

ART

'Interiors' found behind a psychological door

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Art Critic

The title of this exhibition is "Interiors," but you must take it very broadly. It has nothing to do with living space a la glossy magazines, but rather a condition of interiority approached in six different ways by six different artists.

Vicky A. Clark, curator of the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Shadyside, where this exhibition may be seen until March 30, agrees the six artists shown present diverse readings on the theme.

Take Mark Perrott's large photographs, in the space you first encounter. You can always recognize their obsessive interest in subject matter, whether tattoos (one of his favored subjects), or, as in this case, interior photographs of the decaying Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia.

Obviously these are "interiors," each one precisely depicting some atmospheric detail — a discarded shaving brush ... a dentist's chair — all in the obvious context of the enclosed, but redundant prison.

We don't need to dwell unduly on the common photographic device of showing abandoned spaces. More interesting is the psychology of the space ... its interiority. Even if you don't know that this prison was innovatively built to provide inmates with a therapeutic solitary confinement in the early part of the 19th century, you sense something like it.

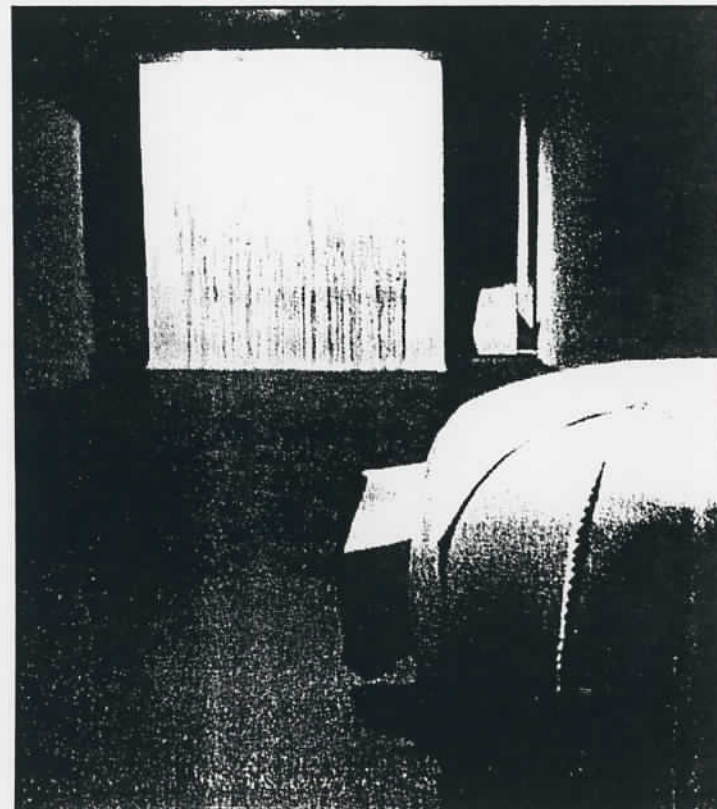
The pressure of the situation, "a mental and emotional state," as Clark observes, is more important than the formal perfection of the photographs themselves. Nonetheless, Perrot's is the "most literal" approach to the subject you are likely to find in this exhibition.

Adrienne Heinrich's beautiful installation catches you unawares. In a darkened room, one of her typical frail

ships hangs from the ceiling, and light is cast into the translucent hull of the vessel. Heinrich's installations, particularly the suspended ships with which she is currently concerned, almost invariably slip us into a meditative mode. The ship, we understand, represents hope, tentatively moving onward. But there is an auditory dimension to this work: The softly spoken voices of three African-American poets "communicate hidden or suppressed feelings and thoughts about race." Deliberately, the voices overlap and are difficult to decipher. I couldn't make out the sounds at all, and therein is the weakness of the piece (others may have better hearing).

Because of this difficulty, Clark has written, the viewer is forced to abandon traditional thinking and to transcend typical ways of looking at the issue. But I didn't do either of these things, and I didn't get the point. The sense of interiority is unquestionably supplied by the space, but it is not qualified or articulated by the sound element. A piece Heinrich worked on at a recent Three Rivers Arts Festival used sound to better effect.

Rather disturbed by fear of deafness after that installation I limped into the next, only to receive the impression that I was not only deaf, but also too old. You will gather from the title of Jennifer Charron's piece that Generation X is speaking: "'Cause I'm like way too introspective, I think." I overheard talk like that at the movies last week, waiting to get into "Star Wars." And so this multimedia installation may have had the unintended effect of making me feel out of it. What I imagine Charron is doing is identifying one aspect of the angst of her generation, placed in the context of how television affects that generation's life.



Cont'd On Page D5 Delanie Jenkins: 'Veil,' 1996

'Interiors' a mental showcase

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Although Sigmund Freud affects all our lives to some degree, he makes the feminists' blood boil. Delanie Jenkins, in an elegant installation, catches the old man at his most silly when he asserts that "women have made few contributions to the discoveries and inventions in the history of civilization."

Iain Macshell's "Bed Book 2," 1996, considers the bedroom, an intimate interior, with complex ramifications. The analogy of the book, the form of which he has adopted in earlier pieces, is vaguely present here with a video arrangement set into a bed in the installation.

One thing we can do, with Faith

Wilding's work, "Womb Room," is to ask how well it stands up to the passage of time, for it was originally shown in 1971 in Los Angeles. It does, and is an evocative feminist document. It also connotes interiority, and is as accessible as any piece in this interesting, if often nerve-wracking, exhibition.