

Sue Pedley

humidity

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With multimedia and interactivity now firmly conflated with CD-ROM and on-line technologies in the official hype of government and corporate cultural strategies, it is salutary to pause a second to consider how the concepts inherent in these terms are being critically and pointedly

addressed through what are now called traditional media, such as sculpture and installation. Sue Pedley's is one such project. Without fear of risking obsolescence through her obsession with the materiality of plaster, wool and dyes, she circuitously provides a fully interactive multimedia piece.

humidity is an installation which represents a continuous process of both subtle and dramatic transformation. Composed of a series of elements, most notably several hundred hand-made plaster bricks harbouring brilliantly coloured, edible, finger paint dyes which slowly eke to the surface, the work is never complete nor free from intervention. When I viewed it, the high windows of the gallery were half-obscured by a wall of these iridescent bricks, each distinct in colour and texture. They formed a 'painterly' surface evocative of the passage of time, of the tales told by *patinas* and *pentimento*. Photographs on the opposite wall showed other configurations of the elements of the installation made during the exhibition: a knee-high wall following the full perimeter of the gallery; a pile of bricks lying in disassembled anarchy; a head-high tower; a curious circular cubicle. The possibilities of physical manifestation appeared many: the promise of order or chaos equally strong. Through the artist's and viewer's interference, the elements of the installation were in continual interaction with the space, reconfiguring and challenging its confines.

At another level of interactivity, the plaster bricks are in constant exchange with the humidity in the air, an exchange betrayed in the glacial movement of the dyes through the plaster. The more the moisture, the more brilliant the colours.

This is an effect which Pedley is attempting to control. The artist has introduced means to artificially boost the moisture level. In this work, a glass vaporiser rests on a plaster bed, its condensation slowly but perceptibly drenching its surroundings with colour. This acceleration of 'natural' processes brings an awareness of an environment in perpetual flux, and with it an awareness of our occupying an organic space no matter how 'artificial' might appear our surroundings.

The installation is playful, open and striking. Its freshness is both evoked and rebutted by the work's focus on the process of change – not only tumultuous change as reflected in the artist's continual shifting of objects, but also the less glamorous change that is inextricable from the passage of time. Change promises renewal, but also decay. This rendering tangible of temporality stays with me: to me, the subtle transmutations which Pedley's installation undergoes are a poetic reminder of the inevitably aging body. While I am walking amongst these 'living' objects, breathing change into them, appropriating their lustre with my fingers, Pedley tells me that upon completing an exhibition, she may smash portions of her sculptures for use in future work. She also tells me that if they are not carefully tended in a controlled environment, within a few years the plaster bricks will, as if all of a sudden, turn to dust. The reference does not escape me.