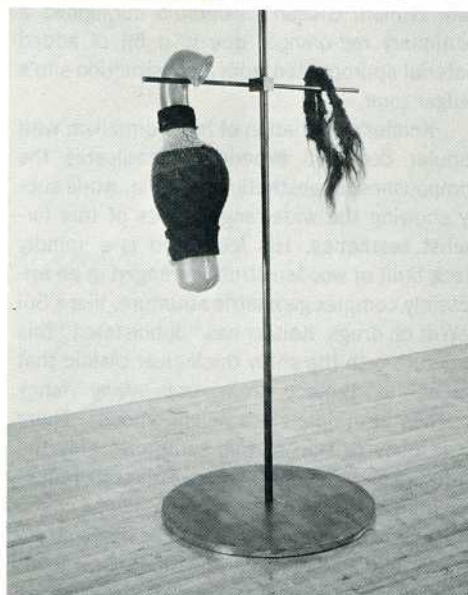


DAVID NYZIO
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David Nyzio, *Morphology of Inactivity*, 1991, Dyed human hair, hair from captive orangutan, plastic, steel, 77" x 43" x 34". Courtesy Postmasters.

Having used algae and its growth as an art medium for years, David Nyzio is no stranger to the metaphors that can be gleaned from the processes, conditions, and elements of nature (Postmasters, November 22–December 21). In this show the diversity of works directs one's attention from the individual effect of his "science experiment" approach to Nyzio's larger examination. He takes more chances here than in earlier arrangements of algae growth, which all

too easily devolved into a glib "art and science" aesthetic. This other dimension of the work becomes apparent in a piece like *Not Documentation*, a sheet of glass with dried algae stains set over a recessed photograph of the same stains. An area of the glassed original is masked off to create a rectangular site-sight through which one perceives the image of the "original," with the shadow of the original necessarily imposed by the conditions of its nature and presentation: glass is transparent and light happens. Each work in the show is a reflection or image of Nyzio's project, and each possesses an element of the conceptual viaduct made actual in *Not Documentation*, and in this sense the piece acts as a key to the other work. A *Morphology of Inactivity* is composed of a steel T-shaped frame. On one half is a strangely anthropomorphic form with a curved swollen belly and two suggestive orifices. An elaborately knitted turtleneck sweater made from dyed human hair fits the form snugly. Draped over the other arm of the structure is a clump of clotted red hair cut from the mane of a captive orangutan. The distorted "human" shape with its gruesomely handsome garment and the unhealthy, matted hair of an animal kept in an unnatural state of captivity both seem to refer to the results of states of depression and perversity incurred by man's attachment to the specificity of knowledge endemic to the field of science. This interest in the residue of behavior and situation is examined again in a pair of "drawings" made by immersing a sheet of paper, then allowing smoke to collect upon the surface of the water, and slowly draining the liquid, so that the film of soot is captured, creating a surface design that is, in this context, considered to be the drawing. Nyzio acknowledges his role as interceptor by blowing his initials into the floating soot, and they are subtly recorded in the resulting image. He also works with butterfly wings, cutting them into squares and making a static minimalist "pattern painting." He fashions a stereotypical caped raincoat made of vinyl to which the wings have been attached. The adhesive dulls the bright colors of the wings into a muted gray-brown so it isn't immediately apparent what medium Nyzio is using to accomplish the strangely opalescent effect of the coat, increased by the shiny nature of the plastic. This may seem, at first, to be a more simplistic piece—the wings, a butterfly's "raincoat," are literally and directly translated into an object that is equivalent in human terms, but with it Nyzio implies that often, in order for us to understand the natural world, we corral it into an unnatural state (so it can be studied), or it has to be shifted drastically to a medium that is directly related to our own experience. He seems to be saying that there is no way for us to access a true objective or other-subjective knowledge through traditionally rational analytic means.

Gretchen Faust