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Site into Stage: Artist Dorothy Cross at the Opera

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In 2005, I curated and wrote the catalogue for an exhibition at the McMullen Museum at Boston College *GONE: Site-specific Works by Dorothy Cross*. I have been immersed in the complexities and subtleties of Cross's work for several years. In all of her art Dorothy Cross explores the local particularities of time and place, and at the same time, inclines toward the psychic commonality of our anxieties and desires. In her site-specific projects, she brings this dual perspective to bear on three interrelated themes: the return of the repressed, the impossibility of desire, and the inevitability of loss.

Created in locations as varied as a Byzantine church in Turkey and an abandoned handball alley in Ireland, these works evoke the return of repressed histories; the limits of desire; and the haunting traces of absence and loss. Cross did not set out to preserve or recreate the sites and objects used in these installations, but to collaborate with them, and to release them, transformed, into circulation. Remarking on the fate of personal family objects used in some of her works, she explains, "I am passing them away from me, breaking the line of inheritance." By breaking this line of personal inheritance, Cross transmits to viewers the collective inheritance of a "common mortality, common love and common struggle" (Cross qtd. in Bonaventura 19).

Dorothy Cross was born in Cork, Ireland in 1956 and pursued her early technical and aesthetic training in Ireland, England, and the United States. Since the early 1980s, she has worked in a range of genres, including jewelry design, printmaking, sculpture and assemblage, stage and costume design, photography, video, and site-specific installation. Although her first solo exhibitions were in Ireland, by 1991 she was exhibiting internationally, with solo shows in major galleries in Philadelphia, New York, and London. Representing Ireland at the Venice Biennale in 1993, Cross gained wide recognition as an artist whose work is both local and global in its range of concerns as well as in its reception.¹

Cross's contribution to site-specific art practice can best be appreciated in the context of the history of that genre's re-conceptualizations of production and reception over the past three decades. In the 1960s, many artists began to move out of the museums and galleries, creating sited works that challenged the ideological principles and economic forces dominating the art world. Their goal was, in part, to "democratize art" by bringing it into the public sphere (Jacob 15). Some works were constructed for permanent installation in a particular place (Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*, 1981), others were designed to be dismantled after a given time or to disappear gradually through erosion and decay (Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed*, 1970).² Whether asserting their permanence or their ephemerality, these works resisted what some artists saw as the art institutions' deadly commodification of creativity.

Some critics herald the site-specific genre as an important shift away from the primacy of the object and the personality of the individual artist, and towards a dynamic interaction between art object, site, and viewer. These works encourage us to participate in the creative act not as detached, rational observers but as bodies moving through space in real time. Encouraged to encounter art as an integral part of lived experience, the audience becomes a collaborator in the creative process. Site-specific art enters the domain of theatre and performance.

Materialized, but never commodified, the temporary site-specific works Cross has produced since 1991 involve both production and performance, the simultaneous enactment of memorializing and dispersing. These sited works escape the immobility of the monument and the austere sterility of the relic because they do not memorialize a single past event or lost object, but rather illuminate the ongoing process of

disappearance and loss. A performative element runs throughout Cross's art, from early gallery installations such as *Ebb*, which the artist describes as a kind of "theatre piece" completed by the audience, to a site-specific installation at Niagara Falls which constitutes a "theatre of the river," to her most recent and most theatrical site-specific projects, her operatic stagings of *Chiasm* and *Stabat Mater*. In these two projects Cross realizes most thoroughly the transformation of site into stage.

***Chiasm* (1999)**

Chiasm has three distinct but intricately interwoven layers. Its foundation is a pair of abandoned, open-air handball alleys in Galway, Ireland. Onto their cement floors Cross projects video images of a limestone tidal pool filmed on the Aran Islands. These adjoining courts, transformed by the projection of the pool and divided by a cement wall, provide the stage on which a tenor and a soprano sing fragments from ten romantic operas, including such classic love tragedies as Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*, Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, and Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*.³ The three repeated cycles that make up each full performance of *Chiasm* were staged for only two nights in May 1999.

