

Pittsburgh

Lynn Cazabon: *Spot*
 Delanie Jenkins: *Root Bound*
Mattress Factory

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by Caroline Koebel

Descending in the elevator. Rounding the corner. Approaching the entrance of the windowless underground space. A certain something becoming ever stronger....

Smell is said to be the most profound sensory trigger of memory. If such is the case, the stink of a damp, aged stone cellar overrides all other stimuli in the multi-sensory zone of Lynn Cazabon's *Spot*. For this installation dealing with staged sexuality, role reversals, and the construction of spectacle, the artist sinks her vision below the surface; she's in the cellar.

The damp and the cool evoke a place that is more phantasmagoric than real; as in a fairy tale, there's a secret that must be either discovered or safeguarded for the survival of "good." The play of the subject in the staging of sexual identity, for example.

Streaming red velvet forms the scene's backdrop. A black table hosts a get-up of odd parts (stitched together in

such a way as to be unwearable): big hair, big bra, little pants, tool belt, numerous synthetic nails. On the floor below: spiky, silver platform shoes hyperextend toward the whole. A mini LCD video monitor hovering above shows a woman in said costume (pre stitching?) as she steps out from behind the curtain.

Fingering the textures of the table's parts, peering at the figure in the spotlight, making sense of the too-many nails, the viewer is also listening to sounds. A placid, feminine voice recaps the movements of (heterosexual) lovers in a porn flick: "The muscles in my arms tense as I pull forward; you recline backwards into the tub; you toss your head back, eyes closed." Who is the speaker in relation to the characters? How does she want to identify herself? Is she the man, the woman; does she speak about the man, the woman; and to what extent does it matter anyway?

The more insistent sound, the more primal and rhythmic sound, is from beyond the velvet wall. Within a brief picture of time from entering *Spot*, the viewer pushes through the center slit only to be caught in the real spotlight that was a moment before its own representation (on video). Perhaps not exactly mirroring the screen woman's reflexive shielding of her eyes from the light, the viewer at least squints, and also pauses on the spot to discern her placement in the grander space.

A cluster of seven monitors transmits a body in fragments: hand, eye, knee, breast, nose. Shot on Super-8 film and often backlit, the body is both close at hand and receding into abstraction (akin to how bodies actually are experienced in intimacy). The repetitive sound

shifts from a background noise hinting at the possibility of more (at what lies beyond the curtain) to a foreground dissonance. The amplification of breathing—of body sound being so insistently present—becomes almost crude in relation to the complicated nature of the sighted body.

The disparate quality of this particular juxtaposition, as well as that of *Spot* altogether, seems an intended effect of the artist. Cazabon, at times more profoundly than others, positions the viewer to be on the spot, or at least to glean that the stage and the seats of the spectacle are not at such an impenetrable binary opposition after all.

Delanie Jenkins's *Root Bound* is an architectural installation consisting of several distinct spaces, beginning with a series of three membranous walls of material hanging from ceiling to floor. On each, a buttonhole is at navel level. Dim lighting adds to the already present sense of the room's interiority and protectedness.

Lynn Cazabon
Spot
 1998. Detail of monitors, second room.



Delanie Jenkins
Root Bound
 1998. Cotton, polyester, plaster.

What is striking is how, though the single hole (a tiny sliver surrounded by fine thread) is barely present, the illusion of burden is weighty. It is almost as if the buttonhole, in its contradictory being, compels one to insert an index finger and bear down, ripping the vanishing wound into a lasting scar. Or, conversely, the fragility of the curtains and their holes provoke awe and reverence, and the viewer assumes a protective stature.

The installation's locus is a hallway that joins all its points. Ducking left or right, the viewer is in a soft, curved room—in an apse—with walls of thick strands of cotton that have been pulled through a mesh armature. The intimate scale (approximately four feet deep and seven feet high) of the apse enables the solo viewer to occupy the space with ease (the rooms were made smaller when the original size was determined to be too large). More intimate than the scale is the suppleness of the walls. The cotton is most evocatively perceived through touch; I, for one, alternate between stroking the wall and pressing my body gently against it.

Root Bound's close is like a cave or hiding place, which is met only after passing through tunnels and around obstacles. Unlike its other sections, in their eliciting an awareness of how one moves between/within spaces (a self-knowledge of one's own body in the environment), it is a place to be (in place). There is nothing to navigate around (the curtains), nothing to push up against (the cotton walls). In the spare, spacious room of brilliantly white walls the installation becomes about vision, for "what is there to see?" Yet, smudges on the main wall trace the viewers' responses to the navel cast into its surface. By running fingers in and around the depression, the viewers betray touch.

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