

JOHN LeKay



Cryonic suspension dewar 1990. New Museum, New York

Q: How does the cryonic suspension work?

John LeKay: The cryonic suspension dewar, which I exhibited in 1991 at the New Museum of Contemporary Art was kind of like a camera. A cryonic suspension dewar is used to freeze something or someone in time. The difference is that a photographic image deteriorates through time and so does the paper it's on. The great thing about cryonic suspension is that in liquid nitrogen, everything stops; there is no deterioration and no decay. Time stands still in there. At 196° C, 320° F below zero, all metabolic and biochemical activity is brought to a halt. At the opening, the dewar was accompanied by a video showing the cryogenic procedure. Also present were members of a cryonics organization (including scientists with

clipboards) available to answer questions and sign up interested individuals.

My intention was for some art collector to buy the dewar so that when he/she died, they would be frozen in it. The collector would become a part of the piece, "kept in storage" for a while, and then resurrected in the future; kind of like a time machine. The way they do with art.

However in reality, it doesn't work like this because there is so much more to this than meets the eye.. The problem is, even if you do resuscitate the body, you can't resuscitate a mind that is no longer there. The chances are you will end up with the wrong mind instead. (laughs)

Q: When did you begin making artwork on this kind of subject?

In the early to mid 80s I began making artwork on the subject of Negation of Experience, Futility, Emptiness, Nothingness, Meaninglessness, Impermanence, Ethereality and Disappearance . I made two or three bodies of art work about this. I wanted to communicate the negation of self through sculptures, infinity mirrors and tactile objects. Depicting the negation of sound and sight through TV sets and others works, since I could not easily do it with words. The tactile objects were used to isolate the sense organ of touch, the same with the olfactory objects. So that one could focus on one particular sensation arising at a time.



Rose. olfactory object. 1987. rose scented deodorizer



Installation at Paula Allan gallery New York, New York. 1990

In the same show, there were perforated stainless steel olfactory objects and odor absorbers as well as metagnomic perception boxes (designed to trigger perception that is obtained from a source outside the five normal human senses), tactile boxes and metamorphic crystallizing chemical sculptures that would vanish into thin air.

I was thinking of a way to conjure up images and thoughts in people's minds without pictures or having to use one's vision. These initial pieces and my meditation practice led me to experimenting with a sensory deprivation tank piece in 1988.



Tactile objects. 1987



Odor absorber. 1987

At the Bronx Museum, I exhibited an hypnosis chamber. Inside was a reclining chair, headphones and tape machine with written instructions to turn it on. Once the participant turned the tape machine on, the tape induced them into a light state of hypnosis and implanted a post hypnotic suggestion that once they step outside of the curtain, the entire experience of listening to his voice, seeing the tape machine and sitting in the chair inside the curtain would be erased from their memory - so they re-enter again and again. This was sub-titled "negation of experience". (As in the process of rebirth).



Negation of Experience. Hypnosis chamber. 1989



Samadhi. Sensory deprivation tank interior view

Q: When did you begin experimenting with a sensory deprivation tank?

Around 1988 -1989 I purchased a sensory deprivation tank from someone in California that had worked with John Lilly, who I had been reading about. I set it up in my art studio. For five years, I conducted experiments which resulted in some deep samadhi states.

Q: How did this sensory deprivation tank work?

The samadhi tank is designed to isolate the mind and body from all known forms of external stimulation; tactile, auditory, visual and olfactory stimulants (sound, light, touch and pressure on the body are eliminated by the blackened out sound proof chamber). The effects of gravity and pressure are negated by floating horizontally in 800 lbs. of Epsom salts and

water solution. The effects of temperature to the body are eliminated by adjusting the salt solution temperature to the that of the outside body temperature which is 94.5 degrees. As a result of total deprivation, one is induced into a deep non dual state of awareness.

Q: How long did you do this for?

For 5 years from 1989 through 1994. Sometimes I would use it everyday. Usually for one or two hours and sometimes longer (even up to 6 hours).

Q: What was the intention with using the tank as an art work?

Traditional art stimulates the mind through external visual and auditory stimuli, i.e. painting, sculpture and music etc. Conversely, as an art object, the sensory deprivation tank functioned as an non dual awareness creating instrument to observe the mindscape, ones thoughts, feelings, perceptions and emotions and the internal mental movie of one's memories and hypnogogic thoughts. The intention was to make the person aware that they were in fact the art work itself.

