



Walls, Floors and Ceilings

Experiments in how art occupies space at Solway Gallery

MATT MORRIS // OCT 14, 2009

The ubiquity of Installation Art in museums and galleries for decades now suggests, perhaps incorrectly, that it's a widely understood concept. But Carl Solway Gallery's latest exhibition, *Walls, Floors, & Ceilings*, seems to act as an introduction to

Installation Art practices. The 15 artists that comprise the exhibition have created piles, puddles and wall treatments that in many cases boast attractive color schemes and intricate handwork.

The exhibition as a whole is pleasant enough, but perhaps with too few challenges to wrap my thoughts in. I worry, based on the selections for this exhibition, that a viewer new to the medium of Installation might mistake it as a consistently *pretty* approach to art making. I expect more from many of these internationally established artists, who I know are capable of not just visually pleasing work but also have been responsible for discovering shocking beauty and poignant revelation.

Installation art is a much broader, more uncertain terrain than what is offered here. I hope that this exhibition whets the appetite for the uninitiated. It's a functional primer in the basics of Installation Art, but there is much more to see.

At their most basic, Installations are radical in that they extend beyond spaces that have traditionally been reserved for art. Objects, imagery, light and sound might be employed to engage the same space occupied by viewers. As the Solway exhibition's title points out, artists often incorporate a space's preexisting architecture into the final work so that it is built into or at least acknowledges its surrounding environment.

One such piece in the exhibition would not exist were it not for the gallery's walls. MacArthur fellow and Ohio State University professor Ann Hamilton's "accountings — soot wall" was made by holding lit candles against the gallery walls so that soot and wax would streak the surface. The ritual of burning the walls feels exorcistic, which comments on Hamilton's particular ability to simultaneously coax out inherent characteristics of a place while also infusing the space with poetic, spiritual qualities.

Several artists are represented by framed drawings in conjunction with their installations. This is helpful in that viewers can compare their sensibilities as they work with different scales and materials. For example, Brooklyn-based artist Amy Kao's sinuous, patterned mark making in her two ink drawings don't translate well into "Fire Water," the wall-sized mural of vinyl cutouts. While her orgasmic imagery is more overt at a large scale, I am more interested in the escapist daydreams depicted in the drawings. Clouds gather into suggestive circle jerks around misty islands populated with breast and penis-like botanical forms. Surprisingly, it is the drawings one might get lost in, not Kao's environmental wall piece.

The oldest work in the exhibition is hands down the most interesting, in that its materials and presentation establish further Installation Art's potential for existing closer to "real life" than to "fine art." Donald Lipski's "Gathering Dust" from 1978 is a compilation of 90 small, delicately manipulated forms pinned in a grid to the wall. The materials hearken from real life rather than from an art store: Bent straws, bits of wire, twine, cigarette butts, scraps of paper, broken rubber bands, clumps of fuzz and an entire universe of materials have been twisted, bent and assembled into little intimate, elegant formal studies. "Gathering Dust" is an ongoing project that Lipski has been working on since childhood, making the artwork an idea and a reservoir of objects that can be drawn from to fill areas of wall or exhibitions. Museums and collectors across the world have Lipski installations similar to the one at Solway.

The gallery is staged with a number of installations beyond what is discussed above. Tony Tasset's "Rainbow Rocks" is like the rubble of the "big rock candy mountain" described in Folk songs. Sam Gilliam's "Dance Me, Dance You 2" (pictured) is as interesting for the shadows it casts on the floor as for the tie-dyed bundles hung at eye level in front of Stephen Hendee's wall of polypropylene panels that are illuminated in fuchsia and yellow light.

A sense of play permeates the exhibition, inviting viewers to scramble through the worlds each artist has envisioned. While the spaces are packed with different environments, the number of subdued works leaves me feeling a bit undernourished.

WALLS, FLOORS & CEILINGS continues at Carl Solway Gallery (424 Findlay St., West End) through Dec. 23.

<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13016105/walls-floors-and-ceilings-review>