

**On Tamara Henderson's work *When I'm Not Around*  
A collaborative text by Michelle Lacombe and k.g. Guttman**

Tamara Henderson obviously has an interest in basic processes. In her work, things are substituted, added and, most often, things fall and accumulate or are left to succumb to gravity. Aside from discussing this in a material way that relates to basic physics, I am interested in how these sorts of processes can become metaphors or poetic substitutions in the reading of her sculptures.

Tamara's piece, *When I am Not Around* installed at articule, presents viewers with a simple interactive process (call the phone and make the snow fall on to the palm tree). The title, however, seems to point towards a more emotional space in which the fake snow falling on the tree becomes a fabricated system about longing (calling the phone), absence (not answering the phone) and forgetting (the tree being slowly covered). Evolving throughout the public's interaction during the exhibition, the piece subtly engages the audience and accumulates meaning in a very intimate way. Interestingly, this sentimental reading of the work also mirrors an affective response to the presence-absence of the artist in her work.

I was thinking about Richard Serra's verb list, (1967-68), in which he lists off the ways he manipulates materials (e.g. to curve, to lift, to continue). What I like about this well-known list is that it emphasizes the embodied presence of Serra in relationship to his materials. As with Serra, I believe that Tamara is part of a history of sculptors who are engaged with the process of making rather than the outcome, and how this tradition implies a certain presence. Her work addresses this very particular way she impacts a situation or responds to her environment, and then disappears or lingers at the periphery of the work. Her presence exists in her absence, and is amplified not only by her practice as a sculptor, but also by the way she works materially.

The physical process or systems she proposes seem to me purposely clumsy and fragile. It is this very personal and small-scale way of making work that intrigues me. There is an intimacy to the work, as if you have stumbled upon something "special" and fleeting yet familiar. This solicits a curiosity, an interaction and consideration. The work unleashes a series of guesses and a kind of fascination in the transposition of material things. In other words, *When I am Not Around* creates a playfully coded structure that invites participation with very simple means.

What strikes me most in Tamara's work is this process-based emotional simulation and its relationship to a present absence of the artist. Her work makes it really easy to avoid the concrete, rational or material answer. The combination sort of taps into this evocative space of potential that really lets my imagination and emotions roll. I easily let myself disappear. I get lost.

This text is part of a writing series by members of the gallery, reflecting on the works presented during articule's 2008-2009 programming season. This collaborative text has been produced for Tamara Henderson's window exhibition *When I'm Not Around*, presented from December 21 to January 11, 2009, and is also available as a pdf on the gallery's web site.

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