

DAWN FRYLING

NEW WORK

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

NEW WORK: DAWN FRYLING
SEPTEMBER 19 - NOVEMBER 4, 1990

Dawn Fryling's work is something new. Every exhibition is different from the one before it, often so much so that one would be hard pressed to be sure that it was her work. Yet what Fryling does is always smart, reticent, witty, pure, and somehow subversive, and one can look forward to each new body of work with confidence that it will be significant and fresh.

Working with her on this exhibition has been a delight. We are pleased as well to print below a text on her work by Kevin Ford, which was commissioned at her suggestion.

John Caldwell

Curator of Painting and Sculpture

Dawn Fryling was born in Pasadena, California, in 1960. She received a B.F.A. from the University of Arizona, Scottsdale, in 1985 and an M.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1988. As a student, conceptual- and time-based performance art strongly influenced her work. Along with beauty, Fryling has pursued an eclectic choice of materials and processes, incorporating a wide range of media in her work: sculpture, performance, video, and photography. She focuses on sensations absorbed by the intellect, not on those dependent on sentiment or nostalgia. Fryling's alert intuition and insight into the objective properties of materials display a pragmatic and independent approach, recalling that of artists in the 1960s who worked stridently to distance themselves from Abstract Expressionism.

A factual and unequivocal use of basic materials is plainly stated throughout Fryling's work. As viewers, we are encouraged to read this information without extraneous metaphysical connotations. *No Title, 1990*, is a room with closely hung empty picture frames on each wall. On the floor are brightly shining halide lamps whose beams are directed outward to illuminate the interior space. When stepping into *No Title*, our first thought is to adjust our position to lessen the blinding irritation of the lights. An immediate solution can be found by simply standing in the shadow of another viewer. Once this spot is found, we discover that Fryling's intentions begin to unfold. The subject of this work is the emphasized shadows of the audience in the vacant frames of glass hung on the surrounding walls. The lights and bare frames intentionally withhold specific meaning for the purpose of encouraging a restless interaction with the audience. Because there is no physical content inside the frames, our attention is channeled to the more elusive aspect of the work. The traditional nature of the collectability of the art object has been downplayed, and in its place a stage has been constructed that reflects the human exchange in an inconclusive social performance.

Fryling places audience, circumstances, and equipment on equal footing and regards them as materials with an open dialogue of interchangeable and complementary functions. By giving light fixtures, shadows, and drifting motion meaningful consideration as effective art objects, Fryling's materials and their intended use flow from the principles advocated by artists in the

late 1960s. That is, artwork about things or, as Donald Judd stated, “things that exist exist.” All reference to symbolism or allegory has been collapsed for the purpose of describing this basic phenomenon: she looks for a structure of specific representation from material.

Fryling also favors work that uses the passage of time and the depiction and replacement of materials as key elements. This interchangeability, the purpose of which is to deemphasize preciousness, began with previous sculptures in which the components of toast, flour, or recycled clothing were supplied as needed within the duration of the work’s existence. This element can be seen in *No Title*, as people unpredictably drift in and out of the shadows, replacing one another in a continuous cycle. Within an unspecified time period the people, as main subject, are replaced, causing the work to evolve, yet to remain unchanged.

In her earlier sculptures, Fryling stacked toasted bread on the wall in narrow wooden frames. Here, in the series *Toast 1–7*, 1990, she has made an important further step. By photographing toast, she deprives us of the direct interaction experienced with the earlier pieces. Toast is now perceived through the framework of the intellect rather than through the senses, such as smell, touch, or the “aliveness” of the real object. By distancing us from the subject (as well as enlarging a piece of toast to greater than life size), she enables us to scrutinize the peculiar physical qualities of toast as a real phenomenon. Shape, texture, color, and scale become the primary clues in the search for understanding these pictures. Ordinary toast is not normally considered the material of serious art. But, as we observe bread (primarily encountered at mealtime) in this redefined situation, we are startled by its arresting, and somewhat humorous, distinction. On closer inspection, the beauty of the “patina” (the variegated burn marks) asserts itself, modifying our vision and inclining us to see no longer just plain bread but an aesthetic object. We notice the representation of what is prosaic and mostly unobserved coming into sharper focus.

Throughout her working process, Fryling is constantly probing materials for their physical characteristics and their basic palpable properties. Bread as an aesthetic object becomes more real as we begin to notice the distinct shapes and straightforward beauty of the exaggerated surface. The texture and quality of moving shadows become a physical looming presence in *No Title*. These unassuming and simple elements from everyday life surprise us with their factual realness, while simultaneously downplaying any suggestion of icon, simulation, or sign. The emphasized physical characteristics of toast or shadows are not used as vehicles for peripheral meanings or symbols but are images in themselves.

