

Piia Salmi and Heike Hanada

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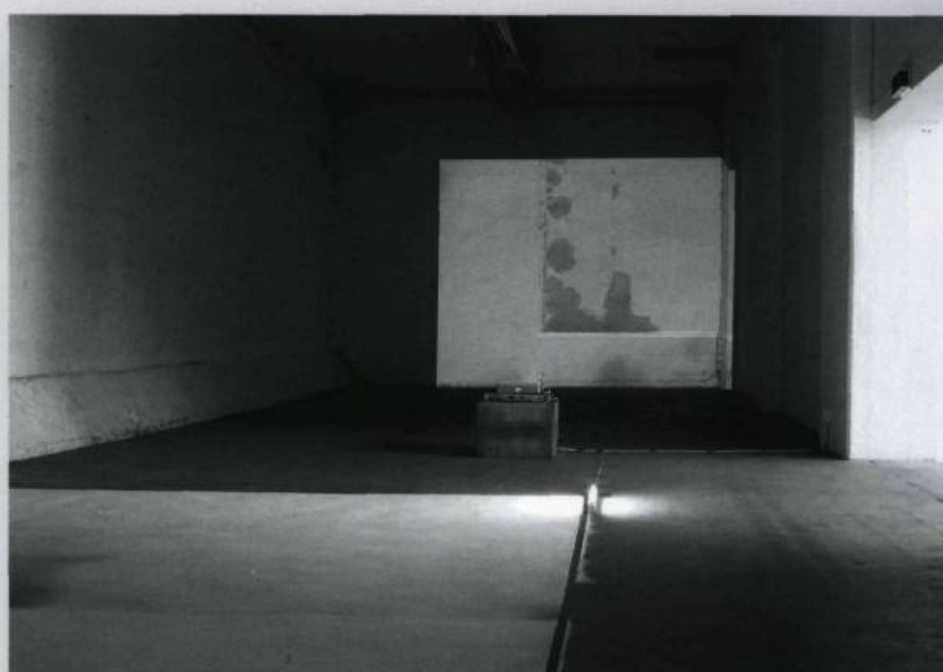
John GAYER

Contemporary art in the world today is typically presented in the neutral spaces provided by most museums and galleries. Finland's Piia Salmi and Germany's Heike Hanada prefer to avoid such settings. Both artists' productions create a dialogue with the site, the character of the exhibition space forming an important component of their work. Their two-person show at Forum Box (May 27–June 19, 2005), a former cold storage facility adjacent to Helsinki's western harbour, ably demonstrated the success of this approach.

At first glance Salmi's textile panels say nothing regarding the laborious process through which they were created. Her nearly monotone rectangles gradually reveal a visual richness and complexity that derives from the intersection of stretched fabric and the hand-stitched lines of thread

unstitched fabric left at the edges of each panel set off the modifications and reinforce their presence.

Although the panels' general appearance alludes to Minimalist painting practice, closer inspection shows that the materials' characteristics undermine perceived similarities. Witnessing solid coloured synthetic thread against the random striations caused by the waxing process speaks more about the distinctions between synthetic and natural materials and between handcraft and industrial production than it does about abstract imagery. The presence of texture and the play of light and shadow across the surfaces intensifies the viewing experience, and the technique of mounting the panels several centimetres in front of the walls emphasizes their sculptural nature. Boards underlying the fabric lend opacity and rigidity to most panels, but recent works, such as *Three (from the untitled series)* (2004–2005), lack the rigid backings and are structurally more complex. Here, two parallel rods



building's walls. The laborious method of stitching mimics the step-by-step process of laying brick and the fields of broken lines within plain borders echo layers of brick framed by poured concrete floors and columns. Holes left by nails, flaking paint and other changes to the walls exhibited textural harmony with the artist's constructions. Salmi manages to undermine many of the assumptions held about planar surfaces. At the same time, she emphatically confirmed their existence as three-dimensional entities.

Hanada's two-part installation, *Displacements* (2004–2005), complements Salmi's work while drawing the viewer's attention to other concepts and features. Part I consisted of a video installation projected on the wall and an adjacent pilaster. At the opposite end of the same space, a large field of salt and several light sources made up Part II. Supporting this piece was *Archive of Displacements* (2002–2005), a collection of tools and material studies displayed in a vitrine near the gallery's entrance. It included samples of various kinds of salt plus a range of glass, aluminium and steel panels, many of which were partially coated with salt crystals.

