



ENO / PALADINO
“I Dormienti”
Roundhouse, London
September 9 - October 6, 2000

The Roundhouse undercroft is, currently, all bare brick and mucky cement underfoot; here and there water seeps from drain covers. Alterations will follow: this installation occurred as just a brief moment in the building's history. The formal elegance of the space is the product of engineering logic, not art: the need was to support enormous weight above. But filled with Eno's music and Paladino's sculpture, you could find a space redolent with mystery. An engine shed became a henge.

The central area is encircled by a wall pierced by eight arched and regularly spaced "entrances." This inner wall is in turn encircled by a second containing twenty four archways. From these, long "alleys" radiate out between spoke-like walls to yet another circling wall and beyond that is the outside wall of the building itself. Paladino placed numerous crocodiles along some of the alleys, mostly positioned in lines and facing inwards - the first snout just in view in the corridor circling the central space. Here numerous sculptured figures lay on the floor - so the first implication was of crocodile dinner. But the figures seemed peaceful, there was no horror here: less than life-size, made from terracotta, curled in a foetal position, some singly, some grouped. Maintaining this troubling poise between death and sleep, many of the figures were shattered, yet tidied: limbs neatly placed close to torso. Every sculpture was different, and some the product of fusions between figure and object: there were bowls and pitchers, reminiscent of burial rites, and some had objects welded to their limbs, suggesting scarification. Some had large shards on top of them and again, there was ambiguity - had these things done damage or were they sought as protection against another threat? One figure, placed near the centre, lay on a circular bed of very fine marble chips; these, like rice, filled a bowl around which the figure was curled.

You came across other isolated sculptures in the dimly-lit outer spaces: figures or, in one instance, a crocodile belly up and trussed in rope ready to be carried away. Paladino had hung drawings, rapidly executed on white paper, on nails hammered into the brickwork. A kind of graffiti; the damp made them curl.

Eno's music, issuing from several CD players shuffling through tracks and repeating at random, came from concealed speakers: the sound overlapped and flowed together. As we'd expect from Eno, this was very much a "built" sound: even a voice had been altered or might not have been sourced as that: Eno himself has called it "an abstraction of singing." Yet despite the electronics, and the infinite variations, what one heard possessed an archaic simplicity: a singing voice, and repeated reverberant cadences.

The British art world tends not to like this kind of thing: too theatrical, too figurative, too irony-free. I have to report that people seemed utterly held by it. They spent a long time here, peering unselfconsciously at details of the sculpture, listening intently to the music, wandering around in the strange architecture. To discuss what the piece was "about" is to risk titters - ponderings on life death and timelessness... but sorry, guys, I found it memorable. The components fitted; it worked. Maybe it was what's needed in this kind of site-specific project: something that takes a grip of your emotions. It felt like the product of uncomplicated enthusiasm, the embracing of a chance that won't come again.

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