



DOVE BRADSHAW  
*SALT*



# *S A L T*

1996-2006

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# SALT

DOVE BRADSHAW

The salt works came from my long-time desire to make sculptures that change shape, an idea going back to my first installation employing live birds in 1969. The first use of water to effect change began in the early 1980s when I made silver-surfaced paintings chemically treated with liver of sulfur to react with humidity. In the early 1990s I used weather, combining unstable pyrite with marble to make my first shape-changing sculptures. Rain caused the iron pyrite to bleed and leave a permanent stain on the stone with the pyrite itself eventually breaking down and disappearing. In 1996, bringing “weather” inside, I made erosion works in salt and stone using water as the catalyst. A water-filled funnel calibrated for slowest flow was suspended above stone blocks, salt boulders, and mounds. The different densities of these materials gave the work its dynamic range. In *Waterstone*, from 1996, a pool of water became a fountain in slow motion leaving behind daily tide lines on a porous limestone block.

The salt works, too, were indoor fountains with the use of natural materials and the slowness of action constituting a return to real time and real materials— a response to the art world’s overwhelming infatuation with shock value entertainment and virtual reality.

There are four works in this series, each distinct in concept and in form, using salt in its three solid states: granules, crystals and boulders, to exhibit different reactions with water. The first works were conceived in 1996 and shown at the Sandra Gering Gallery in New York in 1998. The exhibition was comprised of half-ton boulders shipped from a mine on an island in downtown Cincinnati. The boulders were gray with calcium striations and resembled stone. A year later I found boulders for an exhibition at the University Art Gallery in La Jolla, California from Utah that were also stone-like, but pink. The boulders were hard, so only a four or five inch hole was bored in the course of three-month exhibitions. The mouths of the holes exhibited daily tide lines that slowly evolved into a network of crystal growths. Both works were titled *Negative Ions I*, because fracturing water drops create negative ions which are known to produce a calming effect. This accounts for the calm felt by the seashore or waterfalls where they are abundantly created. I had hoped to produce a similar effect in a gallery environment.

*Negative Ions II* was conceived simultaneously with *Negative Ions I*, but was not shown until 2001, in *Elements*, in Copenhagen. For the first exhibition, it consisted of granulated white salt poured into three mounds. At subsequent exhibitions there was only a single mound in a variety of

sizes with gradations from gray to white and from powder to crystals, owing to the differing salts used— salt for snow melt, for example, or for preserving fish. Once in a gallery in Rome, nearly a ton of salt was poured. Water in a funnel suspended on the floor above dropped onto the mound through a square cut in the floor. In 2006 the cosmetic manufacturer Shu Uemura invited me to make a performance of the installation of *Negative Ions II* in Japan to coincide with the inauguration of his new museum. Unfortunately, he died before building it, but at some point, I would still like to execute this piece.

The installation *Six Continents* was my most complex salt work. It was conceived in 2003 while I was in residence in Bolognano, Italy at the invitation of Baronessa Lucrezia Durini, a patron of Joseph Beuys. The work was comprised of six mounds, each of a different color, each weighing 150 pounds. It required two years to gather the salt for its 2005 opening. Each of the earth's continents was represented: Antarctica, white salt from McMurdo Bay (gathered by scientists through the National Science Foundation Artists and Writers Grant); Africa, gray salt from Egypt; Australia, brown salt from Western Australia; Eurasia, ivory salt from North Korea; North America, green salt from the Dominican Republic; South America, pink salt from Chile. I use local salt from the continent where my exhibition is being held—for instance when the work was shown in the *6th Gwangju Biennale* in Korea, the Eurasian salt came from Gwangju. The variously colored salts react quite differently with water, which bores a hole through the mounds within hours. Some colors re-crystallize in miniature fractal forests at the mouth of the hole and the mound's base, some form allover sea urchin-like growths, while yet others form a white coating like snow. All harden over time.

The most recent work was made in 2006 for *The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama* at the Rubin Museum of Art, New York. In recognition of the unendurable plight of Tibet, I titled the work *salt, half heard*, a phrase from James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, and used Himalayan crystal salt. Although it was conceived as a purely formal work, one viewer noted that it could be seen as tears falling on the land.