Materials and process are not held sacred by Fryling; she applies whatever best fits her needs. Image-producing vitality is found in overlooked materials freed from the content of cultural or social value. Without the dead weight of allegory she acknowledges the independence of her chosen materials, allowing a purity detached from sentiment to prevail. Fryling uses the senses both as a gateway to immediate stimulus and as a tool to help recognize the elegance in the ordinary shapes and furnishings of everyday life. What is achieved by isolating and disclosing the uncommon in the commonplace is a definition of beauty independent of metaphoric or symbolic references.

Kevin Ford

DAWN FRYLING

Born in Pasadena, California, 1960

Lives and works in San Francisco

EDUCATION

University of California, Santa Cruz, 1982

University of Arizona, Tucson, B.F.A., 1985

San Francisco Art Institute, M.F.A., 1988

INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

1985

Zgany Gallery, Tucson, Arizona

1989

The Lab, San Francisco

1990

Southern Exposure Gallery, San Francisco

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1984

Two Evenings of Performance, Casa Seton, Tucson, Arizona

1986

Performance Exhibition, Joseph Gross Gallery, University of Arizona, Tucson

Exchange, Mandeville Center, University of California, La Jolla

Base '86: Emerging Time-based Artists, The Farm, San Francisco

Post Studio, 181 Club, San Francisco

Volm Show, Kid Ailuck Collection Gallery, Tokyo

1987

Spring Show, Emanuel Walter /Atholl McBean Galleries, San Francisco Art Institute

Sculpture: Dawn Fryling and Charles Gute, Diego Rivera Gallery, San Francisco Art Institute

1988

Third Annual Juried Exhibition, Pro Arts, Oakland

Exchange, Sushi Inc., San Diego

Contention, New Langton Arts, San Francisco

1989

Boy Area Conceptualism: Two Generations, Hallwalls, Buffalo, New York

Bill Bury, Dawn Fryling, Ivan Majdrakoff, Mathew Matsuoka, Kent Roberts, Richmond Art Center, California

Introductions '90: Margo Adams, Dawn Fryling, Frank Jackson, and Robert Ortbal, Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco

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Baker, Kenneth. "Dawn Fryling/The Lab."

Artforum 18, no. 1 (September 1989): 152–53.

———. "Artist's Message Written on the Wall." *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 29, 1990, sec. E, p. 4.

Bonetti, David. "This photograph is a frame-up."

San Francisco Examiner, March 23, 1990, sec. C, p. 2.

Gregori, Katherine. "Ten for the '90s." *Art News* 89, no. 4 (April 1990): 153.

Helfand, Glen. "The Beauty of Simplicity." *Artweek* 20, no. 10 (March 11, 1989): 4.

Levy, Mark. "Images of Power." *Art International* 6 (Spring 1989): 66.

Porges, Maria. "Dawn Fryling/The Lab." *Artcoast* 1, no. 2 (May/June 1989): 84–85.

CHECKLIST

No Title

1990

mixed-media installation (wood, glass, halide lights, and paint)

dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco

Toast 1–7

1990

Type "R" prints

50½ x 52½ in. (128 x 133 cm) each

Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco

Untitled (work-in-progress)

1990

mixed-media installation

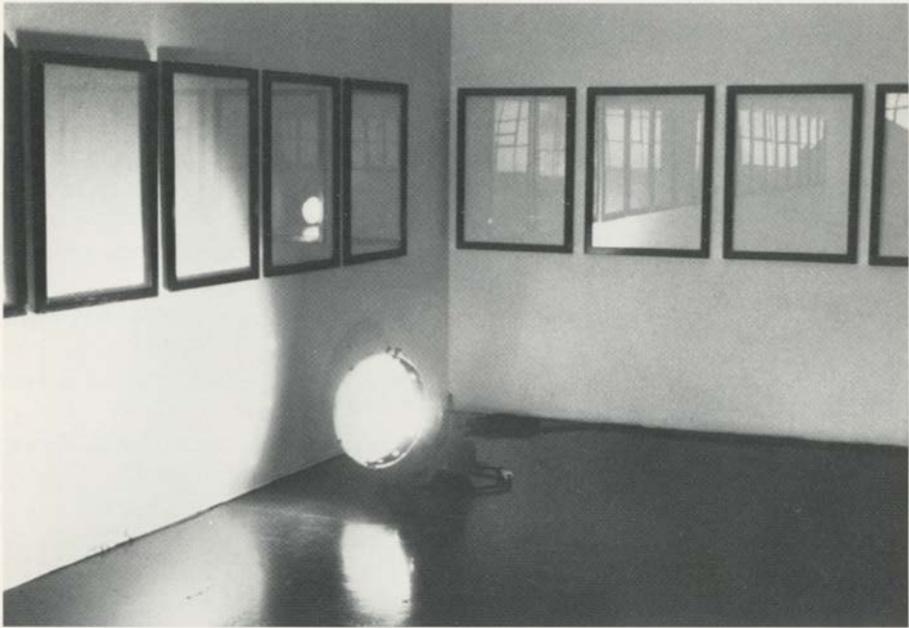
dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco

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Installation view of *No Title*, 1990, at Southern Exposure Gallery, San Francisco

Cover: *Toast*, 1990

NEW WORK

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