

“Scents and Sensibility”

**Three specialists were invited to write about
Ann Hamilton’s site-specific installation *mantle*,
ARTnews (“How to Look at Art”), December 1998, pp. 132-133**

Hamilton has said that in *mantle* her impulse was “to bring the moisture of life into the museum, to bring the smells and the sound of Miami into to skin of the room.” Indeed, the work’s core – the source of its sensual impact – was the towering heap of flowers that lay on the table. The flowers in their setting calling to mind 17th-century Dutch still-life paintings. As those paintings, in their time, functioned as a glimpse into the nouveau riche’s secure, luxurious life, Hamilton’s site-specific work could be seen as referring to the social, cultural, and economic climate of southern Florida.

Located between the Americas, Miami is the center of the import-export business and a focal point of immigration. As an Israeli who moved to Miami in a few years ago, I couldn’t help thinking of the flowers – an allusion of the city’s multimillion-dollar wholesale flower industry – as an embodiment of the cultures that make up the city’s social texture. Miami draws aging people from northern climes (here the restitched useless winter coats come into play) and the political refugees and economic opportunists from the Americas and West Indies. The radio waves flowing from the flowers could be seen as dissemination information, both mundane and political.

Mantle could also be read more positively, seeing compassion expressed in the act of restitching – mending the coats to render them useful once again.

Translated by Daria Kassovsky