

**“Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Form is not different than emptiness; emptiness is not different than form.”**

This quote, from the Prajna Paramita Hrdaya (or “Heart”) sutra is arguably the essence of the Buddhist contribution to the global wisdom canon. The historical Buddha’s revolution was to assert the recognition that fundamentally (with nod to Gertrude Stein,) there is simply no *there* there. Not in matter, not in mind, and more disturbingly to many then as now, not in soul or spirit.

Lest this be misunderstood as the nihilism Buddhism is often wrongly accused of, what the Buddha and two millennia of practitioners of the subsequent related traditions are saying is that impermanence, interdependence, and subjectivity rule the day (this understanding granting vast compassion, good humor, patience, and gratitude, not angst.) Ironically enough, advances in our western positivist/materialist traditions, be it art or virtually any branch of philosophy and science, have already or are all in short order coming to the same conclusions.

The leap from an intellectual understanding to a deeper, more intrinsic incorporation of this concept into being is the reason that Tibetans shut themselves up in caves for decades. But this is simply the actual nature of reality, and is therefore apparent and experiential to anyone with eyes to see, right now, in this moment (“You already understand!” the teachers exhort.) This is the basis of this Zen thing we’ve all heard about (most familiar these days as a marketing catch phrase, or as an excuse for spacey laxness.)

I spent many years practicing Zen Buddhism, living in monasteries and Zen centers, making it the focus of my creative energies. Previously, I had gone to art school, where I met John Cage, who frankly blew my mind, and introduced me to the whole idea. Slowly, art became Zen. Later, Zen came back to art. They never seemed fundamentally all that different; still don’t.

Looking to art, at its best, I see assertions of the same reality I encountered in the meditation hall; in artists, the same striving to touch, embody, and live the truth that I saw among ardent monks and priests, who called it *Dharma*. This is an historic reality, true for artists always, each generation dancing with the elements and forces du jour, conversing with the Good, the True, or the Beautiful as they find them. Even if, as Agnes Martin put it, they’re decrying its absence, or its fragility.

The artists in this exhibition are all dealing more or less directly and consciously with ideas of impermanence, interdependence, radical subjectivity, and the inseparable, fluctuating, intertwining poles of being: presence and absence, being and non-being, form and emptiness.

**Terri Thornton** meticulously erases New Yorker articles on artists, with an eye to the few bits left untouched that echo in the broadened space, potent with new meanings and significance.

**Johnny Robertson** attempts to give weight and form to the very atmosphere. In his apparently sliver monochrome slab, you will find the faint traces of some power lines in the living murk of a sky. Suddenly, a seemingly non-objective, formalist gesture becomes a different kind of representation. Space becomes heavy as concrete.

**Greg Metz** photographs empty office parks at night, secretly surveilling the sleeping carcasses of these spaces in the gaps between their active day lives. The results

are eerie, evocative, and strangely metaphysical, deconstructing and reinventing the sort of hidden, mundane worlds we normally never give a second glance.

**Stephen Laphisophon's** installation incorporates numbers of indicators of insubstantiality and change; right down to the fact you can't even see the elements, hidden in a closed, antiquated box, that are listed on a document nailed to the wall. Other texts on the wall have been mailed out to persons unknown to us, adulterated or responded to in results we won't see, and then deposited into the box throughout the show's run. The texts given us (fragments of Holderlin and Heidegger, and a telegram expressing condolences for a death, on yellowed paper itself not long for this world) add up to more poignant uncertainty, and we're left feeling shimmeringly, poetically unsure of our footing here.

**Chris Hefner's** films literally shimmer and flicker, generating an automatic nostalgia, much like Joseph Cornell's using prints and objects from decades before their incorporation into his boxes. Hefner gives us boxes made of light, containing wispy voices and story book images, that like a good fairy tale, border on the menacing, but seduce with mystery and complex romanticism. His prints condense the same feelings into static form, with head shots of 1930's beauty queens whose images are in various states of degradation or dissolution. The metaphor is clear.

**Kana Harada's** Japanese heritage is apparent in her sculptures and reliefs, as is their spiritual lineage. Her titles often reference Buddhist themes, and the works are profound physical expressions of deep personal insights, while remaining whimsical and light – quite literally. Most of her recent work has been constructed of a feather-weight plastic foam, carefully cut and assembled. This is the case in her hand-mirror frames, with empty centers that simply reflect space. Her “birdcages” are in actuality three dimensional mandalas, arranged to help usher the mind into more contemplative states.

**Daniel Subkoff's** drawings are also informed by his deep familiarity with yoga and meditation. Like Harada's sculptures, they're reminiscent of the mandala, but of a purely intuitive sort, with something of a sci-fi twist. You get the sense that in time, deeper messages might emanate from their webs and skeins of loops and fine-point garlands.

**Cameron Robbins** is an Australian sculptor. He builds machines that look like Victorian scientific apparatus, though beautiful in themselves, are built to record the motions of wind, water, earth and sky. Labeled matter-of-factly with the location, date, and time of creation (“Salmon Point, South Australia; noon, seven hours”) the drawings take you on a virtual walkabout, and you find evidence of not only the wind-manipulated stylus, but how the paper was torn by violent gusts, and how rain, bugs, and birds have spattered the drawing's surface.

**Devin King's** multimedia installation is a mash up of high and low, embracing art, film, philosophy, and architecture. Incorporating sound, text, and photographs, the conversation includes Kierkegaard and Sergio Leone, with King having them meet in a remodeled split level to a highly manipulated, ambient soundtrack.

**Rinpa Eshidan** is a collective of five young artists based in Tokyo. In time-elapsed films they document collaborative art events that often spill into highly visible public environments. Incorporating elements of graffiti, traditional Japanese painting, ceramics, sculpture, video and performance, they convey a sense of exuberant freedom from prevalent notions of art world “respectability” or success, and its outmoded emphasis on the autonomous, sacred gesture of “genius”.