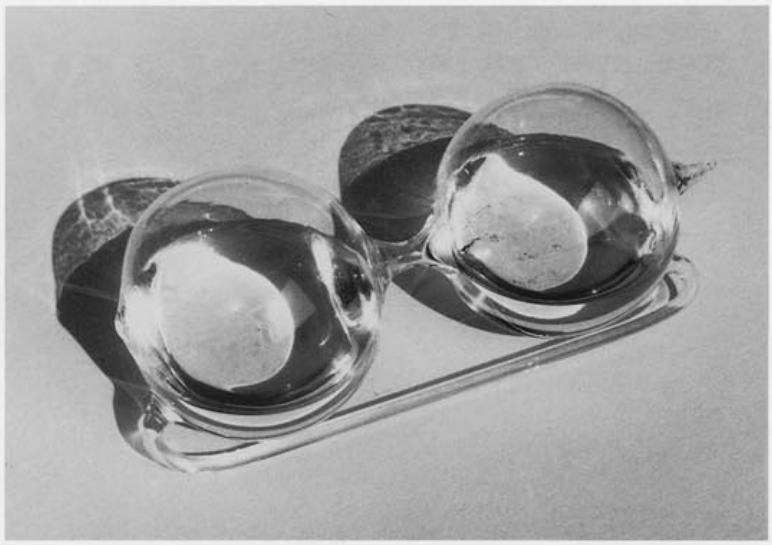
DOVE BRADSHAW



2√0
1971
Glass, acetone
2½x5x2½ inches

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN JOHN CAGE AND THOMAS MC EVILLEY

Cage: There's an idea I had in the 40's, and now that I'm a little bit older I still have the same idea more or less: that one of the ways of saying why we make art is to help us in the enjoyment of life. The way of enjoying life keeps changing because of changes in our scientific awareness. The way you enjoyed life say in 1200 is different from the way you enjoy it now, and that accounts for the changes in art. There is a close connection between art and religion or what we call a spiritual life because of the enjoyment, because the religion or philosophy expresses itself in words whereas the artist uses materials. So in the middle ages, art was called the handmaiden of religion. I think that relationship of art to the spirit continues.

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.

For instance, the works on which she applies silver then liver of sulfur so that what she's putting on the canvas is not necessarily what you're going to see there in a few days or in a month. I saw a work of hers of that kind at the Sandra Gering Gallery and it corresponded with my then notions of beauty and I own it now. [see plate: p. 6] I don't have too much space, but now and then things go off to exhibitions on loan, and a Jasper Johns moved off to England for a year and a half, and at that time Dove's piece took its place. Recently I looked at it, and it isn't what it was; it's something else.

McEvilley: Is this due to its own changes?

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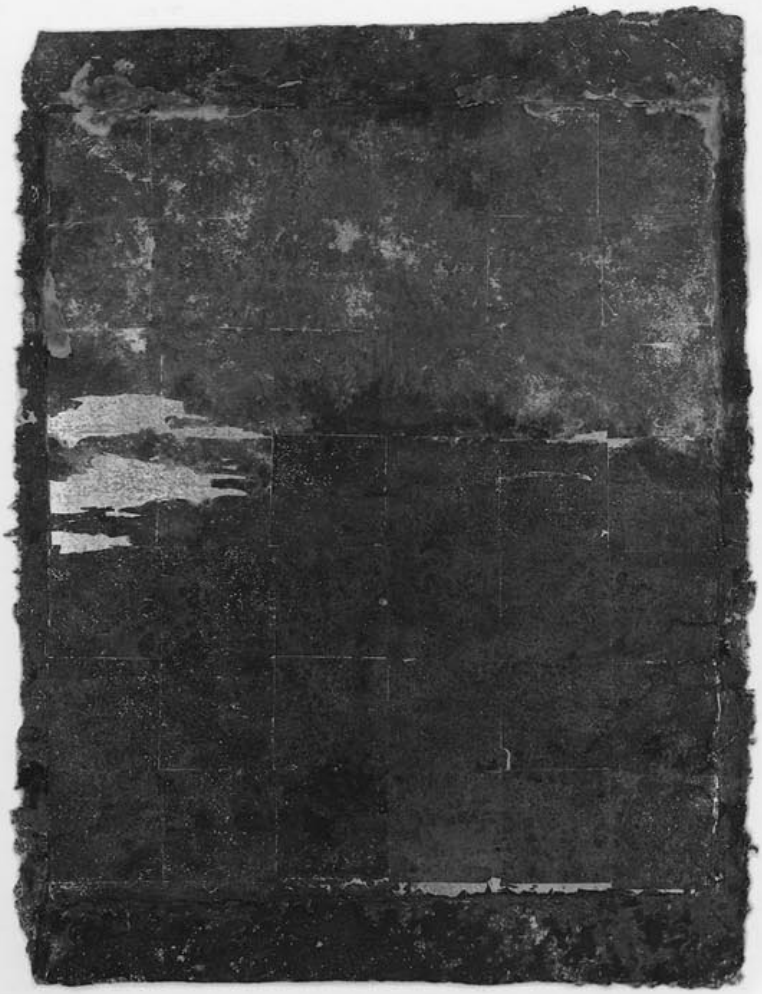

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Contingency Series, 1 of 12
1985
Silver/liver of sulfur on paper
32x24 inches
Photographed: December, 1992
Collection: John Cage
Exhibited by John Cage as part of his presentation at the Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, PA, 1991

C: Yes, and to the way Dove has worked the experiment.

M: Do you mean one of the chessboard pieces with sulfur added which causes it to change in response to the air?

C: Yes, but when I acquired it there was no indication of the chessboard.

M: So it's a real chess game piece. It made a move on you, the grid of order rising up out of nothingness.

C: Now the order is what you see. The mystery, the sense of landscape, of bio-morphic reality, of things beyond human control, all of which was there before, is

gone; now it's the presence of order.

M: This is really what I see as a main theme of Dove's work. This aspect of the work seems to relate to the distinction between nature and culture. The grid of the chessboard signifies culture; the amorphous, changing, process-oriented, unpredictable and hence unknowable ground is nature. And it continues to change.

C: The Lord knows when it will return to my then preference.

