

Phaidon, *Creamier*, Adam Szymczyk, May 2010

PHAIDON





Mel Neuh, 2007. Hole in gallery floor, water, bucket, hose, mist machine, fan. Approx. 20 x 30 x 10' (6m)



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Arabesques of cables on the floor, obsolete radio equipment and sound-system components, neon tubes cooping languidly over bricks (*Soft Snow*, 2005) or hanging limply on a beam (*Winter Sun, Sleepy Tongue*, 2007), bones joined in a circle suspended from the ceiling (*Human Leap* (After Dostoev), 2008), or piled up volcanic stones, it from within by the red glare of neon (*Bag of Bones*, 2007). Nina Casell's work formalize but at the same time defy the traditional notions of sculpture — a striving for permanence and resistance to gravity — while offering new insights into the repertoire of Minimal art. If, as Levin once famously claimed, Communism equalled Soviet power plus the electrification of the country, Casell's work evokes a gradual awakening of the potential of dead sculptural matter through the application of electricity and sound waves, as well as through evoking physical changes in states of matter. *To Be Halted*

And So Invisible (2006) (2009), for example, is a 'sublimated watermelon' placed on a wooden shelf next to a speaker and generator of water-fumes. In another piece, *Sleep Machine* (2008), a stream of air from a small electric fan flows a plastic bag to the gallery wall. *Mis Amok* (2007) is a cloud of steam vaporizing through a hole in the floor.

Casell employs outmoded technical equipment and found objects in her characteristically unassuming low-tech installations. Viewers are invited to witness the ephemeral events in sculpture rather than merely to acknowledge the presence of solid forms. In language, this inermeterly caught-in-the-act state of things has no equivalent in poetry, and indeed, Casell's titles are similar to fragments of poems. The diary-like narrative situations that she devises reveal their affinity to language games and literature, while the formal vocabulary is that of the various traditions of modern sculpture.

Precedent



The New Museum

Endless Columns (*Alternating Current for Twelve Window Fans*) (2006), installed at Konrad Fischer Gallery, points to the avant-garde and mystical origins of Minimalism, conflating a table borrowed from Constantin Brancusi with a structure consisting of Donald Judd's stools. Or, instead of installing of twelve galvanized iron benches attached to the wall, as in Judd's *Untitled* (2006) of 1967, Casell's work comprises twelve standard size window fans that produce alternating wind currents and seem to hover above each other in a column extending from floor to ceiling.

Casell juxtaposes near-traditional things in positions of combination that point to a state of instability and originate from the contingency inherent to our existence. The basic impulse animating her work seems at least twofold: on the one hand, one might think of Duchamp in reducing the 'solid' logic of the body into the rigid economy of Minimalism. On the other hand, the performative and temporal components of Casell's practice may be inspired by Hans Jochen Ader's redefinition of Conceptual art's wholly sciency in favour of highly personal, narrative and poetic works.

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