

'Wall'

A performance by Naheed Raza at

Slade Research Centre
Woburn Square
London WC1H 0AB

Monday 3rd July-4th August 2006
Open daily 9.30am- 4.30pm (Closed weekends)

Supported by Istock Brick Manufacturers, Castle Cement, Build Centre/ GRS Bagging, HSS Hire, Michael O'Brien Demolition Services and the building department at Acton and West London College

Is work quantifiable? What is the meaning of progress and can we see it? Most work is invisible unlike the laborious process of building a wall, brick after brick. On the fifth floor of a building in central London, a slow performance is taking place; the construction of a 100ft long, 6ft high brick wall. At times control slips between the structure and its maker, alternatively dominating and dominated by it. The structure begins to act as a diary registering the daily struggles via the evenness/unevenness of its surface. The act of building takes on existential dimensions connected to the endeavour of building a home, a life. In the myth of Sisyphus, the Greek God's ceaseless and pointless toil is a metaphor for modern lives spent working at futile jobs in factories and offices.

However manual unlike intellectual labour is directly related to the maker's body: in the structure of a brick wall, the joints are gauged by the width of the maker's fingertips, the courses filled in by feeling for the right level. Rolling cement is akin to the light gestures of mixing and lifting paint, the turn of the wrist involved in releasing it, not dissimilar to the precision and flair of an athlete. Yet the craft of bricklaying is an invisible one, our cities are composed of structures made by unknown hands during unacknowledged public performances.

But the activity offers another more fundamental possibility. Through repetition of a single action with a simple unit a possibility is offered of reaching an alternative state of mind. 'Empty' experiences are uncommon in our normal daily activities yet a 'shelling-out', which bricklaying could allow, might be necessary for what is illusory in life to be cast aside.

A wall then; a social, political, mental and linguistic structure - one referenced in every day language and popular culture normally as an obstacle or impasse to vision - could also exist as a device for contemplation. Although brutal and forceful in its demarcation of space, its un-ephemerality, this bound structure may yet become unbound in space and time. An ambiguous structure, which both exposes and conceals, whose silence might overwhelm us and whose meaningless, repetitive, backbreaking construction might take us to the very threshold between ordinary and extraordinary realms.