M: I quite see the point... I was thinking something similar in relation to the much earlier works, the eggshell works from 1969. [p. 42] First there was the broken eggshell in bronze, then later in silver, then in 1988, the ones in gold. I've thought of it as the Orphic egg that breaks and the god Phanes appears out of it and the stream of the world of form flows out of his gaze. It stands at the beginning, like a matrix out of which Dove's oeuvre unfolds. So, like the changing painting, it has to do with going through the veil between form and non-form. The broken eggshell is there like the record of a transit, a crossing of that border. It has also struck me that the distinction you've brought up is like the Buddhist idea that form is emptiness and emptiness is form. It reminds me too of something of yours that I've read where you talked about the possibility of there being nothing. And I took that phrase in two ways. First, there's the possibility of *nothing*, meaning it's possible that there would be nothing; then, there's the *possibility* of nothing, meaning that the world of potentiality comes out of nothing. And the egg piece to me seems to suggest all of that. The transition between formlessness and form which your silver painting underwent to

in an empty room the chair(s), the walls neither painted nor the paint removed (the walls as they are), the use of chance operations to determine the placement and orientation of the chair(s), and which fifteen of a source of forty-eight works, twelve each by dove bradshaw, john cage, mary jean kenton, marsha skinner are presented each day in which positions
John Cage

instructions for changing installation at the mattress factory
The Carnegie International, 1991

your surprise – the soupy stuff inside the egg being relatively unformed, then when it cracked open this beautiful fresh form emerged. And in these recent works where she puts that liver of sulfur on the silvered surface, something like that birth or that crossing or that transition happens again. It's very charming the way you said that it at first related to your then idea of beauty, which was the formless, and now it relates to the formal grid idea which still has potentiality because a chessboard has a potential array of transactions...

C: Yes, it's quite amazing. The fact that the piece changes requires a change, for me; it requires a change of attitude. If I so to speak change with it, then I can change with the world that I'm living in, which is doing the same thing.

M: Which is also changing in uncontrollable ways. So this is what you meant about art being a tool to help you enjoy life.

C: Yes, and to not be set mad by it.

M: So at first the artwork fulfilled your expectations and then it ceased to fulfill them...

C: Now it's teaching me something.

M: Now it's teaching you about the limits of your expectations.

C: And it's answers and its handmaidenness will change too.

M: If the handmaiden to the spirit is changing, then is the spirit changing too?

C: Yes. We're confronting now it seems to me in the very full way that her work is itself working – the identity, not the separateness, but the identity of time and space. Of all the arts, certainly more than music, painting is fixed and is often rectangles, except for a few signs of revolt.

M: And a rectangle, usually horizontal, implies a narrative and a line moving. I love that moment when the chessboard rose up out of the amorphous ground and confronted you.

C: That's a real identity of time and space in the same fixed rectangle.

M: It's happening both as time and as space.

C: Such a change in a fixed way is done in a fluent, unfixed way by music.

M: I see your point. And in terms of the arc of development of Dove's work, that early piece from 1969 with the broken eggshell states in a kind of fixed, symbolic way what this new painting that changed when you weren't looking at it acts out. Dove's work began as sculpture, then proceeded through conceptual art and now is painting. Painting is so ubiquitous again today. But then again Dove's work, when it surprised you and changed while you weren't looking at it – that's not what we call painting – was behaving more like sculpture in its performative aspect, its tendency to occupy the real space-time of the human body. So that in her oeuvre there seems to be an interpenetration between those categories.

C: Yes, and that complexity, that situation which she constructs, we still can't confront in any other way than to be confused. It's in that confusion that we live and to enjoy that absence of security, particularly when security raises its head...

M: ...it's tempting, seductive head...

C: ...it's very curious but very true, I think, and very testing; it's testing us in our tranquillity.

M: In the Perfect Wisdom texts, Subhuti, speaking of the bodhisattvas, says, "They stand firmly, because they stand nowhere."

C: Beautiful.

M: So the silver and sulfur work involves a certain narrative. There's a sense that we're standing, and the ground is underneath us, and then the rug is pulled out, and there's this experience of freefall, and yet both of those things are our location, both the standing and the freefall.

C: Yes, that's where we are. I'm very fortunate to be working on a curious book

that – I don't know how it will be done – in theatre, film and video, combined with music and the editor said the other day in our first talk about going by air to New York from Chicago and how it's not only the space that changes but the time too; it's a timespace, not hyphenated, experience, and I think this is what Dove's work is about, preparing us for that experience which is ours, and we don't know how to do it because we cling.

Marcel Duchamp said, speaking of Utopia, that we won't be able to reach it till we give up the notion of possession. And this work of Dove's confronts possession completely.

M: You've got it and then it slips through your fingers; it's something else.

C: Which you may not have wanted.

M: Which you may not even like.

C: But if you change your mind you may enjoy.

M: So it's very challenging and demanding, isn't it?

C: Oh, very.

M: It cracks the whip over you a little bit.

C: Exactly. Like the Zen monks with the stick: "I slit the cat's throat."

M: In some earlier interview you said, "I don't want to spend my life being pushed around by a bunch of artists."

C: Yes, I did say that.

M: Well, here's another artist pushing you around.

C: Yes, that's true. But not so manipulatively as some. There's a rejection of control.

M: I've mentioned a theme which reveals a lot about Dove's work – the distinction between nature and culture, which is roughly like the difference between life and art. There's an interesting passage where you said that for all your great admiration and friendship for Rauschenberg you had a little difference with him, in that he said he wanted to work between art and life and you would rather just collapse them altogether.

C: Yes.

M: Well, that line of thought brings me to raise the word "history."

C: Yes.

M: The idea of history is like the idea of riding the line of the boundary between nature and culture, tracing the arc of that line, where it is located at different times and places. In our Western, Hegelian, dualistic, Judeo-Christian view, we have a really paranoid dread of nature, that nature will sweep up and overcome history, pulling it down to some swamp of irrational meaninglessness.

You once said that one should get oneself out of whatever cage one is in. Well, history, however we conceive it, is our cage; as Joyce said, "History is a nightmare from which I'm trying to awaken." In trying to break out of it, we seem to pass through this membrane where we turn over into formlessness and what we perceive as disorder, terror, the abyss, the swamp, the sublime and all of that.

And 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. You know, Hegel called history Work and called nature Madness.

C: He did?

M: He thought nature did no work; it had no meaning and no intention. And when we try in this paranoid way to separate off what we do from what's around us, we think of history as embodying an intention, and of nature as not having any intentions. And yet I'm wondering if nature doesn't reveal a sense of intentions – for example, the cyclicity of the solar year could be interpreted as suggesting a kind of intention.

C: As an idea.

