

## David Nyzio

David Nyzio invents form out of the ephemeral, the living, and the natural. His work combines all the grace and beauty of a Theodore Roethke poem with the guile of a Puck. Reading like a recipe for a midsummer night's potion, Nyzio's materials have included algae, milkweed bugs, butterfly wings, moss, iron filings, and golf balls. The artist uses nature as his medium, often allowing it to work within its own time frame. In *Curtain Substrate* of 1989, he hung a large curtain with algae implanted on it; as water fell down the screen, the algae grew, ultimately becoming a field of green both resplendent and repulsive at the same time.

While art and science have very different exploratory aims, both areas share a concern for observation and invention. Nyzio, who employs experiments found in the biology lab, actually straddles both disciplines. But as an inventor of art, he moves toward a formal rather than a functional end. Never repeatable, his experiments vary in technique and submit themselves to the possibility of change.

Nyzio's installation, entitled *The Struggle for Diversity*, includes a large rose window suspended from the ceiling. Inside this cathedral-inspired window grow algae. A box containing a filter and a pump also hangs from the ceiling just beyond the window. A mobile falls to the floor from the imaginary landscape above.

A highlighted article by Stephen Jay Gould, entitled "An Earful of Jaw," has been affixed to the wall for the spectator to read. The article describes the evolution of the auditory organ as having grown out of the jaw bone. A consideration of the multiple modalities and dual uses of jaw bone (functioning as both ear and jaw) allows Gould to pinpoint the vague stage in evolution when one organ grows out of another. Nyzio has adopted Gould's watchwords for the state an organism must be in before evolution can occur—"sloppiness, poor fit, quirky design and redundancy"—for his own general philosophy on creativity. Diversity, then, equals a healthy state and is desirable. Nyzio explains, "To trim off the fringe or to always be compelled to hone the quirky to a polished state eliminates the potential for variation in evolving form."

The algae, as the initial form of life, suggest a potential for renewal. But after reading Gould's article one discovers a second, even contrary meaning. The algae provide no seed for change, other than simply reproducing themselves, growing thicker and thicker. It is rather the physical changes and their effects on the spectator that provide aesthetic diver-

sity. The saturating quality of green from above brings about the sensation of atmospheric weight and actually reddens one's perception of natural light. This strange impression of light becomes more concentrated throughout the duration of the exhibition.

While the mobile illustrates balance in the most elemental way, it complicates the installation by being incongruous with the main sculptural element of the rose window. The work gains "diversity" by this addition of the mobile, which embodies "quirky design and redundancy." It simultaneously suggests a living organism and a technical, kinetic object. The elements that make up the whole are both organic and defunct mechanical objects recycled from past works. Thus they bring their own history and meaning to the work.

Nyzio's installation offers a fundamental sculptural object, the rose window filled with water and algae, plus a more complex, exploratory element, the mobile. These unlike elements live in temporary symbiosis. The irregular mobile creature appears as a mutation that was dropped from above and increased in size as it fell. In biological terms, the window is the working cell; the mobile, its nucleus. The juxtaposition of the two elements battles the even, overall finish that a completed work often possesses. Here, older works are recycled in the mobile while the algae continue to grow, changing the work with time. JG

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