

Redefining particular macrocosmic spaces by means of a series of microcosmic interactions and transitions, Ernie Althoff and Sebastian Di Mauro combine ambiguity of texture and ambiguity of substance with more or less explicit kinds of transformative and performative *process*. Readily classifiable in terms of Hans Arp's notion of the 'concrete' artist who aspires to 'produce as a plant', rather than to 'copy nature' (*Abstract Art, Concrete Art*, 1942), both artists present something theatrical; stage-sets, as it were, for mechanical and elemental iconic and/or sonic interactions.

ERNIE ALTHOFF *TIDAL OSCILLATION*

AT PICA, PERTH

A kinetic installation reminiscent of Alexander Calder's mobiles, Takis's signals and the wonderfully crazy machines of Jean Tinguely, *Tidal Oscillation* was a highly amusing and meticulously balanced music machine, whirring, rippling and rattling as metal leaves hit the floor, or clustered twigs struck carefully positioned

branches. Self-consciously constructed from domestic and organic bits and pieces, Althoff's subtle bricolage captured the imagination as both 'junk' and as a highly accessible metaphor for eco-oscillation. Moving up, down, sideways and in rotation, and presenting a paradoxical conjunction of diverse materials, it made one grin, chuckle and laugh, and did so economically, unpretentiously, in its own terms, making familiar bits and pieces magically unfamiliar.

NICHOLAS ZURBRUGG

SEBASTIAN DI MAURO *PRAEPARATIO PHYSICA*

AT OMNISCIENT GALLERY, BRISBANE

Althoff's installation, *Tidal Oscillation* (during SOUNDweek, curated by Lynne Mitchell of Evos Music, 7-13 November 1993), delighted the ear and eye with traces of confidently eccentric poetic finesse. Animated by the mechanism of two domestic fans (minus their fins), Althoff's construction tugged at strings which in turn raised, lowered and trailed wind-chime-like clusters of twigs and fish-shoal-like clusters of metallic gum leaves across vertical branches supported, flag-pole-like, upon wooden bases, or over strategically placed strips of bark placed horizontally upon the gallery floor.

Whereas Althoff's *Tidal Oscillation* suspended and illuminated fragile twigs and 'leaves' in an open, sunlit gallery, Sebastian di Mauro's *Praeparatio Physica* (13-29 October, 1993), juxtaposed more complex metaphorical and symbolic constructions in a subterranean, chapel-like space, suggestive of 'the preparation of natural science and philosophy'. As the title indicates, this work is concerned with the transformation of energy, the transmutation of elements, and processes of degeneration, regeneration and integration.

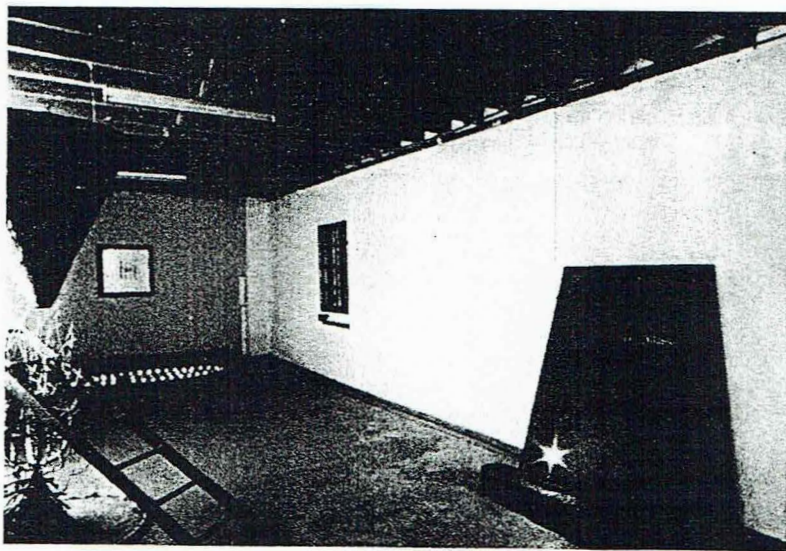
Rather than creating a machine for eye and ear, di Mauro created a machine for the mind and the inner senses, orchestrating diverse materials in different stages of metamorphosis. The most striking piece seemed to be a three-dimensional meditation upon time, space, disintegration and reanimation. Suspending a giant clay cone filtering olive oil over a group of branches encircled by a clay wall containing, absorbing and eventually releasing the ever-accumulating quantity of oil upon the floor, di Mauro complemented this evocation of descending energy with an ascending ladder (itself encased in copper) illuminated by a small light bulb, as if inviting the viewer to climb to a more elevated terrain.

More than just a symbolic juxtaposition of different elements undergoing processes of dehydration and of rehydration, this piece hauntingly interwove conflicting realms of scale within a dream-like cosmos of giant cones, tiny light bulbs, unexpected textures and evocative aromas. Elsewhere, di Mauro combined minimal lighting and mineral, metallic and organic materials to similarly striking effect; in one section counterpointing burned

wood with tiny circles of electric light; in another section, illuminating lead-entombed windows with reflected light, suggesting a still more funereal and ominous alternative to Casper David Freidrich's romantic windows than Marcel Duchamp's more playful *Fresh Widow*.

However, certain sections of this exhibition appeared a little prosaic. A series of containers offering the chance to touch, taste or swallow servings of sulphur, salt and mercury, for example, seemed rather monodimensional. And the powerful coincidental sound of rain pouring through drainpipes during a sudden thunderstorm suggested that di Mauro's future installation work might benefit from more systematic integration of both *son et lumière*.

Less readily legible than Althoff's *Tidal Oscillation*, di Mauro's *Praeparatio Physica* seemed a strong transitional work, anticipating more refined three-dimensional translations of the artist's alchemical concerns. Both Althoff and di Mauro show considerable sensitivity to the poetic potential of multimedia installation as a metaphorical and performative *event*.



Sebastian di Mauro, *Praeparatio Physica*, 1993, installation view.