M: And Dove's 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 your 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?

C: Yes. [long silence] Just now I mentioned Marcel's idea about ownership. And

C: Yes. [long silence] Just now I mentioned Marcel's idea about ownership. And, I was impressed by the difference between Rauschenberg's empty white canvases and the monochromatic white works that Dove has recently made, which if you touch them – I didn't do it – the pigment comes off. [p. 43] Not only is it's nature in transition from within, but we can move it, remove it by contact. That's not exactly the same as those years-ago, also beautiful works of Rauschenberg.

M: The white paintings...

C: And the difference is the difference between then and now. That then became beautiful for me by receiving dust. This now equally whiteness and emptiness is willing to give itself and to change itself, and without losing itself. So that then becomes a model for daily behavior because it is anti-possession.

I look forward to our daily behavior on a global scale becoming utopian, where we won't have this hellish difference between rich and poor, and where ownership will quite naturally no longer be useful.

M: The anthropologist Henry Lewis Morgan, in writing about private property, wrote, "The human mind stands baffled before its own creation" – meaning the institution of private property.

C: Yes. [laughs] I think it's very important that we see that what we own – we don't even know what it is. Or what aspect of nature or non-nature it's going to reveal to us.

M: Faulkner wrote that we don't really possess anything – the paradigm for him

was the earth; how can you really possess a piece of the earth. You'll die and be buried in it; it possesses you. So that when Dove's work changes, or gives part of itself away, it's asserting the impossibility of ownership or the blindness of the idea of ownership.

C: Yes. Or even of the fixity of the thing.

M: Our idea of the fixity of the thing is the result of our desire for security and...

C: ...all of that...

M: ...our desire that we ourselves be fixed and defined.

C: All of those things we need to give up. We're being hit over the head by the need; it's so clear.

M: What you're saying is interestingly parallel to the Marxist idea, in that the elimination of private property would function as the end of the nightmare of history.

C: Most people now cannot believe that ownership will go.

M: Much of the world is still at the beginning of the seduction of ownership.

C: They believe that you should own a good thing rather than a bad thing. That just leads to more problems. They develop all these things seeking something that's no longer spiritually available, namely fixity. 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.

M: So thinking of the broken eggshell again, you seem to be hinting that what might rise out of it is a new sense of our own selfhood.

C: Yes.

M: It's interesting how that eggshell piece changed in its materials with such alchemical implications. Sulfur too has great prominence in that tradition. Yet the alche-

mical implication of some of the work seems to suggest a reference to a higher transcendental fixity. In antiquity, gold, because it doesn't change, came to represent the idea of an essence. The gold eggshell, for example, is a kind of contradiction. The eggshell is frail and changing; the gold is fixed.

I was in Dove's studio yesterday, and we were looking at the large new silver/liver of sulfur painting in the front room; you know it? [p. 47]

C: Yes, it's very beautiful.

M: That's the point. We were looking at this work and I said, Dove, how do you deal with the fact that this work has such presence along lines that we associate with gestural abstract painting? Is the point of this work this condition of esthetic presence, or is the point of it the underlying process of chemical change that is quite indifferent to the idea of esthetic presence? There's an interesting tension between the aspect of esthetic presence pulling the work into culture and the process of underlying change pulling it back into nature. That piece is very attractive at its present moment – that is, it corresponds to my present idea of the esthetic.

C: Yes. Mine too. So her work is anti-possessive and pro-history, actually.

M: But anti-history in its affirmations of nature as a force that could engulf history.

C: Yes, except that many of us, not all of us but many of us, now love nature. Dove has introduced time into space, and our living is in that confusion.

M: Of course, it would be perverse to call the love of nature an opposition to history. It's true that with the decline of Modernist ways of thought it has become historically possible at last to love the idea of redeeming culture through a kind of baptismal immersion in nature.

There are historical connections – the famous story of the *Large Glass* breaking and Duchamp remarking that he liked it better. Polke also has used chemicals that cause his pictures to change color and texture in response to ambient changes in temperature and moisture. So they're constantly changing, but on the other hand

Untitled
1989
Silver/liver of sulfur on vellum
34x26 inches
Exhibited: The New Museum, New York, 1989

they are fixed. I mean, in the same climatic conditions they will always look the same. They don't go away.

C: Do you think so?

M: Whereas in Dove's work what goes away won't come back. It continues to change. But in Polke's work it's controllable: if one put the picture through a certain set of changing conditions it will go through predictable changes. But once Dove's work has gone through a phase it doesn't go back.

C: It won't? I can't imagine the absence of energy and it's energy which is doing these things. It never gets to zero.

M: It's not only the works based on change that involve this idea. There are the paintings on calfskins, for example, which make you wonder whether they are nature or culture. Some of them were in a show at Sandra Gering. You recall those works?

C: I don't any longer. I surprise myself and others by remembering something, but my mode of being now is not having a memory. I just don't remember anything.

M: Is that an ahistorical mode of being? [laughter] Well, there are implications of culture's cruel exploitation of nature. Here we have skinned the calf and then made a painting on it and hung it on our wall as a decoration for ourselves, and there's something terribly cruel about that.

C: Yes, indeed.

M: And then there's that piece of hers which is a large thorn which she has dusted with red pigment. [p. 41] Again, the thorn of course is nature, the pigment represents the idea that art can make nature into culture, which I guess is the quality of the alchemical transfiguration that art does, which is to move things back and forth across this line between nature and culture. Then there's the fact that Dove chose red for the thorn; iconographically again there's a hint of cruelty or sacrifice; the thorn pricks you and you bleed, and that's how it gets red. There's something about this transition being difficult or painful...

C: Or just full. Because the word red and the word blood are the same word in Chinese. It's a full word which goes in these different directions.

M: Of course the whole concept of red and blood, like the eggshell, signifies the end of something and the beginning of something, a mysterious linkage which we can't see at all, but which makes up that fabric of infinite causes and effects.

C: Right now I am reading *The Yellow Emperor*, an ancient Chinese text on health. What they do anciently in terms of health, as far as I understand it, is to take nature as the model for human behavior – which is the cyclic succession of spring, summer, fall and winter, together with heaven and earth – and to see all that as

summer, fall and winter, together with heaven and earth – and to see all that as something which if it works rightly (if it is in the Tao, the Way), the normal succession of events will be for each person to live for a hundred years. And if you do it incorrectly, if you don't act as nature does, you will die much sooner. So long life consists in acting as nature does.

