

Mary Temple's *Extended Afternoon* is a painted, trompe l'oeil installation that has unfolded in three phases over the course of seven months. Charting the movement of a shaft of afternoon light that bisects the Museum from the northwest to the southeast, *Extended Afternoon* poetically references the movement of the sun across the sky, both on a daily and seasonal basis. Phase one, which was installed in September, is on the exterior northwest corner of the Museum (facing the parking lot) and portrays a shard of sunlight containing the shadows of tree branches. In phase two, which was installed in January, the light has reached the Opatrny Gallery, the adjacent corridor, the area around the bridge that overlooks the lobby, and the exterior courtyard wall. Phase three, completed in March, has seen the light finally penetrate into the Museum's Project Space, hitting the upper wall and flooding the floor with light and shadow. Symbolically starting at the corner of the building that contains the Museum's camera obscura, *Extended Afternoon* combines the frozen moment that categorizes still photography with the flow of time found in film and video.

Connecting Temple's work with photography is not as much of a stretch as it might seem. After first toning the chosen architectural surface to a "shadow" color, the artist, using artificial lights, casts real shadows with foliage on the surface, which are then delineated by painting in the "light" around the shadow forms. Although not a photochemical process, Temple's technique is reminiscent of a photogram, the most basic way of producing a photographic image. The fact that the image is initially projected with light on the chosen surface draws a simple parallel with film or video projection, bringing to mind the shadow plays created by magic lanterns before the invention of photography. Why is it that, independent of the photographic associations, Temple's work is so convincingly real, even after repeated viewing?

Although we like to think otherwise, vision is a habitual activity. Every morning when we awaken we do not see the world anew, but rather remember what we have seen, and go about our lives rarely conscious of the act of looking. What we use in order to navigate, on a moment-to-moment basis, are remembered patterns of visual experience that are routinely processed on a subconscious level. Temple uses our memories of the phenomenon of sunlight, that most fleeting and ethereal optical occurrence, not

just to fool the eye, but to fool the mind. Ironically, the artist is at her most successful when the viewer walks through one of her installations and matter-of-factly experiences common daylight, not art (it's common for some people to completely miss some of the artist's subtler works). But art is at the heart of Temple's endeavor, and besides the allusions to photography, the artist engages many of the basic issues raised by aspects of realist painting.

Temple's work is dependent on architecture, casting it in a role that is somewhere between a movie screen and an object in a still-life painting. As in a trompe l'oeil still life, we believe we are experiencing space, but instead of it being contained behind a picture plane, it is a space that expands out into a fictitious daylight. In this way, Temple merges still life with landscape painting, freezing a lie of artificial atmospheric conditions onto a canvas of walls and floors. As much as Vermeer, Turner, or Monet (or any other painter who has attempted to depict the phenomenon of light), Temple exaggerates certain visual effects to create drama. In phase two of her installation at The Aldrich, each of the separate walls that the beam of light hits has a different color sensibility, subtly commenting on the relative nature of the color of all light. The artist also plays off the dilemma that all of us have faced when looking at a house-paint swatch book—what exactly is "white"? Temple routinely tweaks our expectations (and memory) of "white" walls and "natural" sunlight, manipulating both in the service of expression.

Art is one of the only reliable devices that allows us to consciously control the speed at which we experience time, with film and video being the most powerful examples. It has often been said that the experience of a great work of art can induce a trance-like state, where one becomes oblivious to the passage of time, thwarting the regimentation of life that mechanically-based time has increasingly imposed. Prior to the invention of the clock, humans were more attuned to moment-by-moment changes in daylight, as its manifestation was the only available measure of time's passage. The "clockwise" movement of clock hands is an archaic leftover from nature-based time, having originated in the direction of movement of the shadow on a sundial over the course of the day. Walking into one of Temple's installations, time has eerily stopped,

with "afternoon" or "morning" extending indefinitely through lived, real time. There is a sense of a science-fiction-like fantasy of time travel, although the conventional fantasy is inverted with the viewer's experience being one of moving *inside* time, not through it. On entering the Museum's project space, where Temple's conceptual beam of light has finally come to rest, it does seem quieter and slightly removed from the normal world, as if somehow a "pause" button has been pressed, reminiscent of the hush that falls across nature during a solar eclipse. Temple's work consistently, and spectacularly, succeeds in killing time—without injuring eternity.¹

-Richard Klein, director of exhibitions

¹Paraphrased from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854)



Extended Afternoon (Phase I), 2006