

Art in America

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Dove Bradshaw at Sandra Gering

In a time when many artists (and collectors) are concerned about the ways that physical aging may alter their works, Dove Bradshaw embraces such change wholeheartedly. Bradshaw, who was associated with the circle of artists working around the late John Cage, has long made works in which time and change, far from being threats to the survival of her art, are the preconditions of its existence.

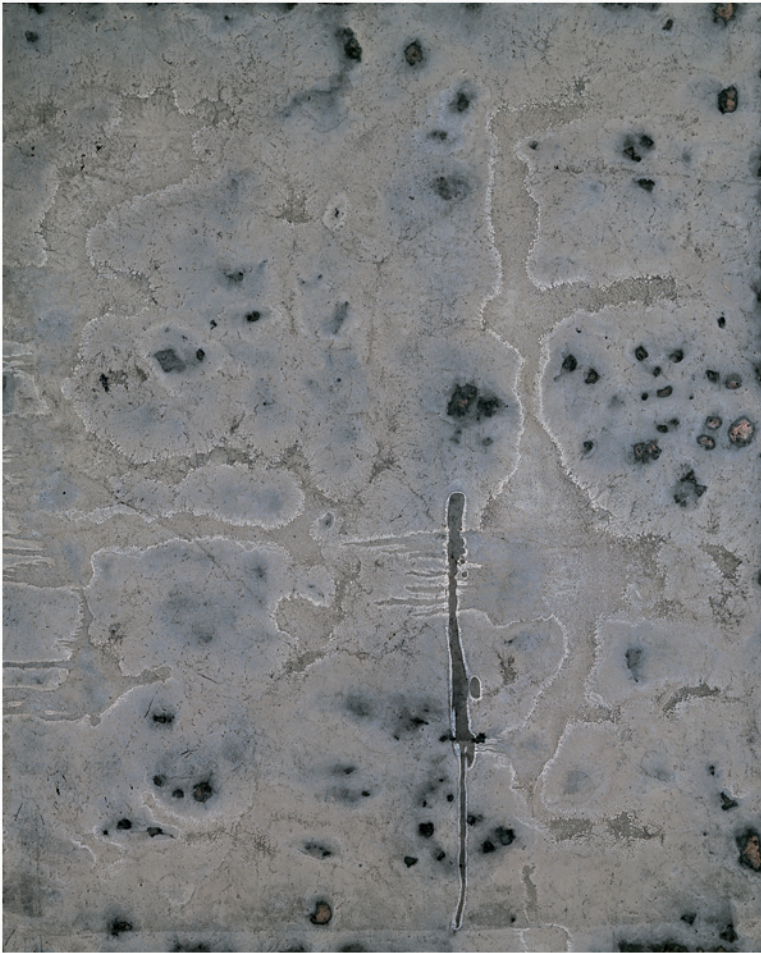
"Contingency," her recent exhibition, included 12 works produced by applying silver leaf to paper or canvas, then pouring onto the silver a sulfurated potash called liver of sulfur. This treatment oxidizes the silver and leaves a salt deposit on the canvas or paper. The visual results—a range of swirling, mottled or marbled-looking patterns—vary according to temperature, relative humidity and other atmospheric variables, each piece being almost a record of the time and season of its creation. They are not static records, however, for once begun, the chemical process will continue.

Bradshaw began working on paper in 1985. She initially applied the small, square sheets of silver leaf in slightly overlapping rows and later in grids. She sandwiched the works between pieces of glass bound with iron, an antiseptic format almost like a Petri dish in which to allow the reaction to take place. When she later began to work on large canvases, she felt that the works would be purer without the grid and abandoned the practice of applying the silver leaf in rows.

Bradshaw did her first large works in the studio. She switched to doing them on the roof because of health concerns, and found that the

location increased the variables in the reaction. The canvas paintings are almost records of a performance. The canvas size is determined by the artist's reach, the span of her outstretched arms. Like Pollock, Bradshaw executes her works with the canvas lying flat, and the surfaces record not only the variations in the chemical application but even the irregularities in the roof's surface on which the canvases are laid. The pieces are identified by date only, and it is easy to discover one's own feelings about the seasons in the works themselves. *May 14, 1992* has the rich copper colors of a warm sunset. *December 24, 1992* has a wintry chill in its gray coloring, while *October 18, 1992*, with its peeling surface, calls to mind the ragged trees of autumn.

Like a potter putting newly glazed ceramics into a kiln, Bradshaw has no way of knowing exactly what the final product will be. She can apply the liver of sulfur once more after her initial run if she feels the first go is not sufficiently interesting, but as a disciple of Cage, she cannot in principle discard a work. Since these pieces are never final but will continue to change, how could a particular work be invalid? It can only be found more or less attractive at a particular moment. It's a more Oriental esthetic philosophy than we are used to; risky, by Western standards, yet it produces beautiful results. —Reagan Upshaw



Dove Bradshaw: *December 24, 1992*, silver and liver of sulfur on canvas, 82 by 66 inches; at Sandra Gering.