



Mary Temple: *Forest for the Sea*, 2006, latex on Sheetrock, 24 by 66 feet

Mary Temple and Liza McConnell at Smack Mellon

Concerned with the dematerializing effects of light, Mary Temple and Liza McConnell pursue their interest in dramatically different ways, as was evident in this recent paired-solo show. Both artists achieve ethereal ends through self-evident, disarmingly direct means. In *Forest for the Sea*, Temple made smart use of Smack Mellon's problematic architectural features, including dominant, north-facing windows, intrusive columns, and an enormous but obstructed 24-by-66-foot wall. Having toned the latter in an even off-white, the artist convincingly painted, using a slightly paler white, the illusion of raking sunlight falling upon the wall through tree branches and foliage, interrupted by vertical bands of varying widths. At least momentarily, her silhouettes passed for actual shadows – until the viewer recognized that there was no sunlight of the sort streaming through those windows and around those columns, and little by way of foliage outside the gallery's windows that could cast such shadows anyway.

In Temple's work, wall painting functions as installation; the trompe-l'oeil element activates the entire space, as the viewer tries to verify the alignment of illumination, trees and framing architecture that give rise to this particular configuration, and, finding none, is a bit unsettled. (A funny characteristic of the installation is that it deflects the viewer's attention away from the painting itself.) Temple re-creates a visual experience – familiar to the point of being mundane – that the viewer is accustomed to seeing occur naturally. Depicting a phenomenon that is often subliminal, that we habitually filter out of our experience of interior space, her installations have been known literally to blend into the woodwork. The absence of any other elements in *Forest for the Sea* was startling, nervy and necessary.

McConnell's *Compound*, housed in a darkened enclosure off the main space, comprised two parts. The less flashy component involved three tapering coils of fiberglass insulation, in the bowels of which were planted glowing lightbulbs. Slightly spooky, the coils were clustered together like pods in a science-fiction movie. Through their tops they collectively cast on the low ceiling a soft, cottony pool of light, like a gathering storm cloud or the atmosphere of Venus. A few feet away was a stack nearly 6 feet tall of nested, bottomless plastic pails, their interiors apparently encrusted with left-over joint compound and similarly outfitted with incandescent bulbs. The stack projected a crisper, more legible image; the light traveling up its curling, loric length and through a hole cut in the top pail's lid was focused by a single eyeglass lens. By installing a

curved panel that rounded the juncture of wall and ceiling, McConnell deftly complicated the space; the eccentric spotlight reached the panel looking something like the moon. In an inspired bit of tweaking, the artist shimmed the column of buckets ever so slightly with a broad putty knife, so that this moon was a few days past full. The suggestion of the lunar cycle chimed quietly with Temple's frozen, late-afternoon moment, which halted the earth's rotation.

- *Stephen Maine*