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2.23.06 — "SITE 92"

At first, Smack Mellon's new space left me cold. As still a work in progress last fall, down to the bare essentials, it probably left its staff literally reaching for sweaters. Besides, the inaugural clutter, all of videos and all together in the one new room, did not exactly attempt to hang together. The space also seemed to lack the ramshackle charm of the abandoned one a block or two over in Dumbo. Its old split level revealed its caverns and its art only slowly, and it cried out for installations responsive to the site.

With the latest group show, through March 5, Smack Mellon won me over completely by soliciting just that, site-specific work. Sure, I may wish one day to find a gallery *not* displaying either video or a jam-packed installation. Moreover, a review like this can never treat two dozen artists with any semblance of fairness. However, "Site 92" serves as a fine belated introduction to large, flexible interior, even if the doors still let in winter air if visitors do not behave themselves. Like "The Reconstruction," the reopening exhibition of Exit Art after its move in 2003, it allows artists to participate in defining one's future understanding of the space.

Some do so by architectural imagery. Maria Levitsky's photographs explain *How to Stretch a Building* and *How to Turn a Building Inside-Out* (presumably, with caution). Amy Yoes plays with two dimensions and the geometry of a building plan in her wall drawing, while Dannielle Tegeder and Lili Herrera base theirs on the air vents, electricity, and other "hidden systems." Trevor Stafford also echoes an actual structure of gallery windows, while Suzanne Song's especially nice acrylic only *looks* like a wall drawing. Its soft blacks can at one moment suggest pencil shading, at another contradictory planes in three dimensions.

Others push into the gallery's nooks and crannies, not to mention the bathroom, inviting one to keep looking until one has explored it all. I almost overlooked Megan Piontkowski's *Birds* perched over the entrance, and it took me a moment to figure out how Ruby Palmer's *Floor Plan* could cantilever over the stairs. Bobby Neel Adams uses a mix of photography and construction materials to turn a half-hidden back wall into community of its own, while Heesop Yoon invites one into the stairwell—only to find that his masking tape allows more visual than physical access. If one has not seen quite enough, Yuichiro Nishizawa points a telescope into the main area, although its electronics resolve the actual interior into points of light, like a night sky normally hidden by Brooklyn light pollution.

Others adapt architectural elements for their own metaphors of inside and out. Danielle Dimston calls her corrugated cardboard *A Walk in the Woods*, since after all it does look like tree fungus growing on a structural riser. Kim Beck bars an actual look out to nature, but supplies her own alternative foliage, as green vinyl overlays on the windows. I admit that I liked the title, *A Weed Grows in Brooklyn*, more than the routine image, but it seems a better description of the Brooklyn I know than the novel. Claire Watkins deconstructs nature with another science experiment, in which needles appear to line up in an unexplained magnetic field.

Finally, some simply take over the central area, for a playful appreciation of its scale. As in past sculpture and performance at Smack Mellon, Karen Dolmanisth invokes unstated nature rituals, with twigs and other common objects. They create a space of their own within, and the old metal column they enclose seems to belong to it rather than to the gallery. For a nice contrast, Luisa Caldwell's adjacent column of space sticks to the present tense. *Color Falls* consists mostly of thread and candy wrappers. If that sounds cloyingly sweet, she allows one to think of *falls* as both a noun and a verb—which now has me thinking about "Smack Mellon."