

66% WATER Carl Cheng

The relationship of man to nature from our cultural perspective has been misunderstood for many centuries. We have been educated to believe that man is the eternal destroyer of nature and that we are constantly trying to control it. At a time when the human population, like a virus, threatens to engulf every other species, we need to seek a new concept that does not place ourselves at the top and everything else below us. Even if we destroy everything in the world, including ourselves, nature will continue to evolve. A small earthquake and we're helpless. It is arrogant for us to assume such an inflated view of ourselves.

My art work results from an attitude that says we humans are not adversaries of nature, but are a part of nature. Art and science are two aspects of human nature which incorporate our ideas, beliefs, discoveries, and inventions. For the past 21 years I have been making art projects and installations and sharing with the public the illumination of our true integration with nature.

-- Carl Cheng

66% Water refers to the proportion of water, by weight, in the human body (though it varies according to the age and chemistry of individuals). It is also the area of the downstairs floor of Capp Street Project/AVT which is covered by a reflecting pool. It also refers to Carl Cheng's organic approach to the site. His theory evolves from his creative activity. He works in an intuitive manner, linking his visual and aural effects to the support systems of the building - water, electricity, lighting, sewage. In effect, he has transformed a static structure into an organic machine which lives and moves and changes within the space.

There is a natural progression in the issue of mechanical control in Carl's work. As the machinery has become more complex, the controls, the valves, the sequence of manipulation has become more elaborate. In earlier pieces, the audience watched a different universe of Carl's making from a distance. In this installation the lights and pumps are manipulated by computer program, and we, the audience, stand within the controlled space. In many ways the subject of this installation is not the environment created by Carl, but the random thoughts and reactions of the audience. It is up to us to participate subjectively in Carl's work, rather than simply judge the installation objectively as a phenomenon. This is an environment for contemplation, filled with many subtle touches.

While ultimately, the issue of the presence of nature in an environment manipulated by controlling machinery must be answered by the artist, it is clear that he is conceptually reversing our role as aggressors towards the natural environment. Man and his machines are viewed as part of the natural scheme, and it is our responsibility to judge whether our exploitations of the environment are destructive or are a natural component of the universe. The lesson behind his art is in teaching us to transform confrontation with nature into cooperation. It is also in giving us a means of finding and grounding ourselves within the machine environment, because this, inevitably, is the only route to our salvation as a species.

--Richard Pinegar

The schedule for Carl's residency begins with the construction of the black pool and the Room B Water Laboratory. Water as a mirror and the use of computerized dimmers to manipulate the Capp Street space will be the first phase of his investigative process of art making. In the coming weeks aspects of reflection phenomena, wave action on the water surface, and qualities of weightlessness due to virtual reflected objects suspended over the water will be added to the installation. Viewers will be able to return to see the continuing changes in the installation.

Major funding for 66% Water has been provided by the Filtridge and LEF Foundations. Special thanks to Steven Oliver, Oliver & Company. This installation was created with the dedicated and skillful contributions of Robert Catalusci, Steve Knauff, Jason Starkle, and volunteers Sleglinde de Bruin, Heather Dolin, Bryan Gammill, Cliff Hengst, Paul Kass, Abraham Leon, Krisztina Sami, and Barbara Wighman.