

Two Less Two (2009), a series of room-encompassing, gold-framed mirrors, which were smashed by the artist after being installed, holds a power and formality beyond the character of the mirror paintings he has been making since 1961. The mirror is an image both patently real and surreal; the act of breaking it is simultaneously destructive and creative, resonant of the human condition. In Joan Jonas's *Reading Dante II* (2009), the text is movingly recited by a range of friends, including kids, speaking in vernacular language, a rich confluence of then and now, future and present. Jan Häfström's installation of cut-out images, a vocabulary that has defined his Pop-based work since the 1960s, came to life, literally and uncannily, in a performance with Swedish choreographer Lotta Melin. In a grassy area beyond the Giardini, where rows of pine trees fill some six acres, a picnic of sorts was held late one afternoon, enjoyed by sophisticated Swedes, dressed mainly in black and white, relaxing on black blankets. If this weren't striking enough, far-off figures cloaked in Häfström's signature black-hooded robes, moved through the grid of trees, erratically and slowly approaching the revelers, halting, striking poses, and stumbling until they were among the picnickers. Then they continued on and moved out of sight. A hooded figure pulled a coffin along the edge of the canal. Minutes later, the sky turned black and the rain poured.

Bruce Nauman's *Topological Gardens*, installed in three locations, won the prestigious Golden Lion for the Best National Participation. This is work we know, that has shaped the conception and making of art for several decades. In the new sound pieces, *Days, Giorni* (2009), disembodied voices offer a litany of the days of the week in fugue-like harmony. The new video, *Untitled 2* (1970/2009), screened in the room where it was filmed in the Univer-

sità Ca' Foscari, is elegant, baroque even, the patterns of the marble floors echoing those in the nearby Accademia. Perhaps my reading was focused by the context, set in a city where streets are waterways and boats act as buses, where contrasts between yesterday and tomorrow shape experience.

—Judith Hoos Fox

St. Louis

Gedi Sibony

Contemporary Art Museum

St. Louis

Gedi Sibony's recent exhibition at the Contemporary Art Museum Saint Louis invited profound intimacy between viewer and museum by way of a series of provisional installations. Humble gestures served as access points, allowing viewers to familiarize themselves with the specific qualities of the space. The artist's acute awareness of his surroundings suggested a basic unify-

ing principle, one in which conventional relationships between figure and ground in an artwork are nearly erased. Viewers found themselves within the art, wholly included in the aesthetic experience.

My Arms Are Tied Behind My Other Arms was constructed from a repertoire of mismatched materials reassuringly lacking in pretense. The motley Arte Povera approach to style and substance in Sibony's installations is resolutely anti-consumerist and antithetical to the current drive toward spectacle. Packing and shipping materials, display pedestals, plastic drop cloth, and leftover hardware from previous exhibitions at the museum elevated the peripheral, the leftover, the carried-over, and the interim. But most profound were the moments in which the artist's subtlety brought you deeper into the rooms themselves.

From the start, Sibony showed us one of his favorite maneuvers: by

altering one area of the pre-existing space, another section becomes visually charged, ripe for open-minded and considered inspection. In *All Conditions Conducive*, a section of Sheetrock about the size of a doorway was cut out and left leaning just beside the gap. Sibony physically opened the wall itself and invited viewers to enter mentally. A digital collage included in Sibony's 2008 artist's book offers the metaphor of the Annunciation, with angels and apparitions telegraphing through walls to convey transcendent news.

(XXXX) featured two small carpet scraps sitting face down on the floor and cresting at the point where their corners met. The artist affirms the intimate overture when he refers to this configuration in the catalogue as the "kissing carpets." A pair of silver staples appeared on a nearby, unlit wall. Was their presence a considered accentuation or an accident? Is one explanation more artistically valid than the other? These minutiae represented a conceptual juncture beyond which all perceptual information in the museum became part of the art experience. Viewers giving themselves over to the artistry of pure perception, were rewarded with ever more visceral traces.

Center Section, the last labeled piece in the exhibition, consisted of a vast white wall marked at irregular, intuitive intervals with gentle wisps of spray paint. The ghostly accents were not the primary experience; rather, they led viewers to see all of what was in front of them. The experience of Sibony's work is quieting, but rather than a sobering take on an impoverished circumstance, his working method is playful and experimental enough to leave viewers feeling inexplicably lifted by an encounter with his orchestrated situations.

—Matt Morris

Gedi Sibony, (XXXX), 2005. Carpet, 7 x 50 x 54 in.

