

MOUSSE

“In Practice: Isabel Mallet” at SculptureCenter, New York



SculptureCenter

“In Practice: Isabel Mallet” at SculptureCenter, New York, 2023. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Charles Benton

Isabel Mallet studies the biological and technological life cycles of materials. She builds forms and systems that reconfigure given architectures, proposing sculpture as a revelatory experience of space.

On the steel I-beams of the gallery’s ceiling, Mallet suspends three stone slabs: a gray granite, a pink granite, and a serpentine. These stones, chosen for their historical specificity in the construction of New York, can be found in buildings, monuments and public spaces throughout the city—as architecture, their durability is symbolic as much as it is physical. However, once extracted from the earth, the stone degrades at a much faster rate due to weather, water, and wear. On a geological time scale, they are quickly turning to dust.

Using the same technology as the city’s streetlamps, Mallet modifies the gallery’s existing lights to turn on when they sense darkness. In this room, the lights respond to each other and

themselves. As each “dusk to dawn” photocell sensor is triggered, it in turn causes another to turn off, entering a random feedback loop.

This summer, along the empty tree pits that line Purves Street outside of SculptureCenter, Mallet planted *datura wrightii*. All parts of the plant contain narcotic alkaloids which are poisonous in high doses. For some, the plant is sacred, and is used medicinally and ceremonially; for others, the plant is considered dangerous and invasive. The datura’s blooms last just one night; those that are pollinated turn into spiky bulbous seed pods that burst open when ripe. It spreads without regard to the defined spaces of the city, filling in cracks and craters, carrying out its own lifecycle, on repeat, year after year.

In ways perceptible and not, the exhibition grafts together these different registers of time, staging extractive interruptions as flashes in daily life amid cycles of blooming, propagating, and dying beyond the human.

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