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Trisha Donnelly

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AUTHOR: BRIAN DROITCOUR

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Jerry Saltz wrote that Trisha Donnelly is a good artist who doesn't "mount good gallery shows." Perhaps only a public institution has the patience to let her hang her work right. In this churchlike installation, her works, as ever, are like icons—flat portals to the transcendental. A photograph of a sphinx paw that supposedly keeps grains of sand from floating into the air in *The Hand That Holds the Desert Down*, 2002; an organ with its pipes installed seemingly pointing downward, so that its music can be felt through the floor, depicted in *The Vibration Station*, 2002; and twenty-two other works are all arranged as if in an asymmetrical iconostasis. The line they create jags across one wall of the well-lit, narrow atrium. In the adjacent dim, low-ceilinged space, speakers emit haunting sound pieces, including a howling wind, a chant slowed to a rumble, and a carillon's peals from afar. The show's evocation of the sacred models the viewer's perception of the works to align it with the artist's own.

The atmosphere of reverence discourages discussion of the irreverent thread in Donnelly's work, but to ignore it would be misleading. After all, her art does not construct an actual system of belief. Rather, it suggests that she, like a synesthetic, is endowed with an uncanny cognition, only instead of blending colors and pitches, she sees eternity in oddities. In the last century, nondenominational transcendent art was austere abstraction, and while Donnelly's works can't always be called figurative—her rejection of mimesis is partly what makes them like icons—they include some plain, earthy elements that allow for ambiguous humor. There is the wide-brimmed, ribboned hat floating in *Study for Danang*, 2005; the pea-green hue of the velvety fabric in *Untitled*, 2007; the grumpy man glimpsed on his balcony in *Untitled*, 2005. Oddly enough, the exhibition best achieves its sacral effect when approached through the back door—not the well-marked entrance that opens onto a sidelong view of the pieces, but one that connects the dim rear chamber to the next gallery. The viewer can pass from empty darkness into the luminous row of artworks only by going the wrong way.



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