

# The Spatial Drive

The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York September 27, 1992 - January 3, 1993

## From the Foreword to the First Edition

### Navigating the space of display

*The Spatial Drive* is an exhibition concerned with the growing prevalence of forms of art that fall between the categories of "art object" and "installation." "Installation," however, is a difficult term, in that it traditionally has been used to denote two different types of work: site-specific art that relies on and points to the particularities of a given location, and work that--like a large art object that the viewer enters--fills and fully occupies a space, determining both context and content. Through the '80s and increasingly in the '90s, a configurative type of art has been appearing that combines the qualities of site-specificity with those of the discrete art object, yet is distinct from both. It is neither determined by its site, nor closed off from its surroundings; it is structured both in terms of an internal system of relations, and through the relations it establishes between itself and the site or sites in which it is installed. It is portable yet relies on the site, circulating into and out of different display contexts with sometimes minor modifications, inhabiting exhibition space both as an intervention in existing space and as an orchestration or array of different elements.

Along with the site, it embraces the viewer as a crucial, mobile component, an integral aspect of a variable system of spatial relations--for the system alters as the viewer moves. Emphasizing the peripatetic nature of art "viewing," along with the function of context in providing a frame, the art work seems to reside in the layered and shifting perceptual relations between configured objects, the viewer, and elements of the space itself.

Configurative work reaches back, on the one hand, to the *distributional* character of postminimal, antiform, or process art,<sup>19</sup> and on the other to the *situational* character of much early conceptualism and of the site-specific installations of the '70s.<sup>20</sup> The extraordinary efforts undertaken in postminimal art and early conceptualism to push the envelope of

perception and cognition--to stretch and loosen what Robert Smithson called "cerebral sedimentation"--is modulated in configurative work by a more or less pronounced incorporation of the tradition of institutional critique.<sup>21</sup> Minimalism charged the space *within* institutional walls, and did so in a way that tended toward a domination of available space by the art work.<sup>22</sup> Postminimal work of the '60s and '70s sought to abolish the institutional frame surrounding art, or else to soften and "naturalize" institutional spaces. Here, instead, the interlinking institutional frameworks that govern the production, circulation, and display of art are taken as the given limits against which, but also thanks to which, perception and cognition operate. The institutional framework, in other words, is assumed as the condition of the work's possibility. At the same time, it is examined, pressed, in specific if subtle ways.

Without annulling institutional contexts and frames, or passively endorsing them, such work asserts that space is open to improvisation within parameters--the parameters given by the work, the site, the larger social context, and also those brought along by the viewer. Lacking closure to surrounding space, it is also informed by *time*, the time it takes for viewers to engage with the work, and also the time of display, including historical events and individual circumstance. Unlike optical art, this form of work enlists viewers in the transformation of display space into a space of pleasure and "unproductive" play. Against the grain of "pure" visual cognition, it emphasizes spatial relations and the *social* relations that inhere in them. So while it is unproductive in one sense, it is productive in another; such work engages viewers in producing a space that resists the abstracting and anesthetizing tendencies of a consumer-oriented culture.

Addressing an ambulatory body, configurative art also embraces aspects of body art and gallery-based performance--sometimes through intermittent, task-oriented actions carried out by the artist as part of the work, more often through a transfer of this function onto the viewer in her or his contributory role. Often, the body of the viewer is temporarily assimilated and affirmed as part of the work for other exhibition visitors; items included in the arrangement may make specific reference to issues of gender or sexual preference, racial or cultural identity, or class, thereby further charging with social implications the staging of the viewer's body

as an element of the work. Other times, tasks are negotiated that engage the institution's staff, so that the usually invisible labor that supports the display of art becomes tangible. The process of negotiating with the institution, in such cases, is included as a crucial part of the "work," again underscoring that the institutional context is a given, and necessary, but not predetermined, closed condition.