After the design for this piece had been completed, Cross was introduced to a philosophical concept from the writings of Merleau-Ponty that would become its title. In philosophy, and specifically in the late work of Merleau-Ponty, chiasm denotes a complex mode of relationality, an intimate encounter of the visible and the invisible, subject and world, subject and other. Although Cross was not initially inspired by Merleau-Ponty's philosophical elaboration of being in chiasm, the striking affinities between their ways of thinking provide a fruitful starting point for an analysis of this piece.

Deviating from the hierarchical structures of traditional Western metaphysics, Merleau-Ponty turns to chiasm as an effect of intertwining, intersection, and inversion in which each element nevertheless retains its alterity. He envisions the relationship between the perceiving subject and the sensible/visible world, between seeing and touching, and between the subject and the other as an exchange in which "each borrows from the other . . . encroaches upon the other, intersects with the other, is in chiasm with the other" (1968, 261) without losing itself. As nature and culture, myth and history, seer and seen are brought into intimate encounter, Merleau-Ponty argues, all binary oppositions are thrown off balance, every defining barrier breached. Between body and world "there is a relation that is one of embrace. . . . And between these two . . . there is not a frontier, but a contact surface" (1968, 271). From that contact surface everything radiates outward in a kind of Derridean dissemination. The temporary aspect of Cross's site-specific art, and particularly of a performance piece like *Chiasm*, enacts most poignantly the artist's willingness to be dispossessed—of permanence, of identity, of mastery, and of the satisfaction of desire.

For Cross, as for Merleau-Ponty, what shows itself in chiasm is the unconscious; Merleau-Ponty makes these unconscious effects visible (or visualizable) in his description of chiasm as a complex landscape, a "topological space as a model of being" (1968, 210). In his philosophical system, each subject constitutes a "landscape" that participates with "other landscapes," caressing and interpenetrating each other: "[these] landscapes interweave, their actions and their passions fit together exactly" with "an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand" (1968, 140-41, 142, 130-31). In her version of chiasm, Cross enhances this sensual and erotic aspect of Merleau-Ponty's geographical metaphor.

Chiasmic encounters occur in Cross's piece in several different ways. The *site* of the installation weaves together handball courts, tidal pool, and operatic stage; at the level of *discourse*, the artist's arrangement of libretto fragments dramatizes the fertility of unexpected juxtapositions; and in the live *performance* of *Chiasm*, the audience provides the final element of this intricate construction, as viewers are brought into an intimate encounter with site, image, and text.

The Site: neither here nor there

Catherine Belsey argues that one cannot "tell the truth of desire Desire can neither be seen nor shown [nor] put on display." Unless, she adds, it finds a form at once "non-systematic, untheorized, elliptical, incomplete, uncertain . . . and in all kinds of ways *neither here nor there*" (71). The complexly layered stage of *Chiasm* provides just such an uncertain ground. Within the genre of site-specific art, this

piece creates what James Meyer calls a "functional site," "a process, an operation occurring between sites . . . a palimpsest of text, photographs and video . . . a temporary thing, a movement"(25). In Cross's piece, handball courts, tidal pool projection, and the various settings evoked by the operatic fragments leave viewers neither here nor there or simultaneously here and there. These destabilizing spatial effects provide uncertain but fertile ground for an exploration of desire.

The individual layers of *Chiasm* are caught up in multiple networks of unconscious associations, ideological overlays, and the sedimentations of lived history. The Irish landscape has long been recognized for its archaeological richness, from ancient standing stones to more modern ruins—from deserted famine cottages to abandoned handball courts. These courts and hundreds like them were built by the Gaelic Athletic Association around the countryside in the early decades of the twentieth century. In the program of cultural revival, handball was promoted as one of three national Gaelic sports. The surviving alleys are viewed by some with nostalgia, as "desolate and deserted . . . relics of a different age" (Healy 63). These abandoned courts provide an occasion for lamenting the advent of modernity in general: "Handball, like so much else in life, has moved on, taking a step indoors into warmth, comfort and sophistication" (63). Other accounts, however, read in the courts' emptiness a testimony to the impact of political violence, famine, and economic disasters that led to massive migration to cities and abroad. While they once stood "at or beyond the edge of settlements," "serving the casual needs of marginalised or disaffected youths," the growing silence of these alleys "connote[s] young men on the move with their cardboard suitcases" (O'Connor 26). Cross herself never loses sight of the historicity of the courts—and that historicity includes their association with past conflicts (which were simultaneously athletic and political), their present condition as beautifully weathered surface and form, and even their potential for future transformations.

