



View of the exhibition "Dove Bradshaw: Formformlessness 1969-2003," 2003, showing (on floor) two marble and pyrite works from the "Indeterminacy" series, (on wall, left) *Guilty Marks*, 1999, and (back wall) *S*, 1997; at the Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College, New York.

Dove Bradshaw: Between Science and Poetry

Both technical and artistic explanations attach to this New York artist's process works, which are perhaps most deeply influenced by John Cage's engagement with change and chance.

BY JANET KOPLOS

The exhibition "Dove Bradshaw: Formformlessness 1969-2003," mounted at the Mishkin Gallery of Baruch College in New York, covered a great deal of ground in its 29 works, done in mediums from gold to photography to video. There was a red-painted twig mounted high on one wall, and a photograph of a seated female nude on whose back was printed a list of the elements found in the human body, in type sizes cued to their proportional presence. Bradshaw is clearly curious and exploratory.

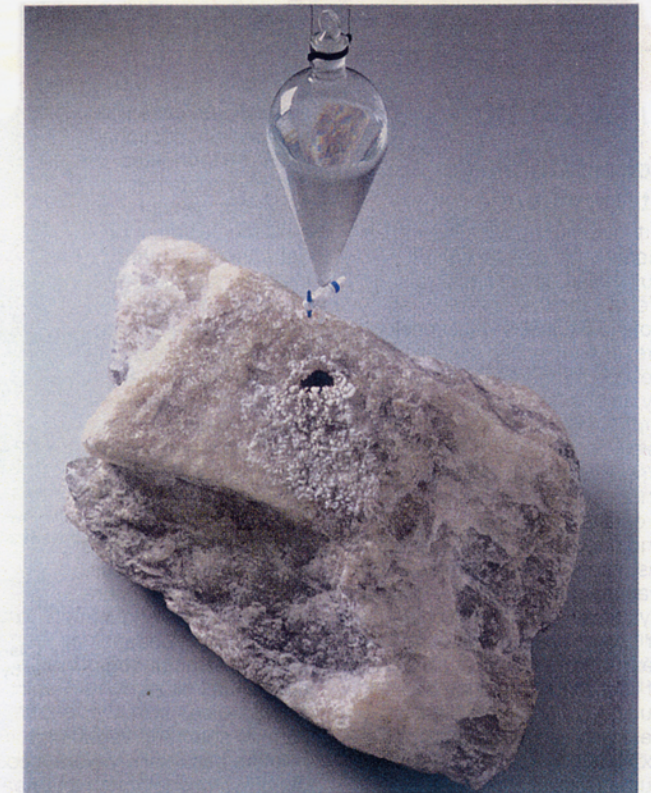
Several possible understandings suggest themselves for the variety of pieces shown. One is a scientific explanation, for various works involve beakers, substances dripping from glass funnels, surface crystallizations and evidence of careful procedures that might be more native to the lab than to the studio. There was a clump of rock salt eaten away by water, a marble mass stained by a nugget of iron pyrite placed on it, a strip of copper mounted high on the gallery wall, leaving a pattern of verdigris drips down the entire surface. But other pieces more clearly spoke of the studio: large two-dimensional works on paper or linen have blotches, stains, impastolike encrustations and dribbles reminiscent of the formal fascinations and sweeping ambitions of Abstract Expressionism. They are also darkly, atmospherically beautiful.

What seems to link most of these works is a concern with actions leading to reactions, but ones without perfect predictability, allowing for nature to participate as it will. These processes involve open-ended transformations, so that printed images of the works are notated with the date when the work was "activated" and also the date when it was photographed. If one were to see the work later, it would not look the same.

The paintinglike pieces (from an intimate 17 by 14 inches to the more imposing 82 by 66 inches) are titled *Contingency* or *Contingency Pour*. Exhibition labels disclosed that they involve silver, liver of sulfur and varnish on linen or flax paper. These may evoke clouds or lichens, satellite views or microscopic details. The language is nature's, writ large or small. The artist has chosen the conditions and decided when to start and stop the process, just as in any painting, but has minimized her hand in the interim.

The show was accompanied by Thomas McEville's book *The Art of Dove Bradshaw: Nature, Change and Indeterminacy*, which describes Bradshaw's interest in alchemy and her long engagement with the Eastern-inflected ideas of John Cage. McEville, in his broadly learned and aggrandizing style, emphasizes both the conceptual nature of her endeavor and its symbolic references. He provides a deep context reaching back not only to Duchamp but to Buddhist ideas.

Bradshaw's cleverest conceptual project was represented in the show by a simple photograph; one must turn to the book for the story. In 1976, she



Negative Ions I, 1996, Pyrex funnel, water, rock salt, 39 inches wide. Private collection, New York.

affixed a label next to a fire hose in the Metropolitan Museum that identified it as her work, and took a picture that she subsequently made into a postcard. She sneaked the postcards into a rack in the museum store, and over several years continued to replenish them as they were sold. In 1980 the museum, wise to the scheme and appreciative of it, purchased the photograph and issued its own postcard, which included a printed explanation.

In light of Bradshaw's later work, the duration of that project is significant. Much of her art has required a substantial measure of patience in its extended procedures. Condensation, percolation, the accumulation of dust, tarnishing, erosion, staining and other indications of change and chance are not quickly realized. She has a light hand here, and also in those few works, mostly two-dimensional, that involve measurement and placement, such as clusters of wax or plaster triangles on linen. Ephemerality is captured and held in a few other works, such as the spent bullet she cast in precious metal.

Bradshaw's best work catches a certain aura of magic that hovers between science and poetry. Her own comment in the catalogue text, that she essentially exhibits "materials as themselves, without working them extensively," is as true and unadorned as her art. □

"Dove Bradshaw: Formformlessness 1969-2003" appeared at the Mishkin Gallery of Baruch College, New York [Mar. 28-Apr. 29, 2003]. Work by the artist is currently on view at Volume Gallery, New York [Apr. 24-May 22].

Contingency Pour, activated June 1991, silver, liver of sulfur, varnish on linen, 17 by 14 inches; left: photographed January 1992, right: photographed August 1993. Collection Celia Ascher.

