

SUE PEDLEY

TIDE

FIRST DRAFT INC. WEST, SYDNEY

ABBY MELLICK

On a day when the true heat of summer seemed to settle with some finality over the city, I entered the cool, domestic environment of First Draft West on Parramatta Road. From the street, Sue Pedley's sculptural installation *Tide* appeared unfinished. Long, thin objects of indeterminate colour leaned precariously against the walls of the room. These objects were lit from below, the lights appearing not to have been set up yet.

Moving among the objects in the first room, I became embraced by the quiet presence of this installation, still somehow 'unfinished', but not in the sense I had first thought. Rather, these are *partial* objects. Cast from long, ridged shapes dug in sand, these pillars seem to bear the imprint of fantastic sea creatures, or the organic, intricate textures and honeycomb contours of coastal sandstone. The sand-encased convex surfaces are brittle, with delicate laced edges curving around an inside of hard, smooth, white plaster, reminiscent of the underside

of cuttle fish. Pedley cast several of these objects with a second skin, from new shapes excavated in the sand. Some of the pieces are peeled of their fragile second surface, revealing the experiments of this casting process.

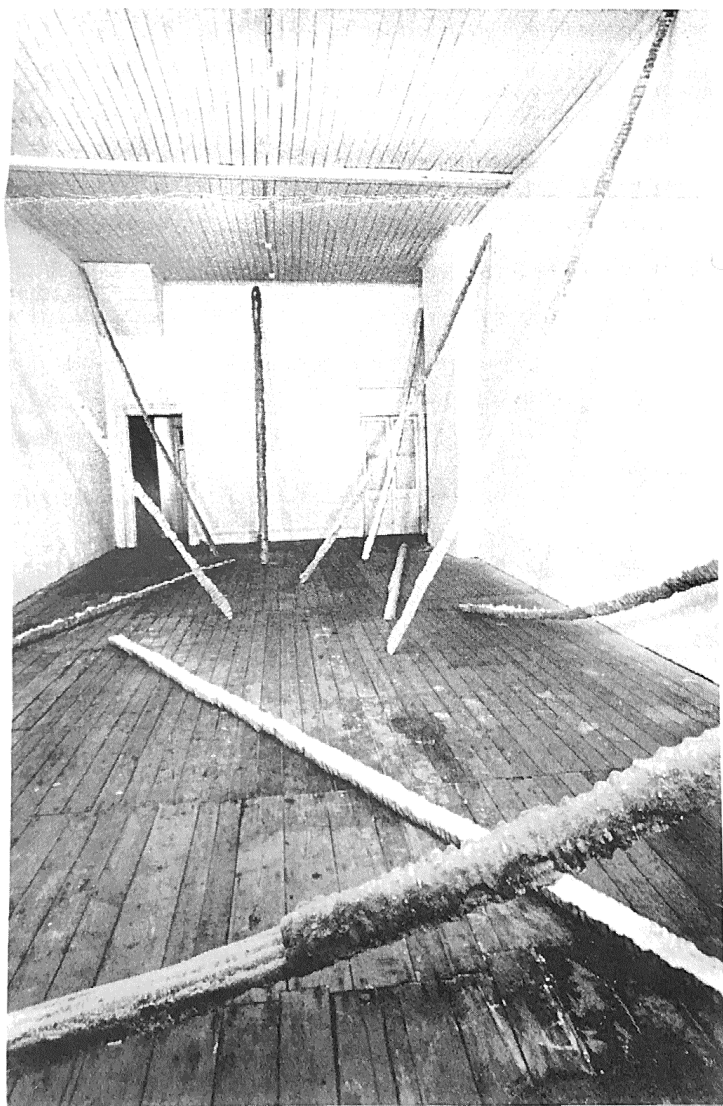
In the second, smaller room – a passage-way between two open doors – a soft breeze ripples two rows of fine, beach-coloured muslin which 'flow' to the floor from white coat racks fixed to opposite sides of the room. The muslin is attached to the pegs with wide, red rubber bands, forming protrusions like bandaged digits. The fabric is pinched and stretched by a process of starching and ironing to create a patterning like waves. On the adjacent wall, a wide fold of roughly formed, honey-coloured rubber hangs from a white rail. It has a bubbled and faulted surface – thick at the top and tapering to a frail, diaphanous fold. We have left the beach for the sea, for the different textures of water, consistencies of waves and the movement of the tide.

Pedley works and reworks her materials. The 'accidents' incurred in this process become part of her work. She reveals a fascination with materials, with tactile surfaces and textures which refuse to close around literal forms.

Meaning passes over the tight physicality of the objects with their contagion of imaginative associations and resonances. These are 'loose' objects, untidy conceptually and visually, offering a challenge to the sort of goal-directed looking at art inherent in our lack of time and consequent impatience. They challenge the sort of looking which worships the emphatic, 'finished' image and which seems to judge a work on its perfection of visual/conceptual closure.

This installation is open-ended, shifting around the objects and creating an undecidable space. Meaning here touches and retouches rather than is held; turns and returns like the tide, and offers a sense of flight and freedom from the constraints of its final attribution. I am trying to catch the gossamer sense of a moving thing; the tremulous membrane between sure states. I imagine a littoral bordering between sea and sky, or a wave rolling back off the beach leaving a penumbra of sea and shoreline.

I pause in the stairwell which separates the first and second rooms of the gallery to read the essay by Sarah Day which accompanies *Tide*. This piece of writing becomes a part of the experience. It conjures seaside reveries and reveals the absorption of the self in ones experiential surroundings – the intersecting associations from which we are always already inseparable. I am set adrift in remembering a time when rockpools were living worlds to explore, and the sand was an expanse of millions of broken, multi-coloured shells to collect. I re-enter the first room of spindles which now seem like living skeletons, fantastical seaside constructions reanimated and overblown by a child's tireless fascination. This show is about the process of change and the powerful resonances produced by even the most ephemeral things.



Sue Pedley, part installation view. Photo, Chris Fortescue.