

Shotgun Review

A Brief History of Invisible Art at Wattis Institute at CCA

by Chris Sollars

A Brief History of Invisible Art brings together a range of contemporary artists and highlights some rarely seen conceptual works of the 1960's and 1970's. In the viewer it arouses a heightened sense of awareness of the installation and representation of art within an exhibition space.

The invisible is hard to present without a reference. These references take the form of documentation of an event or process, while others are determined by placement, proximity, space, sound, light, architecture, and other subtleties. All of these become crucial factors in determining an Invisible work's impact, especially when a good portion of the works are dependent on space for their success. Ideally the show should be in a much larger room or works should have complete rooms to themselves. The invisible art is sometimes crowded visually or physically as with Andy Warhol's pedestal crowding Michael Asher's Column of Air.

Asher's Column of Air worked great the first time I saw the piece over a month ago, but it didn't work the second time I visited. Sun-light entering the space raised the temperature of the room and caused the ceiling vents to blow lots of air more frequently, creating noise, completely canceling out the channeled air from the individual straws in Asher's Column. These room distractions and a clicking light near Friedman's Cursed Space didn't help either. My experience of Robert Barry's "Electromagnetic Energy Field" was also affected by these distractions and felt it needed to have a large blank space to itself. The wall description tag strangely became a point of reference and converted the waves into text.

The back two works, James Lee Byars' Ghost of James Lee Byars, a darkened room, and Art & Language's Air-Conditioning, a room with AC, are physically set back from the rest of the work in the show. A door between the two links them together and gives a fun house feel to them. As a friend of mine was walking through the darkened space, I could easily surprise him from the other entrance. Both works needed to be physically separated or blocked from the other. The entrance to "The Ghost of James Lee Byars" darkened space is too direct and needed a winding hallway to block out more of the outside light as it is often done in the downstairs space. "Air-Conditioning" is good in the context of the show but needed to be set amongst many to show room to room temperatures.

Carsten Holler's The Invisible, was once one of 7 items in his piece "New World Race", as seen in the catalogue, of a series of 3 dimensional items in different race lanes on either side of it. In New World Race the #4 racer "Invisible" is given volume in reference to the height, width, and length of the other racing objects. Once Invisible is transplanted from that context, without the reference of the others, "Invisible's" volume diminishes and becomes a secondary fragment of the original. At CCA there is no reference to height or depth. The scale of the flat works by Cattelan and Chung hang on either side of it as the shortened parking-spot/race-lane tape on the floor make "The Invisible" two-dimensional.

Viewers like to touch works, but with Tom Friedman's Cursed Space any marks on the pedestal detract from its punch. Location can also distract, if it is too far out from the corner. This causes a viewers site of the cursed space above the pedestal to be broken up by the grey floor line. Friedman often limits a viewer's range of vision with his works. The viewer

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looks in, directly at, and looks down to keep other works out of the line of site. The close placement in proximity to a corner is intentional. I once heard Tom Friedman mention, that cursed space is always shipped with enough room for the actual cursed space above the pedestal. I have these visions of the crew unpacking the work, setting it up, and packing it back up again with its cursed space.

Jay Chung's invisible film, "Nothing Is More Practical than Idealism," involves a film crew who make a film without knowing there wasn't any film loaded in the camera. Its strength lies in its conflict. The piece is both cruel, manipulative, humorous, sad, and sympathetic. Documentation becomes the work's final form and is both essential and problematic. Do we believe or trust Chung's word of doing this? There are many methods of representation and documentation. The piece primarily exists in the action of making it, and is now relying on a mounted color copy/print out of a photo and text description of the event. Would a real photo changed anything? I don't know.

Jonathan Monk's Robert Barry translation is quirky and expands on the language of instruction pieces. Monk's gestures are often quick and sometimes have the feel of a one liner. In 1999 he had vinyl wall piece stating that he would be on the golden gate bridge on a specific day in 2009 or equivalent. I often wonder if it will materialize. Will Jonathan not show up because he gets ill, has a death in the family, or has he already come to the end of his existence? The text creates an image in the viewer. We often do as we read, in that text becomes an image.

Cattelan's "Denuncia" uses documentation within the real world to reference the invisible. An invisible sculpture stolen from the back seat of Cattelan's car, becomes real only through the printed word of a police report. Text on the wall would not have given it as much weight as the official police document. Gianni Motti follows a similar strategy, using news media. Motti often subverts media, and is strongest when he lets "the self's" ego dissolve and become a conduit to reflect larger social structures and political systems. In "Nothing by force, everything through the power of the mind" Motti sends an invitation to the Columbian president to meet with him for an art piece. The president doesn't reply and Motti goes to the newspapers stating he will use telepathy, a form of non-verbal communication, to transmit information to the unpopular president to resign. This invisible communication doesn't become concrete until it is in print. It's strange that the newspaper headlines presented by Motti are framed prints rather than the original newspapers.

Ultimately I am a real believer in the strategies and works of these artists and the means that Rugoff went to getting these works. The Yves Klein's sketches of Air Architecture that Rugoff has brought to the show and are reproduced in the catalogue are a rarity. These sketches are ideas of impossible possibility. They remind me of the text descriptions of Dario Robletto's early work in *I Want To Be A Part Of The Sum Of Your World Vol. I* 1998. Pieces such as *I Would Give You The Air You Breath* in which the official dirtiest air in the world from Mexico City was collected in tanks and pumped into a gallery every hour through its ventilation system. In another Robletto goes through his neighborhood in San Antonio, Texas switching out all the porch bulbs with slightly brighter ones. I have never seen these works, but have only read about it in text form. Does the visual form lose in relation to the vivid description he presents? The text above is a reference, but does writing about this show's invisibility make it visible in writing about it?



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« February (First Friday) | Home