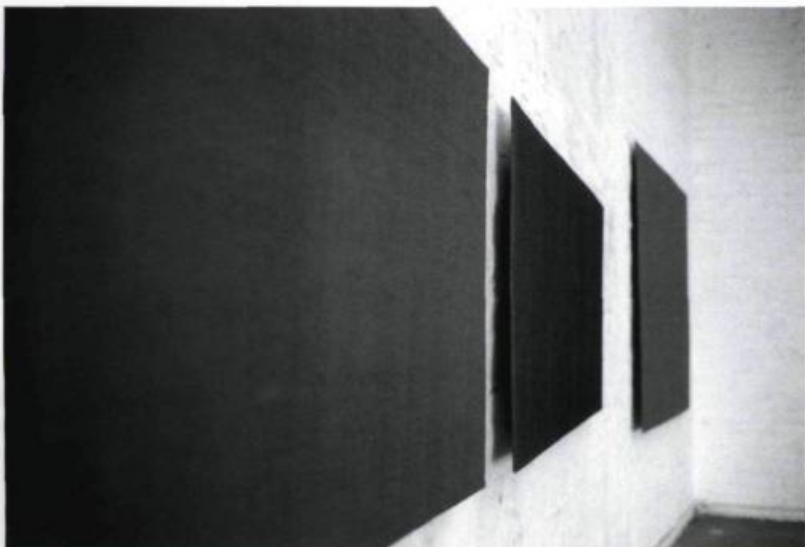
The video component of the installation presented a visual

puzzle to the viewer. Across the walls' irregular surface passed images of tide lines, salt fields, details of the gallery's aged walls, and Archive selections. Through this literal blending of organic, crystalline and architectural forms it was difficult, at times, to discern which features belonged to the wall and which were being projected onto it. In contrast to the projection, the second part of the installation broke down the spectrum of components into distinct, yet contiguous sections.

At one end of the installation a beam of light from a projector highlighted the zone where the various planes—salt, painted walls, and an oversize concrete moulding at the base of one of the two walls—all met. Raking across these surfaces, the light brought subtle textures into high relief and threw some of their shadows onto the opposite wall. A second, more concentrated beam spotlighted the small part of the concrete moulding, especially the irregular edge at the top. The glow from a third source, a fluorescent tube on the floor at the opposite end of the field that also mirrored the fixtures on the ceiling, illuminated gentle undulations, ridges defining the presence of a smaller rectangle within the large one and an area where salt failed to completely cover the floor.

Heike HANADA, *Displacements*, 2004–2005. Detail. Forum Box, 2005. Photo: © Hanada.

Piia SALMI, *Plane Invasion* 1, 2, 4. Forum Box, 2005. Photo: © Salmi.



that interrupt these planes. Penetrating an industrially produced waxed cotton over and over again with her needle, Salmi patiently sews countless numbers of broken parallel lines within each rectangle's domain. The thread complements or contrasts the colour of the fabric support and, by altering tension within the weave, creates dense networks of ripples across the surfaces. Borders of

hold the cotton in tension along the vertical axis whereas the left and right sides undulate and remain unfinished. No longer strictly rectangular, and allowing light to pass through, these translucent membranes somehow seem more alive.

In a neutral setting Salmi's panels work would be considered self-contained systems, but here they reflected many aspects of the

Ed Pien: *In a Realm of Others*

Margaret RODGERS

The careful choice and organization of components focused attention not only on the character of the space, but also on its context and history. The placement of various sources of light revealed how we come to understand our surroundings. It illuminates the surfaces, to which shadows lend depth and offer clues of a suggested space, while light, in the form of a truncated beam, exists as a volume. Like the tool-marks animating the surfaces of more traditional sculptures, light revealed the wood-grain texture of planks used to mould the concrete elements, along with evidence of other manufacturing processes. Both parts of the installation reference the physical properties of the materials. Salt's propensity to dissolve in water enables it to travel through brick and across other surfaces. Re-crystallization resulting from the solvent's evaporation leaves visual disfigurement and frost-like effects, features present on both the gallery's walls and the material studies. The building's location – the site was hollowed out from a rock outcropping –, its proximity to the sea, and its former use underscore salt's mineral and maritime sources and its role as a preservative.

Superficially, the luminosity of waxed fabric and the sparkle of a Zen-like garden of sodium chloride suggested an altogether different, somewhat magical, world. Encouraging the viewer to look and keep looking, the colours, textures, and structure of Salmi and Hanada's work demonstrated how the eye responds to the unique qualities of quite ordinary materials. The sense of magic accompanying the experience derived from the exhibition's intelligent execution. ←

