

Ron Haselden at Mobile Home Gallery, London

Art in America, July 2002, by Charles Dee Mitchell

There is a French road sign that reads, *Trop Vite. Levez le Pied.* (Too Fast. Lift your Foot.). Ron Haselden's version of that sign is a small, white, rectangular wooden box, mounted to the wall and studded with blinking white lights, the size of pinheads, that spell out the French message. This was the first thing you encountered upon entering Haselden's exhibition. By gently but insistently telling you to slow down, *Trop Vite* (1998) suggested the approach the artist feels is appropriate to his work.

Haselden is best known for light and sound installations that combine extravagant scale and subtle means. For *Fete* (1990), he festooned the grounds of the Serpentine Gallery with strings of lights and played recorded music to re-create the atmosphere of a French country fair. Working with the four small rooms at *Mobile Home*, he necessarily adopted more modest means. Each room featured an amazingly slender neon tube that cut across the ceiling on the diagonal. The tubes proved too small to support their own weight in the longer rectangular rooms, so a single tiny wire loop helped secure them, an accommodation that emphasized their fragility. Using a specific gas or combination of gases in each tube, Haselden produced four distinct colors: orange, from neon; blue, from argon; yellow, from argon/helium; and lavender, from argon/mercury.

I saw the exhibition on a sunny afternoon. The strong lines of light cast the slightest glow on the ceiling and walls, yet they were clearly the dominant presence in each room, and I felt that their apparent reticence was a game played with the weather and the time of day. *Windvane* (1998), a wall work, engaged the weather quite differently. A small white wooden square contained a compass of sorts, made with the same pin-head-sized lights as *Trop Vite*. This very homemade contraption was wired to a weather vane mounted outside the gallery. Unlike the compass, the vane was clearly a scientific instrument, though the sort that comes in the Home Weather Kit you might give your dad shortly after his retirement. The changing sequences and colors of the compass's lights were activated by shifts in the wind's direction. *Windvane* is a humble and visually satisfying encounter between the realms of the do-it-yourself, the relatively high tech and the vast force of nature.

Charting change with light in response to powerful energies took on a different cast in the final piece. Behind a small square of translucent white glass stood an upright black form maybe 6 inches tall. Wires ran from the object to a CD player, and as the strains of an uncommonly beautiful rendition of *Ave Maria* began to play, tiny red lights appeared behind the glass, climbing up the form as the voice rose in pitch. The work is called *Castrato* (1994), and the singer, recorded at the turn of the 20th century, was the last of his kind.

COPYRIGHT 2002 Brant Publications, Inc.

COPYRIGHT 2002 Gale Group