In addition to its physical qualities salt has other significance for me. On Mars the recent discovery of salt proved to scientists that some form of life had existed there. In the Nevada desert 250 million-year-old living protozoa were discovered preserved in an air bubble within a crystal of salt. Salt is a sign of life.

*SIX CONTINENTS*

2003

6th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, South Korea, 2006







*SIX CONTINENTS*

2003

Premiere:  
Larry Becker Contemporary Art,  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2005



*SIX CONTINENTS*

2003

SolwayJones, Los Angeles, 2005

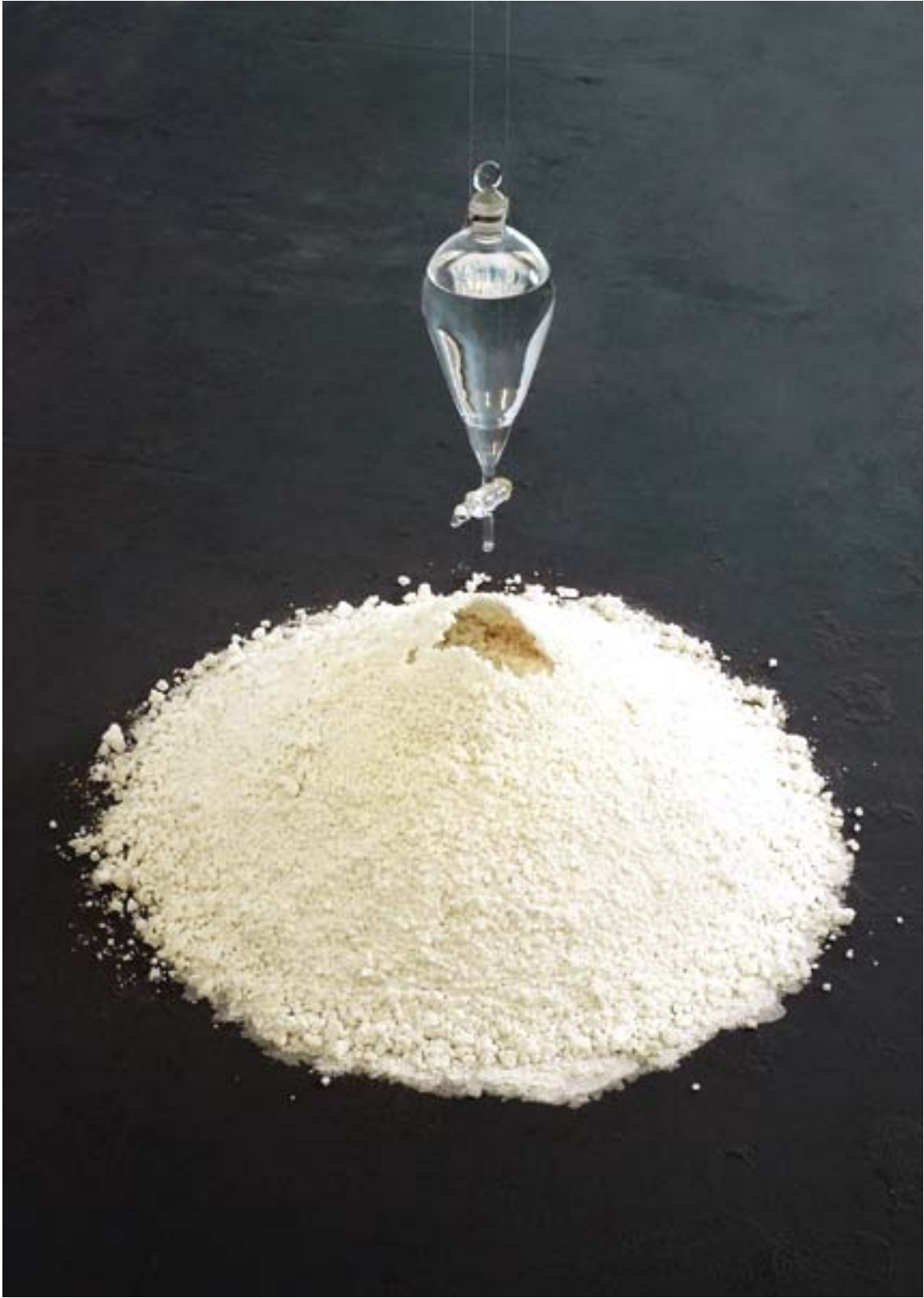




*Africa*



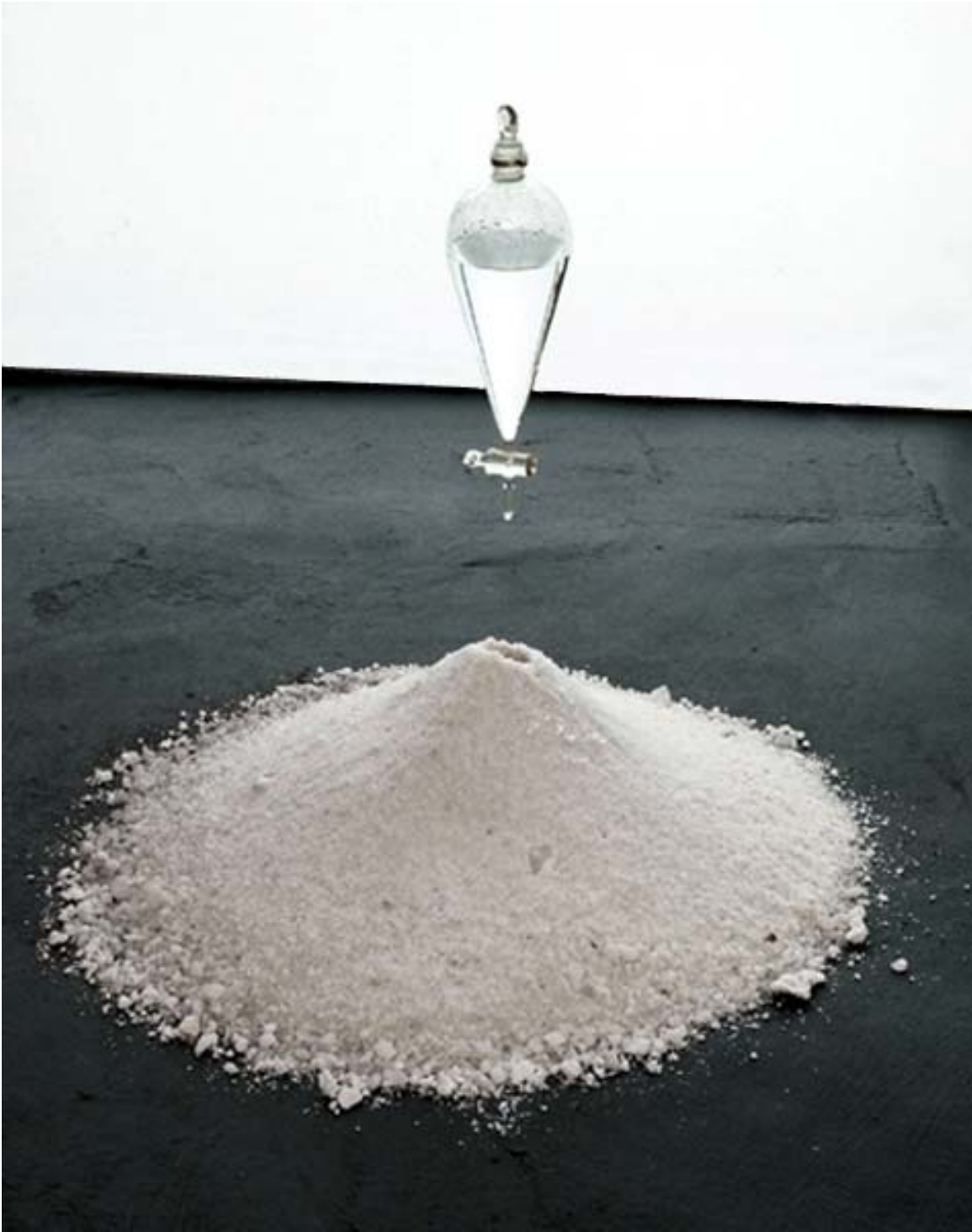
*North America*



*Australia*



*South America*



*Antarctica*



*Eurasia*

# *SIX CONTINENTS*

ANDREA LILLI

Remember your fable Grandfather Hesiod. Once upon a time there was total darkness, a gaping vacuum, an abyss, obscurity without form, in a word, Chaos. In the beginning this was the case, and then Gaia appeared, the mother of the Universe, the matrix of the Sky, the Sea, the Stars, the Sun, the Earth and the Moon. While Gaia created the world, union with the sky gave birth to her first son and afterwards her second came from union with the sea, and then from union with Chaos came a much more mysterious, a much more unknowable group. Erebus, Night, the Ether, Day, Sleep, Death. Afterwards, the first born avoided each other with great care never to touch, except when the third principal actor on the scene who though sterile (never having had children) provoked every coupling, of Chaos, of Gaia, of their children and grandchildren: this was the irresistible Eros. Grandfather, your fable came to mind while looking at *Six Continents*, a work of Dove Bradshaw. There are six mounds of salt, each different because each is taken from a different continent, overseen/impregnated by a raining sky that transforms their color and composition, in various tones each different from the other. But could the Sky fertilize the Earth without the force of gravity? It is a powerful force of attraction, which creates harmony in the universe and life on Earth, unconquerable, and equally as irresistible as Eros. But Grandfather about Eros, you have to admit that you have always been a bit laconic, if not reticent, apart from the usual rigamorole that "he is the most beautiful of the Gods who melts the limbs and yokes reason in the breast of all Gods and men, overcoming every wise decision", to me, he seems heavy, grave and boring, exactly what we fight every day in order to move freely in Space, on foot, bicycle, internal combustion engines, jet engines, on rail, on Wings, while having nothing better to do at night, he catches and pins us to the Earth again, deathly tired. In conclusion grandfather! If only you could find something more appropriate for this poor Eros who is so beautiful that he never sleeps?



*NEGATIVE IONS II*

1996

Senzatitolo, Rome, 2007  
Stalke Gallery, Copenhagen, 2001  
Thomas Rehbein Gallery, 2009  
Pierre Menard Gallery, 2008



*Negative Ions II*, 1996  
*Time & Material*, Senzatitolo, Rome, 2007





*Negative Ions II*  
*Elements, Stalke Gallery, Copenhagen, 2001, premiere*



*Negative Ions II* and *Untitled # 2*, 1965, Robert Ryman  
*ONE More*, Thomas Rehbein Gallery, Cologne, 2009

Opposite:

*Negative Ions II*, Pierre Menard Gallery, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2008