Unlike the Stone Age or early Christian ruins that mark the Irish landscape, the handball alleys are not likely to be preserved by the heritage industry. They are too mundane to be narrated or reenacted as legendary history (like the megalithic New Grange tomb), and too austere to be commodified as picturesque kitsch (like the thatched cottage). This uncertain status of the modern "outmoded"⁴ drew Cross to the handball alleys, just as the Surrealists were drawn to the Paris arcades—as "spatial allegories of temporal crossing or historical change" (Hansen 194). Having outlived its original function, the handball site becomes open to reincarnation.

Cross describes the courts as "modernist sculptures, beautiful empty arenas" one might happen upon unexpectedly in rural areas, on the margins of towns and villages. Viewed as aesthetic objects, the courts have the same beauty found in early sculptures by Richard Serra, Donald Judd, or Sol LeWitt. Art critics compare the imposing minimalist sculptures by these artists to ancient monuments like Stonehenge or, bringing us almost full circle, to ancient Toltec ritual ballcourts (Krauss 1985, 279). Cross's handball alleys retain, in latency, all of these associations: the history of Irish handball courts of the early twentieth century, of American sculpture of the 1960s and 1970s, and of ancient stone monoliths from around the world.

The courts are not only a site of temporal chiasm—as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "Past and Present *Ineinander*" (1968, 268)—but also of the spatial interpenetration of nature and culture. In the "expanded field" of modernist sculpture, Rosalind Krauss recognizes a breakdown of traditional categories; defying the conventional definition of sculpture as that which is neither landscape nor architecture, these minimalist sited works are "*both* landscape and architecture"(1985, 284). Although Cross perceives the courts' minimalist beauty through a modernist lens, she also departs from that tradition. Whereas Serra or Smithson erected man-made structures in the natural landscape, Cross finds an artificial structure already situated in the landscape and projects onto its surface the displaced image of a stunning natural phenomenon—the Aran Island tidal pool.

Handball courts and tidal pool come together not just as sites but as citations, the courts referring to a particular period in Irish history, the pool calling up the mythologized geography of the Aran Islands. Although it is metonymically connected to that larger landscape and its myths, this particular tidal pool, named Poll na bPéist, or the Worm's Hole, is unique in its *resistance* to being incorporated into any

legend. Remote and relatively inaccessible, such tidal pools rarely appear in the popular representations of Western Ireland that have coalesced into a set of touristic and ideological stereotypes.

The peculiar structure of the Worm's Hole makes it too disorienting and ambiguous to be circulated as an icon or commodity. The history of its geological formation constitutes a chiasmic inversion, a crossing over of the relationship of land and sea. Over time, the collision of the surrounding sea against the rocks carved out a subterranean vault beneath the cliffs. When its roof eventually collapsed, a vast limestone pool was created above, and within its perfect rectangle the restless tides are now contained, calm or turbulent at the whim of the weather.

Structurally, *Chiasm* is an incarnation of what Merleau-Ponty describes as a "relation with being [that] is *simultaneously* a taking and a being taken, the hold is held" (1968, 266). Water surrounds or holds the island; the island, in turn, captures and contains the tides. Projected onto the floor of the handball courts, the image of the pool is contained within cement walls, and yet it seems to be "continually moving, . . . surge and calm" ("*Chiasm: AP*"). In *Chiasm* the holding is never final, for the constant motion of the tidal waters seems to dissolve the solidity of the courts. Cross mirrors the video so that a doubled image of the limestone pool (one projected onto each court) rotates from the axis of the dividing wall—as if the tidal waters have set the surrounding stone and cement in motion. The accelerated speed of modernization that produces outmoded ruins like the handball alleys in just a few decades is written over in this cinematic palimpsest by the slower, cyclical time of archaic nature.

Cross's kaleidoscopic film, particularly in those parts of the cycle where the singers are not present on "stage," creates a similar disorientation, occasionally suggesting giant granite bones parting to expose the blue pool within, then closing up again in silent slow pulsations. Cross herself observes that the tidal pools superimposed onto the courts resemble two watery graves, the dividing wall a skeletal armature. In her incorporation of the Worm's Hole into *Chiasm* she preserves both its geometrical austerity—its containment of the sea's power—and its haunting evocation of the hidden workings of desire and the death drive.

