

DONALD KUSPIT : ONA B.

What fascinates me about Ona B. is the spontaneity of her analogical thinking: a rowing shell in the gallery becomes an arrow shot out into the street, with Zen concentration and determination. Or it is like a sharp knife, cutting with ease through the water. Its speed is what fascinates Ona B., and its precarious balance: it moves silently and swiftly so long as it is balanced. It sits on the very surface of the water, about to tip over, but never does, so long as it keeps moving. In its balanced, rapid movement it is like a planet, maintaining its orbit only so long as it continues to move. Should it stop it would fall into the nothingness of infinite space – become a bit of cosmic debris, rather than a beautiful form, moving systematically in space, indeed, creating its own space: its orbit. Ona B.'s intertextual installations are about the sublimity of space, the precariousness but necessity of inner balance for survival, the need to keep moving in order to reassure oneself that one exists and has meaning, and above all the sense of beauty – the esthetic high – that comes from overcoming inertia, ever-threatening.

Everything is implicitly in transmutative process in her installations: the roses on the gallery floor will wilt and die, the gyroscopically balanced – self-balancing – planet-like globes endlessly repeat as they drift into the infinity of a mirror, and the erotic, amorphous, seductive painting – a kind of tapestry or portable mural – never stops changing. Its sensuality – the sensuality of the whole installation – is infinitely varied. And peculiarly tense: the painting and rowing shell, while equally of great length, are at odds, the former being two-dimensional, formless, and latently infinite, the latter three-dimensional, self-contained, and decidedly finite. The latter implicitly glides over the surface of the latter. Similarly, the circle of soft roses lies flat on the floor, while the hard globe is suspended in air. And the cushions provided for one's comfort and meditation are relatively flat, while one's body is not. Thus Ona B. is a formalist, setting up, in open space, esthetic contrasts or conflicts. Yet the opposites – the different dimensions, the different substances, the different textures – abstractly converge, like parallel lines in imaginary space. Her installations occur as much in the space of the mind as in architectural space, and the two implicitly converge by way of her analogies.

All kinds of theories have been used to explain Ona B.'s installations, from Peter Weibel's art historically accurate descriptions of them as painting in the expanded field, to Nepomuk A. Maelzel's quasi-scientific if not altogether mock physics of light in the case of her "In Luce" installation. Clearly Ona B. has cosmic ambition: she is striving for an oceanic feeling. In the "In Luce" installation a staircase leads to heaven, as it were. And this suggests to me that the basis of her art is not so much conceptual as emotional.

Her installations are an attempt to overcome anxiety about space and time – fear of being lost, even dissolving in them – in the very act of acknowledging it. Ona B. wants to save herself from time and space – both forms of inertia, and equally immeasurable. Cosmic sensuality is her means of doing so. More precisely, her installations show her coolly keeping her head – maintaining her sense of inner balance – while sensualizing time and space by speeding through them as fast as possible, without looking back at them. It is Wilhelm Worringer's old argument, with an eloquent twist: the precision of geometrical abstraction – and the rowing shell and globes, nonobjectively perceived, are pure geometry – defends against the infinite, but another way to do so is to eroticize the cosmos. It becomes more resonant and alive when one projects one's sensuality into it. The rowing shell zooming along at the speed of light does this, affording a sensual oceanic experience. The heavenly spheres make music – the special music of silence, that is, the unheard music that Keats said was more sweet or sensual than heard music – because they keep themselves balanced as they move silently through space.

As her photographs suggest, Ona B. clearly identifies with her luminous, transparent globes and erotically red, hypersensual painting, with its rapidly changing moods. Thus an installation by Ona B. is a cosmos to itself, like Ona B.