*NEGATIVE IONS I*

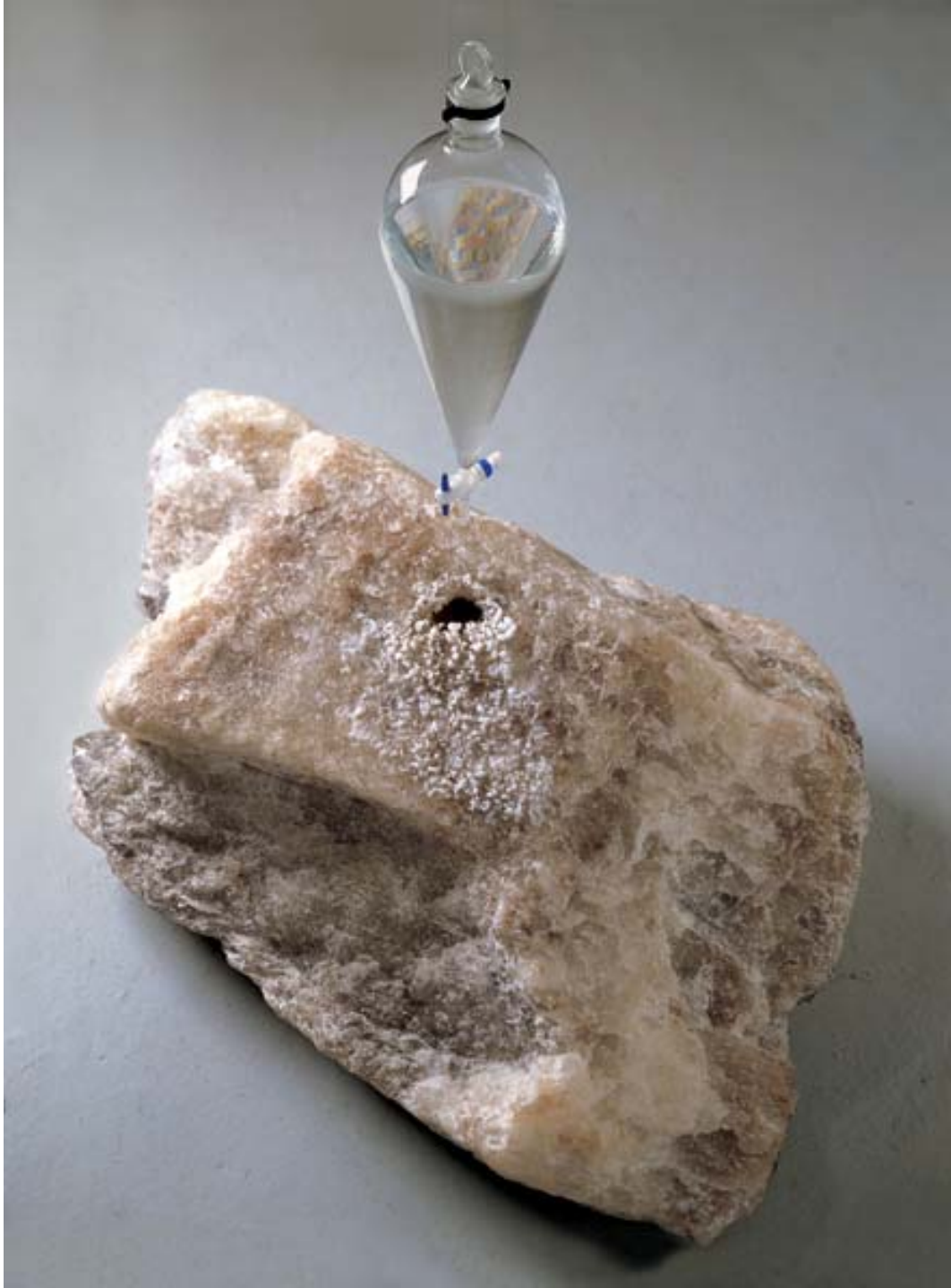
1996

Premiere:  
Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, 1998





*Negative Ions I*, 1996, rock salt, 18 x 32 x 27 inches



*Negative Ions I*, 1996, rock salt, 18 x 39 x 20 inches

*I am not just interested in how a work looks, but how it behaves.*

Dove Bradshaw



Rock salt, 16 x 24 x 20 inches

*salt, half heard*

2 0 0 6

Himalayan crystal salt

*The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama*

Fundacion Canal, Madrid, 2009

Hillside Terrace, Shibuya, Tokyo, 2008

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, 2007

Emory Visual Arts Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia, 2007

The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2007

Loyola University Museum of Art, Chicago, 2007

Premiere: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles, 2006



# *CAGE, McEVILLEY, FRANK, KNIGHT*

The work of Dove Bradshaw works with our changing conceptions of time and space which we have assumed for a long time are two different things. She's involved, as we are in our lives, because of art, with an almost scientific procedure, so that she can experiment in such a way as to prove something. And she can subject us to the results of her experiments, which can open us to the life we are living. It's very curious and very true. ...

Dove's work is preparing us for a constant loss and a constant gain, and also of not knowing whether it's good or bad.

*John Cage*

*Dove Bradshaw: Works, 1969-1992, Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, 1992*

There's that moment when it's almost like there's a choice between form and void, and yet we can't make the choice; we have to somehow have both. And this is that kind of perilous tightrope edge that I see Dove's work walking. ...

Her work can be seen as balanced at that line where you're seeking for that other sense of intention which is in nature, without completely losing your grip on culture, or that very circumscribed trap of limited intention which is history. So in terms of [John Cage's] remark about getting out of whatever cage you are in, Dove's work is about hovering at the door of the cage maybe—you're not sure which way to go?...

