

Patrick Foley  
Judson Beaumont  
*Or Gallery*  
Vancouver  
June 30 to July 12

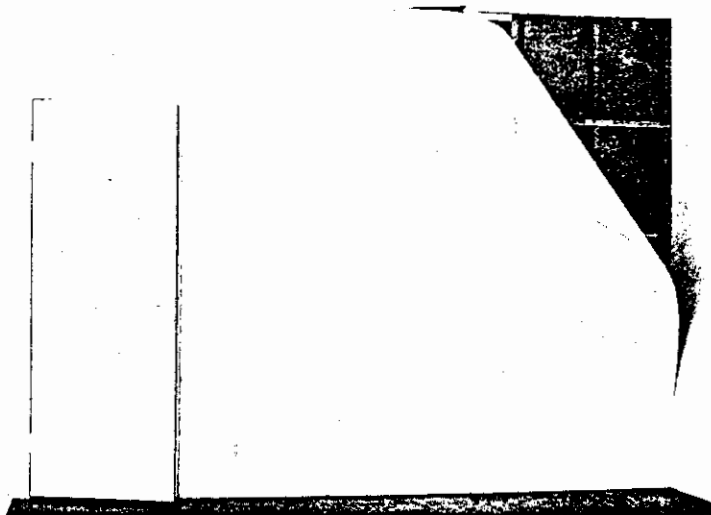
In the larger of the two elements of this collaborative installation, titled *Walls*, the plaster board wall sheathing appears to have been diagonally peeled off from the rear wall of the gallery, revealing some portion of the original wall construction. The smaller work is an inverted representation of the larger rear peeled wall, set into the centre of the longest side wall. Its size and placement relate it to conventional pictorial representation. The greater curve of the larger peel seems to have been naturally determined by its weight, acting under gravity; the lesser upward curve of the smaller work confirms this to a degree. These peeling skins ignore their supporting walls as they splash slowly into the gallery. They aspire to a condition of objecthood, attempting to meet and concretize the space of the room. The logic of this structure and its possible meaning is derived from an immediate sensation of overwhelming massive whiteness.

Herman Melville writes on *Whiteness* (*Moby Dick*, Chapter 42, "Whiteness of the Whale") of "an elusive something in the innermost idea of the hue that strikes more of panic in the soul" and asks the question, "Why does the name of the White Sea exert such a spectralness over fancy?" Walter Pater replies to the query (*Marius the Epicurean*, Chapter II, "White Nights") with a theory on the representational potential of Whiteness "the mystery of white things... ever an after-thought the doubles or seconds of real things, and themselves but half real, half material... the white Mass, which as the black Mass is a travesty of the true Mass turned to evil... is celebrated by young candidates for the priesthood with an unconsecrated host, by way of rehearsal." In sculpture, this half-real, preliminary or secondary characteristic of Whiteness is manifested historically as the white plaster forms of preliminary sketch models (maquettes),

as positive and negative production moulds, in the use of plaster as a transitional medium and in the production of relatively inexpensive plaster copies (e.g. museum replicas) of more enduring originals. In painting, these preliminary characteristics of Whiteness may correspond to the initial priming of the canvas and, in interior architecture, to the panelling of timber structure with plasterboard in imitation of a massive wall. The representational nature of Whiteness is a clue to the meaning of this installation. The first impression of mass fails within the Whiteness. The peeling walls are not what they appear to be.

From: *Vanguard*

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Judson Beaumont and Patrick Foley, *Walls* (1986), installation, photo: Storme

The constructions of Foley and Beaumont are in fact the antithesis of the literal sculptural reduction, the *taille directe*, that they mimic. It is the antithesis of the modern historical precedent set in any number of works by Gordon Matta Clark, for example. In this collaborative work by Foley and Beaumont, what appear to be curved plaster board panels peeled back to reveal their support in the structure of the wall are actually carefully constructed masses; laminated slabs laboriously built up from thin sheets of wood veneer and then concealed beneath a thick layer of white paint. As representational art it might, on the surface, be said to relate to "Process Art." The contradiction noted between the represented process and the actual process is a conventional dialectic of representation: the necessary distinction between the subject and the object of representation.

Seen in contrast to the original poorly done wall construction of the gallery, the technical virtuosity displayed in this exhibition becomes all the more ominous. The peeling integument looks as if it was neatly, almost surgically flayed from its architectural support. This slickness of execution is an indication of sculpture

devolving into the task-ethic of craft, an indication of a labour ethic gone awry, away from a conception of labour as fulfilling in itself and equally away from the conception of labour as social responsibility. Beaumont comments that the work is, "like [how] every day we're busy opening up cartons of milk, peeling back tabs on juice, and tearing the tops off T.V. dinners." Here is reference more to Oldenberg than to Matta Clark. Beaumont's conception of normal daily (and apparently, healthy) activity is an imposed (and accepted) busy-ness, his labour of consumption dictated by the nature of the consumable object of his desire. Once located within the consumerist conception of labour, the exhibition installation can be seen to acquire the characteristics of consumable objecthood in its concealment of the means of production. This work can be directly related to certain kinds of contemporary interior design. The innocent good humour, the likeability of this work tends to blunt too complex or too ominous a reading, and yet the ease of acceptance is unsettling.

Robin Peck