

# REVIEWS

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## ART

ROBERT ATKINS

**RICHARD ALPERT:** *Time Expands to Fill the Mold*, at La Marmelle, 70 12th St., SF, through April 25.

*Time Expands to Fill the Mold* is a sort of mini-retrospective for San Franciscan Richard Alpert's conceptual performance-making of the last six years. (Far more extensive, by the way, than the token representation accorded him in the SF Museum of Modern Art's recent *Space/Time/Sound* show.) Two early (1974) performances hold the key to Alpert's almost scientific brand of sensibility as inquiry.

For *Probe*, part of the *South of the Slot* series, Alpert kicked a ball against a wall, measuring space both by the energy expended and the intensity of the sound produced. He performed this athletic feat in a half-illuminated, half-darkened space. Starting from the unlit back wall, he began to kick the ball. As he moved closer to the other wall, the sound grew louder and more focused. As he retreated toward the back wall, the sound became more diffused and the energy required greater.

In *Strategy for a Dance*, performed at UC Davis, he pummeled a lead ball swinging from the ceiling with a pointy mallet until it disintegrated. During this ritualistic action, chalk words describing the essence of the work in mystery-thriller terms (the product as the unraveling of the process), and inscribed on the gallery floor, were obliterated. Again, the ever-changing relationship of energy expended to the intensity of sound produced was the ostensible focus.

The intriguing artifacts—lead chips, mallet—from this long, process-oriented performance are exhibited, as is a videotape. Alpert is a skilled video artist, and I suspect the taped version is more engaging than was the performance (although I didn't see it). On tape, the sound is amplified and the viewer is taken close in or provided with balletic perspectives from above.

My suspicion stems from having seen Alpert perform live and later on tape. One would assume that the hypnotic, drawn-out experiential qualities of the performance

would be lost. Curiously, they are replaced with a sharper visual focus but augmented by wonderfully lulling high-volume audio.

Lately, Alpert's performances have grown more complex. Psychological processes complement phenomenological ones. For *Circular Route*, a performance I saw last September, at the Farm, Alpert transformed the totality of emotional processes into a strangely cerebral, almost Tantric dance. (This recently developed balance of the intuitive or the emotive and the rational suggests a mature and distinctive sensibility.)

Within a mandala-like 25-foot diameter circle were written numerous words descriptive of emotional orientation—"frustrated," "joyful," "disillusioned," etc. On a video monitor, one saw a spinning bicycle wheel on which Alpert makes rather Balinese sounding music. Teresa Dickinson simultaneously performed a swirling dance, a controlled vision of ecstasy. At the end, a long inscription beginning "emotions move from one feeling to the next in a circumferential manner" appeared on the rim of the wheel and Dickinson ever so slowly danced her way to the ground.

In person, the 18-minute piece had more conceptual appeal than performance punch. On the re-staged 18-minute tape, *Circular Route* is nothing less than extraordinary. The cacophonous sound is amplified and suggestive of Thai temple music. Visual metaphors accumulate through changing camera positions. Circular forms suggest both spiralling energy and the archetypal feminine.

About an hour's worth of short tapes, notes, objects and photo-documentation are displayed in the gallery. The viewer can even play Alpert's musical bicycle wheel and operate a World War II vintage hand generator that both energizes a light and makes its mark on a conveniently situated tabletop "canvas." *Time Expands to Fill the Mold* is a small but expansive exhibition.