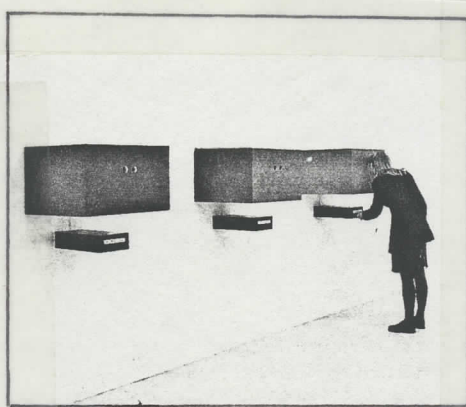


## Aimee Rankin Postmasters

What one saw on entering the gallery was a series of thirteen bulky wooden boxes (each 17" x 24" x 24"), evenly spaced, at head level. Each had two small holes in front. Each was a different bright but flat, unreflective colour – or rather two colours, since one soon noticed that the top edge of each box used a contrasting colour. Below each of these boxes was a smaller, black one (4" x 8" x 18"), each with a different noun – a title in fact – decalced onto it: *Attraction*, *Bliss*, *Perversity*, *Suffocation*, etc. Were it not for those wildly melodramatic words one might have thought one had wandered into an exhibition of the latest Judds, or more likely some follower. In conjunction with the titles, however, the eyeholes extended an invitation to a sort of curiosity that is quite different from the confirmation of self-evidence offered by Judd. In order to see through the holes one had to take a pair of headphones and plug into the smaller black box; this connection made, the *son et lumière* show which was the extravagant content of these prim containers began.

The title for the entire exhibition was *Ecstasy*. The interior of each box was laid out as a kind of wildly symbolic bedroom in which the viewer's gaze united with an array of sensorially excessive, affectively overcoded cultural debris, ranging from plastic trinkets through animal skins and feathers to digital clocks, shark embryos in jars of formaldehyde, and postcard reproductions of Surrealist, Mannerist, and pre-Raphaelite paintings. There were flashing lights and moving parts, all to the accompaniment of appropriate examples of recent or outdated pop music, from country-and-western to heavy metal. The loosely narrative tour from box to box through the stages of desire from *Attraction* to *Memory* reduplicated the experience of viewing each box, in which the technologically regulated "intercourse" with the object, through the act of plugging in, exiled the viewer to the position of *voyeur*, one's gaze condemned to wander among the details of these grotto-like (i.e. grotesque) miniature stage sets. Mirrors as concealing/revealing/framing devices



AIMEE RANKIN Installation at Postmasters

artist herself writes: "The crucial solitude of the spectators and their physical connection to the art object, which acts as a specular prosthesis, foregrounds the box as an obtrusive barrier and heightens the tension between 'wanting in' and 'wanting out' of this synthesis."

While Rankin often succeeds brilliantly in subjecting her rich and unruly array of materials to a well-developed articulation of ambivalence, there are also times when they escape her control. She needs to be more careful, in particular, in her use of reproductions of paintings, which often resist the readings her structures impose upon them because of the way they recall the specificity of their originals.

Barry Schwabsky

ARTSCRIBE  
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