Space as Expression: Some Thoughts on Dimensionality

Yam Lau
Space as Expression: Some Thoughts on Dimensionality

Yam LAU

Sometimes a group exhibition offers a new way to think about what a group exhibition could be. Dimensionality, an exhibition curated by Andy Patton at YYZ Artists’ Outlet, is a special accomplishment in this regard.

Having been to the show, and sensing that something very unique was presented there, I came to realize that it would not be fruitful to follow the usual procedure in reviewing a group show—i.e., to discuss the individual merits of the works in relation to overarching thematic concerns. Dimensionality foregrounds something else: a new way to think about what a group exhibition could be. Sometimes a group exhibition offers a new way to think about what a group exhibition could be.

With Dimensionality, one cannot regard the gallery space as a neutral container of artworks; one cannot presume that the works and the space are two isolated things. Nor is it adequate to conceive of the space simply as facilitating an effective presentation of the works. Instead, the show gives me the feeling that the exhibition space has become an expression of the works. In Dimensionality, each work somehow in its own way manages to "pinch away" the physical dimensions or limits of the space, making it "virtual" to an extent that varies according to the effects of the works. It is as if the works are somehow in its own way manages to "pinch away" the physical dimensions or limits of the space, making it "virtual" to an extent that varies according to the effects of the works.

With Dimensionality, one cannot regard the gallery space as a neutral container of artworks; one cannot presume that the works and the space are two isolated things. Nor is it adequate to conceive of the space simply as facilitating an effective presentation of the works. Instead, the show gives me the feeling that the exhibition space has become an expression of the works. In Dimensionality, each work somehow in its own way manages to "pinch away" the physical dimensions or limits of the space, making it "virtual" to an extent that varies according to the effects of the works. It is as if the works are somehow in its own way manages to "pinch away" the physical dimensions or limits of the space, making it "virtual" to an extent that varies according to the effects of the works.

I think Patton must have intended more than just a connection between the works. He has orchestrated a new opportunity that is more than the sum of the individual works. The fact that most of the works seem to be motivated by a desire to "take off" from their material constraints into other kinds of space is intensified by having them share the same space. Patton's excellent introductory text, entitled "The Quick Download," outlines his motivation in curating the show and offers brief and insightful accounts of the works. In it, Patton notes that space is the initial frontier. This leads me to understand what actually happens in the show. Its space is an expression of the works. This is something I certainly could not have anticipated and its effect is a wonderful surprise. I think, for the curator, artists and audience alike. □

David REED, Juds Bedroom, 2005. Digital C-Print. 8.5 in x 15.25 in. Photo: courtesy of the artist.


Yam LAU is an artist and writer based in Toronto. He is a professor of painting at York University.

Sheila Ayers, Robert Fones, Morna Gamblin, Nestor Kruger, Angela Leach, Kristen Peterson, David Reed, Dimensionality
Curated by Andy Patton
September 10 - October 22, 2005 YYZ galleries and YYZ Window, Toronto, Ontario
December 2, 2005 - January 15, 2006 Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario