



Art: *New York Earth Room*

Site: Second floor, industrial building,

Place: Dia Gallery, SoHo

Location: New York, NY

Artist: Walter De Maria



diaart.org

Here is a reversal of the usual premise of a structure in nature – instead, nature is inside a manmade structure. The Earth Room is, literally, a vast room filled about two feet high with dirt: black, rich dirt. Aside from being completely surprising in the scope and scale of it, the smell and color are other notable aspects to the sensory experience of this installation. You inhale it and feel its humidity as you start up the narrow staircase that leads to the gallery, the intensity building with the ascent.

Its only view is through a doorway with a glass shield from the floor to about knee height. Beyond that glass, the earth appears to go on out to the horizon. There is nothing but brown below and white above; banks of windows bring in natural light at opposite ends of the room. It is like some giant incubator or petrie dish. It is minimal but it is lush, the burnt umber color has a depth and quality of silk velvet, a texture of powdered pigment or pure cacao. It is powerful and awesome, engendering contemplative silence once you get over the mind-bogglingness of its situation.

A field of the same dirt would make no impression. The context is key here: inside/outside, nature/structure, light/dark, above/below, real/unreal. Mr. De Maria loves to play with your mind and your perceptions and, in

this case, your senses. There is a voluptuousness about this simple substance, the precious stuff that we inhabit and that we require for sustenance. The earth we see in this room is not sustaining us physically but, put into this context, creating a precious thing of beauty, it is sustaining us in other ways. It results in that same compulsion to roll around in it as one would experience in a pristine fallen snow or a spring meadow, a sense of wanting to be in and of it – a life response.

But it sits here, encapsulated, confined, entombed, mummified, like the last earth on earth. It is basic, and it is deep.

Impact:

- Context/contrast
 - Scale
 - Smell
- Conceptual
 - Color
 - Minimal

Art-to-Site Rating: High

View Date: June 2008

