

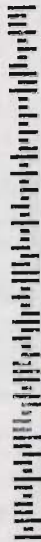
ART NEW ENGLAND

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

Antonio López García • Currier Museum Expansion • Matt Brackett's Mysteries

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ANNA POOR AND DIANA ARCADIPONEThe Art Institute of Boston Gallery @ University Hall • Cambridge, MA • www.aiboston.edu • January 17–February 23, 2008

Andrew Mroczek's pairing of Anna Poor's sculpture with the mixed-media paintings of Diana Arcadipone, is a model of curatorial coherency that has produced an exhibition filled with aesthetic contrasts, passion, and powerfully mysterious imagery. These two artists, who are friends and academic colleagues at the Art Institute of Boston, take nature as both subject matter and vehicle to heighten our response to the natural world, exploring the contrasting states of mind it inspires.

Diana Arcadipone's mixed-media/gouache paintings are more than a little inspired by Emersonian transcendentalism. Her large paintings, such as *Pond* and *Lodge*, depict small, quiet bodies of water in subdued, transparent tones, framed by overhanging trees and virtuoso renderings of branches, twigs, and undergrowth that reflect the spontaneity and energy of the natural scene. Residing amidst this calligraphic exuberance is imagery of the most industrious and methodical of nature's creatures: the beaver, a contrasting symbol of the underlying unity and orderliness of cre-



Diana Arcadipone, *Pond*, 30 x 40", gouache, wood and thread on paper, 2008. Courtesy of the artist.

ation. The surface of Arcadipone's paintings is enlivened and brought into the third dimension by the attachment of arching wooden branches, leaves, and details rendered in thread. This is especially effective in *Lodge*, in which the magical, glittering background of undulating shoreline and gently rolling hills is defined by the sewn line. A dark, discordant note is intro-

duced into the compositions by the nearly illegible, handwritten passages from obscure texts about waterways and beavers, suggesting man's disruptive presence in these lyrical scenes.

A portion of Anna Poor's sculptural installation consists of a series of bronze panels that rework the myth of Leda and the Swan—perhaps an autobiographical meditation on the strife and bliss of human relationships. The most affecting part of the installation is a series of small bronze figures of endearingly grotesque hybrid reptiles and rodents that the artist calls "innocent bystanders in a violent world." While clearly victims of a collision with the world of humans, these small figures evoke a pathos that is heartbreaking and provocative. There is also a surreal element in Anna Poor's creations that resists easy interpretation. One of the most intriguing pieces in the exhibition is *Limbs and Lovers*, a suspended mobile in which two hybrid creatures, locked in an embrace, hurtle from the sky amidst a shower of dismembered legs of waterfowl.

—Raymond Liddell

MIXED REALITIES: AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORKED ART EXHIBITION

Huret & Spector Gallery @ Emerson College • Boston, MA

www.emerson.edu; www.turbulence.org/mixed_realities; www.secondlife.com • Through April 15, 2008

Mixed Realities is less an art exhibition than a probing of the now porous boundary between real and virtual worlds. Five international teams of cyber-explorers were commissioned to create interactive installations that exist simultaneously, in different degrees of materiality, at three locations: the Huret and Spector Gallery at Emerson College, the Web site turbulence.org, and *Ars Virtua*, a media center and gallery located in the synthetic world of *Second Life*. These five installations do nothing less than challenge our fundamental assumptions about real and virtual realities, and begin to blur the distinctions that separate them.

The physical installations are located at Emerson, but each installation can also be experienced and manipulated from the two remote cyber locations with surprising results. Only one of the installations can be mentioned here, but it serves to suggest the extraordinary potential of this line of research.

Imaging Beijing, created by John Craig Freeman, a faculty member in Emerson's



John Craig Freeman, *Imaging Beijing*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist.

Department of Visual and Media Arts, presents us with a control panel to navigate a large projected aerial image of the city of Beijing. Silvery information balloons lead down to various locations in the city where a resident provides commentary about his life and his city. A window at the top of the projected image shows you at the control panel. At first, this may appear to be simply a sophisticated information retrieval system—until you realize the networked interaction between you and the cyber

locations of the installations. A female avatar—a synthetic personality created in *Second Life*—appears on the screen, bustling between (and inspecting) the information balloons. Suddenly, you realize that another human is manipulating the installation simultaneously from a remote location and can see, hear, and communicate with you, if she were so inclined. On the day of my visit, the avatar was outfitted in bonnet and long, hooped dress of the antebellum era, but modesty and shyness kept us apart. In some respects, the experience was like an unlimited videoconference with the world, erasing all physical boundaries and elevating the concept of the cyber chat room to a totally new dimension.

Be prepared to spend hours, if not days, at this stimulating exhibition investigating this and the other four, equally thought-provoking installations (*CATERWAUL*, *NO MATTER*, *Remote*, and *The Vitruvian World*).

—Raymond Liddell