

Surface tension

Faced with these installations one is reminded of Maholy Nagy's *Light Machine* where purely looking and observing the visual object is as much pleasure as deciphering and understanding its construction and processes. These multi-screen installations focus on the visual reading of surface, playing with distance, reflections and picture planes. Elements such as the tide, waves, currents and their rhythms become active components in conjunction with the framing, loops, angles and multi-projection to create a myriad of possibilities where each set-up produces a different event. The pieces are made in relation to specific landscapes and although using many 'natural' elements as source material they do not reflect or mimic nature but rather translate some of the patterns, movements and structures present in both the content and the technological apparatus into a visually autonomous *installation*.

In *Frames* the four screens provide four spaces each divided into three by mirrors floating on the beach surface. The piece is crossed by many layers of motion, the pebbles and water carried by the tide appear both beneath and above the floating mirrors which themselves reflect both sky and water. The loop projection presents a variety of spatial relationships as the mirrors move in and out of frame at differing rhythms throughout. The red frame of the mirrors produces a stark outline for the reflected blue sky as does the green/brown seabed with the wash of the tide strengthening the emphasis on screen space and framed space. Observation and attention are the key operatives here although the whole set-up involves a certain humour: plastic framed bathroom mirrors placed in a landscape environment allude to a dadaesque use of objects.

Good Friday also uses waves, water and pebbles as elements but in an even more complex construction. Each screen contains a wooden cross placed on a beach surface (hence the title), dividing the space into four sections. A fifth screen similarly divided was projected centrally, to, in effect, link and bind all four screens. As the waves interacted with each screen, shifting shingle and water from one square to another, identical or opposite motions occur on the other screens. The fifth screen, the central square, doubly layered becomes a synthesis of all the movements present. *Good Friday* works not only

as a visual puzzle but also as a continual object of observation. The added element, the fifth screen, produces another level of operation which multiplies the number of possibilities as the space is multiplied fourfold in a kind of logarithmic progression.

In *Angles*, this dynamic is very present and gives the piece a strong sense of composition. A set of angled geometric shapes with reflecting qualities were placed at the bottom of a shallow stream reflecting the water which crossed them continuously. Because of the light the surrounding surface appears black and the mirrored water very bright which creates a contradictory reading of the surface, the mirror appears to be on the surface of the water (which it in fact reflects) and the surrounding darkness appears as shapes above the waterline. Only by noticing the accumulation of weeds along the edge of the mirror is the illusion understood and the space read accurately. The camera here rotates around the shapes creating conflicting diagonals from screen to screen against the purely symmetrical compositions in other pieces.

Kaleidoscope is very much in the same vein as *Angles*, although using more numerous and smaller geometric shapes. The frameless mirrors, the change of scale and the camera's rotation gives the surface a delicate luminous quality.

These installations are part of an interest in Landscape Art which considers representation and metaphor and also attempts to include the viewer in the process of observation. The observer/observed structure is denied for a more fruitful set of positions where natural motions, mechanic procedures and human interference are in constantly shifting relationships. The understanding of the installations is never total or immediate and demands a varied level of attention as the pieces do not offer a solution but rather the possibility of numerous lines of access.

The use of strong patterns, the importance of shape, colour and texture gives these pieces an aesthetic quality akin to design and printmaking. The recurrence of specific shapes firstly by the four screen format and secondly, by the elements added in, crosses, squares, circles and triangles

puts an emphasis on spatial repetition and geometric variation reminiscent of futurist and constructivist aesthetics.

The landscape is not used metaphorically but integrated as an active agent; the tide, water, sky, shingle become a part of the pieces in direct relation to the frame, the colour, the screens and the looped projection. The human marks or traces (mirrors, crosses, shapes) are used as *in-between* elements mediating between the purely plastic/ technological and the natural/landscape operatives.

Through their use of spatial repetition (repeated frames/multiple screens) and temporal (looped projection/repeated cyclical motion) these installations take on a spatio-temporal autonomy balancing cycles of motion with instants and moments of chance. The consistent use of form as a spatial device echoing and interacting with the elements in the landscape, the use of multi-screen producing unstable but related spaces all work towards constructing a visual mobile object challenging the viewer to engage her/himself in the work.

As such these installations relate both to the content they are using (the sea, landscape, the forms, shapes) and the means of filming and exhibiting producing a complex, accessible visual object which draws the viewer into an active and questioning relationship with the work.

Michael Maziere, April 1985