

I visited Annette Lawrence's studio to view her recent installation entitled *Free Paper*. The artist saved her junk mail for 13 months from November 2005 through November 2006. She tore the stacks of paper into two-inch wide strips which she then stacked on top of each other. Each month of *free paper* stands on a small table-high shelf. Lawrence speaks of the 11 years it took her to feel comfortable with the horizontal orientation of work, having moved from New York to Texas where, as everyone knows, the sky is bigger. These works spread out along their shelves like faded horizon lines stacked upon each other. Simultaneously, they stand high like architectural models, quiet skyscrapers pushing up against the white sky of the studio walls.

Evidence of marks and their maker. The strips of newspapers, glossy inserts and hard coupons speak of the internal as well—into earth and body. There is up down, the four directions, inside outside. And there is into. This invocation of the geological suggests a contemporary sedimentation: greys, reds, so many reds, an orange edge, but not quite. Strata of capitalism. Made beautiful. The weight of the thin strips of paper makes the stack curve fall at the edges, as the horizon line always bends in our peripheral vision. We should always remember the curvature of the earth.

These were once trees, this *free paper*. Lawrence has created rings of age, movement and breath. I can imagine the artist's hands holding the metal straight-edge against small stacks of paper, then ripping, the sound hypnotic. I am looking at evidence of 13 months in a small room—November through November, an almost-lunar counting system. The overlap of months makes me think of a spiral. And infinity. Though they measure a specific beginning and end, there is really none to speak of. Though unintended, there is a lovely reference to the Jamaican saying "free-paper burn". When free paper (a slave's pass or documents of freedom) burn, our vacation is over, we must return to work. But here I imagine *free paper* could again become earth, trees, ash, air, breath.

I walk closer to these forms, remains and want to breathe them in, smell them, want them to smell like wet earth and clay, something alive. They are curiously absent of scent. I peer around the edges and am reminded

of what exactly this is, this *free paper*: a Target logo, the blonde hair of a department store model, a coupon for 10% off. Must sacred always require the profane? And the liminal the ordinary?

I am in love with these bodies these forms and their spines—the squarish spaces that run through the middle of the stacks, devoid of color, that place in the fold of the newspaper the ink cannot touch. They are crooked vertebrae. Her body, my body, the neighbor, the mail carrier, whose free papers, whose bodies. They are all of us and absolutely gorgeous. I am again convinced that we live in a time of artists. Who else can transform junk into such beauty and reverence. I am reminded of Paul Chan's *My birds... trash... the future*, a two channel digital projection that occupies two sides of a flat screen, all futures are possible.

And they can indeed emerge un-apocalyptically.

It is humbling to stand before a work that makes me want to move slower, to savor and embrace my own actions, the rise and fall of my own breathing and voice. I am so moved by the *what remains*. It is photographic. Pre-photographic. Ancient as fossils. Rectangles of colored light that reflect up against the wall, a field of red or purple or blue. A kind of camera obscura, as if the light will remember the piece after the paper's disintegration. (I think of Rothko here. Is it possible that works of art speak to each other regardless of our presence before them? Is the sound between works something we cannot hear? Does it surface as light? Is it the space before—in front of—the painting?)

I have been thinking about what constitutes an aesthetics of bravery. Is it the into? The vulnerability of the dirty, the truest truth of junk, trash, books, bibles, ships at sea, returning and returned, free paper burning. Not because of endings and apocalypse. Perhaps bravery is a future, a red light on a wall that is only sometimes there. A spiral. A chapel...I haven't even spoken of the boxes that Lawrence builds for mailing these works, perfectly fitted for each month's variations, rarely to be used, but waiting. More layers in the strata, crossroads become mathematical, between boxes and stacks, between shore and ocean, free and burn, between quick and linger there is into.