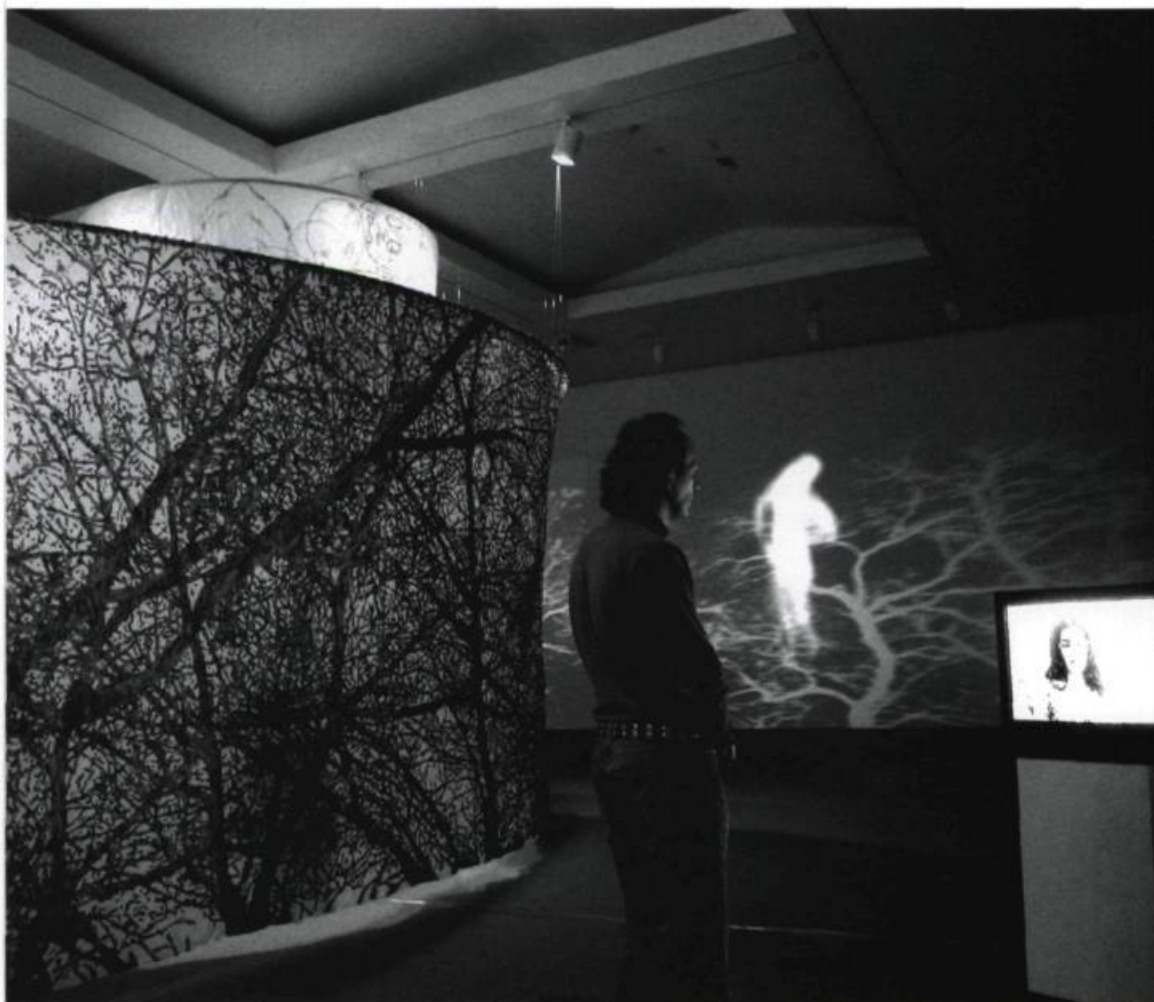
Piia Salmi, Heike Hanada
Forum Box, Helsinki
May 27 – June 19, 2005

John GAYER splits his time between restoring paintings, being an artist, and writing about art. He is researching the phenomenon of monochromaticism in paintings, sculpture, and other artistic disciplines.

A cast of misshapen anthropomorphic figures ingests and extrudes bodily matter, stares hauntingly, often in overlapping and variously arranged configurations, upon an undefined space. Misplaced and misshapen genitalia, sores and mutilations on desecrated bodies float on a crushed background as if the drawings were balled up, discarded, then retrieved on second thought to haunt again.

the psyche, evoking multiple histories and visceral experience.

Playing against the grotesque, Pien uses colour and delicacy of construction to inform and integrate aspects of eastern and western culture. A recent visit to China has intensified this exploration, connecting it to Asian practices of ancestor worship and to the ancient art of paper cutting. The context remains as a manifestation of the artist's inner story, heritage and position within contemporary artistic practice; the range of ideas and images that the exhibition



Ed PIEN, *In a Realm of Others*, 2005. Detail. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

Both creepy and gorgeous, Ed Pien's travelling exhibition *In a Realm of Others*, recently at Oshawa Ontario's Robert McLaughlin Gallery, is an aesthetic *tour de force*. Well known for his constructed spaces and Dubuffet-like drawing on distressed, crinkly ground, Pien fashions a conduit into

evokes is a fertile repository for feeling and thought.

While previous Pien installations have sometimes employed a wealth of colour, it has often come in aggressively vibrant hues. Conversely, here he employs a lush green that transforms the gallery into a verdant and magical forest.