Another thing that I think I learned from Zen and from the teaching of Suzuki is that the whole of creation is Mind with a big M, and each person is mind with a little m. The little m often thinks that it has purposes and senses of direction, but if it changes its direction, if it turns round or is converted, then it looks out of itself toward the big Mind, either at night through dreams or in the day through the senses. And what Zen wants is that it flows with the Big Mind, and what Chinese medicine wants is a relation of conduct to nature.

And there's no fear of chaos.

M: So Dove's work seems to be an attempt to do this... to act according to nature.

C: Particularly when it doesn't seem to be art.

The things that happen in her work are, so to speak, full of not *her* determination but *its* determination, such as chemical change, or gravity. She uses the word "event". Much as the president might take of some disaster that needs federal assistance – what is that called?

M: An emergency? [laughter]

C: Or when things need help, but Dove doesn't do that; she speaks of it as an event and observes it. I don't think she bothers either to encourage it or not.

M: Well, she has set up the situation for the event to transpire in, and has defined the parameters. Then back to that question again of the esthetic presence of much of her work. Is she going to encourage that or remain indifferent to it or even oppose it, as some artists do who feel under obligation to resist esthetic presence.

C: When I told her that the one I had liked had changed to an image that I didn't particularly like, she offered to let me exchange it for one I did like. I said, no, I want to keep the one I have. I want to continue to see what is happening in it.

M: A work that relates to all of this is the piece with the doves living in the gallery.

C: Yes, I'd love to hear what you have to say about it.

M: Well, it's her namesake work, it's the first work in her box [*boîte en livre*], *nothing*. And she's repeated it. It seems to me she's put some special emphasis on it. You mentioned that her work has a certain sense of scientific experiment...

C: Yes.

M: Which again, in terms of art history, goes back to Duchamp, specifically to the *Three Standard Stoppages* of 1913, in which he developed a quasi-scientific procedure for creating these three lines that don't show the prejudice of a hand or a taste or a habit system. Dove, by introducing the birds into a gallery and providing stuff so they might build a nest from there, has brought nature into the place of culture. The context redefines things so, when the doves make the nest it's as if they're making art. On one level it's similar to the strategy of Lamonte Young years ago when he released a butterfly on the stage and that was the concert. But it's different too, because the doves will change the space in ways we can perceive. What will it look like after they have redesigned it for a week or a month?... like your changing painting. The bicycle wheel and the targets under it which will be marked by bird droppings are on the one hand a lineage, references to Duchamp and Johns.

plain air
1991
Pidgeons, installation
Installation view: P.S.1 Museum, New York
Exhibited:
The Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, PA, 1990
Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, 1989

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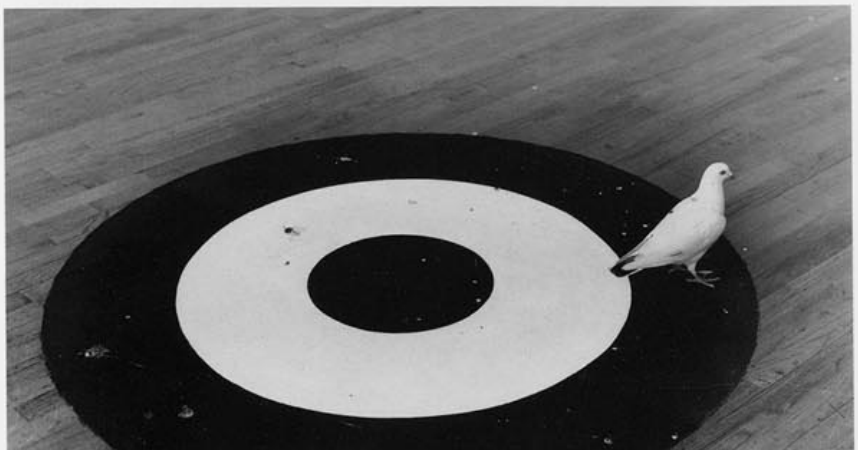
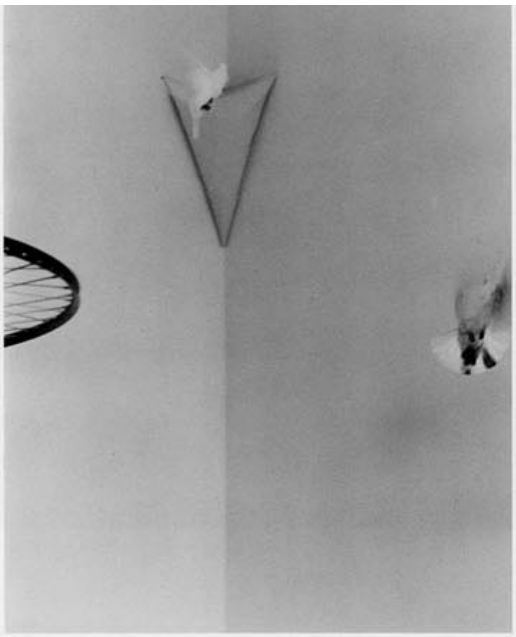


plain air
1991
Pidgeon, acrylic on canvas
Installation view: P.S.1 Museum

plain air
1989
Doves, installation
Installation view: Sandra Gering Gallery



plain air
1991
Installation view: P.S.1 Museum

She says that she tried to get Zen archers' targets but couldn't, so she recreated these from memory. The bird droppings are the semi-random activity of nature, but there is a focus. The birds have their own habit system which is a kind of parody of our sense of goal orientation, because of course to the dove it doesn't matter what part of the target it falls on. This is consistent, as she says, with the Zen archer's disinterest in hitting a bull's-eye.

On the one hand, it's very historicized, in our moment, which is so full of art historical referencing, because it contains these incorporations of Duchamp and Johns. On the other hand, it is devoted to letting nature alone.

C: It doesn't even seem to be art. I remember Jasper saying that when the *Étant donnés* is seen in a museum it will be the most unlikely experience for a museum to give.

M: You say it doesn't even look like art; again it's the nature/culture separation. There is a story about Ramakrishna being taken to the zoo in Calcutta. He saw the lion first, then insisted on going home. He couldn't take any more. It was already overwhelming. And it was like art in a terrible sense, that nature has that incredible power in it – terrifyingly beyond what we do with art. And yet the doves adapt peacefully...

C: It's interesting how the nest is incorporated in the carbon paper removals.

M: The hair, the grass, the twigs...

C: Not the way the birds have put it together, but the way it is crumbled so it can lie flat.

M: Some of the carbon removals have an elegant esthetic presence along recognizable lines even though they involve the direct incorporation of nature. They have a presence which goes back in a way to abstract expressionism. I remember a passage where you were talking about the dichotomy between Tobey and Pollock. But dichotomy or not, both those artists, and others of their time, taught us to esthetically respond to the idea of these randomly modulated allover fields which you compared to pavement, and which are like other things that we see around us all the time. It's this type of esthetic presence that the carbon removal

works have, and it is like nature, like the way fungus moves and covers a surface.

C: Which we're also taught by photography. There's something about the relation of time on the one hand to photography, and on the other hand to Dove's work. Time and space. We speak of the snapshot casually, but really we've accepted that photography is a way of possessing something. But in Dove's work again it's removed from possession, from thing.

M: The absence is left there by the removals, and the absence is what we see.

C: Yes.

M: I think that approach was a discovery of the post-war period. It involves a tip of the hat to Yves Klein, whose work also was about these reversals, taking things out of a gallery instead of bringing things in, for example. Your own championing of randomness and found sound, your concept of silence relates too, wouldn't you say?

C: I would just take out the word "concept".

M:Yes. Like in an interview with Wheeler, the famous physicist – he was asked,

"When you began a certain line of investigation what were you looking for?" He answered, "Why, whatever I would find."

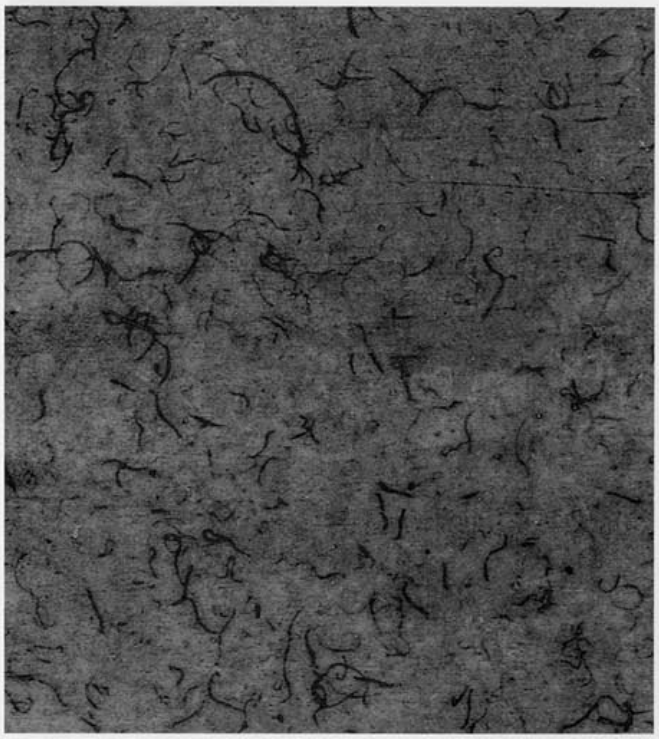
C: That's beautiful.

M: There's this idea that in culture we work in a highly focused historicized way toward something that may not be goal-oriented or rigidly fixed at all, but with a complete acceptance of uncertainty. Dove's work involves a pointed acceptance of uncertainty and indefiniteness, even a prideful abrogation of control. Yet, at the same time, for all its acceptance of indeterminacy, it is highly determined and clearly defined in an art historical sense – the different historical presences which flow into it, Duchamp, Johns, Klein, the Black Mountain spirit which is still moving through our web of culture, and, of course, your own work.

You've been a collector of Dove's work for a while?

being
1969
Wire, string, hair
6 inches diameter

A pair of mourning doves, given the freedom of the artist's studio, built a nest with appropriated material.



Untitled
(carbon removal)
1981
Carbon paper
47/8x43/8 inches
Collection: John Cage

C: Yes. The first ones were drawings of leaves.

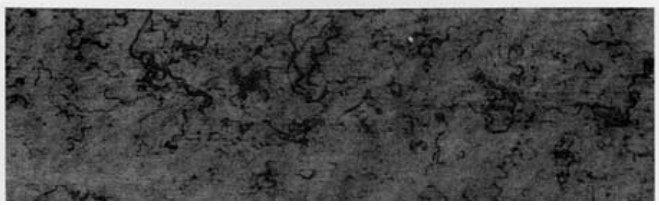
M: Interesting how that fits into all this, isn't it?

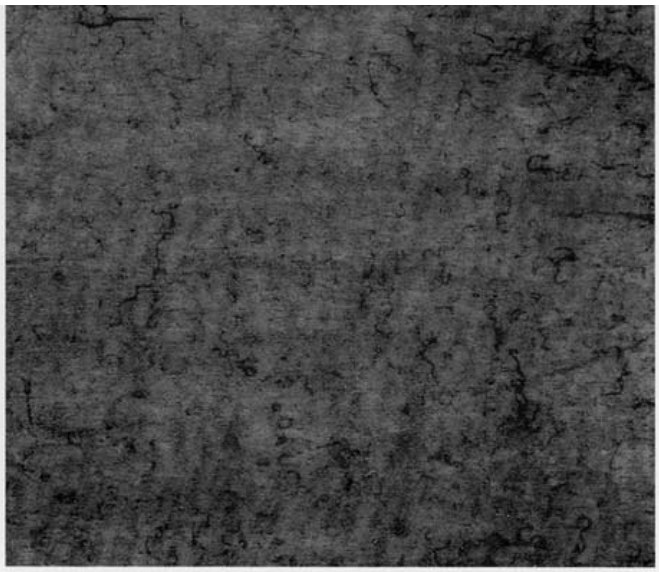
C: Yes. The next ones I think were small white paintings.

M: The tiny white squares?

C: Yes. Then carbon removals, and more recently a large work related to chil-

Untitled
(carbon removal)
1981
Carbon paper
47/8x41/4 inches
Collection: John Cage





dren's drawings. And after that the ones that we've mostly been talking about, that aren't fixed, but are changing through these chemical and physical means.

It's very interesting that this work has led Dove to treat the floor as the canvas rather than the easel, like what Pollock did, to modify the action of gravity. But, as Dove has noticed, pools are apt to be formed on the surfaces.