On this stage where rock and sea embrace, where pool and court are intertwined, Cross creates her own version of a theatre of desire.

The Sound: giving voice to desire

By adding music and words to this piece Cross transforms *Chiasm* into a discursive as well as a visual site. To the palimpsest of handball alley and tidal pool projection Cross adds the final element of operatic performance. The operatic libretto, where extremes of passion are given narrative form and harmonious order, provides Cross with the perfect discourse for her theatre of desire. Belsey observes that although "desire is more voluble than ever before" in twentieth century literature (76), our postmodern culture lacks the codes and conventions to represent the dilemma of the lover. Some contemporary artists and writers look back, as does Cross, to the operatic tradition for an amatory discourse that gives expression to the paradoxical nature of desire as wounded lack and extravagant excess. Opera, Cross observes, arises from the human need to represent love, passion, and loss; her collage of fragments from operas spanning three centuries reveals the constancy and universality of that need.

Cross had already worked in opera before mounting *Chiasm*, most notably in designing sets and costumes for a production of Handel's *Tamerlano* in 1997. For that opera, Cross clothed the singers in animal skins and created a steel wall on the stage, the costumes concretizing the primal vitality of the drives and the set embodying the impossibility of any direct encounter in the symbolic. Even as she embraces the operatic, however, Cross undermines and complicates its effects. Everything that constitutes romantic opera as conventionalized spectacle—its reassuringly familiar images and codes—is unsettled in her theatre of desire.⁵ The confusion of space and fracturing of narrative in *Chiasm* put such shattering on display, producing not a spectacle that hides loss, but the spectacle of loss itself. Whereas opera's narratives shape and contain passion, Cross's libretto-collage fractures continuity; stories interrupt each other, events blur into memory, memories dissolve into amnesia and pure sound. Just as courts and tidal

pool never quite come to rest in perfect alignment, the efforts of the characters, performers, and audience to hold on to any narrative clarity about the present or the past are repeatedly undone.

In traditional opera, the orchestral accompaniment surrounds, soothes, and aestheticizes even the starkest expression of loneliness and despair. As Wayne Koestenbaum points out, when Tatyana describes how desolate she would be without Eugene Onegin, the orchestra embraces her: "Tatyana declares her solitude but the orchestra proves her wrong (when she sings 'I am alone' *she is not alone*, an orchestra surrounds her with corroboration and blossoming" (230). By contrast, in *Chiasm* the fractured libretto is "divorced from the orchestral music," the voices "raw and vulnerable," "shattered" ("*Chiasm*: AP").

Chiasm makes visible and audible what some feminist theorists call the semiotic chora, where energies are traced back to primal rhythm, gesture, and movement, into "[m]usic . . . preliminary to meaning" (Irigaray 1993, 168). The rhythmic music of the drives that emerges in the "raw corporeality" of language (Oliver 1993, 105) can be heard in the operatic voices in *Chiasm*, vibrating with bodily materiality and mediated meaning. As Catherine Clément points out, "language . . . always keeps to the shadows" in opera, either distorted by the style of musical delivery or estranged in some foreign language (12, 9). Cross multiplies that estrangement by producing a Babel of five different languages, a breakdown in the conventions of communication that suggests the impossibility of desire and its satisfaction.

Chiasm's textual collage dramatizes how love propels us toward language, how desire demands expression; yet words seem barely adequate to the task. Lovers' speech dissolves into sweet but empty murmurings, and at the extremes of love's suffering, it escapes into madness and nonsense. In opera, Clément observes, "words are strung together for the pleasure of an ear that is finally released from meaning" (17). Cross similarly describes the operatic fragments in *Chiasm* as joined together "like a string of pearls" (PN), their impact more sculptural than referential or expressive.

The visual chiasm of real and virtual space in Cross's piece reappears at the level of sound in the intertwining of words and music, song and singer's body. Koestenbaum finds this merging typical of all operatic performance, where words and music come together like the lovers in Aristophanes' myth, seeking in their union the recovery of a lost original wholeness (178-9). Although in opera "language seeks its shadow-bride in music, and music crosses Lethe to find its echo in language" (178), neither quest succeeds. Operas are "works of mourning" (178), and the reunion of lovers is most often exposed as an impossible dream.

