Espace Sculpture

Hélène Sarrazin
*Mater /Materia*

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When Hélène Sarrazin initially proposed Mater/Materia for installation at Gallery Skol, she used literary excerpts to communicate and situate her work — to successful ends. After all, how is one to describe an installation in a small room composed of recorded sounds of water, traces of plaster on the walls with dust on the floor to evoke waves receded — a space the spectator is to occupy for an hour. One is made wanting. However, after being swayed by the familiar sounds thus "travelling" in space and time to the mater (mother) and to materia (materials, objects and subjects), the spectator's eyes adjust to the dimly lit room only to find surface traces. Vertical and horizontal striations on the walls and rubble on the floor become a stark reminder of the traces of an absence.

The real
The real has left, momentarily, or is made overtly present in memory, as the spectator is being touched (touché) by the sounds of familiarity. For, the touché is what initiates a productive engagement, confronting the spectator with the real. The real, I suggest, is the traumatic absence, the memories of fullness, of in utero 1 evolved in this artwork. The real is that "which is non-narrativizable, having no sure identity," as theorist Judith Butler phrased it. 3 And, having no direct language either with which the real could be articulated, being the effect and remainder of a trauma.

Mater/Materia

We can view Mater/Materia as a new trajectory in Sarrazin's art practice. Her use of allegory allows the layering of discourses and temporality which attracts and intensifies the experience of the beholder. Her previous work focused often on the tangible material object, made of wicker and wood, where the object's presence and exterior surfaces were given emphasis demanding much space when showcased, and where the beholder was in a viewing-observing role. The installation at Gallery Skol, by contrast, is visually minimal, focusing on the interior spaces of memory via sound-waves and faintly «sketched» surface traces, touching the psychic space of the beholder, thus positioning the spectator centre-stage. By removing the object and replacing it with space and sound (and ultimately with the beholder) there is initially a sense of loss, foregrounded by the presence (an) absence — a melancholia of sorts. But the melancholic is characteristic of the allegorical paradigm, linked with absences in order to effect fullness in the viewing/listening subject. A melancholic tension can be located in the artwork's shift between past and future with which the work redefines its own trajectory and that of the beholder, who is repositioned and displaced in this viewing/listening dynamic. This Janus-like aspect of looking backward and forward is intrinsic to allegory, it establishes historical connectedness while disputing historical fixedness of inherent meaning, making the novel work unstable for discursive, personal, and emotive engagements. In stepping into the installation of Mater/Materia, one is confronted with loss while filled with imaginary plenitude; that is the dialectic of allegory. There is the sonoric lavishness of approaching and receding waves, which attempts to rescue what is no longer there to fill the gap of a loss with fullness and coherence, which the spectator experiences when s/he is touched by the real. This installation lends itself to that original fullness before the split occurs between mother/child, providing the viewing/listening subject with an image of sonoric and specular coherence. The allegorical paradigm with its opacity and transparency, revealing while concealing with its focus on detail, on space and temporality, demystifies the real while inscribing it onto the beholder.

Skin-traces
But the faint, almost decorative surface traces left on the wall can also become very tangible, and point to touch and to human skin, to the embrace and to the touch of the other.