wire, and wrapping paper