



Dove Bradshaw, *Plain Air* (detail), 1989, mixed media. Installation view.

DOVE BRADSHAW

SANDRA GERING
FINE ARTS

Dove Bradshaw's installation *Plain Air*, 1989, was shown in the living quarters of Sandra Gering's home, which is also her gallery. The installation featured a pair of male and female ring-necked doves. A bicycle wheel without a tire was hung perpendicular to the ceiling by a single steel cable and the birds often perched on the wheel, seeming comfortable despite the tilt brought about by their weight. As days passed they redefined the room by establishing habits in it; they usually slept on the wheel, chose a perch as their favorite for eating, and so on. A stencil of the words *plein air* (after the bicycle wheel, a second Duchampian reference) was negatively inscribed on a glass partition in the room. Directly below the wheel on the floor was a target used for archery, at one level a vocabulary reference to Jasper Johns. Bradshaw altered the Western-style target into a Zen archer's target, which has no scores marked on it. The bird droppings accumulating randomly on the target confronted nature and culture with their different kinds of purposiveness.

In the bedroom downstairs were three calfskins which had been compressed into vellum intended to be used for book binding. Bradshaw duplicated the natural spots on the skins, repositioned them through a chance method, and silver-leafed the repositioned ones, bringing cultural intervention to bear on the natural objects. On a table lay two cast hen's eggs, one silver, one bronze. On the wall behind the desk were two works in silver leaf on paper that had been tarnished with liquid liver of sulphur. Finally, a small work in gold leaf on distressed paper was shown between plates of glass.

There was something companionable and warm about the installation, with the unpretentious works scattered seemingly casually through the real living quarters. There was an interface between art and life that was echoed by the presence of the birds. Most of this charming and modest work seemed

an intuitive reflection on, and transgression of, the border between nature and culture, a border which currently seems to be dissolving before our eyes.

The German poet Schiller once remarked that he wrote poetry the way birds sing—as a completely natural and spontaneous act. In his tradition the remark seems a reference to the myth of the young Siegfried who, having been raised in the forest, understood the language of the birds. Bradshaw has somewhat ironically reversed this conflation, leaving the birds to make the art in front of a human audience. Thus, the similarities between the pre-Modern and the post-Modern are made clear in the way that both indict the distinction between nature and culture as a kind of a sham.

—Thomas McEvilley