

On Ashley Culver “-ness (II)”

Solo show at The Coffin Factory
Unit 302 - 101 Niagara St., Toronto
Sat. March 24, 10:00 - 5:00 PM, 2018

Upon entering the room, I encountered several vessels lined up on the floor, each one holding a unique volume of water. Each container, placed directly on the floor, simply waited for a ray of sunlight to enter.

While sitting on the floor and spending time in front of this work, I thought of John Cage and the way in which he referred to Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*. Cage compared them to airports. He saw them as “surfaces for the landing of light, shadows and particles”¹ and wished he had seen them more closely and through a magnifying glass².

Rauschenberg himself, when talking about the paintings, referred to them as clocks. Due to their sensitivity to light, he thought that the viewer could use them for telling the passage of time, the amount of people in the room, and even infer the state of the weather outside.

Ashley Culver's *-ness (II)*, like Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*, is an acknowledgement of the subtle variations of light in its environment. Like them, this arrangement also responds to particles of dust, and, even more directly than Rauschenberg's monochromes, to temperature. The sensitivity of the work to heat is evidenced over time by the uneven evaporation of water in each of the vessels. A process that disrupts the otherwise parallel line that connects each container with the next.

Thinking about this subtle and slow change —which the artist compensates by pouring small quantities of water into the vessels—, brought my attention to the uniqueness of each volume, and to the uniqueness of each container's form. This awareness distanced my attention from any “pictorial” properties, and placed me in contact with volume, with the language of forms.

This work also provided me with an encounter with *quantity*, with a “more than one” that forms a unity. Each vessel, as a single unit, occupies a position in space and invites me to count. While doing so, I also became aware of the generalization that is necessary to make in the mind in order to count units that are different in themselves. In doing so, I also became aware of the futility of this activity. In fact, the number of vessels that make this particular arrangement is not fixed. Their number responds to the physical conditions of each space in which they are displayed. Their number is less important than the distance between them, and one is invited to move *around* them, but not *between* them. This particular configuration placed my body in motion in a direction that echoes that of the room: East to West.

Rauschenberg used commercial white house paint and a roller for making his paintings (initially composed by three panels, each one measuring 72 by 36 inches), making a statement about art production by rendering the activity of the painter open and accessible to anyone. In a similar way, this skillfully placed arrangement —that requires no specialized skill—, is an open invitation, a gift offered with no intention of reciprocation. As Rauschenberg monochromes, it tells the visitor: you can make me too, if so you wish.

For Culver art is not in the specificities of the medium, neither in the dexterity of “facture”, but in being attentive to every moment, as every moment brings its own arrangement of lights and shadows, fluctuations of sound and temperature, and particles of dust.

-ness (II) doesn't require attentive looking, but it is an invitation to look. It doesn't require attentive listening, but it is an invitation to listen.

Alejandro Tamayo



-ness (II), glassware and water, 20' x 10" x 12", 2018. Photo: Ashley Culver.

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- 1) Cage, John, *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961, p. 102.
 - 2) "The white paintings caught whatever fell on them; why did I not look at them with my magnifying glass?" p. 108.