M: Which leave an impression like a kind of solar burst.

ear witness
1987
Oil, graphite, crayon on vellum
52x36 inches
Collection: John Cage

right:
Untitled
1986
Oil, crayon on vellum
52x36 inches
Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, New York

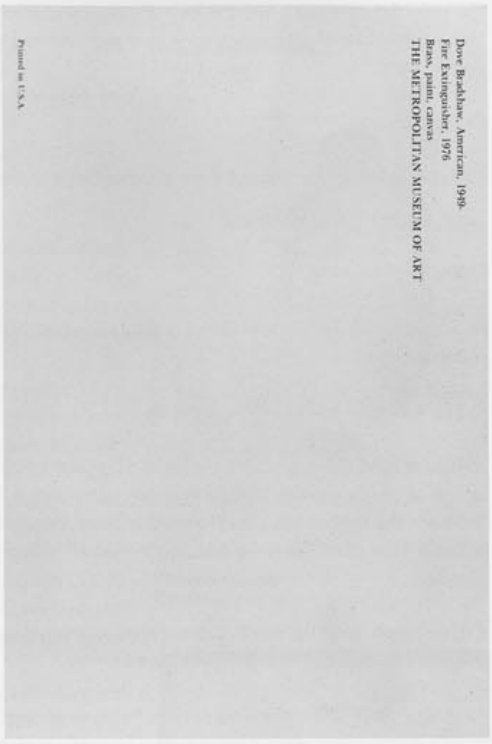
C: Yes. And she recognizes this as something that works against what she's actually doing, which is not doing anything. It's doing too much of one thing, whereas she's interested in an undefined freedom of action for the chemistry. Of not doing anything.

M:This work of 1975 is interesting in that respect – a crushed paintcan that looks like it's been run over by a bulldozer. A lot of her works from this period are really classical conceptual art, like the reduction of a painting to its materials. This again goes back to Duchamp, to his remark that the painting is an altered Ready-made. And Yves Klein exhibiting the rollers that he had used rather than the painting he had made with them.

C: I like that.

M: *Performance*, 1976, the encased fire hose she claimed as art and later made into a postcard, is classical conceptualism too. Not only because it's what's there – it collapses that art/life distinction – but in addition because it seems to have

certain specific meanings and suggestions. It involves, for example, a flow of water,



Performance
1978
Post card edition of 1000
6 1/8x4 1/8 inches
Collection: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

A plaque (mimicking the museum's typical format) was mounted on a wall next to an encased fire hose with the text: Dove Bradshaw, American, 1949-, *Fire Extinguisher*, 1976, Brass, paint, canvas. The site was monitored by the artist who replaced the plaque with a facsimile whenever it was found to have been removed. Eventually, the plaque was discovered inside the glass case. The artist had the Fire Hose photographed, produced a postcard edition in 1978 and quietly supplied the appropriate museum store rack with cards. In 1992, the Museum produced its own edition of the postcard with documentation.

the idea of putting out a fire, the idea of danger and emergency as something about the nature of art today. As Lyotard said, "Art is a perpetual crisis." It's implied here.

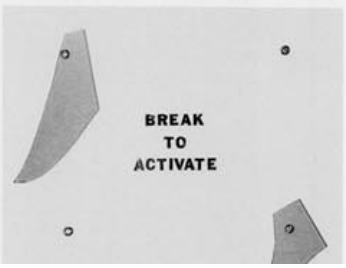
C: Yes, I see that.

M: Art has the ability to put out a fire, a healing or corrective power.

I love the work *Break to Activate*.

C: Yes, that's beautiful.

M: Something we haven't mentioned overtly yet is Dove's rather inspired use of materials.



C: Yes, and her constant experimentation.

M: You're right; they are kind of the same thing, aren't they? Making something art can be simply a matter of experimentally transposing it from one material to another – the eggshell becomes bronze, then silver, then gold. This I feel is a really inspired use of materials – a little bottle smeared with petroleum jelly on the outside

outside.

C: Like Tobey, what we find in Dove's work is constant experimentation with things to see what happens when you do that.

M: Both Pollock and Tobey are famous for their all over pattern. Of course Pollock is not really all over, there's usually a border. The all over painting is a reference to nature. History is based on the idea that there is a center and a periphery. Nature is based on the idea that consciousness melts into and diffuses through everything.

C: I used to see the all over as identical with what seemed to be its opposite, the center – the chessboard of Dove's to be equivalent to the centeredness – the presence of intention. [p. 45] To have something centered completely or identified with a chessboard, something known very well apart from the artist is very much like Jasper Johns' numbers or flags which eliminate the necessity of an idea

Untitled
1977
Press type, glass, screws, edition of 3
13x18x1/8 inches
Installation views:
P.S.1 Museum, June, 1977
P.S.1 Museum, December, 1977
Collection: Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA

and brought about the anythingness of the process, up to the point of Dove's use of things that simply don't remain.

M: The chessboard pattern is the creation of a field for intentionality to work on.

C: Or at least to be evident to. So the chessboard or the flag are recognizable as things apart from the people who use them, as one would think of a straight line or a circle even.

This is an example of Bill Anastasi's work. It's a cloth put over a pot while brown rice is being cooked. He was able to make that which is like the highest Zen work of Enzo without doing anything, as in Zen. In fact they would say, "By taking a nap, I pound the rice."

M: The chessboard of course implies doing something. It's like a field of consciousness that's all prepared for action, for decision, for rules, for structure from which something will unfold, and yet of course it's quite unpredictable what that unfolding will be. No two chess games are exactly alike either.

C: That's why we say we enjoy it. [laughter]

M: We were talking before about the important focus on materials in Dove's work. I wanted to mention this work, *Untitled*, 1977. Each material is marked with a number indicating the years it can be expected to remain unchanged under museum conditions.
The newsprint area is marked two years, the matboard is marked 100 years, and the glass and wood are marked indefinite. All these materials are seen as changing inwardly, and at different rates.

C: It's the same thing again, isn't it, the identity of space and time.

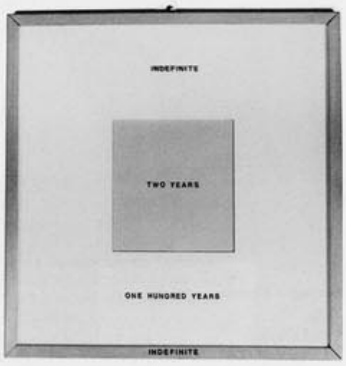
M: *Untitled*, 1978; you may remember this work – rolls of dry paint razor knifed off of a sheet of glass.