In opera, as Clément observes, the characters are "no more than little symbolic figures . . . tiny actors." The encounters we witness on stage do not occur at the level of these insignificant figures, but at a more primary level, where "nature and culture seek, thwart, and marry one another—part and tear one another apart" (20). In the singers' operatic performance in *Chiasm*, music and words similarly approximate a potentially annihilating embrace that is never consummated. The fractured form of *Chiasm's* libretto was inspired, in part, by the haunting quality Cross heard in the voices of opera singers practicing random phrases alone in their dressing rooms before a performance. In *Chiasm*, she places each singer in a solitary court, framing each voice in space, isolated from all meaning, narrative, relation.

The shifting juxtapositions of the collage text, the random blocking of the singers' movements within their courts, the open seating that encourages viewers to watch the repeated cycles of the performance from several different points of view—all of these effects foreground the effects of chance, misunderstanding, and accident. *Chiasm* enacts this theatre of chance on a physical level, as the singers wander in fluid space, approaching and receding from the dividing wall like the tide itself. At times, miraculously, they come together there, each tentatively extending a hand to touch the cement surface, each blind to how close or far the other might be. The operas from which *Chiasm's* libretto is derived are full of lamentations over missed chances and bad timing, painful reminders of the impossibility of desire.

Cross's work reminds us, however, that despite love's vulnerability to the effects of chance, there is also choice, making decisions, taking sides. The sad tales of these operas are well known, their course towards disaster irreversible. But there is also the choice to engage repeatedly with that fate; again and again, lovers choose to hurl themselves down the slippery slope. Hearing the reckless courage in the arias of

tragic heroines ready to die for love, Clément declares with admiration, "the act of falling, the final gesture, is theirs"(22).

Determined by both chance and choice, desire shows itself in *Chiasm* in the encounter of handball alleys and tidal pool, in the repeated cycles of each performance, and above all in the weaving together of textual fragments. Unmoored from the specifics of plot, character, and setting, the libretto is disrupted by sudden shifts that enact the unpredictable nature of desire, consistent only in its inconsistency. The extremes of desire are expressed in metaphors evoking the fire of newly discovered passion and the icy despair of betrayal. Cross's selections are often provocatively paired, the "cradle of this fatal love" with the "grave . . . my wedding bed" [R/J]); "I love you" and "All is over between us" sung almost in the same breath (EO, C). The libretto's confusion echoes the confusions of love itself. In the grips of the disorienting effects of desire, one lover frantically seeks his bearings: "What shall lost Aeneas do?" (D/A), while another luxuriously gives in to those unsettling effects, declaring, "[love's] intensity disturbs my very being" (R/J).

The viewers of *Chiasm* experience a similar confusion as the fractured text transports them without warning from language to language and from place to place. The literal or metaphorical places in which the lovers are situated are often sites of displacement, foreign lands to which they have been abandoned or exiled: an unidentified "desolate plain" or "arid waste" (ML), "wasteland," "tomb," (R/J), or "prison"(C). Ariadne's plight is exemplary: she finds herself on an isolated island with her homeland in view, but always out of reach. The theme of exile, which has particular resonance for Irish cultural identity, is universalized in *Chiasm* as the pain of all insatiable longings. As Freud argues, all love is a form of "homesickness," a longing for the lost perfect union of maternal love that never existed except in fantasy (1919 245). The place of desire, then, is uncannily familiar and strange, like the palimpsest of cement court and spinning tidal pool.

On that uncertain ground, the lovers deliver their solos in separate courts, occasionally transcending their isolation in unexpected and glorious duets. The classical poetic figure for such perfect union is chiasmus—a rhetorical form that reflects the perfect mirroring of the lovers' hearts. This trope, in which two become one in love, finds expression in the opening lines of *Chiasm*, in which Ariadne describes the ideal of two lovers merged into one identity: "There was a thing of beauty called Theseus/Ariadne that walked in light and rejoiced in life" (A/N).