Rather than "timeless" and "universal" artisanal objects, landscapes of "natural" materials, or monoliths of mass-production, such works instead are made up of industrial discards, culturally-specific iconic objects, artificial imitations of nature, familiar products from daily life in urban or suburban contexts. Works in *The Spatial Drive* include such components as industrial-density cardboard tubing, cast off from the fabric bolts of which they formed the core, turned into "instruments" awaiting activation by the exhibition visitor; a phone machine with its message light blinking, waiting to be played, that speaks of the psychic and spatial "landmarks" of childhood in the projects of New York's Lower East Side; plastic deli-bags printed with a variable number of stars, like the rating stars on restaurant reviews, placed in piles outside the actual space of display; processed sound prerecorded on-site, sent through the ventilation system to produce a tableau of fabricated weather; palm tree columns of compacted clay that disintegrate through interaction by touch; quasi-minimal sculptures of polished crystal quartz, against which the viewer is invited to place her or his body in a meditative relation; a cow heart preserved in salt, gold-leafed, and shrouded in a net of braided human hair set out to ensnare viewers; a contemplative space modelled on the proportions of a traditional Japanese tea house, whose entry and interior are distinctly particularized in feminine terms; a skylit room whose natural light is souped up by security street lights, and whose walls display abstract images of homoerotic transport; a folded curtain of latex draped over a small frame, and a spray of text, that together point obliquely to an off-site performance/installation in which spectators are incorporated as agents. Instead of dominating display space, such work seems to domesticate space, and invite a kind of co-occupancy on the part of both context and viewer.<sup>23</sup> It is the social body in space that is addressed by and that answers to the newer work.

Through minimalist art practices of the '80s, and the tradition of work

engaged in a creating a critical awareness of the institutional character of art, navigating exhibition space became a key element in the experience of works of art in recent years. Such work underscored that art is seen in a social field structured by the language of "pedestrian" circulation and display.<sup>24</sup> In work that functions as an open arrangement, navigation remains fundamental, though the *terms* of display itself are less likely to figure as an explicit part of the material. Over the course of organizing the exhibition, an interesting and unexpected shift in emphasis occurred, as some of the participating artists ceased using visual devices that call attention to ways in which art functions as display, and others left behind the use of written text that tends to "block" the consumption of the art-work-as-image by asking the viewer to literally read the art. Instead, in their work and that of others, the spoken word came to prominence, prompting a reflection on the ways in which dialogue functions within exhibition space. Through dialogue, navigation and negotiation become concrete in personal terms, while the "empty" space of the gallery is filled with material traces of the exchange between viewer and work, between different viewers, or among exhibition visitors and the staff. The space of the work and of the surrounding site are not simply permeable to one another, but traversed and altered by the exhibition visitor. Such work creatively disrupts abstract flows of information and production, but does so at the level of the daily users of space.

### **Laura Trippi, Curator**

19. The term "distributional sculpture" was used by Barry LeVa to describe his work in the late 1960s, but could be extended to include related work by other artists of the period. See "distribution" and the excerpt from Robert Morris's "Notes on Sculpture" in *The Pocket Dictionary* under "antiform/process art." For a brief recent account of this movement, which brings out its refusal of the "limitations of closed forms" as well as its "psychosexual dimension," see Maurice Berger, "Objects of Liberation: The Sculpture of Eva Hesse," in *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective*, exhibition catalogue (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 119-35; see in particular 124-26.
20. The interest in understanding art work in terms of and as situation embraces a wide range of the artistic practice of the late 1960s and '70s, from certain strands of conceptualism (Robert Barry, Douglas Heubler, and Adrian Piper, for example) through light and space art (Robert Irwin and James Turrell) to performance/installation (Vito Acconci, David Hammons, and Susan Hiller, among others), earthworks (especially Robert Smithson), and site-specific installation. See "art object"; "art work"; "conceptualism"; "field"; "light and space art"; "spatialization."
21. See "cerebral sediment"; "spatialization."
22. See Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64 (January 1990), 44-63.
23. See "domesticana"; "occupancy."
24. See "display"; "drive 5"; "transitional space."

## ARTISTS AND WORKS IN THE SPATIAL DRIVE

### Marina Abramovic

*Green Dragon* (lying), 1988

Iron with patinated copper, quartz 'pillow', hardware, wall support, instructions for the public

11 inches x 8 feet 2 1/2 inches x 1 foot 9 inches

Courtesy Foundation Abramovic

*Black Dragon* (waiting), 1989-1992

4 hematite crystal 'pillows', 1 amethyst crystal 'pillow', metal brackets, instructions for the public

4 inches x 7 5/8 inches x 4 5/8 inches each

Courtesy Foundation Abramovic

*Shoes for Departure*, 1992

Crystal quartz, instructions for the public

2 shoes, 9 inches x 1 foot x 2 feet each

Courtesy Foundation Abramovic

### Laurie Carlos

*Stone Hole Where My Voice Used to Live*, 1992

Telephone answering machine, prerecorded cassette tapes

2 1/4 inches x 7 3/4 inches x 7 1/4 inches

Courtesy of the artist

### Lewis deSoto

*Tempest*, 1992

Installation utilizing the ventilation system, with cassette player, 4 speakers, quartz lights, control unit, processed prerecorded ambient sound, light table, meteorological map transparencies, and staff participation