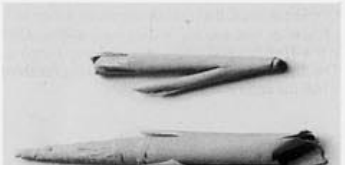
C: That's just marvellous.

M: I like its delicacy.

Untitled
1977
Glass, jar, petroleum jelly
2 1/2x1 1/4 inches

Untitled
1977
Wood, glass, paper
8 5/8x12x11 5/8 inches

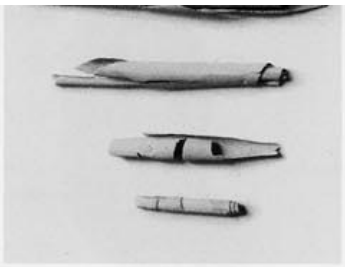




C: Yes.

M: Its tininess. Of course it's again like the bulldozed paintcan, a part of that general conceptual project that Duchamp began of breaking up the idea of the painting, which again Dove does in the new works also.

To a degree that element is part of the classical conceptualist project of subvert



Untitled
1978
Acrylic scrolls
c. 2 inches longest length

Homage á Thoreau
1978
Pencil shaving
1/2 inch radius

To a degree that element is part of the classical conceptualist project of subverting the idea of the painting, parodying the idea of the eternality of the masterpiece by changing almost before your eyes. But then, of course, traditional paintings change in time too. I was in Amsterdam a couple of days ago and went to the Rijksmuseum and saw the big Rembrandt picture, *The Night Watch*. This was not initially a painting of a nocturnal scene; it was set in the afternoon. The paint darkened. So traditional paintings, as much as Dove's work, are also going through this change from moment to moment, though more slowly.

C: In the pyramid style.

M: Yes. She speeds the process up as if to expose the secret: this pyramid is not eternal, anymore than that thatched hut beside it is.

Homage á Thoreau, 1978; pencil shaving – it's very similar. It's reduction of drawing to its material origin.

C: Beautiful.

M: Again I love its delicacy

C: Yes.

M: Also the sense that it's detritus, the thing that would ordinarily be thrown away. This whole area of Dove's middle period work relates so closely to the themes that Yves Klein left, such as his famous remark, "My paintings are the ashes of my art." This piece seems to partake of that spirit.

This piece is the hygrometer, a humidity measuring device that's in the museum gallery already, which then Dove labels as her work; it is also called *Performance*, like the fire hose piece. This is interesting because this device is there to protect the paintings, to make them eternal.

Dressed as a nun, the artist sat silently on a chair with a basket on two successive days, form 6AM to 6PM in the 42nd Street Grand Central Subway Terminal. The first day – expressionless - the artist received $143; the second day – smiling – $186.

30% Better; the nun piece. I believe you own this piece.

C: Yes. It's at this point actually that I met Dove, and she came to my house on Bank Street dressed as a nun, and I didn't recognize her. I was surprised because I thought she was a stranger.

M: The beautiful simplicity of the question, how much is a smile worth?

C: Yes, it's very beautiful.

M: In a sense the material of this piece is a smile. The whole question of what a smile means – the mysterious Buddha smile, the mysterious Mona Lisa smile, the crazy Chinese monk's smile. And it's contextualized within a holy uniform; the smile is presented as a holy force that can elicit acts of charity. There's something very good-willed, something from an earlier age that's passing – from the make love not war age. This is probably as close to an overt political orientation as Dove's work has gotten.

C: The distinction between intentionality and art – and say Dove's recent work, which

30% Better
1979
Performance: April 9
April 10
Grand Central Subway Terminal
Photographic documentation, ed. of 6

doesn't seem to have that but I think nevertheless has it – makes me think of the difference between pure science as opposed to applied science. And Dove has worked in both ways.

Photograph on resin coated paper
10x8 inches
Collections: John Cage
Muestra International De Arte Grafico, Bilbao

Performance
1979
Claimed object, hygrometer
8x10x5 inches
Installation view: The Kunstmuseum, Dusseldorf

solution
1979
Two lengths of rope each 27 inches
Variable

M: Whereas politically oriented work we would see as applied science.

C: I think her normal way of working is higher, that it could go through more aspects of our lives.

M: This work of 1978 is just a burned book. Why? To me it again suggests the dread that nature, such as fire, will engulf history and reduce its monuments to fertilizer, as happened to the library of Alexandria. There's a kind of prophetic sense to it, in the sense that civilization is something that will char like a leaf. Those early leaf drawings there's something like that here – that the pages of a book as it burns fly off like leaves falling from a tree.

C: I think that the truth that comes out of all this is that we are able as human beings to enjoy it at any point.
Are you saying this is history burning? Well, we can take it unburned or burned. And we can see it as art at any point.

M: Now here's *disembraining machine* – it's a very funny piece, in a way.

C: It looks like chicken legs. It looks like looking into the broiler.

M: It also looks like culture undergoing a meltdown, perhaps in that immolation that burned the other book. It's being melted down into this kind of greasy substrate from which new life forms might arise – the idea of civilization as fertilizer, or of history as a series of fertilizings and refertilizings of that field of potentiality represented by the empty chessboard.

Here's another piece from the box, *solution* – it's two ropes – one used as clothesline for nine years, the other unused. You know, a lot of Dove's work involves contrasting the idea of an unchanging state with the idea of a changing state. You know those two red pigment paintings for example? One of them she leaves alone and the pigment sheds off and it darkens, or gets marked, and the other one she repigments every now and then. And they hang together, the one pristine, like the eternal, unaging painting, carrier of an absolute cultural value which will never change, and the other shows the hidden underbelly of that ideology, the movement of unseen particles beneath the surface that is disintegrating and remaking us all at every moment.

C: It's like, "Which twin has the Toni?" – like in a barber shop, before the permanent wave and after the permanent wave?

We're coming away as people, particularly with overpopulation, we're coming away from any sense of style, any should.

M: Yeah. Or anyway at least allowing a multiplicity of shoulds, even contradictory.

C: Oh, yeah.

M: Style is still among us, but in a more lighthearted way.

C: But very individualistic.

M: Yes, very.

(a) muse: a pair of glasses with photographs behind the lenses – there's a lot that one can say about this.

Untitled
1979
Burned book
2x8x12 inches

C: Yes, I love that world of glass. Her use of metal frames with glass and being able to see from either side, I think that's very important.

M: This piece is a ringed book, which can begin anywhere and be looked at in either direction, called *Periphery*, 1979, involving a walk around the perimeter of Manhattan Island, photodocumentation of the walk.

