

Eberhard Bosslet

EN - Day, Peter: Spaces 88, Catalog of the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Prato, Italien 1988., EN - Day, Peter; in The Collection 1988-90, Museo d'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato 1991, S.58/59.

Eberhard Bosslet's Supporting Measures at Mercer, 1988

From March 29 to April 23, 1988, Mercer Union in Toronto was the site of Eberhard Bosslet's installation, "Supporting Measures at Mercer, 1988". The piece measured 3.3 m. high by 7.3 m. wide by 10.4 m. long. It consisted of an assemblage of one hundred and sixty-eight adjustable metal poleshores and one hundred and fourteen plywood covered, steelframe Paschal Modular Formwork panels of various sizes. Both these materials are employed in the construction industry and were loaned in used condition by two different Toronto area companies who customarily lease them to building companies. "Supporting Measures" is a series of installations that began in the mid 1980s. The series has used poleshores and other prefabricated materials "late-industrial vernacular" is the phrase that the American writer Dan Cameron has coined to describe the prefabricated off-the-shelf products and materials employed by a number of contemporary European sculptors including John M. Armleder, Guillaume Bijl, IFP, Bertrand Lavier, Ange Leccia, Wolfgang Staehle and Bosslet. The adjustable poleshores are used either to prop up collapsing buildings or to support newly installed beams or floors. The formwork panels are a flexible kit of interlocking modules that can be assembled on or off a construction site in a variety of shapes to create moulds for poured concrete elements. Bosslet assembled his work with the help of a construction team and plans he had drawn up after two visits to the space in 1987 - approximately one hundred hours of labour were required to complete the job. The installation was effected without welds, screws, nails, bolts or rivets. In a review of Supporting Measures at Mercer, 1988 the Toronto critic John Bentley Mays pointed out that Bosslet is a homo faber - the builder of meanings, as opposed to the producer of beautiful knickknacks or objets d'art. On one level Bosslet's installation was an extremely formal piece. It was an earthbound arrangement of found metal elements in the tradition of Anthony Caro; however, there were other layers to the work. The formworks were stacked in precise, minimal geometric shapes reminiscent of Carl Andre's stacked brick works (such as his 1966. Equivalents» series) or some of Joseph Beuys's piles of industrial materials. In fact Bosslet's use of off-the-shelf materials in all his "Supporting Measures" installations echo, and owed much to, both Beuys and the Minimalists of the mid 1960s; however, Bosslet has adapted and extended their rhetoric. "Supporting Measures at Mercer, 1988" was a site-specific installation which incorporated its site into the piece. The work could only exist within the Mercer Union space. The gallery space and its walls, ceiling and floor were integral parts of the work. The poleshores and formworks needed the floor, ceiling and walls as support, otherwise the work would have collapsed. Though the piece seemed to have a perfect balance, tension and a sense of imminent collapse hovered around it. By installing the poleshores in the space, Bosslet caused the visitor to experience this ambiguity. Poleshores are customarily used in the building industry to prop up walls, beams or floors that are newly installed or in danger of collapsing. By tampering with the inherent characteristics of ceilings, floors, walls and the volume of an interior space, Bosslet was initiating both a potential destruction and a deconstruction of the space. By supporting the ceiling Bosslet made the visitor acutely aware of the presence of the ceiling and the possibility of collapse inherent in it. As a result the visitor was forced to wonder whether the ceiling was in fact in danger of collapsing and if to prevent this from happening it had been shored up by the poles. Under the sideways pressure and thrust of the horizontal poleshores the walls too seemed in danger of collapsing. Were they too about to fall over and to prevent this from happening were being supported? Even the floor seemed at risk of caving in under the downward thrust of the poleshores. In addition to the "hard-hat" quality of the installation, thoughts were invoked of Atlas, who supported the world on his back, or the blind, longhaired Samson, his arms outstretched between the two structural support columns of the Temple, about to push down the building. The loadbearing poleshores are reminiscent of columns or caryatid figures. The central hub of the installation with its the rectangular hollow centre, bordered by a colonnade of poleshores, had the basic form of a Greek temple, with its outer perimeter of columns and inner sanctum. Is it too farfetched to see this installation as a «lateindustrial» garden with a path that takes the visitor on a journey through the space, past hill-top temples and even across a bridge? Even the horizontal rows of poleshores could be interpreted as the ripples on

symbolic water. As in gardens designed by Alexander Pope, William Kent or 'Capability' Brown, each view of the piece offered the visitor a quite different vision and silhouette.

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