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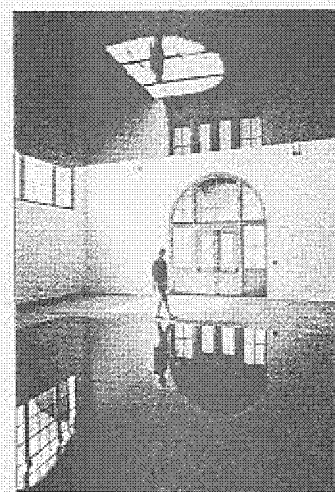
Living Color

Robert Irwin: Primaries and Secondaries

By Robert Irwin and Hugh Davies

Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 220 pages, \$65

Robert Irwin's art frequently involves controlled light and subtle wall reliefs that heighten the viewer's perceptions. Given the powerful immediacy of such work, any attempt to document it in a book faces a serious challenge: to capture something as elusive as altered perception, something conditioned entirely by its precise surroundings, something that is often barely a "thing" at all. Acutely aware of



Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow & Blue³, 2006-7, by Robert Irwin.

the difficulties, Irwin for years prohibited all photographic reproduction, describing it as a "complete contradiction." Given the limitations, this handsome catalogue manages to meet the challenge of providing a retrospective between covers about as well as could be hoped. Photographically, the book emphasizes Irwin's recent (and more physically tangible) work, while the text provides a broad overview of his long career.

The book was published in conjunction with last year's exhibition

of the same title at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. It was a rare major show for Irwin, organized by an institution with an important collection of his work and curated by Hugh Davies, who contributes to the book a survey essay as well as a chatty interview with the artist. There are many plates dedicated to recent installations—including *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow & Blue³* (2006-7), featuring giant panels painted in reflective primary colors hanging from the ceiling and lying on the floor, and *Light and Space* (2007), made principally from fluorescent fixtures—as well as a welcome selection of Irwin's pencil drawings for the architectural projects that have occupied him in recent years. The catalogue also includes a DVD of a short documentary that centers on the preparation of the show at MCASD and that reveals Irwin's earnest intelligence while avoiding hagiography.

Arguably the most valuable aspect of the book is the compilation of Irwin's writings. A brilliant and peripatetic lecturer, Irwin is not a prolific writer; on occasion, however, he has composed ambitious philosophical texts that are less about his work than about his overarching artistic vision. These texts make for rather dense reading, especially in comparison with the plain-spoken charm of Irwin's lectures, but they provide an important starting point for grasping the extent of the artist's goals (despite the surprising ab-

sence of Irwin's 1993 essay "The Hidden Structures of Art"). The selected exhibition history covers the period from 1952 to 2006—a staggeringly long period, especially for an artist whose work continues to be remarkably fresh.

—George Stolz

Subconsciousness Raising

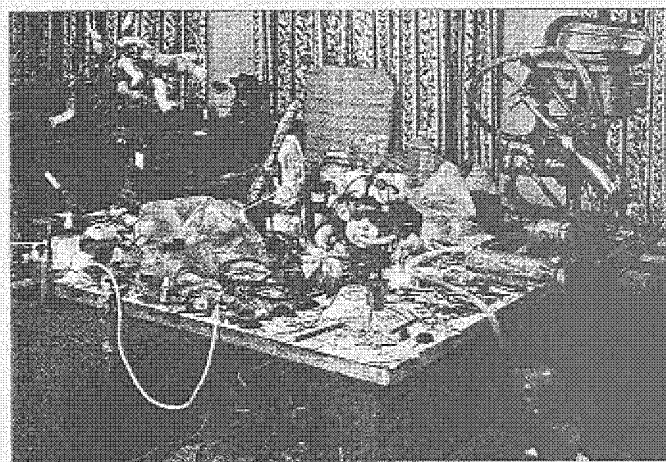
Polymorphous Perverse

By Tim Noble and Sue Webster

Other Criteria, 56 pages, \$75

Tim Noble and Sue Webster's ability to create spectacles glorifying bad taste from bits of garbage brings to mind Freud's discovery of the lust and cruelty buried in the subconscious. No wonder curator James Putnam invited them to create a site-specific installation at the Freud Museum in London. And that 2006-7 exhibition has now been documented in this artist's book, which features copious photographs along with essays by Putnam and art historian Linda Nochlin.

The term "polymorphous perversity" derives from Freud's theory that infantile sexuality finds satisfaction in all kinds of taboo stimuli, unfettered by the inhibitions of socialized adults. Noble and Webster reinvigorate this now overused term by spreading a bountiful collection of mutilated toys, taxidermied animals, artificial food, motors, tools, and fluids—including baby oil, urine, and stage blood—over a large table in the office used by Freud's daughter Anna (herself an important early practitioner of child psychoanalysis). That installation, titled *Scarlett*, was the subject of most of the book's illustrations. Ghostly obscenities, possible leftover



Tim Noble and Sue Webster's *Scarlett*, 2006, installed in Anna Freud's office.

traces from the fantasies of the bygone psychoanalyst and her patients, materialize in the decorous room usually furnished with only a couch, a chair, a loom, and a bookcase.

Sensors set off by the viewer's approach animated such mechanized bits as a doll's head in a plastic bag sucking on a bottle of yellow liquid; more doll fragments performing sexual acts; and buttocks endlessly defecating. In her essay, Nochlin revels in *Scarlett*'s "dark, silly brilliance," and this book's generous photographs bring its mayhem to life. —Elisabeth Kley

LEFT: PHILIP HILSON; CENTER: MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART SAN DIEGO; RIGHT: MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART SAN DIEGO