

From critical-MAS.tv:

Bethany Bristow: Other Than Eigenstates

The physicist Erwin Schroedinger famously proposed the following experiment:

"One can even set up quite ridiculous cases. A cat is penned up in a steel chamber, along with the following diabolical device (which must be secured against direct interference by the cat): in a Geiger counter there is a tiny bit of radioactive substance, so small that perhaps in the course of one hour one of the atoms decays, but also, with equal probability, perhaps none; if it happens, the counter tube discharges and through a relay releases a hammer which shatters a small flask of hydrocyanic acid.

If one has left this entire system to itself for an hour, one would say that the cat still lives if meanwhile no atom has decayed. The first atomic decay would have poisoned it. The Psi function for the entire system would express this by having in it the living and the dead cat (pardon the expression) mixed or smeared out in equal parts.

It is typical of these cases that an indeterminacy originally restricted to the atomic domain becomes transformed into macroscopic indeterminacy, which can then be resolved by direct observation. That prevents us from so naively accepting as valid a 'blurred model' for representing reality. In itself it would not embody anything unclear or contradictory. There is a difference between a shaky or out-of-focus photograph and a snapshot of clouds and fog banks."

But is this any longer the case? What happens when indirect observations is privileged to the equivalent of direct observation? What when the representation of reality is more real, at least in terms of "immediate", than "reality itself"?

Such are the questions posed by Bethany Bristow's new body of work. Small public sculptural installations placed with neither prior permission nor license, are extensively documented and then left to the whims of the urban environment. It is the c-prints of the installations which are in fact the artwork. But what is the status of the installations themselves after the artist has left the site? In truth they exist in a Schroedingerian state of indeterminacy. The artist has returned to the sites of the installations, sometimes the same evening, sometimes the next day or day after; the objects have been there, the objects have been gone (with or without evidence of their presence). Yet, until their presence or absence is verified (in this case by direct observation), these objects which serve as the content of Bristow's art are simultaneously extant and nonexistent. The artist has learned or surmised that the installations have met their demise in a variety of ways. Just as these objects are not properly Bristow's art, yet merely an element in a body which contains aspects of sculpture, performance, and photography, so their (temporary) state of indefiniteness furthers the appreciation of the chromes as the final (and in this case, "actual") art product.

In this way Bristow's latest project serves as a poignant, -- as well as beautiful, haunting, and ambiguous -- meditation on the temporality of the sublime in the controlled chaos of an urban setting, as well as the need for the contemporary artist to alternately absolutely dictate their produce and simultaneously enter into what may be an involved and protracted mediation with the environment their work is placed in.

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