

Melissa Smedley

Scenic Overlook

To tell you the truth, I've never liked the word installation that much. It reminds me too much of bathroom fixtures or those lit up Exit signs. I prefer **installment**, because of the continuousness implied. To show a segment or a facet of something ongoing.

My work dwells on the making of objects that impose different parameters on my body and the psyche that roams within it. With these contraptions, I have performed journies or ritual ordeals in a desired landscape and transported them to the viewer through video. The body acts as engine to a crudely locomoting sculptural configuration comprised of various recognizable domestic and homely stray materials. Held together With significant hardware.

When running, I frequently pass a woman out painting with her easel. Strangely, as a multi-media artist, I have a kinship with this painter who goes out into the field. Except that my work is to become the easel, to become the contraption that structures the activity. It is a physics of heart.

Since over the past few months, my primary artwandering activity has been with words, the constructions will have to do with this form of grappling. With this upstairs room. With this performance.

In **Scenic Overlook**, I seek to make the installment into an imaginary landscape within which a certain exertion of

Olav Westphalen

A faithful reconstruction of the upstairs room with all its contents

What you see is a group of mechanisms performing therapeutic functions. Some are in working order, others are just being assembled. They are appliances and may be applied to and by whoever comes to see them.

I guess they have to do with cure-alls, snake oils, and other devices that suggest fulfillment of desires of a grand scale. They ask for interaction.

Why are these contraptions not on their own? Why do they share a room with various other things?

This is what I have to offer in place of an answer: When we move away from the isolated, metaphorical space of painting into the threedimensional world we make a step away from a purely symbolic phenomenon towards factual situations with possible real impact on the viewer - who is not just a viewer anymore - and possible impact of the viewers action on the situation^{one}.

We thus loosen our control over the situation and over its exact meaning. If control and mastery were at stake - like they may be in painting - why would we want anybody to walk around in our piece (just to make matters more complicated)?^{one b}

The real space of a theatre stage

energy and a certain interaction with other people will take place over the few weeks. In a sense what has been packed up and brought to the overlook is an art kit with little baggies full of hardware. A vocabulary of forms without any instruction booklet.

... "I distinctly remember, now as I write, how, in a desperate attempt to strike out some new line of fairy-lore, I had sent my heroine straight down a rabbit-hole, to begin with, without the least idea what was to happen afterwards"
Lewis Carroll - 1887

That man with the bony face, Marcel Duchamp, made in 1918 *sculpture for traveling* - which was a collapsible sculpture made from colored strips of rubber cut from bathing caps that could be arranged in any configuration by attaching the strings to various points in the room.

Now it's already 1992. Time flies.

I'm attracted to peripheral things. The ears are parenthesis for ((the head)) for instance. I like very much the idea of having another person's artwork become part of the scenery that is a part of my artwork and vice versa. Afterall - what happens in a museum. A barbershop. The grocery store. Everybody is trying to pick just the right bunch of bananas.

An artist does some things on purpose, then most of the rest of the things an artist does toward the insides of anyone else is the accident which occurs in the form of registry in the recipient. What jives in the channels and runnels in that new brain it has leaked into. Then whether or how it gets remembered. Then whether or how it gets told to

is sufficiently insulated from the rest of reality - by the building that houses it, the lobby, darkness surrounding the stage, the proscenium - to be able to become symbolic. Similar things could be said about amusement parks and wax museums. There are theatrical installations, which work much the same way.

What interests me is to be found in the opposite direction. I am curious about that loss of control^{two}, I wonder how what I do will look when it collides with something else. I wonder whether what I thought was the content of what I do will still be the same thereafter.

One possibility to let yourself be surprised is to simply let the work be in contact with the things in the world^{three}. Among other things it might touch things in that world, that are themselves works of art.

In a situation like the one we will have in the upstairs room of the brewery where the boundaries between one work and another work, the world and the work, the achievements of one of the persons who are in some way responsible for the situation (without ever having collaborated in the common sense) and those of the other, are unclear and a matter of speculation, the meaning of the work can wander unpredictable paths. And not only the meaning of one piece could shift but also the meaning of the other piece, the meaning of one for the other, of the other for the one, of one

another one. Given this elusive incalculable unstoppable quality to art, it seems an honest conundrum to show too the tools, the sidestep, the raw state of wonderment rather than the relic.

Recently John Cage became another kind of matter. As the accident chef, his mischief has always remained great to me. When I was living in Cambridge, I attended a series of lectures and performances by the artist. During one of the lectures, a young woman walked up on stage and drank the water that was placed there as a courtesy to his throat. It made the news. When later asked if this action bothered him, he said he didn't know as "he didn't have the best seat in the house". Always, he played musical chairs.

A week later I met Jon Cage by chance in the subway. We could barely hear each other talk due to the clatter of the train and wafts of air sliding inbetween stations. Like most conversations that are engaging, it's moving while you're talking.

I'm interested in processes. In conversations. And will be brewing them here in the brewery building. Thank you for wandering.

through the other and the other through the one.

I believe that we learn from friction^{four}. I am not too interested in displaying the things I already know. I embrace context because it is what creates meaning.

^{one} Of course, things are never that clear. Someone who slashes a painting with a knife - one could say - suspends in some way the agreement about its metaphorical quality and decides to treat it like just another object, on the other hand there are obviously few (if any) real objects that don't have symbolical properties too.

^{one b} There is another advantage in three dimensional real space work: the possibility to provide a fuller experience, much like a picture one can feel and smell and walk into. This has nothing to do with dispensing control. Works that rely mainly on these possibilities have to awkwardly avoid or rule out or try to predict and counteract the behaviour of the public. They tend to lean towards an illusionism of three dimensional kind.

^{two} Which by the way is often more interesting if one exerts quite a bit of local control. In other words, one has to first take control to loose it later. Pure arbitrariness won't do. It is not random, but the tension between what is intended and the unintended that casts new light on an idea.

^{three} Which is not as clear cut as it sounds - given that the work is itself just a thing in the world.

^{four} And if we wouldn't want to learn, why would we be in the game anyway?