DANCING IN THE LAND WHERE CHILDREN ARE THE LIGHT

ANN SARGENT-WOOSTER

Rita Myers continues her exploration of mystery and spirituality in this elaborate multi-media, multi-monitor installation. Like an initiate or a space traveler, you enter through a red-lit vestibule with lights placed along the base boards. A voice intones relaxation/concentration instructions. You enter a darkened room that has been transformed into a garden-like landscape. Curving metal plates, serving as heraldic stanchions or trees sprout from black pulverized glass heaped into hillocks. Pathways wind through the material, expanding and complicating the space like a Japanese garden. Here, three unsynchronized half hour tapes are shown on three monitors which are placed so you can only see one at a time.

The tapes describe the creation of the world in three “songs.” The spoken texts for Myers’ recent work have stressed mystery and ritual applied to such diverse experiences as a detective story and the initiation of a young girl in The Points of The Star. The material in Dancing is based on creation myths and is recited by a variety of voices in a pattern of ragged singing and chanting (Myers is not a musician).

At another point, rectangular metallic blocks, such as might be used as models for Futurist architecture or Le Corbusier’s buildings are arrayed in a skyscraper complex seen from a low-flying airplane. Gleaming in the sand, the shiny blocks also recall Robert Smithson’s Mirror Displacements. Here, Smithson’s simple and elegant conceptual markers of a journey have become architectural structures.

The second and third “songs” depict the creation of “man.” A silvery skeleton is found adrift on the beach. In a startling play on scale, its true size is revealed: no longer “life-size,” it seemingly shrinks, showing that its actual dimensions are those of a gumball machine toy or a homonucleus.

As with many current art works, Myers’ performance/installations rely on the disjunction of image and text. A rivalry is established in which sound and image are not equal partners. Vision and movement command more attention, especially in the scenes with blocks and other props. Disengaged from activity, the sound never has the same immediacy as the images. This is The Problem endemic to disjunctive layering and multi-monitor installations: in a situation intended to increase information and parallel the information structure of the world, much of the material becomes filler as the mind wanders between different tidbits. Although the artist can manipulate the viewer and control the viewer’s selective synthesis of the “story” that is not the case here. One is left with a sense of being overwhelmed and underwhelmed at once.

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