



DOVE BRADSHAW

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Curator: Julie Lazar

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by
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Dove Bradshaw's art changes faster than most, and that is its point and its splendor. To restore it would be to ruin it. Hers is not a kinetic but a chemical art. She works in inorganic chemistry as if it were organic, acknowledging indeterminacy as central to the working of the natural world, to a universe that expands. ...Bradshaw sets natural processes in motion and then withdraws, observing their results. The Contingency series, (of which several pieces appear at MOCA) demonstrates unpredictable chemistry in action. Canvases (or linen or flax) incorporate unstable chemicals that respond over time to changes in light and humidity as a record of the process of oxidation. In the Indeterminacy series stones bleed into stones leaving haunting patterns.

For Bradshaw's large *Contingency* book, ...she applied wax, varnish, and silver to sheets of linen paper then sandwiched them between other chemically active works leaving them to oxidize, buried in her studio, untouched, for two years. The resulting book of the bound pages, epic in size and imposingly archaic-like as if it was a medieval,

mystical tome, contains the writings and drawings of chemistry from the bleedings of her other works onto these pages. There exudes a strong whiff of alchemy here, though in reverse, especially in the way the silver turns gold briefly during its first oxidation before becoming black. On display, the book continues to change; the open pages oxidize, the closed pages bleed. A viewer's breath or a page-turner's fingers affect and in the Duchampian sense, "finish" the work.

Ground (1988) is nothing more than a thin coat of plaster originally applied on top of a segment of her entrance hall. White on white, it became polished when rubbed by passersby. In another piece, entitled *Passion* (1993), Bradshaw embedded a bar of copper flush with the surface of the wall and misted it with a mild acid solution to invite activity.

After many failed experiments, Bradshaw learned that pyrite will leach onto certain stones like marble and produce complex stains on the surface. Thus Bradshaw creates a spectacular sense of flux even with heavy, immobile stones.... They remind us that stone, like all nature, is alive. That can be an unsettling thought—we tend to think of the "performance" of stone as disaster, of earthquake or avalanche. But when we see the gentle beauty of mineral bleeding, we have to change our thinking.

And therein lies the greatest challenge of Dove Bradshaw's work, as she moves further and further away from making esthetic choices and challenges us to face nature more and more directly, to find beauty where we didn't expect it.