C: She walks with regard to how far she can see in front and behind.

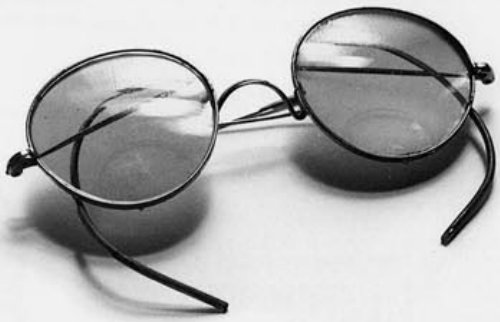
M: To the farthest visible protrusion of land into water. And she photographs it in both directions.

C: I remember seeing it exhibited on a pier into the river. It's a beautiful piece.

M: In Modernism, the difference between a thing and its representation seemed clear. I'm not sure it does any more. A representation is just another thing. I think there's something of that in this work. The critique of cannons of representation which is a major preoccupation of Post-Modern art is like the critique of the idea

disembraining machine
1979
Book, axle grease
1/2x7 1/4x10 inches

35



36

of absolutes – the critique of the idea of an exclusive should or exclusive vision of reality which is such a coaptive belief

of reality which is such a deceptive belief.

You once quoted, I think it was Thoreau, as saying, "When I hear a sentence I hear feet marching."

C: Yes, that was he.

M: I guess he meant that any assertion is a power move, that any assertion is like an army moving on reality and trying to force it to submit.

C: It's in the preface of one of my books.

M: I think Thoreau is one of the key American authors.

C: I think he's the only one.

M: Although Melville and Whitman mean a lot too.

C: And Whitman more and more; it must be true of Melville too.

But what I'm learning now in this recent year when Whitman is again being noticed – his view was not just of Americans as we had thought, but of the whole world.

M: It was like many of the texts of ancient stoics and cynics when they talk about the world as one village, one family, a theme in ancient Tamil poetry too. Or the famous remark of Diogenes when he was asked, "Where's your home town?" and he said, "The world". Whitman's *Mannahatta* is like that, being in a human body in a world, not just a human body. I love his continual expressions that he could live with the animals. I wonder whether this collapsing of nature and culture isn't the American destiny.

(a) muse
For William Anastasi
1979
Glasses, photographs
1 3/4x5x1/2 inches
Collection: The Getty Center, Santa Monica, CA

The rims frame two photographic cut outs

C: That thing we have noticed in Dove's work, that it might almost be more at home with science than with art, we find that in Thoreau. *Walden* was a scientific experiment to see whether life was worth living. He says that. He says also that he has to use the word "I", or become the individual because he knows that experience better than any other experience. He doesn't know what it is to be someone else other than himself.

Untitled
1980
Rubber, wood, ink
1 1/8x2 1/4x2 1/4 inches

M: He was really our American Diogenes. When he moved into the tool box by the railroad tracks he was consciously thinking of Diogenes living in the grain bin in the market place.
And I really suspect that his idea of civil disobedience came at least in part from contemplating the resistance tactics of Diogenes.

Was it Milarepa whose teacher had him build a house and then take it down and build it again?

C: That's right... and he flies through the air in the form of a thistle. That's such a beautiful book; you read it too?

M: That's kind of a paradigm of what we think of the type of making that's involved in art.

C: That was the way he was taught – to move the house over two inches and then he went away. He finally got free of his teacher and went to another teacher, in a rebellious spirit, and was sent back by that one to the first one.
I was going to write an opera. If my life had continued differently, I would have been through writing that opera in say, 1950. But instead I made the silent piece.

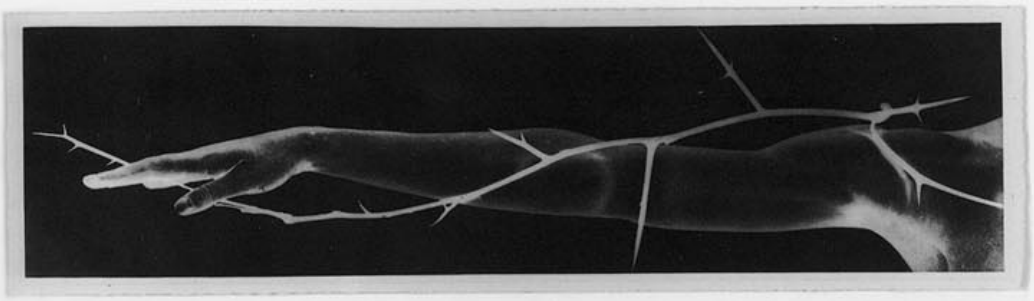
M: Diogenes praised people who were just on the verge of marrying, entering a profession or going on a journey and decided then not to.

This is an interesting work of 1980, *Untitled*; a rubber stamp was made of the word *cliché*. That's basically it. There was the early period of Dove's work when it was sculpture, like the eggshells, then there was this middle period when it was classical conceptual art in the really formal sense, of which the piece *cliché* is a clear example. This is very gentle play.

C: I have a friend I don't see often. I just met him in Scotland, he lives on the Island. And he speaks of cats as having "artistic vocations". All they have to do is be beautiful, and they do it very well.

M: They're so esthetic. I mean the way a cat will choose where it will lie down.

C: Cats give us complete pleasure doing nothing.



M: This is that wonderful work, an argument between Dove and Bill [Anastasi] – a relation work, 1981, in which they wrote down their arguments.

Here we're looking at a carbon removal in which dust was allowed to collect on carbon paper. [p. 26, p. 27] Duchamp's reference to dust collecting for several months on the *Large Glass*.

C: The thorn on the arm; a collodion on glass. That's beautiful.

What is the last one in the box?

M: These Dove just gave to me last night. These are the latest additions to the box. This is a beautiful photograph of the birds.

C: Isn't it beautiful!

M: It may be my favorite photograph in the box. This is the P.S.1 show of two years ago. This closes the circle of our conversation.

And this is the silver and sulfur work that you brought up.

It's interesting, again, sulfur being such a major ingredient in alchemy, even though I don't think that's why Dove adopted it, it does become involved I think.

C: That work I invited Dove to exhibit in the Carnegie International.

Do you want to see the one I have?

medium
1992
Photogravure on Somerset Satin paper
Edition, 12
8 1/4x29 inches
Published by:
Evans Editions, New York
Renaissance Press, New Hampshire

Interview with John Cage and Thomas McEvilley, 1992