



Ben Brandt
Co-Lab Project Space, Austin
Closed May 26
by Thao Votang

The instant I stepped through the threshold of Ben Brandt's installation *All_Over* at Project Space¹, I entered another world—and stood completely at the mercy of his environment. Brandt's installation successfully demonstrates his thoughtfulness and marks the completion of his M.F.A. at The University of Texas at Austin. It is a loud announcement of Brandt's push from the safe docks of school.

All_Over represents a contemporary look at the ancient grottoes that “served as oracle temples and garden decorations”² and establishes a space viewers enter physically, mentally and spiritually. Like gardens or cloisters, viewers enter an environment in which the outside world might as well not exist. Brandt's grotto comes complete with the cave-like sensation of entering through a gaping mouth and squeezing through an exit. While the large north door invites visitors inside, they must slip through a small opening cut into plastic to exit the south door. As darkness falls, clip lamps placed through the space provide limited light. These don't function as pointers but rather add to the illusion

of spelunking or deep sea diving.

Inside, sound is muffled; the white cube is terrifically gray. Blown insulation lies piled on the floor, clings to the walls, sticks to objects placed around the room and floats in the air. Wooden planks (construction material that are a common thread through Brandt's larger body of work) lean against walls, old artwork sits on the floor, a shirt hangs off a peg on the north wall and a worktable stands near the center of the room. Busts fill a bookcase in the southwest corner—opposite to it a string and wood sculpture rests. Five painted wood planks rise from the insulation on the floor up to the ceiling. These planks are striped hues of blue and red and lack a dusting. Additionally, insulation also does not completely cover the ceiling, giving a sense of movement to the work. The insulation seems to still be creeping upward, and Brandt catches it in mid-motion.

A path forms as foot traffic flattens the soft and lumpy insulation and marks the presence of others after they have left. Similarly, the hanging shirt on the north wall is not simply the abandoned workspace of an artist, but a gesture of things we all leave behind. By including the busts, Brandt refers to forms found in ancient grottoes. These remnants, the abandoned sculptures and the footprints of others, create an archaeological site for visitors to explore. The oppressive heat and impure air within the installation make it physically difficult to tolerate; however, the beauty and eerie quiet of *All_Over* ask the viewer to stay and consider their own memory and subconscious.

Brandt's influence from Buontalenti Grotto in Boboli Garden and his other works *Apoxyomenos (The Scaper)*, *Plaid Apoxyomenos*³, and the humorous video projected outside at Project Space bring the installation beyond a superficial use of an apocalyptic theme to a meditation of time. By displaying a forgotten space in which blown insulation usually inhabits as a grotto or place of meditation, Brandt asks visitors to reflect upon their own buried sculptures.

All_Over's success lies in Brandt's ability to completely utilize Project Space and present guests with an installation that transforms the room and changes as visitors pass through. The competence shown in using a material such as blown insulation, creating a sensual impact that surrounds visitors, demonstrates Brandt's potential as he moves forward.

- See more at: <http://www.fluentcollab.org/mbg/index.php/reviews/review/192/438#sthash.X5mAk1Ea.dpuf>

1. The new name for the east 7th Co-Lab Projects location.

2. <http://colabspace.org/#21443714123>

3. http://benbrandt.net/html/Home_Thumbs.html