Q: What other artworks did you make to further illustrate this?

There were many pieces. One was an 8 hour film of a turned off television screen. I then took the video tape and played it on the same television set that was turned on for 8 hours, which when played appeared as if it was still turned off.

So just looking at the TV it appeared to be off, when in fact it was playing an eight hour video. I made an entire body of work that has never been shown on this subject.



Awareness 1989. 8 hour film, TV set.



Drinking Clouds. 2002. Parabuddha.

I also created para Buddha's. Made of out crystallized gas, disappearing into nothingness for contemplation. This body of work was about impermanence, emptiness.

This was in 1995 through 2002. The Buddha head would begin to evaporate, turn into gas and this gas would get sucked into the adjacent

vitrine by circulating fans. Then it would de-materialize and re-crystallize on the other side. A literal illustration of the notion that emptiness is form, form is emptiness.

I had been communicating this sort of thing for some time; since 1987. I also had an exhibition about this called the Separation of Church and State. The pieces portrayed what happens with the separation of the mind and body, as well as the sense of being a separate person, alienation and that sort of thing. "Church" was just a metaphor for the body, and "state" was about the various states of mind in the various realms of discontent.

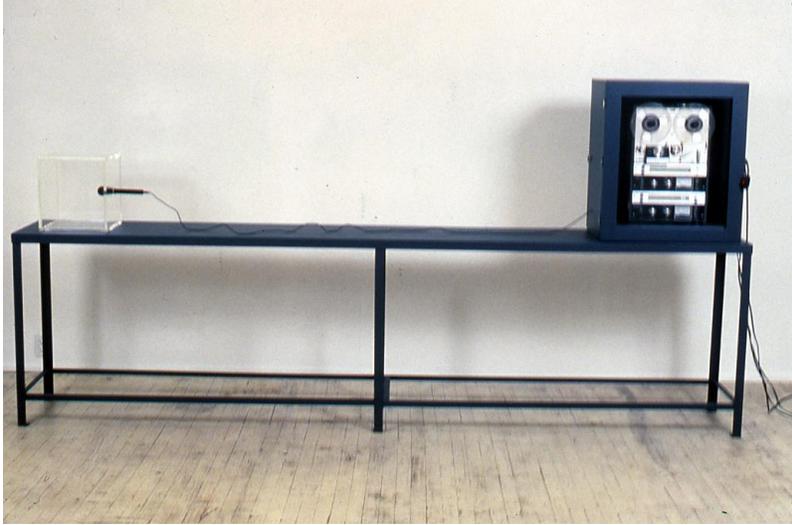
I also made a sound of silence, a now - creating eternity machine. It was a reel to reel tape machine within a soundproof box with an extension leading to a microphone, which was contained inside of a thick soundproof plexiglass box. The tape machine recorded the sound of silence inside the plexiglass box onto a perpetual tape loop; it was erasing the sound and then recording the sound and vice versa in a life cycle.

There's a point in which the erased recording and the newly created recording meet. This point is where destruction and creativity become one. A kind of metaphor for the alpha and omega. "God" the void or the trimurti (three forms in Sanskrit) is a concept in Hinduism in which the cosmic functions of creation, maintenance, and destruction are personified.

I was also thinking about time. How time and space is a man made concept of the mind. I wanted to capture this timelessness, space-lessness, nothingness, infinity, or eternity, visually inside the empty box - somehow. An eternal now machine where the past is being erased and a new thought arises, then that gets erased as well. It's about a heightened awareness.

I made about three of these. There were other objects like this as well using books and other types of objects.

In the 90s, there were many sculptures made with stones, gems, and crystals from chandeliers, jewelry and Swarovski crystals, soap, wax, clay, plaster and more.



Untitled God. (Eternal Now Machine) 1987



Abyss. 2001

In 2001. I made a piece about standing on a precipice before leaping off into the abyss. The void so to speak. That sense of climbing to the top of something and then jumping off into nothingness. Both the ladder rungs and prosthetic leg were burned with a blow torch, so there was no going

back. No climbing back down or going anywhere else, like having the rug pulled out from underneath you and going into eternal free fall.