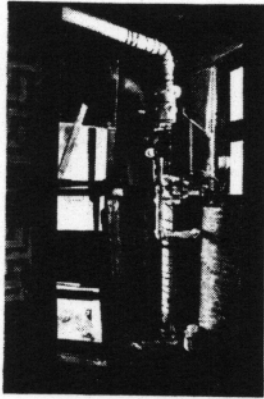


Kevin Concannon, "Pier Gustafson," *Art New England*, March 1985, p. 13.



Pier Gustafson, *Suite in Sonata Form*

Gallery Naga/Boston

**Pier Gustafson: Installation—Suite in Sonata Form**

Having walked into Pier Gustafson's *Suite in Sonata Form* expecting a sound installation, I was immediately struck by an overbearing silence around me. An installation of three basement rooms constructed entirely of heavy white paper with black markings and washes, this "suite" was based loosely on the form of a Ravel sonata to which the artist listened repeatedly while constructing the piece. And true enough to the artist's stated intentions, the suite parallels architecturally the structure of a sonata in its manipulation of ambulatory space and other "passages." This, however, is not what imbued the work with its ghostly presence—a very silent presence at that.

Viewers were encouraged to explore this dimly-lit, trompe-l'oeil fantasy with a flashlight available at the gallery desk. Moving through the rooms, one could not resist tracing the pipes along the walls and ceilings; examining the odd bits and pieces scattered around the floors; and inspecting the eerily convincing shovels, skis, and other assorted tools propped up against the walls. Ultimately each visitor determined his or her own pace, unmoved by the incidental ambulatory scheme.

I remember seeing Gustafson's work last March and leaving the gallery with the sensation that, compelling as the objects were, there was something not quite right about them. Their illusion was completely convincing. Although their monochromatic execution screamed "fake," you had to keep reminding yourself that it was only a clever forgery. The more I thought about the work, the more Kitsch it seemed; the old suitcases, trunks, and musical instruments might have been props for a vintage black and white movie.

In *Suite*, that edge of Kitsch was no longer present. The work, however, was no less disturbing. The objects resonated with the patina of old photographs. The difference here might well have been the untouched, abandoned feel of the subject portrayed. Those shovels and skis seemed to have been there forever—artifacts of another era. He is not so much trafficking in nostalgia as he is dislocating the viewer from any present reality. He traps us in a thirty-five millimeter dream of three dimensions. And the effect is less amusing than it is disquieting. *Suite* provides the necessary frame for Gustafson's work (lacking in last year's show) in both a literal and figurative sense.

Kevin Concannon