In *Chiasm*, the lovers often realize their mutuality in self-sacrifice and self-annihilation: Romeo and Juliet, for example, are each eager to take on the burden of sin for the other; Des Grieux and Manon share their willing enslavement in "chains of love," simultaneously demanding: "Yield to me" and declaring "I am yours" (ML). Ironically, these lovers are joined together most intimately when they commiserate on the "sweet sorrow" of parting (R/J). When the frustrated lovers from *Eugene Onegin* sing in duet from opposite sides of the wall, "So close, So close," their situation is given a stark architectural literalness. In this fragmented libretto such dramatic moments are never resolved in the completion of a plot; *Chiasm's* score offers only repetition, ending with the same two solos with which it began. This final fragment is the only place in the libretto where Cross manipulates the original music, creating a new duet from solos from two different operas.

In the opening sequence of *Chiasm*, the abandoned Ariadne mourns the loss of a perfect union now no more than a memory; this solo is followed by Des Grieux expressing his amazement at the first sight of his beloved: "A maiden like this I have never beheld" (ML). The loss of love and its first blossoming are thus strangely reversed in order; love is lost even before it begins. The final duet of *Chiasm* reprises this opening sequence, but with a difference: the death and birth of love are now expressed simultaneously and in a harmonious duet, as if to say that love never dies, it is always just beginning again. The duet seems the very triumph of love; the voices of man and woman are joined not just across the cement wall, but across different plots and languages.

Or is this triumph a mere delusion? The singers, after all, remain in their solitary courts, on opposite sides of that undeniable wall. In her original proposal for the *Chiasm* project, Cross cites the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe, finding there the precedent of a "cruel wall" that prevents intimacy of embrace, but allows the

lovers the "privilege of transmitting love words" through a tiny opening between its stones. The wall in *Chiasm* lacks such a tantalizing aperture, but as Pyramus and Thisbe's experience proves, the obstruction or repression of desire only intensifies its fire: "the fire burned more intensely for being covered up" (Bullfinch 25). In acknowledging and incorporating the limits of desire, *Chiasm* also heightens its impact; the wall stands in for the structure of the symbolic order, for words that mediate but never satisfy desire.

With the wall Cross materializes the limits that constrain all desire, particularly the limits of our knowledge of the other. Des Grieux pleads across the cement wall, "See me, See me" (ML), but the lovers in *Chiasm* remain blind to each other in spite of their movements within the same projected landscape. Although these characters' voices temporarily come together in glorious duets within the audience's hearing, they meet only as disembodied voices. *Chiasm* performs the impossibility of desire, its entrapment in a quest for what is lost and will always remain just out of reach.

Stabat Mater (2004)

Julia Kristeva suggests that we look to art for its healing power, for the "sublimatory hold [it offers] over the lost Thing" (1989, 97). An artist like Dorothy Cross, who is committed to dispossession and transmission, relinquishes that hold when the work is given over to the audience for completion. Cross continues, with each new work, to "remake nothingness better than it was . . . here and now and forever, for the sake of someone else" (99). This mediating aspect of Cross's art is evident in all of her sited works, but it is realized with striking power and beauty in her most recent site-specific project, *Stabat Mater*. This multi-media performance piece bears witness to what is gone and keeps faith with what continues.

Off the western coast of Ireland, on the island of Valentia, a huge cave dug out of the side of a mountain is presided over by a statue of the Virgin Mary. Here, for three nights in late August 2004, a small baroque ensemble and two singers perform the eighteenth-century sacred music of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* for an audience assembled outside the cave, huddled together against the cold and rain. The history embedded in this site recalls the slate mining industry that flourished on Valentia in the nineteenth century, providing slate for London's Houses of Parliament and for the Paris Opera House. A major collapse of the stone vault closed the mine in 1911, and a statue of the Virgin Mary was later installed in a high crevice in honor of the dead and surviving mine workers. The "Grotto" has become an attraction for tourists visiting the region, and serves occasionally as a pilgrimage site where mass is performed. The slate industry on Valentia was reactivated in 1998, and the cave is once again a working industrial quarry.

This already hybridized location, where historical memorial, religious shrine, and industrial site converge, is further transformed by Cross into a Wagnerian stage set, its arched cathedral-like ceiling suggesting an archetypal and primal space. This mysterious opening into the earth is inhabited, anachronistically, by a modern structure installed by the artist—a large metal scaffolding supporting a video screen that can be moved along tracks running from the front to the back of the cave. The musical performance takes place in front of the screen, which displays a still close-up of a singer's open mouth. After the final "Amen," the performers wander back into the dark recesses of the cave, and the screen moves forward to the outer edge of the cave's mouth.

