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Dance 2367H

Paper 2.3

### The Ethereal Forest of the Forgotten

When I first walked into *when an object reaches for your hand* by Ann Hamilton I saw gigantic volumes open on clean white tables. I was unsure if this was an actual installation or just a library room. The room had a cool light grey color scheme. Upon further inspection, I realized these “books” were not books at all, but folded pages, perfectly stacked on each other. The stacks rise about a foot above their respective tables and the pages are poster sized. Viewed from above, each stack has an image of an object preserved from the passage of time by the Ohio State archives. The object blurs into the thundercloud background of the page. The only color in the room originates from the objects on the posters. The items range from natural objects to old possessions soaked in nostalgia, such as a pair of black shoes. There is a page with gossamer fabric, one with a wooden pushpin, another with a nautilus shell, and yet another with a monkey. Observers of the installation are encouraged to take a page off of the perfectly aligned stacks so they can bring it home or mail it to a friend.

The stacks themselves are very heavy, but the installation as a whole feels light and airy. Hamilton creates a feeling of suspension in the room with white minimalistic tables holding the stacks of paper from their gravitational fate. The tables easily escape notice since they are supported by four thin poles. Thus, heavy stacks of paper seem to float at chest level around the room. Hamilton arranged the tables to be parallel or perpendicular to each other. However, the tables are not spaced out in a perfect grid. They still create an organic rhythm of repeated rectangles throughout the room.

Only after I got accustomed to the absurdity and eeriness created by the “dead” objects, did I hear the whistling music playing in the room. On the back wall there are three record players playing the same music but in asynchrony and at different volumes. The music seems similar to birdsong—long and drawn-out high-pitched singing—and this theme of birds is reflected on some of the pages that have images of dead birds. When the records run out, they play a rhythmic white noise.

Initially I did not notice any movement in the installation. It seemed that everything was inanimate and lifeless. However, after patiently observing, I realized that the installation did have movement—the type of movement a quiet forest has. First there is movement due to interaction with the installation, since observers are taking pages from the stacks, causing them to decrease in height. Some of the stacks have top pages that are skewed from observers who considered taking a page but never committed. The lifeless forgotten objects are given a second anima when the people interact with them. The other movement relates to the music in the background. First there is the spinning of the records as they emit whistling. Then there is the movement of the security guard walking over to move the needles back to the outside of the records so that they can play again.

I noticed even more movement the second time I visited the exhibit. Over time, certain favorite stacks became shorter than other stacks. For example, it seems that visitors preferred the teapot over the striped shirt, as the stacks had a clear difference in height. I also noticed movement in the alignment of individual stacks. The “spine” was not perfectly straight because the interaction with people caused it to jut out or sink in, mimicking a raised relief map of a mountain. In contrast to my first visit, more than half of the top papers of stacks were askew.

The installation initially made me feel very relaxed. The color scheme reminded me of pebbles on the beach being washed over by water. After a while, I felt sadness. The objects all seemed to have an earlier life that is forgotten now, separated by the 21st century trials and tribulations. Some of the objects had past signs of life stemming from their owner, such as the fabric bonnet. The bonnet is colored in such a beautiful array of browns, signifying its age and its value to its previous owner. The objects that seemed to come from a field museum such as the dead birds and dried out shells, also carried the idea of a past life. Because memories of past objects of value were buried, a feeling of melancholy arises. This mixture of melancholy and calmness felt like an emotional cleanse for me. It allowed me to let go of the stress I had and appreciate the objects from the past.