

DOVE BRADSHAW

A COAGULA REVIEW

February 2006

The opening show of the season at SolwayJones was a condensed retrospective of the work of NY artist Dove Bradshaw, featuring prime examples of a body of work whose roots stretch into Duchampian, fluxus and minimalist territories. Something in the spirit of John Cage's embrace of the perfection of happenstances, the stern absurdism of Becket, and Joyce's grand celebration of Life. While Bradshaw is a brilliant, intent and thorough thinker, she poetically gets out of her own way as soon as she has caught an evidence or set a process in motion. She deftly abandons the work to the forces of change and allows their elementalness to take over without the expectation of any precise result. This curious tension between an informed intelligence with formalist predilections and a graceful abandonment to the eternal unknown is central to her work. The exhibit featured several *Contingency* paintings whose surface is layered with silver then brushed with a solution of liver of sulfur which causes the surface to become unevenly clouded, billowing in blacks, grays and yellows over time, lending it all at once a dramatic depth and a certain lyrical but impersonal beauty. These works, perhaps reminiscent of Anselm Kiefer's books (works on lead and photographs) but lacking his engaged heroic involvement, are more self-referential or simply oriented towards an acceptance of the march of natural forces which will take place seen or unseen by the artist and future onlookers.

The centerpiece of the exhibition, however, consisted in an installation of six pale 18" high volcanoes floating on the grey floor of the gallery, titled "Six Continents". Each mound whose color varied from stark white to algae green, tender ochre and the pink of dried roses, was made of 100 pounds of coarse, unrefined salt gathered respectively from Antarctica, Africa, Australia, Eurasia, South America and North America. Above each one, suspended from the ceiling, hung transparent glass womb-shaped vessels filled with water. A glass spigot at the tapered bottom of the funnels was tightly turned to let only one drop form slowly and fall onto the center of the volcano, gradually creating a crater and causing the surface to harden, crystallize and glisten. Reflections flashed in the glass and the water surface of each vessel; the entire room itself and its contents, are squeezed into the suspended funnels, as if sucked into the water, dissolving into a shimmer and being expelled drop by drop into the earthen conical form below, a perfect parabola for alchemical transformation "So above, So below." It



6 VOLCANOES AND THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD IN A DROP OF WATER

A NEW YORKER IN LA:

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also evoked the materialization of processes through time, the temporary tangibility of time itself, the concentration of all the now into one single moment and its vanishing into a cavernous future from where it would not return.

By
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Half-size images of the other vessels floated in the water as if traversing some barely perceptible dimension. And more: the small upside down image of the volcano appeared to float on the surface of the water in the vessel above it. All in balance, one within the other.

Water and salt; mind arrested. There was the expectancy of the falling of a drop and its disappearance into the invisibility and immeasurability of geological time, the slow crystallization of the salt altering the surfaces. Over the duration of the installation, the crater tops widened into a deeper gap, their base circled outwards and their skin became veiled in pale iridescences.

While, curiously, the installation seems to be caught between a certain nostalgia for the Victorian age of great inventions and great geographical discoveries on the one hand, and our contemporary anguish at the ominousness of an uncertain environmental future on the other, it offered a gate to the timeless in the constancy of transformation itself, here at the breaking tips of bubbles.