The lingering echo of the singers' voices is cut short as the video screen and soundtrack suddenly spring to life with the chaos and cacophony of industrial machinery digging, cutting, and polishing stone. The austere intensity of the *Stabat* performance is drowned out by the no less awesome power of machines and men at work. The video details not only the industrial production now brought back into operation, but also the natural surroundings. Rain sweeps over workers, sparse vegetation, and the Virgin Mary alike. Occasionally the video cuts from these scenes back to the singing mouth; straining, one can just hear (or imagine one hears) faint sounds of that pure soprano persisting even in such inhospitable circumstances. The camera travels inward to the cave's hidden depths where the singers sit by an internal pool, evocatively lit from below, a space of quiet contemplation surviving within the industrial clamor.

These are the productive encounters Cross loves: of ancient and modern, inside and outside, darkness and illumination, noise and silence, industry and art, performers and viewers.

The image of the hole, which appears so often in Cross's work to mark absence and loss, looms large here as the gaping mouth of the cave. Yet that void has been transformed into the frame of a precious spectacle in which loss is not denied but set off like a jewel. Cross originally thought of using the cave as the setting for a performance of *Orfeo*; the poet-singer's descent to the underworld to retrieve his beloved Euridice would emphasize the role of art as mediating between life and death, art coaxing life out of the void. The final decision to stage *Stabat Mater* in the cave offers an experience of mediation that is at once more intimate and more public. The young Pergolesi, dying in monastic isolation, set to music this plea to the Virgin Mary to make one feel, as she feels it, the intensity of the Passion—a plea to be able to join in her mourning. In the language of the libretto, such communal suffering gathers Christ, Mary, and the faithful around the fertile wound that transforms shared suffering into a fountain of love, *dolorosa* into *fons amoris*.

Cross's staging of *Stabat Mater* gathers audience and performers together around a similarly fertile void where mediation is performed not by the Virgin Mary, but by the chiasmic intertwining of nature and industry, of music and visual image, of art and performance. In this complex and uncertain space where viewers find themselves simultaneously exposed and sheltered, Dorothy Cross generates an art of ritual, endurance, risk, and stunning reward.

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¹ Cross also participated by invitation in the *Edge Biennial* in London and Madrid (1992), the *Istanbul Biennial* (1997), and the *Liverpool Biennale* (1999). Her work is in the permanent collections of the Tate Modern in London, the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, and other public collections in Ireland, the U.S., and Europe.

² Ironically, *Tilted Arc* was eventually removed from its "permanent" site after great controversy, and Smithsonian's *Partially Buried Woodshed*, which was intended to "disintegrate naturally," was "declared an eyesore . . . [and] bulldozed" (Wallis 97). The remains of the installation were carefully excavated by artist Renée Green over twenty years later.

³ Textual citations from *Romeo and Juliet* (R/J), *Manon Lescaut* (ML) and *Eugene Onegin* (EO) are taken from the program notes of *Chiasm*. The other operas used in *Chiasm* are: *Ariadne auf Naxos* (AN), Strauss (1912), *Dido and Aeneas* (D/A), Purcell (1689); *Orfeo ed Euridice* (O/E), Gluck (1762); *Carmen* (C), Bizet (1875); *Les Troyens* (LT), Berlioz (1890); *L'Orfeo*, Monteverdi (1607); *Pêcheurs de Perles* (PP); Bizet (1863); and *Otello* (O), Verdi (1887). Quotations from Cross's comments in the program notes of *Chiasm* will appear in the main text as PN; quotations from the artist's proposal for the project will appear as "Chiasm: AP." The full text of *Chiasm's* libretto appears in the Appendix to this volume.

⁴ See Foster on "Outmoded Spaces" (1993, 157-91).

⁵ Hal Foster has argued that conventional spectacle denies loss by projecting "fetishistic images" (1985, 83) that represent a comforting totality that hides the shattering of the subject by desire and death. See also Bersani (51-79) and Barthes (1985a, 302-3).