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Christopher Grimes Gallery

### Gretchen Faust and Kevin Warren

*A Long Instrument for Listening and Talking*, 1992

Found industrial density cardboard tubing, constructed wooden supports, tree stumps

16 tubes 5 feet 1 inch x 2 inches diameter each, with 10 supports 3 feet x 7 inches x 2 feet 1 inch, and 2-10 tree stumps 2 feet x 20 inches diameter (approximate), all variously configured over time

Courtesy of the artists and Pat Hearn Gallery

### Fred Holland

*If Not the Body/Then the Flesh*, 1992

Gold leaf on cow heart preserved with salt, net of braided human hair, wooden box, metal bowl with water

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

### Sonia Labouriau

*Colonata (Colonade)*, 1992

Plaster of Paris molds with wire, compacted clay powder, interaction by duration and touch

1 Plaster of Paris column 5 feet 9 1/2 inches;

3 compacted clay columns 5 feet 8 inches x

14 inches each (approximate), rebuilt over time

Courtesy of the artist

### John Lindell

Untitled, 1992

Installation utilizing skylight, with metallic felt pen wall drawings, street lamp, seating

17 feet x 35 feet x 9 feet

Courtesy of the artist

### Rel Nalto

*une place sur la Terre II*, 1992

Enclosed room with tent of organza, multiple small objects, 12 40 watt lights

12 feet x 8 feet x 35 feet with doorway of 3 feet 1 inch x 2 feet 7 1/2 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Sagacho Exhibit Space

### Marylene Negro

Untitled, 1992

40,000 plastic bags with printed stars (1-4), manufacturer's printed cardboard boxes

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Jennifer Flay, Paris

### Security and Admissions Project (Kimball

Augustus, Bessie Bowens, Luis Burgos,

Emily Ching, Judith Daniel, Dirk

Glasgow, Adam Glickman, Shelley

Goldberg, Elon Joseph, Tadeo Ortiz,

Laurie Parsons, Nondas Sable, Jonathan

Schnapp, L. Daniel Vincent, and Alphonse

### Whitsett), 1992-93

Project for the exhibition's educational frame, in collaboration with the Museum's Education, Security, and Admissions departments

### Fiona Templeton

*untitled installation/performance*

*fragment*, 1992

With Siobhan Liddell

Silkscreened wall text, latex, Foam Board

4 feet 5 1/2 inches x 2 feet

Courtesy of the artists

### Articulate Architecture, 1992

With Robert Kocik and Siobhan Liddell,

assisted by David Ramirez

Mobile, interactive installation environment created in conjunction with research into space and behavior

### Metamorphosis, 1992

With Lenora Champagne, Robert Kocik,

Anna Kohler, Siobhan Liddell, Thomas JF Regan III, Michael Ratomski, and John Holt Smith

Modular and interactive performance, an installment of the *Realities* project, a work-in-progress

Installation and performance presented in collaboration with Consort Amsterdam at the Brooklyn Anchorage, October 7-11, 1992

### The X-Art Foundation

*Blast: The Spatial Drive*, 1992-

Dialogical system, boxes, and variable editorial materials

Series of 500

Produced in collaboration with The New Museum

## PUBLISHED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE SPATIAL DRIVE

*The Pocket Dictionary of Spatial Drives: Classified and arranged so as to facilitate the exchange and circulation of ideas, and to assist in the elaboration of spatial relations*, 1992

Interdisciplinary archival guide to emergent

issues of social space relations, with original entries and excerpts of previously published works, structured as a concise encyclopedia

**The New Museum in association with Archer Fields Press and Border Editions**

## ADDITIONAL PROJECT OF THE EXHIBITION

*Visitors' alcove for The Spatial Drive*, 1992

Lobby/window installation providing access to *Blast: The Spatial Drive* and *The Pocket Dictionary of Spatial Drives*

With design provided by Ken Saylor and assistance from Tony Bielaczyc

**In collaboration with The X-Art Foundation** with additional support from Archer Field Press and D.A.P. (Distributed Art Publishers)

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583 Broadway, New York, NY 10012  
212/219-1222