

Space as Expression: Some Thoughts on *Dimensionality*

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Space as Expression: Some Thoughts on Dimensionality

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Sometimes a group exhibition offers a new way to think about what a group exhibition could be. *Dimensionality*, an exhibition curated by Andy Patton at YYZ Artists' Outlet, is a special accomplishment in this regard.

Having been to the show, and sensing that something very unique was presented there, I came to realize that it would not be fruitful to follow the usual procedure in reviewing a group show—i.e. to discuss the individual merits of the works in relation to overarching thematic concerns. *Dimensionality* foregrounds something else: a new spatial experience, a new relationship between space and works. All of which, of course, could only happen in the very space where the works are enlisted to work harmoniously together.

With *Dimensionality*, one cannot regard the gallery space as a neutral container of artworks; one

different kind of space—a space that, without losing its integrity and continuity, is nonetheless animated in a multitude of dimensions and directions by the different kinds of works enlisted there. Hence the space seems to be freed from its physical parameters, made looser, loses its contour. It no longer “houses” the works but simply becomes the effect of what the works do. This, I think, is one of the meanings of the show. It is something that cannot be entirely anticipated in advance of the actual “taking place” of the space.

In his introductory text to the exhibition, Patton states that he selected these artists because he sensed a new kind of space in their work. According to Patton, this space is more akin to the virtual, diagrammatic space of the computer and our information society than the illusionistic or pictorial space usually associated with conventional painting. With the exception of one American painter,



David REED, *Scottie's Bedroom*, 2005. Digital C-Print. 8.5 in x 15.25 in. Photo: courtesy of the artist.



David REED, *Judy's Bedroom*, 2005. Digital C-Print. 8.5 in x 15.25 in. Photo: courtesy of the artist.



cannot presume that the works and the space are two isolated things. Nor is it adequate to conceive of the space simply as facilitating an effective presentation of the works. Instead, the show gives me the feeling that the exhibition space has become an expression of the works. In *Dimensionality*, each work somehow in its own way manages to “pinch away” the physical dimensions or limits of the space, making it “virtual” to an extent that varies according to the effects of the works. It is as if the works are brought together to construct a

David Reed, the other six participants span three generations (a generation is rather short these days) of Toronto artists. While I am familiar with all of the Toronto artists' work, I also know that they are not necessarily aware of each other's practice. One does wonder if there is a legacy of such works in Toronto and how such a legacy is transmitted, especially when this kind of work is not typical of Toronto painting. Patton notes that it has simply emerged here and there within the past few years. It is perhaps not very helpful to

extract a commonality from these diverse pieces beyond their point of departure. At most, one could say that, in varying degrees, these artists have more or less disregarded the logic of the picture plane. For example, Robert Fones' *trompe l'oeil* effect casts a relief image outward from the picture plane into “real” space. Morna Gamblin projects the coloured planes of a wall sculpture by Donald Judd onto the gallery wall, ceiling and floor, making the Judd completely contingent to the gallery architecture. Nestor Kruger's computer rendering of an interior fluctuates between the sensation of complete flatness and implosion. Kristen Peterson's deliberately incomplete wall drawings compel the viewer to seek a vantage point that would give “sense” to the work.

I have seen each of these works elsewhere in the context of solo exhibitions. I found, having experienced *Dimensionality*, that they seem to work better in this group show. Perhaps this is because a solo exhibition implies some sort of closure, thematic or otherwise, that is contradictory to the nature of the works in *Dimensionality*.

I think Patton must have intuited more than just a connection between the works. He has orchestrated a new opportunity that is

more than the sum of the individual works. The fact that most of the works seems to be motivated by a desire to “take off” from their material constraints into other kinds of space is intensified by having them share the same space. Patton's excellent introductory text, entitled “The Quick Download,” outlines his motivation in curating the show and offers brief and insightful accounts of the works. In it, Patton notes that space is the initial frontier. This leads me to understand what actually happens in the show. Its space is an expression of the works. This is something I certainly could not have anticipated and its effect is a wonderful surprise, I think, for the curator, artists and audience alike. ←

Yam LAU is an artist and writer based in Toronto. He is a professor of painting at York University.

Sheila Ayerst, Robert Fones, Morna Gamblin, Nestor Kruger, Angela Leach, Kristen Peterson, David Reed, *Dimensionality*
Curated by Andy Patton
September 10 - October 22, 2005
YYZ galleries and YYZ Window,
Toronto, Ontario
December 2, 2005 - January 15, 2006
Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario

Kristen PETERSON, *Untitled (Within and Beyond the Frame)*, 2005. Hand-cut vinyl on wall. Photo: K. Peterson.