Tao means "The Way." According to the *Tao Te Ching*, the classic text attributed to Lao Tsu, The Way [may also be called the Valley Spirit or the Water Spirit or the Mysterious Female]. The nature of the water spirit is that it seeks the low ground. When water has reached the lowest point, it has returned to the state of the Uncarved Block, to the Mysterious Female. Bradshaw, then, is using The Way, or the Water Spirit, in [*Six Continents* and the *Negative Ion works*]; the liquid flows downward eating away the [salt] as it seeks the lowest place.

The essence of The Way is ceding control, holding oneself back from intervention as much as possible. In terms of art, this is anecdotally embodied in the story of Hokusai dipping a chicken's claws in ink and letting it run across the page. ... Bradshaw has said, in reference to her role with her materials, "I like to withdraw." She lets the forces of nature take charge and go their way without further intervention. Though not the western way, this actually, is a clear-sighted bid for control. Again from the *Tao Te Ching* (XXIX), "The sage's way is to act

without striving.” “Those that would gain what is under heaven by tampering with it—I have seen that they do not succeed.” (LXXXI)

There seems a dualism in *yang* and *yin*, yet the *Tao Te Ching* says they “produce oneness” and in the Taoist painting tradition this was called *i-hua* (one-painting or painting the oneness). Extrapolating from this idea it could be said as opposed to “one could say” that Bradshaw’s *Negative Ions* are an attempt to paint the oneness.

The *Contingency*, *Indeterminacy*, and *Negative Ion/Waterstone* paintings and sculptures have a kinship with the entropy theory of Robert Smithson, an artist whose work connects with several of Bradshaw’s concerns. Smithson had proposed looking at the decayed state of structures and environments when they are chaotically falling apart rather than the stage at which they seem rigid, stable, and under control. Similarly, those works of Bradshaw’s all focus attention on the ongoing process of disintegration.

*Thomas McEvilley*

*Dove Bradshaw: Nature, Change and Indeterminacy*, Batty, LLC, NY, 2003

Performing alchemy on geographically informed geological material...Dove Bradshaw romances the stones—at least the salt crystals—all six continents (Europe and Asia count as one) in her installation. Water drips from Pyrex funnels onto the brown salt from Ireland, pink salt from Chile, gray salt from Egypt, etc., causing each mound to crater and discolor like a volcano in reverse. Other...pieces also chart the effects of time and tide on the mineral kingdom and humankind alike. Bradshaw’s is no mere display of process; it is the physical realm made metaphysical through the contemplation of transformation, by someone whose exploration of such dates back almost as far back as Smithson’s.

*Peter Frank*

*LA Weekly, Pick of the Week*, 2003

Given the materials, obvious associations include global oceans and humanity’s tears, while the hoary relationship between art and alchemy as magical markers for change gets yet another outing. However, the most appealing feature of *Six Continents* is its more sober quality as a global time clock—erosion, evaporation, reconstitution, constant transformation—which compresses geological eons into a rhythmic drip, drip, drip.

*Christopher Knight*

*Los Angeles Times*, 2005

*Poetry is every evident, all one has to do is present materials.*

Dove Bradshaw



the artist, SolwayJones, Los Angeles, 2005



## Photographic Credits:

Cover and Pages 7, 8, 9: *Six Continents*, 6th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, South Korea, 2006, Dove Bradshaw

Page 11: *Six Continents*, Larry Becker Contemporary Art, 2005, courtesy of the gallery

Pages 14-20: *Six Continents*, SolwayJones Gallery, 2005, Robert Wedemeyer

Page 23: *Time & Material*, Rome, 2007, Dove Bradshaw

Page 24, 25: *Negative Ions II, Elements*, Stalke Gallery, Copenhagen, 2001, Sam Jedig

Page 26: *Negative Ions II, ONE More Cologne*, Thomas Rehbein Gallery, Cologne, 2008, Dove Bradshaw

Page 27: *Negative Ions II, Time Matters*, Pierre Menard Gallery, 2008, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Dove Bradshaw

Pages 29-33: *Negative Ions I*, Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, 1998, John Bessler

Page 35: *Salt, Half Heard, The Missing Peace*, Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2007, Robert Wedemeyer

Page 39: photograph of the artist, *Six Continents*, SolwayJones Gallery, 2005, courtesy of the gallery

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*SALT*  
2009



