

ESSAY

After And Before

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With this exhibition The Society will do something it rarely does—in fact something it has not done in over twenty years—open a historical exhibition. *After and Before* affords a rare opportunity to reconsider past achievements of artists in the Bergman Gallery and the challenging and sensitive programming of Society Director Susanne Ghez.

The exhibition is organized around the premise of time—time as structure, time as narrative, time as ephemera, time passing. This is obviously appropriate for a historical exhibition, but even more so in that the work of many younger artists involves time as a central structure and issue. Diana Thater, Gaylen Gerber, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres are a few such artists, working respectively in video, painting, and sculpture and installation. For each of these artists time is not subject matter as much as it is the engine of relativity. Assuming that one's experience and interpretation of an artwork is predicated on the conditions (the exact time and place) of that experience, these artists set out to prolong that experience and ultimately heighten the viewer's awareness within a tenable situation.

In the 1970s and 1980s installation artists such as Ann Hamilton, Jin Soo Kim, Judy Pfaff, and Jessica Stockholder began to merge these concerns with making spatial environments which were materially elaborate, and which took time to negotiate. The

viewer's visual experience was protracted by the scale and complexity of the object—in this case, a room-sized installation. Nonetheless, even though these installations took time to perceive they were ultimately more about spatial, rather than durational experience.

Recent work retains and pares down the object and shifts the emphasis back onto time and the duration of the viewer's experience, but without the extremes of earlier work. Where a Chris Burden performance could go on for days or weeks, or an Ann Hamilton installation might entail the careful placement of 10,000 books or post-it notes, the majority of recent work is modest in every way. In this work time is not made impressive through its marking or its accumulation, but through its flexibility. It moves, things change, and nothing is ever exactly certain or the same as it was before. It quietly, thoroughly, and powerfully asserts that there is no center of knowledge or experience, only motion and direction, entropy and change.