

Soft Matter

Adriano Amaral

Over the past few years, Adriano Amaral has developed a varied body of works that include paintings, photographs, sculptures, installations and film. Exploring the physical and symbolic qualities of both organic and industrial materials, he often creates unstable situations that involve the gradual transformation of matter over time. Recently, this approach to materials has been increasingly aligned to an interest in the spatial qualities of architecture, one of the guiding principles in *Soft Matter*. From the outset, this exhibition was conceived as a single project where each piece is in dialogue both with the given architectural features of Space In Between and with one another. Therefore, rather than a show comprising several works, *Soft Matter* can be understood as a composition of different elements into a single project.

The occupation of space was determined by an existing 'frame' around one of the gallery walls; defined by the structural beams surrounding it thus creating a recessed surface. The largest work presented at Space In Between consists of an intervention in the 'hollow' area circumscribed by the beams, which was completely filled with a mixture of peat compost and flour whose colour and texture naturally change as mould grows during the course of the exhibition. Here, the artist's attitude towards space is to appropriate what is given by architecture without deliberately trying to impose a form, while simultaneously retaining and taking further some of the concerns that characterise his previous production. The obstinate research and experimental testing of materials, as well as the tension conveyed by the works' opposing physical qualities that characterise his production from the outset are also present here. With the simple gesture of filling the wall recess with the peat mixture, Amaral promotes the encounter between architecture's geometric rigour and the formless, mutable quality of the moulding material. The work is also characterised by a prevailing sense of fragility or entropy, something that is clearly observed in previous works such as the series of sculptures made with reclaimed construction rubble that slowly erode in time.

The dialogue with architecture is explored further in other works in the exhibition. A hole, cast in clay by pressing a rock on its surface, is installed on one of the walls. Next to it, the joint line on the same MDF wall has been torn open and filled with rock wool. The two pieces work together in a complementary manner: the first suggests the illusion of depth on the MDF surface, while the other simultaneously 'unmakes' this illusion by revealing the actual wall's depth and what is behind it. As the artist states, his intention with the first piece is not to create something 'magical' – as the 'magic trick' is instantly revealed by the second piece - but to subvert the logic of the space and to destabilise the audience's perception.

Surface and colour seem to be equally important elements in Amaral's work, and are indeed one of the most remarkable characteristics of his large peat installation. Throughout all the works in *Soft Matter* there is a shared approach towards surface: they are elaborately worn out, delicate, often in muted colours and with an organic quality. But surface is not only painstakingly constructed in this exhibition, it is also found in nature: the white chalk cliffs of Seven Sisters serve as the backdrop for a video in which a figure moves inside a silver fabric cover against this impressive landscape. There is a stark contrast between the artificially created moving silver

fabric and the natural chalk background – a formal composition made with images. Amaral says he was particularly interested in the fact that the chalk cliffs are in an advanced state of erosion and in how we can experience geological time – usually much more extended than a human lifespan – through them, as it is possible to witness the way in which they are rapidly collapsing. Therefore, besides creating a formal composition through contrasting materials, the moving figure in the video seems to somehow underscore this temporal quality. But, beyond that, the collapsing surface of the white cliff is then reflected on a delicate fabric and plaster work whose surface has been laboriously worked by the artist, rendering it feeble and perishable.

In *Soft Matter*, ideas of entropy, materiality, and the perception of space and time seem to migrate from one work to another, sometimes through formal approximations and others through conceptual affinities. For this exhibition, the artist has worked on site for several weeks, choreographing, rehearsing and testing the space in order to respond to its given features. The correspondence between certain aspects of the works are not merely coincidental, but the result of conceiving the exhibition as a single project where space itself seems to have been incorporated as raw material.

Kiki Mazzucchelli, February 2014